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Impact of Abundance of Social Media in Education in Developing Countries

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Abstract:
It is common knowledge that technology has penetrated all sectors of our lives and education is one of them. University students joining these institutions are engrained in technology and other modern electronic devices that teaching them is a major challenge of the education system does not embrace technology in its delivery and operations. For those engaged in online culture, one of the cardinal digital literacies is the ability to effectively exploit social networking services. YouTube currently has millions and millions of videos for academic purpose at all levels and the content is loaded on 24-hour basis. This study was to investigate abundance of social media in developing countries and explore possible benefits it has for the education sector. Using descriptive survey, the study was conducted among selected universities in Kenya. The findings indicated that social media is actually in use among student and lecturers including the administrative staff. The study further noted that the use of social media in higher institutions has been propelled by the availability of internet services in educational institutions and the society as a whole.

Keywords: Education, Facebook, learning, social media, universities

1. Introduction

Education is globally challenged from different circles. There ARE   some 2.2 billion children (UNICEF, 2010) who need to access quality education among other basic necessities. A large number of them cannot get the right education to move forward. Additionally, 114 out of 208 countries have a shortage of teachers with majority being in Africa. In many third world countries the right to education is not there as some associate education with western culture and maybe not conforming to the society's expectations. Many challenges that affect societies in developing countries also impacts on education hence the need to address the root causes.

Selecting the right tools that will enable each of us to connect into and exploit the collective intelligence of the most relevant communities of practice is one of the new digital literacies professionals and students will need to draw upon. Therefore, there is need to rethink about education critically. Technology ought to have brought an entirely fresh way to make learning better since it has succeeded in many sectors of the economy. With the emergence of avant-garde software and technologies aimed at bringing information alive, traditional teaching and brick-and-mortar structures common in most countries in developing countries may remain important only for two main reasons, namely, to aid with encouraging an organized way of doing things, and providing a relatively safe place for youngsters to be while guardians go off to work. Simply adding the extraordinary technology of the 21st century to processes developed in the 20th century has not made learning better. Too many of the practices of the past that still exist today are just plain wrong in any case.
Various researches have shown that, any type of technology when well integrated or used is capable of making a change in the learning and teaching process of the current generation of students. Researchers have noted that the various technologies in the hands of leaners had an influence in the way they learn, communicate and even socialize. New social sites like Facebook, twitter, instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Ning, Bebo and others are in use amonghighereducation students hence the need to leverage them for education purposes. Access to mobile electronic devices is the norm at the moment and many institutions in developed and developing countries are taking advantage of them for teaching and learning purposes.

Significant trends have been realized in use of technology and especially use of social media sites for various purposes. Illich (1970) theorized on self-help 'learning webs' which has now become a reality. Freire (1993) talked of the open democracy unleashed by new social media and how it has fomented an erosion of the oppressive pedagogical practices as envisaged in traditional education. This shows that the new modes of acquiring knowledge brought about by technological innovations is a plus in the everyday learning and teaching in educational setups.

Moreover, it is argued that educational environments could be greatly enhanced by including social media and by moving in a similar direction (Kort et al, 2001). However, some technology observers also warn for the opposite – that social media and the overload of information they create might make our interactions less meaningful (Lanier, 2010; Turkle, 2011).

Researches on how young people learn have focused on use of electronic mobile devices and their benefits to education. Leaners are more inclined to use one or two more types of electronic devices in the knowledge acquisition and

also interaction at different perspectives. In a survey of 4374 students across 13 institutions in the United States (Kvavik, Caruso & Morgan, 2004) found that the majority of respondents owned personal computers (93.4%) and mobile phones (82%), but a much smaller proportion owned handheld computers (11.9%). The most common technology uses were word processing (99.5%), emailing (99.5%) and surfing the Net for pleasure (99.5%).

In order to truly understand the effects of online technologies for learning purposes , PEOL[PE need to clearly comprehend what the technologies can offer, its usability, cost implications and how it can affect learning before embarking on integrating them in education. Andalso how dimensions such as enjoyment, engagement, value, trust and loyalty, and social and cognitive presence, also affect the learning experience as noted by (Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Picard et al, 2004; Dron & Anderson, 2009).

Mobile computing, in particular, is considered as one of the key developments that will affect academic life in the near future (Johnson, et al., 2009; Johnson, et al., 2010). In the Horizon Report: 2009 Australia–New Zealand Edition, Johnson, et al (2010) noted; It is increasingly common for universities to provide admissions, registration, event and other information for students via mobile Internet devices … Teachers converse with students via text–messaging or Twitter, and post class notes, lectures and syllabi in forms that can be read by mobiles Johnson, et al(2010)

Many other researchers have noted the importance of electronic mobile devices in education .for social media tools like Twitter are used by both students and tutors to share instant information and can reach millions with a given time frame. Facebook is also giving instant updates and is shared among many people worldwide and also YouTube has live videos which can be used for individual or group teaching. Interaction online between students and academics is also realized o as noted by Muñoz and Towner, 2011). These interactions can be of great value to the education sector as more and more leaning ides come up and are utilized.

2. The value of Social media and learning

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and others are recognized as growing as social networking sites which are attracting lager number of followers and majority being the youth who are still in schools and colleges. As learning progresses and becomes more advanced, technology can assist in its delivery especially in developing countries where learning is still a challenge to many. . The major issue in education to take cognizance of is in recognizing the difference between social media and social learning, and what social media is and what is isn't and how it can be used for learning and teaching purposes.

Educationalists and learning technologists like Lankshear &Knobel (2006), Wilson et al, 2006; and Siemens (2008) havephilosophized on how the second wave ofInternet technologies such as social media could be instrumental in moving towards a holistic and Personalized learning experience by moving from a hierarchical institutionally based teachingapproach to a networked approach.Social media can or may be utilized to achieve this transformation but the use must be in line with education policies and rules.

Academicians and scholars are also on the lookout in relation to use of social media in education.Academia.edu the social networking site, set up specifically for academics, started in October 2008 and was originally targeted to the sciences (Academia.edu, 2012).Since then other social sights like research gate, orchid and others are now serving academic purposes. Facebook accounts, the site provides a way of presenting a uniquely academic persona, within a space dominated by other academics (Kim&Marshall, 2012). Whereas Facebook asks 'What's on your mind?' and Twitter asks 'What's happening?' Academia.com offers two options: update status, and ask a question. The question function encourages discourse and connections with a diverse and potentially unknown academic audience, and therefore marks a significant divergence from the more well–known 'status update'. With all these features, twitter alongside other social media tools is capable of revolutionizing the academic circle and learning in higher institutions of learning(ibid).

3. Maintaining Learning in Social Media and Education

Though it is still a challenge for educationists to believe in using social media for learning and teaching purposes, the trend is challenging and institutions are embracing social media sites for education purposes and knowledge assimilation and distribution. Kim and Barbour (2007) posits that

'Maintaining persona in online interaction in institutions of higher learning in which they categorized the persona in four self's, that's; The formal self or The static self which is usually the formal identity, the public self or the networked self which encourages discourse, and focuses on sharing ideas and networking, the comprehensive selfin which in addition to research or teaching issues, new media is used by these academics in the same way as it is used by most social networkers: to keep in touch with friends and family members and to organize a social life (Kim and Barbour(2007).

In terms of teaching staff, they have also embraced social media as university lecturer form Whats App groups and interact on Facebook with their students; You Tube is widely used by both students and lecturers for live videos and animations. This goes a long way in maintaining personas online and offline as these are important and crucial since they define and distinguish the level of interaction on social network sites in different settings and levels.

Education institutions are grappling with challenges of technology as the consumers today are more knowledgeable and active. The information which the current generation requires could be slightly different for what the old generation required hence the need to adjust to new changes. The pedagogy o in use now could also be different from the old one as leaners become more informed and knowledgeable.

4. Methodology

The area of focus in this paper is harnessing social media in university education in Kenya. Using descriptive survey design, the study targeted University students in four Universities. The universities targeted were; University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, United states International University and Strathmore University. The first two are public and the other two are private Universities. The researcher gave questionnaires to 250 students at the University of Nairobi while the other Universities in addition again to University of Nairobi, the researcher observed the student's interaction online especially on the official social media websites hosted on their university websites and homepages. The research started in 2016 and was concluded in early 2018.The research sampled students and faculty staff from the Bachelor of Education Arts (Distance learning), Bachelor of law (LLB), Bachelor of Science (Physics), Bachelor of Computer Science, and Postgraduate diploma in Education and Master of Arts in Peace Education. The students and staff were basically at the University of Nairobi and the researcher was interested in knowing their level of interaction on social media sites.

The study was grounded on socialization theory; Socialization is the process by which human infants begin to acquire the skills necessary to perform as a functioning member of their society, and is the most influential learning process. It suits this study because as leaners grow up, they acquire new learning skills and ideas which help them adjust to the socialization process as well.

5. Research Findings

One of the key findings of the research was that all the targeted universities have social network sites on their website home pages. The most popular website on the four universities homepages were, Google+, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and others. The most popular social media site where the student's presence was mostly realized in the Universities was on Facebook with the University of Nairobi leading with 24,613 followers followed by Kenyatta University with 18,000 then followed by Strathmore and lastly United States international University. These figures keep changing day by day hence these are approximate as by December 2017 when the research ended

The other finding was that most of the Universities social media sites were informative with education related features leading, followed by entertainment, announcement, collaborations, news and others. This is an indication that the social network sites can be used for education purposes if well enhanced and programmed. The use of twitter hashtag was quite good in all the universities with good number of followers but the best was realized at Strathmore where the students engage each other on academic, social and economic issues on their official hashtag @ StrathU. The YouTube accounts in all the four universities were quite informative and educative as they gave a lot of information on what goes on in those Universities. Kenyatta University had a good Google + platform which is quite interactive and can be used by both the students and the staff making social media usable in academic circles and also it had a live chart account which is quite good for interactive purpose considering that educational institutions are open systems.

On the questionnaires which had both closed and open ended questions, the findings were quite agreeable to the other universities as all the respondents agreed that that there are actively social media participants and have facebook, twitter, Skype, YouTube, Instagram and other accounts which they use frequently with the latest being WhatsApp among many more coming up.

Majority of students stated in the questionnaires that they use their mobile phones for checking the internet with minority using cyber cafes for the following services; Email services,tweeting,chatting, sharing photos and events, catching up with what is new among many more. The academic and non-academic staff also indicated their use of social media sites like facebook where both lecturers and students interact, twitter hashtags where students and lecturers can use to share and learn new concepts. Lecturers refer students to YouTube to download relevant vides and also to learn. For non-teaching staff, they have also social networking sites where they also update students on some new requirements and updates in the university. These were common in all the universities. There was quite good online interaction among staff and students for academic purposes which gives value to having the sites and also having internet in institutions.

Though any aspect of technological invention is taunted for its advantages, social media and its network sites have a lot to contribute to higher education in terms of modern ways of learning like using videos, emails, online interaction, online search engines are all helpful in enhancing quality education. First and foremost, the large number of friends and followers which the students in sampled Kenyan universities gathered through their interaction forms a foundation for sharing online information and exposure to other aspects of life which could hitherto not have been known to them.

The student respondents also noted that learning becomes interactive and participatory as they interact on social media. Social media they said makes student enjoy learning and gives them enough exposure. The computer science respondents indicated that social media sites like YouTube are very popular with the students as it enables them to learn and even be a head with their syllabus coverage.

From the website and social media sites of the universities targeted in this study, there was a lot of advertisements for job opportunities, upcoming events, new products and many other things. Social media therefore exposes university students to marketing and the world of business. This is a new feature of information flow which initially was for media houses to share in the newspapers.

The student respondents especially the education by distance students noted that social media cuts down distance and allows them to interact with others locally and internationally. They also noted that with social media sites, it has become much easier and cheaper for them to catch up and share academic issues together on a platform and Social media was also noted among the student respondent involve in the study as being very fast and helps in spreading relevant information faster to friends and other recipients, access individual and institutional profiles and reduction of distance

whereby online media has and is capable of reducing academic distance as it allows one to study wherever or whenever he is.

Though the study also found it has disadvantages like some lecturers are not keen on using social media because they believe it is not meant for academic purposes, Students also noted its disadvantages like it is addictive, there is overload of information. Its subject to abuse and can also mislead one in the learning process,

6. Discussions

In Africa, Facebook is still the popular social network site with 50,386,750 followers with 1,886,560 in Kenya. South Africa takes the led in Facebook followers in Africa with 5,534,160 followed by Nigeria with 5,250,340 followers (www.sociamediabakers.com).Scholars are documenting the implications of social network sites (SNS) use with respect to schools, universities, and libraries. For example, scholarship has examined how students feel about having professors on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006) and how faculty participation affects student-professor relations (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). As technology brings in new innovations and ideas, in various parts of the world, some tend not to be compatible to some societies, ages or to other affiliations. A number of the students said that some of what they come across on social media is not worth carrying or talking about anywhere neither elsewhere nor some of what was said in some of the university websites I accessed and blog postings are not worth being shared with others.

As technological revolutions increase their social impact, ethical problems increase. Other researchers have alsoadvocated how technology is changing the education sector just like this study also found out. However, studies have shown that, for emerging technologies, ethicists do not wait until new technological devices and uses manifest themselves, but rather that they become proactive. This means that ethicists should "learn about the technology as it is developing and to project and assess possible consequences of its various applications. This was realized in the study as students who filled the question had 45%complaining that one of the challenges of internet use is information overload which is time wasting for them.

On timelines, the students said that they access the internet on different intervals as some said they access the net daily, some a few number of times ,others a week or not so frequently. But majority agreed that social media can compromise ones study time hence involvement and usage should be controlled and accessed by the individual user so as to avoid being addicted. The issue of affordability as we already learn that media could make some of the academic services affordable was disputed by the students from the Kenyan universities.50% said that that internet services are quite expensive unless you are accessing from the university system hence this lowers their online participation as you only participate when you have money.

In Kenya, the internet is still mostly concentrated in the major towns and their peripheries. This leaves out the rural areas so the students from the rural areas with no electricity cannot access internet when they are at home hence limits the learning process

Personal identity, information overloads and accessing of wrong sites was a challenge in social media which the students didn't know how to cope up with. The links to friends and other friend's network on facebook, twitter and others provides much information and links which is time consuming and sorting is a big problem to the students. To answer these problems, Sherry Beck Paprocki stated in the New York Times (March 27, 2009): that "[i]f you don't brand yourself, Google will brand you", referring to a perceived need to control the information people find about you when they type your name into a search engine. Times reporter Alina Tugend motivates her story on the challenge of presenting oneself online as follows: "[n]ot being online today is akin to not existing." Apparently, it is not enough to have a profile on Facebook, you need a Twitter account, a YouTube channel, you should be uploading your own video mashups, designing custom levels in your favorite computer game, and on the whole using any kind of media to tell everyone about everything. So all these put together, the students will get their position on what to do about social media and how to come up better and outdo its challenges.

The general observation of the short survey was that most of the postgraduate students do not have much information about social media like social media sites apart from having Facebook accounts hence they could not answer most of the questions while undergraduate students were quite conversant with social media and its related issues and usage. This supports the statements by Kinyamu Muthrui while addressing a social media launch platform for all Kenyan Universities in 2012 that Kenyan universities should enlightened the students and the tutors on social media issues and how it can be enhanced for educational purpose at the university just as in other countries and universities where social media has been so well integrated in the learning teaching process.

With various initiatives in Kenya like SocialPro launched in 2012 with an aim of easing content sharing and networking amongst Kenyan varsity students and faculty online and offline (Kinyamu Muthuri,2012) the social media landscape is likely to realize a positive upward move.

If well utilized social media can help Kenya universities achieve better communication networks between university staff students and the wider community since majority of Kenyan students are on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, instead of using other expensive modes of communication like newspapers, television and radio.

Marvin Tumbo (2010) noted that, social media can also be used to arrest strikes which are a major issue in Kenyan universities. Various Kenyan universities should engage their alumni through social media so as to enable them be proactive in their former universities.

7. Conclusion

Proper and effective use of Social media is necessary for its integration and utilization in education. Higher education in Developing countries can be better and more effacingly delivered if technology with its advantages like social media is well utilized in Education. Social media is capable of providing rich ideas socially, economically and political which is good for general knowledge and development of learners at all levels. With current global pressures like inflation, violence, depression, mobility and others, social networking will be the only tool to counteract the pressure and constant world changes which affect people's lives both positively and negatively. And for educational institutions, they have to engage more on social sites so as to catch up in researchers, collaborate and share information in a wider spectrum with those they share common interest with or those they can learn from. It will also expose university activities to others hence makes the learning institutions more open and innovative.

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