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## ***Social Media in Higher Education***

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### **Abstract**

*Social media is a platform where one can expand one's social presence, inflate contacts, develop relations, grow and remain informed and connected. It is opening the horizons of communications and has given a new way to connect and communicate with the world. It has made communication easier. As we know that in today's 'tech world' social media has penetrated almost every walk of life including the education system. This paper therefore tries to explore the importance of social media in higher education in Indian perspective and also looks into the ways it can be used to assimilate the importance of higher education amongst students. While establishing the landscape of social media and its reach amongst the educators and students, it looks into the opportunity and challenges faced by the social media in higher education. The paper highlights the ways in which educators and students can strengthen the process of learning and sharing through social media and how well social media can be used for the benefit of their institution. The study also reveals the benefits of social media for the educators and students.*

### **Introduction**

The world is a click away. Digital revolution has immensely benefitted us all in all ways. It wouldn't be wrong to term this generation as a "Plug-In Generation". Social media has become one of the

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most effective channels of communication nowadays. In easy terms, social media is a tool to share information via the internet through several applications which are present in our mobiles and computers. FaceBook, Twitter, Linked-in, Watsapp and Instagram etc are some of the popular networking sites. There are also platforms like Blogs where one can straightforwardly pen down one's thoughts and can have a discussion or get engaged in conversation with the people of the same or different mindsets. It is opening the horizons of communications and has given a new way to connect and communicate with the world. It is now easy to share information on the spur of the moment. It is a platform where one can expand one's social presence, inflate contacts, develop relations, grow and remain connected and informed. It has a very important role in our lives and we cannot ignore its presence in almost every field whether it is health, politics, administration or education. This paper tries to analyze the importance of social media in one of the most important aspects, i.e. education; higher education in Indian perspective by looking into the ways social media can be used to assimilate the importance of higher education amongst students.

According to Techopedia<sup>1</sup> social media is a catch-all term for a variety of internet applications that allow users to create content and interact with each other. This interaction can take many forms, but some common types include:

- Sharing links to interesting content produced by third parties
- Public updates to a profile, including information on current activities and even location data
- Sharing photos, videos and posts
- Commenting on the photos, posts, updates, videos and links shared by others

Social media tools provide an exciting opportunity for educators and academicians to raise the level of education; for example, they can easily provide information about their ongoing academic programmes, grow their student community and improve their enrollment procedures. It helps in the admission of high potential students; it makes them remain connected with the alumni, helps to promote research endeavor; with social media it becomes easy.

### *Social Media in Higher Education*

With the intensification of social media over the years, education has gone through tremendous changes. Today, the internet is not a one-way broadcast delivery system where the individual user downloads data, information and other resources produced by a relatively small number of content providers, rather the internet is now driven by (and to some extent determined through) the activities of its ordinary users-what has been described as many-to-many rather than one-to-many connectivity. The use and implication of web is comparatively different than the internet era in the 1990s and 2000s. It is more participatory in nature now. Social media use is often described in terms of association, geniality and resourcefulness. These web applications appear to be open rather than closed, bottom-up rather than top-down. The users can go online to share and rate, mash-up and remix. The ways in which the internet is imagined in 2021 is certainly very different to that of previous years.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Social media scenario in India**

According to a report published in the Times of India, Indians spend almost 70% of the time on apps like Facebook and WhatsApp, and music and entertainment apps. On an average, a user in India spends 200 minutes a day on mobile apps.<sup>3</sup> Social media users in India grew from 38 million in November 2011 to 60.5 million at present (<https://www.techinasia.com/india-mobile-social-infographic>). But that's just five per cent social media penetration among the growing populace as a whole. A primary reason behind this might be that 70 per cent of Indians reside in rural areas, and are often not interested in connecting. And so, at present, a large per cent of the country's web users live in urban areas. India's young web users - 75 per cent of its netizens are below the age of 35. It means that the social media boom is only just starting.<sup>4</sup>

When it comes to numbers, India stands first in using the internet with more than 150,000,000 internet users. It is 11% of the total population of the country. Every two seconds India adds a new internet user, i.e. more than 150,000,000 per month. India has the highest growing online market in the world. More than 75% internet user population of the country is below the age of 35. India has more than 60,545,120 social media users. This is the primary driver of the

online community in the country. Top social media networking sites are Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, BharatStudent.com, Zedge.net, Ibibo.com, hi5.com, Shtyle.fm, Indyarocks, Fropper.com and Myspace.com. The 48% users using Facebook are between 18 and 24 years of age. 33,000,000 users use other social media sites. 15,000,000 users have twitter account. 15, 396, 526 users have LinkedIn account. This is the second largest in the world after the United States. There are approximately 55, 800, 000 unique YouTube visitors in India as in July 2012. Indian users view more than 4, 000, 000, 000 YouTube videos in a month. India ranks as the second largest country having 50, 000, 000 Google+ users.<sup>5</sup>

### **Challenges in higher education**

According to a February 2014 British Council report, "Understanding India: The Future of Higher Education and Opportunities for International Cooperation", the demand for higher education and the magnitude of planned reforms over the coming years in India will provide the largest opportunity in the world for international higher education institutions and education businesses.<sup>6</sup>

But the greatest challenge facing higher education in India is the unrelenting shortage of faculty. Either the faculties are not trained or they are reluctant to use internet while imparting knowledge. The concerned faculties lack training since their mode of teaching has always been restricted to classroom. In fact, there are different reports which say that 30% to 40% of trained faculty positions are unfilled. Most faculties have had no training in online teaching. Other concerned area: Outdated and rigid curricula and the absence of employer engagement in course development/up gradation, faculty development, content and skills development. There are very few opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. Teaching pedagogies and assessment are focused on input and result based learning. Students have little opportunity to develop a wide range of transversal skills, that includes critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem-solving and collaborative working, high student teacher ratio, pressure to enroll more students, separation of research and teaching; lack of early stage research experience.<sup>7</sup> There is also concern on the privacy and integrity issues while using social media. Lack of integrity

### *Social Media in Higher Education*

and copy paste culture is prevalent among students and it is a big barrier. In spite of these concerns, educators believe that social media sites offer value in teaching. The silver lining is that the technology has brought a lot of transformations in the communication process and has given a lot of opportunities and, of course, challenges to the higher education system. It has enormous potential for both supplementing and replacing the existing traditional ways of teaching and learning. Teachers can make a social media directory and manage resources like departments, colleges, courses and services. They can create their own groups like alumni groups per class, share campus news, conduct workshop, share important research and updates.

#### **Benefits to educators and students**

Technology in higher education could be used in a variety of different contexts like language learning, writing, and class discussion, even after class discussion, because of flexibility and availability, synchronous and asynchronous communication, community building and curricular tool. The optimum use of social media in higher education helps the relationships of learners and teachers. It is changing tremendously and providing a unique stage for interaction amongst students and teachers and amongst students themselves. For them social media has become a convenient tool to communicate, access information, and to provide information. Studies can have the opportunity to expand their learning skills by effective usage of social media tools under the guidance of their instructors. They can watch the recorded lectures delivered, disseminate information and connect in discussions. The use of social media has also established increased teacher-student and student-student interaction. Studies have specified that the use of social media in higher education has improved learning, augmented participation and engagement, better content dissemination and enhanced teaching and information sharing.<sup>8</sup> Social media let the learners to receive timely feedback from a number of sources. Student presentations distributed via the internet can be viewed by a much larger audience. As every student has dissimilar academic strengths and skill sets, and working mutually allows them to develop their own skills. If no graduate assistants are available,

each year social media applications can strengthen class material and positively influence discussions, collaborative work, and authoring. There are ways through which educators and researchers can experiment with social media technologies and stimulate critical thinking skills, collaboration, and knowledge construction among students. Therefore, it is logical to include the use of social media and its approaches in instructional teaching methods because it is proving to be an effective communication tool today. 9

Some instructors are using social media very effectively for academic purpose. It is heartening that the higher education teaching faculty is aware of the major social media sites and more than half of it visits social media site very often for their personal and academic purpose. More impressive is their rate of espousal of social media in their specialized field. According to a report; almost 90% of all faculties are using social media in courses they're teaching or for their professional careers outside the classroom. For personal use, Facebook is both the most visited site and, by a large margin, the one with the highest rate of postings. YouTube is the second most visited, but posting rates are low. YouTube and Facebook are also the most frequently cited when faculty report on their uses of social media in support of their professional careers. It has been observed that nearly two-thirds of the faculty have used social media during a class session, and some are using it to post content for students to view or read outside class. Some higher education faculties also ask students to read or view social media as part of a course assignment, and some have also asked students to comment on or post to social media sites and make online videos. It is important to mention that educators believe that recorded lectures, You-video, video, podcasts, and other social media tools are valuable for teaching, and also for collaborative learning. 10

This online participation not only provides wisdom to the student but also helps in inculcating a sense of participation amongst them. There are "NO BACK-BENCHERS in online studies". Consequently it becomes essential that the higher educators should approach social media in a considered and objective manner. The higher education fraternity must presume a greater role in shaping the development of

### *Social Media in Higher Education*

social media on the ground in higher education settings. Social media are increasingly visible in higher education settings as instructors look to technology to mediate and enhance their instruction as well as promote active learning for students.

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