Social Media for Information Dissemination in Agricultural Education

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Article ID: 12001

The word education is derived from Latin words, i.e., 'educare' and 'educatum'. Educare means 'to train and mould', whereas educatum is 'the act of teaching'. It is a continuous and lifelong process of acquisition of experiences that leads to the development of both an individual and society, in such a manner that both find happiness and prosperity. Earlier, it has a traditional system of face-to-face education. However, with the invention of the internet, different social media platforms have been developed and have become an integral part of our lives. Learners at all levels and spheres are preferring to use social media to access, learn and share ready information, reviews and solutions for their queries. It has become the fastest communication channel used by people globally for sharing information within a fraction of a second.

Initially, social media was developed and considered to be a method of communication among friends, family and known people. Its content may include a pool of information, starting from personal information, documents, videos, photos, blogs, podcasts, micro-blogs, weblogs, business forums, etc. Users can get engaged with social media through computers, tablets, smartphones, provided with internet facility, via web-based software, etc. Later, people started using various social media applications for networking and finding career opportunities. It has connected billions of people across the globe and facilitated the sharing of their thoughts, feelings and insights through the virtual network. At present, it has become an irreplaceable tool not only in the field of communication and marketing but also in education.

Social media is helping people to connect with different learning groups and educational systems and thus has made education much more convenient. Over the period of time, social network tools and techniques have immensely improved the learning methods. Moreover, social media plugins have enabled the sharing and interaction among millions of people across the globe. Learners all over the globe are benefitting from online tutorials and study materials, shared through various social

networking sites. Several social media sites have made it possible.

Types of social media

Social media includes multiple tech-enabled activities like photo sharing, blogging, social gaming, social networks, video sharing, business networks, virtual worlds, reviews, and much more. Different platforms can be used in various ways in the field of education. Some of the possible ways are explained as follows.

Facebook Page for updates

Facebook can be treated as an extended classroom for communicating updates. It can be a perfect social media platform. Instead of introducing the instructors and learners to a new application, sticking to something which everyone is already aware of and accustomed to may improve the acceptability. Learners may be encouraged to follow the classroom's Facebook Page, where the class updates, details of homework, assignments, group discussion, etc., would be posted. In the case of agricultural education, there is a wide section of people who would be interested to learn about the updates. A different Facebook page, including updates in a layman's language, would benefit people who are in need of such information.

Facebook Group for discussions

A Facebook Group can be created by the instructors/mentors for every class. It can be open to both public or private. This platform can be used for streaming of live lectures, post-discussion, question and answer sessions, awareness creation, assigning homework and making important announcements. This can help the instructors to keep the learners engaged during summer, winter and other such holidays by posting reminders regarding holiday assignments and evaluating the same before school reopens. However, the use of social media for education should be more formal, with professional boundaries set by the educational institutions. In the process of creation of the Facebook group for the learners, the instructor/mentor should not send friend's request to the learners instead a direct link of the Facebook Group for access to be send to the registered E-mail of both parents as well as the learner.

Twitter as Message Board

Twitter, a very popular social media tool, can be used exactly like a discussion board or message board for the learners as well as their parents. A single Twitter handle can be created by instructors for each class and the same can be reused every year, or a separate handle can be created for each

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academic session. The character limit of 280 would make the students think critically and communicate effectively and precisely. Instructors can also use Twitter to put reminders for the assignment/project submission due date. Inspirational quotes, motivational messages and helpful links for quizzes or study materials can also be posted or shared. Instructors can also motivate the learners for discussions via Twitter chats on some specific topics like sustainable agriculture, climate-smart farming, increasing farmers' income, women empowerment, etc.

Instagram for Photo Essays

Instagram can be used by the learners to put photographs and graphics in a visually appealing and meaningful manner to spread important messages in a colorful and eye-catching manner. It would develop the skill of digital storytelling among learners. Learners may be encouraged to create class-specific Instagram accounts and these may be deleted after the course is completed.

Blog for Discussions

Blog writing may be an alternative available for learners. Writing blog posts builds creativity among the learners and helps in brainstorming. There are various platforms available, such as WordPress, Squarespace, WIX, Blogger, Tumblr, or Medium, where both instructor and learner can create a blog specific to the class. Learners may also create their own user accounts to add posts or add comments on the posts. The blog can also be used to put updates on syllabus, practicals etc.

Blog Posts for write-ups

Learners may create their own blog for writing essays, articles, success stories, etc., which can be a strategy for connecting social media with learning. This type of writing would develop students' writing and presentation skills. The platform may not be limited just to the writing skills of the student, but may also be used to share their innovative idea and concepts. It may also be a place to post the researchable areas for further discussion, like natural farming, climate-smart agriculture, etc.

Subject-Specific Pinterest Board

Instructors may design Pinterest boards for each of their discussions and save pins to the relevant information. Pinterest is a great social media platform for instructors to prepare and organize resources, lesson plans and worksheets for their content in one place. Create boards according to the learner's group or subject, and create sub-topic boards for weekly tasks or other assignments.

Social Media Links on institution Website

Adding social media links on websites makes it easier for the learners and various stakeholders to get the institution's social media profiles by visiting the website. A social media directory may also be developed that houses them all in one place.

Share Institution's Achievements and Events

In order to spread awareness and disseminate information, photos of various events, activities and achievements happening in the institution may be shared for all interested stakeholders. This would keep people informed and educated.

Interest-based Facebook Groups

Creating an interest-based Facebook group for all learners, instructors, officials and stakeholders can keep everyone informed and educate them. It would provide motivation as well as guidance to the learners staying on the campus and stakeholders present off the campus. It would also bring all interested learners under one single umbrella.

Role of Social Media in Agricultural Education

Agricultural education is a part of the curriculum for many primary and secondary schools, along with tertiary institutions like colleges, universities, vocational and technical schools. Agricultural education resources are being provided by youth organizations, farm apprenticeships/internships, different non-profit organizations, and various government agencies/ministries. This is also being done by agricultural workshops, trainings, shows, fairs and research institutions. It is a vast subject, consists of unlimited information. There is always new information, ideas, innovations, techniques, and tools to be learned. This requires constantly updated information. Thus, a pre-fixed course curriculum and a set of instructors are not sufficient to disseminate all the required information all the time. Thus, social media may play a vital role in the dissemination of information as well as the running of the institution efficiently and effectively.

Social media provides a very unique characteristic of self-paced learning, where the information/ content can be accessed by the learners from any place and at any time, as per their convenience. It provides them with an opportunity to interact and learn from others, irrespective of the geographical location. It helps them in developing, computing and communication skills as well as acts as a faster medium of disseminating required in need and on specific problems/topics. It also enhances learners' participation, interaction, insights and writing skills (Zheng, 2013).

Social media also enhances instructor-learner relationships and serves as a forum for

interaction (Williams, 2012) and provides opportunities for collaborative learning. (Lockyer and Patterson, 2008). Its user-friendly nature creates an inclusive learning environment for learners, even learners with special abilities, who experience similar learning using social media (Asuncion *et al.,* 2012).

Challenges of Social Media Use in Education

Young learners face multiple challenges due to this association with social media for education. They face issues like threats to privacy, health, misguidance, wrong or incorrect information, etc. People get addicted to social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, etc. Young learners make friends with strangers and share personal information with them. These types of associations were many times found to be a threat to their mental health. Spending a lot of time on online education has also created problems like social isolation among students as well as with their instructors/mentors.

Negative Impacts of Social Media Use in Education

The first and foremost ill effect of social media is addiction to the virtual world. People get habituated to checking their accounts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, etc. after every few mins. It becomes a reason for distraction and lack of concentration. With the passage of time, people stop taking an active part in socializing in person, taking part in sports, communication, etc. It reduces the focus and retention power of learners. They tend to rely more on social media and other websites for getting answers to queries, as this requires less time and the information is accessible in no time. They don't want to spend more time searching for things on their own. People who spend more time on social media slowly reduces their communication and feel more comfortable in communication using social media.

Conclusion

Social media is playing a very important role in the field of education. With its help, accessing information and communicating with instructors, colleagues and other people of the same interest group have become very easy. Learners can now remain connected to their peers all the time using this platform. However, the use of social media for education has some disadvantages also and therefore, has been criticized of late. Thus, social media tools must be regulated by the instructors or the mentors at the institutional level and access should be allowed as per the age of the learners. People must be sensitized regarding the negative aspects or ill effects of social media. Instructors and mentors must be skilled and technically sound about the use of different sites, settings and their

functions. They need to be aware of the various risks involved in it and must protect the young minds from this.

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