

Use of Social Media in the Teaching–Learning Process: An Insight from Community Campuses in Chitwan

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of social media has restructured communication and has provided new opportunities for teaching and learning at the college level. Teachers at the community campuses in Nepal started using social media based applications including Facebook, Messenger, YouTube and WhatsApp along with Google Class Room to carry out teaching and learning activities for delivering lectures online, for sharing reading materials among them, communicating among themselves as well as with students for pedagogical process. Community colleges in Chitwan accommodate students from various socio-economic and academic categories who have encountered both opportunities and challenges while using social media as an instructional tool. This paper aims to assess lecturers' perspective on the use of social media for teaching and learning in community campuses in Chitwan. Through a qualitative content analysis, five emergent themes were accessibility and connectivity, pedagogical use of social media, socio-economic and digital divides, and future agenda of social-media-supported learning. The results indicate that social media has improved the communication, flexibility, and informal learning possibilities while digital divide, distraction and pedagogical preparedness remain as challenges. The research present insights within context and makes recommendations for the relevant use and implementation of social media in higher education in resource poor environments.

Keywords: Social media, teaching–learning process, community campuses, higher education , qualitative content analysis.

Introduction

Incorporating digital technology within higher education has transformed the way teaching and learning are conceptualized around the world. Within this set of technologies are social media platforms, which provide ways for individuals to communicate, collaborate and consume knowledge across non-formal even non-campus classroom contexts. When it comes to imparting knowledge, some instructors and students have resorted to leveraging Facebook, YouTube WhatsApp Messenger and other social networking apps for sharing academic material and class discussion as well as sustaining learning interactions (Tess, 2013; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

The COVID-19 forced the introduction of online and technology-supported academic practices, especially in developing countries like Nepal where formal learning management systems were not prevalent. Against this problem, as an option to war-to-normal dilemma, social media opened up a readily available and familiar means of maintaining the continuum of teaching–learning (Paudel, 2021). Community colleges, important in broadening university attendance among students from rural and semi-urban backgrounds, used social media platforms extensively because they were inexpensive, user-friendly and popular.

Social media in the teaching – learning process can facilitate interaction, peer formative assessment as well as collaborative knowledge construction and learners self-direction (Hrastinski, 2009). Nevertheless, the educational use of the Wi-Fi in community campuses also brings concerns on distraction (Pallithanam & Philip, 2016), information overload (Salinas et al., 2018), inequity of access and limited pedagogical integration (Selwyn, 2016). Knowing how social media is perceived and used by lecturers in teaching and learning is, therefore critical, if the educational possibilities of this tool are to be optimized as well as its disadvantages minimized.

This research is centered on the lecturers of community campuses in Chitwan district, rapidly increasing educational center of Nepal, to investigate about their experiences and perceptions regarding use of social media in teaching learning process.

Statement of the Problem

Exchange meaningful interactions, effective communication and accessibility of learning resources are prerequisites for effective teaching and learning. Social media are a potential tool that can be used to promote these aspects, as they allow students to interact and share outside sustainable classroom time. But, the incorporation of social media as an educational tool is somehow informal, unstructured and depended on individually initiated by lecturers at campuses of Nepal.

Community campuses in Chitwan serve to the students from various socio-economic status with limited access to sophisticated digital facilities or dedicated learning management systems. Although social networking services are commonly used for personal communication, the pedagogical use of these tools has its pitfalls to overcome such as annoying digital distraction; opportunistic engagement; missing institutional strategies and policies, and limited skills related to using web technologies among lecturers (Koirala, Pandey, & Sharma, 2020).

Although the use of social media for academic purposes is increasing, a dearth of empirical research in relation to lecturers' perspectives on its role in teaching–learning activities in Nepalese community campuses has been processed. The available research is also often centered on student use of social media or is carried out in highly technologized environments with few implications for community colleges. A lack of reasonable information in this area hinders decision-making with respect to policy development and pedagogy.

This study fills this gap with a look at how lecturers working in the community campuses of Chitwan conceive, use and consider social media roles for teaching–learning processes.

Literature Review

Social media refers to web-based applications that enable users to create, share, and exchange content within virtual communities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). In educational contexts, social media supports communication, collaboration, and participatory learning (Tess, 2013). Unlike formal learning management systems, social media platforms are often informal, learner-centered, and socially driven.

Research indicates that social media can enhance learning by promoting interaction, peer feedback, and collaborative knowledge construction (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). YouTube facilitates visual learning, Facebook groups support discussion, and messaging apps enable quick clarification and academic coordination. However, effective learning outcomes depend on purposeful pedagogical integration rather than mere usage (Selwyn, 2016).

Key factors influencing the educational use of social media include accessibility, digital literacy, student motivation, and instructor guidance. While familiarity with social media increases participation, lack of self-regulation may lead to distraction and superficial engagement (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

Students from low-income backgrounds face challenges related to device availability, internet affordability, and conducive learning environments. These disparities influence the extent and quality of social media–based learning (Czerniewicz et al., 2020).

This study is grounded in social constructivism and connectivism. Social constructivism emphasizes learning through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978), while connectivism highlights learning through digital networks and connections (Siemens, 2005). Both frameworks justify the use of social media as a learning space.

Existing literature reveals limited studies focusing on lecturers' perspectives in community campuses and insufficient attention to context-specific challenges in Nepal. This study responds to these gaps.

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was used to get a detailed understanding of lecturers' perceptions. Interview data was analyzed systematically through content analysis. A purposive sampling technique was used to select ten lecturers (6 males and 4 females) from five community campuses of the Chitwan district. Participants were from the fields of management, education, social sciences and Science and Technology and had 3–20 years' experience in teaching.

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out over a period of 45–60 min. Interview questions emphasized the efficacy, value, difficulties and future use of social media in teaching and learning. The analysis of the data in this study was conducted according to qualitative content analysis as outlined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008) through stages. Content analysis was chosen because it provides a systemic approach to make inferences by the derivation of codes, categories and themes from textual data, which is ideal for examining perceptions, experiences and meanings encountered in social media–enhanced learning.

Preparation included familiarization with the data collected. Transcripts of the interviews and open-ended responses were read and re-read in order to establish a general sensibility about the participants' experiences point of view. During this phase, researchers engaged in the data selections of units of meanings were that phrases or sentences isolated at second level relating to use of social media with teaching and learning.

The transcripts were checked for accuracy based on comparison with audio recordings, and participants' words were recorded as originally spoken. This phase sensitized the researchers to the context of responses, including institutional factors, technological contexts and broader economic social bases informing the use of social media and educational activity.

For coding, open coding was done in the margins of the text. The key concept of the meaning unit was labelled with a code. For instance, phrases like "students can easily enter in a class by the use of their cell phones" were coded as easy access and expressions like "Internet connectivity is very poor in rural areas, so students are struggling form it" were coded as digital divide.

Coding was inductive, in which codes were drawn out of the data, rather than forced a priori onto pre-defined theoretical frameworks. This was done to ensure that respondents' real voices and life experiences would inform the analysis. Codes like that were continually checked, and revised to eliminate redundancy and guarantee clarity.

After coding, codes were then categorized into theme-related groups based on similarities and connections. For example, the codes easy accessibility, mobile-friendly and low technical skills were nested to the category of Accessibility of platforms. Codes of peer interaction, active participation and informal communication were subsumed under student engagement, as well.

This process included constantly comparing categories to ensure their internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (i.e., that data sharing a category were conceptually alike, and that the categories themselves were dissimilar). 'Labeling the data served to simplify it and provided a framework for generating themes.

In the last stage, a broader five themes were created by abstraction and synthesizing related categories. Themes referred to broader meanings that reflected the core of participants' experiences with social media-facilitated learning. This analysis yielded five main themes:

- Accessibility and Connectivity
- Student Engagement and Motivation
- Pedagogical Use of Social Media
- Socio-Economic and Digital Disparities
- The Future of Social Media-Facilitated Learning

These topics are the center of the results presented in Section five. Narratives of participants are used to substantiate each theme, and what the lecturers view as the positives and negatives of using social media in higher education.

Trustworthiness and ethical soundness were addressed in all stages of the research.

The research followed the criteria for trustworthiness of credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability for this kind of qualitative study.

- a. Credibility was established through member checking, whereby participants were afforded opportunities to confirm and validate interpretations made from the data. Moreover, sustained engagement with the data gave the researchers a deep sense of familiarity of the research context, but minimized any potential risk for misinterpretation.
- b. Dependability was established by maintaining an explicit audit trail of methodological decisions, such as data collection, coding and theme development. This makes it possible for other researchers to track the logic of the study.
- c. Conformability was assumed by limiting researchers' biases through reflexive journal provision and reliance on concrete participants' voice instead of assuming people thoughts with the aid of reasonable interpretation making.
- d. Transferability was addressed through rich, thick descriptions of the research context, subjects and findings that allow readers to consider the extent that findings can be useful in their own educational situations.

The study had received an ethical approval before the data collection. The patients received full explanation for the purpose of the study that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time without penalty. Participants gave informed consent.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly preserved to protect the privacy of participants. Respondents' characteristics were sanitized in the transcripts, while pseudonyms or codes were applied during data analysis and reporting. Information was kept confidential and accessible exclusively by the researchers. These strategies were used to optimize ethical standards and mutual trust among the researchers and participants.

Findings

The result of the analysis unveiled five themes describing the experience of lecturers concerning social media-enabled learning in higher education. Accessibility and connectivity were reported to be one of the most

influential themes that underlie the adoption and effectiveness of social media in general. It is pointed out that members overwhelmingly named that by learning, feelers utilized platforms such as facebook, whasapp, and youtube, which students could easily sign in. Such platforms do not require a high-level of expertise as a virtual learning system needed. This allowed the students to access learning using their smartphone and mobile data which could have an advantage in a situation where not every student owns a labtop and not every area has broadband to access the internet. This makes the student attain learning materials at any time and at any place, hence spreading the learning beyond a classroom. However, a frequent voice along with accessibility was connectivity, given that most urban-based students do not face the difficulties by those coming from deprived backgrounds generally experienced uninterrupted internet connections hence sometimes “freezing’ them out of the participation. But even in this case, respondents believed social media platforms to be more accessible as compared to the institution-based social media portals. The second theme that emerged in all reactions concerned student engagement and motivation. Responses outlined the fragmented role of social media in informal students by enhancing an interactive approach in communication between the learners and the lecturers. For interactivity, there was a possibility to comment, likes, share, and instant message, creating a sense of social perspective. There was a remark by the participant that it such a forum made even less talkative and active students to express their viewpoints in a more structured ways.

The pedagogical use of social media was a major theme demonstrating benefits and constraints. Lecturers shared lecture notes, video links, announcements, assignments and feedback using platforms like Facebook groups, YouTube channels and messaging applications.

Although such activities facilitated continuum of learning, participants recognized that the use of social media was predominantly unsystematic rather than systematized in curriculum planning. The vast majority of lecturers relied solely on individual initiative, rather than being supported by institutional direction – and with this came ad hoc pedagogy.

Some instructors were concerned about distractions, no clear integration of assessment, and the lack of personal space versus school space. These results point to the necessity of pedagogical structures and continued professional development in order to capitalize on the educational value of social media.

Irrespective of its anticipated advantages, a major challenge is represented by socio-economic and digital divide. Not all students had access to smartphones, stable internet connections or comprehensive data packages. Economically disadvantaged students were most affected, resulting in inconsistent engagement and learning loss.

Lecturers were cautious of depending on social media, for fear that it would be a medium that would unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities. Social media reduced some barriers, but didn’t eliminate the structural problems of poverty, infrastructure and digital literacy.

This theme identifies the need for more inclusive policies and support structures needed to prevent that technology-based learning further marginalizes at-risk student groups.

Respondents were tentatively hopeful about the potential integration of social media into formal education in the future. Both blended learning (part in the classroom, part in social media) and online enhancements of traditional classrooms were commonly envisaged.

They noted that any successful integration would need institutional policy, pedagogical training and uniform ethical standards. The importance of lecturer and student capacity building to enhance digital competence and responsibility was highlighted.

Although in social media generally was not seen as a substitute to traditional instruction, but rather part of the multimodal teaching pedagogy with potential to support access, engagement and flexibility if integrated as part of coherent design.

Tabular Presentation of Findings

Theme	Categories	Key Findings	Representative Insights
Accessibility and Connectivity	Easy access, Mobile learning, Internet availability	Social media platforms are widely accessible and require minimal technical skills	Students can participate using smartphones and mobile data
Student Engagement and Motivation	Interaction, Participation, Peer learning	Increased engagement, especially among previously passive students	Informal communication encouraged confidence and collaboration

Pedagogical Use of Social Media	Content sharing, Feedback, Supplementary teaching	Use remains informal and supplementary	Lack of structured integration into curriculum
Socio-Economic and Digital Disparities	Device access, Internet cost, Digital divide	Unequal access affects participation	Disadvantaged students face greater challenges
Future Prospects of Social Media–Supported Learning	Blended learning, Training needs, Policy support	Optimism for structured integration	Institutional guidelines and training are essential

Discussion

The findings of this study bring out the various role played by social media in facilitating teaching–learning within community campuses at Chitwan. Online social networks (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp and Messenger) and video sharing websites (YouTube) were characterized as familiar, easy to access mediums that supported communication, flexibility and informal learning. With the availability of these platforms, mainly on smartphone and internet access, challenges around infrastructure in campuses can be overcome. Students are able to engage in learning at their convenience and location which encourages education that transcends the physical classroom space. This is consistent with previous studies that conclude social media offers accessible, low-cost and flexible platforms for information sharing and communication (Tess, 2013; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

This work also suggests that the use of social media can increase student’s engagement and motivation. Functions such as comments, likes and shares and instant messengers evoke the sense of social presence, which has been found to engage students who would be otherwise passive in traditional classrooms. The possibility to articulate ideas in less formal circumstances as well as the support of peers who share resources and provide feedback, this meaning-making supports students’ confidence and engagement. These results provide evidence to the social constructivist view that learning is understood as a socially mediated process in which knowledge is co-constructed through mutual interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). For this situation, not only communication is made possible by social media, but also participating and collaborating to knowledge creation.

Yet notwithstanding these advantages, the pedagogical application of social media in learning is mostly informal and add-on. The majority of lecturers indicated that social media activities had been introduced to teaching as an individual initiative, not as a planned teaching program. Content sharing, feedback provision and announcement are commonly used but there is little systematic pedagogical integration or alignment to assessment in evidence. This unstructured approach also raises questions around consistency, effectiveness and the danger of distraction, all pointing to an institutional basis, professional development and clear protocols as being most likely to maximize educational impact (Selwyn, 2016).

Digital and socio-economic differences also add to the complexity in using social media for learning. Disparate access to smart phones, stable internet connections and adequate data packages particularly disadvantages students from disadvantaged contexts — potentially increases existing educational inequalities. This result is consistent with previous works highlighting the importance of digital divide to students’ engagement and learning outcomes (Czerniewicz et al., 2020). Overcoming these disparities demands inclusive policies, support systems and an edifice of infrastructure up-grading for equitable access and participation.

Prospectively, lecturers had mixed views on the possibility of social media learning in community campuses. They would prefer models of blended learning that incorporate standard face to face with purposeful social media as long as training, institutional support, and ethical guidance are in place. This situates with connectivist theory, which emphasizes learning as a network-based process that has been supported by digital networks (Siemens, 2005). Accordingly, social media is not reintroduced as an alternative for traditional pedagogy but as a tool that, if well-measured and strategically used, can serve to support access, active participation, engagement and learner autonomy.

As a conclusion, the study highlights social media’s role as a transformative tool for higher education in resource-constraint environments. Its merits for communication, interaction and flexibility are well established; however challenges of digital equity, pedagogical readiness and planned integration must be faced in order to make it as effective as possible. Planning strategically and professional development and institutional support are essential for realizing the full potential of social media enhanced learning in community campuses.

Conclusion

This study explored the use of social media as a tool for teaching learning process in community campuses focusing on its potentials and challenges. The results suggest that using social networking sites (e.g.,

Facebook, WhatsApp), messaging and chat tools (e.g., Messenger) and video sharing websites (e.g., YouTube) is an easily available informal learning mechanism at low cost that can be used to help people connect, interact, communicate, and engage beyond the classroom. Increased student engagement, peer collaboration and the ability to learn independently are some of the positive aspects for students, specifically those who might be less participating in a traditional classroom. With the exception of offers, social media is thus mostly used informally and as a supplement to lectures rather than in terms of curriculum design and assessment. Furthermore, socio-economic and digital divides impact student engagement, suggesting that technology by itself cannot bridge social inequalities. Lecturers remained cautiously optimistic about the future of social media for learning, especially within blended learning approaches, with support through training (to manage time) and policy and ethical considerations. In conclusion, social media is a supplementary pedagogical tool that contributes to improving accessibility, engagement and learner autonomy in resource-deprived educational environments if used strategically. They note that if community campuses is to really meet its potential there must be reflection on how to use it most effectively as a tool in education, and investment in policy, training and infrastructure.

Limitations of the Study

Although this work has yielded useful information regarding lecturers' views on use of social media in community campus, the following limitations need to be recognized:

- Being restricted to a small sample of 10 lecturers however, may not be generalizable to the other community campuses or Nepal's higher education setting.
- The research only examined lecturers' views and experiences; yet, the students also had their own experiences which would have given a richer account of social media facilitated-learning.
- Interviews were semi-structured and may have been subject to self-reporting and social desirability biases.
- The nature of the qualitative research design is depth rather than breadth and, therefore, no attempts were made to quantitatively measure the influence of social media on learning outcomes.
- Specific circumstances, such as campus resources and local internet availability, may restrict the generalizability of findings to other geographic or institutional contexts.

Turning to the limitations, one could see that future studies might expand on these results have larger, mixed method studies including perspectives of both lecturers and students in combination with a focus on measurable learning outcomes to enhance our overall insight into the incorporation of social media in higher education.

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