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Exploring Students' Experiences of Using Facebook for Communication and Education

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the Secondary Level students' experiences and perceptions of using Facebook for academic and communicational purposes contributing to the less explored literature on students' social media usage in the context of Nepal. I used a descriptive-qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews with purposively selected eight grades 11 and 12 students studying in a government secondary school in Morang to investigate their daily usage of Facebook. The thematic analysis of this study indicated that most students perceived Facebook positively as one of the potential tools for their classroom learning purposes along with their daily online communication with family, relatives, and friends. However, some students also revealed their experiences of misusing Facebook such as creating fake Facebook accounts, chatting and flirting with unknown people, uploading fake photos, and receiving unpleasant comments in the posts resulting in family pressure on them. This study highlighted Facebook as a popular social network that has become one of the important tools in students' daily lives and academic careers by ensuring their electronic participation in communication

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and education, increasing their social relationships, collaboration and information sharing in the 21st century.

Keywords: Facebook usage, Online collaboration, descriptive-qualitative, learning purposes, e-communication

Introduction

The development of social media is outlined back to the time when the mainframe computer was developed in about 1960s, the microcomputer in the 1970s, the internet in the 1980s and the World Wide Web in the 1990s (Donaldson & Knupfer, 2002). Computer technology and the Internet have supported the foundation for the development of social networking sites at present. Aghaei et al. (2012) state that the World Wide Web (WWW) as a significant information search engine, has supported the progression of four generations of web technologies such as Web 1.0 evolved for connecting information, Web 2.0 for connecting people, Web 3.0 for connecting knowledge, and recently Web 4.0 for connecting intelligence. With the Web 2.0 features of the internet development, social media such as YouTube, Facebook, blogs and wikis became popular across the world in the first decade of the 21st century (Reinhardt, 2019). In the beginning, the arrival of Web 2.0 promoted blogs as a platform for sharing personal content that motivated many people around the globe to use social networking sites such as

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Skype, Instagram, Google+, and ResearchGate (Chiroma et al., 2016) Social media are internet-based applications with the technological foundations of Web 2.0, allowing people to create and exchange User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Facebook, as the fastest-growing Web 2.0 technology (Isacsson & Gretzel, 2011), has the highest popularity among all social networking sites (Chiroma et al., 2016). Weil (2015) stated that Mark Zuckerberg launched Facebook on February 4, 2004, to connect Harvard students to be familiar with each other and now it is available in over 70 languages of 213 countries (Pander et al., 2014). There were about 2.50 billion monthly active Facebook users in the world by September 2019, of which 387 million Facebook users were from Europe and 1,013,000 from Asia (Aslam, 2020). He further reports that India has the largest monthly Facebook users with 270 million, then 190 million in the US, and about 82% of the college graduates are on Facebook.

Social media are widely used websites as the essential parts of Information and Communication Technology to communicate virtually in the global context. The growing body of literature has emphasised that social media such as Facebook, Messenger, What's App, Twitter, Viber, and Google classroom are increasingly being used for educational purposes in many parts of the world, as it provides collaborative access to users to communicate and share content in virtual groups (Al-Dheleai & Tasir, 2017; Allam & Elyas, 2016; Miller et al., 2019; Premadasa et al., 2019). Rana (2018) reported that practising computer and ICT technology in education is a newer practice in Nepal. Studies on social media usage in education have become one of the popular and largely explored research areas in the western context, including many developed countries; however, it is needed to explore in the low technological context like Nepal focusing on how the students representing today's young generation perceive social media such as Facebook and how they have been using them in their daily life and study purposes. Realizing this situation, the researcher explored the typical experiences of students on Facebook usage. Although the statistics of internet and mobile users in Nepal are gradually increasing, many people cannot afford it due to their socioeconomic status and geographical location of the country. The study (Acharya, 2016) states that there is a considerable growth of internet users in Nepal along with the evolution of social networks. Talking about the internet penetration in Nepal, Neupane (2018) reported that there were about 35.70% internet users in October 2014, which increased to 45.64% in October 2015, 54.42% in October 2016 and approximately 62.94% in October 2017.

Similarly, based on the NTA report, Onlinekhabar (2019) informs that about 4.4 million Nepali internet users are added in a year and about 63% of the total population has access to the internet. Similarly, about 49 % of the total population uses internet services on their mobile phones, whereas about 10.9 million use the 3G service. Neupane (2018) states that Nepali users are increasing in social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter and communication platforms like Messenger, What's App, and Viber. Similarly, platforms like Emo and Viber are popular among people whose family members are abroad. Furthermore, Prasain (2019) reports that there are approximately 9.8 million active Facebook and Instagram users in the country, which is rapidly expanding internet access, and the presence of young people on Facebook is more than that of adults due to their online literacy. Dinesh (2021) reported according to the recent record of the Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) that there are about 36.7% of internet users in Nepal in the year 2020 including about 69.89% of social media users on Facebook and most of the internet bandwidth is consumed for social media such as Facebook, Tik-Tok, and YouTube. It seems that many young students are attracted to the extensive use of Facebook in their daily lives, but the limited research work on social media use in education in Nepal drew my attention. The researcher chose Facebook for this study as it is a popular social media with increasing choices of many young people in the present situation. Considering the importance of investigating the practices of

this social networks, focusing on how and for what purposes students studying in higher level have used Facebook in their daily life, this study aims to examine the experiences and perception on Facebook for academic and communicational purposes using the descriptive qualitative method. The following research questions guided the overall study:

- a) How are the students' experiences and perceptions of using Facebook in daily life and study?
- b) How does Facebook help students in their day-to-day life and study-related activities?

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature related to information and communication technology, Facebook as a social network and Learner productivity in Facebook Use.

Information and Communication Technology

Information and communication technologies (ICT) these days have become the necessities of many people around the world Ibrahim (2010). Different forms of traditional technologies such as radio, television, and telephone have been used in the field of education as an important means of serving with communication and delivering messages from the beginning. Wishart and Thomas (2015) argue that the development of Web 2.0 tools has greatly enabled people to create and share information online all over the world. Moreover, they report that it is more interactive than the previous static Web which allows only to consume information passively. The evolution of Web 2.0 has allowed new applications for social engagement (Woerner, 2015). As a result, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, what's app, Blogs, and YouTube have become the choice of many young people these days and they have been continuously used for interaction, collaboration, and information sharing among people around the globe. Researching the students' uses of social media is less explored in the context of Nepal, therefore it needs researchers' attention to fill this literature gap.

Facebook as a Popular Social Media

Social media technologies have changed the landscape of both personal and professional communication (Acharya, 2014). Similarly, Masin (2011) argued that the early 21st century has focused on the use of social media as the new platform of information sharing user-created content. (akir & Atmaca, 2015) reported that Facebook could potentially increase learners' self-study skills, language skills, access to authentic learning materials, practising new forms of knowledge, receiving instant feedback, and motivation from academic activities in intermediate classes. Supporting the widening use of social sites like Facebook, Chugh and Ruhi (2018) stated that Facebook has become an integral part of social media which aims to promote social communication and collaboration among people in the world. Various research emphasises the utility value of Facebook as the platform for communication, socialisation, fun, and recruitment, sources of data collection, research, and education.

Learner Productivity in Facebook Use

Facebook is recognized as one of the most popular and acceptable social networking sites among young students studying in college and university to facilitate online interaction and communication (Ping & Maniam, 2015). Students spend their considerable time on social media and Facebook has been preferred as the largest and leading social media application in the present-day virtual world (Al-Dheleai & Tasir, 2017; Hew, 2011). The Facebook platform was the information channel specially used to promote online communication, collaboration, content sharing, and engagement among people for academic and non-academic purposes (Alhazmi & Rahman, 2013) which creates several opportunities and challenges together (Chen & Sali, 2010). For example, Nguyen (2017) stated some of the problems resulting from the negative output of Facebook usage such as creating a distraction in work, ineffective and informal communication, collaboration, information accuracy, and cyber-bullying.

Similarly, Facebook has several misuses, such as fake identity, blackmailing, misinformation, and advertising.

In recent years, Facebook usage has increased rapidly and has become one of the most popular social media among students at the university and higher education levels. The study by Alhazmi and Rahman (2013) found that Facebook supported students in diverse ways in their academic and daily lives due to its interactive and collaborative features. Several studies such as (Çakir & Atmaca, 2015; Ping & Maniam, 2015; Shih, 2011) revealed that college students have a great deal of experience in using Facebook for different purposes. These studies showed that teaching through Facebook significantly improved the students' interests and motivation, increased the learners' self-study skills, language skills, access to authentic learning materials, practising new forms of knowledge, receiving instant feedback and motivation from educational activities in the intermediate classes. Similarly, a study in Nepal (Jha et al., 2016) of Nepal reported most of the students used Facebook mainly for online communication with friends and family, news updates and leisure time but only about 5% of students used Facebook for educational purposes.

The above literature reflects Facebook as one of the widely used social networking sites, has several beneficial features for students at higher levels such as collaboration, communication, and knowledge transformation. However, limited studies are addressing the student use of Facebook in the context of Nepal.

Methodology

As suggested by Lambert and Lambert (2012), the study was based on the descriptive design under qualitative research to find out the detailed information, experience and perception of students' using Facebook in their daily life and study. The selection of this design supported the researcher in describing social phenomena and a comprehensive summary of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals in everyday life (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The study was carried out in Shree Pokhariya Secondary School of Morang, Nepal. The students studying in grades 11 and 12 were the study population and eight Facebook-using students were selected as the sample of the study by using a purpose sampling method as suggested by (Cohen et al., 2007).

The semi-structured interview was used in the study following the idea of Cohen et al. (2018) as a major tool of data collection to get the free space for personal responses from the smaller size of the sample in the study. The researchers can ask about people's beliefs, perspectives, facts, feelings and motives to yield rich information from the interview in qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018). Therefore, following the idea (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018), open-ended questions were designed in the interview guidelines to investigate the overall experience and perception of students about Facebook usage. A qualitative descriptive research approach needs a straightforward description of a phenomenon (Lambert & Lambert, 2012), hence, the obtained information was analysed by using a descriptive summary of the information. The findings were presented in an organized, logical, and relevant manner based on the different categories and subcategories of the themes.

Results

This section presents the critical analysis of the findings outlined under the different themes and sub-themes based on the information obtained from the semi-structured interviews with the students. The major themes of the findings were: students' experience and perception of Facebook use in daily life and using Facebook for academic purposes.

Students' Experience and Perception on Facebook Use in Daily Life

The students involved in this study responded to their growing attraction to using Facebook to connect with friends and share ideas as most of them were found to be active Facebook users, spending more than three hours daily on Facebook. They reported their access to mobile, laptop, and internet at home, and sometimes they used Facebook from mobile data connecting to 3G and 4G. One of the interviewed students explained:

I have four years of experience in using Facebook with more than one thousand Facebook friends. I spend about five hours a day using this application to chat with old friends and relatives. I use it for entertainment such as watching videos, listening to music, sharing photos, and getting updated on recent news. (S1)

I use Facebook for three hours daily to watch and react to my friends' stories and posts especially to know what they have done today. Similarly, I use it to be in touch with my relatives and friends, to follow my favourite celebrities, and to be updated about the current news, sports, and weather. (S3)

The experiences indicated how secondary-level students use Facebook in their daily lives in their context. They seem active in this social media spending extensive periods for various entertainment and e-communicational purposes. This is similar to the findings of Thapa (2017) who reported that most of the students use Facebook for communication among their friends and teachers which developed their interpersonal communication skills.

Some of the participants revealed in the interview that they used Facebook based on their personal choices. For example, one of the participants expressed, "Facebook removes my boredom as I chat with my girlfriend, strangers and my crush using Facebook. Occasionally I like to flirt with my crush and watch her stories' photos" (S2).

These findings indicated the way students practise Facebook in the context of this study. Their participation in using this application showed that the use of social media is mostly directed for personal entertainment purposes and also for establishing a familial, social and romantic relationship among the people around these participants.

The participants involved in this study were technology-friendly and enjoyed learning through Facebook, however, some of the students reported that they did not get support from their parents as their parents' attitude towards Facebook usage was different from their expectations. Some of the students reported that their parents developed a belief that they used Facebook to chat with friends and play mobile games such as Ludo, PUBG and Free Fire making circle of friends. This is contrastive with the study of Raza et al. (2020) who suggested that parental support had a positive role in the students' academic performance in the classroom because parents can lower their children's technological stress that appears while using social media.

Similarly, students used Facebook for different purposes especially to upload their photos, share interesting posts, update with the current news, and follow their favourite celebrities. However, some of the students revealed that they use Facebook unnecessarily for various negative purposes such as creating fake Facebook accounts, chatting and flirting with unknown people, uploading fake photos, getting unnecessary comments on the posts. Some of them could not get parental support to solve the technological and psychological problems created by their misuse of Facebook; instead, parents pressured their children to avoid its use in daily life. For example, one of the respondents shared how she perceived Facebook after her experience of misusing it:

I had seven Facebook accounts, but I used only two real accounts to connect with my friends and relatives. Once, I uploaded my photo on one of my fake Facebook accounts, but I got many negative comments on that post which made me very sad, and I deactivated that Facebook account. My mother scolded me badly and pressured me not to use Facebook. Therefore, I request my brother and sister that we need to use Facebook only in our free time. Now I realised that we should not connect and chat with a stranger. We should think before uploading photos and posts on Facebook. (S7)

This response indicated how social media such as Facebook created complexities in a person's life by establishing false online connections with unknown people.

Most of the students positively perceived Facebook concerning their daily use of virtual connections with people. For example, one of the students said:

Facebook has made it easier to call my parents every day who are far from my rented room. I feel very close to them when I see them every day in video calls. I can talk with my friends and ask about their updates although we have not met for so long. (S4)

This response indicated that Facebook helped students connect and communicate with the outer world, friends, and family members through online communication, such as video calling and chatting.

Using Facebook for Academic Purposes

Similar to the findings of Ainin et al. (2015), students in this study reported that Facebook has supported them in their classroom learning, as they use Facebook as a discussion platform for sharing various digital learning materials, notes, and assignments with their classmates. They reported that they had created a close Facebook group chat of the class where they received the study materials, assignments, project works, and important educational notices sent by the teachers and friends. Moreover, the interviewed students responded that they used Facebook messenger groups to discuss difficult educational problems with friends and teachers. They improved their study by joining various educational groups that provided useful study materials. For example, some students responded as follows:

We have created a Facebook messenger group that includes all my class friends and teachers, which has supported discussing study-related ideas among group members and sharing my homework and notes with friends. We shared our ideas and project work through the messenger group. (S)

I access my assignments, project works, teachers' notes and different school notices through School Facebook pages and close chat groups of my class. Social medial such as Facebook group chat has assisted in my study and I can get a variety of learning materials as per my convenient time. (S5)

Many of the students replied that they used Facebook for lesson-related discussions with friends and teachers and shared study materials, class assignments, notes and important notices in the group chat. This information from the participants indicated that Facebook can help students share academic ideas and information in the group and can improve their study when students use it properly as an interactive learning platform.

The study found students' positive perceptions of using Facebook to improve their studies and get support and feedback from teachers and friends. In response to the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook based on their experience, another respondent said:

We should use Facebook only for a limited time. Being addicted to Facebook wastes our time and makes us physically passive and unhealthy, leading to less interest in studying and involvement in illegal activities. Therefore, I suggest that all students use Facebook properly for educational and informational purposes.
(S2)

This expression indicates how students perceive the uses of social networks regarding their role in their daily life and study.

Discussion

This study focused on the learners' experience and perception of using Facebook for academic and nonacademic purposes in the context of Nepal exploring how this application is used by these students in the present situation.

Students' Facebook Usage

As reported in the study of Sánchez et al. (2014), the participants' experience of using Facebook indicated that students primarily use social media including Facebook for entertainment and rapport building with their friends and family members rather than using it for their learning purposes. However, these students' perception of academic uses of Facebook contradicts the findings of Bashir (2019) who reported that the interactive use of online applications develops collaborative learning. Moreover, the participants revealed that Facebook can be considered one of the accessible social media and learning platforms because it helps students exchange knowledge and information through online communication among their friends and teachers.

All the students positively perceived the role of Facebook uses, however, some of them regretted misusing the Facebook platform through unnecessary posts and negative comments as per the argument of Wang et al. (2011) and suggested that it should be used in leisure time carefully.

The use of Facebook has increased the technological awareness of the participants in this study as per the ideas of Gulati (2008) while using technological tools in the context of developing countries. Students in this study expressed that although they could deal with the issues and problems of using social media, some of them did not get support from their parents to use Facebook. They expected that students' positive use of social media should be encouraged by their friends, teachers and parents.

Facebook Supports to the Students

The result is similar to the study of Sánchez et al. (2014) who found that Facebook adopted by students can have practical implications to increase their learning experience through communication and collaboration. The participants in my study responded to Facebook as an innovative practice to develop an understanding of the lessons and learning contents shared by their friends and teachers in Facebook groups and the findings reflected that students had opportunities to explore and share study content with their friends. Following Resta and Laferrière (2007), collaborative learning is one of the successful outputs of the use of Facebook and participants had a positive reflection of their e-participation for collaborative learning as it introduces several teaching-learning opportunities among learners. Consistent with the conclusion of Geiller (2014), the findings indicated the need of integrating social media in classroom activities for better performance as students in this study informed that they can improve their study in different subjects through online discussion and collaboration.

The learners revealed that the interactive use of Facebook creates a supportive learning environment. These findings aligned with the study of Mali & Hassan (2013) who suggested Facebook as a learning tool significantly affected the intention of students to use it in daily life. However, the findings were dissimilar from the study of Abu-Shanab & Al-Tarawneh (2015) in that they reported the negative influence of social media and Facebook in terms of students' performance that the more time they spent on Facebook, the lower the grade students got. Based on these findings, students can transform the communicative use of Facebook into educational purposes integrating it in everyday teaching-learning activities.

Conclusion and Implications

Facebook as an online application has increased students' e-participation for entertainment purposes, virtual communication and sharing feelings with their friends and relatives due to their extensive uses in daily life. Based on the evidence of this study, students' primary uses of Facebook are not related to educative purposes. One of the most popular online platforms for students to share academic problems and learning materials is Facebook, which creates a variety of learning opportunities, such as expanding their pedagogical, content, and technological knowledge and enhancing their day-to-day learning through Facebook. As a result of the potential for abuse and future consequences, students anticipated using Facebook with caution for a limited period. It is possible to foster a collaborative, innovative, and active learning environment through the use of Facebook for educational purposes. Students' social media preferences can be met by incorporating social media into classroom instruction, such as Facebook. These findings can contribute to the less explored research area about the students' usage of social media in daily life and integration of it in education in many developing countries understanding the primary uses of social media by students in higher-level in Nepal.

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