

Social Networking Sites as a Tool for Education: A Challenge Ahead

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Abstract

The present paper not only discusses the Social Networking Sites (SNS) as a tool for education but also as a challenge ahead in the Indian context. The paper tries to find out how the Indian education system has to explore the opportunities Social Networking Sites (SNS) will generate as an educational tool without compromising the threats it entail. The task ahead for teachers, students, policy makers and administrators is challenging who have to respond immediately because the wider time gap in updating of the education system will result only in more questions unattended.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites, Education

1.0 Introduction

The usage of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has made a huge impact on the lives of youngsters. It became an indispensable sort of status symbol for them to remain updated in their peer group circle. Web 2.0 technologies like social network sites, blogs, wikis, twitter, podcasts, virtual worlds, video and photo sharing are now becoming the matrix of their online and offline life. Before proceeding to the present theme of the paper, we have to go briefly through the technical background and features of Social Networking Sites (SNS) so that its pros and cons in education can be looked intrinsically.

2.0 What are Social Networking Sites (SNS)?

Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined **Social Network Sites** as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of others users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those connections may vary from site to site. They also differentiated between the term Social Network Sites and Social Networking Sites (SNS): **networking** emphasizes relationship initiation often between strangers while **Social Network Sites** enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. Each social networking site has their own criteria of the visibility of users' profile.

2.1 From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 Transformation

In *Web 1.0*, users were passive *consumers* of information and characterized as *the public* without having any contribution or active involvement. The term, *Web 2.0* is commonly associated with web applications which facilitate interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration on the Web so that web communities can be made. The Web 2.0 tools (discussion forums, blogs, wikis, chat-rooms, electronic calendars, and documents) provided a truly interactive, visually compelling, and motivating environment for developing the life skills and knowledge needed for today's globalized, high-tech environment (Ala-Mutka et al., 2009; Eteokleous, 2009; Hargadon, 2009; Richardson, 2009).

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2.2 Examples of Social Networking Sites (SNS)

Twitter, facebook, friendster, MySpace, Cyworld, Bebo, Orkut, Skype and many others. Facebook is one of the most popular Social Networking Sites (SNS) for students and the general public. The number of technological features makes them more user friendly and providing opportunities to share more things frequently. Figure 1 here shows the timeline of major Social Network Sites:

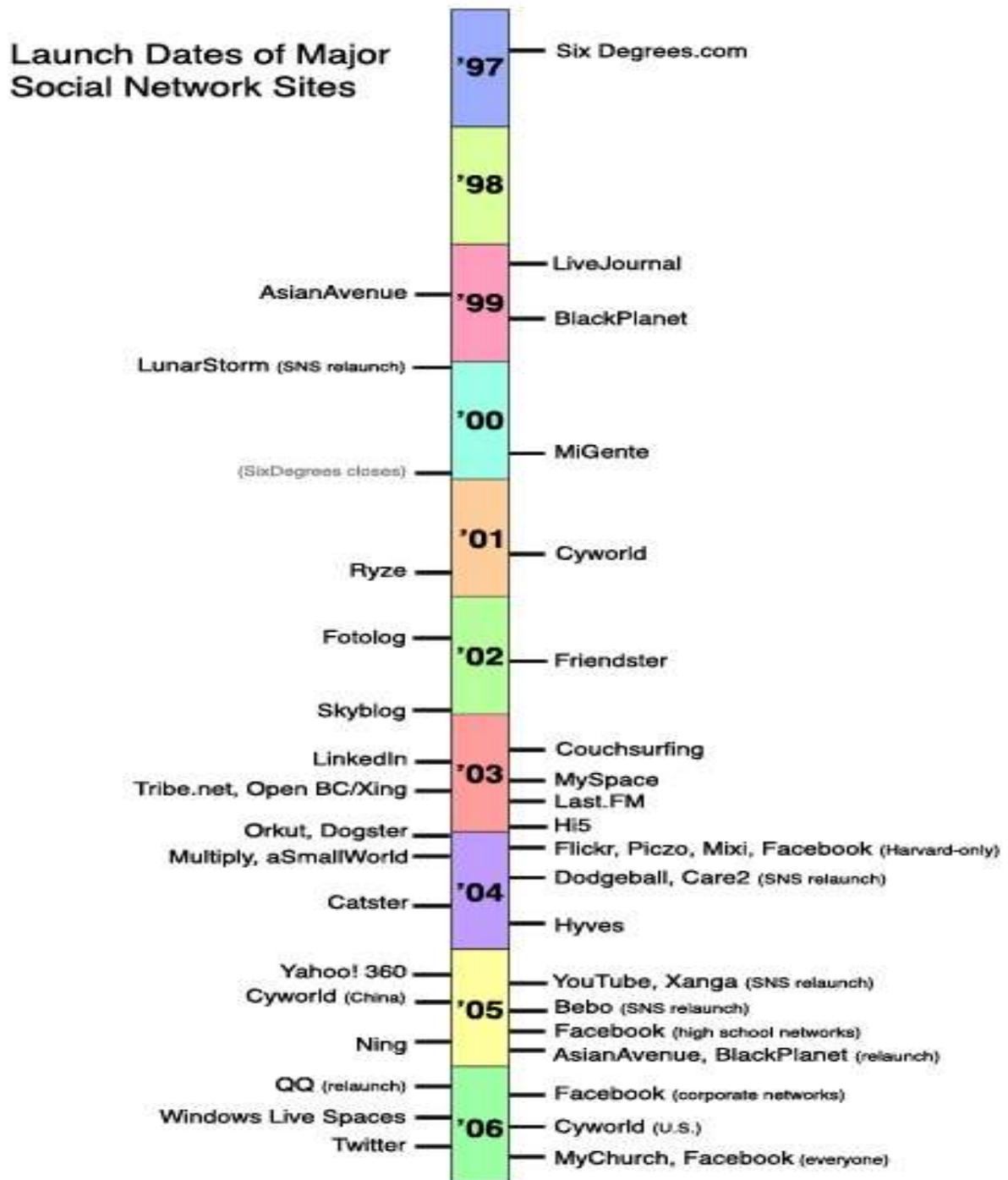


Figure 1: Timeline of the launch dates of major Social Networking Sites (SNS) by Boyd and Ellison (2007)

Many new Social Network Sites emerged since 2006; some of the sites' timeline is indicated here:

Table 1: Major Social Network Sites since 2006

Name	Description/Focus	Date launched	Released on
PatientsLikeMe	Online community for patients with life changing illness to find other patients like them, share their data with others and learn more about their condition to improve their outcome	2006	-
Flixster	Movies sharing	2007	-
WeRead	Books sharing	2007	-
Elixio	Business executives' sharing platform	2007	-
Cross.tv	Faith based social network for Christian believers from around the world	2008	-
Academia.edu	Social networking site for academics and researchers	2008	-
FullCircle	Geosocial networking and location based services portal for mobile devices	2009	-
LaiBhaari	Marathi social networking	2010	-
TermWiki	Learning/languages/translation-1.2m terms in more than 1300 subjects	2010	-
StudentsCircle Network	A social network connecting students, teachers and institutions to course resources, study groups and learning spaces	2010	-
Pinterest	Photo sharing interest	2010	-
Quora	Question and answer website created, edited and organized by its community of users.	2010	-
Google+	General	2011	-
Wellwer	Community without borders, where sharing is everything	2011	-
Twoo.com	Social discovery platform	2011	-
Medium	Blog publishing platform	2012	-
Pheed	Gives users-mainly celebrities, musicians and entertainment types persons to monetizing their 'pheeds' via photos/texts/audio/video broadcast	2012	-
Digg	Sharing of social news	2004	2012
Dropbox	Web-based file hosting service	2008	2012
Instagram	Photo and video sharing	2010	2013
Tumblr	Micro blogging platform	2007	2013
Skype	Free internet calls	2003	2013
WhatsApp	Free internet calls plus photo and video sharing	2009	2013

Source: Wikipedia.org (2013)

2.3 Reasons for the rise of online social networking

Ofcom (2008) discussed the numerous reasons for the rise of online social networking as (i) a common platform of networking with other people; (ii) users' urge to share their views with others on political, cultural, economic scenario; (iii) the users' ideological freedom to express themselves; (iv) creating relationships in the form of Friends or Groups; (v) to satisfy the inherent inquisitiveness of human's what other people are doing with their lives; (vi) the desire to learn and connect with others; (vii) removes social isolation and many other benefits of engaging with public services.

According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) most sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious or nationality-based identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging and photo/video-sharing.

As cited by Boyd and Ellison (2007), currently, there are no reliable data regarding how many people use SNSs, although marketing research indicates that SNSs are growing in popularity worldwide (comScore, 2007). This growth has prompted many corporations to invest time and money in creating, purchasing, promoting, and advertising SNSs. At the same time, other companies are blocking their employees from accessing the sites. Additionally, the U.S. military banned soldiers from accessing MySpace (Frosch, 2007) and the Canadian government prohibited employees from Facebook (Benzie, 2007), while the U.S. Congress has proposed legislation to ban youth from accessing SNSs in schools and libraries (H.R. 5319, 2006).

3.0 Theoretical perspectives about the Social Networking Sites

3.1 Theoretical perspective (*On the positive side of Social Networking Sites*)

The studies done by Yang (2003); Silverman (2007); Kord (2008); Helou & Rahim (2010) and Swang (2011) supported that the college students are frequent users of online social networking, more so for general purposes than for the academic purposes. Lavleen Kaur (2012) in her study on *relationship between Social Networking Sites (SNS) usage and social skills of the pupil teachers* concluded that there exists significant relationship between Social Networking Sites (SNS) and social skills of the teachers.

Walz's (2009) study suggested that the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) may benefit college students by increasing their sense of belonging and increased the proficiency in offline social and communicative behaviours.

Crook and Harrison (2008) stated that little empirical research has been conducted on the value of Web 2.0 in education. However, few of them have specifically addressed its role in pedagogy (Charnigo & Barnett-Ellis, 2007; Mathews, 2006; Mazer et al., 2007; Selwyn, 2007; Towner & VanHorn, 2007).

3.2 Theoretical perspective (*On the negative side of Social Networking Sites*)

Raccanello's (2011) study concluded that online social networking texts are superficial and embellished but also representative of identities which are far away from real identities. Rosen (2011) on the basis of the findings of the studies discussed the potential adverse effects of Social Networking Sites (SNS) as under:

- Narcissistic tendencies, psychological disorders, anti social behaviours, aggressive tendencies, anxiety and depression.
- Health issues.
- Distraction.

4.1 Social Networking Sites (SNS) for Teachers

1. **With links to share with students** : Blackboard; Box.net: Connect and collaborate on a platform that seamlessly integrates with Google, Autodesk, Zoho, WordPress and Picnik; Cramster; Del.icio.us; Ecto; Edu2.0; Edublogs; Flickr; Google Docs; Moodle; Social Media Classroom; TeacherTube; Twitter and WikiEducator; Zumeo.

2. **For teachers only**: 4Teachers; Classroom 2.0; EDU4DRR; Linkedin; Ning; Promethean Planet; ProTeacher Community; TeacherLingo and We the Teachers (Madhavi, 2011).

3. **Top 20 Social Networks for Education**: Twitter, Classroom 2.0, Facebook, Google Plus, Plurk, Educator's PLN, Sophia, Learn Central, ISTE Community, WhoTeaches, Edutopia, Technology Integration in Education, The 21st Century Teacher, Better Lesson, Diipo, Intel Education, Everloop, Edudemic, K12 Advantage and Collaborative Translation (Kapuler, 2011).

4.2 Uses of Social Networking Sites (SNS) for Teachers

1. Rosen (2011) found that Social Networking Sites (SNS)
 - Users are better at showing *virtual empathy* to their online friends.
 - Helps introvert adolescents to learn how to socialise.
 - Provides tools for teaching in compelling ways that engage young students.
2. It assists teachers in creating, collaborating and sharing the teaching material.
3. The posting feature of Social Networking Sites (SNS) can be used by forming the groups of students so that teacher can ask for help on lessons, assignments and exercises, and information on courses and assignments.
4. Teachers and students can share and discuss the news related to their concerned field.
5. Teachers can disseminate the knowledge and information gained from attending seminars, conferences and workshops etc.
6. Teachers can show students how to set up their own blogs using free sites like WordPress.

5. Social Networking Sites (SNS) as a tool for Education

1. **Social Networking Sites (SNS) for the development and promotion of education**: The three type of education i.e. formal, informal and non-formal will be affected by the Social Networking Sites (SNS) usage.

- **Formal Education**: This implies modification of behaviour of the students through an organised system of education which is specifically developed with pre-determined objectives and is having formal ends and ways to accomplish those objectives. Agencies are school, library, museum, art gallery, laboratory and books.
- **Informal Education**: Here the modification of behaviour in the learner is dependent upon his/her receptivity and conditions of the learning environment that comes naturally and spontaneously in his/her life. Agencies are family, community, religion, state and playground.
- **Non-Formal Education**: This system of education is the middle path between Formal and Informal system of education. It is the latest concept and is emerging as a powerful system for the promotion and development of education with the help of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development. Agencies are Open Schools, Open University, Virtual Universities, Open and Distance Learning Centres etc.

The following table shows how the three systems get affected by Social Networking Sites (SNS):

Table 2: Three systems of education and Social Networking Sites (SNS)

Formal Education	Informal Education	Non-formal Education
Revamp the <i>aims and objectives</i> of the education with reference to SNS	Society has to come forward to think about the <i>pros and cons</i> of SNS	Continuously upgrade the <i>aims and objectives</i> of the education with reference to SNS
Teachers: Maintenance of a social network with students, parents, peers, experts, professionals, administrators will generate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnectivity • Creative ideas • Innovation • Research & Development • Transactional communication • Better guidance to students • Immediate feedback • Follow-up of the assigned tasks • Better Evaluation process • Professional development of teachers e.g. LinkedIn- can share different issues • E-content development • Resource material • Teaching methodologies will change • More teaching skills are required 	Awareness about ethical considerations and Cyber laws among the general public.	Teachers: Maintenance of a social network with students, parents, peers, experts, professionals, administrators will generate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnectivity • Research & Development • Better guidance to students • Immediate feedback • Follow-up of the assigned tasks • Better Evaluation process • Professional development of teachers e.g. LinkedIn can share different issues • Easy uploading of E-content • Resource material • Freedom from satellites mode • More accessibility to distance learners • Better student support services • Availability of more experts to distant learners. • More adaptability of teaching strategies during Personal Contact Programmes
Students : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self motivation for self study • More inquisitiveness to learn • Accessibility of teachers and experts • Better understanding and self evaluation • Group connectivity and <i>we</i> feeling among students • Time management • Can seek guidance for educational, personal and vocational purposes • Social and communication skills will develop • Application of knowledge 	Depends upon the intention of users. Users can either engage in useful activities or harmful activities of the Social Networking Sites (SNS)	Students : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self motivation for self study • More inquisitiveness to learn • Accessibility of teachers and experts • Self evaluation • Group connectivity and <i>we</i> feeling among students • Time management • Can seek guidance for educational and vocational purposes • Effective Student Support service • Interest generator
Examination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comprehensive • Quick results 	If ethical considerations are not kept by the users, it will lead to privacy invasion.	Examination: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More comprehensive • Quick results
Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation • Flexible in nature 	User may have no mechanism to evaluate his/her activities on Social Networking Sites (SNS)	Evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation • Flexible in nature
Feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate feedback from teachers 	Users like /unlike define the feedback	Feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate feedback from teachers
Administrators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick disposal of cases • Effective and efficient functioning of the system 	No mechanism is there to act upon users suggestions	Administrators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick disposal of cases • Effective and efficient functioning of the system
Cost effective	Social benefits/costs depend upon the purposes of users	Cost effective
Better Human Resource practices	Depends upon the purposes of users	Maximisation of Human Resource Development
Less requirement of infrastructural set up	—	More extension to Virtual Era
Will cater to the needs of Special and Exceptional children	—	Will cater to the needs of Women and in-service persons

2. *Effect of Social Networking Sites (SNS) on teacher-student relationship:* The two way communication and immediate feedback from teachers will definitely bond the teacher-student relationship in a positive manner provided that teachers know their LIMITS.
3. *Social Networking Sites (SNS) for flourishing the services of education:* The features of email, instant messaging, chatting, uploading of pictures/files/videos and different applications can serve better in flourishing the services of education, like:
 - Guidance Services can be provided by the different educational institutions and NGO's.
 - Placement Services can be run by the educational institutions in an efficient manner.
 - Students' grievances can be redressed which will create trust and faith among the students (further strengthening the bond between teachers and students).
 - The queries can be posted by the students.
 - Job postings can be done by the Placement administrator.
 - Better networking and Inter connectivity between different institutions, companies, employment exchange and students.
 - Helpline to students.
 - Administrators can efficiently seek the appraisal of their policies implementation and efficient decision making process will follow.
 - NGO's can come forward with their solutions to enhance students' life skills.
4. *Behavioural aspects in Social Networking Sites (SNS):* Different psychological behaviours will be get affected by the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS). The students' different skills like communication, decision making, critical thinking etc will be developed and the objective of all round development can be attained.
5. *Impact of Social Networking Sites (SNS) on students' groups:* The community feeling among teachers, students, experts etc will generate the common goals to achieve for the growth and development of education. According to a recent survey by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, about 84 per cent of all young men (2.4 crore) and 82 per cent of college-going students (1.5 crore) and 68 per cent of school-going (1.5 crore) kids in our country have access to social media. The survey indicates that there are 224 million computer literate people in our country. Further, there are 150 million Internet users. Among the total Internet users, 72 per cent have access to social networking. Facebook virtually dwarfs all other social networking sites in India, with 97 per cent (5 crore) of active Internet users accessing the site. This is followed by Google Plus (34 per cent), LinkedIn (17 per cent) and Twitter (14 per cent) (Gautam, 2013).
6. *Impact of Social Networking Sites (SNS) on media technology used in India:* The examples of the use of media technology in education in India are *GyanVani* (an educational FM radio station in several cities of India), *GyanDarshan* (an educational broadcast program initiated by the Indira Gandhi National Open University). Apart from these, teleconferencing, audio conferencing, multi media techniques, e-learning materials have also been used by students. There are various e-courses run by universities and private institutions. But Social Networking Sites like twitter, facebook, orkut and others like Google and YouTube have provided students with a vast pool of knowledge (Tere, 2011).

6. Challenges while using Social Networking Sites (SNS) as an educational tool are:

In our country, computer literacy is very low, as only 3 per cent of our homes own personal computer. However, the Union Government plans to provide broadband Internet connectivity to 2.5 lakh gram panchayats in our country by mid-2014 (Gautam, 2013). The following are the challenges ahead while using Social Networking Sites as an educational tool:

- Social Networking Sites (SNS) at Secondary and Senior Secondary stage of education is still a question mark.
- Invasion of privacy.
- Cases of suicide.
- Societal pressure and fear of social isolation.
- Privacy and security settings of Social Networking Sites (SNS).
- Public opinions in the form of negative criticism.
- Informal interactions with strangers can endanger one's life.
- Weak cyber laws (in case of India). In December 2011, the IT minister KapilSibal expressed his serious concern over the usage of Social Networking Sites that can cause threat to national integration (The Hindu, 2011).
- No one is guiding or supervising the students about security issues, laws and the technicalities' of Social Networking Sites (SNS) operation.
- The defamatory and obscene material.
- Copyright issues.
- Jeopardizing the relationships.
- Public posts can be scrutinized by the authorities and administrators who may found them objectionable.
- National security and peace can be at risk.
- Moral and ethical expectations of the users.
- Time management problems.
- Student indiscipline and politics can create institutional problems.
- Accessibility to internet.
- Uninterrupted power supply.
- Environment problem.
- Lack of research on Social Networking Sites (SNS) in Indian context that how it can promote, enhance and support the existing system of education.

7. Conclusion

We as teachers, as have to make sure that Social Networking Sites (SNS) are not moving us from the *formal system of education*(structured) to the *non-formal education*(virtual boundaries). The technologies may come or become obsolete; the need of the mentor, guide and philosopher as a *teacher* cannot be marginalised at any stage of education. It is the *teacher* who provides the *vision* to the students by leading them from *darkness to light*. Teachers and policy makers of the Indian education system have to consider that Social Networking Sites (SNS) must work as a tool for the nation building capacity (*through education*) not the useless virtual trap of technology for the future generation.

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