

Social Media Usage in Learning, Opportunities and Challenges for Teachers and Learners – Study of Distance and Open Learning

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Abstract

Usage of digital space for learning is not new. Social media can support student engagement, collaboration, and self-managed learning by creating a platform for meaningful, natural discussion (Manca & Ranierit, 2013). But usage of social media in the digital space for learning is providing opportunities and challenges to the users. Hence a study was initiated to examine and evaluate the usage of social media in learning during the courses and programs conducted at the Institute of Distance and Open Learning (IDOL) of University of Mumbai, based on the theory of uses and gratification. The digital space usage has seen an increase in social media platforms among students and teachers in the process of learning and teaching. It has become the common platform for speedy exchange of information related to learning and processing of educational materials. This study aimed at demonstrating various opportunities and challenges for both students and teachers in the process of learning using 'WhatsApp' application. The patterns of communication, in terms of text and image usage, preference and the processing of information between students and teachers were also studied from the data collected from 143 persons who were teachers (n=43) and students (100) at the IDOL in Mumbai University. Even though each social media tools has different characteristics that influence its suitability for learning purposes (Calvo, Arbiol & Iglesias, 2014) only the usage of 'WhatsApp' application was studied. This study also aimed to examine the effectiveness of usage of 'WhatsApp' for learning, using a research tool was developed for the purpose of study. The same was used for gathering of the data. The results of the analysis demonstrated the significant difference in gender, information, education and entertainment purpose of the usage by learners and teachers. The segregation of the groups remained oblivious due the differences in the course of learning, where as the functions performed by the learner in sharing academic and educational information revealed certain specific characteristics, based on the need of the learner. However the 'WhatsApp' as social media platform in digital space remained to be used for more than learning and did offer challenges in terms of culture and diversity to the users.

Keywords: Communication, Social Media, 'WhatsApp', Education, Learning