



Effectiveness of social media platforms in remote learning during lockdowns

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Abstract

The year 2020 will be remembered in history for its viral epidemic named Covid-19, right now this pandemic is killing lakhs of people around the world. The whole world has come to stand still as lockdown is imposed strictly to stop the spread of this virus. Schools, colleges, offices, factories, theatres, etc. every place where people gather are either closed or working with minimum staff, the worst affected are educational institutions. The institutions all over the country have to be shut down abruptly and that too at a time when the academic session was in full swing.

In this situation teachers started using innovative methods to reach the students. Institutions also encouraged the teachers to keep the process of teaching from the confinement of home. Also 'Work from home' concept gained momentum especially in the corporate sector and this concept was readily accepted by the teachers.

Keywords: Covid-19, effectiveness, social media and work from home

Introduction

Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available introduces challenges of definition; however, there are some common features -

1. Social media are interactive Web or Internet-based applications.
2. User-generated content such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions, is the lifeblood of social media.
3. Users create service-specific profiles and identities for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization.
4. Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups.

According to Bryer and Zavatarro (2011), "Social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies contain blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text), slide share, Rss, sharing tools, facebook, and virtual worlds".

Users usually access social media services via web-based apps on desktops, laptops, or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices (e.g., smartphones and tablets). As users engage with these electronic services, they create highly interactive platforms through which individuals, communities, and organizations can share, co-create, discuss, participate and modify user-generated content or self-curated content posted online.

Mobile Social Media

Mobile social media refer to the use of social media on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. Mobile social media are a useful application of mobile marketing because the creation, exchange, and circulation of user-generated content can assist companies with marketing research, communication, and relationship development. Mobile social media differ from others because they incorporate the current location of the user (location-sensitivity) or the time delay between sending and receiving messages (time-sensitivity).

Mobile social media applications can be differentiated among four types

1. *Space-timers* (location and time sensitive): Exchange of information with relevance mostly for one specific location

at one specific point in time (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)

2. *Space-locators* (only location sensitive): Exchange of information, with relevance for one specific location, which is tagged to a certain place and read later by others (e.g. Yelp, Qype, Tumblr, Fishbrain, etc.)
3. *Real-timers* (only time sensitive): Exchange of information with relevance to time (e.g. posting Twitter messages or Facebook status updates, Zoom meetings, skype, Google meet, SlideShare, Google Plus, etc)
4. *Slow-timers* (neither location nor time sensitive): Exchange of social media applications to mobile devices where time and location are not specified (e.g. YouTube video, MOOC programs, etc.)

We will be discussing some of the Social Media Platforms that are being used by the teachers in order to reach their students.

Zoom Video Communications

During this lockdown period, teachers are extensively using Zoom social media technology to reach students. Zoom video Communications provides video-telephony and online chat services through a cloud-based peer-to-peer software platform and is used for teleconferencing, distance education, telecommuting, and social relations. Use of the platform is free for video conferences of up to 100 participants, with a certain time limit depending on the country one is residing. For longer or larger conferences with more features, paid subscriptions are available.

Some of the features of Zoom Meetings are

- Easy integration of Presentation slides, smart boards and other support materials.
- Join from anywhere on any device
- Built-in tools for screen sharing
- HD video and audio calls
- Support for up to 1,000 video participants and 49 videos
- Meet securely with role-based user permissions
- Built-in recording and transcripts
- Team chat both for groups and one-on-one messaging
- Access to extra features like webinars, chat, and phone

Setup

Setting up Zoom is quite easy. Clicking on a Zoom invitation link will either launch the app or prompt users to install the lightweight interface in their devices. Installation of the app takes less than a minute on most devices.

Interface and performance

Zoom's interface is lightweight and easy to use, both on desktops and mobile apps. The app has four buttons: New Meeting, Join, Schedule and Screen Share, with a calendar for upcoming meetings. The web app offers more advanced features, such as managing your profile, managing local and cloud recordings, and scheduling webinars (paid plans only). The interface is clean and easy to navigate.

In terms of performance, Zoom relays audio and video very fast, almost in real-time. Screen sharing may lag a bit depending on the speed of the internet. Zoom is heavy on system resources therefore high configuration is required for smooth running.

Google Classroom

One of the most popular and systematically organised elearning platform is Google Classroom which is specifically designed to provide seamless communication between a teacher and student. Technically speaking the primary purpose of Google Classroom is to streamline the process of sharing files between teachers and students.

Google Classroom integrates documents, sheets, PPT slides, gmail content, and even calendar into a single platform of communication, students can be invited to join a class through a private code issued via email, or automatically imported from a school domain.

Functioning

It immensely suits the teachers as they can create, distribute and mark assignments all within the google ecosystem. Each class of students can create a separate folder in their respective user's drive, where the student can submit work to be graded by a teacher. Assignments and due dates are added to google calendar, each assignment can belong to a category (or topic). Teachers can monitor the progress for each student by reviewing revision history of a document, and after being graded, teachers can return work along with comments.

Student's assignments

Assignments of the students can be stored and graded on Google's suite of productivity applications that allow collaboration between the teacher and the student or student to student. Instead of sharing documents that reside on the student's Google Drive with the teacher, files are hosted on the student's Drive and then submitted for grading. Teachers may choose a file that can then be treated as a template so that every student can edit their own copy and then turn back in for a grade instead of allowing all students to view, copy, or edit the same document. Students can also choose to attach additional documents from their Drive to the assignment.

Grading of assignments

One of the features of Google Classroom is that it supports many different grading schemes. Teachers also have the option to attach files to the assignment which students can view, edit, or get an individual copy. Students can create files and then attach them to the assignment if a copy of a file wasn't created by the teacher. Teachers have the option to monitor the progress of each student on the assignment where they can make comments and edit. Submitted assignments can be graded by the teacher and returned with comments to allow the student to revise the assignment, once graded, assignments can only be edited by the teacher unless the teacher turns the assignment back in.

Communication between teacher and students

Instructions and announcements can be posted by teachers to the class stream which can be commented on by students allowing for two-way communication between the teacher and students. Students can also post to the class stream but there posts will be of lesser priority and can be moderated by the teacher. YouTube videos and Google Drive files can also be attached to announcements and posts to share content. Gmail also provides email options for teachers to send emails to one

or more students in the Google Classroom interface.

Archive course

Google Classroom allows instructors to archive courses at the end of a term or year. When a course is archived, it is removed from the homepage and placed in the Archived Classes area to help teachers keep their current classes organized. When a course is archived, teachers and students can view it, but won't be able to make any changes to it until it is restored.

Google Meet

Google Meet is a video communication service developed by Google. Google launched Meet in March 2017. The service was unveiled as a video conferencing app for up to 30 participants, but the capacity of participants was increased to 250 depending on the subscription. There are three structures for subscription, they are as follows – G Suite for basic users where 100 members can participate, G Suite for Business users where 150 members can participate and G Suite Enterprise where 250 members can participate in online video conferencing.

The precondition to use Google Meet is that every member should compulsorily have a gmail account, this gmail account gives access to the meeting.

The following are the features of Google Meet –

- Google Meet is user friendly any layman can use it.
- Google Meet is highly beneficial in distance mode of education.
- Google Meet is available in both Android and iOS app.
- Google Meet can be accessed on PC through Chrome web browser without installing any plug-ins.
- Google Meet is Integrated with Google Calendar for one-click meeting calls
- Reminders are sent half an hour (as per settings) before the start of the meeting to all the participants hence participant do not forget about the schedule of the meeting.
- There is facility of Screen-sharing to present documents, spreadsheets, or presentations.
- There is also a time limit for free users; the time limit is 60 minutes. Google changes or do away with this time limit as per the prevailing conditions, during COVID pandemic of 2020 Google removed time restriction.

In response to the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, Google began offering Meet's advanced features to free users that previously required an enterprise account to anyone using G Suite or G Suite for Education. This offer was for a limited period.

Facebook

Facebook is the easiest to use website and even a small 14-year-old can easily understand all its features. The mobile app is also extremely user friendly, one can text, comment, like posts of others, view streaming videos, and even participate online. It is one of the most popular website in the world.

Facebook gives its users numerous options to share such as photos, videos, status, feeling, location, etc. Therefore, so many options culminated into one single web page gives people an easy way of sharing information unlike other social websites. Facebook is a part of millions of student's lives around the globe. Students use Facebook for communicating with friends

and playing games. Since they use Facebook frequently and comfortably, teacher can exploit this entertainment-oriented site as an edutainment tool.

Facebook seems to be one of the most effective tools because students generally respond to discussions quickly and are comfortable enough in their "space" to share their information and opinions. By using Facebook in learning, the role of students can therefore shift from only receiving knowledge to both searching and sharing their knowledge. Moreover, interactions with teachers can become more instant since teachers and students can respond quickly via Facebook.

Skype

Skype is a telecommunication application that specializes in providing video chat and voice calls between computers, tablets, or mobile handsets. Skype also provides instant messaging services. Users may transmit text, video, audio and images. Skype allows video conference calls.

Skype is a social media tool which can be effectively used in distance teaching learning process. It is free to download and use, and can be a wonderful opportunity to expand learning situations through voice, text and video sessions.

Skype is very helpful in the following areas of teaching learning:

- Virtual field trips: trips that are not possible due to financial reasons or distance can still be taken using Skype to transport students to another country or area.
- Foreign language learning: Skype can be used to set up short communication sessions with native speakers as listening to and speaking a foreign language is essential if students want to improve listening skills and oral communication.
- Interviewing: connecting with and speaking to an author or celebrity can bring classroom theory alive and make it real for students.
- Homework help or extra lessons: teachers can offer help with homework, long-term projects or give extra lessons to students who are lagging.
- Guest appearances: guest teachers or experts on a subject can teach students through Skype or give an explanation directly from their work environment.
- Illness: students who are hospitalized or who suffer from long-term illnesses and are schooled at home can also benefit by being included in lessons through the Skype platform.

Hence, during this lockdown period Skype will be a very effective mode of communication between the teachers and the students.

LinkedIn SlideShare

SlideShare is an American hosting service for professional content including presentations, infographics, documents, and videos. Users can upload files privately or publicly in PowerPoint, Word, PDF, or Open Document format. Content can then be viewed on the site itself, on desktop or a mobile phone. This platform is considered to be similar to YouTube, but is mostly used for slideshows. The website was originally meant to be used for businesses to share slides among employees more easily, but is now extensively by the teachers

to present their lessons to the remote learners.

Although the website is primarily a slide hosting service, it also supports documents, PDFs, videos and webinars. SlideShare also provides users the ability to rate, comment on, and share the uploaded content. Rashmi Sinha, an Indian origin American is the CEO and co-founder of SlideShare

Zipcasts

SlideShare also added a feature called Zipcasts. A Zipcast is a social web conferencing system that allows presenters to broadcast an audio/video feed while delivering a presentation through the Internet. Zipcasts also allows users to communicate during the presentation via an inbuilt chat function. Zipcasts do not currently support screen sharing with the presenter, a feature available in other competing social networking platforms.

Youtube

Unlike the above discussed social networking platforms, youtube is an open site but is extremely popular video sharing site in the world. One can view, share, download, upload and write comment or like or dislike the video. It uses Adobe Flash Video and HTML5 technology to display a wide variety of user generated video audio content, including movie clips, television clips, music videos, as well as recreational content such as video blogging, short original videos, educational videos, and live streaming media. The most important feature of youtube is its format; the mobile format is easy to view and supports even low mbps speed by automatically adjusting its pixel density.

Google plus

Google plus is one of the social networking site from google stable, it is quite similar to facebook whereby friends and acquaintances can discover new and interesting people. Pictures, videos, audios, documents can be shared among the registered users. It is considered to be a secured platform unlike its rivals.

Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking and microblogging system which allows to compose short messages of 280 characters that are known as tweets. Registered users can read and post tweets while unregistered users can only view them. Teachers can give assignments, homeworks, projects, to the students while the authorities can issue notices and circulars to the students.

Massive Open Online Course (MOOC)

A Massive open online course (MOOC) is a free web based distance learning program that is designed for the participation of large numbers of geographically dispersed students.

In addition to traditional course materials, such as filmed lectures, readings, and problem sets, many MOOCs provide interactive courses with user forums or social media discussions to support community interactions among students, professors, and teaching assistants (TAs), as well as immediate feedback to quick quizzes and assignments. MOOCs are a recent and widely researched development in distance education, first introduced in 2008 and emerged as a popular

mode of learning since 2012.

Swayam

Swayam is a Hindi acronym that stands for "Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds" is a massive open online course (MOOC) platform in India. This initiative was launched in 2017 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India under Digital India to give a coordinated stage and free entry to web courses, covering all advanced education, High School and skill sector courses.

Swayam has been developed cooperatively by MHRD (Ministry of Human Resource Development) and AICTE (All India Council for Technical Education) with the help of Microsoft and is equipped for facilitating 2,000 courses. The platform offers free access to everyone and hosts courses from class 9 till post-graduation. It enables professors and faculty of centrally funded institutes and universities to teach students.

As of now there are 203 partnering universities and institutes, 2,748 completed courses, 12,541,992 student enrolment, 915,538 exam registrations, and 654,664 successful certificates.

Quadrants in MOOC

Swayam operates MOOCs learning resources in different ways and structure. Learning in Swayam has four parts/quadrants they are e-Tutorial, e-Content, discussion forums, and self-assessment.

E-tutorial

The first quadrant is direct teaching by the teachers, and may also include teaching videos, animations, PowerPoint presentations, Podcasts and so on, depending on the subject and the strategy adopted by the teacher to teach the students.

E-content

The second quadrant is an e-content which could include e-books, illustrations, Case studies, Open source content, Reference link, further reading sources and so on.

Discussion forum

The third quadrant is about clearing student's queries, here students can interact with other students and faculty to clarify their doubts. The discussion forum is like a doubt counter where any student or faculty can answer the question of a student.

Self-assessment

The fourth quadrant is self-assessment to check what a student have studied so far. Self-assessment can be tests in the form of Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), quiz, short answer questions, long answer questions, etc. It can even have Frequently Asked Question (FAQs) and their answers to clarify common misconceptions among students.

Advantages of Social Media Platforms

The following are the advantages of Social Media Platforms:

- Social Media Platforms provides a platform for the teachers as well as students where information can be shared, retained, analysed and even assessed.
- Social Media Platforms provides a forum to the learners to engage in healthy conversations, discussions, debates with

their peer groups and even with their teachers. In this way power of reasoning and expression is developed in the learners.

- Social Media is a platform where cooperative and collaborative learning takes place.
- Social networking platform offers the possibility of better forms of assessment or deep understanding which facilitates application of knowledge in a novel contexts and finding creative and innovative solutions to the challenges posed by life.
- Social networking platform facilitates learners to be intrinsically motivated as they are exposed to quality teaching learning environment, where the teacher, support materials and self assessment are available in one single platform.
- In a country like India where the student population is very high, social networking platform provided by Communication technology is a low cost initiative where effective remote learning can take place.

Conclusion

Social Media Platforms have huge potentials in a country like India where social distancing is becoming a new norm especially due to covid-19 pandemic. With the reduction in the cost of both hardware and high speed internet connection, it has now become affordable to the common man. But this technology is grossly underutilized in our country. Nationwide lockdown has given an opportunity to the teachers and educators to utilize and assess various Social Media Platforms and select the one which suits the content and available resources.

In work from home environment, teachers are getting opportunity to use these technologies and discover the huge potential this technology carries. Even technology shy teachers are experimenting with technology and if required are taking help from their family members in establishing link with their students. In near future social networking platforms are more likely will be incorporated into the main stream education system by the teachers and authorities.

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