

A Study to Evaluate use of Facebook as an Educational Tool in Dentistry



Medical Science

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Navdeep Kaur Sodhi

Genesis Institute of Dental Sciences and Research Ferozepur , Punjab , India.

Kamalpreet Kaur

National Dental College and Hospital Derabassi, Punjab, India.

Dilwarjit Kaur

Sri Guru Ramdas Institute of Dental Sciences and Research Amritsar, Punjab, India.

ABSTRACT

Background: Social networking sites are quickly becoming ubiquitous online. Most popular of these websites are Facebook, Bebo and Myspace. Incorporation of these networks is a relatively new addition to higher education, involving blending of formal and informal learning.

Aim and objectives: To investigate views and attitude of dental professionals regarding use of facebook as an educational tool in dental profession.

Materials and Method: A total of 800 dental professionals were enrolled using a self administered questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised of nine questions regarding use of facebook in daily life and its use as an educational tool in dental profession. Data collected was put to statistical analysis using SPSS version 16.0.

Results: It was observed that greater percentage of participants were in favor of using facebook as a tool for educational purposes in dentistry. Although higher percentage of participants reported advantages of facebook but pitfalls were also mentioned by some professionals, which could not be kept aside.

Conclusion: Facebook may be used for pedagogical support to enhance student learning. It has many advantages as an educational tool but pitfalls and negative effects should also be kept in mind. It would be interesting to analyze impact of social networks on students learning and other aspects of education.

Introduction

Social network can be defined as a unique online service, platform, or area where social communication and/or social relations can be established and individuals intensely share information [1]. Social networking sites are also quickly becoming ubiquitous online.. The most popular of these websites are Facebook, Bebo and Myspace.

Incorporation of these networks is a relatively new addition to higher education, involving the blending of formal and informal learning [2]. Facebook (www.facebook.com) is self-described as a social utility which connects people with friends and others. It is the fact that facebook is the largest social network with biggest audience compared to similar media, particularly because it enables people communicate with their friends and exchange multimedia- based information conveniently. Hundreds of people, unaware of each others, may gather around a particular purpose via this social network and may even decide to act together.

Students enrolled in higher education have indicated that they use facebook [3]. Institutions are establishing facebook accounts for the purposes of marketing, such as to recruit students [4]. It has also been reported that adults are a fast growing group on facebook, identifying teaching staff from higher education as among this group [5]. As many dental professionals have facebook accounts and various dental groups and dental pages have been established on this site so we planned to investigate the views and attitudes of dental professionals regarding the use of this largest social network for educational purposes.

Materials and Method:-

This study evaluated the views and attitude of dental professionals regarding use of facebook as an educational tool. Data was collected through a survey (in the form of questionnaire) from the instructors in various dental colleges in Punjab, India. Eight hundred dental professionals including lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors and professors were enrolled. The questionnaire was distributed to all and all of them replied back. Questionnaire included nine questions in order to collect information about the adoption level of facebook in daily life and views on its use for educational purposes. [Table 1]

Prior to data collection the questions were pre-tested among a group of 20 professionals in order to ensure the level of validity and degree of repeatability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.76). Graduate assistants were not enrolled because they are not authorized to teach classes independently. Statistical analysis of data was performed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Inc. Chicago, IL, version 16.0).

Observation and results:-

A total of 800 dental professionals participated in the study. Of them, 150 were professors, 150 were associate professors, 300 were assistant professors and 200 were lecturers. Of the participating professionals 350 were female and 450 were male. Six hundred and seventy of 800 participants have a facebook account. Of 670 dental professionals with an account 391 were male and 279 were female. Four hundred twenty participants stated that they spend half an hour or less on facebook daily, whereas rest, do not log in daily. Five hundred ten out of 670 participants believed that facebook helps in building a relationship between classmates. Four hundred and sixty eight professionals stated that this social network helps in increasing the communication between lecturer and students. Suitability of facebook for announcements about class and college and hospital was agreed upon by 550 of the 670 dental professionals. Five hundred and eighteen participants agreed to the point that facebook can be useful for making academic groups. Five hundred and six participants reported that they are benefited from facebook on academic front but rest did not agree. 560 out of 670 participants were in favor of using facebook as an educational tool and their views are discussed in the later section. Replying to the last question 495 participants stated that facebook have a positive impact whereas rest did not agree to it. Out of 670 stated professionals 175 mentioned pitfalls of facebook as well.

Discussion

Social media is a common concept which gained its position and popularity in our life as a recent consequence of Web 2.0. It refers to the locations with highly accessible and sharable content. It has become more widespread through social interaction using internet and web based technologies. Social networks like facebook have affected the modern society positively and have

changed some of people's habits. To best of our knowledge this is the first study which investigated views and attitudes of dental professionals regarding the use of facebook for educational purposes.

Results of the study revealed that 80.50% of dental professionals have facebook account and 62.68% of them use it daily. This indicated that professionals have adopted facebook in their daily life and they are using it regularly.

In the present study, it was observed that 76.11% of dental professionals stated that facebook can help in building relationship between classmates. It was also reported in a previous study that social networking sites can facilitate meeting of stranger, however individuals are also using social networks to maintain and/or strengthen their current, offline social networks [6]. Facebook is a network that connects students with other students, indirectly creating a learning community [7].

About 70.14% professionals agreed that facebook can help in increasing communication between lecturers and students which is in agreement to a previous survey that reported 2/3rd students surveyed were comfortable with faculty on facebook [8]. 82.8% agreed that facebook is a useful medium for making announcements about class and dental college.

Facebook can be used for forming academic groups as suggested by 77.61% of the participants. This can be attributed to the fact that social networks provide opportunities for academicians. Facebook is used in delivery of information, reference books, group assignments and course sessions. Instructors and students can share education materials, videos and audio files, pictures, database, websites and case presentations effectively. It is very easy to follow up current events, news, groups on social networks. Moreover it is easy to be a part of any discussion on facebook. Participants also have benefited from facebook as reported by 76.1%. Most of the participants (83.58%) were in agreement that facebook can be used as an education tool. Participants stated that facebook can be used for educational purposes as it is very easy for both instructors as well as students to share information. Educators may gain benefits such as program exchanges, job announcements, creating relief funds or searching such funds, arranging conferences and publishing studies [9]. It is beneficial for students also because they can get involved in discussion environment, research activities, case discussions, critical thinking, problem solving etc. [10].

As suggested by participants facebook have following advantages:-

- Independence of time and location
- Improvement in quality and efficiency by use of computer for education
- Ability to learn in a more systemic manner and in shorter time
- Instant feedback
- Ease of displaying content
- Bidirectional communication
- Tendency towards more voluntary behaviours on the side of students for improving research, knowledge, and skills.
- Individualization of learning.
- Development of communication skills.
- Extended participation and social commitment
- Strengthens peer support.

Some of the participants also listed pitfalls associated with facebook's use. These include deliberations over whether to friend or not to friend issue, issues surrounding the provision of an electronic identity, including privacy issues, identity theft and impersonations, public domain challenges and sharing informa-

tion, risk of misuse, issues related to intellectual property and copyright. Concerns related to privacy and anxiety in interacting in this environment, a belief that it does not serve an academic purpose has been expressed in a previous study [11].

Conclusion:-

The use of new technologies is suggested for pedagogical support to enhance student learning. It has many advantages as an educational tool but pitfalls and negative effects should also be kept in mind. It would be interesting to analyze impact of social networks on students learning and other aspects of education. Further surveys including professionals from other parts of the world are warranted to arrive at a definitive decision.

Tables

Table 1: Questionnaire

Sr. No.	Question	Designation: Reply (Yes/No)
1	Do you have a facebook account ?	
2	Do you spend half an hour on Facebook daily?	
3	Does Facebook helps to build up a relationship between classmates?	
4	Does it help to increase communication between lecturer and students?	
5	Is it useful medium for announcements about class and dental institute?	
6	Is it a useful medium for forming academic groups?	
7	Have you ever benefited from it on academic front?	
8	Can Facebook be used as an educational tool? Give your views in brief? **	
9	Any other point you would like to mention? **	
	To give your views for questions with ** markings please write on a separate sheet.	

Table 2:- Subjects in favor and against use of facebook.

Question No.	Subjects in favor of facebook (n=670)	Subjects against facebook (n=670)
2	420 (62.68%)	250 (37.32%)
3	510 (76.11%)	160 (23.88%)
4	468 (70.14%)	202 (29.85%)
5	549 (82.83%)	121 (17.91%)
6	518 (77.61%)	152 (22.3%)
7	506 (76.11%)	164 (23.88%)
8	560 (83.58%)	110 (16.41%)
9	494 (74.62%) stated benefits of facebook as educational tool.	176 (25.37%) reported pitfalls and disadvantages of facebook.

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