Digital Natives & Education: Effectiveness of New Media as a New Tool of Media Education
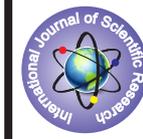
Mass Communication

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ABSTRACT   With increasing access and uses of internet enabled services in India, the social ramifications of the uses of these technological tools and services come to the center stage of discussion. Today, the internet driven new/digital media is not only an information resource or an entertainment tool but also a virtual platform or assembly forum of people. As the media education is gaining momentum, and technologies are being modernized day-by-day, the big question is: how will media schools tap the potential of new communication technologies to make media education more effective and interactive? An implication to this question is the ability of social media, which is highly accessible, interactive and user friendly in India, to act as a medium between the student-student, teacher-student and student internee-trainee employer. Most of the media students are using it regularly without exploring its applicability to the field of education. The author of this paper endeavors to suggest some possible ways as to how these tools can be applied to enrich select modules of media teaching in Indian j-schools such as reporting or producing news, etc.

Introduction:

Today, the young grow in a media rich environment and use of internet enabled new/digital media is very much a part of their lives while they grow. These kids born after 1990 very much grew in the laps of ICT driven media environment. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) call them 'Digital natives'. They attribute their arrival to the human civilization at the time when social digital technologies such as Usenet and bulletin board systems came online. These 'digital natives' have access to networked digital technologies and they possess innate ability to use them. Teenagers are connected to one another by a common major cultural aspect of their lives --- social interactions, friendships and their social activities are mediated by digital technologies. These 'digital natives' have created a 24x7 network that blends the human with the technical to a degree we haven't experienced before, and it is perhaps transforming human relationships in fundamental ways.

Some proponents of digital media would argue that it helps us with a platform to express our opinion over issues, helps us bridge down the geographical distance and connect with people on social networking platforms and forums. Yet, it goes without saying that there are possible threats at such forums as well. Berg and Leenes (2011: 211-232) opine that social network sites lack a common mechanism used by individuals in everyday interactions to manage the impressions they leave on others and protect their privacy/audience segregation. The lack of this mechanism significantly affects the level of users control over their self-presentation in social network sites. They emphasize that audience segregation is not only important in real life, but vital, yet currently undervalued and overlooked for the protection of one's self images and privacy in social network sites. Having such observations, one would definitely ask what possible measures can be taken to ensure welfare of one's children. Here, parental intervention in some form becomes imperative.

With the advent of new media technologies communication has gone through major changes in the last two decades. Among others, social media/social networking is the most emerging part of the new technologies. It has transformed the lives of the people. Knowledge sharing, voicing opinions, micro blogging, global networking, cross-cultural relationships and a lot more have been the outcomes of such transformation through the new media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry, etc (Batra, 2011).

Technology and socio cultural practices evolve together, each feeding back into the other, to constitute a genre such as 'blogs' or even 'news-related blogs' (Graves, 2007). These blogs or social networking sites (SNS) accounts are actually a virtual image of an individual on internet. Users form their identity on the site but not through their body, but through characteristics of their personalities. They try to impress other users by using their virtual identity on these sites. It is easy for someone to convey one's identity by projecting one's body (as a photograph), but a virtual projection of one's personality is not easy to manage.

We can relate this process of performance, interpretation and adjustment with Erving Goffman's concept of impression management (Goffman, 1956). Impression management is a part of a longer process where people seek to define a situation (Goffman, 1963). In social media, bodies are not immediately visible, so people need to interpret situations and manage impressions differently. While text, images, audio and video all provide valuable means for developing a virtual presence, the act of articulation differs from how we convey meaningful informations through our bodies (Boyd, 2007). This process also makes explicit the self-reflexivity that Giddens argues as necessary for identity formation, but the choices individuals make in crafting a digital body highlights the self monitoring that Faucault notes (Boyd, 2007).

In terms of using media technologies, these are considered as tools of self expression for individuals and this 'collective psyche' is an accumulated wealth of a nation since freedom of expression and freedom of information are as effective as education and investments are for development (Novel, 2006). There is a cultural challenge to the access of these technologies. In using social networking sites, there is a concern of cultural intimidation because of the threat people perceive when face-to-face with a new cultural idioms which seem to be sweeping young off their feet because they bring possibilities and promises which seem difficult to resist (Bamezai, 2010). Carlsson writes, 'Transcedence of boundaries and defense of boundaries are twin aspects of the globalization process' (Carlsson, 2010). Here she is actually referring to the practice of social networking as an effect of globalization. This theoretical background is important to understand the social character of networking sites and their effect.

However, in this paper, I wish to briefly reflect on the possible implications of social media as an interactive medium in j-schools for teaching-learning modules like reporting, writing etc between student-student, student-teacher-student and student internee and employer. It is directly concerned with scope of social media in education and examines how teachers and students perceive it to be useful.

Impact of Social Media on Media Education

People gain information, education, news, etc. by electronic media and print media. Social media are different from both of them. They are relatively inexpensive, individual to individual, fast in transmission, and are accessible to enable anyone to publish or access information, compared to conventional media, such as newspapers, television and films, which generally require significant resources to provide information (Gupta, 2011). Whether one looks at the rise and dominance of Facebook or Twitter in Southeast Asia, China's huge online population and its own unique social media landscape,

or Japan and its mobile internet obsession – social media is huge in Asia (Russell, 2011).

Social media presents a huge opportunity for schools, universities and other educational organizations to reach out and connect with students. One notable example is of Singapore Management University where the course by Professor Michael Netzely on internet communications leans heavily on social media. He encourages his students to go out and learn by 'getting their hands dirty' on the likes of Blogger, Word Press, Twitter, Tumbler, Facebook and other social media platforms (Russell, 2011). Thus the media schools have also started recognizing the need to integrate social media into its curricula. For example, in India, Jagran Lakecity University, Bhopal , Symbiosis Institute of Media & Communication, Indian Institute of Journalism & New Media, Bangalore, have courses on social media and digital media   while International University of California, Berkley, University of Texas, Johns Hopkins University, Columbia University, and Arizona State University are globally known universities to include social media in their course curricula. While it is still at an experimental stage, media institutes world over are currently teaching students, how to use social media (Patra, 2011).

Including social media as part of education does not mean having a formal class on Facebook or Twitter, in which many college students are already experts. It means, as I tend to understand, tapping the potential of this media in making education interactive and effective for the young generation.

In comparison to conventional media, social media is highly interactive in nature. Conventional media typically use a centralized framework for organization, production and dissemination whereas social media are by their very nature more decentralized, less hierarchical and distinguished by multiple points of production and utility (Gupta , 2011). With these advantages, it offers tremendous opportunities for its users not only in dissemination of information, but also in sharing the study material and the course content. In other words one can see a possible implication of Osgood-Schram circular model of communication which offers a three dimensional interactivity: Student-student, student-teacher, student internee-employer—all following a process of decoder, interpreter and encoder in the circular movement of messages (Kumar KJ: 1989).

Most of the students of Jagran Lakecity University, Indian Institute of Mass Communication and few Central University are too fond of these social networking sites and make their presence feel in every forum by hooking up to social sites whether it is their departmental blog or communities created on SNS. They feel that even in conventional media these social networking sites are being used to make and maintain relations with sources to dig out the informations. Not only that, these social networking sites can be used for content promotion, interviews, news gathering and research etc. However SNS should be used within the frame work of media ethics as relevant to each country's media regulations, and within the context of the Supreme Court Judgment in respect of *Bakha vs blogger* in 2009 in India.

Pros and cons of Social Media:
In general, in the course of my research I stumbled upon two diametrically opposite views regarding the use of social media in teaching journalism. One view is that social media is not at all a suitable tool for the formal educational purposes as an interaction-learning experience and might even lead to development fancies and cannot thus be strait jacketed for teaching modules. While the other view is that social media is of immense help to the media education system as it provides a platform for discussion without the constraint of time and space.

The idea of social media being a tool for education could be rejected on the basis of argument that social media is nothing but an online process of pamphleteering and extending of learning experience as brochures. It is said; these can be misused for the commercial

purposes and are generally utilized by market forces to promote their product. If at all there should be any inclusion of social media into media education system, it should be to increase the awareness of the students about its dangers and the economic and political games behind it according to a school of thought pitched against social media application in j-schools.

However one fact cannot be ignored that there is a monopoly of a few media houses on j-schools in India where students and teachers could not put their thoughts together independently and innovatively. But social media provides a forum to them to express their opinions. There are 20 million unique users of Facebook, who are as big as TV viewers in 1980s. It proves that social media has actual potential to democratize the education as much as it does in other areas of public sphere. Now knowledge is not confined to few people/limited to a few media houses/institutes; it is within the reach of everyone through social media.

Especially in the discipline of journalism, the papers like *Digital Media Marketing, New Media and Digital Story Telling, Multimedia, Reporting – Tools and Techniques and New Media* can include social media as a necessary part of it. The ethical aspect of social media and its use in social activism could be taught in the paper *Media Laws and Ethics.* For example, Anna Hazare's anti corruption campaigns, Use of social media in the Election, and the campaigns in Middle-East countries could be good case studies through curricular modules with the application of social media acting as a tool. It greatly enhances the teacher-student, student-student, student-employer communication in the model of Osgood and Schramm of communication. Especially the interaction proves a rich experience given the nature of media coverage on these issues of public sphere.

In *'Media Ethics',* interface of students on subjects like *Paid News and market driven journalism or Mudrochization of media* could be effectively taught/dealt with. With regard to the course like *Communication Research* the research techniques enabled by the use of social media work faster in eliciting the views of the public, besides actual quoting someone from Facebook or Twitter or any such SNS. Not only this, papers like *'Communication Theory and Research'* can use the social media to interface with the students on the present use of media and the impact of political decisions on the media economy. For example, involvement of senior journalists, Veer Sanghavi and Barkha Dutt in 2G scam could be case studies through social media. It offers a wider base for discourse and interpretation to build a theory virtually in third world democratic countries. In the paper of *'Reporting-Tools and Techniques',* social media can be taught as a tool of reporting. There are many newspapers like *Times of India and Hindustan Times,* which are using comments by eminent personalities on Facebook and Twitter as their statements and make reports based on it. This was evident when Shashi Tharoor used to tweet about his position and when Amitabh Bachchan wrote about news of soon being grandfather.

Sources are very important in reporting to dig out news. Social media can be very effective tool in making and maintaining relations with sources. How to make and maintain relations with sources can be taught in the techniques of reporting. In addition to it, *citizen journalism* can be taught as a new stream of journalism by using social media.

However, the role of social media in social and political campaigning can be rejected on the basis of examples of some movements without any use of social media. For example *Navnirmana* (New construction) Movement in Gujarat in 1974 by students who themselves activated and sustained that movement. At that time there was no social media present, yet the movement was successful. It is believed that press itself played very active role in social campaigning and it did not need any social media to activate it. Till the time journalism remains vibrant and is able to present the views and aspirations of the people, it can very well do its job. Regarding the role of social media in activating revolutions in middle-east countries we can say

that since journalism was not very strong or free in these countries, this online process had been able to provide a forum to express the feelings of the populace.

There is one view that this entire social media is controlled by powerful western nations and they are creating troubles in various parts of the world by using the virtues of social media. In reality, they are using social media to achieve their political goals. So, it is very important for the new generation and networking crazy students to understand the real mechanism behind such media. The condition of middle-east countries can explain the misuse of social media. In most of these countries leadership was supported by western countries especially by USA. Hosni Mobarak was virtually an American agent. There was growing dissatisfaction among the people of these countries against western forces. So, it is being considered in one faction of media that these forces used the tool of social media to deviate the rage of people from them to their internal government. Now they are utilizing this crisis to actively wage war against the people of the region so that the hegemony of western forces could be continued in Middle East. In reality there are tremendous problems in Saudi Arabia and had it been a spontaneous or self started revolution, it would have been first started in Saudi Arabia, but USA is completely controlling that country and does not want any disturbance there. It wants to pave its way in these less controlled countries like Libya, Tunisia and so it has actually fabricated these revolutions by using the tools of social media.

Thus it is felt that students should not go by the obvious, but they should be able to see the reasons behind any event and interpret them. For that matter the mechanics behind social media should be taught to the media students. If a teacher is not comfortable on such networking sites, it does not make any difference. Being on such networks does not give a separate aura to a person and knowledge is superior to technology. In case of blogs too, it is found that they have commercial interests and one should be extremely cautious in using blogs. There are thousands of blogs, but how many of them are visited by a common person, but someone somewhere in this world is making money by clicking ideas about these blogs. It is a matter to discover that how much an average individual is wasting money on social networks. According to a study by European Union in 2005-06, it was wasting $ 5 billion in just deleting the junk mails and unwanted mails.

However we cannot ignore that social media is best way to get connected and it is very easy to reach out to all students through such sites as all of them are available there. You can form small communities and exchange your views. Department of Advertising and Public Relations in Indian Institute of Mass Communication is actually running their own blogs on which they upload all the classroom lectures and notes which is very beneficial and accessible to the students of all streams.

Some people feel that social sites are too intrusive and they are not at all sensitive towards privacy. They feel that professionally it is useful but personally it is an intrusion.

While few people consider social media as a bridge to the digital divide between urban and rural, the others think that such tools are available and being used in urban areas only. According to latter, the students from rural background, when come to media schools, may use social media as a platform to share views with urban students, but in rural areas there are not basic facilities of classroom teachings, what to think about social media. So in case of rural based and urban based students, there is definitely a digital divide. Language is not considered as a hurdle for students of rural background because social media has its own language which is easy to use. The latter asserts that digital media has overcome the disadvantages of time and space, but these are used to skip the active participation of students face-to-face with teachers.

The present generation is the first generation users of social media

and is still encountering teething problems that are natural of infancy phase. They must be taught to use social media effectively and ethically. An example of very prominent use of social media in the field of education is by Nordic countries. There in schools everyone has a link on Facebook through which teachers guide and give assignments to the students. But such uses are regulated by the school board. It is felt that use of social media as a tool for education is an interesting idea but one would have to see if it is used properly for the given purpose. There is much concern towards the unethical use of this media, because people are using it to do what they are not allowed to do otherwise. There is potential in this media because you can actually upload 3-D lectures and audio-video clippings on these sites, but it is very difficult to restraint people from unethical uses. Social media can work very well in distant mode and distant learning can be made very easy by using social media, but such use requires huge infrastructure at district and university levels. Such a use can be conceptualized, but still it is far from reality.

Based on these arguments social media can be considered as a highly potential media. Traditionally teachers and students could not talk at the same platform, but now through social media they are more transparent to each other. The information provided by social media is authentic. One cannot disown his or her writings or comments on such media. Every press law is equally implemented here, whether it is defamation or parliament privileges. Students are exposed to a lot of knowledge at a click away through social media. However like any other media, regulations are also required in social media and since this media is emerging as an alternate forum for public opinions, very soon government would try to control it. Talking about comfort of teachers on such sites, there are many aged teachers who are handling social media very effectively and even if some teachers restrain themselves from getting involved on such sites; they cannot prevent its expansion, observed some teachers at media institution.

Conclusion

Education is a benchmark for any social development and any important event has to have a manifestation in education also. The relevance of social media must be taught to the students so that they should not be exploited by adverse opinions. Thus we see that social media is considered both as a subject for media education as well as a tool. It differs on the scope, meaning and extent that the course developer ascribes to social media in the context of curriculum one develops/ However, it is my firm view that the academia are currently reinventing social media everyday in terms of its full blown application to media education, and if few more features are added to it, it would evolve as a powerful media for education.

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