

Use of a social media platform for achievement of better participation and improvement in the
Air Force Arabia – a research proposal

Introduction

Given that social media has almost become the sole means of communication in recent times, it would not be wrong to assume that the best way to catch a person's attention is by the use of similar technology. As people's use of technology is increasing and the use of pen and paper is decreasing, it would be worthwhile to explore more technology-based options to indulge people in the field of education and expand their knowledge-base. Peer learning is another trend that is quite popular among students and rather than frown upon it, it would be better to use it positively for teaching purposes. Hence, the combination of these two trends – social media and peer learning – to provide a platform where students can actively participate in group discussions and question-and-answer sessions within themselves is worth exploring to promote healthy learning habits and greater involvement in education.

Statement of the problem

The increasing addiction to technology is negatively harming every person's overall mental and physical development and also creating negligence in their education. Every person has gone through the phase of feeling helpless and inefficient in the face of their addiction to technology. The multitude of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest has pulled everyone in its stride and rarely are people seen without a mobile device in their hands. The use of social media has so completely filled people's lives that they see the world through photos on these sites and learn about their friends' important events upon receiving status update messages. As so much time is spent online, it goes without saying that their

personal and professional lives are largely neglected and little thought is given to future educational or career aspirations.

The second important thing in most people's lives after social media is their friend group. Peer pressure is a common influential element and most people often tend to listen to their friends more than their family. The influence of peers often lead to the beginning of lifelong harmful habits such as smoking, drinking, prostitution or drug addiction. A bad friend in a person's life is worse than addiction to social media as he/she can destroy the person's physical and mental wellbeing. It often becomes difficult for a person to screen their friends or try to protect themselves against the bad ones.

It is well known that young adulthood is a time when people grow adamant and are not ready to listen to anything. In such a scenario, our best bet is using the two things that play a very important role in a person's life – social media and their friends. Hence, by creating a social media-type platform online where all students in a particular class can participate in discussions of the curriculum, syllabus outlines, tests, and doubts, it might help people achieve healthier relationships with their friends and at the same time being close to the technology they like, in order to achieve better grades and acquire more knowledge in their field.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to understand whether involving peer groups in social media-type forums for the purpose of educational discussions has any effect on the educational accomplishments of officers and members of the Saudi Air Force. Holding someone's attention in a classroom is becoming increasingly difficult and it would turn out worthwhile to explore other effective teaching methods rather than forcibly trying to discipline the students. In order to

analyze the effectiveness of a social media forum on a person's academic performance, a combination of cohort studies, observational studies, and questionnaires could be used to track a participant's progress with and without the use of the newly designed forum.

Research questions/Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, the following questions will be addressed:

1. Does the use of a custom designed social media forum where students in a study group or classroom can interact regarding their courses have any effect on the students' final grades?
2. Does the involvement of a teacher or course instructor work positively or negatively to help the students interact with respect to their coursework?

As part of this study, investigation included the following research hypotheses:

1. The involvement of students in a custom designed social media platform where they can interact with their friends and help each other in their educational needs will reflect positively on their academic performance.
2. The non-inclusion of teachers or course instructors from such a forum will work better in helping the students carry out discussions freely and productively rather than having their professors monitor all their conversation threads.

Theoretical Framework

As social media commands most of the time and attention of students these days, it is proposed that using a similar framework to hold an officer's attention will turn out beneficial in indulging a him/her in his/her education. Also, an active interaction with their peer group will let students be close to the group they are comfortable with, at the same time promoting healthy

group learning habits. In order to assess the possibility of using people-friendly technology for the purpose of education, a social media platform will be designed and provided to two groups of participants with and without the presence of their course instructor. Their academic performance will be tracked through a period of one year and compared to that of a control group without access to the platform, to assess if there are any changes in their overall grades.

Literature Review

The effect of social media on students has been documented in several studies and all researchers are united in the belief that addiction to social media sites is a deterrent to students' better academic performance. A survey conducted by Tariq et al in Pakistan found that use of social media sites by children and teenagers is extremely harmful to their education and it should be strictly monitored and regulated by all parents (Tariq et al., 2012). A study conducted by Wang et al in Rhode Island showed similar results. Wang et al used a student perception questionnaire to identify the public opinion regarding the impact of social media usage on students' lives. The study found that more than 6 hours a day were spent on social media by at least 60% of the students and that it definitely had a negative impact on their academic performance (Wang et al., 2011).

A number of studies have affirmed the use of social media in a way that will help students improve in their academics. Yang and Tang conducted a web-based forum study in Taiwan to assess the impact of social media on students' performance. They designed a forum where the course instructor provided questions to be discussed online pertaining to the course. A questionnaire was prepared and given to the participants to assess if they felt any improvement in their academics with the use of this forum. The overall exercise of online discussions of course

material was found to lead to better learning experiences and interpersonal interactions (Yang and Tang, 2003).

Other studies have also outlined the potential benefits of social media usage for better learning outcomes. A study conducted by Al-Rahmi and Othman in Malaysia found that collaborative learning with friends and teachers worked positively in achieving better grades for students (Al-Rahmi and Othman). Another study conducted by Mbodila et al asked participants to use Facebook in a South African university and a semi-structured questionnaire was given to the participants to find out potential impacts after the use of Facebook. Most of the students reported increased levels of collaboration and engagement after the use of Facebook, marking social media as a potentially effective teaching tool (Mbodila et al., 2014).

Methodology

Research Design

A social media platform will be designed and it will allow officers and members of the Saudi Air Force to carry out discussions, question and answer sessions, provide further insights into the course material, group learning for tests and exams, and revisions. All participants will be divided into three groups – one will be the control group, the second will be the test group with the involvement of course instructors and the third will be the test group without the involvement of course instructors. The second and third groups will have access to the platform and their activity will be monitored over a period of one year. All participants' performance will be monitored throughout the year to identify any significant improvements in their knowledge level. In addition, questionnaires will be provided and semi-structured interviews will be conducted to obtain an account of the participants' personal experiences in using social media for

educational purposes. The data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews will be categorized thematically and will be qualitatively analyzed for positive and negative attitudes regarding the use of social media for learning purposes among the students.

Sampling

The target population for this study is officers and members of the Saudi Air Force who are familiar with and widely use social media on a regular basis. Hence, participants will be in the age group of 21-30 years and equal weightage will be given to men and women. Participants will randomly be selected for this study and the total number of participants will be approximately 90. All participants will be divided into three groups comprising about 30 people each. The first group will be the control group and there will be no change in their teaching or learning methods. The second group will have access to the social media platform designed for this study and their course instructors will be a part of all their discussions and conversations. The third group will also have access to the platform, but their course instructors will not be a part of their group and all their discussions will be retained only amongst themselves.

Instrumentation

A social media platform will be designed to engage the participants in collaborative learning and assess learning outcomes. Extensive tables will be prepared to tabulate all data regarding the participants' performance over a period of one year. Questionnaires will be prepared that will attempt to identify the feelings of the participants regarding their use of the platform. Semi-structured interviews will be designed to enable the participants to voice their opinions and suggestions regarding use of the platform for educational purposes.

Data collection and analysis procedures

A letter of consent will be signed and collected from all the participants before the study. Use of the social platform by the participants will be continually monitored and analyzed for trends and usage statistics. Performances of all participants will be tabulated and compared with that of the control group for significant changes. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be conducted at the end of the study to identify the general feeling among the participants regarding changes in their learning tools. All data will be double-checked to eliminate possible avenues of inaccurate results due to human errors.

Protection of Human Rights

All participants' personal information will be kept completely confidential by assigning them a code number which will be their identity throughout the year. The participants' involvement in the study is completely voluntary and if, for any reason, they may choose to withdraw from the study midway, they shall be free to do so.

Conclusion

The topic of this study is a cause of concern for a number of people and any diversion from their technology-addicted life towards better usage of time will be welcome. If this works, it will be a useful way to indulge students, at the same time helping them get more involved in academics. The results of this study will be useful for educators, teachers and trainers who are committed to make the student years of their children's lives more meaningful and productive.

References

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