



Survey of Social Networking Sites Utilized for Higher Education.

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites (SNS) have become integral tools in higher education, facilitating communication, collaboration, and engagement among students, educators, and institutions. This study aims to explore the landscape of SNS utilization in higher education, focusing on the platforms commonly used, their purposes, and the perceived benefits and challenges. The survey gathered data on the types of SNS utilized, frequency of use, specific features utilized, and perceptions regarding their effectiveness in supporting teaching, learning, and institutional initiatives. Preliminary findings indicate that a wide range of SNS, including LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, Slack, Reddit, Discord, Facebook Groups, Twitter, and YouTube, are utilized in higher education for various purposes such as communication, collaboration, resource sharing, and professional networking. While respondents acknowledge the benefits of SNS in fostering student engagement, peer interaction, and personalized learning experiences, they also express concerns regarding privacy, information overload, and distraction. The findings from this survey provide insights into the current landscape of SNS utilization in higher education and inform strategies for effectively integrating these platforms into educational practices to enhance teaching, learning, and institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: Social networking sites, Higher Education, communication, professional networking

1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of social networking sites (SNS) into higher education has transformed the landscape of teaching, learning, and collaboration. These platforms offer diverse opportunities for communication, information sharing, and community-building among students, educators, and institutions. From professional networking to collaborative research, SNS have become indispensable tools in higher education settings worldwide.

The growing prevalence and significance of SNS in higher education underscore the need for a comprehensive understanding of their utilization, purposes, and perceived benefits and challenges. This survey aims to explore the landscape of SNS utilization in higher education, providing insights into the types of platforms commonly used, their specific purposes, and the experiences and perceptions of students, educators, and administrators.

By examining the range of SNS utilized in higher education, this survey seeks to uncover patterns of usage, frequency of engagement, and the perceived effectiveness of these platforms in supporting teaching, learning, and institutional initiatives. Understanding the roles and impacts of SNS in higher education is essential for educators and institutions to harness the full potential of these platforms in enhancing student engagement, fostering collaboration, and promoting innovative pedagogical practices. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on SNS utilization in higher education. The findings will inform strategies for effectively integrating SNS into educational practices, addressing challenges, and maximizing the benefits of these platforms for students, educators, and institutions.

2. Commonly Used Social Networking Sites for Higher Education

Social networking sites are increasingly being utilized for higher educational purposes, facilitating collaboration, communication, and resource sharing among students, educators, and researchers. Here are some of the commonly used social networking sites for higher education:

- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a professional networking platform widely used in higher education for career development, networking, and recruitment. It allows students and faculty to connect with professionals in their field, join industry-specific groups, and showcase their skills and accomplishments through profiles and posts.
- **ResearchGate:** ResearchGate is a social networking site designed for researchers and academics. It enables users to share research papers, collaborate on projects, ask and answer questions, and connect with peers in their field of study. ResearchGate also provides metrics such as citations and views to track the impact of research publications.

- Academia.edu: Academia.edu is a platform for academics to share research papers, monitor the impact of their work, and connect with colleagues worldwide. It allows users to create profiles, follow research interests, join academic groups, and access a vast repository of scholarly articles and publications.
- Mendeley: Mendeley is a reference management tool and academic social network that helps researchers organize, annotate, and share research papers. It also offers collaboration features such as group discussions, shared libraries, and citation management, making it popular among academics for collaborative research projects.
- Slack: Slack is a team communication platform widely used in academic settings for group collaboration, project management, and communication among students and faculty. It allows users to create channels for specific topics, share files, integrate with other tools, and facilitate real-time communication through messaging and video calls.
- Reddit: Reddit hosts various communities (subreddits) dedicated to academic subjects, research disciplines, and career advice. It provides a platform for students and researchers to share resources, ask questions, and engage in discussions on topics relevant to higher education.
- Discord: Discord is a communication platform originally designed for gamers but increasingly used in educational settings. It offers text, voice, and video chat features and allows users to create private servers for study groups, research teams, or academic clubs to facilitate collaboration and communication.
- Facebook Groups: Facebook Groups can be created for academic purposes, allowing students and faculty to join communities focused on specific subjects, research areas, or academic interests. Groups can be used for sharing resources, organizing events, and fostering discussion and collaboration among members.
- Twitter: Twitter is used by academics and researchers to share research findings, engage in academic discussions, and connect with peers and experts in their field. It provides a platform for disseminating research updates, participating in conferences, and networking with colleagues worldwide.
- YouTube: YouTube is a valuable resource for higher education, offering educational content in various formats such as lectures, tutorials, and educational channels. It is used by educators to supplement course materials, provide visual demonstrations, and engage students through multimedia content.

These social networking sites provide valuable platforms for networking, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in higher education, enhancing the academic experience for students, faculty, and researchers alike.

3. The Relationship Between Student Centered Learning And SNS

The relationship between student-centered learning and social networking sites is multifaceted, as these platforms can both complement and enhance student-centered instructional approaches. Here's how social networking sites intersect with student-centered learning:

Criteria	Example Platform	Example Tasks
Promotion of Active Learning:	Slack, Discord, and Facebook Groups	Enable students to collaborate, discuss course materials, ask questions, and share resources, fostering collaborative learning environments
Facilitation of Peer Interaction:	Reddit and Discord	To engage in discussions, seek peer support, and collaborate on projects, promoting a sense of community and collaboration
Personalization and Customization	YouTube and Twitter	Explore diverse content, follow specific topics or hashtags, and curate their feeds based on their interests and learning preferences, empowering personalize learning experiences
Support for Inquiry-Based Learning	ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Mendeley	Scholarly research papers, academic articles, and publications, enabling students to conduct research, evaluate evidence, and engage in critical inquiry.
Promotion of Collaboration and Communication	Slack, Google Classroom, and Facebook Groups	Allowing for seamless sharing of ideas, feedback, and project work.
Enhancement of Student Engagement	YouTube, Twitter, and Discord	Multimedia content, real-time updates, and interactive features to diverse learning styles and preferences, increasing student engagement and participation in the learning process.

Table 1: comparison of selected SNS

In essence, social networking sites can serve as valuable tools for implementing student-centred learning approaches by promoting active learning, peer interaction, personalization, inquiry-based learning, collaboration, communication, engagement, and lifelong learning skills among students. When integrated thoughtfully into educational practices, these platforms have the potential to enrich and enhance student-centred learning experiences in diverse educational settings.

4. The Key Differences Between the Social Networking Sites

These social networking sites have distinct features and functionalities that cater to different user needs, interests, and objectives, making them valuable tools for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in higher education and academia. This can be discussed according to four different aspects of focus, audience, feature and purpose.

SNS	Focus	Audience	Feature	Purpose
LinkedIn	career development, recruitment, and industry connections	professionals, job seekers, recruiters, and businesses	professional profiles, job postings, industry groups, and networking events.	networking, building professional connections, showcasing skills and accomplishments, and recruiting talent
ResearchGate	researches and publications	researchers, scientists, academics, and students in various disciplines	sharing research papers, asking and answering questions, monitoring citations, and connecting with peers.	sharing research findings, collaborating on research projects, seeking feedback, and networking with fellow researchers
Academia.edu	share and discover research papers	researchers, scholars, and academics	profiles, research paper uploads, analytics, and academic networking	sharing research papers, finding collaborators, promoting scholarly work, and connecting with researchers with similar interests.
Mendeley	reference management tool for research publications	researchers, academics, students, and professionals	collaborative features, document sharing, and social networking functionalities	managing research references, collaborating on research projects, sharing research papers, and connecting with peers in academia.
Slack	team communication platform and project Management	teams, organizations, and groups of users in industries, and education	offers channels, messaging, file sharing, integration with other tools, and collaboration	team communication, project collaboration, group discussions, and organizing workflows
Reddit	social news aggregation and discussion platform	diverse audience interested in different topics, in education, research, and academic discussions	forums (subreddits), voting, commenting, and discussion threads	sharing resources, asking questions, participating in discussions, and connecting with communities
Discord	communication platform originally designed for gamers	users interested in real-time communication, collaboration, and community building, including students, educators, and researchers.	Discord offers text, voice, and video chat features, server creation, moderation tools, and integration with other platforms	group communication, study groups, research teams, and academic clubs to facilitate collaboration, discussions, and networking.
Facebook Groups	communities within the Facebook platform	users interested in joining and participating in online communities on Facebook	discussion boards, file sharing, event creation, and group moderation tools	sharing resources, organizing events, facilitating discussions, and connecting with like-minded individuals
Twitter	microblogging platform	students, educators, researchers, and professionals	tweets, hashtags, retweets, mentions, and direct messages for	sharing research updates, participating in discussions, networking with peers, and

			communication and engagement	staying informed about trends and developments in academia.
YouTube	video-sharing platform	students, educators, researchers, and lifelong learners	offers channels, playlists, comments, likes, and subscriptions for content discovery, interaction, and engagement	accessing educational resources, lectures, tutorials, and visual demonstrations, supplementing traditional learning materials, and engaging with educational content creators

Table 2: Key differences of selected SNS

5. Challenges and Issues Associated with Each Platform

While the social networking sites mentioned earlier offer valuable opportunities for education and academic collaboration, they also present certain challenges and issues that are relevant to education. Here are some of the key issues associated with each platform:

1. LinkedIn:

- Limited focus on academic networking: LinkedIn primarily caters to professional networking and career development, which may not fully meet the needs of academic networking and research collaboration.
- Lack of academic-specific features: The platform may lack specific features tailored to academic research, collaboration, and publication sharing.

2. ResearchGate:

- Quality control and credibility: ResearchGate has faced criticism for hosting predatory journals and questionable research, raising concerns about the quality and credibility of the content shared on the platform.
- Copyright and licensing issues: The platform has been involved in legal disputes over copyright infringement and unauthorized sharing of research papers, highlighting challenges related to intellectual property rights

3. Academia.edu:

- Access limitations: While Academia.edu offers free access to basic features, certain advanced features and analytics tools are available only to paying subscribers, limiting access for users who cannot afford premium membership.
- Privacy concerns: Users have raised concerns about privacy and data security on Academia.edu, particularly regarding the platform's data collection and sharing practices.

4. Mendeley:

- Ownership and control: Mendeley is owned by Elsevier, a major academic publisher known for its restrictive access policies and high subscription fees, leading to concerns about corporate control over scholarly communication and research dissemination.
- Integration challenges: Users may face challenges integrating Mendeley with other reference management tools or academic platforms due to compatibility issues or limited interoperability.

5. Slack:

- Privacy and data security: Slack has faced scrutiny over privacy and data security practices, including concerns about data breaches, unauthorized access to user data, and compliance with data protection regulations such as GDPR.
- Distraction and productivity loss: While Slack can enhance communication and collaboration, it may also lead to information overload, distraction, and reduced productivity if not used effectively or managed properly.

6. Reddit:

- Quality control and misinformation: Reddit hosts a wide range of content, including inaccurate information, fake news, and misinformation, posing challenges for users seeking reliable and credible sources of information.
- Community moderation issues: Subreddits may face challenges related to community moderation, including spam, trolling, harassment, and hate speech, impacting the overall user experience and community engagement.

7. Discord:

- Privacy and safety concerns: Discord has faced criticism over privacy and safety issues, including concerns about moderation of inappropriate content, user harassment, and misuse of the platform for illegal activities.

- Distraction and gaming culture: While Discord was originally designed for gamers, its expansion into other communities, including education, may still be associated with gaming culture, memes, and distractions that are not conducive to academic learning.
8. Facebook Groups:
- Privacy and data security: Facebook has faced numerous privacy scandals and controversies, raising concerns about data security, unauthorized access to user data, and the misuse of personal information for targeted advertising.
 - Digital well-being and distraction: Facebook's addictive features and algorithms may contribute to excessive screen time, distraction, and reduced focus on academic activities among students and educators.
9. Twitter:
- Information overload and brevity: Twitter's character limit and real-time nature may lead to oversimplification of complex topics, lack of nuance, and superficial engagement with educational content.
 - Misinformation and echo chambers: Twitter's open nature allows for the rapid spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and polarized discussions, posing challenges for users seeking reliable information and diverse perspectives.
10. YouTube:
- Quality control and misinformation: YouTube hosts a vast amount of content, including misinformation, conspiracy theories, and pseudoscience, highlighting challenges related to content moderation, fact-checking, and quality control.
 - Algorithmic recommendations: YouTube's recommendation algorithms may prioritize sensational or clickbait content over educational or scholarly material, potentially leading to biased or misleading recommendations for users.

These issues highlight the importance of critical thinking, digital literacy, and responsible use of social networking sites in educational contexts. Educators and students should be aware of these challenges and develop strategies to navigate them effectively while leveraging the benefits of social media for learning and collaboration.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the array of social networking sites discussed - LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, Slack, Reddit, Discord, Facebook Groups, Twitter, and YouTube - collectively represent a rich tapestry of digital tools reshaping educational landscapes. Each platform offers unique features and functionalities, catering to diverse needs within academia and beyond.

LinkedIn stands as a powerhouse for professional networking and career advancement, fostering connections between students, educators, and industry professionals. ResearchGate and Academia.edu provide robust platforms for researchers and academics to share knowledge, collaborate on projects, and track the impact of their work. Mendeley serves as a versatile reference management tool, facilitating seamless organization and sharing of research materials.

Slack, Discord, and Facebook Groups offer dynamic spaces for communication, collaboration, and community-building, whether within virtual classrooms, study groups, or academic networks. Reddit fosters vibrant discussions and resource-sharing across a multitude of educational topics and interests.

Twitter emerges as a hub for professional learning networks (PLNs), enabling educators, researchers, and students to engage in real-time conversations, share insights, and participate in broader academic discourse. YouTube stands as a treasure trove of educational content, offering a diverse array of videos, tutorials, and lectures across virtually every subject imaginable.

Despite their transformative potential, these platforms also present challenges, including issues related to privacy, misinformation, content quality, and digital well-being. Navigating these challenges requires critical digital literacy skills, thoughtful moderation, and ethical use of social media in educational contexts.

As technology continues to evolve, the role of social networking sites in education is likely to expand, offering new opportunities for collaboration, innovation, and lifelong learning. By harnessing the power of these platforms thoughtfully and responsibly, educators, students, and researchers can cultivate vibrant communities, enrich educational experiences, and drive positive change in the digital age.

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