SOCIAL MEDIA: ENABLING INCONSPICUOUS BLENDED LEARNING IN DESIGN EDUCATION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Social media has penetrated all strata of society and educational levels and spheres, making it an important channel of communication and knowledge transfer. Even as the Covid-19 pandemic changed the education scenario across the globe, with the medium of instruction majorly shifting to online, things are slowly returning to 'normalcy'. Albeit the use of social media as a conduit for instruction, feedback and learning, which increased during the lockdowns, continues to grow and evolve. This study aims to trace and understand the relationships between online social networking, social connectedness and learning in design education, in online, offline and blended set-ups. This paper reports findings from quantitative studies, done across various design schools in India. Participants responded anonymously to the online survey using the Google Forms platform. This study assesses the amount of course material shared, discussed, and engaged with on various social media. Respondents also marked the amount of connectedness they perceived with peers through social media and whether it impacted their class interaction with each other. It was found that students used various platforms for online communication and exchange of information, though their feedback on online interactions revealed deeper insights into factors that affect their overall experience of design education and learning. Further analysis of data found significant correlation between felt connectedness and interaction on social media with peers and design creativity and learning.

Keywords: Social media, design education, Indian students, social connectedness, blended learning

1 INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on the relationship between social media and student experiences has gained prominence in recent years. Educational fields from medicine to language studies are investigating the impact of social media usage and internet penetration on student lives and motivations. With the recent global pandemic affecting all strata of education, students from kindergarten to higher education have been exposed to the online mode of education. Social media has been rather widely studied among web-based technologies popular today, especially in developed countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States [1].

According to a recent article by The Global Statistics, on an average, Indians spend about 2.36 hours on social media per day. The number of social media users in India have been growing steadily at the rate of 467 million due to deep penetration of internet connectivity. Internet users in India have grown to a colossal 658 million, roughly 47% of the total population of India. Social media has now become an essential part of daily internet usage in India [2]. This study explores the impact of social media usage of design students in India on their social connectedness and design learning experience.

1.1 Social media and education

Social media sites and applications provide specific socio-technical systems [3], offering different services and functions. A study done to investigate individual motivation influence in virtual communities revealed a significant relationship between motivation factors and knowledge sharing. Consequently, students are making the most of social media for problem solving, course discussions, and group assignments [4]. This also highlights the functions of social media in ease of access, affordability, and speedy interaction [5]. A recent study also illustrates the 'affordances' coined by Don Norman, in understanding the features of social media and its application in learning experiences [6]. It further reports how students describe social media as their 'space', requiring a navigation of

appropriateness. These nuances of social media interactions need further research to understand their specific implications in different educational and cultural contexts.

1.2 Social media and social connectedness

Social interactions are key in maintaining the physical and psychological well-being of humans. Social connectedness, one of the main motivating principles behind social behaviour, is often considered a predictor of successful living and has been associated with many social and health benefits [7]. Laffey, et al [8] claim education and various learning interactions, whether traditional F2F or virtual, to be social practices. The extent to which students in online learning environments perceive themselves as being socially connected to their peers appears to be a key factor in predicting the success of online courses [9].

2   METHODOLOGIES

This study set out to answer the following research question: *How does (if at all) social media interaction of students impact their online design learning experience?*

To this effect a questionnaire was designed that consisted of (1) social media functions used by students and educators (i.e., kinds, usage frequency, effect on classroom learning), (2) items to measure the impact of social media interaction on felt social connectedness (such as, sense of authenticity, belonging, feeling understood), and (3) socio-demographic questions such as gender, age, design school, courses, etc.

2.1 Study design

An online google form was designed with 30 items to study student-student and educator-student interaction on social media and its perceived effect on social connectedness and online design learning. Online surveys gave the advantage of greater number of participants in a short time, and the flexibility to participate as per participants' convenience of place and time.

A 5-point Likert scale was employed, and students picked from a range of responses, such as 'Always' (5) to 'Never' (1) or 'Strongly agree' (5) to 'strongly disagree' (1). 50 students from more than 8 design schools across India responded to the survey. 92 percent of the students had attended online design classes for at least 6 months.

2.2 Data analysis

The quantitative data obtained using the online surveys was analysed by using the existing tools from the survey platform. This data was also statistically analysed to find significant correlation between the critical variables and group dynamics. The findings and analysis have been presented in the subsequent section, followed by discussion of some implications of the findings, conclusions, limitations and future scope.

3   RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented below in figurative and tabulation form.

3.1 Profile of respondents

The figure and table below show the sociodemographic profile of the respondents, with a majority of them in the age group of 21-25yrs and online class experience.
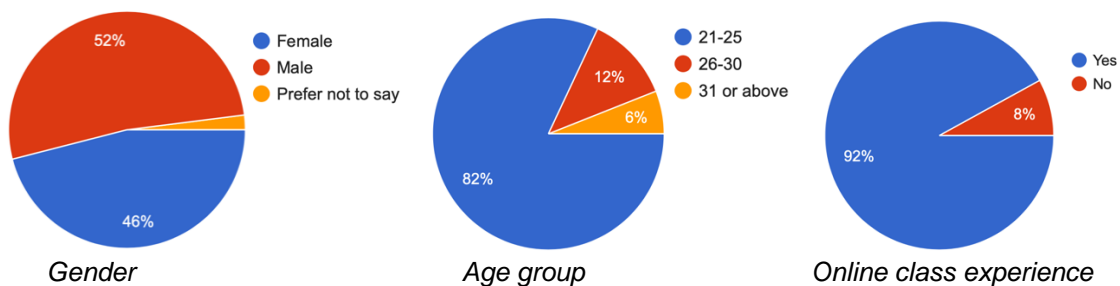

Figure 1. Sociodemographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1. Design schools represented in the study

Design Schools represented	%
DoD, IIT Delhi	32
ISDI, Mumbai	20
School of Design, UPES, Dehradun	16
CPDM, IISc Bangalore	10
Mumbai schools (Pearl, Raffles, anonymous)	10
NIFT, Delhi	4
Indira Gandhi DTU	4
Anonymous	4

3.2 Popular social media apps used by design students and educators

Below are listed some of the social media apps or websites most widely used by design students in India. 78% of the respondents were connected to most of their peers through social media, while 20% were connected to some of their peers.
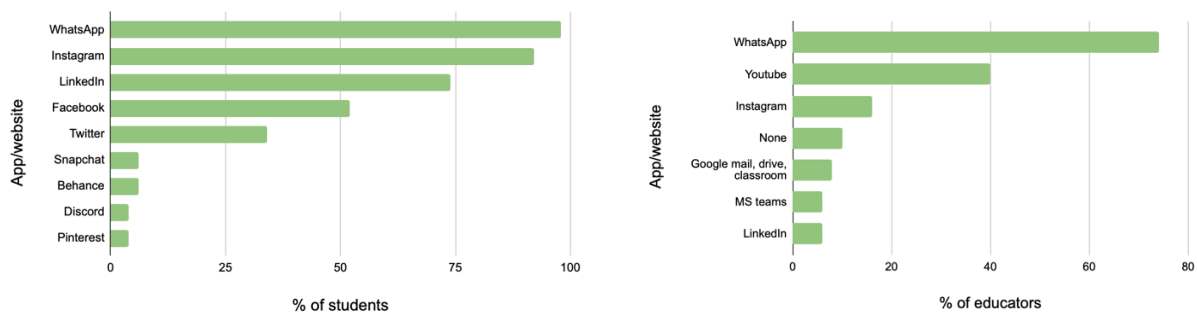

Figure 2. Popular social media apps used by design students and educators

3.3 Student-student and Educator-student interaction on social media

Respondents indicated how often they interacted with their peers and educators on social media as shown in the figure below.
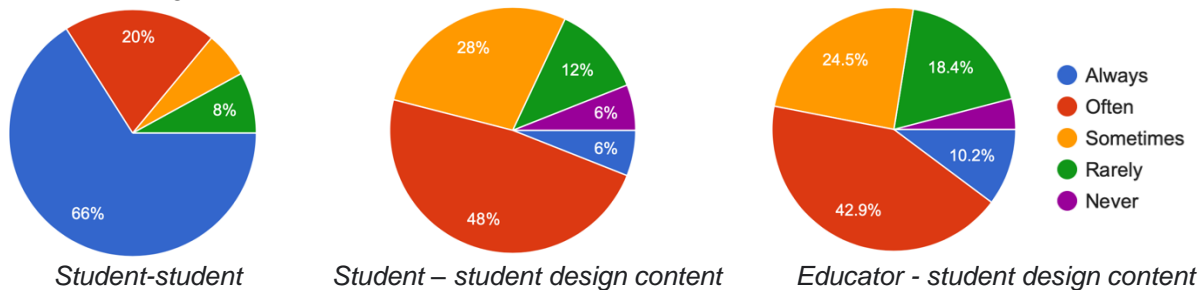

Student-student   *Student – student design content*   *Educator - student design content*

Figure 3. Frequency of Interaction on social media

3.4 Effect of social media interaction on design learning factors

Respondents indicated from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on the perceived effects of their social media interactions with their peers on their design learning experience.
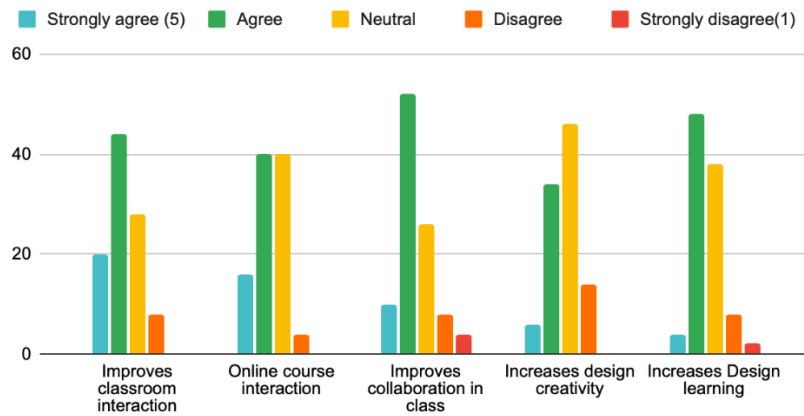
Figure 4. Effect of social media interaction on factors

3.5 Effect of social media interaction on social connectedness

Respondents indicated from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' on the perceived impact of their social media interactions on aspects of social connectedness.
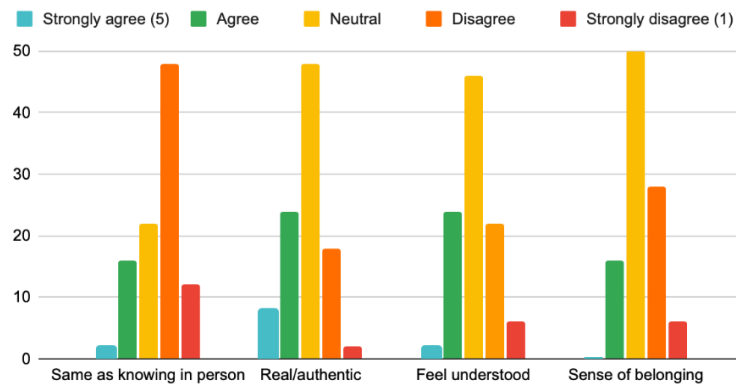

Figure 5. Effect of social media interaction on social connectedness

3.6 Correlation between social media interaction and other factors

Pearson's correlation was applied to see the relationship between social media, the felt connectedness and learning experience. Significant correlation was found between social media interaction of students and other factors.

Table 2. Correlation between social media interaction and other factors

Correlation of social media interaction on (r)	Increased online course interaction	Increased design learning	Being connected online is same as knowing in-person
Increased design knowledge sharing	0.412	-	-
Improved teamwork/collaboration	0.413	0.437	-
Real/authentic	-	-	0.413
Feel understood	-	-	0.434
Sense of belonging	-	-	0.519

4   DISCUSSIONS

The results show that a high percentage of students as well as educators were not only connected on used social media but also used it to share design knowledge. Even after many of these design schools having opened in-person, fully or partially, social media continues to be a convenient medium to share design content through private messages or public posts, making it an indispensable aspect of design education leading to blended learning.

Figure 4 indicates the significant impact of social media interaction among peers on their classroom interaction, design learning, creativity and collaboration, even though Figure 5 provides a dismal view of its effect on perceived social connectedness. Reiterating the findings that students lean more on in-person interaction to feel connected, authentic and understood in their relationship with their peers, as shown in prior research [10]. Interestingly, Table 2 exhibits significant correlations found between the effects of social media interaction (increased online course interaction and increase design learning) on 'increased collaboration' and 'knowledge sharing'. The social media interaction can therefore be seen as an extension of peer learning, feedback and critique to exchange and build on each other's ideas. Significant correlation was also seen between respondents who found social media interactions as real as in-person interactions, and their feeling a sense of belonging and connectedness online.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of social media interactions can be seen as design instructors and students successfully exchange knowledge, content and ideas to deliver and receive design education in both online and in-person setups resulting in continued blended learning. Thus, social media has become a tool that can support and supplement learning management systems for fostering virtual classroom experiences, wherein students across the globe can join in simultaneously to learn and share their ideas [11].

While felt social connectedness of design school instructors and students and its effect on pedagogy has been reported earlier [12], this study specifically focused on the role of social media interaction in the students' online design learning experience. Keeping this in mind, design instructors and course planners therefore need to continue to keep the channels open for online exchange of knowledge even as most design schools in India re-open to in-person classes. Educators can incorporate social media tools as add-ons to their online learning platforms or LMS, thereby inconspicuously and seamlessly incorporating blended learning to heighten the learning experience for both the students and themselves. Our result is consistent with research that relate that students share knowledge through social media to benefit from that sharing [13], and support prior investigations on influence of social media interaction on learning and knowledge exchange [14].

6 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

One could say that the study is only partially complete without studying the impact of social media usage of students on their in-person or face-to-face classroom interaction and learning, and we'd have to agree with them. Therefore, the immediate future scope of this study includes studying this impact and then reporting a comparative analysis of social media usage on online and in-person classroom interaction and learning.

Perhaps, another study could involve listing parameters and scoring them to assess how particular features of social media specifically contribute to design learning, design creativity, or feeling understood, etc. considering the various limitations of social media as well as online mode of design education [15]. This research can be further corroborated by gaining inputs from design educators, as a next step.

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