

Role of Social media in Collaborative Library and Information Science Education among SAARC Countries

Azra Aftab

Department of Library and Information Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.
E-mail address: azraftab@gmail.com

P. M. Naushad Ali

Department of Library and Information Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.
E-mail address: naushadali.amu@gmail.com



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Abstract:

Collaboration is much needed in today's educational scenario to ensure that competencies, talents, experiences and knowledge are distributed to peers as widely as possible. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the adoption of social media for curriculum development, education and research in Library and Information Science (LIS) in select SAARC countries, a hitherto unexplored area of research. This research tries to gather evidence on the effectiveness of its role and its potential future as a facilitator and enhancer of learning in the LIS system. The current research draws on the perspectives of the LIS community regarding the adoption of social media for educational and syllabus enrichment purposes.

Keywords: Collaboration; Library Information Science Education; Social Networking Sites; SAARC Countries.

Introduction

In most simple way to say, collaboration means “The act of working with someone(either an individual or group) to accomplish something”. Collaboration is necessary more than ever now to help institutes and individuals to be able to survive and compete in present global environment. During the last few decades an increasing interest and intensification of collaborative efforts in the field of Library and Information Science (LIS) can be seen. Collaboration is adopted extensively by stake holders in LIS and it has been applied in many-

fold ways such as students exchange programs, workshops, conferences, common accreditation of courses, resource sharing, teaching, research etc. It is no news that educational systems are evolving and this change demands collaboration to keep up with the pace of change. Collaboration in educational environment can help to build stronger LIS community who work towards common goals, upliftment of subject and increasing students' positive outcomes.

There are hundreds of Social Networking Sites (SNS), with various technological tools, supporting a wide range of interests and practices. Certainly, SNSs has changed the way people interact and communicate everyday but it can't be denied that it has vast potential to shape the way people learn. However the use of social media generally is more towards promoting social engagements rather educational i.e. SNSs supports and promotes social interaction and makes it easy for individuals to exchange information and share interests but they are yet to explore the potential in educational development of the people.

This scenario is fast changing in India and other SAARC countries where educators and library professionals are collaborating on social media more than ever. The educators are making judicious use of vast social sites in order to create optimal, natural environments for learning and research to take place. This study not only maps the current scenario in selected SAARC countries but also explores the future prospects of role of SNSs as an alternative supplement to traditional teaching and learning.

A brief instruction to SAARC countries

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established with the signing of the SAARC Charter in Dhaka on 8 December 1985. SAARC comprises of eight member states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Secretariat of the Association was set up in Kathmandu on 17 January 1987. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is the consortium of people of some South Asian countries which was formed to work together towards having a better quality of lives, also to accelerate economic growth and prosperity and to encourage active collaboration and reciprocated assistance in the cultural, technical and scientific fields.

Lis educational scenario in select SAARC countries

The countries selected are Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The LIS-education in South Asia is offered at various levels range from Certificate, Diploma degree, M.Phil and Ph.D. These LIS-education programmes course are offered on regular basis as well as through correspondence or distance education. According to Singh (2006) there are five levels of LIS-education programmes in Pakistan ranging from bachelors level to Ph.D level. According to Islam and Chowdhury (2006) in Bangladesh it varies from Certificate course in LIS, Postgraduate Diploma in LIS, B.A (Honours) in LIS, M.A. in LIS, M.Phil and Ph.D level at universities and in addition there are two certificate courses to coach school librarians. LIS education in Sri Lanka range from Certificate level to Ph.D. Many short time courses are also available. Post graduate diploma and masters degree in teacher librarianship is also available. In India the levels of courses ranges from certificate course, undergraduate diploma course, Postgraduate Diploma course, Bachelor in Library and Information Science (BLIS), Master in Library and Information Science (MLIS), M.Phil, Ph.D and D.Litt. programme. Along with these; many short time diploma courses in Library and Computer applications are there.

All the selected countries have one more active Library Associations. Few are mentioned here.

- Library Association of Bangladesh was formed in 1956 in Dhaka with mission to provide leadership for development, promotion of the profession of librarianship.(Library Association of Bangladesh, n.d.)
- Bangladesh Association of Librarians, Information Scientists and Documentalists (BALID) was founded as Bangladesh Association of Young Librarians, Information Scientists and Documentalist (BAYLID) on January 23, 1986 in Dhaka and it is a non political and professional organization of librarians and information scientists. (BALID, n.d.)
- Pakistan Library Association is the representative national body of librarians in Pakistan. It was founded in 1957 in Karachi.(Pakistan Library Association, n.d.)
- Pakistan Librarians Welfare Organization (PLWO) is a registered, autonomous, non - profit and representative countrywide organization of Library and Information Science Professionals working for the promotion of Library & Information professionals in Pakistan. It was founded at Lahore on September 28, 2005. (Pakistan Librarians Welfare Organization, n.d.)
- Pakistan Library Automation Group (PakLAG) is committed to empower libraries and librarians of Pakistan to create true learning and research environment through learning the use of latest technologies, software and techniques. It was founded in the year 2000 in Lahore. (PakLAG, n.d.)
- The Sri Lanka Library Association (then Ceylon Library Association - CLA) was formed on 28th August 1960 and its mission is to act as the pivotal professional body for library, documentation and information services in Sri Lanka (SLLA, n.d.).
- University Librarians' Association of Sri Lanka (ULA) is a recognized professional organization in Sri Lanka that represents the interests of library practitioners of Sri Lankan university library sector. (ULA, n.d.).
- Indian Library Association (ILA) was established on September 22, 1933. ILA is the largest and renowned professional body in the field of Library and Information Science in India and its headquarter is situated in Delhi.(ILA, n.d.).
- The Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centers (IASLIC) is a non-profit organization based in India that supports development in the entire field of special librarianship in India which was founded on 3 September 1955 at Kolkata. IASLIC maintains its headquarters at Kolkata.(IASLIC, n.d.).
- Indian Association of the Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS) is a national professional organization to further the cause of library education in India. It was founded in the year 1969. (IATLIS, n.d.).
- RRRLF (Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation) is a central autonomous organization established and fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India to motivate public library and information services and systems and to boost movement of public libraries in the nation. It was founded in the year 1972 and its headquarters is situated in Kolkata. (RRRLF, n.d.).

It may be interesting to note that the scenario of LIS education in SAARC countries are comparable, and this miserable state was the reason that we had to focus more on collaboration and find out ways to be able to make a positive change. Almost all these countries have library and information science education and training centers but they have their concerns. One of the major bottle-neck is budget allocation to these institutes leading to insufficient IT infrastructure, which in turn leads to slower IT based developments. Though the nomenclature of courses is changing but the core content remains the same with more emphasis on traditional technical services. There is lack of trained staff to be competent with today's emerging fields such as Big Data, ICT, e-learning, Knowledge Management etc. Most of these tasks are outsourced often rendering libraries a liability in the eyes of administration. Also absence of responsible accreditation both in case of professional and institutional accreditation has further added to the woes. All these have furthered fuelled the need of collaboration among LIS community in these countries.

Research Methodology

The paper tries to explore the education related role of social media and how the LIS communities in selected SAARC countries are harnessing the power of social media to enrich their subject as well as its pedagogy. The countries were selected considering the current scenario of Library and Information Science situation in the country. Due to the relative freshness of the approach in some countries the use of SNSs was fairly restricted and empirical studies were few, those countries are excluded. Finally the countries Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were included for this study. Data collection was done in single stage. A structured questionnaire, which was partially based on the study by Ukachi (2016) and further modified to fulfill the need of this study was sent via email to 175 faculty members working in various reputed Library Schools in these countries. A total of 110 completely filled responses were received which were taken for the investigation. Thematic analysis of data was investigated. The said questionnaire was divided into two broad spectrums, i) to map the perception of these professionals towards collaboration, areas in which they have collaborated, benefits and challenges associated with collaborations and ii) to explore the role of social media in collaborative LIS education. Random sampling technique was adopted for selecting LIS professionals. *Google form* was used for constructing the on line questionnaire and it was send via emails to LIS faculty members, which obtained by visiting the websites of various LIS schools and libraries in selected SAARC countries under study.

Objectives

This paper tries to answer following research objectives:

1. To know the general perception of LIS professionals in select SAARC countries towards collaboration
2. To understand the nature and extent of collaboration among professionals and how it affects their career.
3. To find out the purpose of LIS communities in SAARC countries think to use social media in LIS education in SAARC countries
4. To explore ways SNS can be used to supplement collaborative learning in SAARC countries.

Findings

Part -1

The first part of the findings deals with perception of LIS professionals on collaboration, the areas of collaboration, benefits and challenges associated with collaboration.

1- Perception of LIS professionals towards collaboration.

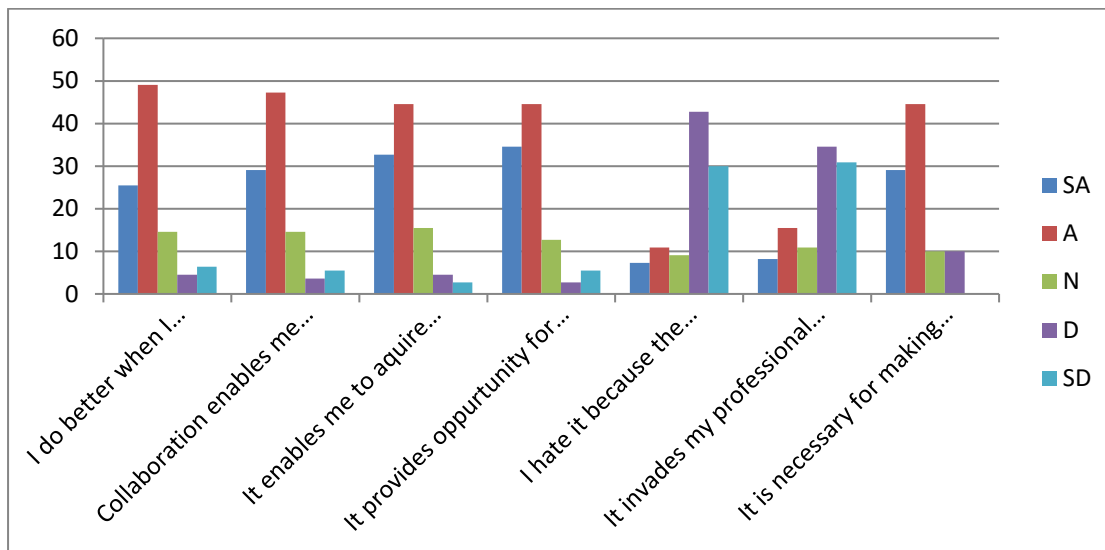
General perception of LIS professionals towards collaborative teaching was investigated. The responses are given below:

Table 1: Perception of LIS professionals towards collaboration.

Perception	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total no of Respondents
I do better when I collaborate	25.45% (28)	49.09% (54)	14.54% (16)	4.54% (05)	6.36% (07)	110
Collaboration enables me to gain more knowledge	29.09% (32)	47.27% (52)	14.54% (16)	3.63% (04)	5.45% (06)	110
It enables me to acquire new skills	32.72% (36)	44.54% (49)	15.45% (17)	4.54% (05)	2.72% (03)	110
It provides opportunity for sharing ideas and knowledge	34.54% (38)	44.54% (49)	12.72% (14)	2.72% (03)	5.45% (06)	110
I hate it because the collaborating partner can steal my knowledge	7.27% (08)	10.90% (12)	9.09% (10)	42.72% (47)	30% (33)	110
It invades my professional privacy.	8.18% (09)	15.45% (17)	10.90% (12)	34.54% (38)	30.90% (34)	110
It is necessary for making the profession better	29.09% (32)	44.54% (49)	10% (11)	10% (11)	6.36% (07)	110

The responses show that the majority of professionals agree that they do better when they collaborate and it helps them to gain new knowledge and skills. It is necessary for improving their professional knowledge. Furthermore the majority disagree that they hate it or it invades their professional privacy. This result shows that LIS community has an optimistic approach towards collaborative teaching and research.

Chart 1: Perception of LIS professionals towards collaboration.



2- Areas of collaboration.

In this query, the investigators tried to find out the areas in which LIS professionals are interested to collaborate. The responses are shown in the table below:

Table 2: Areas of collaboration

Areas of collaboration	MF	P	N	L	NEVER	Total no of Respondents
Research	27.27% (30)	38.18% (42)	15.45% (17)	9.09% (10)	10% (11)	110
Teaching	25.45% (28)	43.63% (48)	15.45% (17)	7.27% (08)	8.18% (09)	110
Exchange Programme	22.72% (25)	39.09% (43)	20% (22)	8.18% (09)	10% (11)	110
Organization of workshop, conferences, seminars, training, etc.	38.18% (42)	41.81% (46)	9.09% (10)	9.09% (10)	1.81% (02)	110
Curriculum planning and development	34.54% (38)	44.54% (49)	10% (11)	6.36% (07)	4.54% (05)	110
Library Collection Development	38.18% (42)	34.54% (38)	15.45% (17)	5.45% (06)	6.36% (07)	110
Catalogue card production (Production of Union Catalogue)	41.81% (46)	36.36% (40)	16.36% (18)	2.72% (03)	2.72% (03)	110
Resources sharing	46.36% (51)	43.63% (48)	6.36% (07)	2.72% (03)	0.90% (01)	110

The responses reveal that the respondents collaborate more or less in all areas but their preferred fields were in research, teaching, curriculum planning and resource sharing.

3- Level of collaboration.

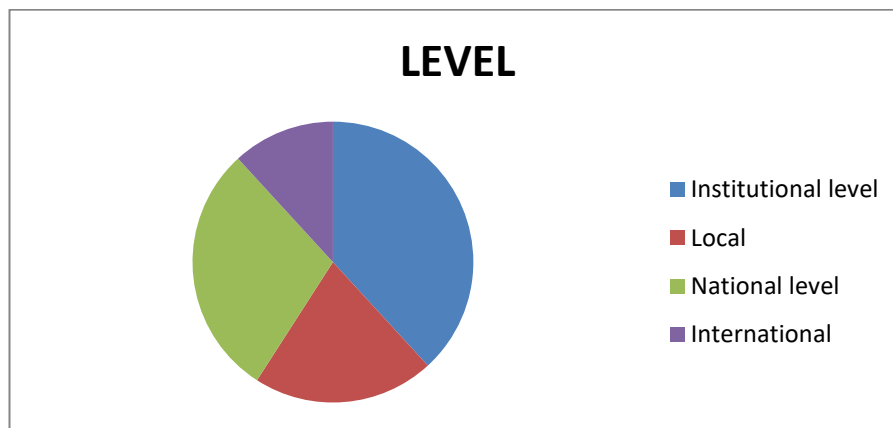
The responses to the level of collaborations are shown in table below:

Table 3: Level of Collaboration

Level of collaboration	%
Institutional level	38.18% (42)
Local	20.90% (23)
National level	29.09% (32)
Cross- national/ International level	11.81% (13)

It may be unfortunate to state that majority of respondents are collaborating only on institutional level. This refrains them from harnessing the true potential of collaboration.

Chart-2: Level of Collaboration



4- Benefits of collaboration.

In this query investigators tried to ascertain the benefits associated with collaboration. The results are tabulated in the table given below:

Table 4: Benefits of collaboration

Benefits	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total no of Respondents
Creates room for professional interaction	41.81% (46)	38.18% (42)	10.90% (12)	6.36% (07)	2.72% (03)	110
Paves way for exchange of ideas, knowledge and experience	39.09% (43)	42.72% (47)	9.09% (10)	5.45% (06)	3.63% (04)	110
Lets us know about what's happening in LIS field in other institutions	40% (44)	39.09% (43)	10% (11)	4.54% (05)	6.36% (07)	110
Creates opportunity for improvement of profession	38.18% (42)	37.27% (41)	11.81% (13)	6.36% (07)	6.36% (07)	110

Platform to gain support for initiatives	35.45% (39)	40% (44)	18.18% (20)	5.45% (06)	0.90% (01)	110
Helps in professional improvement of an individual	29.09% (32)	42.72% (47)	14.54% (16)	6.36% (07)	7.27% (08)	110

The analysis of the table 4 reveals that the LIS professionals agree with most of the benefits highlighted in the options, and they accord with the fact that it creates ways for professional interactions and keep them aware of the latest developments in the field and furthermore helps in professional upgrading of a person.

5- Challenges associated with collaboration.

To ascertain the challenges associated with collaboration, the respondents were provided with a table and requested to indicate the ones valid to them. The responses are provided in the table below:

Table 5: Challenges associated with collaboration

Challenges	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total no of Respondents
Threat to independence and privacy	32.72% (36)	36.36% (40)	10.90% (12)	16.36% (18)	3.63% (04)	110
Lack of trust and confidence on other people	31.81% (35)	29.09% (32)	10.90% (12)	20% (22)	8.18% (09)	110
Challenge of cultural and religious background	16.36% (18)	21.81% (24)	11.81% (13)	24.54% (27)	25.45% (28)	110
Complicated procedures	27.27% (30)	29.09% (32)	5.45% (06)	18.18% (20)	20% (22)	110
Lack of knowledge of how to collaborate	32.72% (36)	38.18% (42)	11.81% (13)	10.90% (12)	6.36% (07)	110
Lack of confidence to perform in a group	30.90% (34)	41.81% (46)	9.09% (10)	8.18% (09)	10% (11)	110
Confidence that I can do better alone	27.27% (30)	38.18% (42)	10% (11)	20% (22)	4.54% (05)	110

According to the results it can be stated that all the options provided played more or less negatively towards collaboration. Lack of privacy, trust and lack of knowledge to collaborate inversed their efforts towards collaboration.

Part -2

In this part of the analysis we tried to investigate the role of social networking sites in collaboration in which we tried to study the general outlook of LIS professionals towards collaboration through SNSs and also to find out how these LIS professionals are making use of these sites for various educational and research purposes.

6.1: Role of Social Networking Sites in Collaboration

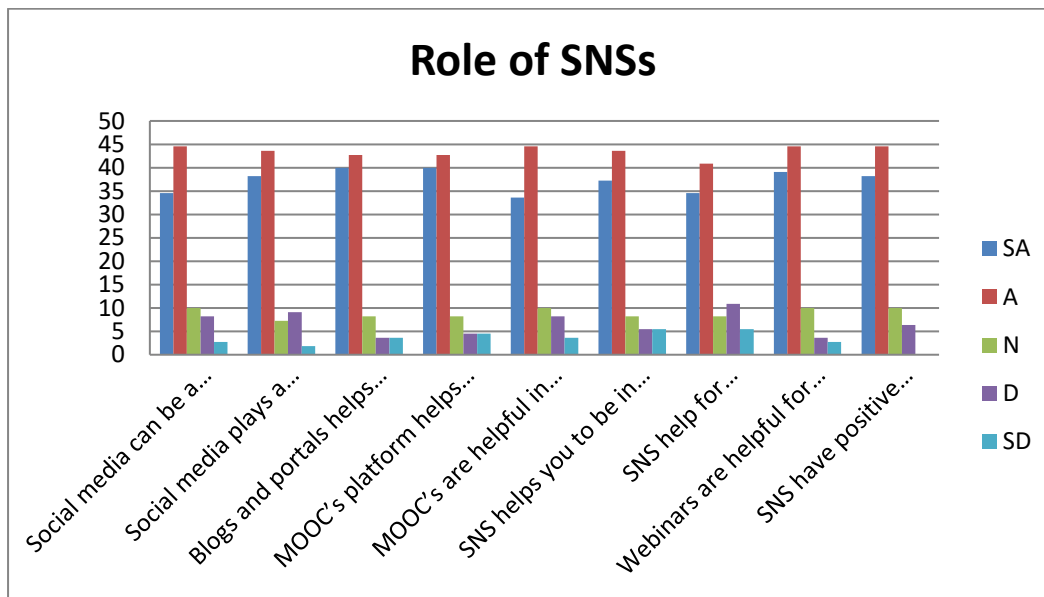
The opinion of respondents regarding roles that SNSs play in collaborative LIS education is tabulated in the Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Role of Social Networking Sites in Collaboration

Role of SNSs in Collaboration	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total no of Respondents
Social media can be a valuable tool for collaborative learning	34.54% (38)	44.54% (49)	10% (11)	8.18% (09)	2.72% (03)	110
Social media plays a great role in enhancing learning	38.18% (42)	43.63% (48)	7.27% (08)	9.09% (10)	1.81% (02)	110
Blogs and portals helps you to get connected to peer professional community	40% (44)	42.72% (47)	8.18% (09)	3.63% (04)	3.63% (04)	110
MOOC's platform helps in context development of courses	40% (44)	42.72% (47)	8.18% (09)	4.54% (05)	4.54% (05)	110
MOOC's are helpful in self educational purposes	33.63% (37)	44.54% (49)	10%(11)	8.18% (09)	3.63% (04)	110
SNS helps you to be in touch with recent trends in research	37.27% (41)	43.63% (48)	8.18% (09)	5.45% (06)	5.45% (06)	110
SNS help for information dissemination and communication	34.54% (38)	40.90% (45)	8.18% (09)	10.90% (12)	5.45% (06)	110
Webinars are helpful for enhancement of learning and education	39.09% (43)	44.54% (49)	10% (11)	3.63% (04)	2.72% (03)	110
SNS have positive impact on collaboration	38.18% (42)	44.54% (49)	10% (11)	6.36% (07)	0.90% (01)	110

The results showed the attitude of LIS professionals is very optimistic towards these sites and majority agrees that SNSs have positive impact on collaboration and they help individuals to be aware of the recent trends in the field and also helps them in information dissemination and communication.

Chart-3: Role of Social Networking Sites in Collaboration



6.2: Areas of Use of Social Media collaborative LIS education

Furthermore the paper has tried to segregate the use of social media in collaborative LIS education among SAARC countries in the following areas. These include: social media use in LIS education as an aid to traditional curriculum, social media as collaborative learning platform, social media’s role in promoting distance education and learning and finally social media as a tool to enrich research. All the data collected was tabulated and then collapsed into these four themes.

Table 6.2: Areas of collaboration via SNSs

Purpose of Collaboration	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Academia	Linkedin	Flickr	Mendeley	Research gate	Blogs	Others
Classroom teaching	62	56	72	12	13	26	27	22	42	16
Dispersion of course material	76	69	44	36	32	26	28	27	42	19
Collaborative learning platform	89	78	54	42	44	39	38	56	49	16
Promoting Distance Education	76	56	58	43	47	28	50	68	57	14
Enriching research	59	42	47	78	72	34	83	85	80	26

i. Social Media Use in Class room learning

This paper tried to highlight on different ways in which SNSs can be integrated in classrooms to enhance student learning process. For example in 62 respondents under study expressed that they use Facebook to enhance classroom teaching, students follow instructors on twitter or join professional Facebook pages, dedicated to specific educational causes. Facebook has become an excellent medium to disperse course materials. There are many education related twitter handles that provide links to study materials that would have been very difficult to

acquire otherwise given financial and geographical constraints. Also there are certain YouTube channels and subject gateways that cater to the needs of LIS community as apparent by the results and provide comprehensive subject material.

ii. Social Media as Collaborative Learning Platform

This study focuses on how these sites are used as a collaborative environment for education, and as a virtual learning platform and also on their use as tutoring and counseling platform. This study shows that majority of respondents make use of various academic SNSs such as Mendeley, Researchgate and Academia as a common collaboration platform, however many respondents resort to use of Facebook (89) and Twitter (78) as they are comparatively more popular and are used for social awareness as well.

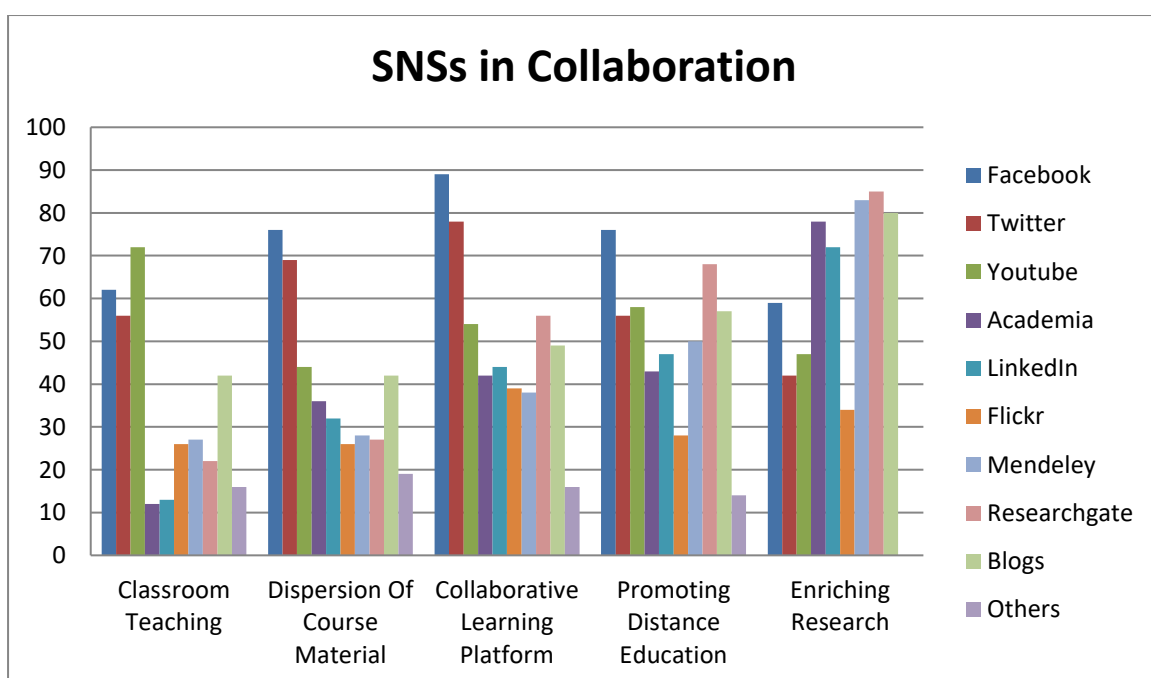
iii. Social Media’s Role in Promoting Distance Education and Learning

In this paper we have tried to access the role of SNSs in promoting distance education and learning and it was found out that many of them are making use of sites such as Facebook(76), Researchgate(68), Mendeley(50) and YouTube(58) amongst others to provide learning material. This is far easier than traditional methods when reading material was literally sent to readers via post or mails. Now these sites act as hosts where one can upload their material or provide links to them. Many professionals are resorting to Blogs (57) to propagate their content.

iv. Social Media as a Collaborative Tool to Enrich Research

Lastly this paper focuses on ways SNSs serve as a medium to enrich Library and Information Science research both on an individual level and on the level of community as well. This paper reveals that respondents use sites such as Academia(78),LinkedIn(72), Researchgate(85), Mendeley(83). The respondents asserted that these sites make them more visible to the community as well as helps them to portray their literature and intellectual content to a large and diverse audience. It also helps them a great deal to be up to date with the recent trends in the field in a most effortless way.

Chart 4: Purpose of collaboration via SNSs



Conclusion and Suggestions

The use of social media encourages students of SAARC countries to interact with one another and may increase engagement and interest in the course content. Facebook has become an excellent medium to disperse course materials. There are many education related twitter handles that provide links to class related materials. Skype is used regularly to bring subject experts that would have been very difficult otherwise given financial and geographical constraints. There are certain YouTube channels and subject gateways that cater to the needs of LIS community by providing comprehensive subject materials. The role of SNSs in promoting collaborative learning is magnanimous. Not only it has enhanced the degree to which students and professionals can collaborate it has also increased the quality of such collaborations manifold. SNSs have helped the people to form peer communities of people of similar specific interests. This has given rise to numerous blogs and portals that serve as a wonderful platform for people of akin interests can share their ideas and thoughts and others can not only be benefitted with such ideas but also critique them or enrich them according to one's perception. These portals and blogs also to a certain extent act as morale boosters as people feel part of a larger community.

The social media can be very useful as e-learning tools which can serve for a distance educational purpose. It can provide certain amount of leverage to scholars that are unable to obtain education in conventional manner. The spectrum of SNSs in promoting distance education is very wide. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is an online course targeting unrestricted and limitless participation via the internet and helps build a vibrant online community of students, teachers and researchers for interactive discussions. Number of participants can range from a few hundred to several thousand people engaged concurrently. For example, SWAYAM is a MOOC initiative by Government of India. The objective of this effort is to take the best teaching learning resources to all, including the most disadvantaged and to bridge the digital divide for students who have hitherto remained untouched by the digital revolution. In Pakistan, the Latif Ebrahim Jamal National Science Information Center (LEJ Center) serves as the focal center of the Virtual Education Project Pakistan (VEPP) which has launched the 'LEJ Knowledge Hub', a MOOC platform. The Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE), is one of the Higher Education Institutions that has already moved towards innovative teaching and pioneering MOOC initiatives in Sri Lanka. However MOOCs are not the only way in which person can obtain distance education. Many educators disperse course materials through YouTube, Twitter, Facebook etc. A good number of web based seminar or webinar are conducted over the internet using video conferencing software which enrich distance learning manifold. These sites provide an excellent way for educational communities to share research ideas, ask and answer questions find collaborators etc. It also helps individual to make their research more visible to enable repetition of work and scientific research mistakes. It is noticed that these countries are yet to explore the full potential of collaboration and the usage is still limited. It may be suggested that as the nature of today's knowledge society has made collaboration very imperative and it is crucial to be able to make most of it.

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