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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Facebook in Medical Sciences - A Boon or Bane

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ABSTRACT

Social networking sites are gaining popularity in recent years all around the world. Users of these sites are generally population below 40 years mostly school students, professional students, corporate world etc. Facebook is the most popular social networking site having more than 90 million users. Many studies had showed usefulness of facebook as informal e-learning tool for professional students and faculty, to hold discussion and online interaction with each other. Beside all these benefits, some studies have showed potential hazards of these sites.

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INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites are rapidly being used by everyone to keep one updated with the changing world. They are in trend to be in touch with friends and family. These sites have attracted millions of users because of the convenience and so many users have integrated these sites into their daily practices.

Social Network Sites: A Definition

These sites are web based services that allow individual to create a public profile within confined system. Users are able to articulate with other users on same site and can share a connection. Users can also view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The organization and classification of these connections may vary from site to site. (Boyd, 2007) Out of hundreds of social networking sites, the top 15 sites in world are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Google Plus+, DeviantArt, LiveJournal, Tagged, Orkut, Pinterest, CafeMom, Ning, Meetup, Mylife, badoo. (www.ebizmba.com, 2012) A constant rise in popularity of social networking is being observed. (Google trends, 2009)

Facebook

Facebook was designed by Mark Zuckerberg in February 2004 as a Harvard-only social networking site. (Cassidy May, 2006) In September 2005, Facebook expanded its popularity in high school students, professionals, corporate people and eventually, everyone. Facebook has had a meteoric rise with 908,000,000+ users (Mark Hachman, 23 April 2012) Facebook is the second most popular site in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings. Search engines refer approximately 5% of visits to Facebook. (Facebook.com, June 2012) Facebook is a simple web based application with good set of social network functionality. At the core, Facebook permits to create a public profile, link with friends, display friends update, create groups, join groups and hold group conversations (threaded discussions). (Tony Karrer, Oct 2007) Approximately half of active users log on to Facebook daily and 30 billion pieces of

matter are shared on Facebook each month. (Facebook Press, Oct 2011) Facebook is particularly appealing to young adults, with over 50% of members being in the age group of 18 to 34 year. (Facebook Stats, Oct 2011) This age group is comprised of individuals who are just at initial stage of establishing their professional lives, whether in a university or in the place of work, and are budding their professional identities. Facebook is also extensively used by students and faculty members in institutions of higher education, including colleges and health professions. (Cain, 2009), (Mattingly, 2010), (Metzger, 2010), (Thompson, 2008).

Facebook –as e learning tool

Due to extreme pace of change in world and addition of new information daily in existing stock it is not possible to complete the growing syllabus in classroom. Many program schedules do not adapt an instructional plan that includes discussing non textbook topics that are commonly, in the newspaper, on radio or television and/or web. Facebook provides students an informal learning environment for presenting current updates and the opinion of professionals not affiliated with a school or college, thereby revealing relevant novel topics. (Cain, 2011) Margarita VD and Jennifer LK conducted a study to compare blackboard verses facebook to facilitate Course-Related Discussion between Students and Faculty Members. They created Facebook page and coordinators encouraged students to “like” the page and to post and view study tips, links, or questions. At the end of the course, anonymous survey tool assessed students’ use and perceptions. They found students were more likely to be exposed to posts on Facebook than on blackboard. They found the addition of a Facebook page a beneficial study tool and believed that most posts added to their learning process. (Margarita, 2012)

Facebook – as learning platform

It encourages active leaning out of interest as compare to passive learning in classrooms. Students, who take the initiative in self learning, learn extra things and outshine than people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught. Self learning helps

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natural processes of psychological development; an essential aspect of maturing is developing the capability to take ever-increasing responsibility of our own lives to become increasingly self-directed. It helps in Self-Directed Learning. One of the important benefits of this approach is that it can handle one of the most everlasting problems in medical education: the exponential growth in medical knowledge. It is a known fact that the syllabus cannot teach everything that doctors consider imperative, and unlimited additions can lead to what Abrahamson (1978) describes as "curriculum hypertrophy." (Abrahamson 1978) Educationalists have been trying hard to condense the extra information, including lengthening of the course and introducing postgraduate and continuing medical education, but nothing has solved the problem. In addition, the obsolescence of knowledge means that much of what is important today may be irrelevant tomorrow. Informal learning experiences occur outside the frame of formal education settings that offer the ways of attracting students in academic content without the time limits of the formal curriculum. (Bull, 2008) Some studies demonstrated that using Facebook as part of learning and teaching is as much of a challenge for educationalists and students. (Gray, 2012) Many others have raised concerns that use of Facebook within a syllabus could increase student and faculty burden as Facebook does not replace other course management systems. (Estus, 2010), (Gray, 2010), (Vincent, 2011). This innovative learning medium is web-based activity, which is dependent on internet availability and connectivity, crash of which obsolete its utility.

Facebook – as a new dimension in continuing medical education

Facebook may help to organize free Online Conference-an Innovative way for participants to get familiar with other participants and hold discussions and used the threaded discussion capability. It may benefit as a considerable portion of the professional are already registered on Facebook and thus wouldn't have to upload profile information. This would allow creating professional friendships that may exist beyond the conference.

Facebook as recruiting vehicle

Facebook can be used as a recruiting vehicle. Some studies have shown employers consider the social behaviors of potential employees on social networking sites. A study by careerbuilders.com found that 22% of employers used social networking sites to screen applicants. In 34% of those cases, this information was used to exclude an applicant. (Elzweig, 2009) In one legal case, Snyder v. Millersville University, a teacher was denied a teaching certificate on basis of photos and comments on MySpace. (Snyder, 2008). (Schonlau, 2007), (McCabe, 2009)



Diagram no. 1. Showing boon of Facebook

Facebook –In patients follow up and to conduct health survey

Various studies support Facebook as a viable recruitment option for assessment of health behavior in young adults. (Ramo, 2012) Internet-based surveys can attend more potential respondents; make possible inclusion of low-incidence or concealed population groups; allow rapid, convenient input by respondents; and decrease bias in response to delicate, potentially stigmatizing topics (Schonlau, 2004), (Cantrell, 2007), (Rhodes, 2003). Facebook (FB) can be used to locate and re-contact study participants targeted for follow up in a longitudinal study. FB provides a potentially effective means to expand conventional methods of correspondence for contacting hard to reach participants. (Franklin, 2012)



Diagram no. 2. Showing bane of Facebook

Drawbacks of Facebook

Social networking is based in relationships of trust but they lack authenticity and validity. Impersonation means having a profile by one person, which actually belong to other person's identity. Fraud is the biggest dangers due to identity theft. Disclosure of important personal information publicly increases risk. Other drawback is the material posted in threaded discussion lack Ownership/ copyright. (John Sileo, 2012) Healthcare professions students tussle with the cord between their professional individuality and their personal uniqueness as is reflected by unprofessional postings seen on the profiles of professional students. (Finn, 2010) Several studies had recognized the potential risks of combining social media and health professions education. Specifically they are concerned about maintaining a professional picture. The probable hazards of online interactions beyond professional limit between faculty members and students affect the respectful qualified expert image. This may promote inappropriate or unethical acts or disclosure of protected information. (Cain, 2009), (Metzger, 2010), (Thompson, 2008), (Cain 2008). (Cain, 2010) Promoting, improving and revising of university guidelines regarding professionalism and social media have increased in some universities. (Chretien, 2009) While in other universities there are no standard guidelines for health professions faculty members that detail whether or how best to interact with students on social media Web sites, some institutions have developed or are considering implementation of policies about social media use. (Kind, 2010)

Conclusion

Facebook is like two edge sword, if used precisely there are lot of applications that could power this core capability. Though an innovative, novel, informal learning tool, facebook cannot replace traditional methods of learning (e.g., Blackboard). Safety measures if practiced can prevent the misuse. Strict worldwide university guidelines for students faculty interaction, and to maintain professionalism are the present day necessity. At last it's one owns

conscious mind that should decide to make correct, ethical use of this unique technology which is gifted to us to make things easier that yesterday.

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