

# Facebook an Open Education Platform: Exploring Its Educational Uses\*

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**Abstract.** Past few years have witnessed the growing popularity of Facebook among young people particularly school and college going students. Due to the ever-growing user community of Facebook educational researchers and practitioners believe that Facebook could be used for delivering educational content and act as a learning tool. In this work in progress submission, we aim at exploring if and how Facebook could be used as an open education platform and explore its educational uses. Facebook for educational users has received some attentions from educational researchers but majority of this research is focused on University and college going students. In contrast to previous research, we have organized a questionnaire survey with 424 high school students in India. This questionnaire survey investigates different aspects addressed the bigger issue i.e. how Facebook can be used for educational purposes. This study addresses if and how Facebook could be used as a medium for open education, different affordances (such as technical, social, communication) offered by Facebook for educational purposes, various benefits and limitations of Facebook in context to educational spaces and finally various policy level implications of Facebook use on education institutions and its stakeholders.

**Keywords:** Educational technology, Facebook, information technology, information systems, open education, quantitative survey.

## 1 Introduction

Past decade has witnessed the emergence of online social networks such as Facebook, Orkut and LinkedIn. However, among these different social media platforms, the role and usage of Facebook has always been dominant since its emersion. Over past few years, Facebook has emerged as the preferred social media platform for expression and communication among young people. The popularity of Facebook can be seen

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\* Statistics 1, 2013, <http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts>

Statistics 2, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/number-active-users-facebook-over-230449748.html>

Statistics 3, 2013, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/> (India statistics)

from the statistics published by Facebook (Statistics 1, 2013), as of December 2012, it has around a billion of users who are active on monthly basis (Statistics 2, 2013). Furthermore, there are around 1.06 billion Facebook users around the world as of December 2012 out of which 62.6 million users from India (Statistics 3, 2013). Due to this overwhelming popularity of Facebook among young people particularly students from all three educational levels i.e. primary, secondary and tertiary, educational technology practitioners and researchers are optimistic about using Facebook for educational purposes [1]. This claim gets more strength after looking at the ever-growing user community of Facebook, which has recently crossed 1 billion. Educational technology practitioners see this large community of Facebook users as a lucrative market while educational technology researchers believe that Facebook can be used as a communication channel for hosting learning related content and reach the masses [2]. This becomes more realistic considering the recent emergence of newer concepts of “openness in education” in the educational instruction. The last few years have witnessed the emergence of a newer phenomena referred to as “openness in education” that calls for an unrestricted access to any educational content or material so that different stakeholders of any educational system namely students, teachers, parents, and even institutions can access them anytime and anywhere [3]. The success of the concept of educational technology is extending its roots by significantly contributing to the emergence of new concepts such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Existing studies on “open education” have coined MOOCs and Open educational resources (OER), which are commonly referred as new high profile development in the field of education and instruction [3]. The seeds of such educational learning concepts was sown by MIT in 2001 by introducing their first Open-CourseWare (OCW) based courses for their undergraduate and graduate level students [3]. Such new initiatives can be perceived as: 1) promising tools for enhancing the learning experience. 2) These account for shaping the future of the educational sector. 3) They might have profound impact in shaping the future of any economy by providing easy access to educational material to its youth [3]. In this regard, [3] also extend their support to emergence such concepts for facilitating future learning considering the changes occurring in the existing lifestyles of the users and economical issues being faced by the governments owing to increasing population loads especially in the developing countries such as India and Africa. Previous research on this topic has predicted several policy level implications of “open education” on our social, political, and educational system [4]. These implications are: 1) “open education” has led to the reduction of geographic and economic barriers to education. 2) Loosening of the institutional grip over access to knowledge. 3) Massification of educational opportunities for the learners from low-income groups [4]. Despite its growing popularity and value-added advantages for traditional forms of educational instruction, research pertaining to open education is still in its early phases, which is under-theorized and under-researched.

Considering various added advantages provided by “openness in education” supported by newer concepts namely OER and MOOC, our present study tends to examine: 1) if and how Facebook could be used as a medium for open education 2) investigating different affordances (such as technical, social, communication) offered by Facebook for educational purposes 3) understanding various benefits and limitations of Facebook in context to educational spaces 4) determining various policy level implications of using Facebook on education institutions and its stakeholders. Furthermore the essence of our ongoing study is to “How Facebook can be used as an open education tool therefore open access to various learning and educational

material". Additionally this study examines whether Facebook can be successfully used as a learning tool in high schools, understanding various perceptions of high school students towards using Facebook for learning purposes, benefits and limitations of using Facebook for educational purposes and finally examining various implications of study on educational instruction and policy making in regard to using Facebook in schools. Our study brings a new perspective to the existing research agenda on "open education" i.e. if and how Facebook, a popular social networking site (SNS) especially among Indian teenagers, can serve as a cost effective medium for open education in Indian schools. Developing countries like India requires cost-effective and economical open-education tools that can serve the masses, especially in schools with lower computing infrastructure. This study has examined the perception of students towards the use of Facebook for learning and other educational reasons through a questionnaire survey with 424 respondents from grade 8 to grade 12. In this work in progress submission, we have outlined the background literature on this subject and presented research methodology behind this study covering research questions, study design, sample size and other details related to its implementation.

## 2 Background Research

Existing Facebook related statistics have clearly shown the ever-growing popularity of Facebook. However despite this popularity, little research has examined Facebook's role for learning and various other educational purposes. Facebook could potentially offer various affordances related to its environment, technology, connectivity and presence of huge user community [1]. Considering this need, we argue that it will be useful to investigate different ways in which Facebook can be used utilized for enhancing the learning experience in different educational settings. Learning is an active and social process [5] so Facebook might support the learning experience of students in various ways. The usage of Facebook for learning can add fun element in the process, which will also attract students towards its use. Due to this reason, Facebook has the capability to promote concentration and engagement among young people. Furthermore, the presence of possibility of indulging in informal communications around the clock also enhances the learning experience and learning curve of the students. It also enables the students to engage in communications regarding the problems that they encounter while they are not in the class or in close proximity with peers ([3], [6]. Even though Facebook has been popular among school, college and University level students however little has studied Facebook usage for educational purposes. Existing studies on this subject have mainly examined Facebook role in the tertiary levels of our education system i.e. for University level students. This earlier work mostly focused on following aspects namely examining usage of Facebook as a Learning-management system (LMS), teacher-student relationship in context to Facebook use, exploring students' educational related uses of Facebook and modeling its various educational usages ([7], [8], [9], [10], [11], [12]). In contrast to these earlier studies, our present study is focused on examining the usage of Facebook for educational purposes in high schools in India. This examination includes understanding perception of high school students on using Facebook as a learning tool and examining various gratifications of Facebook use among high school students. To our best of knowledge, no previous study has examined educational uses of Facebook for high schools and that too in India. Almost all of the existing studies are organized in western countries or in China and other East Asian countries.

### 3 Research Methodology

**Research Questions.** The study consists of following research questions: To examine whether Facebook can be successfully used for learning and other educational purposes in high schools; To understand the perception of school students towards using Facebook for educational purposes; To examine various limitations and benefits of using Facebook for educational purposes in schools? To outline various implications and design considerations on various aspects related to educational set up, policy making and classroom instruction.

**Research Method and Study Design.** A comprehensive questionnaire survey was prepared for collecting quantitative data on various underlying themes directly supporting the main research questions behind this study. This questionnaire survey consists of three parts namely: Part A consists of 23 items designed for collecting demographics information about the participating students which includes information on their age, class, academic performance, economic condition and various other statements related to Facebook use. Part B consists of 93 items designed for examining various gratifications and affordances (namely technological, learning, social, connectivity, educational and pedagogical, school performance, and economical) related to Facebook use. Part B consists of 15 items examining impact of Facebook on learning, teaching and students skill improvement in subjects namely science, mathematics and English language.

**Study Process.** This questionnaire study was organized in November-December 2012 and 424 participants mainly students (age 12 to 19 years) studying in different English speaking high schools in India answered it. The respondents were either already using Facebook or those who have recent joined Facebook. Before the actual study, a pilot study was performed where 20 participants (10 males and 10 female students) of same age group participated and answer this questionnaire. After the pilot study, the survey questionnaire was updated based on the feedback and study results as participants were instructed to point out difficult, complex and confusing statements and words. Afterwards, the updated questionnaire study was advertised in 5 local schools in North-western India where all students from grade 8 to grade 12 were informed about the study objective, purpose and background information. It was informed that this study is purely voluntary in nature and no negative consequences will occur to those students who will withdraw their participant at anytime before and during the study questionnaire survey. However, there was no possibility to withdraw their participation once survey is answered and returned since we did not keep any identification or coding of the answer sheets so it was impossible for us to find the returned answer sheet from the pile of respondents. The study was organized during the school hours and inside the normal classrooms in the presence of their class-teachers. Interested students received the questionnaire survey inside the classroom and it took 30 minutes on average to complete this study. No monetary or other kind of incentive was given to the participating students.

### 4 Conclusion and Future Work

In this work in progress submission, we have addressed the growing concern among educational technology researchers on how Facebook could be used for delivering open educational content and act as a learning tool. Towards this direction, we have

organized a questionnaire survey with 424 high school students in India. This questionnaire survey investigates different aspects addressed the bigger issue i.e. how Facebook can be used for educational purposes. This study addresses if and how Facebook could be used as a medium for open education, different affordances offered by Facebook for educational purposes, various benefits and limitations of Facebook in context to educational spaces and finally various policy level implications of Facebook use on education institutions and its stakeholders.

In our future work, we aim to organize the same questionnaire survey in other countries namely Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Finland. This kind of data collection in other parts of the world would enable us to perform cross-cultural analysis, which would in way help us in understanding the underlying subjects from different point of view. Additionally, we aim to generalize the findings of the study by comparing the results received from India with other countries.

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