



ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN (OTOLARYNGOLOGY) TEACHING

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ABSTRACT:

This article is an attempt to analyse and discuss the possible contribution of social networking sites to teaching and learning, with Otorhinolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery as the subject of interest.



INTRODUCTION:

The rising importance and availability of online social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter & their popularity among the youth today are undeniable facts. The disapproval with which such sites are looked down upon by most of their parents/professors/superiors is also quite a well known fact, due to the opportunity it gives for inappropriate behavior and excessive pointless waste of precious time. Nevertheless, the use of such social networking sites has become an integral part of the day-to-day lives of today's youth and as a result, they are communicating with each other on an unprecedented scale. Teaching and learning need to reflect these social changes and conform to the needs and expectations of today's youth. This would serve two purposes. One that through this, teaching and learning would receive a new dimension and possibly reach higher standards. The other being that, such social networking sites would thus be used more constructively by today's youth.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES: A VIRTUAL RENDEZVOUZ



A social networking site is a software that allows people to come together around an idea or topic of interest. It is a virtual location which allows interaction and communication across the globe. It is a virtual venue which could permit the best possible form of collaboration breaking all barriers of connectivity. Examples of common and popular such social networking sites

are Facebook, Twitter, Youtube etc. There are many other such similar sites (less popular in the Indian subcontinent) across the World Wide Web such as Elgg.com, ning.com, Flickr, Myspace, LinkedIn etc.. It is a virtual meeting point which can accommodate the maximum number of members; and there is room for everyone's views and opinions. It allows participation from geographically scattered and culturally diversified participants. The audience reachable is unparalleled by any other form of connectivity. The popularity of Web 2.0 tools reflects today's trend of how the need for this kind of interaction is fast catching on, so much so as to be appreciated if it is possible on the regular websites as well. Studies have in fact revealed that students spend up to 4 hours everyday on Facebook! This addiction if tapped intelligently and appropriately could end up being useful for them. When such a platform is utilized as a medium for education, the results that could be obtained are limitless.

SOCIAL NETWORKING TO ACADEMIC NETWORKING :

“ I never teach my pupils. I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.” - Albert Einstein.

The popularity of such social networking sites reflects the students' clear desire for peer interaction and communication outside the classroom. This attitude can be put to good use for their own academic benefit. It would be like serving knowledge to them on a familiar platter, and in a form they find more palatable! Also personal experience supported by well-established learning theory has shown that learning from one another is one of the deepest forms of learning students ever experience. They stand to gain more from informal than formal learning. A social network expands the learning environment to wherever the learner happens to be and acts as a bridge between school and home, between formal and informal learning. The risk and incidence of inappropriate behavior also probably declines as we go up the ladder from a school student through a college going graduate to a post-graduate pursuer due to a natural physiological process of mental maturation. These people could and should hence look at these sites in this fresh new perspective and make the most of it, while they are at it.

Lets get specific. For example, instead of the usual random posts, try posting a video clipping/ photo of the subject of interest(Otolaryngology in

our case) and observe what happens with a bird's eye view. Even if most of it would be off the record, the results achievable are phenomenal. While the knowledgeable lot (Otolaryngology practitioners and surgeons) critically analyse and comment on the post, and thus mould each other's views on the same for the better, the ignorant majority would have silently been educated in the process. It provides instant access to a community of experts in the field of interest. Pioneers in the field who were hitherto considered to be inaccessible will be only a few clicks away from your reach. Questions thrown at them would boomerang back as instantaneous answers. It will matter less that you may not be pursuing your course in a top-notch institution, if the stalwarts who went into its making are available for interaction on such sites. Our very own Professor and Head Of the Department of ENT, Stanley Medical College and General Hospital, Prof. Dr. T. Balasubramanian, MS, DLO, would make a perfect example. He is a teaching enthusiast who is very active on such social networking sites and hence most accessible and approachable to budding ENT surgeons. He regularly posts and shares videos, photos, articles and snippets related to Otolaryngology on such sites and is most willing to answer queries on his subject through the same medium, apart from having several web pages to his credit dedicated to ENT and Head and Neck Surgery. Otolaryngology teaching has definitely received a new dimension thanks to his efforts.

Such sites provide opportunities for group learning and discussion. For example, opinion polls for the most appropriate line of management for a particular disease condition or presentation could be taken and the best line of treatment could thus be decided upon. Videos demonstrating the ideal way to handle an emergency could be uploaded to educate the students, and this can even be extended to include the non-medical public as well, in an attempt to create awareness and thus save more lives. Teasers in the form of pictures/video clips of a particular clinical presentation/surgical procedure could be posted, and questions thrown at the audience, asking to say, come to a provisional diagnosis, differential diagnosis etc. There are quite a few diseases which are endemic in certain parts of the country/world and almost unseen/unheard of in other parts. For example take Rhinosporidiosis. It is highly prevalent in the districts of Ramnad, Madurai in Tamilnadu and many parts of Kerala, but probably hardly ever seen in other drier northern parts of India. Through this social networking forum, Otorhinolaryngology practitioners and students from Kerala and Ramnad could help their colleagues from say, Punjab and Haryana, get acquainted with this condition.

The circle of discussion and debate would cycle and recycle over and over again until the best conclusions are arrived at.

A NEW PEDAGOGICAL DIMENSION:

“A true teacher is one who, keeping the past alive, is also able to understand the present.” - Confucius.

It is imperative that teachers understand the pedagogical potential of such social networking sites if they were to be put to good academic use. Having said this, it is disappointing that the attitude of most schools and teachers toward them has been quite discouraging. While some schools have downright forbidden their teaching staff from any kind of interaction with their students through such sites, others, like the ones in Trenton, have recently laid down rules which spell the kind of interaction which is considered permissible between their teachers and students through such networking sites. Though they are allowed to have personal accounts on such sites, they are forbidden from be-friending their current students.

While it is true that the traditional nature of the expected type of hierarchial relationship between a teacher and his/her student would begin to blur through interaction on such social networking sites, it is not fair to focus only on the flip side. When teachers and professors make themselves available for access to their students through such media which excite them, they would appeal to them more and make themselves appear more approachable. The students would probably become more willing to listen to what such professors have to say, which will by itself make their teaching efforts more effective. A timid student who is too shy to come out with his/her doubts in front of his colleagues in the physical working environment might possibly be willing to come out of his shell and get his doubts cleared from his superiors and teachers through this forum. Web pages dedicated to the respective subject topics could be started and updated from time to time. This would make the same appear in a new light to the students. The outreach will also be far better. The target audience couldn't get bigger. The scale would jump from a classroom of fifty students (or a department of say 25 members) to all students (or Graduates and Post- Graduates in ENT) across the World (Wide Web)! While the decision regarding personal interaction between the knowledge imparter and gainer could be

individualised, such academic interaction would reap rich dividends for everyone on board – both the giver and the receiver. The school/college/department administration needs to realize that the adoption of social networking could conceivably provide the respective community with a low-cost / high-value platform in which teachers and learners can remain in close contact and interact beyond the constraints of the school/college/department walls, and within which the teacher would be able to provide the learner with further personalised feedback and support to that already provided in the physical learning environment. When social networking is effectively implemented, it allows students to continue learning from one another, under the guidance of their teachers/professor's beyond the school's/department's walls.

CONCLUSION:

Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution is not necessarily restricted to biological processes in this world. Teaching also seems to be subject to it, and such social networking sites could possibly be an important milestone in the process. The pedagogical potential of these sites needs to be recognized and appreciated and put to good use. They are virtual tools which could facilitate teaching to the largest audience possible, yet retain the feeling of a personalized class for the student. While "all work and no play would make Jack a dull boy", and "all play and no work" would be frowned down upon, if work could be extracted through play (knowledge impartment through recreation), who could possibly complain?

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