

# STUDENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR LEARNING AND THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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**Abstract** *The changed learning environment has necessitated formation of interactive networks for sharing, participation and collaboration. The Social Media platform provides tremendous avenues in this regard. The present study aims to investigate the level of integration of Social Media into the learning practices of the students of seven general universities in the state of Odisha. A questionnaire based survey was conducted among 1000 postgraduate students and research scholars segregated into four major disciplines, Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, Pure Sciences, and Applied Sciences & Technology. The findings revealed that Social Media is very much popular among the students. However, the use of these platforms in learning practices has remained very trivial among the students under investigation. In spite of its huge potential as a learning platform, they are chiefly used for personal communication and entertainment. Hence the models has been suggested for successful integration of social media in to learning in the Universities of Odisha and the role of library in promoting usage of social media in to learning has been presented in the paper.*

**Keyword:** *Social Media, Facebook, Twitter, Linked In, Friendster, Web 2.0*

## INTRODUCTION

The recent technological innovations in “social media” have transformed it into a platform for numerous services and applications in education and learning in the academic institutions. Familiar social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have linked billions of people and enabled them to communicate with each other easily (Canty, 2012). Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook were developed in 2003-2004, and the term “social media” became prominent. The term “social media” is usually used interchangeably with “Web 2.0”, with slightly different things. Social media is defined as Internet-based applications that build on the idea and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In a constructivist learning environment knowledge is constructed distinctively in numerous ways using a diversity of tools and resources. “Web 2.0 has provided numerous tools and resources which supports constructivist approaches to learning and has great potential to socialize online learning to a greater extent” (Paily, 2013).

E-learning has become a buzzword, meant for teaching and learning with the support of computers, network and all

other forms of electronic learning available everywhere, all-time, and for anybody (Kundi and Nawaz, 2014). This emerging world of e-learning signifies the philosophy of “community of practice” which is characterized by means of an approach to learning based on conversation, interaction, sharing, collaborative creation of content, etc. The students of ‘Y’ generation forms networks, collaborate, learn together, develop and share content using various social media tools, and organize content according to their own choice. The new generation of students emphasizes latest developments in e-learning based on social media tools.

The present empirical study makes an effort to find out the level of students’ engagement and usage of social media in learning activities in the universities of Odisha.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the recent times, Social Media have become quite common in all circles of human society. The learning community across the world has also been highly influenced by the social media services in order to network together and interact seamlessly. Leading social media platforms like, Facebook and MySpace (for social networking/socializing), LinkedIn (for professional networking), Second Life (for virtual

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world) and Elgg (for knowledge accretion and learning), empower the users to create profiles thereby expressing, their preferences, likes and dislikes which help them to form communities.

Integrating social media into learning produces extremely creative and inspiring modes of learning by optimizing the social and engaging aspects of learning. Active participation of learners in social media sites for upload, modify or create content, develops creativity. These Social networks encourage discovery and hence are very useful media for students. If students are interested in specific reading materials, books, opinions etc. those will be catered by a group within a social networking service.

According to Childnet International (2008), the potential uses of social media for learning lie in Developing a personalized space for learners to record events, achievements and happenings can collect works similar as their work, exploring and promoting their talents and interests; Strengthening their communication and inter-personal skills; Engaging into collaborative practices and team building; Productively showcasing their works, events, assignments, affiliations, etc.; and Forming communities of practice around particular topics or interests.

Study made by Neeraj Kumar on Sikkim University Students found that majority of the Sikkim University students used Social networking tools for academic purpose, followed by friendly communication and making friendship. (Kumar, N., 2012). Another Study made by Rousseau and Puttaraju in Bangalore city on use of Social Networking among the young adults in Bangalore city found Majority of the respondents used Social Networking for academic purposes like sharing and asking questions/doubts or finding learning resources

from their online friends or communities (Rousseau and Puttaraju, 2014). Mohamed Haneefa K. and Sumitha E. in their study on uses of Social Networking by the students of Calicut University, found that majority of the students used the service for academic purposes (Haneefa and Sumitha, 2011).

It is quite interesting and inspiring to note that surveys undertaken in the United States indicate that, education-related topics are the most commonly discussed by the young people in Social networking sites. (Childnet International, 2008). Presenting the experiences of using Facebook by two different lecturers in two (US) higher education settings, Nicole Ellison points out that Facebook, used as a teaching tool, is easily accessible, convenient for students, provides more engaging learning environment and adds a "social" peer-to-peer component. The site is also having potential to support digital literacy and social engagement (Childnet International, 2008).

The most popular social media platform, "Facebook", which was developed by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 made provision of number of applications which fit with the social context of learning. In particular, the conversational, collaborative and communal qualities of Facebook are known to be good models of learning, in that they are collaborative and encourage active participatory role for Learners" (Selwyn, N. (2009). Along with offering prospect for re-engage students with their learning, Facebook also promote a 'critical thinking in learners' about their learning. Hence Social media platform have the capacity to drastically change the learning process to better motivate students for engaged learning. Figure-1 displays the student-teacher community formed on facebook at Glasgow University.

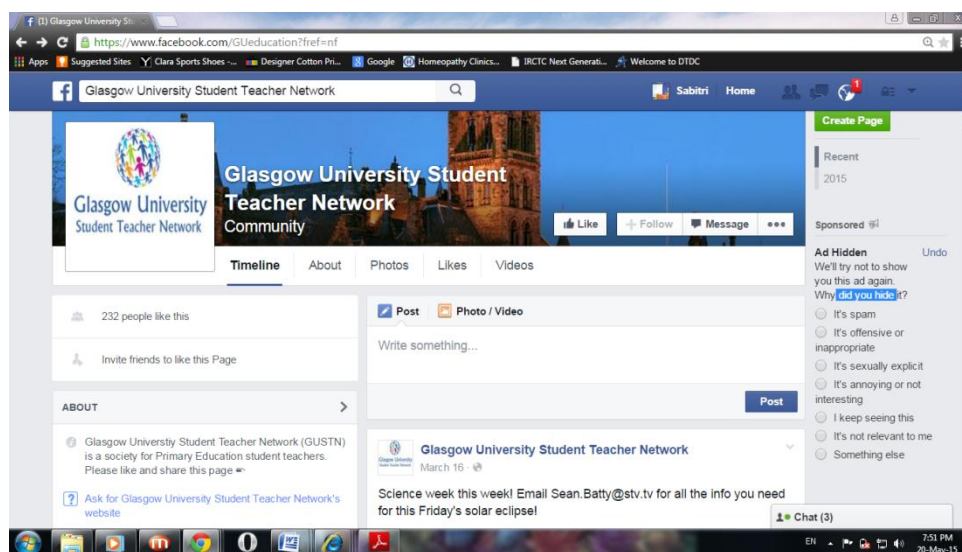


Fig. 1: Example of Student-teacher Network on 'Facebook'

(Source: <https://www.facebook.com/GUeducation>)

## OBJECTIVES

As reviewed in the literature many people in universities and in other academic Institutions across the world have begun to incorporate social media into their learning environment. The present study is designed to trace the integration of Social media in the learning environments of university students of Odisha. Specifically, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To find out familiarity of university students in Odisha with Social media tools;
- To ascertain the usage of Social media tools in different learning practices by the university students;
- To find out students' perception regarding role of Library in promoting and implementing use of Social Media; and
- To develop models for successful integration of Social media in learning and Library practices.

## METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

A structured questionnaire was administered for collecting data among students of Universities in Odisha from four major disciplines: Arts and Humanities (AH), Social Sciences (SS), Pure Sciences (PS) and Applied Science and Technology (AT). A random sample of 15% students from each discipline was selected and a total of 1000 responses were obtained for data analysis. The scope of the present study covers seven general universities in Odisha including Berhampur University, Fakir Mohan University, Central University of Orissa, North Orissa University, Utkal University, Ravenshaw University and Sambalpur University. The questionnaire was distributed randomly among about 15% students from each of the disciplines and

a total of 1000 responses were collected from four major disciplines. Popular Social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Google+*, *Twitter*, *Friendster* and *Linked In* were included in the survey.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

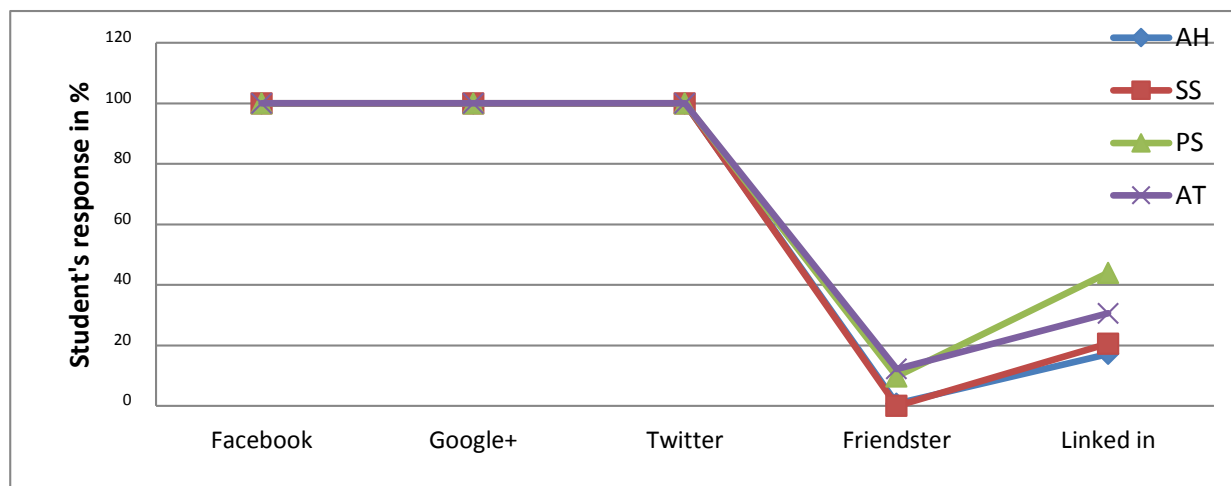
Social media sites like 'Facebook', 'Google+', 'Twitter', etc. provides sophisticated features for social, conversational and collaborative learning and hence, support active participatory role for learners across the world. Students can discuss and communicate their own academic and research information on Social media sites and can ask for comments/suggestions from peers, which can add value to their original work and ideas. Now social media are being used by Students as a data source for their research work and it is also being used for discovering people having similar subject interest. Many related research findings have confirmed that interest in harnessing Social media for educational purpose is high. Social media sites are highly useful in building students' communication and technology skills and understanding different points of view. These sites can also be used for building up skills to create communities of students and to discuss a specific subject relating to their study. The following section discusses the familiarity and usage of social media platforms in learning by university students.

## FAMILIARITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

There are different kinds of Social Media platforms available on the Web with different features. The following table discloses the familiarity of university students with a few popular media platforms.

**Table 1: Familiarity of Social Media Platforms**

Social net- working Site	Arts & Humanities (n= 267)		Social Sciences (n=320)		Pure Sciences (n=266)		Applied Science & Technology (n=147)	
	f <sub>AH</sub>	%	f <sub>SS</sub>	%	f <sub>PS</sub>	%	f <sub>AT</sub>	%
Facebook	267	100	320	100	266	100	147	100
Google+	267	100	320	100	266	100	147	100
Twitter	267	100	320	100	266	100	147	100
Friendster	02	0.74	00	0	26	9.77	18	12.24
Linked in	46	17.22	66	20.62	117	43.98	45	30.61



**Fig. 2: Familiarity of Social Media platforms**

Table-1 divulges that 'Facebook', 'Google+' and 'Twitter' are the most popular social networking tools with 100% familiarity among the university students across disciplines. It was quite expected because 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' have revolutionized the whole world of e-communication and networking. Secondly, 'LinkedIn' is also familiar among 43.98% students from Pure Sciences, 30.61% from Applied Science, 20.62% from Social Science and 17.22% from Arts and Humanities. However, the familiarity of 'Friendster' is not significant among the students across the disciplines.

Overall, the students have a fair degree of familiarity with the three popular social media platforms.

## USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social Media platforms has gained popularity because of the development in the technology especially the smart phones, which has enabled the users to get connected everywhere. With regard to the use of social media, they are used for multiple purposes, starting from improving customer images to finding a lost friend.

**Table 2: Usage of Social Media Platforms**

Social networking Site	Arts & Humanities (n= 267)		Social Sciences (n=320)		Pure Sciences (n=266)		Applied Science & Technology (n=147)	
	f <sub>AH</sub>	%	f <sub>SS</sub>	%	f <sub>PS</sub>	%	f <sub>AT</sub>	%
Facebook	267	100	320	100	266	100	147	100
Google+	80	29.96	78	24.37	126	47.36	67	45.57
Twitter	76	28.46	61	19.06	112	42.10	59	40.13
Friendster	00	00	00	00	00	00	00	00
Linked in	28	10.48	26	8.12	28	10.52	18	12.24

The respondents in the present study have been asked to indicate which Social Media platforms they are using. As reflected in the table-2, in comparison to other Social networking platforms, 'Facebook' is the most popular

platform being used by all the students across disciplines. However a smaller community of students from each of the four disciplines is also using 'Google+' and 'Twitter'. While 'Linked In' is used, by even a smaller group of students, 'Friendster' is not at all used by any of the students.

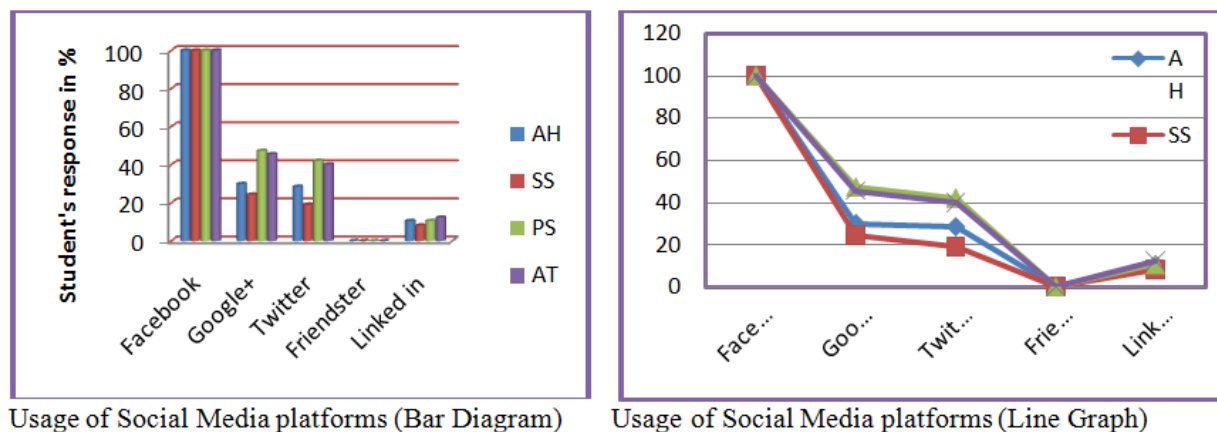


Fig. 3: Usage of Social Media Platforms

### USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN LEARNING

Even though Social networks have been widely popular as a social media, they have not yet become equally popular as a learning platform. In spite of its huge potential as a learning tool, they are chiefly used for personal communication and

entertainment. The following table represents the actual depiction of use of social media in learning.

Table 3: Use of Social Media in Learning

Learning activities on Social Networking Sites	Arts & Humanities (n= 267)		Social Sciences (n=320)		Pure Sciences (n=266)		Applied Science & Technology (n=147)	
	f <sub>AH</sub>	%	f <sub>SS</sub>	%	f <sub>PS</sub>	%	f <sub>AT</sub>	%
Use Social Networking Sites for learning.	102	38.20	123	38.43	109	40.97	75	51.02
Communicate academic and research information on social networking sites.	31	11.61	40	12.5	63	23.68	49	33.33
Use SNS as a data source for research.	05	1.87	18	5.62	10	3.75	08	5.44
Use SNS to Receive Comment / Suggestions from peers.	66	24.71	75	23.43	63	23.68	49	33.33
Use SNS for discovering people having similar subject interest.	69	25.84	54	16.87	61	22.93	40	27.21

Fig. 4: Use of Social Media in learning

As per Table-3, less than 50% students responded to have learning experience with Social media across the disciplines except

Applied Science and Technology discipline with 51.02% of students having learning experience with social media. Although all the students across the disciplines are familiar as well as use Social networking tools, the usage of the tools for learning is not very significant among the students. As regards to specific learning behavior, more than 10% students from all the disciplines communicate academic and research information on social networking site. Less than

one fourth students from Arts & Humanities, Social Science and Pure Sciences use Social media to receive comment / suggestions from peers. Again, about one third student's from Applied Science & Technology use social media to Receive Comment / Suggestions from peers. Just more than one fourth students from Arts & Humanities and Applied Science & Technology use social media for discovering people having similar subject interest. Less than one

fourth students from Social Science and Pure Science use social media for discovering people having similar subject interest. However, usage of social media as a data source for research is very insignificant among the students across the disciplines.

## ROLE OF LIBRARY IN PROMOTING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

As Social media tools are the great source of information and having enormous opportunities for the learners, libraries play significant role in promoting the usage of those tools among the communities, by providing various services via

Social media tools. Libraries may provide information alert services, current awareness services, instructional programs etc. via Social media tools so that users will be familiar with these tools and will be self motivated to use in their day to day learning process. Libraries can also reach to the user community and network with them via social networking tools, so that they can create virtual communities of users and understand their requirements and expectations. In view of this, following questions were asked to the students of the universities under survey to find their perceptions regarding the role of Libraries in promoting use of social media.

**Table 4: Role of Library in Promoting use of Social**

### Media

Social media based library services	Arts & Humanities (n= 267)	Social Sciences (n=320)	Pure Sciences (n=266)	Applied Science & Technology (n=147)	Total	%
Alerting services via Social media	91	124	126	76	417	41.7
Facebook page for Library	193	233	186	133	745	74.5
Instructional videos	106	131	111	83	431	43.1

**Fig. 5: Role of Library in Promoting use of Social Media**

As reflected in the table-4 and figure-5, majority of the students (74.5%) wanted that library should have a 'Facebook Page', so that the users can find notices, news alert services, instructional videos, and latest additions of resources etc. Above 40% students indicated that library should provide alerting services and instructional videos via Social media.

## MODELS FOR INTEGRATING SOCIAL MEDIA IN TO LEARNING

As revealed from the research, familiarity and usage of social media platform among the students is at the peak. However, the usage of social media specifically in learning activities is very insignificant and superficial among the students.

As discussed earlier social media tool is best for interaction, communication and exchange of ideas among individuals as well in the group. The findings indicated that 'Facebook' is

an important social media tool preferred by the majority of the students for day to day communication. Hence, it will be quite easier for the teachers to reach the student's space at 'Facebook' and integrate the space in to learning activities. It is having bulletin boards, groups, instant messaging etc. So, teachers can create a 'Facebook' page for a particular class, which facilitate the teacher to communicate with students of the class. Students can ask any question for clarification from teachers at any time. Students can also build network with other students, follow them, learn more about each other's interest and can share ideas on any topic. In this way both Student-student and Teacher-student interaction in the form of web-enabled communication is possible via 'Facebook'. Following model has been proposed which suggests different learning activities can be initiated by the teachers among students. Teachers can communicate with individual students as well as with specific groups as presented in figure 6.

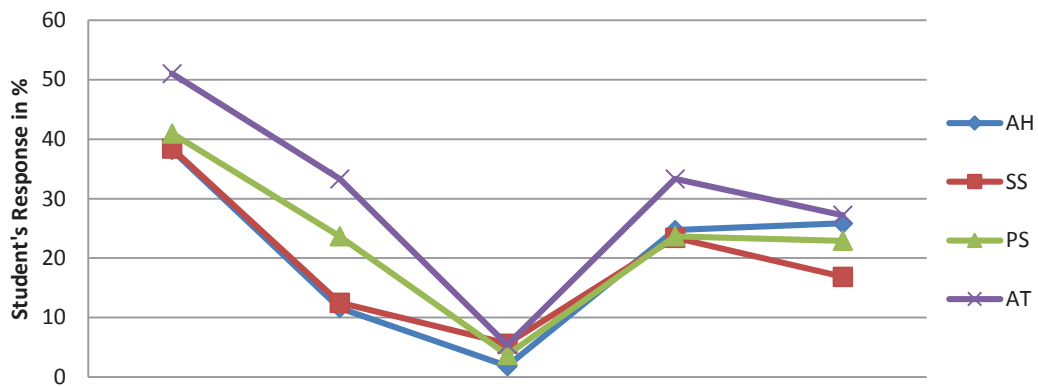


Fig. 6: Model for Integrating Social Media in to Learning

### INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA INTO LIBRARY SERVICES

Library is the heart for learning in an academic institution. Hence, central library of each university should play an important role as a community centre for promoting the use of social media in learning among the students. Social media platforms are having lots of implication for providing library services to the users. Hence, the usage of Social media by libraries for interacting with users and providing information services leads to two fold benefits. First, it will promote usage of library services with a dynamic library portal with high degree of user interaction. Secondly, it will provide a collaborative learning space for all the students of the university and to serve as a knowledge management system.

Results of the survey reveal that Social networking platform 'Facebook' is most popularly, being used by almost all the students in the university. Further, majority of students suggested that central library of the Universities should create 'Facebook page' of their libraries. As user is already there in social networking platform, library should create

a page on 'Facebook' to network with them and share the information, news, upcoming events etc.

Librarian may create instructional videos for the newly admitted students of the university, to make them familiar with the library resources and services, such as: instruction on the use of catalogue; instruction on the searching of e-resource databases and instruction on methods of getting assistance from staff of the library. The created videos may be posted in the 'Facebook page' of the library or in the video sharing platform like 'Youtube'.

Video recordings of the reference interviews (conversation between a library user and a Librarian at reference desk, in which librarian give response to users query about his/her information need) may be uploaded to the Social media site or video sharing site, so that repetition of the job can be avoided by the librarian. Other users having same query can go through the videos available on the site. Thus, Social media provides a great opportunity for the library to integrate into the pedagogical system of the university and to create an extremely dynamic and vibrant teaching and learning environment in the university campuses.

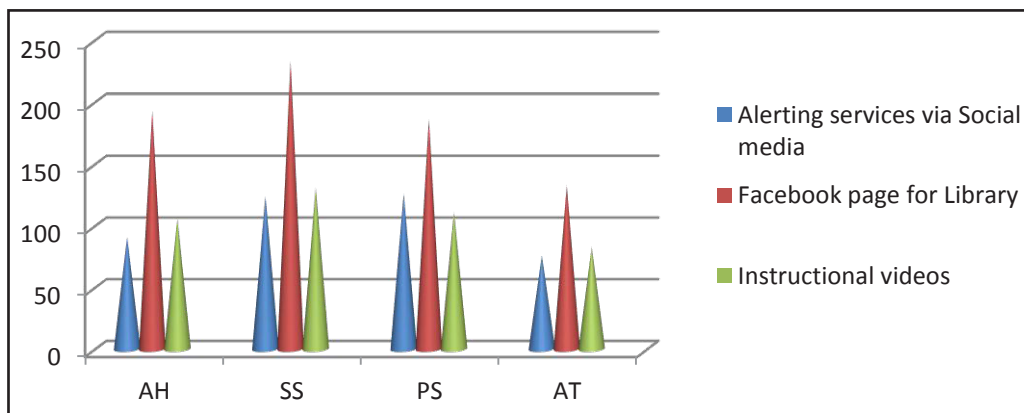


Fig. 7: Integration of Social Media into library Services

## CONCLUSION

The use of social media in learning possesses high potential in acquiring competencies and skills for students. Learning become more interesting as the social media tool is having potential to shift passive and individual learning to a more active and socialized learning for students. Hence, universities in Odisha need to take necessary steps as suggested in the above models in order to make best use of the social media to boost the teaching and learning activities. However, Learning via social media is not the replacement of traditional classroom teaching and learning, it's only an extension for more engaging in social learning among students and teachers.

The central library authority of the Universities should also come forward to make the library a most vibrant learning space for learners of the campus by incorporating social media in library services to meet the diverse needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Networking with the user community, understanding their perceptions and designing smart library service for the stakeholders will reestablish library as the learning hub.

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