A systematic review of studies on Facebook as a social forum

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to present a review of Facebook as a social forum. To this effect, articles are reviewed analytically by collecting the existing information based on the key terms or words related to the study of Facebook as a social forum. The result depicts that Facebook get through different terrain of social media landscape. The review also indicates that Facebook is predominantly used to discuss social issues like education and human rights. In addition, it shows that Facebook has strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. Further, Facebook users have been troubled due to a cybercrime. At the end, the reviewer puts about sign posts of current situations towards the use of Facebook and its future implication specifically in the context of African countries.

Keywords: Facebook, social forum, education, human right

1. Introduction

The world has been interconnected than ever before due to the emerging trends of the Internet and social media essences and associated technological advancement. In turn, it changed the way people interact and communicate with each other. The essence of each and every aspect of communication has also being changed within the changes and advancements in both Internet features and technologies. In addition, communication, Internet, and technology by themselves are the sources of innovation and advancement of the social networking sites. Since their establishment, the popularity of social networking sites has increased immensely. Different scholars use terms interchangeably to represent the same thing. To make it clear, scholars like Morgan and Davis (2013), Bohler-Muller and Merme (2011), Gangopadhyay and Dhar (2014),Unwin (2012) and some others use social media, social networking sites, and online communication interchangeably; however, most studies predominantly use the term social media. For the sake of convenience the term social media is ideal term to use it. Therefore, the working expression used for the purpose of this review is social media.

These social media are "web-based tools and services" (Bohler-Muller and Merme, 2011, p.2) that allow users to create, share, rate, and search for content information up to the purposes or the needs of information seekers until they gratify their needs. One of the most popular social media is Facebook. Facebook founded in 2004 (Gangopadhyay and Dhar, 2014; Wong, 2012) and an integral part of the lifestyle of contemporary generations. Researchers assert that it started as one of a "social communication tool, initially for the students" (De Villiers, 2010, p1).To this end, most literatures indicate that Facebook is one of the Internet forum that could be considered as a social forum on which different societal issues being discussed. The issues being discussed are education, human rights, and so forth.

In summary, the inter-marriage and interdependence of communication, Internet, and technologies brought the emergence and development of Facebook as an alternative social

forum, apart other social medias and the main streaming media, as of the dominant tools of 21st century media landscape.

2. Objective

Facebook-a popular social media is quickly emerging as a new social forum or discussion forum. The aim of this review wants, at least, to address some issues of studies on Facebook as a social forum.

3. Method

The methods used to review the existing or available documents and information is analytical. The articles presented in this literature review obtained using different searching mechanisms. Some of the articles dawn loaded directly from known journals. Some others obtained directly from the Universal Resource Locators (URL) using chrome, fire fox- mozila and some other search engines. Still some other articles retrieved using sci-hub.cc cracking tools (unethical). In order to get these articles, the reviewer used different key words and terms such as social media, Facebook, and Facebook as a social forum etc. The same procedure used every two-day to develop and enrich the themes incorporated in the review. However, in doing so, it is unable to access directly the study of Facebook as a social forum. Another problem is unable to find as many as possible studies on Facebook. That is scarce resources are available. Even if these might be the challenge, the review topic is very important but somehow difficult to articulate it very well due to above mentioned constraints. It would rather studies address issues of people attitudes, perceptions, motivations and some other, mostly, related issues including politics. What is more Facebook studied as one of the alternative political forum in Ethiopia (Tesfaye, 2013) as an alternative political discussion forum another perspective the reviewer came across.

4. Literature review

4.1. Social forum/Internet forum

Forum is a name given to the first Internet based networking and online communication tools, and stills a great way to engage people in an interactive ongoing conversation on various subjects (Unwin, 2012). The term social forum in some literature is called social fora. A social forum is any Internet location or space that allows persons with access to the Internet to contribute content, with or without third-party control or regulation, which other users can access. **What are presented?** The theme that could be presented on the social forum are social movements, trade unions, NGOs, research institutions, social rights, human rights, gender equality, social justice, health, cultures and education. We have to bear in mind that other issues like politics are inseparable with the main streaming of issues which could be discussed in the platform.

4.2.   Social media

What is social media? Social media is an online communication that is a web-based tool and services that allow users to create, share and search for content information (Boher-Muller and Merme, 2011).Social media has also transformed communication through Internet technologies that allow users to interact and communicate directly with each other. It integrates technology, social interaction, and contact creation to collaboratively create online information. To Gangopadhyay and Dhar (2014) social media are definitely opening up broader avenues of communication. The social media is the platform of content creators (Ahy, 2016).

Social media tools include Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Linkedin, Instagram, YouTube and Google+ (Joney, Goff, and Weber, 2015) and have a tremendous contribution to the interconnectedness of people around the world. These are an integral part of the lifestyle of contemporary youth. In general, social media are public by nature and its popularity has increased immensely; in the mean time; addiction to online social media is rising.

4.3.   Facebook

The social media Facebook, which was one of the first social media tools of its kind, was launched in 2004. According to Susilo (2008) it was created by Mark Zuckerberg among some others a student at Harvard University. The purpose of the website is motivated by a social need at Harvard to be able to identify people in other residential houses (Moyle cited in Susilo, 2008). To Gangopadhyay and Dhar (2014) access of Facebook was mainly limited to universities. In addition, Zuckerberg future goals Facebook's feature are to (1) increase access to the Internet and its service (2) build long term knowledge about the world, and (3) help companies grow through Facebook's advertizing platform.

In 2006 the News Feed feature was introduced. By the year 2009, information given by a user became more and more public by default. That means, it is the most popular/foremost forms of social media (Morgan and Davis, 2013; Jones and Soltren, 2005) in many features. In its public feature, Facebook is currently the most popular social media sites. It is also the "largest social media platform" (Joney, Goff, and Weber, 2015, p.645). In addition, some call it as a popular social media companies. Its popularity is evidenced by its availability of more than 70 languages on Facebook (Wong, 2012). Further, Facebook has attracted considerable attention among researchers. As a social media, it offers an online platform on which users create profiles, generate and share contents and information, and interact with other known and unknown contacts. Facebook users can, among other things, create and customize profile with photos, videos, and information for personal and/or business use. The user can then give friends and other members of the public specified degrees of access at the same time restriction to the postings and information users, and friends also are able to communicate instantly via postings and private messaging. Facebook also has experienced vast expansion in recent years, leading to its extensive use by people from all generations (Rouis, Limayen, and Salehi-Sangari, 2011).

How many people use Facebook?

of the 7.5bn	of the 3.5bn	of the 1.9bn
global population	global Internet users	monthly Facebook users
3.5bn use the	1.9bn use	1.2bn
Internet worldwide	Facebook every month	Facebook everyday

Source: *The Telegraph, May 2017*

In the above numerical data people use to interact or communicate Facebook at either personal or official use. Facebook can be used as personal use for which we can do anything that are both legal and illegal; and official use- for which we can only do what we are authorized to do. People use Facebook, among other things, not only is a social media site but also a platform for people to gratify their needs.

4.4.   **Benefits of Facebook**

We can mention some benefits of Facebook which includes media literacy, education, creativity, individual identity and self-expression, strength interpersonal relationships, sense of belonging and collective identity, strengthening and building communities, civic engagement and political participation and wellbeing (Collin, Rahilly, Richardson, and Third, 2011)

In summary, Facebook has been popular as social media sites that motivate different people around the world to interact and communicate different issues whether it is global or local. Most scholars cited Facebook as one of the alternative discussion forums or platforms or social forums on which many people can communicate or interconnected easily on the basis of their language and culture. In addition, Facebook can benefits individuals or groups in many different ways. However, to achieve the objective and for the aim of this review some social issues like education, and human rights can be discussed.

4.5.   **Facebook as a social forum**

4.5.1 Facebook as educational tool

One area of Facebook application as a social forum is an online interactions and the mapping strategy of these to pedagogy. In simple terms, Facebook has been used as an educational tool.

Facebook is online social network software used by university students to articulate existing offline social connections as well as forge new ones. Besides, the service constitutes a rich site for researchers interested in the affordances of social networks due to its heavy usage patterns and technological capacities which bridge online and offline connections. Like other social media, Facebook enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate "friends" who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles. Research indicates that (Aydin, 2012) Facebook users are predominantly students. Initially in a

study on the use of and attitudes toward the Internet, college students were found to be substantial users of the Internet and web sites like Facebook.

The social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. One of the most important aims in education is to introduce the student to the process of inquiry and contemporary tools used to access people and information. Facebook has important factors that influence learning in distance learning: interactivity, closed collaboration, interesting context, and a sustainable learning environment, and a new opportunity for innovation. According to Arthur, Adu-Manu, and Yeboha (2013) Facebook introduced in education cultivates several advantages such as faculty and staff sharing materials with students, making teaching and learning location independent, enhances creativity and innovation, very easy to learn to use, they are free, provision of multimedia tools for enhancing the understanding of the students. Research has indicated that Facebook can positively affect classroom practices and student involvement.

4.5.2. Facebook as human rights tool

The potential of using Facebook for human rights work is extensive. The use of Facebook tool to disseminate human rights information has grown significantly, and continues to trend upward. Using Facebook tool has become an effective way to expand reach, foster engagement and increase access to credible human rights based messages. Facebook can connect people to: 1) increase the timely dissemination and potential impact of human right information; 2) leverage audience networks to facilitate information sharing; 3) expand reach to a wider audience; 4) personalize and reinforce human rights messages that can be more easily tailored or targeted to a particular audience; 5) facilitative interactive communication, connection and public engagement; 6) collaborate and cross-promote with related organizations and 7) raise funds and empower local communities.

For instance, civil rights groups expressed deep concerns over censorship in letter to Mark Zucherberg emphasizing that Facebook should protect, not censor, human rights issue (the guardian, May 2017).The groups on their letter said, "we are deeply concerned with the recent cases of Facebook censoring human rights documentation, particularly content that depicts police violation." The letter to Mark Zuckerberg also said, " when the most vulnerable members of society turn to your platform to document and share experiences of injustice, Facebook is morally obligated to protect the speech"(the guardian, May 2017).They blamed Facebook for repeated silencing of marginalized communities. Facebook also expands access to evidence of human rights abuses beyond that offered by the main stream media and non-government organizations. And it penetrates veils of secrecy thrown up by repressive regimes.

4.6.   **SWOT analysis of Facebook**

As the Smartphone mobile use increases to be connected on the Internet, there are some strengths, opportunities, weakness and threats.

Table 1: SWOT analysis of Facebook adapted from different articles

Strengths	Weakness
speeds up awareness; interaction between organizations and public; peer-to-peer awareness; accessibility is high, required technological knowledge is low; technological possibilities; restricting access to an exclusive group of predetermined user; scope of connectivity; sharing private information; broad reach; multiple kinds of content; giving updates day-to-day happening	low trust in anonymous and unidentifiable; absence of a filter, few barriers to stop people from publishing what comes to mind, so everybody is able to post; continuous investment of human capital and time needed to stay up to date; low trust in the source; rapid spread of a false message; negative image is seen as a weak spot; lack of familiarity and concerns about intellectual property right, primary and data protection; moderation needed
Opportunities	**Threat**
Need to reach specific audience; popularity of communication technology and its possibility; group feelings; need for spreading unbiased information to a large audience; users can modify their privacy settings; perfect tool to speed up communication; seed up awareness; opportunity to communicate in the real-time; interaction and increased involvement in communication process; accessible and require low technological knowledge.	emotional behavior; fast changing area; low consumer interest in online information; overload of information makes hard to get message through and preference for other social and traditional media and channels, low trust in the source. Facebook affects privacy because users disclose too much; Facebook does not take adequate steps to protect user privacy; third parties are actively seeking out end-user information using Facebook; privacy concerns have taken a backseat in recent years; online victimization; easy trap for the third parties like the hackers

Source: (Joney, Goff & Weber, 2015; Ganggopadhyay & Dhar, 2014; Menzies, Petrie, & Zard, 2015; Unwin,2012; Morgan & Davis,2013;Gumede,2016).

4.7.   **Cybercrime**

One of the danger of using Facebook and other social media is a cyber threat. Cyber threats are rising and governments are rushing to introduce legislation to curb cyber crime and to regulate

the use of social media in general and Facebook in particular. For instance, studies indicate that over the past year, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Angola, Madagascar, and Zimbabwe have proposed stringent laws to fight real and imagined threat. Another evidence, according to the cyber law in Africa review (Yadaly and Wright, 2016) : 1) 11 states cyber crime laws in place; 2) 12 states cybercrime laws partially in place; 3) thirty of fifty-four African states no cybercrime laws in place and 4)draft laws being prepared in 15 African states. Specifically, Ethiopia passed the Computer Crime Proclamation (June 2016) which criminalizes defamatory speech, spam, and pornography, among other offences, with jail sentences of up to 10 years. To sum up, research shows that the harmful consequences of Facebook participation include inappropriate behaviors, abuse, cyber bullying, and problems related to privacy and friendship. For instance, the major problems faced by the users include identity theft, hacking, comment controversies and fake profiles (Gangopadhyay and Dhar, 2014). Facebook has increasingly become the subject of horror stories, garnering much negative publicity.

5. Summary and conclusion

The aim of this review, as it stated in the objective part, is to dig deep studies that were conducted on Facebook as a social forum. The studies indicate that Facebook since its establishment has passed different terrain of the social media landscape. Initially, it limited to universities in USA for specific purpose. As human needs and technology changes from time to time Facebook has been serving the world for different purposes. One important purpose is Facebook used by different but mostly by academician, activists and students as one of the alternative social forum platform to discuss and exchange issues of education as well as human rights. However, the SWOT analysis shows that Facebook has strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats. Therefore, the studies indicate that Facebook as one of the popular social network sites pave the way to enhance and develop human communication around the globe.

6. Future implications

African governments are, from time to time, clamping down on the Internet, social media and messaging applications in attempts to mute democratic opposition, civil society and activists' mobilization against poor governance and social grievances expressed through these platforms. In this context different issues on Facebook are emerging in the continent. These might be the road block to the opportunities and access of Facebook. There are interrelated potentials of future challenges that are related to: i. forum participants related challenges; ii. challenges related with government; iii. the behavior of the forum participants; iv. fear; vi. provisions and regulations and vii. blocking of Facebook. In summary, the rise of censorship of the Internet and social media in Africa, like that of the China, is going to be one of the roadblocks to the use of social media in general and Facebook in particular.

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