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Using social media to support teaching and learning in higher education: an analysis of personal narratives

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The increasing trend of using new media technologies and particularly social media (SM) among students provides an advantage for lecturers. Apparently their importance accelerated with the application of social distancing during a pandemic crisis such as the one World has been experiencing since the end of 2019. In this article, the stories of two academics are used expressing experiences, motives and perceptions on benefits and challenges of using SM to support teaching and learning in the classroom. The stories which form the data of the research describe how and why the participants started to use SM, their intended purpose and the ways of use. Besides, reasons, difficulties and positive as well as the negative sides are explored. The findings show that the virtual learning environments provided by SM facilitated the development of students' enthusiasm and interaction with peers assertively, thus increasing the students' participation. Because of emerging technologies, SM platforms surge and plummet quickly; therefore, it is important for institutions to either develop their platform or to subscribe to existing ones for effective knowledge sharing at an institutional level with clear ethical rules.

Keywords: new media; narrative research; storytelling; knowledge sharing; ethical use of social media

Introduction

Under the COVID-19 pandemic period, the transformation of the global public use of digital technologies speeded up more than anyone could imagine before. The users of new media instruments inevitably peaked up. The utterance of all governmental authorities to cut off public gatherings showed its impact firstly on the education system. The classes are cancelled. In the educational system, the teachers and instructors started to search for different ways to communicate with their students and to facilitate education through online classes. Therefore, this piece of research study, which focuses on the use of new media platforms by faculty members, would provide historical data on such practices before the pandemic crisis and the urgent necessity in its development.

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New media that is accessible through the Internet would facilitate a better environment for online classes as well with its characteristics of digitality, interactivity, hyper textuality, virtuality, networking and simulation (Lister *et al.* 2009). *Social Media (SM)* is usually defined as a subset of *New Media* (Penn 2017); however, in recent literature, these terms are used interchangeably. As is known, the use of SM has stood out not only in the daily life but also in the academic area. Because the use of smartphones, tablets and other technological devices have become essential components of students' communication and everyday activities. As a result, SM has started to be used frequently for supporting the formal and informal learning settings in Higher Education (HE) (Ahern, Feller, and Nagle 2016).

The contemporary use of technology, for students grown up in the digital age, has made the sustainability of traditional learning methods adopted for centuries intolerable. Creating a learning environment, that is encouraging and challenging, motivates students who are reluctant learners in traditional settings (Sanacore 2008). This hesitancy triggers the use of new technological approaches in the Teaching and Learning (T&L) process. So, there are lecturers interested to adopt SM in their teaching environment for various reasons and use different SM tools namely Facebook as one of the popular (Greenhow and Askari 2017).

In this way, it may be beneficial to adapt the daily and effective use of SM, which is already a part of students' social life to education. When this path is chosen, surfing, sharing and networking opportunities of SM can also be used for education. Thus, Swan (2005) stated that an innovative learning environment supporting constructivist, effective and social learning theories can be created by using SM in education. The main aim of this article is to investigate the lecturers' reasons, experiences, motives and perceptions besides the benefits and challenges of adopting SM in T&L.

There are a vast number of studies that investigate SM use in different contexts and using various research approaches. The significance of this research is in using a research methodology that has not been frequently used, that is, a narrative approach to gather lecturers' stories.

In the rest of this section, a literature review of using SM as a tool for knowledge sharing and education as well as the analysis of experiences is offered. The next section covers the methodology of data collection and analysis. The analysis of restorying and concomitant findings are narrated in the subsequent section. Further findings are elaborated in the section entitled Final Discussion. Concluding Remarks section caps this article.

Use of SM as a tool for knowledge sharing

The history of SM can be reviewed shortly to see its development process. The first SM is known as 'Friends United' created in 1999 in England, it is followed by 'Friendster' (2002), 'MySpace' (2003) and 'Facebook' (2004) originated in the USA (Boyd and Ellison 2007). Facebook (2006) was the first one that has allowed public membership, where the number of monthly active users is 2.07 billion as of the third quarter of 2017.

SM forms can be exemplified as blogs, microblogs, forums, message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social tagging, and news, writing groups, storytelling, data/ content/ image/ video sharing, widgets and applications, podcasting and integrated intelligence. All the forms mentioned as SM are virtual interaction applications

called as tools. Social network sites are a form of SM (Greenhow and Askari 2017). 'While social networks have similar functionality, they exhibit different social norms and organization' (Tess 2013, p. A61). Thus, some of today's popular SM outlets are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram and Snapchat.

SM is an individual media and a technology that provides interaction between people in their communication activities. Tess (2013) presented an operational definition by reviewing the relevant studies. Thus, SM defined as a term that is generally used to describe a group of technological systems related to communication, collaboration and community building that allow users to form individual profiles, create/ share content and messages by connecting with others in the social network, which is constantly in a state of change so that new or enhanced features are developed to meet the demands. 'The current trend towards Social Media can therefore be seen as an evolution back to the Internet's roots, since it retransforms the World Wide Web to what it was initially created for: a platform to facilitate information exchange between users' (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 60). However, they inform, bearing in mind that SM is a fast and very active domain, today's up-to-date information/ news on it may be out of date tomorrow. Ahmed *et al*. (2019) emphasises that SM is nowadays attracting the professional and the academic fields by becoming a special platform for facilitating knowledge sharing besides only communication. So information, skills and expertise exchange can transform SM to be a favourite educational technology.

Use of SM as a tool for education

As it is seen from the above literature, the beginning of the 2000s can be recorded in the history of technology as the years in which today's digital youngsters started to socialise in virtual environments. Based on this, the integration of SM in education can contribute to their learning in addition to their socialisation. The use of SM for educational purposes has become the interest of many researches and applications (Latif *et al*. 2019; Sun 2010).

SM approach is also investigated in diverse disciplinary research areas. It is used by teachers and students to disseminate the information and support their communication related to teaching, mainly creating/ modifying content, task assignment, announcement, sending messages to their classmates, simple way of connecting with peers and communicating for class projects, class rescheduling negotiation and examination (Özer, Karpinski, and Kirschner 2014; Raspopovic *et al*. 2017; Suprapto and Rosmala 2011). In T&L, academics have explored SM as a broad research area, mainly focusing on specific social networking sites and their effectiveness in the informal and formal learning. There are several review papers that summarise a large number of research studies related to SM (Ahmed *et al*. 2019; Greenhow and Askari 2017; Manca and Ranieri 2016b; Rodríguez-Hoyos, Haya Salmón, and Fernández-Díaz 2015; Tess 2013).

The opportunities (interaction, collaboration, idea/ information/ resource sharing, participation, critical thinking and peer support) and challenges (waste of time, harm to privacy and risk of weakening the traditional roles of teacher and student) during the adoption and usage of SM in pedagogical practices are also discussed by many studies (Bennett 2017; Greenhow and Askari 2017; Lanclos and Phipps 2019; Latif *et al*. 2019; Manca and Ranieri 2016a; Tess 2013). Despite the challenges faced by the faculty, the innovators with technological tools as Bennett (2017) claims

'welcomed the opportunities that SM present for exposing their students to knowledge communities and did so by willingly experimenting with technology to explore its potential' (p. 254).

There are some qualitative research studies related to SM use. The perceptions of students about using SM as an effective educational tool found out that the students were generally more inclined to use social networks, video conferencing and file sharing sites (Neier and Zayer 2015). In the same research, students found SM valuable for facilitating communication with their friends and lecturers in courses and preferred discussions through technology over face-to-face discussions performed in traditional classrooms. Research carried out by Özer *et al.* (2014) investigated the effect of SM on the academic performance of students in the USA and Europe, where European students prefer using SM for educational purposes and having a positive effect on their academic performances, more than American students. Research from another part of the world, Australasia, explored the themes emerged from a debate (Twitter, Periscope) about the use of SM in HE (Willems *et al.* 2018). It was found that there is a direct significant relationship between the use of SM and the academic success of the students (Maqableh *et al.* 2015).

From an institutional perspective, another study proposes a social learning environment (SLE) to support problem-solving, collaboration and communication with lecturers and peers besides learning activities from the institutional e-learning system (Raspopovic *et al.* 2017). As an example, Australia Victoria University created its SM Registry for its students with qualified applications and prepared an SM guidebook for the lecturers to use the social environment effectively (VUSMR 2009). This guidebook aimed to introduce institutional SM tools, to provide participation of students and to submit attested, fair, reliable, accessible and safer virtual platform. On the other hand, varied research (Abdelraheem 2013; BrckaLorenz, Cervera, and Garver 2010) claims that when the institutional guidance is not provided, the students in HE use SM for more social purposes than academic. In another research, it is discovered that there are risks of both adapting and ignoring SM (Willems *et al.* 2018). The reality of SM being available in education cannot be ignored; instead, they suggest that institutions should create a clear and understandable SM policy that would help its use in education.

As well as there are many advantages of using SM in education, it has obstacles as well. In their research, Manca and Ranieri (2016a) discovered that teachers' traditional roles, such as believing in the importance and effectiveness of face-to-face T&L, lack of technical infrastructure and support and perceived risk of using SM negatively affect the use of SM in HE. In a similar study, a Facebook group created for course participants is analysed to find out whether it enhanced pre-service teachers' knowledge as well as the purposes of its use (O'Bannon, Beard, and Britt 2013). The results indicated that this educational group contributed to their readiness for the course evaluations, where communication and cooperation opportunities with their classmates were improved.

Analysing the experiences on SM use for educational purposes

The lecturers who are aware of the supportive opportunities may want to integrate innovative SM to their courses for educational purposes. They can create their social sites and networks according to their fields of interest such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube

and Wikipedia. They can use social networks such as NING, Netlog, Edmodo, Weebly and Xing serving the purpose of social cooperation and supporting education.

SM provides many opportunities to benefit lecturers in addition to students. According to a research carried out by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011), 90% of the HE lecturers use SM in their courses and professional development activities. According to the findings of the same research, it is seen that participation does not have a significant difference between the groups created by lecturers (online learning, academic staff, full-time, etc.). In another study, measuring the lecturers' Facebook usage as an educational tool, the lecturers have a Facebook account but less than half of them see it as an environment that can be used for course-related discussions (Tiryakioğlu and Erzurum 2011). Furthermore, it was discovered that making announcements, task distribution and collecting assignments are the most favourite purposes of Facebook. Freeman (2014) investigated the domestication of SM in classrooms, where results showed that lecturers use SM besides other traditional educational technologies, and they consider it an essentially student-centred, participatory orientation to teaching. Some study results brought out the importance of faculty and teacher educator professional development about the use of SM in HE (Greenhow and Askari 2017; Willems *et al*. 2018).

Although the previously mentioned studies for investigating SM used many different research approaches, narratives are not often encountered. One of the studies (Cousins and Bissar 2012) revealed the reflections on experiences of lecturers using the digital technology. This was performed by listening to the referred lecturers' life stories. Elçi and Devran (2014) explains the reasons for choosing narrative research methodology approach in discovering the experiences of lecturers about SM usage in HE. Bennett's (2017) phenomenological study of faculty experiences explores the way that they make use of SM in their pedagogical practice. The existence of such research shows that the use of experiences for developing teaching in HE has been gradually starting.

This study aims to analyse and reflect the narratives identifying the positive and negative experiences of two lecturers while using SM and Web 2.0 to support their T&L environment. Because of a rapid increase in the tendency to use SM in recent years, the participants will share their use of SM stories that they consider as a constructive factor for communication and interaction outside the classroom with their students in 'their way'. In this study, the following research questions will be answered:

1. How is Social Media integrated into Teaching and Learning process in Higher Education?
2. What are the positive and negative outcomes of using Social Media in Teaching and Learning process in Higher Education?

In the rest of this article, data collection and analysis methodology is given next; then, restorying and its analysis section are followed by the concluding remarks.

Methodology of data collection and analysis

Narrative study is used as a phenomenon and also a method in this study. The three narrative categories which are progress, practice and transformation (Bearman, Greenhill, and Nestel 2019, p. 372) are used to group the stories of the participants to provide coherence to their plots.

As emphasised by Riessman and Quinney (2005), it should not be forgotten that the stories in the narrative analysis will persuade the readers for using innovative SM for supporting teaching in this way. In the same work, it is stated that narrative applications come from 'beyond the experiences and worlds behind the writer' and go to 'human interaction in relations'. These experience narratives will be guiding or helpful to other academicians. According to Moen (2006), 'A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant for the narrator or her/his audience' (p. 60).

In this piece of research study, the two defined sample individuals narrated their stories as explained by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), and these were collected as the raw data. Those stories were interpreted as the experiences of the narrators and presented to the reader. A narrative study is a research approach aiming at 'understanding the results of the comments rather than the explanations' by providing an opportunity to collect data from the real-life and orally illuminated real-life experiences by the narrator (Kramp 2004). The typical characteristics of a narrative study are named as individual experiences, the chronology of the experiences, collecting individual stories, restorying, coding the main motives, the context and scene and the cooperation with participants (Cresswell 2003). Thus, the researcher gets a chance for understanding the studies and behaviours, gestures and feelings of the participants in their real environment and gets an opportunity to listen to feelings, thoughts and experiences: a short life story of the participant from the first hand.

In a narrative analysis, according to Polkinghorne (1995), the researcher collects the explanations of activities and events as data and later uses it for creating stories by setting a context. 'Finally, the interpretive stories are brought together to form a personal experience narrative' (McCormack 2004, p. 1). As applied in this study, the stories which form the data of the research describe how and why the participants started to use SM, their intended purpose and ways of use. Reasons, difficulties and positive as well as the negative sides of using SM were described in detail.

Participants, who have been using SM for similar purposes in their undergraduate courses as a tool for supporting T&L since 2007, were asked to document the experiences of their use of SM by writing down their stories. The samples of this study consisted of these two lecturers who have been teaching more than 10 years in HE institutions. The lecturers were chosen through convenient sampling because they were the faculty members who were known to be sustainable users of SM technologies to support their classroom teaching. The participants and the researchers were working in the same HE institution. Although, the researcher was not engaged in teaching in technology-enhanced environments as the participants.

Both participants of the research study have a Computer and Educational Sciences-based interdisciplinary academic background and have taught related courses. They detailed their experiences which are obtained during the process of using SM for their courses in different undergraduate levels and departments. The students are enrolled in the Computer Teaching and Instructional Technologies (CITE), Mathematics Teaching (MT) and Information Technologies (IT) departments. The freshmen student of CITE has a heterogeneous technology background. Those students who graduated from computer vocational high schools already have advanced computer knowledge. The students from the Mathematics Teaching and Information Technologies departments are in a homogeneous range concerning their years (junior and senior) and their use of computers.

The steps of data collection and analysis process are as given below:

1. The participants, as the narrators, individually narrate in written form their detailed personal story including personal opinions in chronological order by making connections with SM activities in the courses;
2. The researcher read, analysed and restoried the narrative of the participants;
3. Narrators read back and clarify their personal restoried stories;
4. Researcher associated the restoried findings with the research questions.

The researcher did participant verifications to confirm whether the created story expressed the same (original) meaning by asking the participant whose story has been analysed (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2008). In addition to this, the reliability can be provided as narrative research gives a chance to the participant and researcher to understand the behaviour in cooperative environments and discover the explanations (Goodson and Sikes 2001). Also, the narrators narrated their stories in detail by associating their stories with the data activities in SM; this has been effective for providing internal-validity.

The ethical aspects are also considered carefully in this research study. Smythe and Murray (2000) claim that there is usually an ethical conflict in narrative researchers to justify both their own and their participants' very different perception of their life experiences and what happens during a narrative interview process between the participant and the researcher depends on the 'individuality of the research participant and the quality of rapport that develops'. The personal relationship between the researchers and the participants created a comfortable space to establish rapport. 'By limiting emotional disclosure that may focus the conversation too much back on them, researchers can establish an authentic connection without interfering with participants' narratives' (Sandoval 2018, p. 3).

Although the two narrators are telling their experiences by storying their teaching with a similar aim, their perceptions towards the students' emotions, attitudes and behaviour may be different. When the two narratives are read, some of the same events may be perceived differently by the researcher. 'In other words, these narratives offer a situation in which the same events are perceived and interpreted in contexts that vary' (Kafalenos 2006, p. 126). One of the narratives was longer than the other. Because the first narrator prefers to give details of the people, events and practices. S/he used the first-person point of view in the story. On the other hand, the other narrator explained and storied only what is inquired. This narrator used the third-person passive voice point of view. The two narratives were also different from each other regarding the wording. One of them was written with more emotional and enthusiastic words, where beliefs were more emphasised in detail. The other narrative was straight to the point, objective and premeditated.

In the next section, narrative analysis was applied to the stories of participants, who will be referred to as narrators from now on. Their stories that are collected in written format, allowed them to express their experiences of using SM as a support technology in T&L.

Analysis of restorying and findings

In this part, it is intended to understand and share the stories of HE lecturers who integrated SM in their courses. In short, the findings obtained from the narratives to respond to both research questions are presented.

The narrators indicated the reasons that triggered the change: as some students do not join the learning process much, and further, they became unwilling to learn in the courses where the traditional teaching methods and materials were used. One of the narrators who used more enthusiastic words than the other showing her passion, supported this view with these utterances: 'it has become difficult to attract the students' attention. They do not turn in their assignments, except a couple; they do not answer questions or take part in class discussions'. For this reason, the narrators decided to use SM for their courses to create a supportive learning tool. Their target was especially those students who could be motivated to be interested to obtain knowledge because in that age they are highly interested in SM and use it actively in their private lives.

Both narrators believed that students use SM for socialising with their peers. In this study, the narrators aimed to use SM as a tool in supporting the learning and teaching process. For this purpose, narrators started using SM, specifically Facebook, for their classes. The criticisms made by the students at the end of the academic year, made them decide to add another social network platform NING, that would be available and could be created on-demand in the following semester. Later, because NING started requesting a subscription fee, both narrators decided to use solely Facebook again for their courses as the cost for NING subscription was not covered by their institution. In the following semester, the narrators are differentiated in the use of SM tools. One of them who is more premeditated, paid for NING subscription by herself to use it again for her/his classes after considering the objections of students about Facebook use. Because the students were not very comfortable in sharing the same Facebook group with previous semesters' students. NING served better in providing interaction opportunities only for those students taking that particular instance of the course. Further, the narrators realised that NING serves better for academic participation whereas in the use of Facebook the students get distracted by social issues other than course-related subjects. The narrator stated proudly this situation as 'in NING, they only focus on education-related issues'.

Users have more control over the individualised social platform as the background view of the home pages of the courses and other visual design changes were decided in the agreement with the students as stated by both narrators. The narrators highlighted the importance of such cooperation with these words: 'Thus, students will face a screen they choose when they connect to this page' and 'they will develop a sense of participation from the beginning'.

Both Facebook and NING platforms were used by the narrators by forming a social learning group on Facebook and a specific network site in NING by the course code. By doing this, as referred by the narrators, the features that Facebook already provided for its members could be taken advantage of. On the other hand, narrators benefited from multimedia components they chose such as discussion (forum), blog, image, film and instant message (chatting) while creating the NING platform. Creating a NING platform was summarised as follows by one of the narrators. Each student creates a personal page by adding colour, background view and image; by making her/his specific design by uploading their photo, music and video. The narrator starts a discussion about a topic. S/he provides the students the notes about special days and activities, deadlines/dates of exams and organised conferences/seminar dates here. In addition to these, NING provides e-mail, instant messaging and blog opportunities. The students are required to create their blog and contribute to the class discussions through their pages. 'The students were not actually writing their ideas.

Instead, they were finding related articles and sharing them on their home pages'. That was acceptable to the narrators as the students were still learning while they were searching for the related article.

These personal pages introduced the personal characteristics of students to both narrators and their friends. Thus, as it is stated 'it provided communication opportunity for students beyond the walls of the classroom'. Individual participation was expected from each student in the social networks as a requirement of the course. Narrators aimed for student–student interaction as well as student–lecturer interaction. During the use of SM in T&L, students are asked for sharing different multimedia components (video, image, comics, web line, etc.) about the subjects studied in the courses and making comments for the others' contributions. Students configure their personal NING page as a social learning platform that narrators provided as an infrastructure template. It is expected from students to share information (video, image, etc.) about the course in the Facebook group and make comments on the contributions of others. It is stated that despite of all opportunities some students did not participate actively in this virtual platform.

It is stated by both narrators that even though applied effectively in some courses, certain problems were experienced during the use of SM (Facebook, NING, etc.). The narrators were distinguished by the challenges they faced. While some problems with the application and students' participation show similarities, others differ from one narrator to the other. The narrator that was using Facebook, mentioned that when s/he had first started to use SM in her/his teaching some students did not even have a Facebook account and insisted not get one even for their use in the course; consequently, they could not participate in the course via Facebook. Besides this, it was noted that some students not having personal accounts, used the accounts of their friends after informing the lecturer. It was mentioned in written stories that because of various cultural and social restrictions some of the students did not have their accounts under their own names. One of the narrators thought that the restrictions may generally be put either by one of their conservative family members or partners who did not want them to socialise online.

The experience of using NING in a practical lab course was summarised as follows. Certain activities were assigned to students for studying, and they were asked to express their feelings and opinions about these activities. Students were advised to add comments to the discussion of their friends where necessary. Also, they were asked to search for new activities like the ones performed in labs and share them with other students. It was stated that students informed their friends by sharing the appropriate and challenging images related to the topics and writing blogs. In addition to this, one of the narrators stated that s/he was more experienced in comparison with her/his previous use. This also distinguished one narrator from the other based on the experience. Thus, s/he also used NING more effectively as a T&L tool, and this encouraged her/his students for being active users of NING. Students are assigned research topics in the traditional classroom and shared the results with their friends in the virtual learning platform. Thus, the blogs and discussions created by students about the resources they read, sharing the new information searched from the Internet by the students and lecturers, comments of students, so on, formed a qualified sample for the use of NING in the following semester. According to the feedback received from students, it was stated that the information shared through NING contributed to the students' knowledge base and contact with students outside the classroom was seen as fun and positive.

The narrators claimed that some students were reluctant to comment much on the contributions of others on Facebook. Some students who prefer to listen quietly in a traditional classroom environment may also prefer being quiet in a virtual learning platform; they abstain from using it but contribute just for getting sufficient mark. At the beginning of the semester, students were informed that the active use of SM will contribute to their marks for the evaluation of the use of SM in teaching. In this situation, narrators stated that reinforcements such as extra marks or prize caused some students to use these social platforms more.

Narrators stated that they were acting both as academic advisors and personal supporters. They provided technical guidance for the students in reaching the correct and necessary information as well as in their research projects and homework. Moreover, the platform also provided opportunities for students to seek information by communicating directly to the course lecturers through SM about the unclear topics. The role of the students was described as follows:

'They are the learners researching the concerned topic, choosing the best info, sharing with their classmates, making comments about the other students' contributed material when necessary, and trying to find a solution for the questions of their classmates about the course through social media'.

Further, the narrators intended for students to develop skills such as critical thinking and reflecting on what they learned. Accordingly, one of the narrators explained the way of using SM by students in her/his courses as 'In addition to online class participation through these platforms, uploading some important information, files and presentations and sharing ideas about these contributions are the most frequent way of their usage'. Furthermore, the reliability and accuracy of information shared in SM for academic purposes were mentioned as a crucial issue by both narrators. 'The students have to be selective while obtaining information from the Internet' stated one and 'I have to guide the students in their personal online learning platform by playing different roles such as learner, teacher, facilitator, and commentator' said the other.

Both narrators stated that they use SM for sharing resources and information on various issues such as announcing exam dates, marks, seminars, deadlines, etc.; further when required, to get in touch with students; furthermore, to support their self-confidence by commenting positively on their comments and shares. Also, the narrators stated that they followed the contributions of students on their main page and they gave feedback to each student as much as possible.

As a self-criticism, narrators regretfully stated that they had some shortcomings on first-time use. For instance, one of the narrators said that s/he believed s/he did not make sufficient contributions and announcements in this platform for effective use to motivate students. Thus, this situation caused insufficient active participation of students. Thereupon, s/he explained that the students expressed the necessity of more active use of social networks and how to actively use it in the questionnaire administered for taking the opinions of students about the use of Facebook at the end of the term. S/he observed increased active participation of students when the lecturer directed and effectively and actively participated in the media. It was expressed as 'when we direct them to make visual, written, or audio sharing through making searches in parallel to the topics studied during the course, we obtained satisfactory results. There were also some students commenting about these contributions'.

In different geographies, the attitude and approach of students could be different. One of the narrators explained his/her contrasting experience faced during the use of SM, and wrote: 'After I started working in a different university in another city, I faced the difference. Few students joined the Facebook group and their contribution was not adequate'. Unfortunately, s/he experienced also ethical problems with some students in one of her/his groups: as it was expressed by her/him, some of the students 'made sarcastic and insulting statements about the course, lecturer and classmates in an unethical way for no valid reason'. The narrator explained the precautions s/he took for preventing such cases: 'I approved the ethical messages of the students for publishing by setting a message control to this group in the social network for the first time'. S/he stated that one of the main reasons of these problems was that the code of conduct about the ethical use of SM was not specified to students either verbally or in a written text. 'I did not set up written rules for students at the beginning. Only after I confronted the problem, I expressed orally and sometimes in writing how they were supposed to behave ethically'.

Final discussion

In this study, narrators aimed to support T&L environment with the use of SM. The stories that were given above indicate that more or less they reached their aim. But they also had various unexpected experiences while using SM in HE.

The narrators tried to benefit from the advantages of using SM in their teaching. Students and narrators made their use in different ways for making announcements, contributing comments (both by teacher and students) and so on. Özer *et al.* (2014), and Suprapto and Rosmala (2011) similarly reported that SM was used for assigning tasks, making announcements, commenting on the contributions of each other and more.

The narrators started by using Facebook, one of the most popular SM, but then they switched to NING. Research reviews also reported Facebook as the most commonly used and studied social network site, and NING was second (Greenhow and Askari 2017; Rodríguez-Hoyos *et al.* 2015). It is discovered that NING provided more interaction opportunities compared to Facebook. This is in parallel with the findings of Ahern *et al.* (2016).

However, they discovered that students can be easily distracted when using Facebook compared to NING. The students' easy distraction by Facebook is also confirmed in Greenhow and Askari (2017). But this result was contradictory to Manca and Ranieri (2016a), who found that Facebook was mainly used by the faculty to increase the motivation and involvement of students and they are used by more students to access the content.

The ethical issues on the use of SM were another major output of this research where the narrators personally experienced that ethical codes and terms of reference for participation should be provided in the first week of the classes. In line with this, in Foulger *et al.*'s (2009) study students perceived the need for more conclusive guidelines about participation in the SM environment. Lanclos and Phipps (2019) also urge to develop our leaders, all staff in HE, not only to use SM but also to understand the ethical and political consequences.

It becomes obvious that it is necessary to assign SM policy or ethical rules by institutions or by faculty. This result is confirmed with the literature (Willems *et al.* 2018) who found that SM policy would help the better use of SM. VUSMR (2009) also advised that a guide book can be introduced for using social environment effectively.

Narratives also show that students are encouraged to use a critical perspective while they were making comments on the posts and their friends. Briefly, they wanted to turn SM used for social purposes into an advantage to improve the delivery of their courses. Even though their expected aims about the active use of SM couldn't be achieved initially, it worked better in the following years. Besides, the students having different learning styles who prefer to learn in virtual environments were motivated via online activities. Also, introverted students not tending to interact in the class were provided an opportunity to participate in SM. Although, students who were silent in regular classrooms preferred to be silent in the virtual learning environment as well, except they contribute rarely for getting marks. However, Jones *et al*. (2010) reported one of the reasons students rarely used SM for educational purposes was their preference to separate social lives (personal space) from learning/studying (learning space).

Moreover, narratives show that using SM in HE provided communication opportunities beyond the classroom walls. This finding was similar to O'Bannon *et al*. (2013) who discovered that Facebook educational groups promote an opportunity to improve preservice teachers' communication and cooperation with their mates. The conclusion from the explanations proved that SM contributes to increase both lecturer–student and student–student interactions as it is stated by Neier and Zayer (2015). The use of SM helped students configure their learning environment by sharing useful links, writing blogs and making comments. Blogs and discussions that were created by students may need quality improvement and content creativity.

Another important finding of this research was that students, instead of discussing their innovative ideas in SM, were solely searching for related documents and sharing them. Graham (2014) also discovered that in a virtual environment some students were not willing to use for the knowledge creation process instead they prefer to reach the available learning material. From the critical literature reviews, Rodríguez-Hoyos *et al.* (2015) claimed that the educational use of SM is at an 'early stage of development'. Now digital age is the time to talk about knowledge sharing and forming a knowledge community based on SM (Ahmed *et al*. 2019). Since the digital age requires to involve 21st-century skills, like collaboration, communication, critical thinking and experiences in addition to basic information.

Concluding remarks

SM is one of the most important communication platforms that 21st-century digital youth uses for interaction in their daily life. Considering the time students spend in virtual media, it will be beneficial to use these facilities for classes to support T&L. This piece of research study discusses the integration and the positive and negative sides of using SM platforms, for the T&L process, through the experiences of two academics. For this purpose, the two narrators narrated their experiences about the use of SM in support of T&L outside of classes in their undergraduate level courses. The analysis of the use of SM as a tool in T&L and its drawbacks were based on the inscriptive stories of these two. The findings provide some hints for the lecturers intending to use and prepare their virtual teaching plan via SM.

It is understood from the narratives that the main reason why they had started to use SM was to extend T&L outside the classroom and provide communication and interaction among students and lecturers. The critical point here is that the narrators did not aim to test whether the main topics about the course are learned or not by students, through SM. In contrast, they stated that they use SM for sharing information

about the main topics and supporting T&L. Thus, it tried to provide an opportunity for students to learn new information from each other through peer interaction in the classroom and SM. It could be argued that this type of usage of SM may mainly help to develop students' 21st-century skills, collaboration, communications and critical thinking. Students are directed to be selective while sharing in SM as the information obtained from the Internet may not always be relevant to the course topic and may not be correct information. And as the research said this 'ultimately proven incorrect' information shared through the Internet and SM can negatively affect college students (Lindo 2020).

The final remark for this research could be, although the narrators had difficulties in using SM in their course either technically or obstacles caused by students' attendance or application of tools, they did not give up and continued to use as Bennett (2017) discovered.

The conclusion of this study can refer to the following findings and suggestions:

1. It is thought that some students could not participate in a virtual environment effectively for certain reasons such as lack of interest, avoiding sharing ideas or writing through the Internet because of introversion, unwillingness to participate in the activities performed in a virtual environment and even due to inadequate Internet access in student dormitories. Another guess was that the restrictions imposed by their conservative family members or partners may be part of the reason.
2. Lecturers who are expecting active participation of the students on social platforms should use SM actively and effectively to become a role model and to encourage them.
3. It is costly for faculty subscribing and sustaining membership for social platforms for their classes. SM platforms surge and plummet quickly; therefore, it is important for institutions to develop either their platforms or to subscribe for one for its use and updates at an institutional level. Further, HE institutions can provide professional development programmes for faculty members for their effective use.
4. It is understood from the expressions that, NING was used more for academic discussion, but Facebook was mostly for social and everyday occasions. This proves that academia needs its social platforms for courses.
5. Even though the students mostly share articles of others, instead of writing their own, on the social platforms when a question asked, or homework assigned by the course lecturers, is still a beneficial platform to create curiosity and contribute to the development of a selective perception related to their field of study as they always have a desire to share something important and interesting.
6. Lecturers should specify in detail the terms of reference for student participation in SM for course work at the beginning of the semester and share them with students. Thus, unethical behaviour or correspondences by students may be prevented.
7. It can be beneficial to compose, for example, a grading key (rubric) for objective evaluation of student contributions in the SM by considering the assumption that students would contribute more for a mark.

In this century, that is entitled as the digital age, it may be needed to increase the awareness about the use of new media environments in bringing the learner and

teacher together and providing a knowledge-based medium to create a network for cooperation and teaching–learning serving for both social and academic aspects. This research was intended to highlight the need through sharing exemplary experiences of two faculty members.

Moreover, for further research, the influence of using SM on teaching and learning can be discovered. Students' point of view can be collected to understand their motivation, progress in their success while using SM. This can also be in the form of students' narratives, to hear their stories for SM use in HE.

One of the limitations of the study is related to its methodology as it is based on the narratives of the faculty, the stories are subject to subjectivity. Another limitation of this study is the number of samples. More faculty members' stories can be explored to obtain detailed insight into the use of SM in HE.

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