NETWORKING EDUCATION INTO THE FUTURE: WHY SOCIAL MEDIA? A REVIEW

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This review paper focuses on an emerging global trend in open and distance learning and higher education: the use of social media for instruction and learner support. Specifically, the review uses a wide range of sources to identify the key reasons for the readiness and adoption of social media for tertiary, as well as, open and distance learning within Sri Lanka.

The paper reviews the literature on the unique features of social media and highlights a number of significant factors that promote the adoption of social media for higher education. First, it reviews the literature on the emerging net generation of digital learners who assimilate knowledge differently through the use of social media as well as other web-based digital technologies. Second, the paper focuses on the literature related to increasing use of social media among youth in Sri Lanka, which illustrates the potential for the incorporation of the teaching-learning environment with social media platforms. Finally, the paper reviews the literature on the repurposing of social media, which is now primarily used for potentially distracting entertainment, by exploiting the underlying technologies and outcomes of social media for knowledge construction.

Furthermore, this review paper also recognizes the potential of social media for open and distance learning education to meet its unique and specific needs. Emphasis is placed upon the many facets of social media, such as its strengths in communication, collaboration, active participation, community building, information sharing and feedback. The authors of this review argue that these facets of social media provides an ideal teaching and learning environment for an effective open and distance learning system and that the development of a technology enhanced and mediated personal learning environment through the adaptation of social media in open and distance learning should be rigorously explored at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Finally, it is recommended that an undertaking such as developing a technology enhanced and mediated personal learning environment should begin with the study of the unique patterns of

existing social media use among the stakeholders of the Open University of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Networking Education, Social Media, Open and Distance Learning, Mediated personal learning environment

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