

Enhancing Business Education with Technology Using Social Media to Aid Learning

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INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on students' use of technology to enhance their understanding of course material. Researchers surveyed five undergraduate business law classes in fall, 2011 and fall, 2012 and two graduate executive business classes in spring, 2012 to determine how widespread the use of technology, particularly the use of social media, is among undergraduate and graduate students studying business law. Student responses demonstrated an enthusiasm for the wealth of relevant and useful information available from search engines such as Google and Bing, encyclopedias such as Wikipedia, educational repositories such as Khan Academy and data sources such as Investopedia. The use of social media sites, such as YouTube and Google+ were noted by more than 45% of the students responding as being useful in understanding what the instructor wanted and/or in learning course material. By comparison, Facebook was cited by less than ten percent of students responding. When Facebook was noted, it was in reference to interaction with fellow students.

Improving online instruction and its corollary, learning in the online environment, are critical for higher education. Allen and Seaman (2010) reported that 63% of institutions of higher education participating in their survey stated that online learning played a key role in their institution's long-range strategic plans. At the same time, the growth of open access learning, even with the involvement of leading institutions of higher learning, has raised concerns about ensuring the qual-

ity of online instruction. Determining how students use Internet-based applications such as social media in their courses is a key element in designing quality online instruction going forward.

BACKGROUND

Going forward, how will technology shape instructional design? What role will social media play? In his article on using social media in online college classes, Goatman (2011) suggests that students are using social media to better understand course material. Social media provides instant access to the instructor and to fellow students as well as to source material that expands on and clarifies what has been taught in class. In her article on students' use of Facebook in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Rice (2011) explores the impact of social media on learning. Others have found that different Web 2.0 technologies, such as wikis, do positively impact student learning by facilitating access to the teacher as well as to fellow students (Huang & Nakazawa, 2010). Kelm (2011) studied the effects of social media on business communication pedagogy. He concluded that in the examples used, the use of social media was crucial to understanding course material.

There have been several studies investigating the impact of social media on instructional design, among them, Greenhow, Robelia and Hughes (2009) who reported on the potential of using interactive technologies in teaching and learning. Kerner and Gunderson

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(2012) explored cross-disciplinary pollination in their study how technology was being used in undergraduate education. Otte, Gold, Gorges, Smith and Stein (2012) described the impact of academic social networks in building community and facilitating resource sharing, resulting in a growing adoption of technology for academic purposes. In their study of students' course-learning experiences and community-building within the classroom, Hung and Yuen (2010) conclude that the use of social media in certain learning contexts extends the educational value of social networking.

In a study focusing on similar issues to those in this study, Baggett and Williams (2012) asked their students how they used Web 2.0 technologies. Students cited Facebook, Google+ and Tumblr as most used to share information and to network, leading the authors to conclude that social media could provide useful tools for education as well as for communication.

STUDENTS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO AID LEARNING

Issues, Controversies, Problems

On campus and online, students are focused on texting friends, checking their Facebook accounts and otherwise surfing the Internet. Despite the problems with reliability, Wikipedia has become a "go to" source for students seeking information, at least as a first step. Students "google" to find descriptions and context for course material not easily understood, they say, from textbooks or instructors' notes. Increasingly, students are using social networking sites, such as Google+, to help them learn. Less used for learning course material but still a factor in communicating and collaborating in the online environment, Facebook connects students with each other and provides a forum for discussion of issues raised by the instructor or for elaboration on the teacher's instructions (Cole, Swartz, & Shelley, 2013).

Asking what place social media holds in the learning environment, Dubose (2011) looked at the advantages and disadvantages for student learning posed by the use of simulations, digital libraries, and computer-based tutorial programs. She found that, due to the lack of empirical studies, the link between the attractiveness of integrating social media into the curriculum (lower costs and student demand) and student learning was as

yet unproven. Chen and Bryer (2012) would concur, noting that the investigation of the role of social media in higher education is an emerging field of study.

Liu (2010) tells us that students' use of social media tools is ubiquitous. In that study, the author found that students using social media preferred Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. While students were not asked how they used social media tools to enhance their learning, Liu did conclude from the evidence of student engagement for social and relationship-building purposes that social media could prove to be a valuable resource for educational purposes.

In their study of the challenges facing higher education in the evaluation of social media -enhanced learning, Silius, Kailanto and Tervakari (2011) noted that the use of social media services such as Facebook, YouTube and blogs in an educational context was an increasing trend. However, the issue remains: can interactive, collaborative tools such as these be successfully integrated into a quality online curriculum?

Online education is expanding at a rate much faster than traditional campus-based programs (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Social media technologies, blogs, wikis, online social networking and virtual worlds continue to proliferate.

It is clear that the use of social media by students, inside as well as outside of the academic environment, is growing at an extremely fast pace. Consider the events of 2011's "Arab Spring" and the resolution of 2013's Boston Marathon disaster. In higher education settings, services including, but not limited to, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn appear to be utilized by the vast majority of students (Friedman & Friedman, 2013). Undoubtedly, more such services will be developed in the near future and will quickly become widely available. Friedman and Friedman argue that the Internet has changed the rules. Skills that students needed in the past may not be as relevant today. What role will social media play? Can social media technologies also become effective learning tools for the growing numbers of students taking online courses?

Solutions and Recommendations

To begin to answer this question, researchers surveyed students in seven business law classes over three terms in 2011 and 2012 to determine how social media tools helped them to learn course material. Students were first asked if they used social media tools to better

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