

Chapter 27

Like It:

A Facebook E-Learning Architecture for Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Social networking environments have become a ubiquitous part of the university experience. Accordingly, postsecondary institutions have started to consider the role that social networking can play in teaching and learning across academic disciplines. This case study documents findings from a 2012-2013 mixed-methods data collection in six graduate and undergraduate Digital Literacies and New Media Literacies courses at a major Canadian comprehensive university. It examines the pedagogical implications of adapting the Facebook platform for online collaboration and multimedia learning in blended courses, and offers a model of Facebook implementation for engineering and architecture education. Questions guiding the research ask: What is gained pedagogically through the use of Facebook in higher education courses? What are the pedagogical challenges encountered, and how might these be addressed? Suggestions based on observed trends are offered for the effective inclusion of Facebook as a beneficial pedagogical component in the design of e-learning platforms for higher education.

INTRODUCTION

For postsecondary students across disciplines and fields, online social networking environments have become a ubiquitous part of social experience (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014). Accordingly, postsecondary institutions have begun to consider the role that social networking can play in the pedagogical process. With an awareness of how students are using social media to find resources,

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co-create knowledge (Bowers-Campbell, 2008), and crowd-source for public interests, educators can leverage social media use to improve the learning process (Buckingham, 2008; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008). This bridge leads to changes not only in practice, but more importantly, in the way we think and design for teaching and learning in the digital age (Schmidt & Cohen, 2014). It further invites an emphasis on “knowing in action” (Schon, 1987): combining theory with practices that are particularly important to built environment applications found in both engineering and architecture education (Bala & Arat, 2013).

This case study (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2009), which forms part of a longer-term study of Facebook usage in higher education, documents and analyzes classroom-based data from a mixed methods study spanning a single academic year (2012-2013) and a total of six graduate and undergraduate New Media Literacies courses at a major Canadian comprehensive university. It examines the pedagogical implications of adapting the Facebook platform for online collaboration and multimedia learning in blended (face-to-face and online) courses, and provides valuable insight into a working model for social media learning frameworks across disciplines and fields in higher education.

Three central questions guide our research: What is gained pedagogically through the use of Facebook in higher education graduate and undergraduate courses? What are the challenges encountered? And how might these issues be addressed? The objective of the case study is to document pedagogical possibilities for Facebook use in blended learning settings across academic disciplines, where the e-learning platform is transferrable and adaptable for content specific tasks. The authors of this chapter have been engaged since 2007 in experimental and exploratory research of Facebook as a learning medium in university classrooms. Since then, although academic interest – and with it a wave of relevant literature – has grown in this novel research area, there is still much to be gained pedagogically through studying the use of social media in higher education. This research is especially needed in engineering and architecture education where, to date, there are few studies investigating pedagogical possibilities in regard to employing Facebook or other social media (Bala & Arat, 2013). This chapter illuminates our approach and findings regarding Facebook as a critical component of an e-learning blended course design.

BACKGROUND

Social media challenge the existing structures of universities by breaking down strict hierarchical pedagogical structures and allowing learners to engage in meaningful and critical conversations in online learning environments (Morbey, Sabeti, & Frank, 2014). Further, social media provide students with opportunities for more diverse and enriching conversations with educators; learners become team players, technologically collaborating in the production of knowledge, sharing their personal insights, and engaging in debates. These activities are particularly relevant to engineering and architecture education where students and professionals come together to complete designs of built environments (Bala & Arat, 2013). Whether pertaining to the study of architecture, engineering, or education itself, technology enhanced learning platforms are becoming more common at the postsecondary level, but have yet to be fully understood.

Learning, based on the notion of participatory culture (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2009), can be facilitated by social media learning. What Gee (2004) calls affinity spaces are in fact participatory cultures – instructionally designed spaces with low barriers for engagement that offer strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, informal mentorship, and potential full

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