

Chapter 34

Embracing Social Media to Advance Knowledge Creation and Transfer in the Modernized University: Management of the Space, the Tool, and the Message

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ABSTRACT

New ways of utilizing technology in the online space are challenging how academics and students communicate, participate, and publish in modern universities, and thereby influence knowledge production, exchange, and transfer. Social media provides a suite of tools that are powerful additions to the pedagogy of academics and demonstrate that “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1960). These tools provide opportunity for public global dialogue, continuous discussions in the online space beyond the four walls of a physical classroom, and greater interactions between individuals and collective groups. In this chapter, the authors present several cases of social media use from the perspective of being researchers and teachers in higher education. Through strategic and precise use of social media, academics can create strong, connected, virtual communities to enhance knowledge production, exchange, and transfer within higher education. The cases demonstrate the ability to create and curate content while engaging with global connections to enhance and disrupt traditional ways of working in academia.

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INTRODUCTION

In these turbulent times in universities it is important for academics to take the initiative and embrace new technologies to engage students in learning. Universities are in the business of producing knowledge workers, and academics have a commitment to take full advantage of available technologies to maximize their academic research outputs (knowledge production) as well as ensure our pedagogies are relevant to twenty-first century learners. In this chapter we provide case studies from research- and teaching-active academics who have embraced social media to engage with students, research partners and the global community. These case studies demonstrate that effective social media pedagogies can stimulate dialogue and rich interactions that extend beyond geographical and time boundaries.

In taking the initiative to embrace what was initially considered a student space (social media) we can develop and manage a new form of engagement. By doing so, academics have been able to stimulate learning activities, build communication and collaboration opportunities, and take full advantage of the medium, to deliver, develop and create our messages through public global dialogue, continuous discussion and greater interaction (Lemon, 2013). Throughout the chapter, examples of engagement with different social media are presented to demonstrate how knowledge production, exchange and transfer within higher education is possible.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Five decades ago McLuhan was the first to highlight the importance of the medium in delivering a message coining the phrase “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1960, p. 17), which, while initially applied to the influence of television (McLuhan, 1989), is relevant to social media technologies and their uses in education today. Ahead of his time, McLuhan was also the first to use the oxymoron “global village” (McLuhan, 1960, p. 19), a common phrase used with reference to mass media and more recently social media. Over fifty years later it is apparent that there is a strong need to embrace new media and pedagogies in higher education:

New approaches to teaching and learning... will need to be more appropriately and intelligently utilized so that the potential [they offer] is able to be exploited in a way that enriches and enhances teaching and learning...the teacher becomes the co-learner and [...] students are given a greater sense of accountability and control over their learning. (Ling, 2014, p. 38)

The current state of the higher education sector in Australia is presented by Fitzgerald thoroughly and succinctly in Chapter One of this book, where the tensions of maintaining a client-focused, sustainable, enterprising and competitive culture in times of reduced government funding are elucidated. This decline in government funding that results in reduced face to face time and larger classes demands that academics be proactive in embracing new paradigms and renegotiate their roles and the nature of academic work to become “professional knowledge workers” (Lipman, 2004, p. 25).

The changing nature of the student population in universities is also an important driver of university culture, with many students spending less time on campus due to economic and lifestyle factors. Student engagement is therefore being redefined and renegotiated by technologically savvy students. Engagement has been defined as “the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful

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