

Chapter 7.1

But Do They Want Us in “Their” World?

Evaluating the Types of Academic Information Students Want through Mobile and Social Media

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ABSTRACT

The growth of social media and mobile communication provides educators with an opportunity to transmit course-related information to students in new ways. But are students willing to accept course information through those channels, typically seen as “fun” and “social?” The study in this chapter examines the reasons that students use different types of personal media and how appropriate certain types of communication channels are for academic information. Results show that students prefer to get their academic information through “official” channels, such as email and course management systems. However, they are willing to accept certain types of information through social channels (mobile devices, social networking), as long as they do not have to share personal information.

INTRODUCTION

Social networking sites continue to grow in popularity. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others have changed the way that many people communicate on the Web. This growth has led educators to

experiment with different ways to use these Web 2.0 tools to transmit content to their students. But while some experiments have focused on different ways to use these tools (Young, 2004; Young, 2009), very little scholarship has examined the motivations people have for using these tools. Without a clear understanding of why people use

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their social networking tools, educators may be spending energy on experiments that may have little chance of success.

This study examines the motivations that college students have for using different social networking sites and mobile media. By grounding this study in the uses and gratifications paradigm, we can come to a more complete understanding as to the reasons that people use these tools. In addition, by incorporating conceptual aspects of the Technology Acceptance Model into this study, we can also see how useful students see these tools and whether students are ready to accept academic content through these very social media. If they aren't, then educators are trying to force students to think of “work” (their classes) in a communication channel that they may be using primarily for play. A better understanding of what students are looking for in social and mobile media in the classroom – and what they don't want – can help educators convey academic information more effectively and more efficiently.

BACKGROUND

In order to examine what students want out of their social media and mobile tools in the classroom, we're going to use two fundamental theoretical foundations: uses and gratifications, and the technology acceptance model (TAM). The uses and gratifications approach helps us examine the motivations, or reasons, that people use different types of media, whether it's television, radio, the Internet, or mobile phones. The technology acceptance model (TAM) introduces the concepts of usefulness and ease of use; in other words, does the user think the technology or media is useful and easy to use. We'll examine the specific questions a bit later, but first some necessary background on these theories and the work that has brought us to this point.

Uses and Gratifications

The study of motivations for using different forms of media has a long history in communications research (Katz, 1959; Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; Ruggiero, 2000), focusing primarily on traditional mass media such as television and radio. Rubin and Perse (1987) noted that television news viewers tended to become more involved with the news if they watched for a specific reason, rather than just out of habit. Diddi and LaRose (2006) noted that “escape” motivations, or passing the time, were likely to drive college students to view news across many different platforms rather than just television or radio. The approach has also been used to study personal media; Dimmick, Sikand and Patterson (1994) determined that sociability was a major factor in using the telephone, but coordination of social events was a subfactor. More recent research has examined the motivations for using newer media, such as cell phones and pagers (Leung & Wei, 1998; Wei & Lo, 2006), home computers (Perse & Dunn, 1998), email (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000) and satellite radio (Lin, 2006). Lin (2006) noted that just because a person is drawn to one type of new media (online radio) doesn't necessarily indicate their acceptance of another, similar media (satellite radio).

As that research has grown, so has the notion that even as the motivations for using media are different, the motivations can differ within the media, rather than just the need. Matthews and Schrum (2003) noted that college students living in dorms found the convenience of high speed access important for social communication through email and IM, but a distraction when trying to study. More recent research has examined how and why college students use social networking sites (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ray, 2007). Sheldon (2008) noted that college students use Facebook in large part to maintain existing relationships instead of finding new ones. Ray (2007) found that in addition to relationship management, social networking sites also allowed users to

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