

Chapter 80

Reaching Them Where They Live: Effectively Utilizing the Social Media Literacy of C-Borgs in Higher Education and Beyond

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the interconnected nature of social media use in higher education and business, exploring how educators and employers should use the social media literacy of “C-borgs” as a means of not just communicating with them, but allowing them to do what they do best – consume, create, collaborate, and connect with content. The chapter presents key issues educators and employers face when working to effectively harness the social media literacy of C-borgs, including: how their social media use differs according to their “mode” (work/personal/educational), how to strategically incorporate the C-borg’s social media use into educational and business contexts, and how to utilize the C-borg’s natural inclination toward a connected, content-centric lifestyle to facilitate educational and corporate engagement. The chapter concludes by discussing several key social media strategies educators and employers can use for harnessing the creative, collaborative, and communicative power of C-borgs.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years, there has been a sustained movement within higher education encouraging the use of Internet technologies in the classroom, as a means of more effectively connecting with students. A number of researchers have explored the various benefits that can be gained, including

greater collaboration, improved literacy, greater participation and improved cross-cultural communication. While the initial focus was on how such computers in the classroom and the Internet could facilitate learning, since the early 1990’s the concern shifted to focus on using the technology that the ‘Net Generation’ or ‘Generation C’ (students born in the mid-1980s and later) are

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8614-4.ch080

fluent in, to better cater to their changing learning needs – with researchers (Prensky, 2001) arguing that their ‘always connected’ nature fundamentally changed the way they learned by programming them differently to earlier generations.

As Internet technology continued to evolve, so too did the connected nature of our students. Where once they were great ‘Net Surfers’ who would surf through amounts of information to find what they wanted, the development and adoption of social media, including MySpace, Facebook and Tumblr has further changed them, making them communication connoisseurs who not only consume vast amounts of digital content on a daily basis, but generate new content. However, this focus on millennials and Generation C is problematic as it takes an age-based viewpoint, which assumes that older students are not as technologically savvy and connected, something that has been shown to be untrue in recent years where 92% of 20-49 year olds and 83% of 50-59 year olds are shown to be avid users of Internet technology (Pew, 2013). Rather than focus narrowly based on age, this chapter offers a new perspective, considering the modern university student to be a ‘C-borg’, or someone who is technologically literate, inherently connected to the technology and their ‘digital collective’, but also has a drive to not only consume information, but to create it and share it.

There is no doubt that these students are different from previous generations due to their technological savvy and their drive to be ‘content controllers’ as much as content consumers. However much of the literature merely encourages educators to *use* new technologies without considering the primary reason students attend university -- to increase their chance of employment. Therefore, academics need to consider the ultimate goal of their students when incorporating new communication technologies like social media into their courses in ways that facilitate the ultimate goal of their students.

That said, changing the way that educators use social media in the classroom in order to facilitate

the job-related aspirations of their students is only half of the equation. Employers also need to consider the social media savvy of this generation and adapt some of their business practices and expectations in order to effectively harness the skills, abilities, and drive to connect these employees have. It is not enough to adopt every type of social media that develops, assuming that C-borgs will embrace it with open arms. Businesses and employers must think strategically when choosing which types of social media to use and more importantly *how* to use social media to encourage C-borgs to work more effectively.

At the outset, the chapter will consider the technological characteristics and behaviors of C-borgs and social media. Building from this, the chapter addresses the challenges and special considerations faced by educators and employers when working to effectively engage C-borgs via social media. The chapter concludes by discussing C⁶, an interaction model that offers several key strategies educators and employers can use for harnessing the social media savvy of C-borgs in educational and workplace contexts.

C-BORGS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the key problems inherent in any discussion of social media in higher education and the workplace at the moment is one of semantics. Many different terms are used in mass media, marketing and scholarly work to describe technologically savvy young people and the Internet-based applications that they use. Social media. Social networking. Net generation. Generation Y. Millennials. Digital Natives. Web 2.0. The list goes on and on. The array of terms used in and of itself is not the problem, however the fact that some of them are used as if they are synonymous is a problem, as they are not interchangeable. This section addresses the key terms that underpin the rest of the chapter – C-borgs and social media.

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