Chapter 98
New Visual Social Media for the Higher Education Classroom

Julie A. Delello
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

Rochell R. McWhorter
The University of Texas at Tyler, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines how next-generation visual social platforms motivate students to capture authentic evidence of their learning and achievements, publish digital artifacts, and share content across visual social media. Educators are facing the immediate task of integrating social media into their current practice to meet the needs of the twenty-first century learner. Using a case study, this chapter highlights through empirical work how nascent visual social media platforms such as Pinterest are being utilized in the college classroom and concludes with projections on ways visual networking platforms will transform traditional models of education.

INTRODUCTION

While social media is permeating our personal and professional lives (McWhorter, 2010), students are arriving in higher education classrooms technologically connected and community-oriented (Friedrich, Peterson & Koster, 2011). According to the New Media Consortium (2012), students' instant access to networks and social media has facilitated a rise in their level of expectations for the higher education classroom to embrace collaborative learning and content creation. This new paradigm is changing "the nature of the way we communicate, access information, connect with peers and colleagues, learn, and even socialize" (p. 6).

As social media has migrated to the mainstream, higher educators are increasingly interested in harnessing its engaging features for learning (Joosten, 2012). For example, studies of Facebook and Twitter usage in the classroom are emerging in the academic literature (Dyrud, 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp & Laverie, 2011). Also, Pinterest, the number three social media platform is showing promise for learning (Delello & McWhorter, 2013). Through the use of these and similar social media tools, instructors are realizing increased communication, visual literacy skills, and student engagement in the classroom.

VISUAL LITERACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Communicating with visual images is not new. From early cave dwellers to present day civilization, history has shown that people use images to communicate ideas. If one wants to recognize the influence of visual images, one would look no farther than Michelangelo's Biblical representations painted between 1508 and 1512 upon the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. "For Michelangelo, faith and creativity– liturgy and art–are inseparably linked by a shared power to transform the viewer" (Romaine, 2006, p. 23). According to the National Education Association (2001), Western civilization has become dependent upon visual culture, visual artifacts, and visual communication. Visual images are formed from pictures, maps, statues, illusions, diagrams, dreams, hallucinations, spectacles, ideas, and even memories (Mitchell, 1984). As children, many of our first images came in the form of symbols or picture representations in books. All of these visual imageries demonstrate the lived reality and cultural values of mankind.

The term *visual literacy* originated in 1969 from John Debes who defined the term as "a group of vision-competencies a human being can develop by seeing and at the same time having and integrating other sensory experiences… the development of these competencies is fundamental to normal human learning" (p. 27). Visual literacy, according to Gray (2008) is "the ability to both read *and write* visual information… to learn visually; to think and solve problems in the visual domain… as the information revolution evolves, [it will] become a requirement for success in business and in life" (para.10). Associated with visual literacy is visual communication and technology. Burmark (2002) defined visual literacy as "a person's ability to interpret and create visual information…to understand images of all kinds and use them to communicate more effectively"

(p. V). Technology, according to Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1999) refers to "the designs and environments that engage learners" (p. 12). In an interview, American film director Martin Scorsese responded that "Today, our society and our world are saturated with visual stimulation… to reach younger people at an earlier age…to shape their minds in a critical way; you really need to know how ideas and emotions are expressed visually" (Cruickshank, 2006, para. 6).

Defining visual literacy in the midst of new media technology is challenging as it encompasses a wide variety of meanings. According to Oblinger and Oblinger (2005), "The Net Gen are more visually literate than previous generations; many express themselves using images. They are able to weave together images, text, and sound in a natural way. Their ability to move between the real and the virtual is instantaneous, expanding their literacy way beyond text" (para. 15). Although visual perception seems to precede any textual explanations, the combination of images, media, and new technologies will require students to be multi-literate. This new literacy will fuse visual literacy with innovative forms of technology and digital communications. As we are in the beginning of a new millennium, it is evident multimedia visual imagery is essential to our culture (Kellner, 2008) wherein, visual technology is connected to the communication needs of the current generation.

MULTIMEDIA AND THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION

The development of the Internet has revolutionized the world as we know it. The title of a recent article written by NASBE (2012) *Born in Another Time* referenced the fact that there is no divide between technology and students of today. "The long march of visual culture to hegemony continues a

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