

Chapter 2

Social Media in Education: Gains in Student Learning and Instructor Best Practices

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ABSTRACT

Although social media is prevalent among individual use, instructors and students have not fully embraced social media as tool for the classroom. The focus of the chapter is to identify and identify ways in which social media, as a complementary pedagogical tool to traditional techniques, contributes to create an innovative, collaborative educational environment for students. Different categories and themes, as well as best practices have been identified as the ways of improving students' learning as a result of utilizing social media. Social media helps students in their learning through facilitating active learning, promoting affective learning outcomes, inspiring creativity and innovation, supporting team-based work, and creating a community of learners. Social media enhances professional development and increases performance and grades. Finally, the authors identify best practices for implementing social media in educational setting during the different phases of instructional design process.

INTRODUCTION

What impact has social media had on education? Li, Wei, Xiong, Feng, Ye, and Jiang (2017) characterized social media research “by rapid growth and dynamic collaboration, with a rising number of publications and citation[s]” (p. 1). Various fields have investigated social media with education research leading the charge. For instance, the Computers & Education ranked first according to the average citations (Li et al., 2017). Li et al., (2017)’s bibliometric analysis, identified the University of Wisconsin, University of Michigan, and Harvard University as the most productive institutions in publishing social media research.

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Technology is a substantial part of education. Technological advancements along with the changes in demographic characteristics of learners confront today's educators with the new issues in delivering effective educational strategies. For example, the new generation of learners are more self-directed and team-oriented; they know how to use technology to get the information they need, and they request immediate feedback. Additionally, students come from more diverse backgrounds with various learning styles, prior knowledge, previous experience of education system, and many other differential factors. Moreover, increasing numbers of home-schooling and demands of parents to have the option to still have access to the teaching materials for their children when they might be physically dispersed from the school environment are other changing demands of educators.

As learner characteristics transform, the educational paradigms have been shifted from instructor-centered into student-centered to meet the new demands of learners. Education systems have provided adaptive strategies and platforms to communicate with a new generation of students. In such a changing environment, traditional teaching strategies and tools that worked before in education settings are no longer able to address the issues derived from technological advancements and changing styles of students.

Social media is one way to address shifting needs of new generation of learners. Social media provides an interactive platform for educators to design innovative teaching styles that provide multi-way interactions and opportunities for teamwork. Social media also enables learners to engage in the learning process by allowing students to take responsibility for their learning, act on just-in-time feedback, and access customized and up-to-date information for each individual learner. Social media also offers 24-hour accessibility to information and other students for physically dispersed learners.

BACKGROUND

Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, wikis, and social book marks are some of the most cited technologies or tools in web 2.0 that have affected education field in many ways like knowledge sharing and training (Wang, 2012). Acknowledging the low actual human interaction when using virtual environments and technological tools among aforementioned tools, social media provides a place for more interaction among individual who may or may not physically dispersed from each other (Wang, 2012). According to many studies (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godees, 2013; Lin & Lazar, 2013), social media has changed the way of communication and knowledge sharing.

Twitter, the second most popular social media in the world (26% internet users in the US), currently has 284 million monthly active users, and 500 million Tweets are sent per day (Twitter.com). Statistics showed a forecast of the number of active Twitter users in the United States from 2012 to 2018. In 2015, the microblogging site is projected to reach 56.9 million monthly active users in the United States. In 2014, Twitter obtained 48.2 million users. From all over the world, it was found that 50.99 percent of worldwide Twitter users were located in the United States. Lin and Lazar (2013) developed a visualization tool "Whisper" to show how, when, where and what kinds of information have been spread out through Twitter. They believed that tracing the tweets in a real-time manner could help us to detect the opinion leader and identify the popularity of an idea.

Additional feature of Twitter according to Kwak, Lee, Park, and Moon (2010) is that Twitter has a feature that identify the "Homophily" among Tweets. According to the Authors homophily is "a contact between similar people occurs at a high rate than among dissimilar people" (p.594). Through the information gathered from this feature, organization may find people who have proximity of ideas in

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