Chapter 3
Utilizing Social Media to Engage Students in Online Learning:
Building Relationships Outside of the Learning Management System

Sara Bender
Central Washington University, USA

Patricia Dickenson
National University, USA

ABSTRACT

There is a large body of research suggesting that online students feel disconnected from their academic institutions. This sense of detachment may elicit feelings of frustration and isolation, as well as contribute to academic failure. Students' success and satisfaction in the online learning environment may be contingent upon the type of interaction between the student, faculty member, and their classroom peers. Online instructors are challenged with finding the means to bridge the gap of physical space to create authentic relationships. Social media, especially social networking, holds much promise for creating a space where emotional engagement between the instructor and students can be facilitated beyond the virtual classroom. The aim of this chapter is to share best practices in social media to engage the online student in a manner that is both productive and efficient.

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, over 7.1 million students in higher education pursued at least one online class (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Online learning is increasingly popular due to the many benefits associated with it, including: significant flexibility in one's academic schedule, reduced cost, and less commuting time (Clingerman & Bernard, 2004; Crowell & McCarragher, 2007; Kim, 2008). Many students also seek online learning opportunities due to the increased access to diverse faculty, specialty programs, and the individualized support it brings (Crowell & McCarragher, 2007; Kim, 2008). Despite these notable benefits associated

with online learning, this modality of education is often criticized for a myriad of reasons, including its potential to perpetuate student isolation; which could have negative implications on one's academic achievement, satisfaction, and self-esteem (Glazer & Wanstreet, 2011). In fact, some estimate that there is a 10-20% higher dropout rate amongst online learning courses compared to traditional higher education courses (Carr, 2000).

While there are many factors likely to contribute to a student's decision to drop a course, one must consider the impact of learning environment on such a choice, including the student's interactions with others in the class. The close physical proximity between class members within traditional learning environments naturally facilitates student-to-student interactions as well as those that occur between faculty and students. This tends to lead to the establishment of a positive rapport amongst class members. By traditional design, however, many online courses rely on pre-loaded content, which may not promote student engagement. With this in mind, online instructors are tasked with the job of expanding the traditional faculty role of content expert to educational community facilitator. This new role is met by providing students with a virtual learning community in which students are encouraged to engage in both formal and informal communications allowing for the opportunity to make connections with others in the class, to explore new ideas, and to master course content. One way to promote interactions between online students and their faculty and with their peers is to capitalize on the use of social media, especially social networking platforms. Interactions via social media may contribute to an increased sense of connection thus stimulating the establishment of a positive rapport amongst class members and subsequent student success and satisfaction.

Learning management systems typically allow instructors and course designers to embed various widgets into their course shells. The use of such tools allows faculty to capitalize on social media sites to share information and communicate with their pupils. More than 74% of adults access the Internet to patronize social media sites. As such, it may be assumed that most students maintain some sort of social media presence (Pew Research, 2014). By engaging students via these channels, instructors may increase a sense of community within a class, and promote student interest in course materials while simultaneously prompting them to participate in class activities. The goals of this chapter are:

1. Introduce the reader to various forms of social media typically accessed by students
2. Explain how each type of social media may be used to connect with students and be leveraged for student success
3. Review strategies to promote the instructor's online presence and social media activity in a manner that is both productive and efficient

BACKGROUND

Social media emerged from the increased popularity of and access to the Internet. Dabbagh and Kitsantas (2011) indicate that social media is "a 21st century term used to broadly define a variety of networked tools or technologies that emphasize the social aspects of the Internet as a channel for communication, collaboration and creative expression" (p. 3). Social media are tools that allow users to share information with others in a manner that is expedient, collaborative, and flexible. A majority of Americans maintain at least one social media account, if not several, to help them remain in contact with and collaborate with others (Pew Center, 2014). One critical aspect of social media is social networking. Social networks

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may
be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/utilizing-social-media-to-engage-students-in-
online-learning/205698

Related Content

Virtuality and Reality: What Happens When the Two Collide?
Celia Romm-Livermoreand Gail Livermore (2009). *Social Networking Communities and E-Dating Services:
Concepts and Implications (pp. 239-252).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/virtuality-reality-happens-when-two/29225

Facebook's Rise to the Top: Exploring Social Networking Registrations by Country
Thomas A. Wikleand Jonathan C. Comer (2012). *International Journal of Virtual Communities and Social
Networking (pp. 46-60).*
www.irma-international.org/article/facebook-rise-top/73010

The Mediating Effect of Bridging Social Capital Between Social Media Usage and Affective
Attitude: An Explanatory Model
Akhilesh Bajaj, Adrien Bouchetand Li Sun (2021). *International Journal of Social Media and Online
Communities (pp. 51-75).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-mediating-effect-of-bridging-social-capital-between-social-media-usage-and-
affective-attitude/280554

DemonD: A Social Search Engine Built Upon the Actor-Network Theory
Charles Delalondeand Eddie Soulier (2010). *Social Computing: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and
Applications (pp. 652-668).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/demond-social-search-engine-built/39748

The Pervasive and the Digital: Immersive Worlds in Blast Theory's 'A Machine to See With' and
Dennis Del Favero's 'Scenario'
Daniel Paul O'Brien (2017). *International Journal of E-Politics (pp. 30-41).*
www.irma-international.org/article/the-pervasive-and-the-digital/186962