Chapter 12
Using Social Media to Enhance Instruction in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter informs readers on ways to integrate social media into the college classroom. Preexisting and relevant research is reviewed including suggested practices, efficacy of use, and data supporting the teaching methods described. Data from an original study is also presented, which assessed students' perspectives on integrating social media into the higher education classroom. The authors of this chapter also provide suggestions on how to transform research into actual classroom practices based on theory including informal and incidental theory, relational mentoring, and situation learning theory.

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of social media in US and world culture cannot be ignored. It is reported that over 901 million people use Facebook worldwide and 100 million users exist on Twitter (Davis, Deil-Amen, Aguilar, & Canche, 2012; Facebook, 2012). These web-based businesses are valued at 80 billion and 8 billion dollars respectively (Serrano, 2011). Over the past few years, these technologies have transformed the way that people interact with one another. "Digital natives," or those born in a generation who have always had laptop computers, cell phones, and text messages compose our current traditional age college population (Davis et al., 2012). Considering such explosion in usage, should social media be considered as a tool in the higher education classroom?

Based on social media usage in the population, and specifically among college students, it is no surprise that colleges and universities have jumped

on the social media bandwagon. Over half of 148 polled colleges in the United States report using Facebook for various reasons (Reuben, 2008). Davis and colleagues (2012) conducted a survey of 224 community colleges to understand social media technology use. They found that institutions are using such technology to communicate and engage with students in courses, link students to educational classroom management system updates, post course content, facilitate study groups, boast about student academic accomplishments, connect with alumni, market the institution, and recruit students into specific academic programs. These reports highlight the various uses of social media in higher education (Davis et al., 2008). Before investigating their effectiveness, it is helpful to have a clear understanding of what constitutes social media technology and what does not.

Drawing from literature, we define social media technology as "web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated or existing content, in digital environments though multi-way communication" (Davis et al., 2012, p.1). Interestingly, educational content management systems such as Blackboard are not included under the definition of social media. Although similar, these platforms are not intended to promote exchanges and interactions in the manner that social media does. We will focus on the social networking sites (SNS) Facebook and Twitter.

Considering the prevalence of social media and its influence, it might be assumed that a plethora of literature exists in which social media technology has been integrated and tested for use in the classroom. A marginal amount of scholarly and empirical work has been devoted to the topic. Furthermore, very little of this research has attempted to investigate the specific effects that social media has on individual student learning. Table 1 contains a list of journal articles related to Social Networking Sites (SNS). The apparent lack of research on this topic regarding learning outcomes is the catalyst for this chapter. Thus, the

information provided throughout this chapter will inform readers on several key elements related to the integration of SM into the classroom. First, we would like to inform the readers on relevant research on using social media in higher education. This includes suggested practices, efficacy of use, and data supporting the method of implementing social media into the classroom. Specifically we will focus our review on using Twitter and Facebook as a means of instruction (e.g., Blessing et al., in-press; Junco, Heibert, & Loken, 2011). Second, we will discuss a study by (Gonzoales, Fleck, & Yin, unpublished) that assessed student's perspectives on integrating social media into the higher education classroom. Third, we will provide suggestions on how to transform past research into actual classroom practices. This will include a theoretical foundation, suggestions for utilizing Twitter and Facebook, and universal procedures used to implement these suggestions.

A REVIEW OF EXISTENT RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION

General Electronic Media Usage, Preferences, and Outcomes

Research suggests that students spend a considerable amount of time using electronic media. Many students have even reported being "addicted to using the internet" (Jabr, 2011, p. 97). Jacobsen and Forste (2011) examined the electronic media use of 1,026 first-year students using a time diary. Findings revealed that out of all media use (e.g., TV, emailing), students spent the most time (about an hour a day) using SNS and watching TV. In larger sample studies, students reported checking their Facebook account an average of almost 6 times a day, resulting in an average use time of just over 100 minutes a day (Junco, 2012a, 2012b). However, other research indicates greater usage (Cheung & Vogel, 2011), with students

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