Chapter 9
Social Media in Higher Education:
Restrained Potential

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ABSTRACT

The technological revolution of the past two decades has changed higher education; technology use in higher education, particularly with respect to the implementation of social media, has yet to reach the expected potential. Technology offers higher education students and faculty an array of options to learn, network, stay informed and connected; however, social media use comes with risks and consequences. Personal use of digital technologies for social media communication is one thing; social media use by professors for communication with students is another. Can social media be used in higher education to improve learning through student and faculty collaboration? Are there less than desirable results in the interaction of social media and higher education?

INTRODUCTION

Social communication tools, social media, provide tools for experiential instruction in higher education; however, the adoption of social media by higher education faculty has been restrained according to Adams Becker, Cummins, Davis, Freeman, Hall Giesinger & Ananthanarayanan (2017) and Miller, Costa, Haynes, McDonald, Nicolescu, Sinanan, Spyer, Venkotramin, & Wang (2016). Social media

provides new means to enhance pedagogy; as a tool, it needs to provide value as an alternative means of instruction (Al-Aufi, & Fulton, 2015; Vandeyar, 2020).

However, one of the continuing challenges in higher education institutions, according to the New Media Horizon Report (Adams Becker, Cummins, Davis, Freeman, Hall Giesinger, & Ananthanarayanan, 2017), is integrating social media into formal and informal learning processes. To do this higher education faculty need to emulate the collaborative practices of 21st century businesses in which emerging higher education graduates will work (Cao, Ajjan, & Hong, 2013). Cao et al. (2013) suggest, "social media applications provide multiple formats directions, and channels of communication (p. 583), which can address collaborative tools, document sharing, and creating and sharing media (Benson, 2014; Boateng & Liu, 2014; Chikoore, Probets, Fry, & Creaser, 2016; Parsons, 2014; Tess, 2013). This necessitates blending formal and informal learning into appropriate pedagogical practices (Kilis, Gülbahar, & Rapp, 2016). While formal, traditional pedagogical practices are established, incorporating processes such as social media are regarded as challenging by some higher education faculty on a personal and professional level (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Institutional guidelines in some cases are barriers; some higher education institutions provide in-depth guidance while others suggest stronger cautionary practices to use protected and accepted university learning platforms (Manca & Whitworth, 2018). Further issues include guidelines about contact between university faculty and students (Budge, Lemon & McPherson, 2016; Jain, Petty, Jaber, Tackett, Purkiss, Fitzgerald, & White, 2014). Privacy is one issue while another is the concern about breaking the boundaries between a professional and student (Delello, & Mokhtari, 2020). Thirty years ago, Rupert and Holmes (1997) reported increasing concerns with "increased interaction" between professors and students outside the classroom, while at the same time acknowledging the myriad roles of faculty: teacher, advisor, and mentor. Confounding issues include higher education faculty members who participate in personal social networking sites where they may express personal or private views that may conflict with the higher education institution and may run into "ethical mind fields", according to Barnes, Penn-Edwards, & Sim (2015).

While social media has the potential to enhance student participation and learning outcomes, educational faculty also have to determine if social media provides better learning outcomes while considering if the use of social media may hinder outcomes (Ansari, & Khan, 2020). Some researchers speculate that the use of technology intensifies engagement and generates innovation that could make students more attentive (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie & Gonyea, 2008; Records, Pritchard, & Behling, 2011). Despite the ubiquitous use by students, controversies still exist over the use of social media in educational settings (Adams Becker, Cummins, Davis, Freeman, Hall Giesinger, & Ananthanarayanan, 2017; Chugh & Ruhl, 2018).

Social media platforms allow the creation and sharing of information and content, thus becoming a major communication vehicle for universities' students (Berger & Wild, 2013; Foroudi, 2017; Mpungose, 2020). While university administrators are increasingly incorporating social media technologies, some professors are still questioning if the pedagogical use of social media will achieve comparable or better student learning outcomes (Lewis, 2015; Sobaih, Moustafa, Ghandforoush, & Khan, 2016).

Colleges and university communal areas once served as locations for social interaction between students (Dyson, Vickers, Turtle, & Cowan, 2015; Tess, 2013). However, in a 21st century technology-based world, virtual connections such as Facebook, Twitter and emerging social media applications provide a method for college students to make connections (Fuller & Allen, 2016; Knight McCord, 2014). Social media sites provide methods enabling users to link to others, to send messages, to enable users to con-

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