Chapter 13
Social Media in the Canadian Post–Secondary Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In Canada, the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) for instructional purposes at post-secondary institutions is constrained by students' legislated rights to privacy. Some universities have explored ways to obtain the advantages of cloud computing while still meeting mandated obligations to protect student privacy. The government of British Columbia maintains the strictest standards in Canada regarding access to and storage of personal information, hampering instructional use of SNS. The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) decided to work within this legislation and challenge faculty to modify their classroom practice. At UFV the most significant SNS-related teachable moments come from education towards informed consent to public sharing of information through SNS. While our ability to teach students how to use SNS resources is restricted, working within the legislation encourages educators to evaluate their central purpose for using SNS. Students acquire digital skills through various forms of informal learning; therefore, the formal instructional setting becomes an opportunity to foster development of digital citizens.

INTRODUCTION

The global reach of social networks and the US-centric nature of the largest English-speaking social networks raise complex issues for educators outside of the United States (US) due to legislation that governs the storage and transmission of personal information. The sweeping powers of the US Patriot Act, renewed in 2011 for an additional four years (Mascaro, 2011), caused governments around the world to revisit privacy safeguards to protect the personal data of their citizens from

distribution without their informed consent. Canada, and in particular British Columbia (BC), followed this trend even as social network sites like Facebook and Twitter experienced massive growth precisely due to widespread (and in some cases even indiscriminate) sharing of personal data (Comscore, 2012).

Participation in social network sites (SNS) is now part of routine social behaviour for the overwhelming majority of post-secondary students in Canada, as in other countries around the world (Comscore, 2012). The challenge for educators is to address social media not only as a social and cultural force, but also as a communication, teaching, and learning challenge. We believe much can be learned by examining in detail ethical and pedagogical questions raised by the intersection of privacy legislation and social media use by post-secondary educators. The particulars of legislation governing the use, storage and transmission of personal information vary widely between and even within countries, and the global reach of SNSs means that the exact nature of the challenges they present changes from region to region. Examination of current practices related to use of social media in the Canadian post-secondary environment sheds light on some examples of the complexities posed by privacy legislation, among other concerns, while at the same time spotlighting creative and innovative solutions being explored by educators. Researchers, educators, and administrators in other jurisdictions can use our discussion and the examples we provide to reflect upon both comparative restrictions and opportunities applicable to their own situations.

The chapter is divided into six sections. Although a thorough literature review was conducted on several topics, references are threaded in their appropriate section as opposed to being represented in a separate literature review. The first section provides background information to situate and contextualize the Canadian post-secondary landscape. The objectives of the chapter are addressed in the next four sections. Specifically, they

1) describe the impact of the legislation governing data sharing and personal information in Canada; 2) demonstrate how Canadian post-secondary education is engaging with SNS; 3) outline the challenges of trying to balance education and legislation; and 4) explore teachable moments and opportunities that post-secondary instructors, especially communications instructors, have encountered when embracing SNS and working within the legislation. The final section illustrates how the SNS tension between legislation and instructional practice can be used to enhance and enrich classroom learning and further research.

BACKGROUND

Canada has a complex education system that is governed on a national and provincial level. There are two distinct education systems, one for children and youth, and another for adults. Each province must follow national guidelines, but is responsible for its own education systems. As a result, there are various models of education delivery across the country. The term post-secondary education is being used in this chapter to ensure our review of Canadian SNS practices captures the full range of adult learning opportunities and experiences. The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) defined *post-secondary education* (PSE) as skills and knowledge taken as an adult, 19 years of age or older, at the university, university college, college, career, vocational, or technical level. The CCL articulated the importance of each component in the PSE sector in contributing to Canada's social and economic development as a result of participation in an education system (2009).

In understanding the contextual nature of Canada and its education system, it is important to note that Canada borders the United States (US) and draws heavily on research, education materials, and resources produced in the US. However, as will be explained in the next section, Canada has quite distinct privacy legislation, as well as

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