Exploring Perspectives on Social Media in Higher Education

Abigail G. Scheg
Elizabeth City State University, USA

INTRODUCTION

Social media sites are websites that one can visit in order to create a profile, communicate, interact, and share ideas with other individuals. Examples of social media sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, MySpace, and many more. Many of these sites are used for private correspondences between friends, family, or even strangers. Others have more directed purpose such as Pinterest, which is a place where individuals go to post and share ideas about crafts, recipes, or decorations.

Although social media may have started as a service that was just available to the general public, and college-aged students mainly, for personal correspondences, social media is now mainstream in many other facets of society including education. There are many positive opportunities for education using social media such as enhanced communication, using a communicative tool that the students enjoy, the opportunity to network with other individuals, more interactive discussions, typically very fast responses, and many more reasons. However, there are also concerns about using social media for educational purposes on a number of levels. Many institutions block social media websites on campus computers so that students will not be distracted by these sites when they should be researching or writing school work. Some individuals, instructors and administrators alike, do not understand the difference between communicating via email and social media and therefore, do not recommend it as a classroom tool. Therefore, this article will explore the varying perspectives of social media from students, instructors, and administrators on the foundation that social media can have positive communicative impacts when implemented in the classroom.

BACKGROUND

In May 2013, the PEW Internet Project reported that "72% of online adults use social networking sites" (Brenner, 2013). This number only increases when looking specifically at traditional college-aged students. According to a 2012 PEW Research Center Report, 83% of Internet users ages 18-29 are likely to use a social networking site (Duggan & Brenner, 2013, par. 1). Although individuals of all ages participate in higher education, the traditional college-aged student is approximately 18-23 years of age, aligning quite well with the statistics of individuals using social media. Using this statistic, let us examine the perspectives of higher education affiliates in regards to social media.

Arguably the most important participant in higher education would be the students; without the participation and perpetual enrollment of students, higher education opportunities would cease to exist. As the above statistic demonstrates, traditional college-aged students have a propensity to use social media if only as a means to communicate with friends, family, strangers, or generate a digital representation of their life. 67% of social media users cite "Staying in touch with current friends," as a major reason for regular participation on a particular website (Smith, 2011, p. 2). 64% claim that "Staying in touch with family members," is a major reason for their participation (Smith, p. 2). The other high-ranking reasons include: Connecting with old friends you've lost touch with, 50%; Connecting with others with shared hobbies or interests, 14%; Making new friends, 9%; Reading comments by celebrities, athletes or politicians, 5%; Finding potential romantic or dating partners, 3% (Smith, p. 2). Other factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status impact an individuals' propensity for using social media for specific reasons. Females, in particular, are more likely to maintain social media profiles and the main

reasons for usage such as engaging with family members is "especially important to women" (Smith, p. 3).

According to Blankenship (2010), 80% of faculty members surveyed by Babson Survey Research Group in collaboration with New Marketing Labs and Pearson Learning Solutions stated that they "use social media in some capacity, whether they're watching a friend's cat video or updating their Facebook status, and more than half use the tools as part of their teaching" (p. 11). The same survey found that 30% of faculty "use social networks to communicate with their students (trading posts on blogs, for instance) while more than 52 percent use online videos, podcasts, blogs, and wikis (group-authored Web sites) during actual class time" (p. 11). To clarify, the survey found that faculty that have been teaching for twenty or more years "use social media at almost the same level as their younger peers" (p. 11).

As these statistics demonstrate, faculty have found successful communicative modes and interesting assignment dynamics in social media. Whether the social media is limited to networking within the classroom (such as a blog feature establishing within a learning management system) or outside (such as Twitter), the positive impacts are being realized by faculty members across disciplines and institutions. Seeing positive impacts is allowing faculty members to make more risks with their choice of technological tool and encouraging them to use other types of social media tools to see what best fosters student engagement and enhances the assignments designed for a specific course.

Perspectives from administrators regarding social media are highly varied across institutions. Some institutions have developed limited allowance plans for technology or social media for reasons of deterring behavioral issues, improving students' self-image or self-representation, or because these technologies are still viewed as a teaching distraction rather than a tool. Making informed decisions regarding social media is not limited to a specific administrator or group of administrators, but rather the result of many layers of conversation taking place across levels at an institution. Ultimately, policies are established demonstrating acceptance or rejection of a social media tool for faculty and student use. If a regulation rejecting the use of social media on campus computers (for instance) is made at an institutional level, then all of the faculty

and students who are using these tools for a course may be negatively impacted by the change. Therefore, clear conversations and inclusion of varied perspectives should be mandated before an institution-wide policy is implemented. In order for such change to occur, more research needs to be conducted as to better understand the perspectives of individuals at institutions of higher education regarding social media.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE

Issues, Controversies, Problems

The main problem with social media at the institutional level is that there are so many different voices representing different perspectives on this conversation (Scheg, 2014a, 2014b). Students have mixed feelings about using social media for educational purposes because of the (typically) personal nature of their accounts, but yet writing on such networks is an enjoyable type of communication for them, which makes education more accessible and interesting for them. Faculty also represent different perspectives on the spectrum, some of which are highly invested in using such technological tools to enhance their classroom teaching. Others, though, are skeptical of the nature of social media and the way in which it can interact in a positive manner, with education. Administrators, likewise, represent even more perspectives on the implementation of social media communications at an institutional level because they can regulate and monitor the usage.

An issue, for which a solution will be given, is that there are limited studies determining individuals' perspectives on social media at the higher education level. It is apparent when looking at different institutions and their policies (or lack thereof) of social media, that there are many conversations happening at the departmental and institutional level. Some faculty members are highly engaged in these conversations and others are not. Some administrators are highly engaged in these conversations and others are not. With a limited understanding of the varied perspectives of individuals across institutions and within institutions, it is difficult to make assessments and recommend changes that specifically address individuals' concerns.

4 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/exploring-perspectives-on-social-media-in-higher-education/112665

Related Content

Technology Assessment of Information and Communication Technologies
Armin Grunwaldand Carsten Orwat (2018). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Fourth Edition (pp. 4267-4277).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/technology-assessment-of-information-and-communication-technologies/184133

Fear Appeals, Threat Perceptions, and Protection Motivation in Information Systems Security
Narasimha Paravastuand Murugan Anandarajan (2015). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Third Edition (pp. 4310-4316).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/fear-appeals-threat-perceptions-and-protection-motivation-in-information-systems-security/112873

Enhancing Car Segmentation for Thailand's Expressway Industry With an Automated Hybrid Machine Learning Framework
Kulkatechol Kanokngamwitrojand Chetneti Srisa-An (2024). *International Journal of Information Technologies and Systems Approach (pp. 1-23).*
www.irma-international.org/article/enhancing-car-segmentation-for-thailands-expressway-industry-with-an-automated-hybrid-machine-learning-framework/353439

Ecosystem Wetlands Restoration Approach for Sustainable Development Planning
Carolina Collaro (2015). *Encyclopedia of Information Science and Technology, Third Edition (pp. 2931-2941).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/ecosystem-wetlands-restoration-approach-for-sustainable-development-planning/112716

On the Suitability of Soft Systems Methodology and the Work System Method in Some Software Project Contexts
Doncho Petkov, Steven Alter, Olga Petkovaand Theo Andrew (2013). *International Journal of Information Technologies and Systems Approach (pp. 22-34).*
www.irma-international.org/article/on-the-suitability-of-soft-systems-methodology-and-the-work-system-method-in-some-software-project-contexts/78905