

Chapter 9

The Impact of Social Media on Policy Decisions in International Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The infusion of technology is one of the major ironies of modern education because technology has changed delivery techniques for higher education. The technological revolution of the past two decades has changed communication in contemporary educational settings, particularly higher education. Educators are teaching how to live successfully in a future that is increasingly ambiguous and fast-paced. That is a formidable task in the quickly changing world of technology where educators must prepare students to be able to find the information they need and the knowledge of how to analyze appropriately, not just to regurgitate facts. Technology offers college students an array of options to socialize, network, stay informed and connected, but they come with risks and consequences. As social media use by students becomes more established, educators in higher education are pursuing methods to continue significant and appropriate contact with their audience and are shifting from the acquisition of skills so prevalent in today's colleges to a true learning design focused on technology.

INTRODUCTION

Educators in higher education have begun exploring alternative means of instruction including social communication tools designed for easy use, ease of use, instructional freedom, and constant online discussions (Brady, Holcomb, & Smith, 2010; Lee & McLoughlin, 2010; Webb, 2009). Social media

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is commonly defined as any media used to integrate technology into the lives of people to facilitate communication (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012; Veletsianos, 2011). As social media has proliferated in society, more higher education institutions are using social media tools such as social networking, wikis, blogs, or video, to interact with or engage in students (Bayne, 2008; Veletsianos, 2010). There is compelling evidence that social media can be a prized instrument for increasing student engagement (Martínez-Alemán, & Wartman, 2009). Increased engagement would also improve student academic performance (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). Social media has the potential enhance student participation and learning outcomes (Buzzetto-More, 2012). . 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). The uses of social networks have increased exponentially in recent years although there is some controversy over the use of social mediums in educational settings (Chu & Meulemans, 2008; Connell, 2009; Dron & Anderson, 2007; Schneier, 2010).

Colleges and university common areas once served as locations for social interaction between students (Tess, 2013). However, in a 21st century technology-based world, virtual meeting areas such as Facebook provide a venue for college students to make connections (Murray, 2008; Rambe, 2012). Social media sites provide connections enabling users to link to others, to send messages, to link to social networking sites enabling users to connect with friends and colleagues, to send mails and instant messages, to blog, to meet new people, to share pictures and information on common interests and to post personal information profiles (Connell, 2009; Junco, 2011; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2010).

Social media is changing the way people interact, present ideas and information, and judge the quality of content and contributions. More than one billion people use Facebook regularly; other social media platforms extend those numbers to nearly one third of all people on the planet. Educators, students, alumni, ... routinely use social media to share news about scientific and other developments. The impact of these changes in scholarly communication and on the credibility of information remains to be seen, but it is clear that social media has found significant traction in almost every education sector. (New Media Consortium Horizon, 2013, p. 1)

Social media and social networking sites provide methods to communicate through Internet web sites, forums, weblogs (blogs), microblogs, wikis, social media networks, podcasts, discussion forums, photo sharing sites, and video sites (Ala-Mutka, Broster, Cachia, Cento, Feijoo, & Hache', 2009; Chu & Meulemans, 2008; Higdon & Topaz, 2009; Junco, Heigerger, Loken, 2010; LaRose, Kim, Peng, 2010; McDermott & Kowalsky, 2011; Parameswaran & Whinston, 2007, Salmon, 2005; Shih & Waugh, 2011; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010).

“The purpose of social networking sites is building relationships, moulding identities, and sharing and hence, ‘networking’, which render them useful for unraveling social power relations in academia” (Rambe, 2012, p. 72). Social networks permit participants to publish personal information and to communicate with friends, make new friends and share contents such as photos and videos (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Wilson, 2008). Jones and Shao (2011) explain that while first-time students entering higher education are particularly impacted by social networking technologies, services that support the uploading sharing and manipulation of media such as YouTube, and the use of mobile devices, students do not enter the university with particular demands for the use of new technologies. Further, they explain

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