


Chapter 12

Heteroplatforming and Prospects for Integrating Higher Education With Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Heteroplatforming is a form of educational activity in which students of higher education institutions record audio essays on a topic set by the instructor and upload them for public access and discussion to an open educational group in social media. This chapter explores the experience of the Faculty of Philosophy at Saratov University in implementing heteroplatforming during the 2020-2021 pandemic. Based on empirical data, the study highlights the ambiguous consequences of heteroplatforming. On the one hand, it positively affects the quality of education, student engagement, and employability. On the other hand, heteroplatforming is involved in the spontaneous transition to product-based learning in liberal arts education and the migration to narrative frameworks in the teaching of theoretical knowledge. Heteroplatforming strengthens the mutual influence of higher education and network societies, empowering universities to direct the scientific and educational interests of society, but also making them vulnerable and dependent on the preferences and demands of external audiences.

INTRODUCTION

The emergency circumstances that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020), have interrupted consistent discussions of readiness, strategies, and conceptual models for new forms of learning (e.g., Haw et al., 2015; Ling Chean et al., 2018; Martin et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2020) and have diverted many researchers' attention to describing and

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analyzing students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of the forced transformation of formal education into online education (f.e., Mishra et al., 2020; Tzivinikou et al., 2020; Alarcón López et al., 2021; Alasmari, 2021; Jelińska and Paradowski, 2021).

Meanwhile, in the development of digital forms of learning in the pre-pandemic years, changes were accumulating that might be seen as the next stage in the evolution of online learning. In the first phase of this evolution, the use of telecommunication technologies initially gave students the freedom to choose where, when, how, and at what pace to learn, which in the early decades of online learning was seen by scholars as its major advantage (Hiltz, 1988; Boettcher, 1993; Steeples et al., 1994; Goodyear, 1996). Wright and Cordeaux (1996) cited an inaugural professorial lecture by Jack Adams in 1995 in which the spread of online (in the terms of those years, 'telematic') learning was a movement from the mass education of industrialized society to an individuated information society in which the role of teachers would be "supporting the more individually focused student-centered environment".

However, in the 2010s, the rapid proliferation of always-on Internet-enabled devices, cheaper videoconferencing technology, and the introduction of synchronous hybrid or blended learning (Alexander et al. 2014; Zydney et al., 2019) have blurred the boundaries between on-site and remote learning, which extends the access to high-quality learning resources, but can lead to low cognitive engagement by students (Raes et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2021). The intensive use of platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Team, and others for remote classes during the pandemic-induced lockdowns brought back the constraints of timetabled meetings in the form of synchronous distance (online) education (Leiba and Gafni, 2021), which has become the main form of learning in many universities. However, this form was not always welcomed by students because it increased the effort of studying the subject matter, and students called for a greater emphasis on asynchronous forms of learning (Kaliba and Ambrožová, 2021).

Along with the rapid adoption of videoconferencing platforms, higher education in the last decade has been strongly influenced by Web 2.0-based social media, whose impact on university education is hardly unambiguous. On the one hand, social media ostensibly push the boundaries of learners' freedom, provide access to more flexible in time and space educational experiences (Niu, 2019), return control of learning to learners themselves (Raut and Patil, 2016), reduce their dependence on timetabled meetings through easy access to learning materials, help and advice from other students and faculty. On the other hand, the internal logic of social media focused on social creativity (Kim and Freberg, 2016) made them suitable tools for implementing a social constructivist approach to education and introducing group (social) active learning (Kent and Rechavi, 2018).

The pressure of social media to increase student's engagement in learning and their productivity in generating new knowledge has not yet been fully explored in the academic literature since it is the norm for educational groups to be closed to outsiders. Seamlessness is often cited as one of the benefits of using social media in higher education, referring to the close intertwining of learning and everyday life, involving the intensive use of social media as a place to discuss learning material, share assignments, and help each other among learners (Mushtaq, 2018). At the same time, this seamlessness is not the case, as learning is separated from students' social lives by the closed boundaries of the educational group. Regarding the existing open professional groups in social media with members drawn together by a shared topic of interest" (Hillman et al., 2021), learning in them is informal, completely self-directed, and unrelated to higher education, so it is not relevant for this research field.

In this chapter, we propose to investigate the experience of the Faculty of Philosophy at Saratov State University, where a variant of teaching has been applied that is almost not covered in the academic literature. Since 2017, this department has been implementing the practice of organizing some train-

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