

Chapter 46

Navigating the Social Media Space for Māori and Indigenous Communities

Maryann Lee

Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how Māori and Indigenous communities are engaging in social media in ways that reflect their cultural aspirations and Indigenous ways of being. Social media provides opportunities for Indigenous people to represent an Indigenous worldview that encompasses cultural, political, and social preferences. Highlighted also in this chapter are the risks inherent within the use of social media for Māori and Indigenous communities: in ways in which the misrepresentation, commodification, and exploitation of Indigenous culture and traditions are amplified through the use of social media that support colonial ideologies and the ongoing practice of colonization.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how Māori and Indigenous groups are engaging in social media in ways that reflect our cultural aspirations and Indigenous ways of being. I argue that social media provides opportunities to create new spaces to reflect an Indigenous worldview, which encompasses cultural, political and social preferences. This includes advancing an agenda of self-determination that challenges colonial ideologies and western constructs of colonization (Pihama, 2001). I also highlight the risks inherent within the use of social media for Māori and Indigenous communities; and how social media can be used to perpetuate the ongoing practice of colonization, which systematically sets out to maintain the power and control of the dominant society (Iseke-Barne, 2002).

Due to the lack of literature published on social media and Indigenous people within tertiary education (Huijser & Bronnimann, 2014), this chapter provides a Kaupapa Māori framework for better understanding Māori and Indigenous engagement in social media in general. Establishing this broader context serves to introduce some of the motivations, considerations and aspirations of Māori and Indigenous

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people in the use of social media. In this regard, this chapter prefaces a case-study in chapter four, about the use of Facebook to support Māori doctoral scholars and academics within the New Zealand tertiary environment. For Māori, educational aspirations are not limited to educational contexts and individual success; they have much wider implications that impact on whānau (family), hapū (sub-tribe) and iwi (tribe). Therefore, understanding the context of how Māori and Indigenous groups engage in social media as a decolonizing process for the transformation of Indigenous communities is critical and relevant for all educators. This chapter begins with an introduction to a Kaupapa Māori approach, followed by a discussion on ways in which Māori and Indigenous people are using social media to support our cultural aspirations, drawing on three Kaupapa Māori principles. The final section highlights the risks associated with social media for Indigenous communities in relation to the exploitation and commodification of indigenous culture; the racial discrimination against, and misrepresentation of, Indigenous people; and the disruption of Indigenous ways of being.

A KAUPAPA MĀORI APPROACH

This analysis is underpinned by a Kaupapa Māori methodological approach that draws from a Māori knowledge base and lived experiences. Kaupapa Māori promotes the validity of Māori language, knowledge and culture (Pihama, 2001). Kaupapa Māori supports Māori academics to carry out research in ways that embrace the values and principles of our whānau, hapū and iwi (L. Smith, 2003). Linda Smith (2003) asserts that Kaupapa Māori research comes from a local Indigenous theoretical position; a philosophy that encompasses a Māori worldview including spiritual, cultural and political dimensions. The Kaupapa Māori methodological approach enables Māori academics to participate in research that draws from ontological worldviews, and embraces Māori tikanga and values (L. Smith, 2003).

Kaupapa Māori also provides a theoretical and political tool as a basis for Indigenous researchers to work as change agents and to engage in research that is transformative for Indigenous people (G. Smith, 2003). Linda Smith (2003) believes that recognizing the injustices of colonization and thinking about ways that we can resist and challenge colonial ideologies is the first step to decolonization. She argues that while there is often an illusion that colonization is no longer practiced, there are still “new forms of colonization” which have been reformed in more subtle ways and, “many of these formations are insidious, and many of them have yet to be fully explored” (L. Smith, 2003, p. 215). Social media can be considered as one of these forms that often appear neutral, a-cultural and decolonized.

Graham Smith’s (2003) discussion on Kaupapa Māori emphasizes the need to uncover injustices experienced by underprivileged groups, and recognizes the powerlessness that individuals may feel about their own destinies. He points out that Māori are struggling from the injustices of the past, whether they are aware of this or not. In Graham Smith’s view, Māori are located within three intervention areas: conscientization, a ‘freeing’ of the Indigenous mind from the dominant hegemony; resistance, or going outside the constraints of the dominant system; transformative action, or engaging in a radical pedagogy and becoming change agents (G. Smith, 2003, p. 13). These areas are not independent of each other, nor do they fall in a linear order. Instead, they represent a cyclic approach whereby all Māori can be plotted somewhere within the cycle of Kaupapa Māori praxis. This is an important critique to assist in better understanding Māori engagement in social media with a Kaupapa Māori agenda.

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