Foreword

Social media is on its way to earning a distinctive position amongst educational technologies, attracting the attention of academic and industry researchers. As this social phenomenon began to emerge, Boyd and Ellison (2007) provided a comprehensive definition of social networking sites recognising their multifaceted nature:

*Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 210)*

Over recent years, social media has evolved and acquired a variety of technical features and capabilities that are intuitive to use. It has gained an unprecedented reach among most students. The adoption of social media for academic purposes became inevitable with the wide acceptance of the tool by end-users, particularly younger people. Earlier technology had an incremental influence on learning and teaching innovation, technology merely offered new ways of doing traditional things. The advent of tools such as blogs, electronic assessment, wikis, and gamification have had a significant impact on higher education as new ways of engaging became available to instructors. The impact of social networking is no longer contested, and social media is viewed by some as a revolutionary, set to change the face of higher education.

As social technologies have earned their place as pedagogical tools, the understanding of their pedagogical potential has increased. The role of social media in higher education comprises of five dimensions: (1) serving as networking enabler, (2) marketing and recruitment tool, (3) collaboration, (4) teaching and learning tool, as well as (5) a medium presenting career management and entrepreneurship opportunities. These five dimensions have been examined by academics in different disciplines drawing on research in pedagogy, social capital theory, information technology, legal studies, and other fields, eliciting the perspectives on social media use in the context of higher education:

1. Networking enabler (for example, enhancing the student sense of community and development of communities of practice, Hung & Yuen, 2010).
2. Marketing and recruitment (for example, the increasing use of Facebook and other sites to enhance a university’s reputation and recruit new students; however, there is evidence this is still not used strategically, see Tutten & Marks, 2012; Benson & Morgan, 2013a).
3. Collaboration – A space for creativity and innovation (research indicates online collaboration through social media increases levels of creativity and improves learning outcomes, see Okoro, Hauseman, & Washington, 2012).
4. Teaching and learning (not only blogs and wikis as learning tools but sites such as Facebook as an integrated part of the learning process).

5. Social capital and career management (for example, developing connections on social media sites such as LinkedIn enable improvements in career prospects, see Benson & Morgan 2013b).

Privacy and compliance considerations are also increasingly of interest, and it is clear these have implications for education not only in technological terms but in ensuring that students are fully aware of the issues involved.

Not only has social media changed the way universities communicate with students and external stakeholders, it is changing the role of the university as regards to student communication. We have seen a reversal of roles in marketing communications with the empowerment of students, as they take a key role in promoting, or demoting, their university. Further research is needed to fully understand the impact social media is having on the student experience, but this book goes a long way to giving the reader the latest ideas in the area. The editors and chapter authors have worked hard to ensure a wide-ranging discussion of the issues and areas in need of further research.

This book addresses the five dimensions of the impact of social media on higher education in depth and sets the research agenda for academics and industry.

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REFERENCES


