Chapter 9

The Role of Social Media in the Globalized World of Education

Janelle Christine Simmons
Liberty University, USA

ABSTRACT

Social media has transformed the way that people communicate during the 21st century. This occurrence has transformed society in a globalized world by impacting social interactions, financial institutions and ways of completing transactions, ways of communicating as well as the educational sector. This chapter will introduce the audience/reader to definitions/terms such as communication, media, social media and globalization while discussing the role of social media in a globalized world. In addition, an exploratory discussion of social media and education will be established.

INTRODUCTION

There have been expansive changes during the last few decades in regards to technology but most importantly how technology allows us as a society to communicate with one another. With the spread of the Internet, new platforms of communication such as Web 2.0 have emerged that have actually changed not only the means of communication, but also how people actually communicate. A person in Mumbai can speak in real-time through forums like Skype or Google Hangouts or even FaceTime with a person sitting in Arizona and actually see their face and their en-
environment. They can hear each other’s voices. They can even simultaneously open other windows, watch a movie together, transmit documents, etc. No one would have ever thought this was possible one hundred years ago. In fact, one may have laughed in another person’s face if they had proposed such an option or suggested such a ludicrous possibility. Yet, such possibilities now exist.

In the same vein, the way that communities, societies and even countries have been affected and transformed by technology, in the 21st century technology has trickled into the realm of education. Schools (whether public or private), institutes and institutions of higher education have all been challenged in how to use technology inside and outside of the classroom. In some ways, this experiment in social learning has been positive. For example, middle school and high school principals have been able to send e-alerts and texts to parents to update them on their child’s progress or incidents, and whole communities have been invited into the learning experience through social media platforms.

These same institutions have also had to analyze the legal and ethical implications of such interactions. For example, certain questions are pervasive: should an instructor be a Facebook friend with a student? What are the boundaries of engagement? Can an instructor be liable for what they place on their personal Facebook page? Can a student be reprimanded or suspended for sending an instructor an ill-mannered message or posting an ill-mannered message about them? What boundaries must school administrators set in regards to communicating with parents, students and other stakeholders within the community? These are all questions that show the diverse array of challenges that can occur when integrating technology, and particularly social media, into educational sector.

Cases involving teacher “misconduct” are many. Take Carol Thebarge, for example. A 79-year old substitute teacher, she was fired for refusing to “unfriend” approximately 250 of her current students at New Hampshire High School in 2014. Other cases of teachers being fired for offenses include posting a picture in a bikini on Facebook (and having current students on their friends list) or posting a comment that was reported to their district and being fired subsequently. All of these instances have come to light during the last five years through news outlets. In fact, some of these cases, based on their merit, have risen to the appellate court division where at least the latter case (i.e., a comment out of stride) was struck down and the teacher was reinstated.

However, the fact that social media has not only transformed how we communicate (i.e., including how language has changed), but also how school districts deal with their employees and how our legal system operates, boggles the mind. The fact is that communication is power. As you read through this chapter, more issues may emerge in your mind, yet the objectives of this chapter remain: