Chapter 14
Social Media Strategies for Seamless Learning: Approaches and Metrics

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ABSTRACT
The chapter discusses best practice approaches and metrics for evaluation that support seamless learning with social media on three different organizational levels: (1) the learning organization, (2) the learning program/curriculum, and (3) the individual teacher/learner. Initially, we establish how social media and seamless learning are connected, by sketching a brief overview of the history and evolution of each concept. We draw upon the theoretical frameworks of social learning theory, transfer learning (bricolage), and educational design patterns to elaborate upon different ideas for ways in which social media can support seamless learning. To exemplify how social media can support seamless learning we follow up with presenting three case studies on the organizational level, on the program level, and on the individual level. Each case study analyzes the context for the use of social media, followed by a discussion of how social media serves as a catalyst for seamless learning.

INTRODUCTION
For at least two decades, contemporary educational research has advocated the blurring of boundaries between formal and informal learning to create seamless learning experiences, a term created by Kuh (1996). Seamless learning refers to the integration of learning experiences across formal and informal contexts, individual and social spaces, as well as face-to-face and online settings (Wong & Looi, 2011; Wong, Milrad, & Specht, 2015). The emphasis on student centered learning focuses the institutional
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mission on enabling learning by whatever means are available, convenient and comfortable for the learner (Bell, 2000). As such the idea of seamless learning is closely related to the concept of ‘Personal Learning Environment’ (PLE).

Personal learning environments (PLE) are ‘an idea of how individuals approach the task of learning’ (Educause, 2009; Couros, 2010) and describe ‘the activities and milieu of a modern online learner’ (Martindale & Dowdy, 2010). PLEs comprise tools, communities, and services learners use to direct their own learning and pursue educational goals. They migrate the management of learning from the institution to the learner (Downes, 2007). Though technology plays an important role in facilitating one’s PLE, the specific tools and environments may shift over time: As smart phones and tablets are more and more widespread, the concept has moved away from centralized, server-based solutions to distributed and portable mobile apps.

In the era of Web 2.0, ubiquitous mobile technologies and social media, borders and constraints for learning scenarios have become blurred and formerly acknowledged concepts need to be redefined. Social media in particular, offers a fruitful ground for the idea of seamlessness to flourish.

Social Media Bridges the Seams

Let us consider how social media can bridge the seams in the 10 dimensions of the framework by Wong and Looi (2011), originally developed for mobile seamless learning.

“Encompassing formal and informal learning”: Students can post and share their notes or questions during a formal classroom session on a social network. Other students can provide feedback or answers later in an informal way. Questions and comments that have been posted in a forum of a learning community can be addressed in the next classroom session. Thus, learning activities transcendent formal and informal settings. Learning spaces and resources can be accessed by learners to foster their “ongoing self- and co-construction of knowledge” (Milrad et al., 2013) instead just feeding them facts from textbooks and lectures. In the past the student life in the classroom and out of the classroom has been perceived as two domains (Kezar, 2003). Social media however, brings knowledge from outside into the classroom and shares ideas, work results and inspirations from the classroom with the outside world. Students can construct knowledge collaboratively in various settings (Kong & Song, 2013).

“Encompassing personalized and social learning”: Students work individually on artefacts but can always share their resources with others. Social tools enable collaborative writing. Individual and collaborative learning are not isolated activities but deeply intertwined (Kazmer, 2005). For example, a Wiki can be used both in and outside the classroom. The design of environments for personalized and social learning should enable personalized support, on demand learning solutions and real-time assessment of learning (Obisat & Hattab 2009).

“Across time” and “Across locations”: Being always online, students can learn anytime and anywhere without interruption when they move between different places (Chiu, Kuo, Huang, & Chen, 2008). Learning is blended at various locations and times, using heterogeneous technologies and diverse social settings (Sharples et al., 2012). Students are connected both synchronously and asynchronously. For example, a group of students can create an online mindmap that is shared between several users. The users can edit the mindmap at the same time, maybe discussing their changes via Skype or Facetime. But they could also co-create the artefact iteratively at different times. It is not the tool nor the instructional setup but the needs and circumstances of the students that define how, when and where the tools are used. The traditional classroom becomes digital and is extended without constraints of time and space.