Blurring the Boundaries:
The Impact of Social Media in the Higher Education Classroom

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ABSTRACT
This article reports the results of a mixed methods study aimed at exploring faculty and student perceptions regarding the use of social media in the higher education classroom. Two groups of faculty (n = 50) and students (n = 396) voluntarily responded to an online survey consisting of a mix of close and open-ended questions pertaining to their perceptions of social media use inside and outside the classroom. Key findings revealed that among faculty (52%) and students (23%) see social media as a distraction. In addition, contrary to prior research indicating that interpersonal boundaries between faculty and students are shifting as people become more connected via social media, only 17% of students and 29% of faculty reported forming social media friendships outside of the classroom. These findings are discussed in light of extant research on the use of social media along with implications for the role of social media in the higher education classroom.

KEYWORDS
Distraction, Faculty, Higher Education, Social Media, Students

INTRODUCTION
New and emerging advances in social media and mobile technologies have allowed us to communicate with others almost anywhere and at any time. According to the Pew Research Center (2017), 69% of Americans build connections with one another and share and monitor information through the use of social media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. Nielson (2016) reported an average of 14.2 million daily social media exchanges across Facebook and Twitter in the United States.

Social media have also permeated institutions of higher education. According to the NMC Horizon Report: 2015 Higher Education, the use of social media by faculty members and students on campuses is expanding (Johnson, Adams Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2015). Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, and Zickuhr (2010) found that 72% of all college students have a social media profile with 45% of college students using a social media site at least once a day. In one study, Junco (2012) found that 92% of undergraduates spent an average of over one hour and 40 minutes on Facebook each day.

Mirroring the general population, 70% of faculty reported using social media platforms. Of those, 55% used social media for managing their professional image (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013).

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In another study, it was reported that almost 85% of faculty had a Facebook account, two-thirds were on LinkedIn, and 50% used Twitter (Faculty Focus, 2011). However, a much lower percentage of faculty (41%) utilized social media for instruction (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013). Some researchers even reported that 100% of four-year college campuses were using social networking in one form or another (Barnes & Lescault, 2012).

Heiberger and Junco (2015) suggested that in order to improve educational outcomes, faculty should be using social media like Facebook and Twitter to engage students. But to what extent are faculty and students actually using social media in the classroom? The purpose of this study was to examine student and faculty perceptions regarding the potential benefits or detriments in the classroom. Do they view social media as beneficial for instruction? Or do they see them as a mere distraction? A related purpose of this study was to explore how faculty and students felt about extending social media relationships outside the classroom. To date, little is known about the effects of teacher-student social media relationships in the higher education setting (Metzger, Finley, Ulbrich, McAuley, 2010).

According to the New Media Consortium [NMC], the use of social media is positioned to change the face of education over the next five years. Students will use social media platforms to embark on collaborative learning and “seamless sharing and communication” (Adams Becker et al., 2017, p. 20).

The term social media is defined as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Web 2.0 refers to the second generation of the World Wide Web which allows for greater collaboration and sharing across the Internet through social media platforms such as Facebook, Pinterest, and Instagram which integrate visual tools with digital technologies (Delello and McWhorter, 2014). Social media technologies have the capability to change “the nature of the way we communicate, access information, connect with peers and colleagues, learn, and even socialize” (Johnson, Adams, & Cummins, 2012, p. 6).

**RELATED LITERATURE**

**Student Use of Social Media**

In a recent study, Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan (2016) found that 18-29 year olds use more social media than any other age group to stay connected with others. In fact, Quan-Haase and Young (2010), noted that majority of college students visited multiple social media sites daily to stay connected with their family and friends. This is correlated to the upsurge in the use of Internet ready mobile devices as 97% of college students own a Smartphone (Neilson, 2016) and are connected to a digital device more than 141 hours per week (Refuel, 2015). The NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Higher Education Edition reported that mobile applications are tightly integrated with social networks, making tablets effective tools for collaborating and sharing (Johnson, et al., 2013).

Neilson (2016) noted that 24% of college students’ overall media time is social. The Keiser Foundation (2013) reported that, “The continued expansion of high-speed home Internet access, the proliferation of television content available online, and the development of compelling new applications such as social networking and YouTube, have all contributed to the increase in the amount of media young people consume each day” (p. 3). YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are reported to play critical roles in students’ everyday lives (Refuel, 2015). In a recent poll, The Harvard Institute of Politics (2017), reported that “Facebook (87%), Twitter (47%), Instagram (45%), Pinterest (37%), Snapchat (34%) and Tumblr (19%) are all more popular among college students than among young Americans who are not in, or never have attended, college” (para. 5). Junco and Cotton (2011) noted the typical college student sends an average of 96 text messages and receives nearly 104 text messages per day, and spends an average of 1.4 hours on Facebook.

Several studies have researched students’ perceptions of using social media as part of instruction. For example, Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, and Leveritt (2012) reported that 78% of the students they surveyed...
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