Chapter 2

Facebook in the International Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The case explores international students’ learning experiences with Facebook-based activities within the eight-week study term known as the intensive mode of course delivery. By implementing participant observation and two asynchronous Facebook focus groups, the study investigates the potential values of Facebook for learning from international students’ perspective. In addition, the case looks at the challenges faced by students and discusses key factors that may impact international students’ experiences with courses that incorporate Facebook as a learning tool. The research is framed in the context of New Zealand tertiary education and intended as a contribution to the emerging body of educational research on social media.

INTRODUCTION

The world that is fast emerging from the clash of new values and technologies, new life-styles and modes of communication, demands wholly new ideas and concepts. (Toffler, 1980, p. 2)

During the last decade there has been a noticeable interest among educators towards social media and the changes they have brought about to teaching and learning. For many universities and institutions, emerging online learning

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environment is a novel situation. Matters are complicated further by the fact that tertiary student profiles, demands of the employment market as well as the learners’ expectations, personal goals, learning habits and behavior have also changed. In addition, taking into consideration a constantly growing number of international students coming to New Zealand, tertiary education authorities have pointed out a necessity to develop new models of course delivery with a strong focus on communication and social connections.

Given the above issues, the concern here is to explore not just new social contexts for learning that tertiary educators suddenly have been provided with, but first and foremost learners’ experiences with these contexts. Although teachers and learning designers have been using social media in course design and delivery for a while, academic researchers have only recently begun to acknowledge the importance of looking at social media in the tertiary education context.

In this regard, research questions, typically, have ranged from affordances of social media in contract with learning management systems, to social media for students’ self-regulated learning, and teachers’ views on benefits and challenges associated with social media. Absent in current research are insights into international learners’ experiences with social media. As has already been mentioned, due to the internationalization of tertiary education, there is a need for new, well-functioning models that could respond to “the demands of more diverse learners”, and a “changing society” (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2017). The motivation behind this study is informed by several gaps identified through the literature review as set out below.

Firstly, the literature review reveals that there is a lack of empirical data and evidence related to international students’ learning experiences with social media as a learning tool, specifically in the context of intensive courses that are defined as “compressed, concentrated, or short-term learning” (Serdyukov, 2008, p. 37). Secondly, despite the growing use of social media in delivering courses, the research into what kind of factors may impact students’ learning experiences remains limited. Finally, the existing research still focuses on a homogeneous rather than diverse student population, suggesting that insights are required into international students’ learning experiences with social media.

This study aims at exploring international students’ learning experiences with Facebook-based activities incorporated in two undergraduate intensive business courses: Event Planning and Management and Entrepreneurship at Otago Polytechnic Auckland International Campus, New Zealand (OPAIC).
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