An Interdisciplinary Perspective of Incorporating Social Media into Teaching Practice

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ABSTRACT

The ability to use social media as a job skill among several industries is growing increasingly prevalent. From social media managers to digital content coordinators to fan engagement specialists, graduating students have tremendous opportunity to thrive professionally due to the popularity and ubiquity of social media. In collegiate and professional settings alike, a clear emphasis on the importance of effective social media management is now critical. As a result, educators are now challenged to find creative and innovative ways to prepare students through theoretical knowledge and practical experience relating to the ever-changing landscape of both the technical and industrial demands. This article presents a critical review of existing information on the use of social technologies in the classroom, a discussion on relevant perceptions, techniques, recommendations for interdisciplinary classroom implementation and student engagement, and considerations for educators incorporating social media practice into their curricula.

KEYWORDS

Educational Technology, Interdisciplinary Teaching, Pedagogy, Social Media, Student Engagement

INTRODUCTION

The following article provides a detailed examination of the value of incorporating personal social media strategy into the college classroom, and the ways social media can serve as a teaching, engagement, and professional development tool for undergraduate students across academic disciplines. With this in mind, this paper sets forth suggestions for trial and implementation of various social media uses and activities, and describes these exercises within the respective contexts of sport management and communication studies courses. Lastly, a series of legal and practical considerations are presented to aid educators in their understanding of how to responsibly integrate social media into their teaching pedagogy.

CRITICAL LITERATURE ASSESSMENT

Relevant Perceptions of Social Media for Teaching and Learning

The ubiquity of social media continues to embed in social and cultural fabrics on a global scale. As such, industries, individuals, and educational institutions are clamouring to maximize of these platforms. While social media for personal use is in its adolescence, it is still arguably in a childlike
stage among brands and businesses. Organizations are readily trying to determine and employ the most effective social media strategy, which is challenged by how quickly social media and digital technologies evolve. Even more, the effective development of courses and training within higher education to accommodate these in-demand job skills are becoming an increasing reality. While research on the subject of social media for education is still relatively limited to date, recent years have brought about a demand that requires ongoing exploration and discovery.

Lebel, Danychuk, and Millar (2015) cite a potential disconnect among the expectations of students, the digital strategies used by faculty in their pedagogy, and the standards and demands within their industry. A sample of 132 sport management faculty at an American university indicates that only roughly 60% include social media as part of course design. Their findings reveal that while faculty recognize the potential benefits of using social media for college teaching, they are not widely utilizing the available social technologies within their classroom. This is troubling, given that the 2016 job study from the National Institute for Social Media emphasized the need for experience when it comes to social media.

In fact, respondents indicate that social media experience is valued over above all when it comes to hiring someone in a social media role. One participant reveals, “It would be very difficult to get a social media position without having any formal social media experience. You can get social media internships; and you can land those for part-time jobs and smaller roles in which you start to volunteer for social media opportunities without having experience” (NISM, 2016, p. 13) Another professional cites the dynamic nature of social media, which is a huge hurdle for educators (discussed later in this paper), in saying, “So, they have to be someone that is willing to learn new things because social media is constantly changing…But, with social media, there’s not going to be textbooks and the exact formula for success, so being a self-starter, as someone who’s creative and a problem solver, very analytical and detail oriented is going to be super important” (NISM, 2016, p. 14).

The speed at which social media has evolved from a purely personal mediated tool to an organizational communication powerhouse is astounding. Liu (2010) notes that the commercial world has quickly adopted social media as a tool for marketing, branding, and customer service, and suggested that due to the obvious modern need for constant connection, social media has potentially tremendous benefit to educational practices. Novakovich, Miah and Shaw (2017) discover a substantial quality gap in the use of social media as it pertains to personal versus professional use.

So how might college educators prepare their students to meet the experiential social media needs within their respective industries through classroom teaching? Manca and Ranieri (2016) discover that Facebook and Twitter are viewed by college faculty members as useful tools to increase student motivation; SlideShare, academic social networks (i.e. ResearchGate, Academia.edu), and YouTube are used to share educational content and increase engagement. In turn, motivations for using social media for college teaching include increasing student engagement and involvement, to provide collaborative learning opportunities, to capitalize on student familiarity with social media tools, to improve teaching quality, to share and distribute content easily (Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

Coa, Ajjan, & Hong (2013) find that perceived usefulness, external pressures, and technology compatibility influence the educational outcomes of social media in college teaching. These external pressures may include a demand from various industries regarding the level and calibre of social media preparedness from graduating students. Nonetheless, existing research proves that use of social media in the college classroom can simultaneously be beneficial and challenging. Among the noted barriers to faculty of using social media in teaching include concerns over privacy and student integrity, grading and assessment concerns, and the ability to accurately measure and assess performance using the platforms, weakening of the traditional student/teacher roles and dynamics, implications to student distractions, and scarcity of best practices (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Despite the paradox of social media as a classroom tool for teaching and learning, more strategies and techniques are becoming published that are helping educators better understand their uses and benefits.
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