



SOCIAL NETWORKING SERVICES (SNS) IN EDUCATION

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Received: 05 April 2022

Accepted: 11 June 2022

Published: 25 June 2022

Short Communication

ABSTRACT

Initially, social media was intended for social activities and aimed at creating an 'online community for us all' [1]. This vision includes engaging with digital dialogue and, at times, creating a social profile as with Facebook. The scope of social media was not one of learning or education provision [2]. Education professionals are now unravelling the idea that social media may have far-reaching potential beyond personal needs and is more closely associated with educational settings where it can contribute to a digitally competent and confident graduate. In the following think piece, I argue that social media has the potential to be integrated into pedagogy successfully.

Keywords: Social media; education; TEL; twitter; classroom.

1. INTRODUCTION

An emerging area of research has critiqued the validity of the generational interpretations of the 'digital native' concept [3]. It can be argued that educational institutions do not typically enable successful pedagogical opportunities for 'digital natives. Helsper and Enyon [4] contribute further to Prensky's [5] 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' debate by claiming such distinctions are generational, suggesting there is insignificant evidence that younger people are fundamentally different in the ways their brains work' (such as using and processing information). Previously, Prensky's ideas have been through the lens of neuroplasticity theories, which indicates that our brains are somewhat flexible and subject to transformation throughout life in response to changes in our environment. In other words, the brains of young people have developed differently from the previous generation before them. Nevertheless, it remains unclear what differences (if any) there are in the brain structure of adults and young people who use digital technologies [4].

Creating an increasingly demanding marketplace has meant social media plays an unequivocal position in liaison, research, business support, presentation, problem-solving and brand reputation [6]. Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) careers service (2014) reported that those businesses were using social media more frequently for activities such as recruitment and an increase in mentions of social media skills in job and person specifications. The workplace now demands that employees are social media ready (Freberg and Kim 2018).

Using social media in pedagogy in higher education has presented some positive outcomes, such as increased engagement and grades of pupils [7]. HE institutes are increasingly reactive to SNS, and this is particularly interesting as most of the education sector has delivered some 'pushback'. This tension is partly due to cyberbullying, digital footprints, e-professionalism, and digital safety concerns. Purvis, Rodgers, and Beckingham [8] introduced some social media workshops for staff to enhance their confidence in incorporating social media in their pedagogy. They

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discovered that most teaching personnel, except those in digital marketing, viewed these sessions as an optional element to their regular CPD. Staff perceived social media as complementary to their teaching and learning activities and not essential. Interestingly, most staff embedded their pedagogy with virtual learning environments or wikis as part of their curriculum, and these tools were widely accepted as part of pedagogy.

Furthermore, educators who accepted social media in their course community were the most confident staff members teaching with technology. These educators were able to facilitate multi-dimensional teaching and learning, such as autonomous and creative learning and creating e-professional portfolios.

This indicates that a lack of confidence is a primary barrier to not using specific learning resources. Some academics even confessed to being a 'technophobe' and actively avoided new technologies. In educators where confidence was high and adequate support was available, the uptake of social media as a tool for teaching was increasingly prevalent and successful [9-11]. However, there was confusion about the perceived benefits of using social media, with most understanding the benefits of YouTube but not Facebook. In addition, there was a correlation between the personal capacity and professional use of particular SNS and the incorporation in their teaching.

Further data collection found that some students who used social media as a resource found that this held the potential to enhance their employability. In contrast, others needed further support and guidance to develop their online learning skills [8]. The authors conclude by recommending a review of staff's skills and development needs with most universities moving towards this way of working.

Twitter is often viewed as microblogging that enables users to digitally follow individuals or organisations or construct their content to engage with their followers publicly. Tang and Hew [12] describe Twitter as 'one of the microblog services that allow users to send and receive information in real-time. Real-time functionality as a concept is exciting as Twitter is a dynamic platform that contains continuously changing multimodal content. This may appear somewhat apparent in digital technologies; however, content on educational portals, even the ones that advocate they are 'interactive', are often static. Blackboard, Moodle, and Abyasa are the most commonly used examples.

Additionally, Twitter is an entirely free platform, which means information such as resources for

educational purposes can be shared worldwide at no cost. This is perhaps why teachers have aimed to exploit Twitter in various disciplines and studies. Some of the benefits of Twitter for teaching and learning expand beyond connecting with fellow professionals. For example, in education, it has been recognised that it may be used as a teaching tool to encourage learning and increase engagement in various tasks (Juno et al., 2011).

Nevertheless, educators currently use Twitter to communicate beyond the traditional class space, such as networking for personal and professional reasons. Contrastingly, YouTube is a social media platform regularly used as part of teaching and learning. Nevertheless, a Haythornthwaite [13] study illustrated Twitter as one of the favoured learning tools in the classroom, with 69% of those surveyed being enthusiastic about Twitter and its potential for pedagogy. Therefore, academics and educators must be aware of incorporating social media meaningfully and how specific platforms can adapt to become increasingly education friendly.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Some examples of applications of Twitter in the classroom are shown in Table 1, with the categories being informed by Tang and Hew's [12] work.

Williams [6] has added to this work by provoking thought around policy, CPD and audience.

Utilising Twitter initially grew within the social sciences; however, with an increased familiarity with the platform, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) experts have begun exploring Twitter as a supplement to teaching. Instances of this form of pedagogy lay within 'Communicating' and include classroom instruction such as tweeting relevant research papers [14]. A significant difficulty in implementing Twitter in the classroom is ensuring that the educators are prepared with basic operational skills, such as the mechanism to follow/unfollow users and understanding the use of hashtags. Studies have shown that neither instructors nor learners are automatically adept at using Twitter [7,12]. When participants become familiar with Twitter, they rate it positively, yet there appear to be concerns around distractions on the platform when using Twitter in classrooms [2]. Thus, Twitter can be potentially useful for pedagogy; however, as with other forms of TEL, there are also challenges in successfully applying this form of social media in teaching and learning.

Table 1. How twitter may be used in the classroom

| Category | Example of activities |
|---------------|---|
| Communicating | Students using a hashtag to communicate with others Students tweeting in a different language to practice MFL writing skills Teachers posting materials such as course content |
| Assessing | Students debating online on a platform such as Twitter Students, either individually or in teams, create tweets using content learned during the focus of the lesson Students answering questions in a live chat or direct message Teacher posting questions on Twitter whilst teaching in class as an activity Learners posting their answers in a tweet as a response to questions which could be worth a percentage of the overall grade |
| Collaborating | Students working together to coordinate a volunteer project Students creating a joint diary/log on their timeline Using Twitter to negotiate time and groups |

3. CONCLUSION

The advantages of embedding social media and its growing role in education have certainly fast-tracked discussions on how it can encourage learning and enhance engagement in the most efficient way (Marich, 2016; Junco, Elvansky and Heiberger [2]). Digital technologies in the classroom are a relevant topic as teachers are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits they can bring to learning. Students now expect that all their experiences are embedded with technology, whilst teachers face many challenges to meet these needs. Furthermore, the workforce now demands that their employees are digitally proficient, social media savvy, and have hard and soft skills (Churchill, 2019). Many of the difficulties in teaching with technology rest with policymakers and not teachers, and this has been the case for a long time in education. Social media does hold the potential to be incorporated into pedagogy successfully, yet the administration to deliver positive outcomes such as learning and engagement remains difficult.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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