

Instruction Using Social Media in Global Higher Education

Robert E. Waller¹, Pamela A. Lemoine² & Michael D. Richardson¹

¹ Educational Leadership, Columbus State University, Columbus, USA

² Educational Leadership, Troy University, Phenix City, USA

Correspondence: Michael D. Richardson, Professor of Educational Leadership, Columbus State University, 4225 University Drive, Columbus, GA 31907, USA. Tel: 706-325-0612.

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Abstract

The technological revolution of the past two decades has changed communication, higher education, and the global society. As a result, there exists a wide gulf between the unlimited use of technology and higher education, particularly with respect to digital communications between professors and students. Web 2.0 digital technologies convey information in a different manner than before and allow for interaction with distance participants. Personal use of digital technologies for social media communication is one thing; social media use by professors for communication with students is another. Both aspects should be examined in detail to determine the future directions for global learning.

Keywords: global higher education, social media, teaching in global higher education, digital technology, privacy issues and globalization

1. Introduction

Social media has become a catalyst for 21st century global higher education both as an administrative tool and an instrument for instruction (Aueretsch, Lehmann, & Wright, 2014; Greenhow, 2011). The use of social media in a classroom setting provides equitable access to multimedia learning tools that address inclusiveness: from special needs students to acceleration of learning for more capable students (Huda, Luthfi, Jasmi, Basiron, Mustari, Safar, Embong, Mohamad, & Mohamed, 2019). Social media technology is rapidly becoming an integral part of the typical operation of higher education institutions, particularly those competing in the global marketplace (Mok, 2015; Quershi & Nair, 2015). The use of social media for instructional purposes in global higher education is becoming a topic for increased discussion to ascertain the educational and ethical issues for resolution. Some would argue that the use of social media in global higher education has been accelerated by the rise of globalization and the need for improved communication globally (Mense, Garretson, Lemoine, & Richardson, 2018; Piven, Gandell, Lee, & Simpson, 2018).

2. Social Media

Social media and social networking sites provide interactive communication through Internet web sites, forums, weblogs (blogs), microblogs, wikis, social media networks, podcasts, discussion forums, photo sharing sites, and video sites (Higdon & Topaz, 2009; Junco, 2011; Salmon, 2005; Shih & Waugh, 2011; Yu, Tian, Vogel, & Kwok, 2010). Social media sites provide connections enabling users to link to others, to send messages, to link to social networking sites permitting users to connect with friends and colleagues, to send mails and instant messages, to blog, to meet new people, to share pictures and information on common interests and to post personal information profiles (Junco, Heibergert, & Loken, 2010).

Social networks permit participants to publish personal information and to communicate with friends, make new friends and share contents such as photos and videos (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The uses of social networks have increased exponentially in recent years although there is some controversy over the use of these systems (Au & Lam, 2015). Many perceive that only younger persons use the Internet and social media but use of social media by older adults has increased dramatically (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter, & Espinoza, 2008). Higher education professors envision the use of Web 2.0 technologies as a solution to help transform higher education and dramatically improve student learning (Jones & Skinner, 2014) but the use of social media by university professors also stimulates challenges addressing issues of student safety and privacy of student and instructor information and data (Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2017c).

3. Instruction Using Social Media

Online and global higher education venues expand daily (Kumar & Nanda, 2019). Some researchers have suggested that students using online learning resources outperform students in traditional face-to-face teaching settings and that social media expands opportunities for learning (Allen & Seaman, 2010). They have also demonstrated that online learning experiences more clearly meet individual student learning needs (Keengwe, Kidd, & Kyei-Blankson, 2009; Stewart & Lanzillo, 2018). With the requirement that 21st century student skills include using information effectively, social media provides global higher education educators access to different methods for teaching and learning in the online and face-to-face environments (Dede, 2011; Gandell & Piven, 2018). The challenge for professors is to move beyond traditional teaching methods and provide students with social media skills and strategies in order to safely take charge of their own learning in the global environment (McCoughlin & Lee; 2010).

Social media provides a real time method to have a conversation between two or more people which is critical to the success of global higher education. Social media formats include online platforms, which provide news updates, as well as information personalized for the interests of social media subscribers (Wiid, Cant, & Nell, 2013). Teaching and communication formats for professors and students once confined to print and then email communications are now methods to share information through social media tools such as Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, and other emerging public platforms (Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010; Henderson, Selwyn, & Aston, 2017; Miranda, Isaias, & Pifano, 2016). Universities are using social media platforms to share their missions, market, and engage in conversations with future and current students, both globally and locally (Wandel, 2008).

Social media allows professors to expand their messages and listen to what students want (Roebuck, Silva, & Bell, 2013). Not only is it important that professors communicate to students, but it is important that the students transmit their needs to professors and administrators particularly in the online and global situation (Simpson, 2018b). Access to social media for global higher education instructors has also resulted in a change for higher education delivery systems (Moghavvemi, Paramanathan, Rahin, & Sharabti, 2017; Navarro & Shoemaker, 1999). Social media encourages students to become more active participants in their own learning and explore new learning opportunities with students who are different and come from different countries and cultures (Englund, Olofsson, & Price, 2017). Social media permit students and professors to have instant access to news, information, and interactive experiences through computers, tablets, and smartphones (Hrastinski & Aghaee, 2012).

Twenty-four/seven access to digital technologies can facilitate new media for professional learning through interactive technology (Flavin, 2016; Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2016). The use of social media as educational tools presents professors with the possibilities of using technology with students to facilitate access to information for research, creativity and collaboration (Gonzalez, Gasco, & Llopis, 2016; Kivunia, 2015; Lodge & Bonsanquet, 2014). However, adding social media tools to instruction requires professors to restructure 20th century pedagogies to leverage 21st century opportunities for learning especially in the global context (Lubua, Semlambo, & Pretorius, 2017). For professors and students, once isolated to their own individual classrooms with limited opportunities beyond the classroom, social media promotes access, communication, tools for collaboration and analysis, and the ability to interactively share their learning and knowledge among a vast audience when responding globally (Pimmer, Mateescu, & Grohbiel, 2016).

4. Ethical, Practical and Educational Concerns of Social Media Use

Students are using social media tools both inside and outside the classroom because social media tools provide great opportunities to connect and learn from and with others in a global milieu (Rashid & Asghar, 2016). Social networking among professors and students also suggests the perceived intimacy of technology and the perception that there is nothing wrong with the use of social networking for whatever reason (Simpson, 2018a). Professors should help to educate users of technology that there is an abundance of materials available on the web, but few guarantees of the quality of the materials (Dee, 2016; Feigenbaum & Iquani, 2015). So, if students search the Internet for information, they should understand the lack of quality controls for materials found on the Internet (Lemoine & Richardson, 2013).

While the use of social media is a popular method for communication among students, some social media tools in universities are blocked and filtered usually due to concerns with cyberbullying and other inappropriate uses of social media (Nelson, Simek, & Foltin (2009-10). Barton and Ryan (2014) suggest part of the responsibilities for professors is to teach the responsible use of social media along with other areas for which they are responsible. It is the responsibility of the professor to speak openly to students and to train them to make ethical

decisions about social networking, to become digitally literate (Chawinga, 2017; Tess, 2013). Some universities have taken a proactive stance in the use of social media in classrooms. Addressed as professional social media use, university social media guidelines often detail recommended practices for communication between employees, as well as between employees and students (Fenwick & Edwards, 2016; Mora, Pont, Casado, & Iglesias, 2015).

Professors are expected to review university guidelines for social media use “in order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students” (Dede, 2011, p. 4). To establish effective instruction that uses social media, professors must listen and learn from current conversations with students, participate in the use of social media to promote positive learning, and become familiar with students’ needs (Abdelraheem & Ahmed, 2015; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Thomas, Johnson, & Fishman, 2018).

5. Challenges of Social Media Use in Global Higher Education

Technology has outgrown use for only administrative applications in global higher education institutions (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). However, there appears to be very little consensus as to how to address the issues raised by social networking (Al-Emran, Elsherif, & Shaalan, 2016). Global universities have concerns with student access to social media technologies as well as the provision of devices and technological infrastructure supporting the use of technology for both professors and students (Anderson & Dron, 2011; Conner & Rabovsky, 2011; Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009; Selwyn, 2016).

Persuading some global universities to allow educational access to social media tools has been an issue in many countries (Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2017b). Educators and researchers support the need to provide for the appropriate use of technology in classrooms (Bugawa & Mirzal, 2018; Chernikova & Varonis, 2016), but some global university faculty members are reluctant to use social media when it is not a familiar tool or if they are hesitant to try new learning approaches (Bernard, Borokhovski, Schmid, Tamim, & Abrami, 2014). Professors must become skilled in the technology as well as the pedagogy for using social media. Training for professors is needed to ensure that they can use mobile learning technologies for both a global and local audience of students (Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009; Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017).

Additionally, administrators and professors need to be well versed in current technologies for both professional and student use (Galloway, Curtis, & Arora, 2018). Some global universities and colleges have done nothing; some have very specific rules about what digital and communication technology is permitted and how and when it can be used (Sobaih, Moustafa, Ghandforush, & Khan, 2016). Other institutions have some variation of the two extremes. Some global higher education institutions are particularly attuned to social networking and provide detailed guidelines and rules while others are oblivious to the dangers of teachers and students using social networks or the Internet (Jang, 2015; McDermott & Kowalsky, 2011; Nelson, Simek & Foltin, 2009-10). Specifically, professors must be vigilant monitors when using social media for coursework with students. However, university and university employees governed by principles of free speech and academic freedom still face risks (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Thomas, Johnson, & Fishman, 2018).

Social media use reduces boundaries between university faculty and students and audiences with access to open social media platforms (Ngai, Moon, Lam, Chin, & Tao, 2015; Sleeman, Lang, & Lemon, 2016) however, privacy issues with social media mean faculty must decide if the use of social media presents inappropriate risks that can become controversial and challenging (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Legal and ethical issues abound with social media and there are few defining laws that provide regulations and guidance for professors and social media use particularly in global institutions (Nelson, Simek, & Foltin, 2009-10). Social media platforms, the Internet, tablets, and smart phones provide new technologies that have not been addressed in updated legislation (Allen & Seaman, 2010). Social media connections between professors and students also blur the lines of relationships (Ophus & Abbitt, 2009).

With social media access to forums such as Facebook, both professors and students can see information, profiles, pictures, and communications about one another bringing about issues with professionalism (Shelton, 2016). Many global universities are addressing social media use by employees by drawing up university policies regarding the use of cyberlearning technologies, ethics, and employee and student conduct (Benson & Morgan, 2018). Guidelines cover issues with confidentiality of student and teacher data and personal information, use for academic coursework, and cyber security policies (Corcoran & Duane, 2019). While employees are encouraged to showcase college and university programs through platforms such as Facebook, university guidelines for social media use need to cover lewd and indecent and inappropriate conduct, threats, disruption of university

programs, and intentional use of malicious or defamatory or hateful materials (Au & Lam, 2015; Bickerstaff & Cormier, 2015).

In a closely related area, professors are now becoming the subject of dismissals and court cases if they have used social media to post information of a personal nature, which is being interpreted as affecting their ability to teach students (Ophus & Abbitt, 2009). Professors have been asked to resign over comments regarding sexual performance, gender preference, and photos with alcoholic beverages. Undoubtedly, there will be court cases to determine the right of privacy for professors as individuals as compared to their professional responsibilities but in a global environment each country will assign rules and regulations for employee conduct (Castagnera & Lanza, 2010).

6. Concluding Thoughts

During the past 15 years methods for communicating and sharing have changed drastically, many would argue that the change is a result of globalization (Chan, Mense, Crain-Dorough, Richardson, & Lane, 2013). In the current environment, global higher education students use digital media for communication and sharing information at an increasing rate (Bartosik-Purgat, Filimon, & Kiygi-Calli, 2017; Zhu, 2015). Additionally, the focus on learning with digital media or cyberlearning is expected to escalate as more higher education institutions go global (Coates, Kelly, & Naylorm 2017; Zhao, 2015).

Cyberlearning has become a trend that includes both independent learning and learning in collaboration with others (Greenhow, 2011; Lemoine & Richardson, 2013). This flexibility is dependent on learning needs, motivations and contexts where students can use mobile devices for personalized learning anytime and anywhere (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). Social media and mobile technologies provide multiple options of services that are satisfying different professor and student needs in terms of flexibility, fluidity, multitasking and accelerated means of learning (Li & Zhao, 2015). Moreover, social media and mobile technologies have enabled students to have better control over what they do, how they do it, and when they do it which has resulted in better student and faculty engagement with learning activities (Gikas & Grant, 2013; Piotrowski, 2015).

Student privacy is a primary concern; thus, names of students, pictures, and personal information about students should not be allowed when students use online resources (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Hemmi, Bayne, & Land, 2009). Some universities also restrict direct communication between professors and students on personal media sites. Student access to social media also has to be bounded by concerns for privacy and protection for students (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009).

Professors must provide training for students in digital global citizenship, building knowledge and responsibility for safe technology usage (Lai & Kong, 2015; Lemoine, Hackett, & Richardson, 2017a). Social media is not a “one size fits all” learning technology, it can take many forms: professors conducting independent research, sending e-mails, text messages, or using the camera to record classroom proceedings but with proper use can accentuate learning for students in global universities (Joo, Joung, & Kim, 2015; Richardson, Brinson, & Lemoine, 2018).

7. Conclusions

The use of social networking and other forms of technology illustrate the global reach of wireless technology for everyone, but it is especially critical for those teaching and learning in today’s fluid global higher education environment. The increasing use of social networking in global colleges and universities and in daily use demonstrates the generational shift that is now impacting global higher education institutions.

The use of social media may not be a panacea, but it is a technique that can change learning in global higher education institutions for local and global students. Professors and administrators are challenged to use social media as one technique for increasing cyberlearning and to collaboratively ensure the best learning opportunities for 21st century global students. Social media has some built in concerns but can be used effectively when coupled with professional development for professors who incorporate cyberlearning into their classrooms. Cyberlearning is the key to current and future learning but social media is the force driving the innovation.

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