The Risks and Benefits of Social Media, and Its Place in Higher Education: a literature review

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Abstract—

I. INTRODUCTION

Finding your place socially at university can be very daunting, especially if you have been unable to find your way into any large social events, or onto any student-run social channels such as Discord etc, if any such things are in place at all. Failure to find such places can have a major impact on not only the university experience but also their mental health, as they can find themselves isolated. I plan to research into the question; could a social media platform embedded into higher education institutions be of benefit to students starting university by aiding their integration into their new social setting?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review investigates the risks and benefits attached to social media and the potential advantages that it could bring forward as a tool in higher education and pedagogy. Social media has made a massive impact on society in many ways, and using it one way or another has become commonplace in most of our lives, but do we fully understand the risks and advantages that it presents? This literary analysis of recent (2010-2022) research papers aim to explore findings on the possible side effects of social media in an effort to weigh the pros against the cons regarding the integration of social media with higher education (HE) and pedagogy. We hypothesize, that with proper application, social media could become a valuable tool within HE institutions and could help increase engagement with learning materials and courses.

A. Social Media in Higher Education

Liu [1] acknowledges that each social media platform comes with its own set of strengths and weaknesses and that the integration of such into pedagogy must be planned cautiously, ensuring that it is the strengths of the platform that are leveraged and not the potential distractions and difficulties that could hinder student learning. Liu talks of each social media platform being a tool, each in its own specific right and each with its designated purpose, so a one size fits all approach would only bring about nuisance. The author notes, for instance, that we could capitalize on Facebook's ubiquity and capabilities for collaboration. Liu [1] and Baruah [4] both talk about the integration of social media into higher

education and both conclude by sharing their thought on that it would be an advantage to implement social media elements as tools within higher education. Baruah further empowers Liu's point about different platforms providing different tools, by discussing how much easier collaboration becomes when using online facilities. Online mediums that provide features allowing users to co-draft documents, organize members, arrange meetings, spread information, and gauge opinion, all while having the capability to reach audiences all over the world. Wang concludes that there will be a greater capacity for groups to participate in collective action, going on to say that it is the hallmark of civil society. Kelm [3] also implemented social media into their course and noticed an increase in engagement from their students and reported a greater sense of team ethic between classmates. Kelm concluded with a note stating that the secret for educators is to observe how technology is used in everyday life and then implement that use into our education systems. Wang et al. [2] mention in the paper that there is a call for an approach to try and better balance the relationship between social media and academic study but pays a great deal of respect to the potential benefits that it can offer. The paper goes on to mention that students are very likely to be affected by social media, whilst it provides a world in which to make new friends and release pressure, it can absolutely impact students' lives and grades, calling for the aforementioned balance. Evans [5] encouraged students to interact with him and their peers through Twitter and found that the amount of Twitter usage was associated with increased student engagement. Course-related tweeting showed no evidence of being related to interpersonal relations between students and their tutors, and finally that Twitter usage did not relate to class attendance.

Williams [6] talks of the capabilities that social media brings forward as advantages in enhancing learner engagement in a very efficient way and reiterates the points provided by Junco et al [7]. The paper from Junco et al. follows a similar experiment to Evans and his 2014 paper [5] but in a slightly more robust and comprehensive fashion. This was achieved by using two separate groups, the first consisting of 125 students, half of whom were required to use Twitter while the other half were required to use Ning, whereas the participation of Twitter and Ning usage was voluntary for study group 2. The study recognised greater motivation towards engagement from study group 1 (those required to use Twitter and Ning). The paper concludes by stating that new technologies being incorporated into contemporary classrooms is an important development in an effort to produce more effective learning strategies and outcomes, while calling for contemporary students to improve

their capacity to engage in more self-directed collaborative practices in order to better take ownership of their learning.

Tripathi [8] observed that nearly two-thirds of faculty at their institution had used social media in a class session, some even posting content for students to further read outside of classes, which saw promising levels of engagement while other members of the faculty ask students explicitly to utilise social media as part of course assignments. On an end note the paper reaffirms that the presence of social media within HE is increasingly visible as instructors continue to further employ technology to enhance their teaching methods and promote active learning for students.

Haythornthwaite, Paulin, and Gruzd [9] discuss an overview of the measures and potential of a multi-method approach for studying learning through means of social media, based on a workshop held at the 2014 Learning Analytics and Knowledge conference. The paper pays vast respect to the implementation of social media into both teaching and learning being new, but still advancing rapidly. It is recognised that learners are already present on these channels and are already capable of information search and acquisition, learning community support, knowledge building, and engagement. In one of the final notes of the paper, there is mention that different settings of formality would call for different considerations to be made. In a formal setting, the intent of the instructor must be taken into consideration while examining the discussion formation comparatively against the desired communication and pedagogical outcomes. Whereas in more informal settings, we must consider the impact of things on a more societal level of mass learning and how the balance of the development of sustained learning communities is affected by massively distributed learning and the 'just-in-time learning' associated with social media exchanges.

B. The Effects of Social Media

The paper by Amedie [10] mentions that 'Ironically, social media is in effect turning us into one of the most antisocial generations, yet. The paper talks about the connection between social media and anxiety – It states that social media causes depression and anxiety in two ways. Chronic stress causes depression and anxiety. Being constantly alert for new social media messages, to your instinctive fight or flight limbic system, is the same as being on continuous alert for predators, which causes a release of the stress hormone cortisol. The second cause of depression anxiety is constantly trying to maintain an unrealistic and unachievable image of oneself on their chosen social network. Catfishing. The paper also mentions that social media can pave the way for criminal activity, by putting to use the freedoms offered by social media to hide their identity and engage in things like cyberbullying, cyber terrorism, human trafficking and drug dealing, though only talks in depth of cyberbullying, criminal and terrorist activities as they are the most common illicit activities. Amedie concludes that despite the positive benefit of rapid information sharing, social media enables people to create false identities and superficial connections, causes depression and is a primary recruiting tool for criminals and terrorists. It also mentions that the negative impacts of social media are rarely discussed, while the benefits are often emphasized.

Kuppuswamy and Narayan [11] recognise that social media sites provide function for individuals to create and maintain social ties, which can be of a great benefit in both academic and social settings. It is also observed that these same sites present risk to individuals' privacy, health, safety and professional reputations if the platforms are not used responsibly. In a 2012 paper by Tariq et al [12], the authors observed that more than 90% of college students use social media [13] and they found social media to be having a negative impact on education. A study conducted by W.Akram and R.Kumar [14] observes the both the negative and poositive impacts of social media on society and business. The paper notes the merits presented by social media while also recognising that it has some faults. Touching on social media within higher education, Akram et al discuss that social media allowing individuals share thoughts with others on the other side of the planet instantly is a massive positive, and in many cases this shared information then becomes easily available for many others to see and benefit from. The literature saw that social media helped towards simply being more prepared, stating that social is fundamentally about showcasing and taking part in current trends around the world, futher enabling students to plan or guage an idea of what might be expected of them. In contrast of those points, the paper outlines that social media could aid toward reduced learning and research capabilities. With a growing dependency on information being easy to find, this could hinder the development of research skills. In most cases people tend to use slang or abbreviated language on social media as most relationships between individuals tend to be interpersonal, coupled with an increased reliance on spellcheckers and autocorrection, this decreases their charge over the dialect and formal writing abilities. Another valuable note from the paper shines light on time wastage, while social media and the internet in general are a boon for education, it opens the door for many distractions if the right amount of self-discipline is not present. While social networking has improved the quality and rate of cooordinated efforts from students, it remains important to be responsible and understand the possible negative effects that social media brings forward. This consensus was very

III. METHODOLOGY

Talk about the methodology, all of the papers I have read so far that conduct any kind of data collection, all do so through an online survey, which greatly justifies my chosen method. I will conduct a within-participant study to survey a collection of first-year students on their experience of starting university. This will be around week 7 (after reading week). We will research how they found integrating into their new social environment and if they have been able to find their cohort socially. We will question how they have been coping mentally, whether they have attended any student union events, or engaged in any other activities such as group gaming sessions. We will also look into how current iterations of social media have played a role in their experience so far.

The same group of students will then be surveyed again through means of within participant study after week 7 of semester 2 after some exposure to my prototype platform to gauge if they think that such a platform would have been of a benefit to them when they started university.

We have chosen a within-participant study as opposed to A/B testing as we will not be subjecting testers to side-by-side versions of the platform with some form of variable changed. By design of the within-participant study, testers will be subjected to all features and functions of the website.

IV. Conclusion

The conclusion goes here.

Acknowledgments

Appendix
Proof of the Zonklar Equations

Use \appendix if you have a single appendix: Do not use \section anymore after \appendix, only \section*. If you have multiple appendixes use \appendices then use \section to start each appendix. You must declare a \section before using any \subsection or using \label (\appendices by itself starts a section numbered zero.)

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BIOGRAPHY SECTION

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