Social Media and Its Use in Education

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Dear Instructors and School Board,

I want to establish social media as a tool that can be utilized for elevating education instead of being completely dismissed from the classroom.

Introduction

Several books, shows, and other forms of media predict the destruction brought upon society by technology and social media in the future, solidifying the image of social media in particular as an enemy; however, I believe that social media is here to stay with no intention of ever leaving. Just in 2010, **73% of American teens with Internet access used social media websites**, and fast forward about nine years, **people**

between 18 and 29 years old reportedly consumed more news through social media than any older generation. With how integrated social media alreading is around high schoolers and college students, we should find a way of taking advantage of the best features of social media to elevate the classroom setting rather than banning it or ignoring its existence. As Brandon University's Associate Professor **Michael Nantais said, "Students are more than just students; their online lives are a part of who they are, and it cannot be ignored."**

As a college freshman, I personally experience the advantages of social media. Just a few days ago, after spending hours stressing over a problem in my computer science homework, I opened up a tab on my computer and typed in **Discord**. On the instant messaging site, I was able to interact with my study group and obtain answers to my questions, leaving the chat with a better understanding of the topic. I can tell a similar story to this one for the majority of my classes in the Summer and Autumn Quarters at the University of Washington. Despite being originally created for the gaming community and not for school, Discord has helped me easily connect with my classmates in a virtual school environment in ways that are impossible to replicate with only e-mails or Zoom private messaging. Observing how smoothly students integrated Discord into school life--with some instructors creating their own Discord chats for their classes or promoting already created chats--I began wondering how other social media platforms that are not specifically targeted to schools could be used for educational purposes, and if there would be more benefits than costs.

Before diving in any deeper, I want to define what "social media" means and what platforms I'm particularly thinking of, for there are no concrete or unanimous meanings of the word. To me, social media is any interactive site intended or sharing information and participating in communities with no limitations on its audience. I aim to focus on two of the most representative and popular social media sites: Twitter and Facebook.

Considering how social media provides the opportunities to easily connect with instructors, classmates, and students all over the world, education can become more personalized, thus more effective, as instructors become more of an approachable mentor rather than a distant stranger, and classmates can form study groups. Social media also furthers how students learn, for students can receive feedback or resources for classes from all over the world and learn the valuable skills needed to operate in this increasingly more digital world. However, involving social media in education poses several significant challenges, so strict limited use of social media in American high school and college classrooms as school-related communication tools, and a platform for teaching digital citizenship and sharing school-related projects or questions must be set.

1. Improving Connections

One of the biggest struggles through my high school career was feeling comfortable enough to look for teachers before or after class to ask questions. I always viewed them as very distant people who I didn't know very well. This image of instructors began to crack in my first quarter of college when I took a computer science class. The instructor helped create a chat for the class to build community and occasionally involved himself

in conversations too with a new account he created. Learning a little bit more of his interests and personality, I found the confidence to often attend his office hours and ask questions. Today, he's a mentor who I still contact to ask about CS in the industry and CS resources at my college.

My story isn't the only one, for in studies and surveys, both instructors and students have pointed to an improvement in connections through social media and noted the positive impacts on the process of learning. Around 2015, a six-month **study** of nine Canadian high school teachers implementing social media in their class as mostly communication tools. Though the study took place in another country, the observations made apply to all settings. Some teachers used Twitter or Facebook, the two platforms that I want to focus on, while some teachers chose more school-intended tools like Edmodo. After the study, teachers noted, "You connect more with the kids" and "You get to know [students] more as people." Students developed similar perspectives on teachers, for the teachers reported how they created new connections with students who previously didn't reach out. Having a more understanding relationship between students and instructors allows for more interesting and personalized lessons, for instructors could include students' interests or hobbies when teaching a topic. This convinces more students to involve themselves in class.

Another important aspect about learning is asking questions, and in the **study** of nine Canadian high school teachers, the teachers explained how social media established an "anytime, anywhere" access for school-related questions, so students too busy during the school day, or have an issue with homework could easily get in contact with

their teachers for contact. The teachers expressed how much they loved answering questions and teaching whenever they could. Questions help develop students' understandings, so having instructors as approachable as possible is essential. Ultimately, allowing social media use in the classroom contributes to an improved relationship between instructors and students.

2. Improving Learning

Social media acts like a **study hall constantly open**, which establishes a stronger study environment. Though the teachers in the previously mentioned study presented themselves as always accessible through social media, all instructors aren't realistically available at all times, so sites like Twitter and Facebook become very valuable. Making a post with a question takes almost no time, but a student can reach people all over the world. Students can **exchange ideas with other students** with completely different perspectives and backgrounds from one another, or **receive varying and diverse resources** to look at. Taking advantage of the global reach that social media has led to students with more open minds and developed understandings of topics.

The wide reach that social media has also convinces students to produce more quality work for assignments that will be posted online. Several schools are adding classes like Digital Communications and Multimodal Composition that teaches students how to create content for the Internet, so **they work on their projects more thoroughly, knowing that people all over the world will see it**. Also, the ways that social media allows people to easily leave praise, like likes and retweets on Twitter and thumbs up and reshares on Facebook, motivates students to continue producing content and

learning. In an **interview**, Eudora High School's Digital Communications teacher Nate Robinson expressed how his students "get so pumped when the click traffic is high because they know that hundreds of people are appreciating the work they did."

As our world rapidly advances to a more digital world, learning digital citizenship and skills on how to operate online becomes more important than ever. Allowing use of social media in the classroom provides opportunities for students to **learn how to navigate online responsibly and safely**. Knowing **how to use social media for learning and researching** is reportedly becoming more important for finding a job.

Issues to Address

Of course, we can't avoid the elephant in the room. Throughout middle and high school, many students were taught that social media is only terrible for our mental health and further isolates people. What students were taught about social media is unfortunately far from false. But with a rise in schools and universities including classes teaching how to properly use social media, more and more students learn how to responsibly spend time online, which helps prevent worsening their mental health. But to teach reasonable use of social media requires social media to be included in the classroom, but with defined time limits, which can teach students how to set time limits on social media use outside of school.

The most significant issues with tying social media and education together are protecting privacy and preventing connections between students and instructors from becoming too personal. The purpose of social media is sharing information about an individual's own life and interests, so many students wouldn't feel comfortable revealing

their accounts to other students, and especially instructors. Many instructors would feel the same as well. A potential solution is banning instructors and students from interacting with personal accounts, and, instead, create accounts for school-use only. A perfect example of an instructor creating such an account and being able to participate in social networking while having privacy is the instructor of my first college CS class. Additionally, if accounts are created with school emails, schools can more easily catch if there's suspicious activity. To further protect privacy, FERPA, which **prevents the sharing of student educational records without explicit permission**, must be heavily enforced to prevent the sharing of information like grades. Though students and instructors must keep FERPA in mind, involving social media in the classroom doesn't automatically violate it. Along with placing rules with how to avoid breaking FERPA, there must be rules and standards between how students and instructors communicate. Rules like preventing instructors and students from following each other's personal accounts, banning discussions about grades on social media, and limiting the amount of allowed topics to discuss will all help set a clear line between instructors and students while they can still get to know one another.

Conclusion

Social media can lead to an improvement in how students and instructors communicate and how students can learn. How schools decide to incorporate social media in today's classrooms may shape how newer technologies will be integrated into classrooms in the future.

Sincerely,

Jessica Burroughs

A College Student