**Benefits and distractions of social Media as tools for Undergraduate student learning**

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An undergraduate music professor received a last-minute invitation for her night class to attend a final rehearsal for an upcoming concerto performance. She emailed her students and also posted an announcement on Blackboard (the university’s teacher-student online network) telling her students to meet at the concert venue for a class that evening. Fewer than half of the students received the message on either source. Most of them, how- ever, had checked their Facebook accounts at last 30 times during the day. The above example illustrates how today’s students are known as digital natives (Ahern, Feller, & Nagle, 2016; Prensky, 2001). Most have grown up surrounded by various forms and uses of technology; they have been sending messages, playing games and accessing information since early childhood. They think, reason, learn and communicate digitally as easily they as do in their native language. As young adults, these natives receive most of their information and communication through social media, so they prefer social media— particularly Facebook—to email, Blackboard, Learning Suite (Ahern et al., 2016), or other less socially oriented and socially complex technology. Social media are changing the way they communicate with others, from close-by peers to individuals who may share their interests around the world (DeAndrea, 2019).

**Educational Benefits**

With its platforms for expression and connectivity, social media use can provide powerful enhancement for learning when professors and teachers find ways to incorporate it into their course instruction. Mark Zuckerberg wrote of his original intentions for creating Facebook, “What we’re trying to do is make it really efficient for people to communicate, get information, and share information” (quoted. by Locke, 2007, p. 1).

Sharing information and resources. On its simplest level, as in the example that opens this article, a teacher can quickly communicate course information to students. The use of social media has also demonstrated increased teacher-student and student-student interaction. Recent studies have mentioned teachers offering out-of-class help to students, delivering lectures and posting lectures by others, and engaging in discussions with students (Chugh, 2018). Students can also communicate with each other: to extend the example of the music rehearsal, a student familiar with the concerto could share information to help his classmates better appreciate it. Someone playing in the accompanying orchestra might give more personal insights—perhaps sharing an amusing early rehearsal story. Answers and extensions can be shared in real time, which is time efficient for all involved.

**Social Media as Distraction**

Along with benefits, difficulties can oc- cur, particularly as social media can distract students’ attention from their coursework and dull their motivation for academic instruction and activities. For example, having mentioned many advantages of social media for teaching and learning, the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning at Harvard University warned, “With those advantages, of course, come an equal and opposite set of possible disadvantages, and for many instructors the latter outweigh the former” (2018, n.p.). Of college students participating in a 2012 study, 54% felt that teachers would be shocked if they knew how much texting was going on during class (Tindell & Bohlander, 2012). These students studied out the class situation and were careful they would not get caught. Room size and arrangement, particularly large dance or dramatic performance rooms, are contexts students find convenient for sneaking texts and other social media use (see Tindell & Bohlander, 2012).

Students claim they are merely multi- tasking when they use Facebook in class for reasons other than lesson involvement; but research has found that this “multitasking” results in significantly lower test scores (Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013) and lower total grade point averages as well (Junco & Cotton, 2013). Professors have noted that in addition to checking Facebook, students play games, text or tweet, and engage in other digital activities. But the most extensive dis- traction offender seems to be texting. Tindell and Bohlander (2012) found that 92% of the students in their sample had sent or received text messages in class, and 30% admitted that they did so every day. Texting and similar distractions interfere with students’ ability for self-regulation, which affects their cognitive learning abilities that are necessary for processing information, which include, in addition to attention and working memory, both short- and long-term memory and metacognition; losing capacity in any of these areas impacts others (Kuznekoff & Titsworth, 2013).

**Study Purpose-----**Given the complexity and controversy surrounding this topic, more research on social media presence in college classrooms is desirable. We conducted a survey, specifically targeting Facebook and Instagram, regarding students’ use, distraction, and academic performance among undergraduate fine arts ma- jors, as social media use in this population has been largely unstudied.

**Results-** This survey study was undertaken to explore undergraduate students’ perceptions regarding their current level of social media use and the effects of such use on their learning.Results showed that Facebook was the most popular account, followed by Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter.

**Discussion**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine undergraduate fine arts students’ perceptions of the importance of social media use for learning, considering the degree to which students use social media accounts as part of their undergraduate learning and how such use may be distracting. Students’ responses concerning their social media accounts were consistent with the results reported by others (Internet Live Statistics, 2018; Smith, &Anderson, 2018): Facebook and Instagram were the two most popular social networking sites overall and the sites most used by individuals 25-34. Snapchat and Twitter (also ranked in the study) are becoming more popular specifically with the college-age users (Smith & Anderson, 2018). According to Smith and Anderson (2018) YouTube, used by 73% of U.S. adults and 94% of 18-24 year-olds, actually outranks Facebook’s 68%. YouTube is not categorized as traditional social media, despite having social elements, but since links to YouTube can be shared on Facebook, its usage may be relevant in considering relationships between college education and social media. What is concerning is that although they engaged with social media an average of 32 times per day, 52% of these students did not consider social media important to their education. This finding has important implications for both professors and students, as such social media use may be distracting students from their educational progress, rather than facilitating it as others have noted (Derek Bok Center, 2018; Tindell & Bohlander, 2012).

On the survey for this study, 39% of the students indicated that they had class assignments requiring them to use social media. An additional 10% noted that they use social media for educational purposes. Considering the ability of Facebook News to provide extensive and varied coverage of current worldwide happenings professors teaching courses in news media would likely find infinite ways of having students critique examples of coverage and create articles and scripts based on facts and viewpoints they have learned.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this study was to add to the research base on possibilities for social media to enhance classroom learning in higher education, without neglecting its potential to distract. Previous research has introduced a considerable variety of possible benefits, along with some sobering recognition of possible losses if social media use is not thoughtfully instituted and controlled. Digital natives are arriving at college with lifestyles centered on navigating social media websites and staying connected online. Some of their professors are also natives; some may still have immigrant status, being adept at using functions they need and want but less “organic” and “authentic” about having life immersed in this culture. Both benefits and risks must be considered by both in a cross-cultural exchange they can accept as agreeable and appropriate.