VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TODAY'S CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Purpose and Methodology: *The purpose of this article is to present information regarding the use of social media in the classroom, including reasons teachers should actually teach the use of social media. A systematic content analysis resulted in the synthesis of material from journal articles and websites dated 2009-2012.* **Findings:** *Most sources presented positive reasons social media should be taught in the classroom. Students will benefit from the knowledge of how to use social media as well as from other workplace skills such as collaboration and creativity. The most popular types of social media were briefly discussed with reasons for including them in the classroom. Conclusions Business educators have the responsibility to help students use social media responsibly. In addition to teaching students to use social media, teachers have the opportunity to help students increase other workplace skills.*

Introduction

Social media (2012), according to Merriam-Webster, is "forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)" (p. 1). The term was first used in 2004, according to Merriam-Webster (2012). Some of the platforms for electronic communication which are considered to be social media include the following: Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn, SlideShare, and Flickr. Blogs, wikis, video, and podcasts are also considered to be forms of social media that may be used in the classroom.

Controversy abounds regarding the value of teaching and/or using social media in the classroom at all educational levels. Many feel that social media has no place in the classroom. Others feel that social media should be taught and used in the classroom. And, finally, others fall somewhere in between these two opinions. "In the early 1990s, the Internet was the topic of a similar debate in schools" (Kessler, 2010, p. 1). So, the debate of whether something should be used in the classroom is certainly not a totally new type of concern about a new concept or technology. Most business and education references found in a search for information about social media presented reasons for including social media in the classroom. Therefore, most of this article will also present the positives of teaching and using social media in the classroom.

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Purpose

The purpose of this article is to present information regarding the use of social media in the classroom at all educational levels, including reasons teachers should actually teach the use of social media. Information was found with a literature review of journals as well as websites. Because of the subject matter, only sources from 2009-2012 were used. A systematic content analysis resulted in the following synthesis.

"A recent Pew Research Center report shows that 73 percent of teens between the ages of 12 and 17 use social networking" (Jackson, 2011, p. 1). Yet, many of these teens do not know how to use social networking in the ways employers expect or need. Therefore, this lack of knowledge of how to use social media professionally is a reason for teachers to teach students the professional use of social media. Two skills often identified by employers as missing from job applicants are the ability to work with others and skills needed to compete in the global economy, including the use of social media (Swan, 2012).

Educators in general, and especially business educators, have the opportunity to help students develop social media skills that will prepare the students for the real world. According to DeCoskey (2011), "If schools made social media professional development mandatory among teachers and then asked them to incorporate that into their classroom activities, we could begin preparing students as early as elementary school to one day engage a global community" (p. 1).

Some schools lack the technology to be able to include instruction on social media. Lack of funds for technology and/or technology teachers is but one reason the use of social media is not taught. Due to some news stories regarding the misuse of social media, some schools do not allow the use of social media in the classroom. Bullying, sexual predators, and varied criminal activities have been connected to social media. However, banning the use of social media in the classroom is "not protecting them today so much as handicapping them tomorrow" (Smith, 2010, p. 1). Social media, according to Smith "helps students learn how to collaborate" (p. 2). Learning to collaborate and be a team player is frequently at the top of the list of skills employers desire in their employees (Kessler, 2010). Teaching students to collaborate and be team players is just one of the benefits of teaching social media that has been identified.

In fact, social network theory is a popular topic in business and political arenas (Sacks & Graves, 2012). "Social network theory examines specific dynamics within webs of interrelationships among people and firms" (Sacks & Graves, 2012, p. 81). Since social media is such a new topic in general, it is surprising that social network theory has gained such interest and popularity. Employees of the future will be expected to know how to use social media in ways to take advantage of the concepts of social network theory (Sacks & Graves, 2012).

Many teachers at all educational levels are already using social media in and out of the classroom. Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) found that "over 90% of all faculty are using social media in courses they're teaching or for their

professional careers outside the classroom" (p. 3). They also found that "…nearly two-thirds of all teaching faculty have used social media in their class sessions…30% have posted content for students to view outside class" (p. 11). "Over 40% of faculty have assigned students to read or view social media as part of course assignments, and 20% have assigned students to comment on or post to social media sites," according to results from the Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane survey (p. 12). Educators are becoming involved with social media. What about businesses?

Value of Social Media to Businesses

"While marketers understand the importance of a channel that now accounts for 1 in every 7 minutes spent online, many are challenged to quantify its effectiveness," according to Andrew Lipsman, ComScore's vice president of industry analysis (Tam, 2012, p. 2). Yet, according to many, social media is the way many people communicate. In fact, according to Hutton and Fosdick (2011), "…social networks now have surpassed all other means of keeping in touch with people, even outstripping face-to-face contact in 2009" (p. 567).

"Social media is changing the parameters of how people and organisations interact and operate," according to Swan (2012, p. 1). "Social media offers massive opportunities to engage with customers, get more word of mouth, interact with a larger audience, present the 'human' side of your business, and get noticed online," and "…social media nothing more than word of mouth amplified," were also identified as benefits of social media by Swan (2012, p. 1).

Another benefit of social media to businesses is that social media is available to all businesses, both small and large. "Most areas of social media require the investment of time and not money, making it a level playing field to be noticed" (Yell, 2011, p. 1). Many forms of social media are free and do not require the business to purchase more equipment/technology.

Hutton and Fosdick (2011) expressed the importance of social media in "…brands themselves directing more marketing effort to engaging their products and services with consumers through social media" (p. 569). Hutton and Fosdick also stated that "…social media have allowed marketers to interact with their consumers in unprecedented ways" (p. 569). Marketing a product/service is often dependent upon businesses interacting with as many consumers as possible. New and unique marketing strategies may help businesses increase their return on investment (ROI) for marketing time and money.

> Finally, Stokes (2011) identified several ways social media are being used by businesses. New social media tools like blogs, wikis, and online social networks are transforming nearly every facet of society. Businesses solicit customer feedback through blogs. Marketers use social networks to build communities around products or services. Comment features in online newspapers have turned columns into conversations. (p. 1)

Businesses appear to be using every form of social media to increase their opportunities to communicate with customers or potential customers. Since social media are being used by businesses, the next question might be how do employees of these businesses learn to use social media? Educators have the opportunity to teach students to use social media responsibly (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011; Sacks & Graves, 2012).

Reasons Educators Should Teach the Use of Social Media

All of the benefits to businesses identified above indicate reasons students need to learn to use social media so they will have skills that are important to businesses. Another big reason for including social media instruction was identified by Haley (2012). "Among the many benefits for including social networking in courses are active student learning and high engagement in the process. High engagement leads to high motivation, which naturally leads to fewer discipline problems in the classroom" (p. 109). Haley went on to say that "…social networking gives students a sense of belonging to a group and gives each student a voice. Students are able to develop communication, collaboration, and peer learning skills" (p. 109).

Phillips, Baird, and Fogg (2010) reported that "…students spend as much (or more) time online in an informal learning environment—interacting with peers and receiving feedback—than they do with their teachers in the traditional classroom" (p. 2). However, according to Stokes (2011), "Despite all the rhetoric about 'digital natives,' some students aren't facile with technology and many more struggle with understanding how to communicate effectively in these new spaces" (p. 1). Jackson (2011) also found a difference in the use of social media based upon household income. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds had not had as much exposure to social media. Therefore, educational institutions at all educational levels have the opportunity to provide social media exposure to those who may not have had the opportunity for exposure outside the classroom.

So, even though students may be using social media in their own personal lives, there is still a need for teachers at all educational levels to include social media in the classroom instruction (Jackson, 2011). In fact, Phillips, Baird, and Fogg (2010) expressed that

> …in the 2010 U.S. National Technology Education Plan, Transforming American Education: Learning Powered by Technology, the U.S. Department of Education calls for applying the advanced technologies used in our daily personal and professional lives to our entire education system to improve student learning. (p. 2)

According to Stokes (2011),

> Even if remarkably high percentages of students report using technology, it doesn't mean they know what they are doing….To prepare students for the

world they will inherit, students need adult guides and mentors willing to create online learning environments that allow students to rehearse for future performances in social media environments. (p. 1)

Educators can serve as these guides and mentors. "Educators can't effectively prepare students for navigating these new online worlds without bringing students there. Students who can navigate and contribute to social media can make their voices heard in these new forums. Students who don't learn to navigate these spaces will be deficient in the labor market and in the civic sphere" (Stokes, 2011, p. 1)

A number one priority for students upon graduation, if not before, is to find a job. "Using social media professionally could boost employability chances in this tough economic climate" (Swan, 2012, p. 2). Ability to use social media as businesses require might be the key to getting a job; or not having the ability to use social media might be the reason a person is not able to find a job. Social media creates a collaborative opportunity for students, which prepares them to work in teams on the job (Kessler, 2010). Teamwork has frequently been identified as an important skill for employees.

Students with social media skills will be better prepared to find and get jobs. "Students need to know how to use it not just for jobs, but also to shape their online presence and convey the skills they have with ease. The demand for employees to be digitally literate in business environments is rising" (Swan, 2012, p. 1).

Phillips, Baird, and Fogg (2011) stated that "Now with the explosion of social media, educators can be part of a larger conversation with young people about digital citizenship and online behavior" (p. 1). In other words, this is an opportunity for educators to be on the cutting edge of providing instruction related to the appropriate use of social media.

The benefits of social media even extend to student achievement. According to DeCoskey (2011), "when students are participating in activities online, they're more likely to be engaged, and achievement rates rise" (p. 2). Blankenship (2011) reported that social media provided many benefits to students including "greater engagement, greater interest, students taking more control and responsibility for their education" (p. 40). All of these benefits are important to a successful career and life.

As is true with almost everything, there are some negatives related to the use of social media. Some of the main negatives will be discussed in the next section.

Negatives of Social Media

There have been several news reports of misuse of social media (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011). Stories about inappropriate relationships and cyberbullying have been reported (DeCoskey, 2011). Phillips, Baird, and Fogg suggested that while a student (2011) "might encounter inappropriate content or sexual predators online," this danger may be exaggerated (p. 1).

Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) discussed some of the issues related to privacy and integrity. They also reported from their Pearson faculty survey that a near majority of faculty surveyed believed social media took more time than it was worth. Yet, in the same survey, faculty reported a strong belief that social media had value for classroom use.

Given the possibilities of social media misuse, teachers have the opportunity to discuss the appropriate use of social media. Teachers have the opportunity to guide students in being respectful and courteous to people online as well as in other settings. The following sections present information about several of the more popular platforms and forms of social media.

Social Media Forms and Platforms

Blogging/Chat/Instant Messaging

Although blogs, chat, and instant messages are different, they provide some of the same benefits for teachers and students. Blogs/chat/instant messages can be used to motivate students to write. They know that others besides the teacher will read their work and will often spend more time thinking about what they write (Kessler, 2010).

"Blogs can be a review or extension of a classroom discussion," according to Haley (2012, p. 112). "There is strong, empirical, circumstantial evidence to indicate microblogging is helping fuel the flourishing and exciting phenomenon of media meshing. Meshing occurs where consumers actively use two media—with at least one being an Internet-enabled mobile device—together to enhance their total media experience," (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011, p. 570). Teachers can provide opportunities for students to learn how to use blogging in a professional manner so they are prepared to use blogging in their future professional endeavors.

Chat/Instant messaging can also be used as a way to extend classroom discussion or review (Kessler, 2010). Although these types of social media take time for the teacher in terms of reading and monitoring, the benefits to students' learning both for the classroom and for their future business success makes the time worthwhile.

Facebook

Facebook is the most visited site for personal use (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011). Facebook has a place in the classroom, as well. Facebook "can provide students with the opportunity to effectively present their ideas, lead online discussions, and collaborate," as well as "help you, as an educator, to tap into the digital learning styles of your students," according to Phillips, Baird, and Fogg (2011, p. 2).

Facebook also allows teachers to connect with colleagues, as well as teachers, parents, students, and even community members (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011). Since Facebook is visited so frequently by many, it seems logical to use it as a communication tool.

"Facebook can enhance learning inside the classroom and beyond," according to Phillips, Baird, and Fogg (2011, p. 1). Facebook users must be 13 or older, and it "complies with United States privacy laws, including the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act" (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011, p. 3). Although privacy laws cannot totally prevent a privacy violation, Facebook does what it can to protect users. Teachers should encourage students to report bullying and abusive comments (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011).

Facebook offers other opportunities for teaching many other concepts besides communication. "Using Facebook as an example of network size and quality allows students to balance the size of their professional network and the amount of time and energy that they want to spend maintaining it," (Sacks & Graves, 2012, p. 82). Facebook provides the teacher with the opportunity to get students' attention regarding other content besides just making a post in Facebook.

Google Docs

Google Docs can be used to help students learn to collaborate, according to Smith (2010). As stated earlier, the ability to work as part of a team is a desired skill by many employers. Google Docs is available to most users and is easy to use to get everyone involved in editing a document.

LinkedIn

Professional networking has received increased interest because of social media. The importance of professional networking is important to people looking for jobs as well as after they have jobs and are seeking input regarding their work. LinkedIn is the most used social media site for professional networking (LinkedIn, 2012). "The principle of social distance is one of the main contributions that LinkedIn provides for professional networking," (Sacks & Graves, 2012, p. 83).

Podcasts/iTunes

Teachers can create podcasts of recorded lectures or discussions (Haley, 2012). These podcasts can be used by students who missed class or by those who did attend as a review of the material.

Students and teachers may also use podcasts/iTunes which have already been created to supplement work they are creating.

Smartphones/Tablets

Many students own smartphones and bring them to class. Teachers may see them as a distraction for the students and possibly even as a tool for cheating. As a result of these negatives, some schoolboards/schools/teachers have created policies banning the use of smartphones/tablets in the classroom (Shim, Dekleva, Guo, & Mittleman, 2011).

According to Kessler (2010), "69% of American high schools have banned cell phones, according to figures compiled by CommonSense Media" (p. 5). However, cell phones can be used to communicate with students and parents. Furthermore, applications (apps) have been created for use on smartphones/tablets that can be beneficial in the classroom. Some of these apps may even continue to be used in the workplace.

Some schools are using tablets as a means of providing textbooks to students. "McGraw-Hill appears to be the first leading textbook publisher coming out with a digital-only textbook for K-12 level of education" (Shim, Dekleva, Guo, & Mittleman, 2011, p. 661).

Twitter

Twitter is very popular because of the short messages of 140 characters or less. However, even though the messages are very short, "Twitter can be used to tap into a wealthy resource of professionals online" (Swan, 2012, p. 1).

One way teachers can teach students to use Twitter in a meaningful way is to use it for class discussion (Haley, 2012). Jackson (2011) reported that "when students were asked to answer questions using Twitter, they felt less pressure, even if the answer was incorrect" (p. 3).

Finally, "Twitter's speed and ease of use reflects the underlying principles of network diffusion and network complexity," according to Sacks and Graves (2012, p. 83). Thus, in addition to teaching the use of Twitter, teachers have the opportunity to teach students a theory which is based on a concept that will be beneficial to them in their future professional lives.

Wikis

Most students are familiar with and have even used Wikipedia to gather information. According to Shim, Dekleva, Guo, and Mittleman (2011), Wikis can be used to teach collaborative authoring, which is a valuable, virtual work skill.

Reciprocal authoring where the writing is virtually available for editing by all members of the group/team results in high-quality work, according to Shim, Dekleva, Guo, and Mittleman (2011). Learning to write collaboratively is a skill that will benefit students in their professional work.

YouTube/Videos

"Online video is by far the most common type of social media used in class and posted outside class for student use," according to Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011, p. 13). Teachers can use YouTube to share content with students. Students can also create their own videos (Haley, 2012). The opportunity to create a video provides the opportunity for students to show their creativity, which is also a requested skill by many employers.

Social Media Policy

"Good digital citizenship means thinking about the effects on others before passing content or sending messages. It also means standing up for anyone they may see being targeted by bullies—online or off" (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011, p. 5). In March 2010, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama made a message regarding the prevention of bullying. This message is available to show students to stimulate a discussion of the topic (Facebook.com/StopBullying. gov) (Phillips, Baird, & Fogg, 2011).

Schools should have a policy concerning the use of social media and business educators should be involved in developing the policy. Due to the dynamic nature of technology, the social media policy will need to be kept current. Groups such as the National School Boards Association recommend developing policies for the online safety of students and teachers (Haley, 2012). Also, the Children's Internet Protection Act requires an Internet safety policy. Many teachers have been required to attend training in how to help protect their students from potential Internet dangers.

Conclusions

As Sacks and Graves (2012) said, "Our goal as business communication teachers is to help students understand the dynamics behind popular social media, to use most effectively, and to avoid career-damaging misuses of these tools" (p. 84). The responsibility to help students use social media should be a goal for all business teachers. In addition to teaching students to use social media, teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to help students develop other workplace skills such as collaboration and creativity while teaching students to responsible and professionally use social media.

Several references included suggestions for how to incorporate social media into the classroom. In particular, Miller (2009a; 2009b) identified many websites, tools, and tips for teacher use.

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