

Integration of Education: Using Social Media Networks to Engage Students

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ABSTRACT

Any educator today will tell you that the strategies used in the classroom have evolved and changed with the access everyone has to technology. In a world with constant changes and shifts because of immediate access to information, the way course content is delivered must evolve and adjust to the new ways students learn.

Engagement of students in course content and reaching learning objectives are the key elements educators strive for in every course. Enter social media networks and the ability to leverage the user activity with these applications in education. Now, educators can provide content which engages students and meets learning objectives the way students want to learn. By reviewing social media networks: Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, Twitter, and Evernote, educators can position themselves to be as technology-savvy as today's students.

Keywords: Education, Technology, Engagement, Integration, Communications, Social Learning, and Social Networks.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has changed the way we communicate, perform research, and streamlines the access people have to learning. Using technology is no longer an option; today's learners must leverage their access and become proficient with the latest tools. This also raises the bar on the methods teachers must use to engage students, to retain, and apply key concepts in a global economy. According to McGraw-Hill, President of Higher Education, Brian Kibby, "Studying effectively – and with the right type of technology – is one of the best ways to ensure that students succeed in class; however, focus is the key!" (Belardi, 2013)

Students are comfortable in a dynamic, digital, and social world. In fact, their expectations embrace the wide range of ever changing technologies available for their online education, as well as, in the classroom. The technology savvy student's of this decade not only expect the use of social media, they seek it out! To avoid using technology for the sake of technologies existence, educators need to become as savvy as their students. By applying a model of social learning, educators can leverage new and social media in their classrooms with six of the largest globally utilized

social media tools: Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, Twitter, and Evernote.

2. SOCIAL LEARNING MODEL

The quality of learning depends on the usability of the device, social technology, and interaction to allow students to absorb information. Developing a social community is important to mobile learning, as illustrated below in Figure 1.

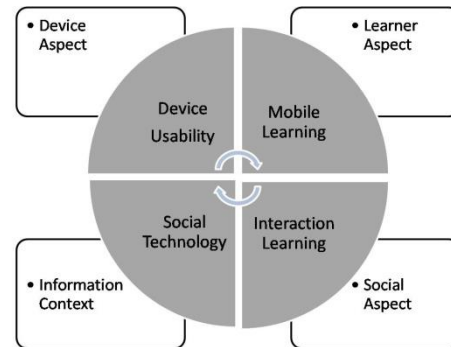


Figure 1: Model for evaluating social learning impact on educational achievement. (Leach, 2013)

What is social learning? It is a method of learning using "mobile devices (smart phones, tablets, or computers) to enable peer review through social media technology in eLearning. *Social media engages Internet users and social learning uses the power for education.*" (Leach, 2013) Today's learners embrace this method of learning because they are highly motivated to interact socially with their peers. As a new generation of learners, overlooks printed materials (I.e. books, newspapers, or magazines) and instead seeks online social platforms for learning this paradigm-shift seems natural. As of June 2014, the top three social media sites with active users are Facebook (1.28billion+ users), Twitter (1 billion users), and Google+ (1.6 billion users). So, being innovative in our approach to learning by incorporating some of these key social media sites in the classroom can leverage the engagement naturally seen by current users of this media.

Does It Work? The proliferation of social media users shows that young people around the world are eager to connect with their peers and are highly proficient at doing so in personal contexts. These developments in web technology can be used for educational purposes, particularly peer review; student's can engage and develop a sense of community with each other while reflecting on the key learning points in their courses. (Leach, 2013)





Students see the benefit of peer review, repetition strengthens their memory, and social learning with the available technology makes needed information easier to access. Our current learners do not use printed materials (I.e. a book, newspaper, or printed journal) as their starting point for information and engagement, but instead seek out online social platforms.

Students' learning English can utilize this new form of literacy to assist in developing writing skills. It is important to apply these strategies and keep practicing outside of class in a medium which further engages the students and prepares them for the constantly growing mobile and social web technologies. (Leach, 2013)

3. IMPLEMENTING SOCIAL LEARNING

Social learning applies the usability of social media to engage learners. Some of the most commonly used social media applications can be integrated into ground or online classrooms to promote achievement. By applying the following tools in core learning areas, educators can capitalize on users natural habits with these tools.

So, how widely used are some of the most common networks? In Figure 2, the chart illustrates the monthly activity and total users per social network:

Social Media Statistics - 2014			
Social Media	Monthly Active Users	Total Users	Facts
	1.28 Billion	Still counting!	"There are more than 50 Million Facebook pages."
	40 Million	70 Million+	"80% of Pinterest users are female."
	200 Million	Still Counting!	"50 Million users signed up to Instagram in the last six months."
	6.7 Million+	"77% of Internet users read blogs."	"23% of Internet time is spent on blogs and social networks."

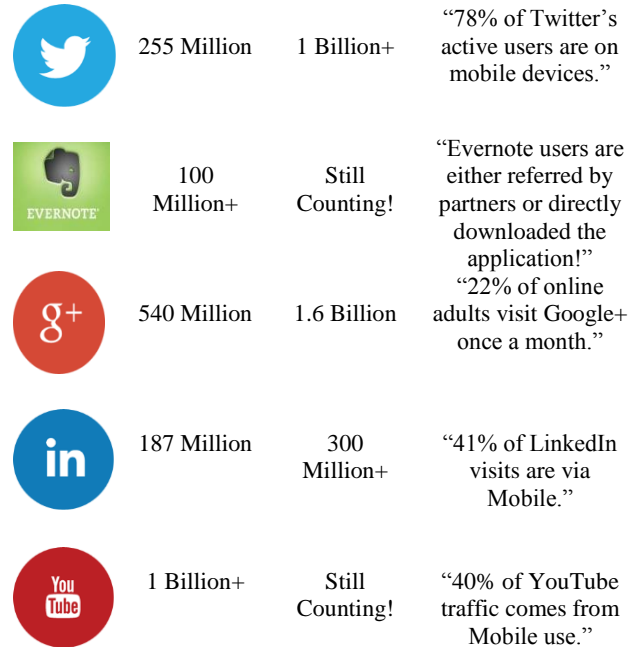


Figure 2: Chart of the monthly activity, total users, and facts about some of the top social media sites. (Ajmera, 2014)

Facebook

As illustrated in Figure 2, Facebook is the largest social media network in the world with "1.28 Billion active users" (Ajmera, 2014) and "more than seventy-five percent of United States college students and young professionals logging onto their Facebook page at least once a day." (EdTechReview, 2014)

As today's students develop their careers academically, through a Facebook page they can build a professional network in their field globally. By creating a professional profile, students can develop resources in their field of study to complete course projects, papers, and network while searching for jobs.

Educators can use Facebook to interact with students on key classroom ideas, while emphasizing more difficult concepts by providing additional examples. More importantly incorporate a social media students already use to engage and further develop a sense of community with the entire class.

Pinterest

Today, one of the fastest growing social media networks is Pinterest. In the United States, this application is a force to be leveraged because Pinterest ranks among the top three social media sites visited. (Wasserman, 2014)

How does it work? Users download the application free on their computer, tablet, or smart phone and start adding "Boards" or similar to folders. Each item you pin has an Internet link to a story or details on the topic reviewed. People pin anything from fashion, recipes, videos, entertainment, or educational boards. The user can customize their boards, create as many boards as you wish, and organize pins by board.

Educators can use Pinterest to perform research in K-12 or higher education for classroom or online applications. By establishing an instructor account, boards can be used to collect resources on weekly topic being discussed and students can review pins and save relevant pin to their own boards. Professionals can share ideas with other users that follow your boards in your field of study; with an estimated active user base of 40 million people (Ajmera, 2014), users can further develop a professional network. *Some professors, use Pinterest in the classroom* to inspire students, increase student participation, and help students tell stories. (Kompleks Creative, 2014) Additionally, educators could create boards for specific classes, focus groups, or “topic by week” and the boards are used as supplemental reading material.

Instagram

Instagram is a social network based around sharing pictures and fifteen-second videos which can be posted to other social media sites.

One example, an educator could have a student review a book and create an Instagram video to share two key points they learned. Even better, if the student is learning English, this application can help them develop an “academic vocabulary.” (Ferralazzo, 2014) Another way is by having students create photo essays based upon a list of themes or concepts from the curriculum, using ‘photo prompts’ to engage students in writing responses based upon the photos, or for taking pictures of a “step-by-step process” while adding a caption to each photo. (Laponis, 2013) The way Instagram becomes integrated into course content remains limited by instructor’s imagination, but provides a medium for students to connect and engage with course concepts.

Blogs

Blogs are a straightforward way for educators and students to engage. These simple web pages support a single or multiple users. From the educator’s standpoint, blogs provide a vehicle for extra support in the classroom, including reference materials, tutorials, videos and more. Blogs can illustrate up-to-date information for educators to share with classes by providing one blog for each course taught. The content of the blog would be controlled by the instructor. Additionally, blogs can be used for commentary, news and announcements, supporting research projects, learning journals, learning communities, and collaborative authoring (Lingard, 2014).

Specific blogs can be created to support each class, every cycle taught, while serving a different purpose. From the student’s standpoint, sharing feedback about the class in a less formal format may increase their participation without fear of being critiqued. In this way, the blog serves as a ‘tool’ to promote collaboration. Students may connect with their peers beyond the classroom or use yet another blog as the basis for a group project or study group.

Why use blogs rather than asynchronous discussions? According to Lane Clarke and Lenore Kinne’s research (2012), they determined that students were more engaged in the class and

formed closer connections to classmates through the use of blogging verses asynchronous discussions.

Twitter

What can you do for your students with a limit of 140 characters? Twitter used in the classroom helps to engage students and educators in the learning process. This media serves as a “back channel” for instructors after class. The tool can be used to share resources, promote brainstorming, extend class discussion, and to promote student sense of community.

For example, students could be assigned to curate their own customized reading lists on particular topic. An educator may use Twitter to create and update their class reading or news lists. As a side benefit, creating a brief posting on Twitter helps students to develop concise writing skills when expressing ideas on course content.

When used in combination with a tool, such as Poll Everywhere (www.PollEverywhere.com), educators may quiz students in class or after class to gain feedback or help focus teaching strategies. (Inge, 2013)



Figure 3: Kelly Tenkely’s (2010), “Bloomin’ Peacock” which illustrates how digital tools can align with the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy.

By applying strategies for using Twitter to align with the different levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy (see Figure 3), educators can develop specific classroom content using best practices. Examples for each level include: (1) *Creating* a Twitter profile for a historical figure, (2) *Evaluating* a “tweet” and writing about it, (3) *Analyzing* (compare/contrast) the use of Twitter as compared to other social media, (4) *Applying* the use of Twitter to examine popular trends, (5) *Understanding* a poem or short story by tweeting the main idea in 140 characters or less, and (6) *Remembering* content by rewriting tweets in your own words. (Barnes, 2013)

Evernote

Evernote is the digital hoarder’s tool for content curation. You, your colleagues, students, and student groups can save a collaborative collection of web sites, pictures, references, snapshots, and any other digital assets in organized folders. The beauty of Evernote is that you can access the content on any

device. In fact, you can share the resources with others, too. Common uses include: (1) Clipping and tagging articles for citation, (2) Selecting web artifacts and carefully categorizing them for later use, (3) Organizing content into folders for the highly visual learner, (4) Developing original character sketches from links, photos, and other assets.

Evernote assists in facilitation of the writing process. For instance, it is possible to: (1) Create an outline as a single note, (2) Create a new note for each main section, (3) Link each section to its note, and (4) Build on what you develop to complete the paper. Evernote is fully collaborative with other people given access, so educators and/or students can use this tool. The beauty of Evernote is how simple it is to use and collaborate with others. (ScholarshipExperts.com, 2014)

4. CONCLUSIONS

In a technology driven world, change is a constant. Educators are finding that technology has disrupted the decades of methods strategies that worked for learners and today's students expect more engaging activities to apply course content. So, the answer is clear. As educators, embracing technology and using social media networks to leverage engagement these applications see can improve the delivery of content and retention.

Some of the future research around social media networks could evaluate the evolving technology-driven classroom, as well as, the apparent paradigm-shift to a 'student directed' learning style. After reviewing Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Blogs, Twitter, and Evernote networks, the need for instructors to apply them in education is obvious to remain as technology-savvy as the students being served.

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