

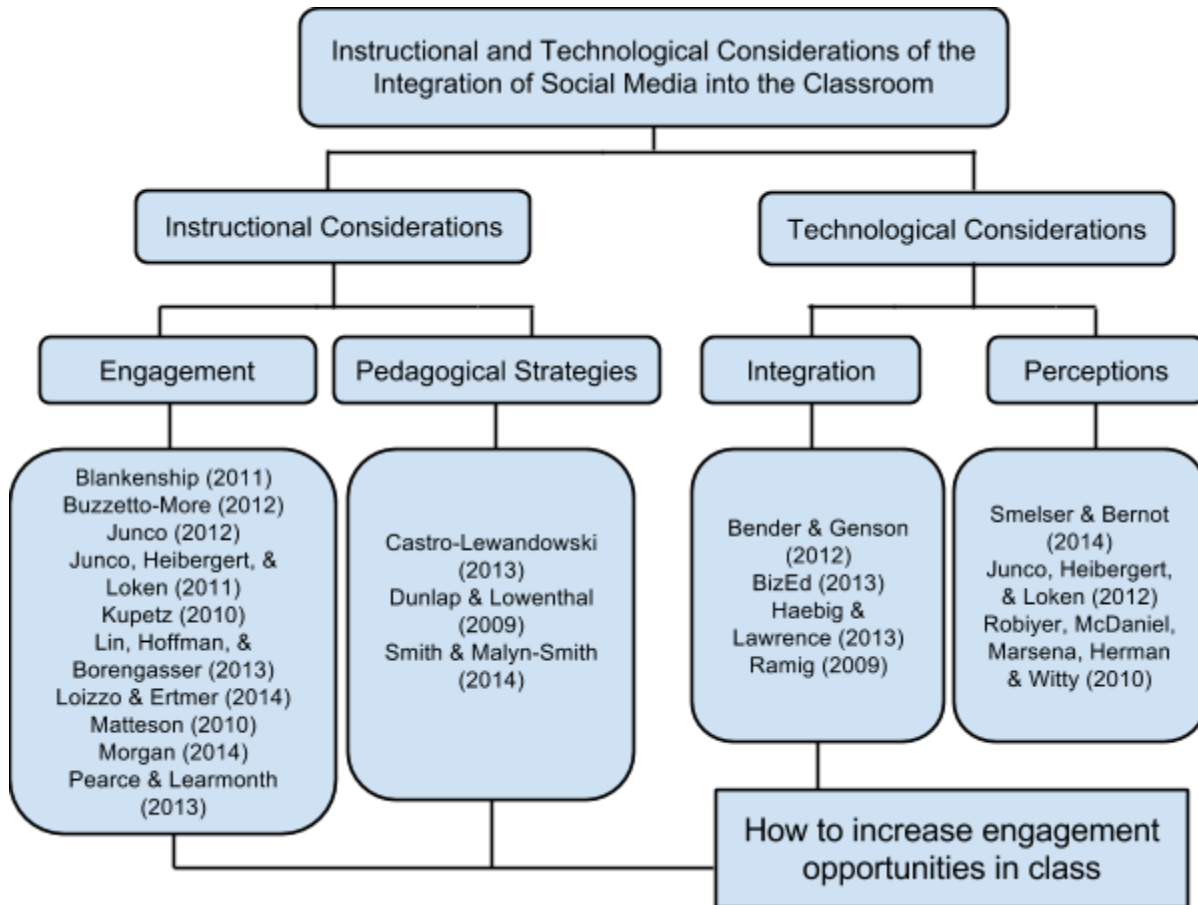
Utilization of Social Media to Create Engagement
Opportunities and Increase Material Retention

Robert H. Wiltbank, III

@RobWiltbank

Fort Hays State University

Literature Map



Technological Considerations

Perceptions.

A shift in perception must occur at the faculty level with regards to social media sites and how they can be utilized and implemented in the classroom to facilitate learning and instruction. These networks are so commonly associated with social activities and entertainment that the knee-jerk reaction is to shun their use in the classroom. 73% of faculty cited lack of interest on the part of the instructor as a primary impediment to integrating social media into their lesson plan (Robiyer, McDaniel, Marsena, Herman & Witty, 2010), but students are ready and willing to explore the use of social media in the classroom, and instructors must be willing to modify their instruction to engage students.

Ultimately, instructors are looking for improved outcomes, better content, and material retention. Using social media in the classroom must be structured around educationally relevant criteria in the development of instruction and course content, and requires active engagement by the instructor to fully realize the benefit of utilizing the platform. A 2012 study by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken determined that the “integration of Twitter into the course based on a theoretically driven pedagogical model and requiring students to use Twitter are essential components of improved outcomes” (p. 279).

It is prudent to evaluate the perception of social media in the higher education classroom, simply because its common purpose is not educational. In providing valuable, relevant content, social media can benefit instruction as an additional source of information. Because the format of networks such as Twitter can be obtuse for facilitating academic discussion, Smelser & Bernot suggest that instructors “link course topics with current news,” while tempering its use for active discussion (2014, p. 26).

In a study conducted by Smelser & Bernot, undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty were polled about social media network usage and asked about their perception of usefulness. The results show that the age of the students correlates to the usage and perceived usefulness of social media in instruction, where 55% of undergraduate students use three or more social media networks as opposed to 19% of graduate students, and 12% of faculty; in terms of helpfulness of improving discussion and concept clarity, 41% of undergraduate students feel using social media would be helpful, but only 19% and 18% of graduates students and faculty respectively perceived that benefit (2014).

Integration.

The use of technology in the classroom affords educators the opportunity to engage both students and other instructors in the educational process. “Teachers are constantly looking for activities or information to help enhance or engage lessons and activities” (Bender & Genson, 2012, p.20), and social media networks, Twitter in particular, are excellent resources for the discussion of such ideas.

Ensuring that our students are marketable, productive, and can work collaboratively once they enter the workforce is of paramount concern in higher education. Regardless of whether the target industry is information in metropolitan New York, or agriculture in rural Kansas, understanding how modern technology works and can benefit the student is a critical component of graduate competencies and can be taught through social media. Reaching students on both an informative, intellectual, and education level has become inexorably tied to technology (Bender & Genson, 2012).

While there have been many hurdles to the adoption of social media in higher education, according to a survey reviewed by BizEd's article, *Educators' Use of Social Media Evolves*, 33% of instructors are using social media in the classroom, and 80% are using online video (2013). The survey also showed a decrease in concerns about privacy, the separation of professional and personal social media accounts, and integrity of academic submissions. Instructors are looking more at opportunities to provide instruction when students are most willing to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant and interesting. A disciplinary gap was also recognized in BizEd's article where those who taught classes revolving around the humanities were more apt to integrate social media into their content than those in mathematics, computer and natural sciences. This can be attributed to the logic-based reasoning required in science and mathematics.

Having claimed the crown for being the best search engine and email providers in the world, Google looked at online document development and cloud-based storage solutions. Partnering with businesses and educational institutions to recoup their investment, Google provided the means to integrate the users of a college into Google Apps. Turning their sights towards the realm of social media, Google released Google+ which provides the ability for the sharing of thoughts, resources and documents in defined communities. Used in concert, especially with single sign-on integration, Google's suite of products make for an incredibly effective learning environment where students can collaborate and learn.

Google Hangouts affords students and instructors the opportunity to share resources and desktops through a videoconference for free. Having the ability to instruct using relevant technology is of particular importance in preparing a student for the technical workforce. "We think that as a part of Google Apps for Education, Google+ meets [learning] criteria and

provides students and educators with a place to engage in meaningful interaction using real-world tools” (Haebig & Lawrence, 2013, p. 26).

By the sixth grade, about 40% of students will have some form of experience with social networking tools through use at home or at a friends house; by high school, approximately 90% of students will be familiar with social media networks (Ramig, 2009). Facebook and Twitter can be used to continue discussions that weren’t wrapped up in class and structure the discussion to keep the focus on the topic at hand. As we see these students enter institutions of higher education, efforts must be made to adapt instruction to how students are living and learning.

Instructional Considerations

Pedagogical strategies.

In terms of using social media as a critical thinking tool, particularly in the realm of writing and storytelling, the use of digital curation tools such as Pinterest should be evaluated. According to Castro-Lewandowski’s *Pinterest in the Writing Classroom*, 53% of Pinterest users “store images of things they dream of having” (2013, p. 1). By viewing resources on the Internet, and selectively group and arranging them, the student is analyzing the content and value of source material and categorizing it not only by topic, but also where that material would fit into their assignment. Castro-Lewandowski that this type of storytelling promotes a “recognition of assumptions, deductions, inductions, interpretations, and evaluations of arguments” (2013).

It is important to note that student-centric engagement and interaction need to be the focus of instruction delivery. Learning is a very human activity, and integrating social media into the lesson plan takes this into account. “When we design and teach online, we build in

authentic and relevant opportunities for our students to interact and connect not only with the content, but also with the instructor” (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

While many institutions of higher education spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on Learning Management Systems (LMS) such as Blackboard or Canvas, the use of social media networks facilitates just-in-time social interactions. In addition, it provides opportunities for students to engage with instructors and other students, both inside and outside of the classroom. By extending the instructional opportunities afforded by an LMS, we are able to increase the potential for designing and integrating learning opportunities for the student.

Teachers can use social media in the classrooms to effectively communicate and engage the students in their classes. The same tools and platforms that students use on a day-to-day basis can be leveraged to distribute information, answer questions, communicate about assigned work and convey any schedule changes for the class (Smith & Malyn-Smith, 2014). The different networks can be utilized for different things: closed communities can be created for class-restricted communications, LinkedIn could provide insight into the professional developments of a business, and Twitter can be used to obtain up-to-date news on current events. Establishing a social media presence can also create a reputation of being a technologically enabled instructor or institution.

Student engagement.

According to a survey conducted by the Babson Survey Research Group in connection with New Marketing Labs and Pearson, 30% of higher education faculty use social media networks to communicate with students, and more than 52% use videos as teaching aids for their classroom activities (Blankenship, 2011). Outside of inspiring creativity in the way instructors develop their lessons, using social media also offers greater opportunities for

engagement, greater interest on behalf of the student, and giving the student more control and responsibility for their education.

As an instructional tool, implementing social media into instruction offers five interconnected literacies: the ability to know where one's attention should be when navigating, being an effective participant in discourse, how to communicate and work collaboratively, understanding the network and how your privacy is affected, and how to consume information critically (Blankenship, 2011). While it may be more work on the part of the instructor to properly and effectively use social media, Blankenship states that it is an inescapable truth that social media will be an ingrained part of our future.

Incoming freshmen classes have grown up with technology and are digital natives who use technology-based communications solutions, whether it be in the form of text messaging or social media networks. Using social media technologies as a pedagogical tool, 61% of polled students indicate agreement that it is beneficial to engagement (Buzetto-More, 2012). Students generally agreed that Blackboard served as a sufficient platform for assignment distribution, collection, and collaboration. Since Blackboard is, in and of itself, a social learning resource, social media networks, in conjunction with learning management systems have proven to be effective social learning tools.

From a pedagogical standpoint, some social networks may be better suited at developing different skills and knowledge than others. A 2012 study conducted by Reynol Junco found that Facebook is better suited at improving psychosocial outcomes, whereas using Twitter can lead to better academic outcomes. While the outcomes of the study showed both positive and negative indicators that Facebook improved student engagement, Junco observed that, "Higher education administrators, faculty and staff have an opportunity to help

students use Facebook in ways that are beneficial to their engagement and, by extension, to their overall academic experience” (2012, p. 170).

Not all social media networks are equally as effective in providing opportunities for student engagement. According to Junco, Heiberger, and Loken, both students and faculty were highly engaged in the academic process when utilizing Twitter, and actually increased the participation of the instructor (2011). Research found that tweets relating to the relationships or connections a student discovered to particular readings were better explored on Twitter since such individual reflections would not have been feasible to cover during classtime discussion. Controlled experimental evidence shows that using Twitter in an educationally relevant manner can increase student engagement and improve student success.

While it is unknown what the long-term impacts of social media in education will be, historically, the effects of technology have been overestimated. This may not be the case with social media. By using the same technology and tools that your incoming freshman class is using, an instructor is able to reach the student more effectively.

Social media provides opportunities for discussion, collaboration, research, and community building through several methods. Students are often “reluctant to raise their hands, particularly if a course is not taught in their native languages or if their cultures discourage engaging with the professor” (Kupetz, 2010), and social media provides the means for a student to consider a question, contemplate an answer, and enter the discussion without the same level of social or cultural bias. Participating in discussion through blogs, Twitter, or Facebook extends the time an instructor can engage with the student, particularly outside of class. Kupetz states that he’d “rather have their partial attention throughout the whole day

since it is all but impossible to have their undivided attention for even a few hours” (2010, p. 48).

Examining how participation is affected, in Lin, Hoffman, and Borengasser’s study *Is Social Media Too Social for Class*, research found that students enjoyed receiving tweets, but rarely retweeted or favorited messages (2013). While questions still remain as to the inherent distractions that come with social media and attempting to integrate it into an academic setting, mitigating factors come in the form of how the course is designed, and the interaction is modeled, and the lesson is scaffolded.

Although Loizzo and Ertmer’s article *10 Tips for Implementing Social Media in the Classroom* primarily revolves around the technical aspects of bringing social media into the classroom, advice is also offered in the area of adjusting teaching methodology based on student feedback. By “examining students’ insights about their social media experiences,” an instructor is able to “find the most effective way to implement the technology into your future lessons” (2014, p. 35).

Motivation to learn can be positively affected as well. Since students are participating in technology-rich activities outside of the classroom, we can increase our level of engagement by providing similar experiences inside of the classroom. “Social media is one way to encourage interaction and collaboration and increase content knowledge” (Loizzo & Ertmer, 2014, p. 35).

Methods of interacting with students and assignment research are enhanced when using social media. To help reinforce homework and classwork topics, a teacher can post a question for the students to answer on Twitter; critical thought and discussions can be fostered through this activity. Matteson also suggests having groups follow specific companies for a

month as they read information about them, and including that material as a current events source for their research (2010).

In addition to providing engagement opportunities and increasing the effectiveness of existing instruction, lessons can be designed around improving literacy and technology skills as well. Morgan reported that an instructor saw an increase in fluency, phrasing, editing and revising when using Twitter to communicate with others (2014). Students are more apt to consider their words and think critically about what they are writing because, “they have to publish the work for an authentic audience” (Morgan, 2014).

Being excited about the subject matter contributes to the overall interest a student carries. When students used Pinterest for the purpose of curating digital sources for an anthropology class, a study discovered that students were sharing and utilizing the sources both inside and outside of the classroom, including with family members (Pearce & Learmouth, 2013). Use of the social media platform in this instance helped develop a students understanding of the material and think critically about its relevance to the assignment.

References

- Bender, D., & Genson, J. (2012). Connect, network, create, share, and be productive with social media tools. *Agricultural Education Magazine*, 85(1), 19-20.
- Blankenship, M. (2011). How social media can and should impact higher education. *Education Digest*, 76(7), 39-42.
- Buzzetto-More. (2012). Social networking in undergraduate education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information, Knowledge, and Management*, Volume 7.
- Castro-Lewandowski, A. (2013). Pinterest in the writing classroom: How digital curation and collaboration promotes critical thinking. *The Common Good: A SUNY Plattsburgh Journal on Teaching and Learning*, (1).
- Dunlap, J. C. & Lowenthal, P. R. (2009). Tweeting the night away: Using twitter to enhance social presence. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2).
- Educators' use of social media evolves. (2013). *BizEd*, 12(1), 64.
- Haebig, C., & Lawrence, D. (2013). 'Hangout' with your students using google. *Learning & Leading With Technology*, 41(4), 26-28.
- Jacquemin, S., Smelser, L., & Bernot, M. (2014). Twitter in the higher education classroom: A student and faculty assessment of use and perception. *Journal Of College Science Teaching*, 43(6), 22-27.
- Junco, R. (2012). The relationship between frequency of facebook use, participation in facebook

activities, and student engagement. *Computers & Education, Vol 58, Issue 1, pp 162-171.*

Junco, R., Heiberger, G., Loken, E. (2011). The effect of twitter on college student engagement and grades. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, Vol 27, Issue 2, pp 119-132.*

Junco, R., Heiberger, G., Loken, E. (2012). Putting twitter to the test: Assessing outcomes for student collaboration, engagement and success. *British Journal of Educational Technology, Vol 44, Issue 2, pp 273-287.*

Kupetz, A. H. (2010). Social media and the business professor. *Bized, 9(1), 44-48.*

Lin, M., Hoffman, E., & Borengasser, C. (2013). Is social media too social for class? A case study of twitter use. *Techtrends: Linking Research & Practice To Improve Learning, 57(2), 39-45.*

Loizzo, J., & Ertmer, P. (2014). 10 tips for implementing social media in the classroom. *Learning*

& Leading With Technology, 41(6), 32-35.

Matteson, A. (2010). Tweacher (n): The twitter enhanced teacher. *School Library Monthly, 27(1), 22-23.*

Morgan, H. (2014). Focus on Technology: Enhancing Instruction and Communication With Twitter. *Childhood Education, 90(1), 75-76.*

Pearce, N., & Learmonth, S. (2013). Learning beyond the classroom: Evaluating the use of pinterest in learning and teaching in an introductory anthropology class. *Journal Of Interactive Media In Education, 1-10.*

Ramig, R. (2009). Social media in the classroom—for kindergartners! Through High Schoolers.

Multimedia & Internet@Schools, 16(6), 8-10.

Robiyer, M.D., McDaniel, M., Marsena, W., Herman, J., Witty, J. (2010). Findings on facebook in

higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites. *Internet and Higher Education, Vol 13, pp 134-140.*

Smith, D., & Malyn-Smith, J. (2014). Technique for using social media in the school, classroom and workplace. *Techniques: Connecting Education & Careers, 89(6), 8-9.*