

Social Media in Education
Assessing the Benefits of Integration

Darci Drylie

December 12, 2013

Southern New Hampshire University

Abstract

Within recent years, the Internet has evolved into one of the most commonly used innovations by members of today's society. Social media is one aspect of the Internet that has also become a prominent staple among Internet users. The research explores social media's progressing role in education and student learning. Current generations of students are demonstrating decreased engagement, participation, and interest towards the different areas of content being presented to them. Research identifies traditional teaching methods as a central cause to the negative learning aspects being portrayed by the students. This is in part due to the fact that traditional methods no longer emphasize active learning and stimulation. By being brought up in a fast paced environment, students need to be stimulated in order to truly process the content. Social media is able to maintain the attention of students and keep them stimulated. Students' daily routines hold a considerable amount of time for social media usage; therefore, further integration into the classroom could rekindle the participation, engagement, and interest once held by students. The research examines the integration that has taken place within schools currently, and assesses the advantages of use towards student learning.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Networking, Education, Students, Learning, 21st Century Learning, Blended Learning, Internet, Communication, Sharing, Community,

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

Social Media in Education

Assessing the Benefits of Integration

Introduction

In a society built upon innovation and change, it becomes necessary for educational institutions to follow suit. The Internet has become one of the fastest evolving aspects of today's society, allowing benefits such as collaboration, connection, and sharing to emerge through social networking platforms. When applied to education, these platforms have shown to have a positive effect on student learning. Educators that have successfully merged social media into their methods of teaching have seen an increase in student engagement, participation, and motivation. However, there are still those who believe there is absolutely no place for social media within the classroom. Research indicates successful social media integration can, and has, been attained, so why are some educators adamantly standing against this innovative change in education? This research will assess social media's benefits to student learning, as well as demonstrate the necessity for educators to modify their traditional methods to accommodate to today's advanced students.

The Average Student

In terms of an educational classroom, the common depiction would be a room full of eager students, who are ready to learn and engage with the material. However, the common structure of learning in today's classrooms often entails many students sitting quietly while furiously copying notes; all while trying to listening and catch every word the teachers sounds off. No real learning can take place in this type of setting. This type of style unintentionally promotes the necessity for students to simply write whatever they can in a limited amount of

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

time. Then forgetting about it until it comes time to study for the test. In an age of learning where students have shorter attention spans and, in their opinion, more interesting things to do, this traditional method of teaching does not come across as an active way of learning for them.

I myself have had my fair share of classes where the structure does not permit very much student creativity and inquiry in the learning process. These classes had a tendency to be the type where you had no choice but to memorize and cram the material in preparation for the assessments. After that, you never need to revisit it again and it is quickly out of your mind and on to the next topic. This benefits no one. The content being presented is meant to be absorbed, thought about, and internalized by the students. They need the chance to question what they are learning, receive the information in a way that works for them, and can spark their interests. Teachers must begin to take a different approach in how to get their students to really learn. That approach, is through social media.

Abe and Jordan (2013) describe students today through the view of Berk who states that many of today's students, "Have grown up with Sesame Street, MTV, reality TV, the Internet, PCs/Macs, video games, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, Skype, iPods, iPhones, PDAs, and TV/DVD remotes as appendages to their bodies" (p. 17). These students have relied heavily on technology during their short lives, and have become accustomed to using its many different forms as a daily essential in their everyday life. You can easily observe this in action, by simply watching students enter the hallways at the end of class; the cell phones come out of the pockets, eyes become glued down to the screen, and masses of people somehow navigate their way to the next class without ever needing to look up.

They can do all this because they are so accustomed to it now; they are in a way programmed to function in this manner. These students are constantly multitasking; Berk

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

described them as, “being born with a chip” (p.16). Students are, in essence, programmed to be performing tasks and staying stimulated. Once class gets out, students go right to their phones to seek out stimulation and be engaged in their interests. Traditional teaching methods cannot adequately fulfill the engagement and stimulation needed by these students.

Tools and Application of Social Media

Many educators have begun incorporating social media into their teaching methods in an attempt to bring back a sense of active student learning. Social media comes in many different forms. This gives everyone the opportunity to find a social media outlet that best suits his or her personal preferences. It is something that a majority of students are comfortable with using, for they tend to check or use it daily. Social media networks that have shown positive responses to learning include, but are not limited to, Twitter, YouTube, Edmodo, Schoology, and Blogger. As a whole, these tools offer students a gateway to seek and ask questions, communicate and collaborate with teachers and fellow peers, be creative, and increase engagement.

Twitter and Backchannel

For communication, Twitter has become one of the greatest resources, allowing students to post responses and have discussions in real time. This activity leads to the use of backchannels as well. Backchannels are described by Gabriel as being, real-time digital streams that allow students to comment, ask questions, and voice opinions (Gabriel, 2011, *Speaking Up in Class, Silently, Using Social Media*). The digital streams employ the use of Twitter, or texting, in order for students to send their answers. This outlet of social media allows more students to communicate and participate in discussions, without feeling shy or embarrassed to answer in front of their classmates.

English teacher Erin Olson has begun incorporating this tool into her own classroom.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

Olson held a discussion on the poem, “To the Lady,” over a Twitter feed. While some students read the poem aloud, others took to their computers to post their opinions and responses to the literary work. Olson and fellow educators explain, “Social media, once kept outside the school door, can entice students who rarely raise a hand to express themselves via a medium they find as natural as breathing.” From a student’s point of view, Justin Lansink had this to say about the assignment, “When we have class discussions, I don’t really feel the need to speak up or anything. When you type something down, it’s a lot easier to say what I feel” (Gabriel, 2011, *Speaking Up in Class, Silently, Using Social Media*). This form of communication in the classroom gives students the chance to be open about their ideas, and be comfortable while sharing.

In continuing with social media integration of Twitter within schools, some teachers have begun employing the use of backchannels in the classroom. Educators have found that when students are, “texting on task, they are less likely to be texting about something else” (Gabriel, 2011, *Speaking Up in Class, Silently, Using Social Media*). (See figure 1.)

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

Backchannel Usage with Twitter

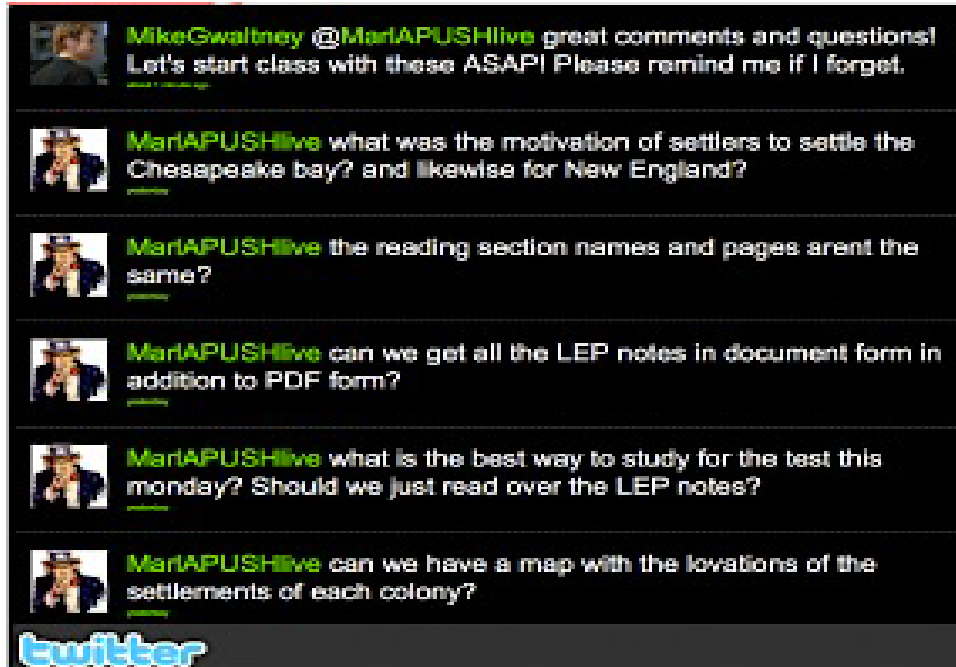


Figure 1. Source: mikegwaltney.net

The figure above displays the use of Twitter through a backchannel in educator Mike Gwaltney's classroom. The teacher has posted discussion questions for the students to respond to. However, rather than writing down answers or raising their hands, the students are able to answer through Twitter. Mr. Gwaltney has provided his students with a specific hashtag to reply with so the students' responses can show up on the screen as they are being sent.

Mrs. Weber, a fourth grade teacher, explains that backchannel has given her students the ability to ask questions they typically would not feel brave enough to raise their hand for. During a reading activity, one student came across a word they did not know and was able to post it to the live stream to receive help. Fellow classmates were able to respond and give their peer the definition. Mrs. Weber explained that without the backchannel, the student would have just kept

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

reading and ignored the word (Gabriel, 2011). This form of social media opens up new opportunities for students to seek information and clarity, without feeling embarrassed or alone.

Educational Social Networks

Edmodo and Schoology are in essence a Facebook equivalent. Rather than directing students to their personal Facebook profiles, students can create profile accounts through these two educational platforms. These accounts have an extremely similar design to Facebook, but have the means of a Blackboard site. The content being posted and shared is specific to what they are doing academically in the classroom and the teacher is able to monitor their activity. These sites allow the posting of assignments, discussions, tests and quizzes. Through Schoology the teacher also has the ability to check student participation and assign grades via the site.

Blogs

Blogger has leant itself to producing numerous benefits to student learning. The personalization that can take place over the creation of personal blogs also increases creativity and interest among students. Blogs are accessible to anyone in the world and with this in mind, students have shown to take greater pride in their work. They become aware that their work is going to be viewed and critiqued by others so in turn they put more time and effort behind it. The comments and interactions of others on a student's blog post show that they have made a contribution to the world. This type of feeling and accomplishment cannot be attained in the traditional classroom setting strictly between classmates (Smith, 2000 p. 24-25)

YouTube

YouTube is a social media tool with some of the greatest benefits to student learning, and its significance within education is becoming increasingly prominent. Younger, Duncan, and Hart (2013) express the platform as being a tool that allows students to record themselves and

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

upload their material. Student generated videos in relation to class content is a creative alternative to traditional written work. In addition to the benefits of in class use, YouTube also allows learning to continue outside of the traditional setting. Younger, Duncan, and Hart (2013) posit that the instructor can record the class lectures and later post the discussions to YouTube.

Students are given the opportunity to revisit material that may have been misunderstood, but can also be reviewed by a student that may have missed class. The ability to revisit material as it was presented in class, ultimately gives students the chance to review the information as many times as necessary until they become comfortable with the ideas (Tuning into YouTube in the Classroom: Improving Assessment Scores through Social Media). Also, through the comments section of the videos students are able to seek further clarification on areas they may be having issues with. The educator and fellow peers have the ability to address the concerns that arise, and assist their fellow classmates.

Educators have the ability to play videos in class, create assignments, and post classroom activities, all through YouTube. When discussing a topic, the educator can take to YouTube and visually show the students what they are learning, creating an engaging way to keep students stimulated, yet also give them a different perspective. (See figure 2 below.)

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

YouTube Science Lesson

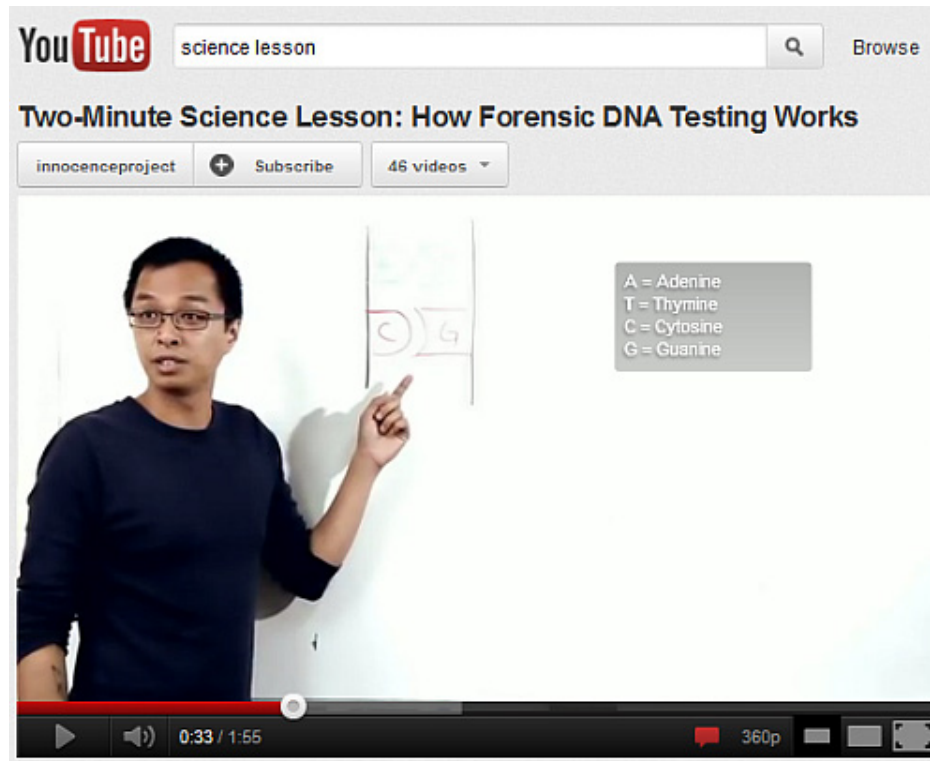


Figure 2. Source: educational-freeware.com/news/youtube-classroom.aspx

The image above showcases one of the positive aspects of learning through YouTube. This video is a short explanation of DNA testing. In a science class, this video may accompany a long discussion and be a great way to break up the information and present it from different views. For students with different learning styles, this would be an easier way for them to see and retain the information presented. The lessons found on YouTube cover a numerous range of topics. Videos can be applied to any content area and be compiled into private playlists that only the students have access to.

Negativity Towards Social Media

Those in opposition to social media integration, make the claim that the rapid movement of social media through today's schools can be a problem. Rivero asserts (2011) that transitioning school related activities from the classroom to the Internet creates risks and

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

liabilities for the schools. By directing students to engage further in social media during school time, harm to student learning may arise in the form of bullying. Educators in opposition fear cyberbullying will become worse from the increased interactions taking place over social networking sites (p.14). According to Careless, students are also put at risk when interacting with strangers over the web. The posting of student generated material, such as blogs and videos can be viewed by anyone. These people can then have interactions with students over the comments or direct messages.

Rivero and Careless postulate that the biggest downfall to social media use in education is its tempting appeal to students as a distraction. Allowing students to use social media in the classroom is like giving them permission to play on Facebook and aimlessly surf the web. Giving students the ability to use social media platforms during instruction detracts from the learning taking place. Careless contributes to this idea (2012) by adding the points of critics, expressing that in terms of education, social media has no place, for it is, “corrupting the youth of America” (p.43).

However, these concerns can be addressed and handled without interrupting the learning environment. Careless presents the ideas of Carolyn Foote to support the actions that can be taken to prevent harm to students within the learning environment. Foote indicates that distractions have always been an issue within classrooms stating,

There have always been kids who read what they’re supposed to in class, and others who hide a motorcycle magazine in their textbook and read that instead, I’m not trivializing this problem, but I am pointing out that it existed long before social media arrived. In either instance, it is up to teachers to look out for these issues and deal with them—and to get more training to deal with them more effectively, if need be. (Careless,

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

2012, p.44)

With this in mind, it comes down to teacher and student relationships within the classroom. Teachers have always monitored students to ensure they were not finding ways to be distracted, even before social media, as mentioned by Foote. Therefore it becomes irrelevant to blame social media as being a primary distraction to students. Distractions have been present far before social media was introduced, so it cannot be disregarded on the assumption that it too will be a distraction. Also, many schools employ strict network disables in terms of social media networks. Because of this, students cannot freely “surf” the web, but rather must stay only on the sites that their instructor has allowed access, preventing them from becoming distracted with another site.

In regards to online safety, strangers are of specific concern. Many teachers raise concern over the increased interactions students may have over social media use. Careless expresses the views of Dean Shareski, explaining that although there are risks, it must be kept in context that when strangers interact with students over their academic work, there is no ill intent in mind (Careless, 2012, p.44). Students benefit greatly from the feedback of others. It would be a disservice to not allow positive interactions to take place, simply for the fear that an unknown individual could leave comments. Teachers also have the ability to watch for negative interactions, and in the event of an occurrence taking place teachers can take action to end the interactions if necessary.

The same can be said about situations arising from bullying. Teachers are a part of the conversations taking place over the social media platforms used in the classroom. Even if the teacher is not keeping constant track of the conversations being held, they can be reviewed at a later time. With social media tools such as Twitter and backchannel, transcripts of the

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

conversations can be printed and assessed. If inappropriate remarks are directed towards another student, the teacher is able to identify who posted the remark and deal with it in an appropriate manner.

Educator's Perspective

To gain further clarity on the subject of social media use in the classroom, a consultation with Professor Katharine York has been utilized. At Southern New Hampshire University, York teaches several different areas of science, however, she is also a former middle school science teacher. In teaching across the different grade levels, York agrees that students today have a harder time staying focused in class. During her own classes, she uses lecture based teaching, and expresses that lectures as a whole, cannot be solely relied on for teaching and it would be unwise to do so. With that in mind, she also pairs the lectures with activities for students to increase their engagement and actually work the information presented. These activities include in class group projects, Ted Talks, and discussion board questions.

In terms of social media, discussion boards can be a great way for students to express themselves and make connections to what they are learning. After reviewing the material from the lecture and taking part in various activities, the students are required to reflect on their learning. These reflections make the student think about how the lecture's content relates to the activities and from that, better connections are formed to the material.

Personally, I am in a few of York's classes and have taken part in these discussions. One of the greatest aspects of the discussion is that you are able to view the reflections of other students. The activities are very open to personal interpretation. Because of this, students can go about the projects in many different ways. Therefore, seeing them reflect on the different information they came up with and internalized can be very beneficial to the learning of others.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

There have even been times when I have looked at another group member's reflection and saw that their view of the information was completely different than mine. This has often helped me to better understand the topic and retain the material better.

Discussion boards are about the only social media related tool York chooses to use. However, it is not because she believes they cannot be beneficial or helpful, but rather she does not know how to use the tools well enough to integrate them. York explains (2013) that when useful resources are used well, they can be very powerful to student learning and agrees that students will write more, than what they will say. Because of that, it becomes necessary to give students a way for them to express all of what they have to offer. York sees the benefits to social media, and would possibly use them in her own classes if she became more familiar with the tools.

Conclusion

As a whole, when assessing social media integration in the classroom, the benefits far surpass the disadvantages. However, many educators still dismiss the positive attributes of social media usage. To fix this, the educators in opposition need to be further educated in the area of social media. Many of their claims could have been easily addressed and disregarded, had they known more about the uses of different social media platforms. Educators must embrace social media as a new method teaching. Careless (2012) makes clear that to do this, "Educators must become personally familiar with social media, just as they had to personally embrace computers not so long ago" (p.46). Educators need to grasp that social media is becoming a new form of learning for students in today's society. Social media interests students, keeps them engaged, and motivates them. From the integration that has occurred, active student participation has increased in those classes and students are no longer hesitant to ask questions or share their ideas.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

To have a smooth integration of social media, educators must start learning about the tools of social media and become familiar with them. They do not need to completely throw away their old methods of teaching, but rather accommodate them to better fit the average student in today's classrooms. Some social media tools are better than others, the teacher will need to address what works and does not work according to educational content and the students. But social media use is becoming the norm and it is the responsibility of educators to create the most optimized learning environment possible for their students to succeed.

SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION

References

- Careless, J. (2012). SOCIAL MEDIA. *Technology & Learning*, 32(7), 42-46
- Doyme, S., & Epstein Ojalvo, H. (2011) Less Is More: Using Social Media to Inspire Concise Writing. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from thenytimes.com
- Dube, R. (2011) 6 Ways to Use YouTube for the Classroom. Retrieved from <http://www.educational-freeware.com/news/youtube-classroom.aspx>
- Duncan, J., Hart L., & Younger, D. (2013). Tuning into YouTube in the Classroom: Improving Assessment Scores through Social Media. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED543108.pdf>
- Gabriel, T. (2011). Speaking Up in Class, Silently, Using Social Media. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from thenytimes.com
- Miller, S. (2010). CIT Showcase 2010: Practicing what we preach. *Center for Instructional Technology*, Retrieved from <http://cit.duke.edu/blog/2010/05/cit-showcase-2010-practicing-what-we-preach/>
- Smith, S. W. (2000). Get connected to science! *Science and Children*, 37(7), 22-25. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/236908278?accountid=3783>
- Swan, C. (2013). BEING SOCIAL. *Technology & Learning*, 33(7), 30-33.
- Rivero, V. (2011). We're talking social media in education. *Internet@Schools*, 18(3), 12-15,4. Retrieved from <http://ezproxy.snhu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/865910640?accountid=3783>
- Why Students Like Social Media But Schools Don't. (2012, January 4). *Edudemic*. Retrieved from <http://www.edudemic.com/students-social-media/>
- York, K. (2013, December 3). Personal Interview