**What’s social media?**

Social media, Internet-based tools that promote collaboration and information sharing (Junco, Helbergert, & Loken, 2011), can be used in academic settings to promote student engagement and facilitate better student learning (Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010).

**Why Social Media?**

The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that although 73% of teens between the ages of 12 and 17 use social media, the rates of social media use are even higher (83%) for young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Madden & Zickuhr, 2011).

Nelson Laird and Kuh (2005) reported that students who use information technology for academics also have a higher likelihood of contributing and participating in active, academic collaboration with other students. This collaboration indicates that as engagement with technology increases, engagement with academics also increases, promoting a deeper connection between the students, educators, and course content (Mehdinezhad, 2011).

Nowadays, most researchers agree that knowledge not only exists in individual minds but also in the discourse and interactions between individuals. Such interactions support active participation, which is an essential element in student learning (Hrastinski, 2009). Learners need to develop skills to share knowledge and to learn with others, both in face-to-face situations and through technology including social media. Kabilan et al. (2010) found that students build learning communities by working collaboratively to construct knowledge. Social media serves as a tool
to facilitate the development of these learning communities by encouraging collaboration and communication.

Social media usage within the academic setting also facilitates peer feedback on assignments and thoughtful student reflections on course content because of the ability for students to openly communicate with each other and develop strong relationships among peers (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Ebner, Leinhardt, Rohs, & Meyer, 2010; Kuh, 1993).

**Challenges of Using Social Media**

Arnold and Paulus (2010) found that even when social media is used for an educational purpose, students incorporate the technology into their lives in a way that may differ from the intentions of the course instructor. For example, off-topic or non-academic discussions occur on social media because of its primary design as a social networking tool (Lin et al., 2013).

The use of social media must be purposeful and as a result should be applied in situations that are the most appropriate for learning and student understanding to occur (Liu, 2010, Väljataga & Fiedler, 2009). For example, social media is best used as an introductory tool for review and collaboration, not merely as a method of advertising class reminders (Annetta et al., 2009; Fewkes & McCabe, 2012). Therefore, educators who are considering incorporating social media into their academic courses should ensure that the specific type of social media used matches the curriculum-based learning goals and learning outcomes for the students (Hofer & Harris, 2010).
References


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