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The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media

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Abstract

When it comes to social media, several perspectives are prevalent among those who have knowledge of the subject. Unfortunately, prior to quite recently, I would have been classified as one of those who view the phenomenon as an entertainment tool riddled with trivial information. Thankfully, this book has contributed to rectifying many preconceived misconceptions and expanded upon potential avenues of basic communication by both showcasing applications of successful utilization and introducing technologies that might not necessarily be at the forefront of applied communication.

Keywords

Media, Education, Micro Sharing, Misconception, book review

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The New Social Learning: A Guide to Transforming Organizations Through Social Media

Nacer Aounallah

Introduction

When it comes to social media, several perspectives are prevalent among those who have knowledge of the subject. Unfortunately, prior to quite recently, I would have been classified as one of those who view the phenomenon as an entertainment tool riddled with trivial information. Thankfully, this book has contributed to rectifying many preconceived misconceptions and expanded upon potential avenues of basic communication by both showcasing applications of successful utilization and introducing technologies that might not necessarily be at the forefront of applied communication.

Key Words

Media, Education, Micro Sharing, Misconception

Summary

The text begins by addressing the common misconceptions associated with social media and its usage. By associating said notions with easy-to-understand analogies, the authors successfully mitigate many of the aforementioned misconceptions and successfully showcase how even current usages are not complete. For example, the text references that when instant messages were initially introduced, the author thought it was a novel solution for communication deficiencies experienced by the hearing and speech impaired, thereby failing to see the larger potential usage that has come to be associated with the technological advancement.

While broad adoption of instant messaging for common communication has become the norm, the similar premise for broad adoption postulated by the book for social media is the adoption for educational usage. For social media to be utilized effectively for educational purposes, communities first must be formed so an appropriate focus and goals can be attributed for social media to be applicable. This is not to say specific organizations need be created with social communication methods embedded as a tool, but rather that existing entities must understand the inherent advantages applicable to social media and adopt them in an appropriate fashion.

After the case for educational usage as applied to organized groups is made, methodologies and groups of similar technological features sets are discussed. Media sharing is emphasized as one of the important features of the social media toolset but an unorthodox approach is taken. As traditional benefits associated with media (such as invoking personal responses, utilizing visual imagery, and emotionally involving individuals) are highlighted, the book takes a novel approach in stating that those very established methods are made fundamentally easier to access with tools such as social media. Aside from new media features and mechanisms, social media provides the ability to access existing content on a greater scale.

In addition to or in tandem with media sharing, micro sharing is also heavily promoted. A case

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is made that educational methods are somewhat outdated, but the solution presented is not total replacement with socially derived curriculum. Rather, a heavily supplemented media-rich feature set that involves micro sharing as the primary means of disseminating information and providing appropriate networks to relevant links and media is suggested. Due to the inherent limits of micro sharing, a new emphasis on concise abbreviations and limiting excess domain name space is advocated. To address the limited resources, an almost completely new symbolic method of communication is necessary, but it is apparently workable as many cases highlighting successful usage in organized events and seminars are presented.

Compounding on media-rich and micro-sharing tools is an aggregate effect referred to as a collective intelligence quotient. Using personification, social media is compared to a nervous system rapidly sending messages to necessary sensors for the good of the organism. By connecting the dots of existing information utilizing a web of social media, information is not merely a blind search being conducted by one individual; many participants are actively involved utilizing their collective knowledge in synchronization toward common tasking.

Critique

A great deal of useful information is presented by the text to promote the usage of social media in the realm of education. Unfortunately, aside from successful implementations of particular media sets and key descriptors, much of the text was focused on dispelling those with serious reservations about adopting social media. Considering the audience for such a book is more than likely ready to adopt, it might have actually been more productive to highlight particular models and strategies for emulation to occur.

While the message of the text was generally composed to present the topic in a positive light, not all of the content fits well with the premise. For example, in one instance the author presented NASA's social Spacebook site as an industry specific example of how such media has fostered growth. Unfortunately, Spacebook was shut down due to a lack of function and ready participation, which can either go to show how fast the industry evolves or that the example might have been inflated to a degree to fit the tone of the book. In addition, the entire premise of hosting virtual environments could not be adopted as readily and utilized in education as many of the other methods that were presented. Experiencing topics such as schizophrenia through manipulation of inputs is not truly the same to a mind that is prepared and the potential for wasted productivity increases substantially.

As the last point highlighted, a lot of negative aspects of social media were left out of the text. While it is briefly discussed, productivity issues are not mentioned, oversaturation is not present, and while misuse is touched upon — stating the need for loose guidelines and urging readers not to blame the tools, but rather those engaging in mischief — not much is expanded upon. That is not to say the text has a ready bias, but rather that its focus was primarily upon informing of social media potential and elaborating on methodologies for educational purposes. To that end, the book was a good and informative read, recommended for anyone interested in the subject matter.

About the Author

Nacer Aounallah is a graduate student at Texas Tech University, pursuing an advanced degree in agriculture. He is also employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assist individuals and entities in revitalizing communities through rural development.