I Just Look it Up: Undergraduate Student Perception of Social Media Use in their Academic Success

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Abstract

College students are increasingly using social media. This case study explores how traditionally aged college students perceive social media use contributes to their academic success. We used survey data collected at a college student union to understand the social media students use in their academic pursuits and to inform a focus group discussion. Findings indicate that students do not differentiate between technology and social media, and that they rely heavily on social media to facilitate their academic success. This case study indicates that while using social media extensively may create minor issues for students, proper use can support academic endeavors.

College students' social media use has been viewed by educators as having a negative impact on academic success (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Junco, 2012b; Kirschner & Karpinksi, 2010). However, the positive effects of social media on academic success are gaining attention amongst

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researchers (Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Ericson, 2011; Hanson, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011; Olofsson, Lindberg & Hauge, 2011; Wolf, 2010; Wodzicki, Scwammlein & Maskaliuk, 2012). The use of nearly every type of social media increased from 2004-2009 (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010), allowing students to collaborate easily on academic projects and connect with their peers or professors more readily. Smartphones, Skype, face-to-face communication devices, and easier access to Internet sites allow information to be shared more easily than eight years ago (Henry, 2012).

Current research presents conflicting information on whether social media supports or hinders academic success. The literature discussion strongly supports the relationship between social media use and the negative effect it has on academic performance. It appears, however, to disregard an option for social media to be utilized by students to support their academic success. Junco (2012b) acknowledges this fact and agrees further research needs to be conducted to determine the role social media can play in the academic life of students.

Literature on the intersection of research on social media, academic success, and academic distraction is limited. By exploring how traditionally-aged college students perceive social media facilitates their academic success, our study fills a gap in the literature. We, a group of four researchers, conducted a case study using survey and focus group data to examine this gap. Our literature review focuses on social media use and academic success, and social media use and academic distraction. We chose these areas because they surround our research question well and create a locus of information in which we can situate our research.

Social Media and Academic Success

Technological collaborative learning occurs in two ways, asynchronous and synchronous learning. First, asynchronous learning via technology includes blogs (Hanson, 2011; Olofsson, Lindberg & Hauge, 2011; Wolf, 2010), wiki (Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011), and social network-based learning (Wodzicki, Scwammlein & Maskaliuk, 2012) where instruction and interaction occur as students post information. This occurs in real-time, yet does not require everyone to connect to the social media platform simultane-

ously. Second, synchronous learning via technology includes video-conferencing (Scott, Castaneda, Quick & Linney, 2009), live classes, and e-office hours for student/faculty interaction (Nian-Shing, Hsiu-Chia, Kinshu & Taiyu, 2006). Synchronous learning requires all participants connect through the technology at the same time.

Blogs, wikis, and social networks dominate the literature on academic success and its intersection with asynchronous online learning. Students found blogging provided opportunities for thoughtful interaction while bolstering critical thinking and problem solving skills (Hanson, 2011). The blogging environment created a reflexive atmosphere to explore classroom content: "The blog…was characterized by a willingness to help each other to further understand rather than to correct and patronize" (Olofsson, Lindberg & Hauge, 2011, p. 189). Blogging also helps students connect with one another academically, especially across the chasm of physical space (Wolf, 2010).

A wiki platform for asynchronous education had similar implications for student learning. Students using a wiki platform found they were academically successful, and that the wiki platform aided them in building relationships with one another (Lin & Yang, 2011). This helped to increase students' cultural understanding of one another (Crossman & Bordia, 2011). This "social interaction also characterized and influenced the learning experience itself and had implications for overall engagement" (p. 329). Generally, wikis allowed for co-constructed learning experiences while promoting student engagement. Through social media, students are now able to supplement their in-class lectures and gain a deeper, richer understanding of course material (Lin & Yang, 2011).

Another way students are connecting with each other is via Facebook. Heiberger's (2007) research adds commentary on Facebook and student involvement. Approximately 92%, who used Facebook more than one hour per day rated their connection with friends as high or very high. Of these students, 63.4% have self-identified as either highly or very highly connected to their institution. By comparison, only 43.4% of students felt connected with their institution when they used Facebook less than one hour per day. Heiberger's statistics suggest that students who are engaged in social media are also more engaged overall in their academics.

Social Media and Academic Distraction

Students spend an average of 7-8 hours each day using social media (Ericson, 2011; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010), but only 11% of students indicated they use social networking sites for academic purposes (Wodzicki, Schwammlein & Maskaliuk, 2012). Additional support labeling social media as a detractor to academic success is evident in a 2009 study (Scott, Castaneda, Quick, & Linney, 2009), in which 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that online peer-to-peer videoconferencing allowed students to ramble inappropriately.

The distractions presented by social media extend beyond the ramblings of other students during videoconferencing calls. In response to an open-ended question in the Ericson (2011) study, 29 students stated that socially interactive technology distracts from studying. Further, nine students stated that other students' use of technology and social media in class is a distraction. Many students are quick to cite strongly developed multi-tasking capabilities as a defense to their use of social media, but literature states that people are poor at multi-tasking (Ophir, Nass & Wagner, 2009).

Junco (2012a) found that Facebook use negatively affects the level of engagement displayed by students. Junco (2012b) also found that Facebook negatively affects academic performance, a claim supported by Kirschner and Karpinksi (2010), who note that increased time spent using Facebook directly leads to a lower grade point average (GPA). Jacobsen and Forste (2011) apply this idea more generally to electronic media, defined as text messaging, email, social networking sites, cell phone communication, video or movie viewing, and video or online gaming. The study relied on self-reported GPA's and time spent utilizing social media. Results indicated that more time spent using electronic media resulted in lower academic performance. The authors specifically note that electronic media is used to fill time, and that students who use instant messaging services are more distracted and take longer to read articles.

Methodology

We selected case study methodology because it is open to an emergent research design and allows for multiple data collection methods (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). We specifically selected instrumental case study (Stake, 2005) because our goal is to

create useful knowledge by providing insight, changing, or redrawing a generalization. In this instance, a generalization exists that all social media use by college students is distracting or negatively impacts academic success (Scott, Castaneda, Quick, and Lenney, 2009). We sought to understand how students may perceive social media to have a positive impact on their academic success, thereby redrawing that generalization.

Our case is bound by a single institution of higher education and by our participant parameters of being traditionally-aged, experienced social media users who have owned a smartphone for at least one year (Merriam, 1998). We defined traditionally-aged students as those between the ages of 18 and 24, a range commonly accepted in higher education (White, Becker-Blease & Grace-Bishop, 2010; Miller & Mei-Yan, 2012; Etaugh & Spiller, 1989). Data collection occurred at Mid-sized State University (MSU), a pseudonym for a regional, mid-sized, public, university enrolls approximately 12,000 students each year, 10,000 of whom are undergraduate students. Although the average age of students at MSU is 22 years old, we acknowledge that many students do not fall within this boundary.

We defined experienced social media users as students who have owned a smartphone for one or more years, and are currently using at least two forms of social media. We asked participants to define what they consider to be social media and they did not differentiate between what they considered to be technology versus social media, therefore we are using social media as an interchangeable term for traditional social media as well as current technology. We used the individual students' experiences with social media and academia as our unit of analysis.

Research Methods

Case study methodology recommends the use of multiple methods to understand the case being explored, including the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). We used an exploratory survey and a focus group to collect data for this study because the survey provided us with a baseline set of information. We chose focus group to understand participants' collective views on the baseline data.

Survey

We used an exploratory survey to understand how traditionally aged students might be using social media to support their academic success. While survey methods generally align with the post-positivist view, we chose to use it as an informative tool rather than the data for primary analysis. We asked undergraduate students at MSU who met our bounded criteria to respond to our paper survey over the course of three days.

Survey participation was elicited from inside the MSU Student Union in spring, 2012. We received 93 surveys, of which 57 were usable; three were incomplete, and 33 were eliminated because the responder did not fit within our case bounds. Questions required multiple-choice or Likert-scale responses and asked questions about which forms of social media students used for academics and how students used social media to connect to their faculty and peers academically. We conducted a descriptive analysis of the survey results and used them to shape the questions. For example, 74 percent of our respondents agreed or strongly agreed that feeling connected to peers aided their academic success and 93 percent agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them feel connected to their peers. We used this information to develop focus group question about participants' use of social media to maintain these connections.

Focus Groups

We used convenience sampling to identify our participants (Creswell, 2007). A female student we asked to participate in the study recruited five of her peers for the focus group. Each of our participants were members of a campus organization and, identifying as Black women, juniors or seniors between 18-24, owned a smartphone for at least one year, and used at least two forms of social media. Because our participants belonged to the same student group, they knew each other. We did not intend to recruit such a homogeneous population, but believe it added to the richness of our data because each participant immediately felt comfortable speaking and sharing stories.

The purpose of the focus group was to facilitate interaction (Kitzinger, 1995) on the topic of social media and to learn about the student experience with social media through their own voices. We discussed social media platforms such as YouTube, Wikipedia, smartphone and tablet applications, email, Facebook, Skype, blogs, search

engines, and Blackboard as they pertained to the participants' academic behaviors. The focus group lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted by one facilitator and one note-taker. Data was collected by audio and video recording and then transcribed.

1	Logistics	Using social media to execute logistical planning of academic tasks and assignments
2	Group Projects	AMSM* used to facilitate group project work
3	Research	AMSM* for individual purposes of academic research
4	Learning Supplements	AMSM* that supplements education/class materials/etc.
5	Academic Survival	AMSM* used to survive or thrive academically
6	Social Media Mask	AMSM* used to "cover", "save face", etc.
7	Connection	AMSM* used to enhance/supplement relationships
8	It hurts so good	AMSM* where it detracts from academic success
9	I'd rather do it in-person	The academic task that would be easier to complete face-to-face
10	Interwebs=magic	Any mention of accepting internet information as fact
11	Efficiency Convenience	Using social media to make academic tasks more efficient or more convenient to complete
		*Any mention of social media

Figure 1. Codes chart

Data Analysis

Using an iterative, group-oriented process, we initially developed eight axial codes for analyzing our data (Creswell, 2007): logistics, group projects, research, learning supplements, academic survival, connection, social media mask, and it hurts so good. Definitions of

these codes can be found in Figure 1. Though many codes are relatively self-explanatory, some require explanation. For example, with the code of "social media mask", we considered any mention of social media where students used it to save academic face such as, "It's easier to be like, I need help with this [via email], instead of looking at [professors] and being embarrassed." With the code of "it hurts so good" we considered any mention of social media where it detracted from academic success. One participant expressed, "I think things can get miscommunicated [with social media]."

We added three new codes in a second round of line-by-line analysis of the data: interwebs equals magic, efficiency and convenience, and face-to-face communication preferred. For example, with the code "efficiency and convenience", we considered any mention of social media that made information more accessible and academic tasks easier to complete such as, "[CTRL+FIND] the word you are looking for...I love [CTRL+FIND], I like literally look for one word and there will be like here is what you are looking for." For "interwebs equal magic", we considered any mention of information accepted as fact when provided by technology. A participant explained that when she asked her peers for academic assistance via Twitter, "Most people reply get on Google or look it up on Google," demonstrating that students believe that Google will have every correct answer.

Once we exhausted the coding process, we collapsed the eleven codes into nine and organized the data by code into a color-coded matrix for thematic development. We then reorganized the data into three themes: academic task completion, connections with peers and faculty, and challenges with social media use in academia.

Findings

We present our findings in two parts, beginning with the survey data collected and used to guide our focus group, followed by the analysis of the focus group data. The survey data demonstrated how students define and use social media for academic purposes. The focus group data is concentrated around the three themes.

Summary of Survey Data

We found that social media is frequently used in MSU academic life. Nearly 74 percent of our respondents identified email as a social media they use specifically for academics. Students also used You-

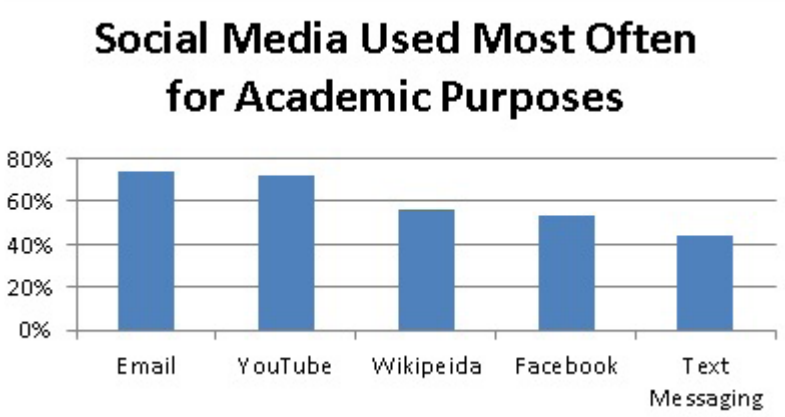

Figure 2. Survey data: Types of social media used in academics

Tube, Wiki, Facebook, and text messaging with high frequency, as represented in Figure 2.

Our respondents used social media for: group project completion (77%), individual study (70%), group project discussion (67%), individual assignment completion (65%), contacting the instructor (54%), and note sharing (53%). Students also indicated that they used social media for note-taking, discussion with instructor, individual assignment discussion, study groups, and substitution for attending lectures either in lieu of attending class or to make up for missing class.

Nearly all of our respondents considered themselves academically successful which they most often associated with grades and GPA. About half identified "learning" as being academically successful. Less than half identified academic success as "passing courses in general", "completing all courses", or "not receiving an F." Overall, about one-third of our participants agreed or strongly agreed that they would be less academically successful if they were not able to use social media, and approximately half agreed or strongly agreed that it would be more difficult to achieve the same level of academic success without social media.

Almost all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media helps them feel connected to their peers, and two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that this connection aided their academic success. It is apparent from the survey that students believed social media also

facilitated connections with their instructors, thereby supporting their academic success. However, only half of respondents felt that instructors incorporated social media adequately into the academic experience.

Focus Group Findings

Epistemological Orientation. We approached our focus group data analysis from a constructivist epistemology because we sought to create meaning and understanding as an end-goal of the project (Stage & Manning, 2003). Our goal was to understand our participants' experiences and co-create meaning about their use of social media (Crotty, 1998, Phillips, 1995).

Theme: Academic task completion. Our participants used social media to manage academic logistics to connect with group members, plan meeting times, and ensure all individuals are aware of their responsibilities. As one participant explained, "Our group found each other and sent our information through Facebook, they found where we can meet and stuff through Facebook." Another participant elaborated:

> Just send out group messages so everyone knows what is going on or needs to do. It was a group project. We just didn't have time to meet at all so we like we just like sending power points around, just filling each other in. We didn't meet one time, not one time, but we managed to get the project done.

As these quotes suggest, our participants are using social media to coordinate course-related group projects without actually having to meet face-to-face. Our participants also perceived that using social media was an efficient and convenient method for this type of work. One student explained, "If you have a group project with say like four people and you are using technology to complete it, it becomes like an assignment broken down into four individual pieces rather than a group assignment."

Participants also used social media to find answers to specific questions, which to them meant always having access to answers. One participant said, in reference to completing math homework, "You type in Google Math Problem Solver, and I can just type in the problem to that. That literally helped me pass that class, a lot of math classes with that website, it's pretty useful." When we asked if aca-

demic success would be more difficult without social media a participant stated, "I think school would be so time consuming [without social media and technology]."

Smartphone or tablet applications, or "apps" provided participants with convenient, efficient, and easy access to academic information, fostering a sense of self-sufficiency in the pursuit of academic success. Focus group members discussed multiple apps for chemistry, biology, and math. When one participant mentioned a specific app she used, another participant downloaded an app, Study Blue, to her iPad during the focus group and laughably stated she would be using it on that night's homework. From our participants' perspective, apps could significantly help with accomplishing their school work and therefore, contribute to their academic success. As one student explained, "For psychology, I have organized articles and dissertations some on my iPad. I just like type in a keyword and it just pops them all up, which is a lot easier."

Another echoed, "I have an app on my iPhone and I found my class on there and there were notes for the chapter and the definitions of each chapter, and it was easier." From this participant's perspective, having access to information about the class reading was a benefit, although she was not able to explain how having this information made the course easier except that it was quicker than looking in a glossary.

Participants also indicated they use YouTube videos to help them understand materials outside of the boundaries of a traditional classroom setting to find answers and to supplement traditional learning techniques:

> I took a sign language class, and that was one of the hardest classes I have ever taken. I'm not that good at sign language, but I would just like YouTube stuff and that was a lot easier for me…it would just be like how do I do the alphabet just like YouTube that and I can pop it up and that way when I am in class I would like be ahead of everyone.

Another participant described using social media during her lecture to assist her learning process:

> I pull up my PowerPoints on my iPad. In one of my classes, [the professor] shows diagrams constantly and I pull up all the diagrams and I have them next to me where I can write notes on it.

Another participant discussed using academic social media like Blackboard and Safe Assign to ensure her academic writing was strong, "Sometimes some teachers will let you submit twice, one that's like a safe assignment check, to see if your plagiarism levels are a certain level and then you can go fix it," and one of her peers responded that this is an important feature, "It shows a percentage of what of your work is plagiarized." This may indicate that students perceive it as unnecessary to have the correct answers on their own, as they understand that social media will guide them to the answers. This process likely leads to better grades, but may hinder actual learning. Our participants had given little thought to what their college experience would be like without social media. When asked about this, one participant hesitated for a moment and then exclaimed. "Oh my goodness, I'd probably fail", to which all others in the focus group agreed. We discussed this response as a group because while it was stated in a light-hearted fashion, it seemed to capture the thoughts of the other participants. We suspect the proper interpretation to mean that our participants had not given much thought to how social media only supports academic learning instead of being responsible for it.

Theme: connections with peers and faculty. Our participants discussed several ways in which social media encouraged connections between peers and faculty, thereby enhancing their academic success. Even though we have heard that students do not use email, our participants found it a key method for communicating with faculty and peers. One participant told a story of a classmate who used email to reach out to the class for academic support after experiencing a personal issue, "I got an email from a student this year who said her car had gotten broken into and her book got stolen and she like emailed the whole class." Having access to other students' email addresses served as a safety net for students who lost access to their academic materials. Similarly, there was a general consensus among our participants that connections are supported via Facebook, Facetime and Twitter.

Twitter was identified as a form of social media that allowed students to keep one another up to date with assignments, announcements, and class information. Participants indicated that they asked for assignment assistance or clarification related to specific class assignment through Twitter. One participant stated, "If you missed

class you would Tweet your friends and ask them what you missed." Students relied on the communication channels that social media provided and found it helpful when professors integrated social media into their curricula, "A couple of my professors put their Skype names on syllabuses now too, especially online classes." Students also asked for help on assignments, "My online class is based off Blackboard, everything about my online class is there," and another student added, "discussion posts, grades, we email our teachers through Blackboard." Participants indicated that this process and collaboration among peers and instructors allowed connections to develop outside of the classroom.

Social media use also supported connections developed through extracurricular activities. One participant sent updates about her student club, "I am good with even like our [student club] email our members so that they know what we did what in the meeting and when the next big thing is...we also do Facebook posts, Twitter with just updates." This same student also explained she used Instagram for promoting events associated with her club, "I could Instagram for promoting stuff with like [student club] with flyers and posting pictures and people can comment and like it [on Facebook]." Students used social media as a way to enhance their connections across multiple contexts such as academics and extracurriculars. This may play an important role in students' ability to persist academically since participants indicated that connections were a vital element contributing to their academic success.

Theme: challenges with social media use in academics. In the academic task completion theme, our participants touted the benefits of social media use in academia, particularly to support group projects. However, the participants were also quick to point out where they struggled with social media in this setting. In particular, participants spoke about preferring to meet in-person to complete logistical tasks, but preferred to avoid in-person contact where they lacked academic confidence.

One participant explained, "With emailing and Facetime, like it's never as clear as face-to-face interaction," and another iterated, "I think everyone's clearer with what you're supposed to do [in person]." They also discussed their concerns with commitment and quality. There was a general feeling that students may not be as committed when completing projects through social media. They felt this

demonstrated a lack of personal accountability, which is often found in a face-to-face environment. Students also alluded to the fact that this can lead to lower quality work because there is a, "lack of commitment [with social media]…if someone is sitting next to you we know like if you are gonna for sure do it." Another participant went on to explain that by using social media, "It's not an expansive detail task list… where when it's face-to-face you discuss like the individual responsibilities and it's more detailed."

Participants expressed frustration when communication was not instantaneous, "You have to be really patient because not everyone is on their phone, email, whatever it is, so you have to wait for that person to respond back to see like [something] needs to be clarified." The expectation for quick responses from their peers carried over to their professors, "You have to email your teacher and they do have to email you back," insinuating students expect an instant response from professors even though they acknowledge this is unrealistic. While intellectually students understand that they cannot expect an instant response, this understanding is overridden emotionally and they lack patience in waiting for a response to come.

We also found that participants used social media to avoid what they perceive to be embarrassing face-to-face communication. Our participants stressed that students communicate with peers or faculty through social media to avoid personal encounters and meetings, "It's much easier to email somebody and feel comfortable in sending out email then going in and looking at that person...especially a teacher 'cause if you are confused then you think ' oh, the teacher thinks I'm dumb." This claim is further supported by a participant who stated, "It's easier to be like I need help with this [using social media] instead of looking at them and being embarrassed." Limiting face-to-face discussion means limiting personal embarrassment or shame.

A challenge not expressed explicitly by our participants, but that we found evident was their reliance on the Internet and their automatic acceptance in the accuracy of the information they found: The Internet is a resource. It's our main resource, I'm sure I can speak for all of us. Whenever we are confused, or when you have research it's always Google or um a school search, what's it called, the research sites. Another participant agreed:

> I have something that I need to find out I need to go onto I am in Google and yeah..I do that all the time...especially like when I am

> reading something and I don't know what a word means I go online to look it up, like that is a big thing that I do, so I understand my homework better or like just the assignment type thing.

Her friend replied emphatically, "I'll Google anything." This response by participants suggests that students' unquestionably rely on Google to answer academic questions and conduct research. Our participants seem to trust Google more than any other source available to them, including textbooks and research databases. This may signify a cultural shift in the way students seek information due to their perception of guaranteed accuracy of information and the convenience of accessing it via Google. This has likely affected students' ability to use any other method of research, including online databases, that function differently to Google. Instructors will need to teach students how to search for information in different ways.

We also asked participants how they felt about using Wikipedia as a source for knowledge. One participant told us:

> I wouldn't get on it but like if I Google something and it is the first thing that pops up and I'll click it and skim it but I'm like I better get on a computer especially because teachers are like, don't use Wikipedia.

While professors have told them not to use Wikipedia as a source, the students still used it to gather information on their academic subjects, further highlighting our students' significant trust in the information they find on the Internet.

Discussion and Implications

As we analyzed our data and began the editing process, it occurred to us that our own research process relied heavily on social media use. Listening to the focus group recording, we found ourselves reflecting on our own use of social media to support our academic success. Over the course of the semester, we have used Google Docs, email, text messaging, video chats, and other social media to exchange ideas and to work on this manuscript. For example, when one of our group members had to a miss a meeting, that person Skyped-in to keep up with the research. We also made regular use of Google Docs to maintain our group timelines, meeting dates, and iterative drafts of our writing and editing processes. Much like the

students in our study who said, "Without it [Social Media] research would take forever," we felt the benefits of being able to use social media to assist us in being both effective and efficient in our own research.

Academic Task Completion Theme

While literature supports the use of social media for learning formally with platforms such as wikis (Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011), and blogs (Hanson, 2011; Olofsson, Lindberg, & Hauge, 2011; Wolf, 2010), it does not address the casual use of social media in day-to-day academic life. Our participants did not reference wikis or blogs, but instead talked about smartphone applications, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other platforms to aid their academic performance. This suggests to us that two separate worlds of social media use may exist for our participants, one that is supported by faculty and the institution and another that students have developed to meet their own needs.

If students do operate in two, distinct social media worlds, this could have significant implications for faculty and institutions, and present opportunities for educators to connect with students using more student-oriented social media formats. Students are organizing themselves as learners, via Skype, Facebook, and Twitter in order to assign and complete tasks, and coordinate meeting locations and times. Institutions of higher education should adapt to their students' changing use of social media. Failing to do so may create a chasm between the way students seek out and receive information and the way institutions provide information both in and out of the classroom. Faculty and staff can promote the use of technology for organizing group projects by highlighting the different technologies in class or using Facebook or Twitter to alert students of upcoming deadlines or campus activities.

We found, as students ourselves, that often times we were asked to keep our laptops closed during class so that we could not access the Internet. This ban on Internet use, while intended to keep us focused, actually hindered our research process by denying us access to our research materials and writing drafts. Rather than ban technology use in the classroom, faculty should find ways to help students appropriately integrate social media and technology use to supplement the lectures being given in class. Successful educational

social media integration is evident in the literature (Lin & Yang, 2011; Nian-Shing, Hsiu-Chia, Kinshu, & Taiyu, 2006; Oloffson, Lindberg, & Hauge, 2011).

Connections Theme

Another way in which students used social media to aid their academic success was to make connections with peers and faculty. The literature on social media and connections supports what we found in our study. Social media has the ability to enhance the connections between students and their peers as well as students and their faculty members (Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011). Our study found that when students connected via social media, they believed they were more academically successful. Without the use of social media, students felt their relationships would not be as strong. Even among our team, it was apparent that our use of social media including Skype, email, texting, and access to Google Drive, helped us to stay connected to one another in order to support our academic success. For example, the use of email and texting helped us stay updated on changes that would impact our ability to meet. We also used Google Drive to view our article simultaneously while working face-to-face or while meeting via Skype.

Our participants felt that without social media, faculty would be less accessible. Faculty and staff should make decisions about how technologically connected they want to be with students. It is beneficial for students, faculty, and staff to maintain a mutual understanding around communication expectations, such as response time. Faculty and staff can also help students use social media as an appropriate place to begin forming relationships. We recommend faculty include a way for students to contact them via a social media platform other than email.

Challenges Theme

We found students had some challenges with social media use. Much of the current literature has focused on how social media can distract students from their academics (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). However, rather than focus on the distractions caused by social media, the students in our study seemed primarily concerned with face-to-face interaction being replaced with social media use. This finding was surprising given the ages of the students and their

regular use of social media with the average student spending 7-8 hours a day (Ericson, 2011; Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). The over-reliance on social media use seemed, to our participants, to imply less accountability, particularly in group work. Students commented when there was a face-to-face interaction there was less confusion about what each person had to do.

We experienced this in our own research process. We agreed our best work happened when we were working in the same physical space and could talk with one another, but had our laptops and Google Drive open. In this way we could ask each other clarifying questions make verbal agreements about what had to be done next and in most cases actually spend the time completing tasks with each other. Faculty and staff should consider encouraging that groups spend some time in face-to-face interaction. They should also consider incentivizing engagement with peers and faculty outside of the classroom such as using co-curricular transcripts.

Conclusion

We chose to use an instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) because of the opportunity to redraw commonly held generalizations on a particular topic. In this case we believed the generalization that existed was that social media distracts students from achieving academic success. The literature has supported this claim in the past (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). This literature, juxtaposed against more recent research that supported the use of social media to aid in academic success (Crossman & Bordia, 2011; Ericson, 2011; Hanson, 2011; Lin & Yang, 2011; Olofsson, Lindberg, & Hauge, 2011; Wodzicki, Scwammlein, & Maskaliuk, 2012; Wolf, 2010) gave mixed messages of where and how social media was either helpful or hurtful. Rather than attempting to delineate social media in this mutually exclusive context, future research should explore where social media can be most helpful in promoting student success while continuing to define where social media is not able to enhance the academic experience.

Participants in our focus group were all members of the same student organization and may have some unique experiences using social media. Future researchers may want to collect data from more heterogeneous groups. Similarly, researchers might explore how non-traditionally aged students use social media to facilitate their

academic success.

This case study demonstrates a variety of ways in which students perceive social media facilitates their academic success. We specifically found that students rely on social media for logistical purposes, to complete group work, to complete individual assignments, and to create and maintain important relationships with peers and instructors. Instructors and practitioners must find ways to incorporate social media into their curriculums and services.

Students shared their challenges with social media use such as commitment from their peers when completing assignments via social media, and social media hindering communication with faculty and peers. We believe that students suggested their use of social media to support their academic success outweighed the challenges. In addition, we observed students unknowingly placed significant trust in the accuracy of the information they found on the internet. These findings suggests that while students are aware of social media's limitations, they are also using it to support their academic success. Through this case study, we believe we have helped to redraw the existing generalization that social media detracts from academic success; instead, we have shown how social media can support undergraduate student academic success.

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