STUDENT AND FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL AT BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY

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A Thesis Proposal

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Committee:

To Be Named
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

Through my years of experience in public media and educational institutions, I have related greatly with the shared mission of educating the public. Moreover, during the time with public media, I became absolutely fascinated with the idea of providing educational messages through accessible and entertaining media. Unfortunately, the cost of producing this educational media is becoming unsustainable through rapid improvements in technology and unstable economies.

At the same time that financial outlooks have become grim, social media has become a constant presence in the today’s student body as the most popular method of communication (DePietro, 2013). Members of society are currently living out an entire existence online that augments their daily routines and activities in their physical realities. As such, this form of communication is quick becoming the most accessible message delivery system to date.

Yet, with all this additional communication, public information literacy is challenged by the viral nature of social media. Misinformation may be spread from one individual to their entire viewership through a click of a single link. The job of fact checking and staying aware of the quality of information shared becomes a full time job of the consumer. Often the act of filtering out inaccurate content is surpassed by the ease of redistribution.

All of these social media interactions take place outside of the bounds of a university education. Understanding that this media is only increasing in usage among university students, this leaves a growing void where education is only continued or sought out by the will and desire of the user. By a user’s own discretion the education and knowledge provided and received in classrooms is, while not barred, restrained from entering the realm of social networks.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore current perceptions of integrating social media into educational goals for higher education classes in both classroom and distance education courses. Social media within this study will be defined as a publicly available web site or service that allows for discourse between multiple participants. Understanding this, there is the possibility that harnessing the power of these social networks would increase the pervasiveness of an educational message. This research will focus on the perception of social media being used within higher educational settings as a compliment to both physical and online education.

Research Questions

What is the current perception of social media being used within higher educational settings as a compliment to both physical and online education?

The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: How can social media be defined?

RQ2: Are there categories or classifications into which all social media tools can be arranged into?

RQ3: Are there that may assist in the success of social media being integrated into the classroom?

RQ4: What restrictions may lead to the failure of integrating social media into university courses?

Significance of Study

While universities have embraced social media as a means for communication of marketing messages and materials (Voorhees, 2012), they have yet to grasp the same technology as a tool for improving educational dissemination. With these socially directed tools being heavily used by a large number of university students, this is an arena that can hardly be ignored.
Instead, as the usage of social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, continue to climb, the goal of the educational professional will be to harness the power of this relatively new technology.

Before attempting to control or guide the usage of social media to accentuate the goals of university courses, a temperature must be taken of the affected community to gauge the willingness and ability to use such an action. Through the review of previous studies and measuring the current perceptions of the active university community, a baseline may be set for future forays into usage of social networks as components of classes. This study will be attempting to provide a cross social network basis that may be used for identifying considerations when using social media within higher education.

**Limitations**

The method being employed for this research will be a questionnaire distributed and collected through digital media. Students and faculty with access to a computer with an internet connection will be able to take the survey. However, any individual without the understanding of or ability to navigate online may be limited from taking part in the collection of data.

The researcher will be restricting the population of the questionnaire to university students and faculty. As the study is focusing on higher education, the limitation serves to focus the responses around users who would be affected by the application of social media in higher education courses.

Social media is still a volatile field which has new social networks and web applications being introduced often. The questionnaire will take into account a number of the most popular applications available as of the date that the questions are approved by both the advisor and the Human Study Review Board. Any further applications or networks will have to be addressed in a future study.
At this time, the researcher will be distributing access to the questionnaire to only faculty and students associated with Bowling Green State University. While the temptation to use social media to gather respondents to the survey is present, the study is to focus on solely educational communities. Also, in hopes of gathering results from individuals who are not currently using social media, the questionnaire will be made available via methods of university specific communication open to the researcher.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are being described for the purpose of this study:

**Blog:** “a Web site on which someone writes about personal opinions, activities, and experiences” (www.merriam-webster.com/, 2014)

**Facebook:** a social networking site allowing the creation of personal profiles with the ability to publically and privately connect with friends, cohorts or users with the same affiliations (Aydin, 2012)

**Information Literacy:** “Information Literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information.” (www.ala.org, 2014)

**LinkedIn:** A social networking site focused on professional networking for business colleagues listing applicable skills. The site also allows users to apply for jobs and follow professional organizations related to their field (Dwight & Hinson, 2010).

**Microblog:** a website allowing someone to blog using only a limited amount of data.

**Social Media:** Digital communications centered around the building and reflection of social relationships (Aydin, 2012)

**Social Network:** An online site that focuses on building and reflecting social relationships as related by interests and/or activities (Aydin, 2012)

**Twitter:** a microblogging application limited to posts of 140 characters or less (Lin et al.,
User: “a person or thing that uses something” (Merriam-Webster, 2014) and for the context of this study, the person using noted social networks.

Vimeo: a video sharing site allowing the upload, viewing and sharing of videos (www.pcmag.com, 2014)

Youtube: At the time of writing, the largest video sharing site on the world wide web where users are able to upload, view and share videos. (www.pcmag.com, 2014)
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media's introduction into education

Educators have been experimenting with one social media network or another in an attempt to address challenges brought on with social reforms. Cordero (2012) addresses early in “The Use of Social Media To Improve Climate Literacy” that the YouTube platform presents a unique opportunity to address a wide public audience with an educational program as the network provides over 3 billion views of video content each day. The conversion to a paperless course provides a sustainable path for future courses (Wilson, 2013) with the additional benefit of assessable portfolios of student submissions.

New technology also presents instructors with unique challenges to overcome. DePietro (2013) notes that in a 2011 study, 55% of undergraduate college students owned a smart phone while 11% owned a tablet computer. These rates were only expected to grow in the years to come. Each of these devices have the ability, and are often used for, connecting to the growing social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The usage of these social networks was proposed to improve feedback, social presence and motivation (Lin et al., 2013) largely due to these adoption rates.

Benefits of using social media

In “Social Networking Goes to School,” Davis (2010) denotes that educators have become aware that social networks are now ubiquitous for students. Usage of social media's growing population (Singh et al., 2012; VanBoskirk, 2009) has provided a pervasive route into the daily lives of both students and educators. The nature of this media allows educators to continue discussions beyond the traditional confines of class times or spaces by utilizing tools such as Skype to set up meetings (Davis, 2010) between classes. Further in Davis' article (2010), Steven Anderson, an instructional technologist in North Carolina, is quoted commenting on the
continuous existence of these conversations through social media, stating that “Twitter is like a giant conference that's on all the time.”

This utilization of social networks opens the debate and discussion of topics to a wider audience. In an analysis of pedagogic benefits of blogging (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012; Ferdig & Trammell, 2004), an effect of this open discussion is a diversity of perspectives in response to the original author of posted content. This in turn, displayed by a study over two separate blogs (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012), contributed to a thinking environment which increased interaction. An interesting by product was also noted in the same study that on both blogs, this interaction fostered cooperation and trust between the participants (Alqudsi-ghabra & Al-Bahrani, 2012) which could also be seen in the usage of Twitter between educational professionals as noted in Davis' (2010) article.

Arguments against using social media

There are, however, concerns that are raised in the usage of social networks as an educational tool. The publicly available and popular networks that are already a part of many students’ lives have a commercial imperative. Popular sites, like Facebook and Twitter, are at heart a business which is about making money for itself and investors (Friesen & Lowe, 2012). Friesen & Lowe (2012) point out that there is an integration of advertisements that cannot be avoided or suspended for any account. The authors also bring up that data is collected on the users of the website for targeting of these ads, as well as a revenue source as this data could be sold to other companies.

Another concern about social media is that it provides an invasion of privacy. Aydin (2012) discusses two articles in which privacy is raised as a concern on the Facebook network. Information and media disclosure are topics touched upon by both Read (2006) and Tufekci (2008). While Lin, Hoffman, and Borrengasser (2013) talk about the same concerns existing
when referencing Twitter. Davis (2010) quotes a Bowling Green State University assistant professor, Montana Miller, in which she states that “Facebook is too much of an intrusion into students' personal and social lives.”

Indeed, these environments are categorically social, which can and has previously lead to inappropriate exchanges. Selami (2012) speaks about both “sexting” and cyber-bullying as horror stories coming out of previous studies of Facebook. Davis (2010) acknowledges many skeptics that exist ranging from school administrators to parents of younger students which provide obstacles in the way of social networking adoption.

Finally, in adoption of social media there is the issue that the technology is “constantly inconsistent” (DePietro, 2013). New media, and social networking since it is a prime example of new media, is always changing. In the concepts that make up the idea of new media, change and quick obsolescence are inevitable outcomes. Courses built around or with current social networks may find need for updating within only a year depending on demand and business for each network.

Components of successful social media endeavors

Through a study performed by Karmen Erjavec (2013) it was found that there are components of educational social network usage. Erjavec (2013) notes that the majority of the participants in the study found support in an exchange of practical information between themselves and their social network. The same study revealed that the connected social network users provided emotional support for one another (Erjavec, 2013) throughout the course of the education experience. Both Aydin (2012) and Erjavec (2013) state that the interactions amongst individuals, their families and instructors seem to show a positive correlation between the students and their experience in the class. Although it is worth noting that Aydin (2012) mentions that female participants in one study viewed teacher and student interactions on social networks
slightly more negatively than male participants.

In the guidelines provided by Huffman (2013), it is noted that establishing and stating the purpose for using a social media tool will reflect positively on the student's acceptance and eventual interaction level. Supporting this claim is Erjavec's (2013) conclusions that using Facebook explicitly for establishing a class network cultivates trust and cohesion among the participants. Yet the purpose alone must be supported by an structure for the educational usage of social media tools. Huffman presents a possible model for establishing the organization and structure for the class experience.

**Reasons why social media had not worked in educational settings**

Social networks work off a feed of content and content from a single source can get lost in the frequently refreshing and updated flow of posts, tweets and status updates. Wilson notes that the one of the most frequently reported obstacles to social media use by faculty is the large amount of time that is required to keep up with this pace. Wilson also mentions that the commitment also includes the monitoring of incoming or related messages.

The frequent monitoring also leads into the question of integrity in student submissions. Wilson notes that in a 2011 survey, 80 percent of faculty worry about student interactions through social media would be lacking in credibility. In a separate approach, Friesen and Lowe (2012) point out that the social networks can be convivial, preventing or limiting qualification or reservation between users during their interactions.

Another issue with the usage of social media within an educational environment are the disparities between each user based on the usability of the social networking sites. Lin, Hoffman, and Borengasser's (2013) study on the use of Twitter for class communications resulted in identifying that there were differences between each user's familiarity with the product. The researchers also identified that the site's structure also caused issues through it's
standard interface as messages were not tracked as conversations but single messages, student's could not recall how the conversation had initially began.

In the same study (Lin, Hoffman & Borengasser 2013), a couple participants also raised concerns about privacy as using the same account for both social and educational messages mixed messages and frequently were pushed to mobile devices during all hours of the day. Along the same topic, Frisen and Lowe (2011) also note that the privacy controls provided by Facebook are difficult to control and that the types of information being shared can eventually be used by marketers in product advertisements. Referring back to Huffman's (2013) article, she also denotes the rise in the usage of social networks in harmful acts, including but not limited to bullying.

**Re-application of research cross networks**

It is important to point out that each social network is different in unique ways. Although these technologies can be, in a rough way, categorized. DePietro (2013) lists the social encyclopedia software category entitled 'Wiki' of which a prime example is the namesake Wikipedia. He also notes micro-blogging services, such as Twitter, which use short text messages to communicate ideas rapidly. Cordero (2012) primarily addresses the video sharing site Youtube, although Vimeo could also be compared (Gonzalez, Davis, Lopez, Munoz, & Soto 2013). Then there are social networking sites that integrate individual profiles which tie in personal interests and history to relate individuals, such as Facebook (Aydin, 2012), MySpace and Google+.

According to *Transforming Education with New Media: Participatory Pedagogy, Interactive Learning and Web 2.0* (DePietro, 2013), the flexibility of these tools is actually not a limitation, but an opportunity to address the the routine nature of learning tools that can create “a kind of learning paralysis.” While each tools has notable differences, each may be built upon
academic theories but ultimately the foundation should be flexible.

Conclusions

Social media use in education is still a debated topic. The issues surrounding usage range from applicability to privacy with both proponents and critics. While there have been models proposed (Huffman, 2013; DePietro, 2013) there are still several authors who believe that these tools are still too social (Lin et al., 2013) or too commercial (Friesen & Lowe, 2012). Some issues, like privacy, could be addressed through establishing an “education only” profile on social networks or by using social networks specifically built for education, but the question then becomes whether the tool is then as accessible or pervasive to a student's life. Future research will be needed into solutions for each of the issues mentioned, addressing each side of the arguments.

Many of the articles either addressed only a single social network or briefly addresses that there were other networks that fit the same category. The rare article, like DePietro's (2013), brought up the multiple styles of social networking that exist. I agree with DePietro, that an adaptable or flexible model for using social media in education is needed to address the constant change of technology. To that end, providing comparable examples or case studies of additional categories using the same basis of academic theories could be beneficial.

Finally, I respect the concerns of Friesen and Lowe (2012) who wrote about the commercial imperative in social media. However, since the trends of adoption indicate that social networking is forecast to only increase usage, this tool should not be wholly ignored. Instead, I would be very curious whether we could learn from the commercial and marketing concepts that drive social media and use that research to adapt our education model to reach student's more effectively.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Within this chapter you will find the methodology that I will be following for this study. This will include the statement of the problem, research questions, research design and demographic of the population in the study. Also included are the procedures under which the data collection instruments will be reviewed, analysis of the data will be moderated, and how the human subjects involved in this study will be protected. Finally, I will also cover the time line and budgetary restraints under which the study will be conducted.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore current perceptions of integrating social media into educational goals for higher education classes in both classroom and distance education courses.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: How can social media be defined?

RQ2: Are there categories or classifications into which all social media tools can be arranged?

RQ3: Are there any factors that may assist in the success of social media being integrated into the classroom?

RQ4: What restrictions may lead to the failure of integrating social media into university courses?

Research Design

The goals of this study will be met by the descriptive research method of a cross-sectional survey. According to Mertler and Charles (2011), a survey is a “structured procedure for questioning respondents, usually by means of printed questionnaires mailed to large samples
In the case of this study, the survey will be conducted electronically through a reliable survey provider to be determined in the near future.

**Demographics and Other Characteristics of the Population in Study**

The population of Bowling Green State University will be used as the basis for sampling. The university has a diverse range of both faculty and students each of whom will have a different perspective and comfort level with social media. The faculty employed by the university are made up of 55% male and 45% female members ranging between 20 to over 70 years old, with the largest segment of 32% being between 40 and 49 years old (BGSU Institutional Research). A student population of more than 16,000 full time equivalent students.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The primary data collection instrument for this survey will be a cross-sectional survey created for this study by the researcher. The survey will be collecting a number of categories of information from two separate segments of the same population. The first being the students of the university and the second being the faculty who teach their courses. The purpose of this survey will be to collect quantitative data using directed questions allowing for both single and multiple answers, and qualitative data using extended response questions. The quantitative questions are to be directed to gather information on the number of networks and the amount of usage of each network. As for the qualitative data collected, this will be used to determine the relevance of each network to the participant, how the concept of integrating education into these networks strikes them, and their opinion of the present state and future of these networks.

The demographic information to be collected from this population will be:

- Age
- Gender
- Geographic Location
Also collected will be information to determine the current social media networks that the participants are using at the time of the survey. This will be a multiple answer question that collects information based on the following networks, which may be altered prior to sending the survey:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- SnapChat
- Google +
- Youtube
- Vimeo
- LinkedIn
- A Fill in for other networks not listed

Communication to Participants

The survey will be delivered to the possible participants by email. The body of this electronic message will contain an explanation of the study, link to the survey, terms of the survey, an estimation on the amount of time the survey will take to complete. Should the message go unanswered, the email will be repeated twice over the course of two weeks, eventually noting the absolute deadline to complete the survey. In each communication, the participants will be informed of the fact that the survey will observe their right to privacy and confidentiality.

Review of Data Collection Instruments

In an exercise to ensure the quality of the survey, the Office of Institutional Research will be asked to review the survey for structure and wording. The adviser of my graduate studies will
also be asked to review the survey.

**Procedures of Data Analysis**

A survey collection website will be used to collect the data from the survey. These results will then be calculated, evaluated and visualized through an application such as Microsoft Excel or SPSS. The extended response answers should be categorized and evaluated through trend analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board will be asked to approved the research design and methodology prior to the survey being distributed. 

**Timeline**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates (subject to change)</th>
<th>Tasks to Complete</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 1, 2016</td>
<td>Proposal</td>
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<td>August 1, 2016</td>
<td>Proposal to Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 22, 2016</td>
<td>Defend Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 29, 2016</td>
<td>Develop Survey Instrument</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 19, 2016</td>
<td>HSRB Approval of Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 26, 2016</td>
<td>Email Survey to Sample Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 3, 2016</td>
<td>Resend Email Survey to Unresponded</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 6, 2016</td>
<td>Resend Email Survey to Unresponded with deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 8, 2016</td>
<td>Results of Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 30, 2016</td>
<td>Chapter 4 &amp; 5 completed and thesis sent to committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 14, 2016</td>
<td>Defend Thesis</td>
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Budget

The budget will be dictated by the expense of the survey collection tool. The cost should include customization of the survey, results available during the survey period, and downloadable results after completion of the survey period. An incentive will also be considered as enticement to participate in the survey.

Summary

This descriptive study will be used to study the current perceptions of integrating social media into educational goals for higher education classes in both classroom and distance education courses. This survey will be distributed to Bowling Green State University faculty and students to gather information about their options and usage of social media usage. This will also collect the current perceptions on attempts to integrate education into their current social media networks.
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