

Running Head: COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Fostering Collaboration and Support Through Social Media

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Benefits of Social Media.....	4
Drawbacks to Social Media.....	5
Current Applications of Social Media.....	6
Conclusion.....	7
References.....	9

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Introduction

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines social media as "forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro-blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos)". A majority of the literature concerning social media deals with its application to an educational setting. There also is a significant gap in research into organizational uses and benefits for social media. Given this absence of information, this paper makes the assumption that the advantages and potential issues surrounding the medium are consistent across the two settings. With this assumption, the following body of work can be viewed as relevant to the topic. This review aims to provide insight into the potential for social media to foster collaboration and support in an organizational setting. It will cover advantages, drawbacks, and current applications.

Hung (2010) illustrates the importance of social media with the following:

For millions of people, the web is a social space that connects them with their friends, colleagues, family members and even total strangers. The new generation of web, or Web 2.0, as it has been labeled, supports social interaction and makes it easy for individuals to exchange information and to share their life and interests in one form or another (e.g. sharing videos in YouTube, photos in Flickr, thoughts in Blogger, and expertise in Wikipedia). As the web continues to evolve, web-based social media or social networking services/sites (SNSs), which help establish or maintain human relationships and social networks, are becoming ubiquitous (p. 703).

According to Walling (2009), drive and motivation are furthered by interaction with the work of others. Social media brings together peers with teachers and other community members,

creating a vast network for learning (Brooks, 2009). Additionally, "in today's new media environment in which students blur the line between school-based technologies and personal devices and engagement, educators find themselves standing on a railroad track facing a speeding high-tech train" (Walling, 2009, p. 22). Obtaining information has become a central issue with these technologies facilitating the exploration (Brooks, 2009). The instructor, and organization by parallel, is met with a choice to either get on board or get rapidly left behind. Fully comprehending how social media effects these systems will help to reach our fullest potential (Brooks, 2009).

Benefits of Social Media

Social media is an ever-growing force in our lives today. "Facebook's global membership increased from 350 million to 500 million in a period of 7 months. This figure represents more than 7% of the total world population, with a user base twice as large as the world's third most populous country" (Lin, Le, Khalil, & Cheng, 2012, p. 196). A study done by Hanson, Drumheller, Mallard, McKee, & Schlegel (2010) revealed that college students spend a significant amount of time socializing through technology (talking face to face, texting, talking on the phone, and using social networking Web sites). The sheer amount of time utilizing these social tools is actually greater than either the time spent in, or studying for, their classes. This illustrates their dominance in our daily lives. The potential of these technologies cannot be overlooked.

Through this prevalent social media, there exists the prospective to aid traditional classes by establishing a community amongst the students. With the addition of social media, feelings regarding social connection and learning experiences tend to be more favorable (Hung, 2010).

Other uses are emerging such as fostering self-direction in individuals. Våljataga and Fiedler (2009) illustrate that "the knowledge and skills needed to select, use and connect different social media in a meaningful way form an important part of the dispositions in self-directing intentional learning projects" (p. 58). As our lives becomes increasingly technological it is essential we develop the skills to navigate these means and still remain connected to one another. These are direct benefits to an organizational setting that can create a stronger sense of community with autonomous individuals.

Drawbacks to Social Media

Although there are numerous advantages to social media, the efficient application of these devices still faces obstacles. Social media has the potential to side-track students from the work at hand. Ganis (2009) states that when technological tools, such as television or personal computers, first became common place, they were viewed as "disruptive" to the class room. Although these devices have great potential to facilitate social learning, individually, they are not "learning solutions" (Ganis, 2009). He proposes that there must exist rules and regulations which guide their use.

Social media has also been found to cause problems in the workplace, distracting employees from their tasks. Lin et al. (2012) revealed that in Taiwan, usage of Facebook for socializing and playing games during work hours was so prevalent by employees, numerous organizations have blocked the site. There have even been accounts of employees losing their jobs for such behavior. With issues such as this surrounding social media, organizations and schools need to carefully evaluate how best to integrate these devices.

Current Applications of Social Media

Aside from the potential for distraction and disruption, many schools and organizations have effectively utilized social media. These applications range from customer service to e-portfolios and are all worth exploring. On an educational, personal, and organizational level, e-portfolios are increasingly commonplace and significant. Kim, Ng, & Lim (2010) proposed a way in which social media could potentially overcome typical obstacles facing e-portfolios. With their design, "a large-scale deployment at a state or national level becomes possible at a very cost-effective manner and also such large-scale deployment with intelligent digital asset management and search features create numerous opportunities in education" (Kim et. al., 2010, p. 1018).

Kidwai (2010) clearly illustrates one of the most effective social networking campaign of recent history, the American Red Cross raising money for earthquake victims in Haiti. " The American Red Cross asked people to donate \$10 by sending a text message with the word 'Haiti' to the number 90999. In the first 24 hours of the campaign, the Red Cross raised approximately \$5.1 million dollars" (Kidwai, 2010, p. 8). Both Twitter and Facebook were also made use of to raise awareness with individuals informing, and requesting donations from, their friends. The significance of this should not be overlooked.

Many business have also begun deployment of these tools with great success as well. "Social networking and social media are making significant inroads into the business practices of major organizations, not the least of which is improving customer support" (Grensing-Pophal, 2009, p. 36). Not only do these networks give customers a place to socialize, they provide support and solutions as well as improving upon relationships. This in turn helps to ease work load on the help desk. Benefits from the perspective of an employee includes being "less costly,

more engaging, and even fun" (Grensing-Pophal, 2009, p. 38). To some organizations social media represents a solution to numerous obstacles while others may not understand how it can be applied. It was not long ago, however, that many business did not recognize the now commonplace practice of interacting with their customers over the internet. (Grensing-Pophal, 2009).

Conclusion

Social media is gaining in popularity to the extent that it cannot be ignored. A large percentage of the world is active in social networks and some even spend a majority of their time exploring these tools. To the organizational setting, established and emerging social media has been proven to facilitate networks as well as provide an avenue for collaboration. Many business currently utilize social media to help raise awareness, offer support, and provide a deeper sense of belonging. However, to fully gain the potential from these technologies it must be recognized that rules and regulations should be established (Ganis, 2009). "The bottom line is that it makes sense for all organizations to remain aware of any emerging communication tools that can have a bottom-line impact on their operations" (Grensing-Pophal, 2009, p. 38).

Although there is significant research done on the potential and impact of social media to education, there still exists a large area of exploration. Many organizations have utilized social media for various gains and yet there is still a profound lack of scholarly work regarding it. To fully comprehend the effects this technology may have in an organizational setting it should be explored much further.

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