

Teaching with Social Media  
Leveraging Social Media for Instructional Goals in For-Credit Classes  
Mark Taylor July 27, 2018

How does social media fit with a “best practices”/ research informed instructional model in higher education, specifically in for credit classes?

What are the pros and cons of instructors adopting social media in their classes?

**Delivery of educational content on-line at sites like YouTube**, on-line lectures (found or created), and on-line simulations are wonderful, effective innovation and burgeoning resource. They provide "rich, current" content and fit perfectly with the flipped class model.

**Social media (SM)** is the interactive part of specific Web 2.0 on-line tools, platforms and services that are web based, dynamic, user-centered and that encourage interaction, collaboration and democracy of interaction.

**Technology** is what ever was not around when you were growing up. Everything you grew up with is just the world. People tend to be less comfortable with new things/ innovations they are less familiar with.

Every communications technology innovation has been **disparaged** by educators who did not grow up with it.

- “The **written word** will replace memory. They will write it down instead of committing it to memory.”
- “**Printing** will give "the illusion of knowing". If they buy it they will think they know it.”
- “**Sound recording** will make lecture obsolete.” (and it should have.)
- “**TV** will make school obsolete.”
- “**On-line learning** will make the classroom obsolete.”
- Social media is the latest innovation/disruption and probably not as **promising** as some people think or as **damaging** as other people think. It is a significant part of most students’ worlds, and of the workplace, so we must address it in higher ed classes.

## Pros of leveraging SM in instruction

1. Establishes **credibility** with digital learner, who are on these sites

anyway.

- If we don't "get" social media, they may wonder what else don't we get?

2. SM **engages** digital learners with each other and instructor on platforms they know and are comfortable with.

- Students may be more **comfortable** communicating on-line than in a live class.
- Generally increasing student engagement increases **persistence**.

3. SM can increase overall levels of student to student and instructor to student **interaction**.

- **Collaboration and** meaningful dialogue are not time and place bound.

4. SM can increase student **responsibility** and **required participation** since their participation can be monitored.

- Instructors can monitor activity through metrics and analytics.

5. With SM instructors can **answer question once** and push the answer to everyone. When one student asks a question it is very likely that other students have the same question but are not asking it.

- SM is also helpful in pushing expectations of class expectations, dates, assignments, etc.

6. SM is a part of **21st Century literacy**. Using it in classes can offer opportunities to help students develop **social media management skills**.

- They will need to know how to manage themselves on-line in their professional future.
- SM sophistication is a large part of many jobs/ professions will probably be an expectation of more workplaces/ careers in the future.

7. SM can facilitate **higher order learning**.

- Students have access to lots of information but often poor judgement about it.

- As SM connects with other on-line information sources it offers the opportunity for instructors to help students **evaluate the quality of on-line resources** which is a very necessary professional and life skill.

8. Even when **instructors are not involved in SM interactions** it offers opportunities for students to collaborate

- They will probably interact on SM with coursework and assignments.

Cons of involving SM in coursework

1. Students **may not want us there**

- Instructors entering students' SM personal spaces may be seen as **intrusive**.
- Student may have curated a **brand** that is not be congruent with the class/ professional expectations and may fear an incongruence and possible judgement. Students are people who are "becoming" some kind of professional; they have not yet "become" that professional so are not yet the person we aspire for them to be, and that may be readily apparent on SM.

2. It is hard for both instructors and students to separate their **personal from professional personas, and keep personal and professional information separate.**

- Even when separate pages are created for class or course groups, it is hard to prevent bleeding between groups.
- This possible overlap might limit authenticity on either personal or professional sites.

3. Is communication on SM **as valuable as** other forms of communication, can it **discourage other forms of communication**, and the development of **critical thinking skills**?

- Maybe that student who won't raise their hand in class needs to learn to raise their hand.
- SM might **discourage or substitute for** face to face interaction and the development of "real life social skills" (though if well managed SM can lead to these other skills.)
- Communication on-line is generally conversational, and is very different from **thoughtful, edited writing which is often the hallmark and indicator of effective critical thinking, as well as the tool for developing critical thinking.**

4. SM may increase students' expectation for the instructor to be available **24/7**.
  - And may increase students' expectation that **instructors respond immediately** to their concerns.
  
5. Class expectations that students use SM may lead to **distractions from the intrusion of other SM material and "pop-ups"**.
  - SM is as famous as a **"time suck"** and it may be **hard for students to stay on task** with coursework.
  
6. SM brings a **third (or fourth) party** into instructional process.
  - Classes already involve a complex dynamic of student, other students, the instructor, the institution on many levels, a course management system and textbook sites.
  - Is it worth bringing a SM provider into this equation?
  - Is the functionality of the benefits of using SM available somewhere else, like the course management system?
  
7. Requiring students to join SM third party platforms raises concerns about **privacy**.
  - Information available on SM, like enrollment in a particular class, may violate **FERPA**.
  - With SM there are always concerns and uncertainties about what those companies are doing with student data for their own commercial ends.
  - If the instructor requires participation on these sites, does responsibility for privacy violations fall to the instructor?
  
8. There is no **half-life** of information on-line; everything lasts forever.
  - What are the long term ramifications of course generated information being on public platforms?
  
9. Adopting SM in instruction raises issues with **accessibility**.
  - **Ensuring access** for students with disabilities falls to the **instructor and the institution**.
  - Failure of SM sites to ensure access **does not absolve** the instructor or the institution of that responsibility.

10. Adopting SM in instruction raises issues with **equity**

- There is still a “digital divide” and **unequal access** between students with fast, reliable, portable internet access and those without.

- Adopting SM in instruction could further **marginalize and disadvantage** some, especially poor, students.

- Making the use of SM “**optional**” in classes does not make it truly fair as it can **advantage** those students who can access it.

11. There is increasing evidence that the impacts of **excessive** (over three hours a day) of time with SM has **negative consequences emotionally** and socially.

- This is a complex issue with limited nuance in the data about the relative impact of different on-line activities.

- Interacting with voice over lecture slides is probably very different that “surfing the web” and watching non-educational YouTube videos and gaming, but **overall on-line time** remains a concern.

12. With SM there are issues with content being **edited and taken out of context for personal, social or** political purposes.

- Haters gonna hate and concerns with trolling, on-line mobbing and flaming are a risk with any SM activity.

## Conclusion

We are going to have to

- understand SM
- help students learn to use it responsibly/ professionally
- leverage it for instructional purposes

We should only do so

- with great care
- with an understanding of the opportunities and risks
- every instructor should have a plan and know what they are getting into with SM in instruction.

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