



# Social Media in Higher Education

~~Is it~~ Time to Take the Plunge?

a report by

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## Executive Summary

Social media in higher education is a technology in transition. Learners and educators both find social media an appealing way to supplement formal learning, but the evidence for its effectiveness in formal courses remains inconclusive. Surprisingly, it is educators, not learners, who are leading the charge to experiment with social media. Educators, nearly as engaged as learners using the ubiquitous Facebook, have broadened their use of social media much more so than learners. Educators are attempting to find ways to fit social media into their models of teaching and learning while the learners seem content with

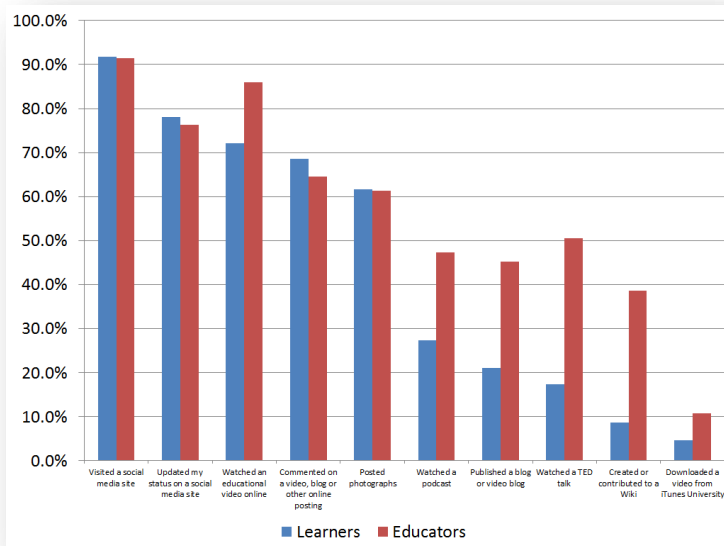
social media remaining as a virtual social construct best left out of the learning equation.

This new study looks at a broad range of social media interactions in higher education and concludes that any juggernaut of social media activity transforming the classroom may be more illusion than reality. Although there is ample evidence that social media is being used in formal learning, preferences for its use remain far behind those of face-to-face communications (52.5% of learners prefer face-to-face as the

primary way to communicate with

educators), and e-mail (45.6% chose e-mail as their first choice, and 51.3% selected it as their second choice). Facebook was a distant third. Only a combined total of 8.5% of learners selected Facebook as their first or second choice for instructor communication. Services like *Rate My Professors*, however, which uses social feedback to rate educators, was used frequently, with 64% of those using the service agreeing or strongly agreeing that it accurately reflected their personal experiences with faculty.

This study suggests that social media is best used when it is understood by faculty and applied in a way that complements formal learning. Educators will likely facilitate the introduction of social media into classroom situations where they believe it can add value. Over the short term learners may constrain their use of social media to schedule coordination, learning augmentation and informal learning, if educators succeed, social media will be tightly integrated with the learning experiences, both virtual and experiential.



A COMPARISON OF LEARNER AND EDUCATOR SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT



# Social Media in Higher Education

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# Social Media in Higher Education

## Introduction

This survey was undertaken to determine the current state of social media use within higher education as an educational tool. For clarity, the definition from Wikipedia can be used as an acceptable definition for social media:

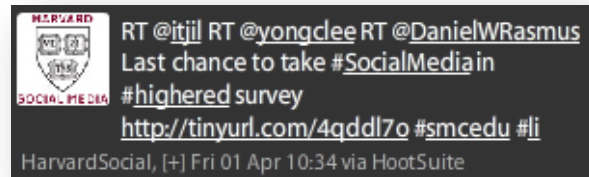
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*Social media are media for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable communication techniques. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into interactive dialogue.*

*Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content." Businesses may also refer to social media as consumer-generated media (CGM). A common thread running through all definitions of social media is a blending of technology and social interaction for the co-creation of value.*

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The survey was promoted via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and direct e-mail. Although the survey was promoted internationally, it is primarily a United States-centric view on the topic.



This report begins with a model of learning that can be used to evaluate respondent recommendations, findings from the survey and to form the basis for recommendations. The report also explores the future of social media through scenarios by “wind tunneling” social media to see how it might evolve under various social, technological, economic, environmental and political circumstances.

This report draws on information from a SurveyMonkey.com survey designed and executed by the author, as well as input from other social media sources and personal interviews.

To start the class, students need to generate their CV on LinkedIn and create a Twitter account. We keep in touch via Twitter: it is there where they get reminders about the class and their deadlines, where I answer their questions and where they can engage with our remote guest lecturers during class time or after.

I also use live synchronous video platforms such as Skype or TokBox to bring in the classroom guest speakers, people that are actively engaged in the creative and cultural industries and can give a positive and inspiring example to the students.

Ana A.

### A Model of Learning

The literature on learning is filled with models that oversimplify, and in doing so, obscure the complexities and subtleties of the learning process. Rather than abstract feedback arrows, learning is a much more fluid and organic process filled with eddies and side currents that are important in the refinement of knowledge, as well as pointers to topics one may wish to explore later.

Many adopt D.A. Kolb's learning styles model<sup>1</sup> and experiential learning theory as a reasonable base for self-reflective improvements in teaching and learning. The model in Figure 1 builds on Kolb by creating an umbrella that captures solutions thinking as a parallel and integrative modes of learning through experience. The model also suggests that a multi-dimensional feedback loop exists during assessment, which asks that the learner challenge themselves to prove competency, but that they also challenge the conceptual material being presented for validity and relevancy. By incorporating this feedback loop, learners test their educators and the tacit acceptance of all that is provided as input. In a world of great uncertainty, one in which scientific and engineering discoveries regularly overturn long-held assertions, and rapid shifts in social norms also occur, social media can provide an authentic and transparent path that facilitates dialog about these changes and captures intermediary conclusions.

Social media has not, and will not, change the fundamentals of learning, but will rather complement and supplement its dynamics by

creating new channels of communication. Social media will also create new channels of trust as the global reach of the Internet exposes learners to new sources of learning, be those sources, people or repositories.

**Social media will also create  
new channels of trust**

The model of learning below contains certain assertions about the teaching and learning. It assumes that the educator has assumed the role of guide, and seldom, if ever, acts as the didactic source of knowledge to the learner. The model assumes that much of the experience is co-created, and that the use of technology, like social media, may be initiated by the educator or the learner, and that once initiated, the learning boundaries are limited only by the community engaged in the dialog.

The model also assumes that there is no finite end-point to any learning experience. Topics surrounded by the aurora of precision, and those governed by personal aesthetics, can be enhanced equally by further exploration, refinement of query, or by the revelation of new facts or perspectives.

At the core of the model, the educator assumes the role of guide, helping learners through revelation of information, assistance with the curation of new information (such as helping learners classify and evaluate information from outside sources), the role of challenging the learner's assumptions and conclusions, and the advisory role that help learners place their learning in context for further development or for application.

Unlike Kolb, who makes distinctions between feeling, watching, thinking and doing, this model proposes an integrated continuum, where, if these distinctions do exist, they are of less cognitive importance

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<sup>1</sup> Kolb, D.A. *Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall. 1984.

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because the entire cycle can take place during micro-learning experiences when the separation of activities may prove interesting to cognitive psychologists, but would have little bearing on the experience of the learner. This model can thus be applied to short-duration learning experiences and to longer-term experiences as well.

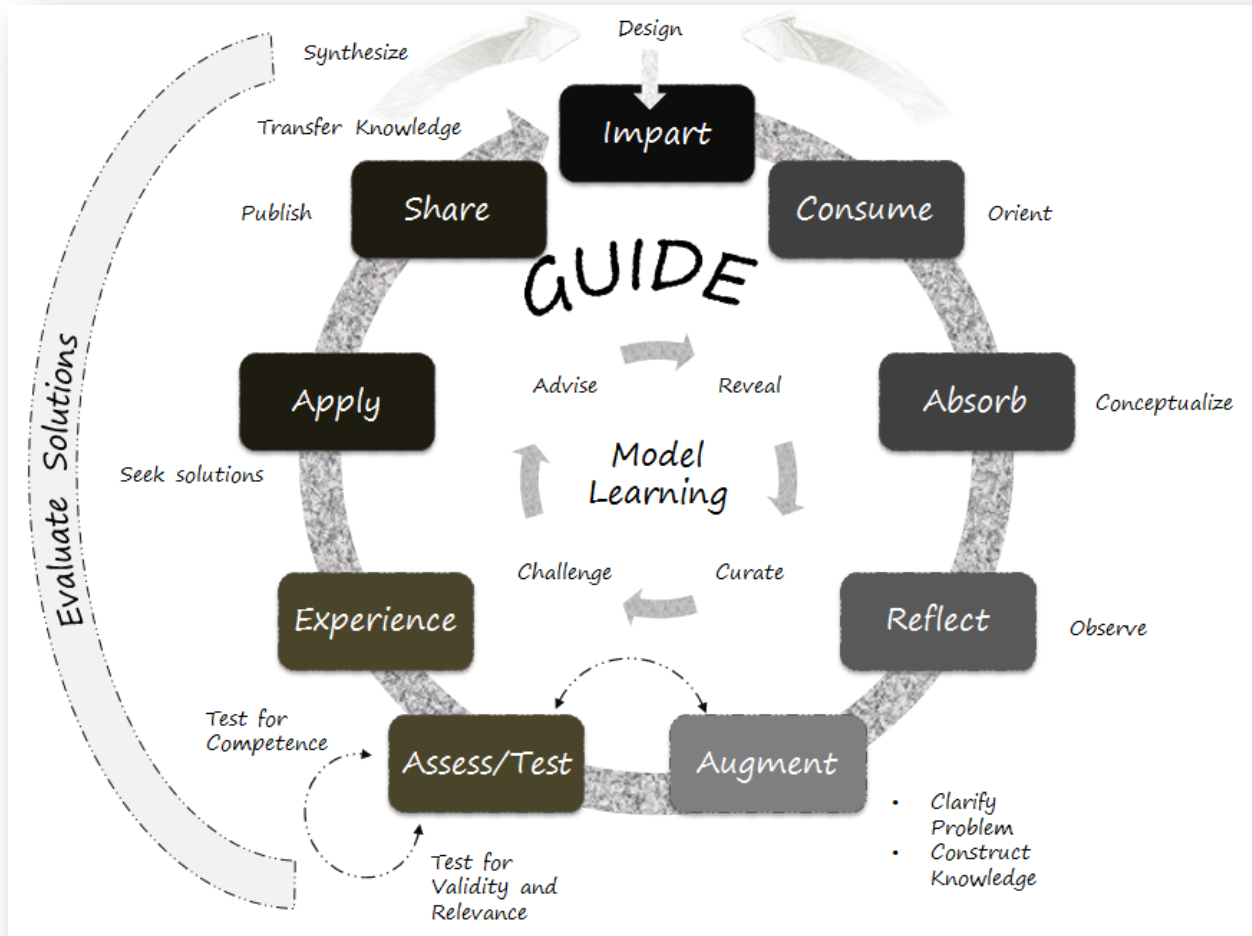


FIGURE 1 A MODEL FOR LEARNING

The primary reason for developing this diagram was to use it for the classification of verbatim responses to questions about the use of social media in higher education. The less-detailed or more abstract models did not create enough categories to cover the responses, thus I inferred the model was incomplete and attempted, with this conceptualization, to create a more inclusive model.

This model has not been tested against real-world learning experiences in a systematic way, though it has undergone scrutiny through observation of many different higher education learning experiences. Preliminary analysis suggests that this model will serve the purpose of classifying responses in a meaningful way, and driving dialog about those responses.

### Findings and Analysis

The data from an online survey conducted in February of 2011 provided some intriguing hints at the current views of learners and educators when it comes to the use of social media in higher education. Given the relatively small sample size (N=381) this survey cannot be deemed a definitive indicator of social media use or opinions about its use, but it is a significant enough glimpse into the current state of learner and educator practice, and when combined with interviews and other material, it provides a snapshot of technology in transition.

The respondents to this survey were very aware of social media, and very active in its use. The survey suggests that the use of social media for higher education has yet to find traction, however, not because higher education learners fall outside of the general perception of high social media engagement by young people, but because they have not yet discovered a value proposition for integrating it into their higher education experience. 89% of the survey respondents reported that they had an account on at least one social media system.

Of the social media sites listed in the survey, Facebook was the overwhelming winner with 90.4% of learners reporting an active account, followed by Skype (57.1%) and YouTube (53%). Figure 2 illustrates the results for other social media platforms. It also illustrates one of the primary issues for educators, which is the wide variety of social media tools, making the selection of any one tool, outside of Facebook, a choice that would eliminate 50% or more of learners from immediate participation (pending their agreement to join a site for class purposes). And despite the length of this list, 12.3% of learners reported holding an account on a service that was not listed.

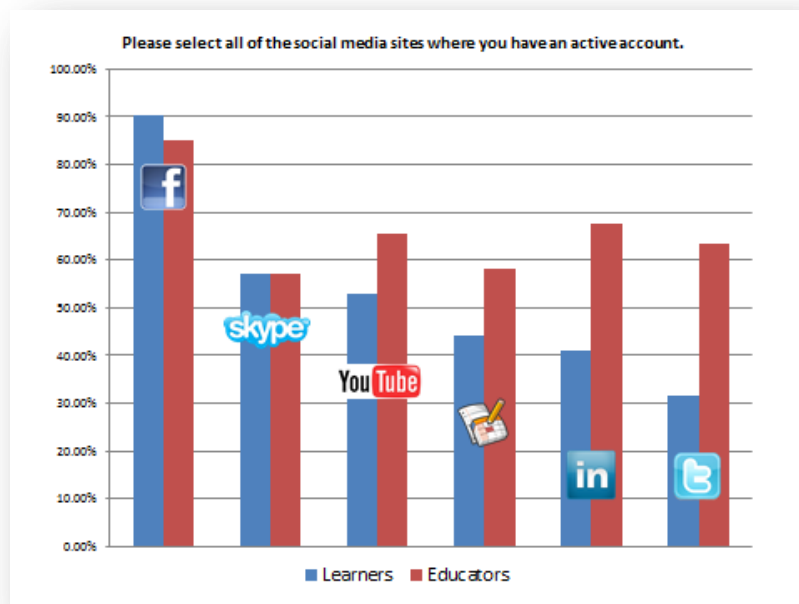


FIGURE 2 SOCIAL MEDIA SITE USE BY LEARNERS AND EDUCATORS

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For educators, the mix was Facebook first (84.9%), followed by LinkedIn (67.7%), YouTube(65.6%), Twitter(63.4%), Google Docs (58.1%) and Skype (57%).

Interestingly, when educators were asked about the use of consumer social media platforms for instruction, YouTube was number one, with Google Docs in second place. Unlike the learner responses, where the top-visited website rated higher than “all other responses” for educators, the plethora of tools not listed in the survey came in a very close third to Google Docs.

This following Wordle ([wordle.net](http://wordle.net)) cloud represents the verbatim responses from educators for which tools they used that were not listed in the survey for response.

*Unlike the learner responses, where the top visited website rated higher than “all other responses” for educators, the plethora of tools not listed in the survey came in a very close third to Google Docs.*



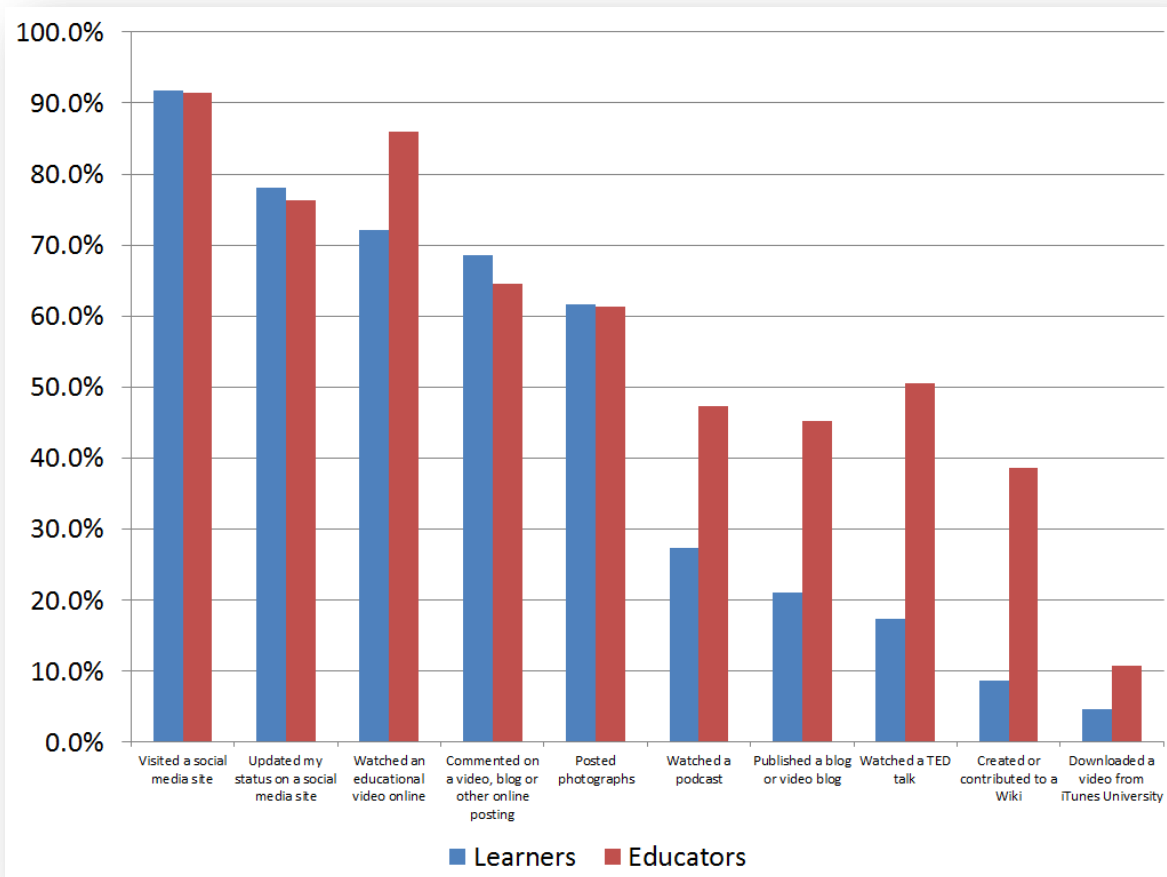
FIGURE 3 WORDLE CLOUD FOR ADDITIONAL TOOLS USED BY EDUCATORS

All learner respondents reported some social media activity within thirty-days of taking the survey, a second strong indicator of social media integration into their lives. 91.8% of respondents reported visiting a social media site, with 78.1% reporting that they updated a social media site. A little over



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70.2% watched an educational video on YouTube, which reinforces the reported use of social media for informal learning. Learners were active participants in social media, with 68.5% reporting that they commented on a video, blog or other online posting.



**FIGURE 4** A COMPARISON OF LEARNER AND EDUCATOR SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Educators indicated they were as active, if not more active, than learners when it came to social media. The differences were pointedly focused on education-related activity. Where learners were slightly more engaged with updating their status and commenting on posts, educators were more likely, (in some cases more than two-to-one over learners), to engage in informal educational activity such as watching a podcast, publishing a blog, watching a TED talk, creating or contributing to a wiki or downloading a video from iTunes University.

One of the key points documented in Figure 1, A Learning Model, is the inner circle where educators model learning for learners. This survey may reflect this phenomenon. Although some responses from educators were very negative when it came to the use of social media in the classes, (most extremely: “do not ever use it, it is the devil”), the survey may be more indicative of an effort by educators to understand the application of this new technology to education. Learners may come to social media initially from a purely social perspective, and become engaged with learning through social media as an

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outcome of connecting with other learners within a course, a college or university, or a discipline. Educators seem to be coming to social media as a new tool that they are trying to align with their personal teaching and learning approaches. Those who are more adventuresome and open are actively experimenting with ways to effectively incorporate social media into their curriculum and teaching practices.

This survey captured the responses to a highly engaged community of learners. When it came to learning, however, only 22.8% regularly used social media to support formal learning. Interestingly, 63% reported use of social media to support informal learning, suggesting a disconnect between formal and informal learning engagement and style. For educators, the use of social media for informal learning was 73.1%, over a point higher than those who claimed to have an account on a social media system.

Only one-third of learners (29%) reported that being informed that an educator employed social media would make them more likely to take a class. Social media appears to play a more neutral role for most, with almost 58% of learners reporting that if they knew an educator was going to use social media during instruction, it would not influence their choice. A little over 13% reported that it would negatively impact their choice.

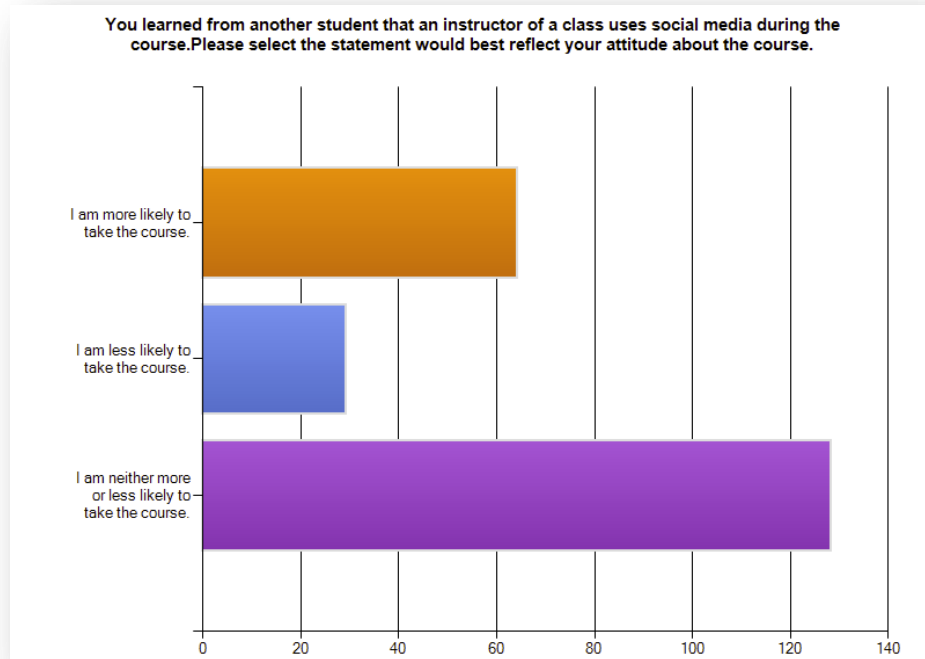
This finding suggests that social media is not yet a major indicator of innovation for learners, or that innovations, such as the use of new teaching tools, is not seen as a positive differentiator by learners. This finding is substantiated all the way back to the recruiting and admissions process where only 15.5% of learners reported that social media influenced their choice of what learning institution to attend.

When it came to learning, however, only **22.8% regularly used social media to support formal learning**. Interestingly, **63% reported use of social media to support informal learning, suggesting a disconnect between formal and informal learning engagement.**

***"I don't think it [social media] should ever replace face-to-face communication"***

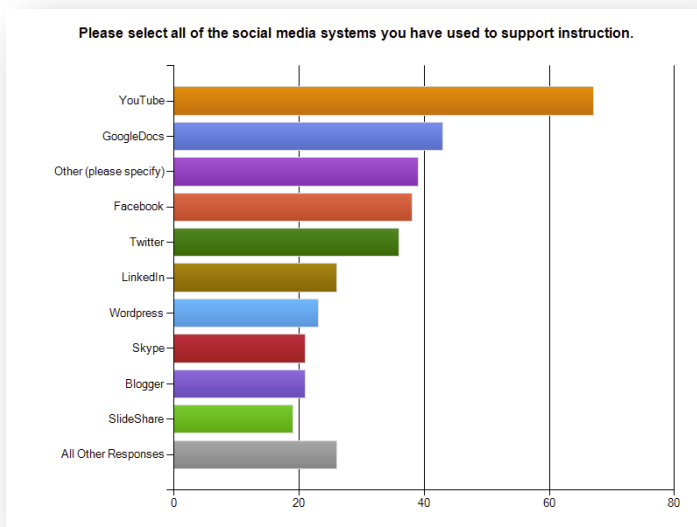


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**FIGURE 5** SOCIAL MEDIA AS COURSE RECRUITING TOOL QUESTION RESULTS

Face-to-face, at 52.2%, remained the most popular form of communication. E-mail was the primary choice for electronic mediated communication at 45.6%. E-mail was also the overall second choice for communication, with 51.3% of learners choosing it over all other forms of electronic communication.

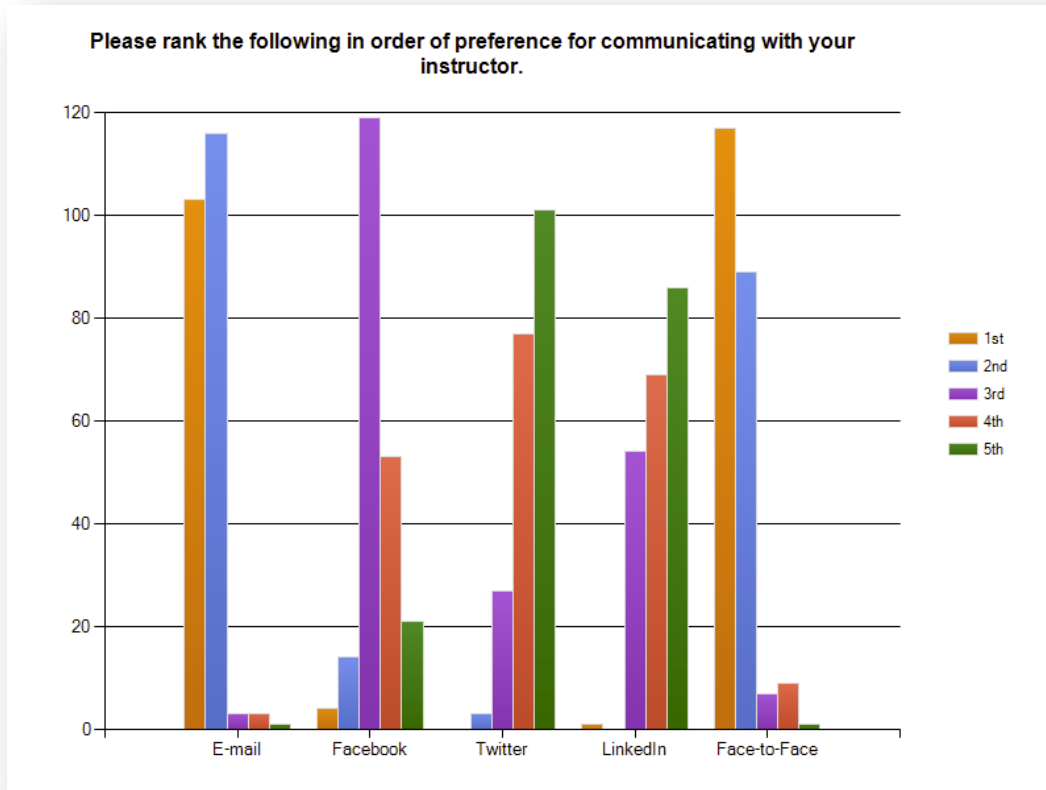


**FIGURE 6** EDUCATOR USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO SUPPORT INSTRUCTION

Facebook ranked a clear third at 56.4% of third choices, but received only a total of 8.5% of responses as a first or second choice.

The use of video, podcasts and wikis, however, were more favorable, with over 75% of the respondents indicating that they were valuable learning tools.

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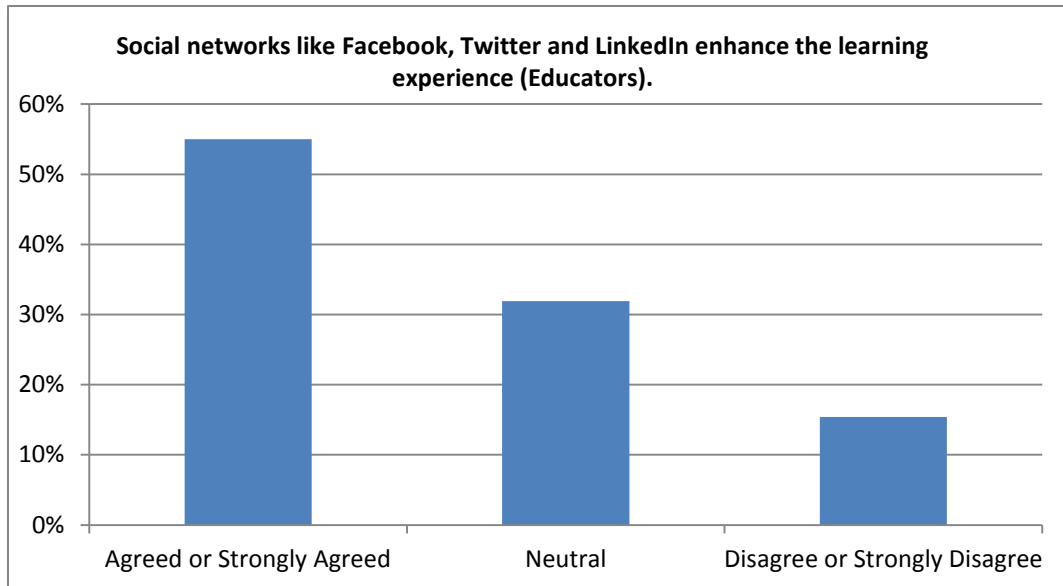


**FIGURE 7** LEARNER RESPONSES TO INSTRUCTOR COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

This overwhelming desire for face-to-face communications challenges theories that technology can be used to effectively scale the learning experience. Some organizations, such as the Innosight Institute, suggest that technology will play a disruptive role in education by scaling resources, leading to innovative new models. That may be the case, but those models appear outside the current experience of most learners or educators in higher education. The burgeoning use of social media for informal learning may point to disruptive channels, but currently those channels do not offer recognition of learning obtained in that manner, and given that most of it was informal, e.g., outside of a course of study. The use of social media currently appears to be complementing, broadening and augmenting experiences for both educators and learners, but does not yet appear to demonstrate a solid perceived value when evaluated against traditional forms of learning.

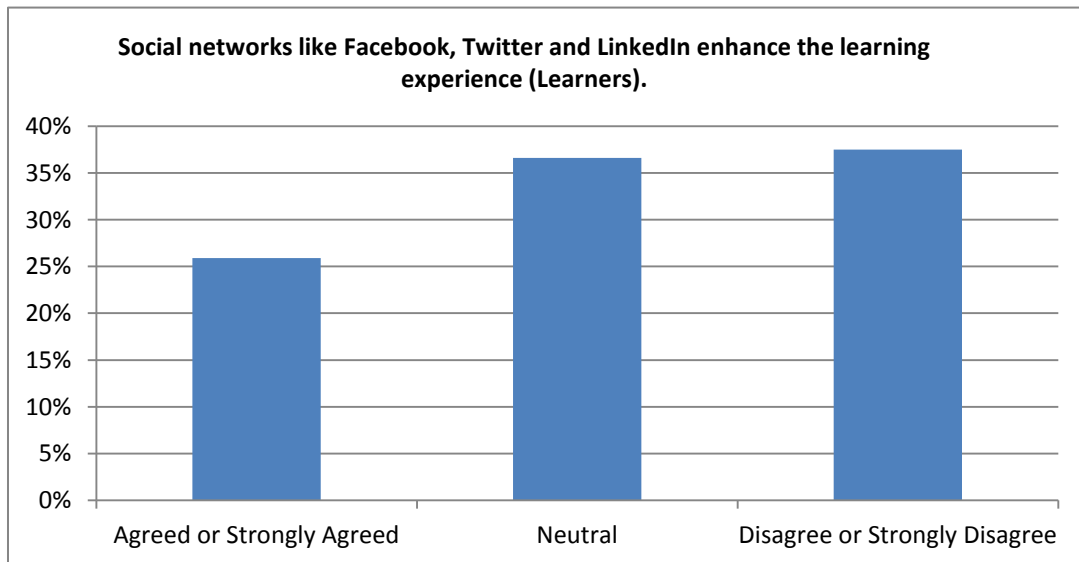
55% of educators reported value in social media as a communication tool at either the strongly agree (19.8%) or the agree level (35.2%). 52.8% agreed (30.8%) or strongly agreed (22%) that Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn enhanced the learning experience. Neutral to negative responses were narrowly behind positive responses at 47.3%.

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**FIGURE 8** EDUCATOR RESPONSES TO THE VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO LEARNING

In the learning experience, learners reported reluctance to endorse social media, with only 25.9% agreeing, or strongly agreeing that social media tools enhanced formal learning situations. 36.6% were neutral, and 37.5% disagreed, or strongly disagreed about the value of social media in learning. Learners were more favorable with social media for communications, with 43% agreeing or strongly agreeing that it was a valuable communication tool, though nearly one third (31%) had a negative or strongly negative response to value of social media for communication.



**FIGURE 9** LEARNER RESPONSES TO THE VALUE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO LEARNING

*“I use Rate My Professor a lot, it really helps to get somewhat of a preview of what the professor will be like. I use it only for negative comments, people only comment on the bad, not the good. If there are negative comments, don't take it from that professor.”*

This study examined one particular social media site dedicated to evaluating the efficacy of faculty: *Rate My Professors*. As an information augmentation tool, this site appears to have an impact, with 62.8% of learners reporting that they used *Rate My Professors* to gain insight into potential educator teaching styles, learner relationships and other factors. Of those learners, 43.5% reported that *Rate My Professors* information accurately reflected their personal experience with faculty. An informal study conducted at the University of Washington, Bothell (and reported during a private interview) came to a similar conclusion. When the examined faculty performance ratings were compared to those found on *Rate My Professors*, they discovered a close correlation, though *Rate My Professors* contained less subtlety and nuance than the formal evaluation system.

### Conclusion

This survey on social media in higher education, like other surveys on emerging technologies, reflects only a snapshot in the history of a technology's adoption. Although the study may prove inconclusive in predicting the future state of social media in education, it does document inferences that may prove valuable in helping determine the future course for the adoption of social media in higher education, such as the need for educator leadership to help define its role in the educational experience.

The study clearly demonstrates that learners are conflicted about social media. Some are willing to embrace it and “friend” their educators, and others want a clear separation between their social lives and their learning lives. Some learners even go as far as suggesting the use of social media through popular online sites, with Facebook most frequently noted, as “unprofessional” when it comes to education. For those in favor of using social media, most want it to provide clear value and “not fill time” or be used to help the educator “look cool.”

*“It's somewhat creepy to have your professor be a part of your social media. People put stuff up that is meant only for their friends and is not appropriate for the classroom.”*

The survey also suggests that rather than consumer social media becoming a channel for higher education communications that commercial tools, like Blackboard, which is dedicated to the learning environment, may create a more neutral ground for educator-learner interactions.

These findings indicate that the future of social media integration will likely be led by educators who engage learners in authentic, experience-based, experiments with social media in learning situations.

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The use of YouTube to show videos in class is not a social media application, especially if those videos are simply more convenient ways to access video material available elsewhere. The use of social media implies a strong community element where the learners engage with their communities throughout the learning cycle as illustrated in Figure 1. There is some evidence that learners are touching some points in the cycle, but it is clear that the use of social media among learners for learning is nascent.

It remains important to monitor learner behavior in order to discover when a material shift takes place in the use of social media. This survey suggests that the shift is currently taking place much more among educators than among learners. The short answers suggest learners want to separate social media from learning, including the delivery mechanism, with several expressing the opinion to use “school technology,” not Facebook, to communicate. Reasons for this included information overload in the social media environment and the falseness of friendships with professors that would add time to manage them. The amount of time for educator experiences to diffuse into learning styles and expectations is unclear. The survey suggests that learners are unlikely to adopt social media broadly as a learning tool without educator guidance and the delivery of learning experiences using social media that prove effective and meaningful to learners.

It may also be that social media services, like Facebook and Twitter, have yet to create an engagement model that facilitates learning. Facebook, for instance, could create pages for classes that learners could join without friending faculty. Posts would exist within that microcosm only for the duration of a course. Twitter could create deeper metadata to improve message segmentation over the use of hashtags. Twitter could, for instance, have registered tags that act as private tweet spaces.

These ideas represent only a couple of ways consumer social media tools could add value to the learning experience. It is not clear, however, that social media service providers have a desire to be more aligned with formal learning, or to offer learning services that may complicate their business models. It is clear, however, that social media is forcing learners and educators to re-examine how they communicate, engage with content and structure their learning.

How social media ultimately manifests itself in learning experiences will remain a source of intense speculation for many more years. The Future of Social media section of this report briefly explores how social media may evolve under different social and economic scenarios.

*“Try to use them [social media services] as sparingly as possible. I know it may be the wave of the future, but I think it takes something away from the overall experience of college and learning new things. I may be old-fashioned, but I prefer going to class and listening to an instructor give a lecture rather than reading something online.”*



## Recommendations

### Serious Insights

By Daniel W. Rasmus



## Ten Recommendations for Effective Use of Social Media in Higher Education

**1 Start with Proven Practices** Not all learners are open to full social media engagements with educators, so start applying social media to education through proven practices such as sharing links, answering questions and creating spaces for shared work.

**2 Have a Technical Architecture in Mind** Many social media services can be interconnected (such as tweets showing up in Facebook). Make sure you don't over-complicate the use of social media by making learners visit too many places. Educators should choose the message, let the learners choose their subscription channels.

**3 Don't be Afraid to Learn** from learners. It is OK to look at this as an experiment and ask learners for guidance. Social media is an ideal place to model learning. Let the learners experience how you ask questions, evaluate responses, incorporate new data, set-up experiments and test hypotheses.

**4 Avoid the Personal, Respect Privacy** One of the biggest concerns among learners is the lack of privacy. Many don't trust that educators will respect the boundaries between learning lives and social lives. Make it clear, even if the institution doesn't have a clear policy, that you do. Keep the interaction at the professional learning level for it to be both effective and respected.

**5 Measurements** No clear set of measurements exists to determine if social media is effective in a learning situation. Educators should create their own tests of efficacy. They should also avoid false metrics like involvement or time saved. Social media is not a productivity tool, but a relationship enhancing tool, be that relation between learners and educators, between learners and learners, or between learners and the wide variety of content available. Rule of thumb: if the metric doesn't equate to the improvement of an already established learning outcome, then it is probably a false metric.

**6 Plan** for the use of social media. Don't just randomly throw it into the mix. If you plan to take social media beyond the few generally

proven practices, take time to figure out how it will add to the learning experience. If it isn't appropriate or doesn't support learning outcomes, then don't use it.

**7 Be Brand** Social media will likely be most effective with educators who make social interaction part of their personal brand, just as commercial consultants and products and services do. If you really want to use social media in innovative ways, you will need permission, often known as "brand permission," in marketing. This means that your learners will give you "permission" to take them on social media journeys because of your reputation garnered through social media.

**8 Be Brave** The classroom is only one venue. Be brave and think big. Consider the Twitter Scavenger Hunt for journalism students who are asked to seek out school spirit, little-known facts and fanatic fans. (for more see: <http://www.convergemag.com/classtech/Twitter-Scavenger-Hunt.html>)

**9 Think Project** Sometimes the best way to learn is to craft a project with clear goals and clear boundaries. Social media is finding its way into many learning experiences not as a general communication tool or learning augmentation tool, but as a project. Learners are creating "mash-ups" as class projects, coordinated research and social simulations where groups of learners collectively work through a hypothetical situation.

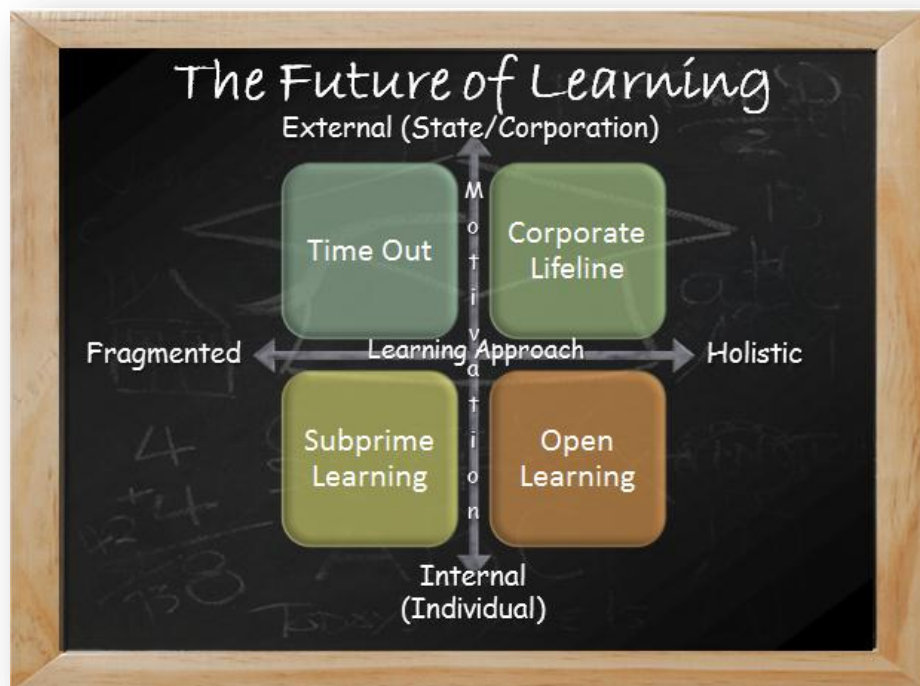
**10 Question Scale** In learning situations, we must challenge the assumption that technology scales learning. In some cases it may scale knowledge exchange, but colleges and universities are about preparing learners for life. Much of the value of higher education comes from face-to-face encounters between learners and educators, and between learners and learners. It is important that institutions, governance bodies and education reform groups not look to tools like social media as a replacement for more traditional forms of learning. Individuals and institutions must seek a balance that respects the varied experiences learners require to fulfill their learning objectives.



## The Future of Social Media in Higher Education

The future of social media is far from preordained. The hype cycle under which it currently finds itself will soon fade, and more realistic expectations will set in. Given the broad reach of social media, there is little doubt that it will continue to play a role in the future of learners, but the details of the future are open to interpretation.

The future of any technology depends on the social, technological, economic, environmental and political (STEEP) circumstances under which it is deployed. Change those circumstances, and technology that thrives, may be of little use, and even if the technology remains useful, the ways its success is measured may be very different.



This section of the report examines social media against the backdrop of four future of learning scenarios.

SCENARIO PLANNING IS A STRATEGIC PLANNING TECHNIQUE THAT HELPS ORGANIZATIONS DEVELOP LONG-TERM PLANS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL, TECHNOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC, ENVIRONMENTAL AND POLITICAL UNCERTAINTIES.

SCENARIO PLANNING USES "OUTSIDE-IN" ANALYSIS TO UNDERSTAND THE ORGANIZATION'S ROLE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LARGER FRAMEWORKS.

SCENARIO PLANNING CAN BE EFFECTIVELY USED TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITY OF INTER-RELATED TRENDS, CREATE CONTINGENCY PLANS, AVOID SURPRISES BY PRACTICING THE FUTURE, AND DRIVE INNOVATION WITH SCENARIOS ACTING AS A CREATIVE CATALYST.

## social media in higher education



### Corporate Lifeline

Orientation: Corporate-private partnerships define learning. Learning is holistic, as the goal is to create well-rounded lifelong learners who can serve corporate and public sector interests.

**Social Media Environment** Social media is sponsored by, and encouraged by, large companies. Companies gather information about prospective employees and perspective customers from social media interaction. Social media is used for learning, with learners and educators required to participate. Social media has replaced e-mail as the primary tool of communication as it is much easier to analyze information in the more open data structures of social media. Face-to-face remains a primary means of delivering instruction.



### Time Out

Orientation: State-driven education. Education is more indoctrination and exploration.

**Social Media Environment** Social media is a tool of the State, and is subject to its analysis and its constraints. Straying too far from educational parameters can become a real-world threat. The State uses what it learns from social media as input to its career placement programs.



### Subprime Learning

Orientation: The global economy is in turmoil. Traditional economic assumptions have failed and little definition has replaced them. The world is grasping for answers.

**Social Media Environment** Social media, where it exists, is being used to coordinate either counter-terrorism or terrorism, at least that is the primary chatter. Back channels, some off the main grid, are being used to negotiate new economic and governance models. Social media may be the tool that leads to the light at the end of the tunnel.



### Open Learning

Orientation: Corporations have divested themselves of much of their “non-core” competencies creating a near-freelance economy.

**Social Media Environment** Individuals use social media to coordinate work and learn *just-in-time* from their community. Traditional degrees have given way to recognition of “validated” learning experiences, validated either through performance or certification. Social media is the lifeblood of communication for most people. Sophisticated artificial intelligence software helps people pay attention to what is important. This analysis is strictly personal with many safeguards in place to keep data out of the hands of companies or government agencies.

### Personal Social Media Experiences

Through the survey, interviews and a number of other inputs, including Quroa and LinkedIn conversations, the following innovative uses of social media were identified. They have been classified by their application to the learning model presented at the beginning of this report.

**Note:** These verbatim responses have been categorized as well as edited for clarity. Some very similar responses were combined.

#### Impart

- Twitter updates to point students to content related to the day's lecture.
- Practice activities and practice exams online, sometimes as assigned homework.
- Use Skype to assist students in the class. As an online course the ability to meet face-to-face is not available. Skype lets distance learners "see" the instructor.
- YouTube to support lecture points, demonstrate a theory (during class). Example: instructor using YouTube videos to illustrate different approaches to marketing.
- Also, use YouTube to display media that used to be rare and hard to find.

#### Consume

- Create a personal and secure wiki journal or notebook as a class work portfolio.
- Post questions to the class and use those questions to drive discussions. Everyone is required to reply. It was great! Not to mention, every time someone would post something, it would go right to phone as well so people would also know where the conversation was going. *"It was literally like an ongoing conversation. Loved it!"*
- Keep ill students, or those recovering from surgery, or otherwise temporarily remote, involved by using social media to stay connected, answer questions about assignments and facilitate discussions. *"I had a discussion with her about a topic other classmates had previously that morning for me to keep up-to-date."*

#### Google Spreadsheet Example

From Frank M.

I have used Google Spreadsheet as follows:

- Create a matrix where the left column identifies different media types (TV, radio, Email, web, billboard, etc.) and the top row shows attributes (cost, reach, emotional impact, etc.).
- Make the spreadsheet public and writable for everyone with the link.
- Make a <http://bit.ly> link of the spreadsheet.
- Show the link in my class and have students fill in the matrix collectively.
- Show the live spreadsheet on the projector in class.

Learning outcomes:

- People can work together and live online.
- People see what others contribute. In the beginning it's all fun and games, after 3-4 minutes it becomes more serious.
- Students correct each other, the end product gets better.

## social media in higher education

### Absorb

- Video teleconferencing is critical for distance learning teams. Great for holding strategy meetings and brain storming.
- Facebook as a way to “mass message” people in class to work on the homework together.
- Suggest YouTube that reinforce points from class (after class).
- Coordinate in-person study sessions. Connect with classmates on Facebook to plan and organize study groups and group projects.
- Friend people so it is easier to reach out to them and ask questions.

### Reflect

- When assigned group projects, social media is an extremely useful way to communicate with group members.
- Chat with friends over Facebook about homework.
- Ask class to create blogs. All homework is captured in blog posts about assigned reading. *“I like this because it's a good way to reflect on the information learned and express your opinions.”*
- Find videos that enhance a paper, class, or presentation [note: this is different than assigned videos, in that the student must find their own videos to reinforce learning].

***“During my Excel class, I was struggling with a concept. I Googled it and was able to view podcasts from two other Universities that assisted me in understanding how the concept worked.”***

- Capture comments during a lecture and have instructor reveal them after lecture.
- Ask a question via social media and read and discuss responses in next class.
- Facilitate group work: *“I once completed a 10-page group paper without ever actually meeting my group. We corresponded via Facebook and email.”*
- Use Wikipedia as an informal source for general references. *“In my Anthropology 201 course, the professor had the class create its own Wiki page and his goal was to create a student made textbook. With better instruction and more accurate information about what he wanted, the project could have been very successful.”*
- Read and critique the writing of other classmates online as well as get feedback from them via Blackboard.

### Augment

- Ask learners to post relevant websites and other online references to a shared blog or other repository in order to create a list of resources for the class.
- University course related posts. *“I personally love the fact that students are share interesting news/videos on Facebook, broadening the whole learning experience.”*
- Suggest Twitter accounts to follow. *“I like getting news updates on Twitter because it gives me another vehicle for reviewing news without having to read every article.”* Tweets can also provide links to relevant online resources.

### Assess/Test

- Announcements of exams.
- Twitter direct message (DM) from the instructor to share test results and grades.



## Bring Focus Through Twitter's Limitations

From Pedro DeB.

This is something I've already done a couple of times: I've let the students create 140-character signs that recap the past half-hour of class and let me text or twitter them. I then put them all on the screen in 3 categories:

- correct and to the point
- correct but w/o details
- wrong + correction

I've also done the same exercise but instead asking them to make test questions about the past half-hour.

**Note:** There were no relevant verbatim comments related to **gaining practical experience, applying experience in the real-world** or turning that experience back into a form that would be taught (**sharing**)

*"I prefer to just use social media on my own, like open courseware for learning about a class that I'm not taking."*

## Practice Suggestions

The following comments on practice were generated via the question:

### 2. What advice would you offer instructors using social media during courses?

The responses have been edited for clarity and combined when they closely match.

#### From Learners

- Respect student's privacy. Students only accept using social media in class the educator violates their trust.
- Give students the ability to opt out of social media use.
- Use social media for the extended discussions, especially when class doesn't give enough time.
- Post videos and other content you thought about before class.
- Don't overuse social media.
- Make social media use fun and interesting for students so that they feel the need to check their twitters to learn something about the course in addition to the textbook.
- Use social media to encourage discussion and share links for further learning/reading.
- Technology should be part of learning tool-kit not mistaken for the tool. Not everyone learns through visual or audio stimulation.

***"Young people are way too involved with technology-based communication and they don't seem to have down-time for creative thought process."***

- Recognize that students will embrace social media independently of their lecturers.
- I don't think it should ever replace face-to-face communication.
- Communication is key...anything you can put online for your students to use is really great. Grades, assignments, the syllabus- it cuts back on paper and unnecessary questions.
- Use e-mail, in which interactions still demand a minimum commitment and are not de-contextualised in a jungle of interactions with other groups that pertain to my personal social network.
- Create a group for courses in Facebook.
- Using social media such as Facebook and such allow for more direct communication if a response is needed more quickly. It can, however, detract from the professionalism of the class so don't use it as the only method to communicate.
- Use social media to make a point not just to fill time.
- Stick to education-based resources such as Blackboard. Social media is too informal for a learning situation. Separate the two—choose a more neutral social media. Consumer social media is too personal, with the exception of LinkedIn, for me to feel comfortable to use it with a professor. I don't want to be Facebook friends with my instructors.
- Take advantage of it. Students have access to these social media sites at all times with the insurgence of smart phones. Everyone just about has one. It is a great tool to share your educational experiences and get the students involved on their level.
- Keep it simple. Not everyone is a fan of social media and choosing something really weird or obscure could make things much harder for students.
- Provide links to sources that support the course-work using social media.



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- Ask students to respect each other and the learning environment by not using social media during class in a distracting way.
- Recognize that many people are watchers and not posters. While you feel not many students are actively getting use from the site, there are many more than you can see. There are huge benefits to the non-posters as well as the posters.

***“Don’t use social media as a replacement for yourself.... we are paying YOU to teach a class, not to sit us down in front of YouTube videos.”***

- Make it as clear as possible from the start. Make time for a demonstration-especially for people new to using social media. Be available to offer tech support, but don’t let it consume the course.
- Don't just broadcast, use it as a means to engage and support students in the same manner that would be done with face-to-face interaction.
- Fully utilize and understand the advanced features of a service or tool before using it.
- Only use social media if you are personally comfortable. Forcing it will create more stress.
- Use social media with a specific purpose in mind rather than as a method of communication. Help students define a project or model where social media applies.
- If you are going to use social media, create a rich experience that adds value to the class.
- Don't create a situation where someone not using social media would be at a disadvantage.
- Use comments on content to create dialog rather than Facebook or LinkedIn which avoids the “friending” issue.
- For online classes and professors who test extensively, it would be of high value to the students if these professors would record their classes onto a podcast.
- Allow their lectures to be recorded for the purpose of student review.
- Instead of trying to use entertainment mediums to reach out to students, I would suggest trying to increase group work and face-to-face time. Students get enough exposure to computers and social media. They need more real-life experiences, not more screen time.
- I do not think this avenue of teaching is of benefit to students. In class lecture and discussion is preferable to social media use. There is no way to monitor who is inputting information into the social network system, whether or not actual learning is taking place, or if any additional benefits can be gleaned from the use of these sites. I admire teachers who are attempting to utilize new tools; however social media sites are too distracting, were not designed for teaching, and instead of being helpful could be harmful to the educational experience.
- Use social media to get to know students. Form groups using your students if possible.
- Use the same social media platform students do so they don't have to go to different places for each class. The universities should stick to one thing, for example, all teachers MUST have a blackboard account, from there they must list due dates and assignments, but they can then post a link to whatever they desire. This would streamline student’s time expenditure.
- Don’t use social media just to “be cool”.
- Create a personal brand. Use the power of social media to outline experiences in the field, as well as describe your teaching style. This can help filter out students with different learning preferences, and attract those synergistic with your teaching style.
- Brush-up on your interpersonal, face-to-face skills before worrying about how to communicate electronically.

## **social media in higher education**

- Make sure to, when showing videos, load them ahead as to not waste time. And with e-mail, check it every day to make communication more reliable.
- Make sure that the technology you use is something that will add to the course, not just using social media for the sake of using something trendy.

### From Educators

- Do not be afraid to talk to students about the use of social media for teaching.
- Schedule more time than you'd think for hands-on implementation.
- Have fun with it.
- Don't underestimate how much students are using it to communicate with each other.
- Use it to get student involvement outside the classroom up, on issues that apply learning in the classroom.
- Step-by-step, learn the social media as you go. Ask students to help show you the way. Don't use it just "because" others do - use it because it's a great way to reach students and peer educators.
- Use social media to provide examples and articulate course content; avoid social media that does neither.
- Have a plan for using social media that supports the learning objectives and goals of the course and doesn't become a detractor from the learning experience. Take time to show students how to use social media as learning tools and how to develop a strategy for personal and professional development using social media in the most effective way.
- Tied to a learning activity after understanding the tool's capabilities - use for the sake of the glitz factor is a waste of time unless it is just to get students to pay attention...
- Determine the learning outcomes before you select the tool. Gain broad stakeholder support. Utilize responsible use statements/policies.
- You (the instructor) must use the tools first and get comfortable with them. Students aren't as comfortable with most social media as instructors often think. Be prepared for push-back from students who don't see the professional or learning value. Be prepared for students who don't know how to use the tools. Students often forget passwords, be prepared for that.
- Be available at set times so students know they can get interaction with you. Then have a strong, non-class, presence in the media to build your reputation.
- To incorporate more interaction in their courses by using social media and all of its tools.
- Each piece of media used, when used correctly, has its benefits. But they also have their downfalls. Be sure not to ignore the focus and objectives of the class in order to include the latest/greatest technology in the classroom.
- Take advantage of connecting face to face with those around you. Use social media in a support capacity but stay connected to your immediate surroundings.
- Be very detailed and precise in your explanations and instructions.
- Nothing replaces an engaged teacher getting to know their students personally, but social media and other online tools can help offload some of the busy work and allow you to focus on working with your students.
- Plan carefully and use social media for what it is good at: creating communities of practice.
- Social media are best used when they enhance a dialog and encourage participation. Social media pitfalls abound due to privacy boundary (d)evolution, commercial / exploitive vs. open access /rights legal environments, and the broader issues of trying to use a tool designed for one purpose (broad to niche advertising) for another (achieving educational outcomes); this isn't to say that other models can't evolve (though Diaspora may never be

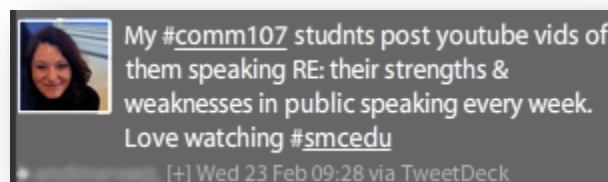


## social media in higher education

ready for prime time unless it sells out), but we could have been teaching classes in coffeehouses for years (but coffeehouses aren't properly equipped for learning).

- Don't over use social media. Students may focus more on the technology than on using their own brains.
- Recognize that social media is just another gathering place.
- Provide time to experiment and play with social media during actual class sessions. In my experience, students learn how to manage and navigate social media when the instructor is right there to address concerns/questions.
- Use social media to facilitate interaction as opposed to 'transmit knowledge'.
- Structure and Moderation. Provide specific prompts, specify time frames and define expectations for participation. Develop detailed communication threads.
- Be very specific about the boundaries and regulations when you give out the work assignment. Most people are used to social networks as their friends' site and the language and interaction might not be appropriate. It is better to use a specifically designed site or at least a make an effort to design a unique look for the page you are using.
- Test out social media tools yourself before using them to enhance learning. Also, don't assume students are all digital natives.
- How a professor might use social media is very dependent on a variety of factors and isn't always appropriate for every class. Tread lightly and don't just jump in - think through what your needs are and then focus on supporting those needs.

*"I believe that one of the first things that I learned in college was that it is important to know your audience and to use that information to better reach them. I think teachers need to take a lesson from themselves and really start to understand that social media is in their student's everyday lives and that it can be a useful tool in the educational arena and it can help reach students on their level."*



## Methodology and Demographics

### Methodology

This survey was conducted using Survey Monkey ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). It was socialized via Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and e-mail. No personal information, nor identifying information of any kind, was solicited for this survey, nor was any captured from the survey instrument.

As an anonymous survey there is no way to ascertain if respondents responded more than once or if they responded in more than one category. The data does not suggest any deliberate attempt to manipulate the outcome.

This survey includes data from 381 respondents. As noted in the survey, this is statistically significant, but not necessarily reflective of all groups and subgroups within higher education.

Respondents were asked to identify themselves as educators or learners, and the survey branched to appropriate questions for those audiences before returning to a common set of questions. In the opinions section of the survey, respondents were given the ability to enter text to illuminate their responses.

Demographics were gathered at the end of the survey.

### Demographics

#### Learners

Respondents: 240

Male 42.5%

Female 56.5%

Declined to respond .9%

26 people skipped this question

#### Educators

Respondents: 90

Male: 42.2%

Female: 52.2%

Declined to respond: 5.6%

48 people skipped this question

Educator ages ranged from 19-24 to 40 and higher. Over 40 was the largest segment of respondents at 53.3%.

Educators were mixed between part-time (44.1%) and full-time (41.9%). Tenured, or tenure-track faculty made up 6.5% of the respondents. Graduate students or Teaching Assistants accounted for 7.5% of respondents. 68.5% of educators taught primarily in the classroom, with the remainder, 31.5%, teaching primarily online.

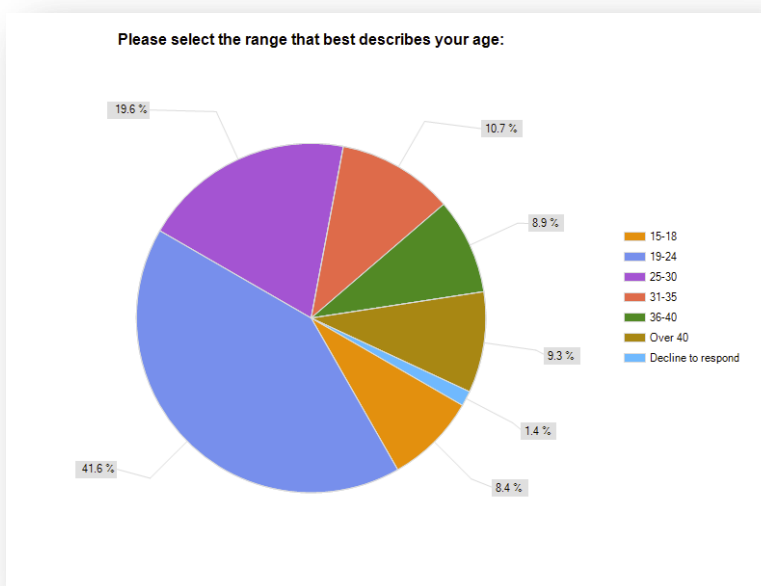


FIGURE 10 RESPONDENT AGES FOR LEARNERS

## Geographic Distribution



**FIGURE 11** GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Even if we like to say that the kids of today are much more comfortable using new technology, I have realized that it's not really true (especially kids here in Sweden who don't have English as first language). I have worked with a number of groups of students in Google Docs and only getting them to understand the registration process of a Google account, took forever. They know their way around familiar features that you can find in Facebook, Hotmail and MSN, but when it comes to using new tools, they are totally lost. It's easy to over-exaggerate when talking about today's kid's tech and computer skills.

Jazzper I.

## Suggestions for Further Study

- ☐ Evaluate perceived boundaries learners appear to erect between social media and learning.
- ☐ Develop a deeper understanding of the drivers for social media use among educators.
- ☐ Investigate perceptions of innovation and determine if innovation is viewed as positive by students, and if social media use is a proxy for innovative education experiences.
- ☐ Understand under what circumstances various forms of social media enhance learning outcomes, and when they detract from them.
- ☐ Explore how coming to social media as an educator or as a learner changes the experience and the expectations for the use of social media.

We use Ning to share media arts assignments (mp3s, avi, mpg, jpg, text based response). We'd previously used a USB stick while walking around to each computer to download finished work. Now students can share it in a safe, closed, social media environment on the Ning.

In media arts, this worked very well, in computer engineering, it did not. Computer engineer students felt that the graphics and media on Ning slowed down loading so much it became meaningless (public education has bandwidth caps that you wouldn't believe). Access to information is key to this group.

In that same computer engineering class, I tried using Wikispaces to generate student responses to material covered in class, but the responses were less than effective (under a 70% completion rate); I suspect because the Wiki was too open ended and didn't have punitive enough incompleteness responses. It wasn't worked at seriously: <http://cwfalcontech.wikispaces.com/>. In that same class, a basic proboard worked very well (text only, information driven): <http://cwfalcontech.proboards.com/>

Conclusions? Social media tools, especially open-ended, media driven ones aren't always the answer, and there is an odd reticence in tech-savvy students because they want to reserve the social media space for non-academic pursuits, especially if school network limitations make the operation of the webpage painfully slow.

From Timothy K.

### About the Author



### Daniel W. Rasmus

Daniel W. Rasmus, the author of [Listening to the Future](#), is a strategist and industry analyst who helps clients put their future in context. Rasmus uses scenarios to analyze trends in society, technology, economics, the environment, and politics in order to discover implications used to develop and refine products, services and experiences. His latest book, [Management by Design](#), creates an innovative new methodology for designing work experiences.

Prior to starting his own consulting practice, Rasmus was the Director of Business Insights at Microsoft Corporation, where he helped the company envision how people will work in the future. Rasmus coordinated the Microsoft® Office Information Worker Board of the Future, an advisory panel composed of college-aged students who shared ideas on how to better serve the Millennial Generation as they join the workforce. Rasmus also managed the Center for Information Work, an immersive experience that helped Microsoft's customers experience the future of work first hand.

In 2005, Rasmus created the concept of the New World of Work which has helped transform how businesses see the workplace, today and tomorrow. The New World of Work was adopted by a number of Microsoft's European subsidiaries as a way to redefine their relationship with employees, their customers and their markets. He documents these ideas in *Listening to the Future*.

Rasmus is involved in a number of industry and public sector events, including The National Association of Workforce Boards, the National Educator's Workshop, and The Front End of Innovation. He was recognized as a Distinguished Speaker by the Microsoft Executive Briefing Center in 2007 and was recognized with the One Microsoft Award in 2008 and 2009.

Before joining Microsoft in October 2003, Rasmus was an analyst with the Giga Information Group, and later Forrester Research Inc. His achievements include inventing conceptual frameworks for next generation collaboration, adaptive workspaces and intelligent content services. Rasmus also served as Giga's Chief Knowledge Officer, managing internal learning within research, sales and marketing.

As a technology writer, Rasmus has authored over 220 trade journal articles and four books, including *Listening to the Future*, and *Management by Design*. Rasmus blogs regularly about the future at [Fast Company](#), and on his own blog, [Your Future in Context](#). His education related work can be found at [Learning Reimagined](#). Rasmus worked on the staff of *PC AI Magazine* and *Manufacturing Systems Magazine*, and has been a columnist for several other publications. His comments have appeared in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Financial Times*, *The Times of London*, *CIO*, *USA Today*, *Bloomberg*, *CNN*, *ComputerWorld*, *Information Week*, *Network World*, *Fast Company*, *InternetWeek*, *InfoWorld*, *The Boston Globe*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Le Monde* and *Jornal Gazeta Mercantil*. Rasmus is also a published poet.

Rasmus attended the University of California at Santa Cruz and received a certificate in intelligent systems engineering from the University of California at Irvine. He is currently the Visiting Liberal Arts Fellow at Bellevue College in Bellevue, WA.

Rasmus lives in Sammamish, Washington with his wife Janet, his daughters Rachel and Alyssa—and their dog Indiana Jones.

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