Social Media: Application in Education

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This paper serves as an initial discussion for how higher education institutions like Truman State University could begin incorporating social media into higher education. Needs of the millennial generation are different from previous generations, requiring increased engagement, real application for future careers, and accessible educational material in a digital form. The paper will take you through research to support the needs of millennial students in higher education, followed by recommendations for educational applications in each of the following widely-used social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube.

INTRODUCTION

"Members of the net generation use the web differently, they network differently, and they learn differently...Many of the teaching techniques that have worked for decades do not work anymore because new students learn differently too" (Selwyn, 2011). A shift in method and practice is occurring in our educational system. The techniques that were once used in higher education no longer work. In the last five years social media has grown to transform every aspect of how users experience the Internet. Colleges and universities have started to embrace social media and have quickly realized the potential power of social media as a medium to reach students in a unique and effective way.

Social media should be viewed as a tool by higher education for several reasons. First, social media has the ability to connect students with original new sources, which contributes to learning and discussion in the classroom. Second, and most important, employers are turning to social media at increasing rates to hire graduates for entry-level positions. Students should be taught in higher education how to maximize their marketability for future employers by creating regular, quality content for their personal brand. Lastly, social media networking functions as a method for connections to be made between individuals, organizations and other entities. Higher education can make meaningful connections between students and universities to increase engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty to benefit both parties.

Millennials

Higher education is currently facing the challenge of tailoring education to the millennial generation. Born after 1980, the millennial generation consists of over 80 million individuals and is the largest generation to date ("Millennials from adulthood," 2014). "[Millennials] are relatively unattached to organized politics and religion, linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry— and optimistic about the future," according to a recent Pew Research report ("Millennials from adulthood," 2014). The effectiveness of higher education is most dependent on understanding Millennials as "digital natives," or the first generation that has not had to adapt to social platforms. Millennials have seized the opportunities of social media to create networks of friends.
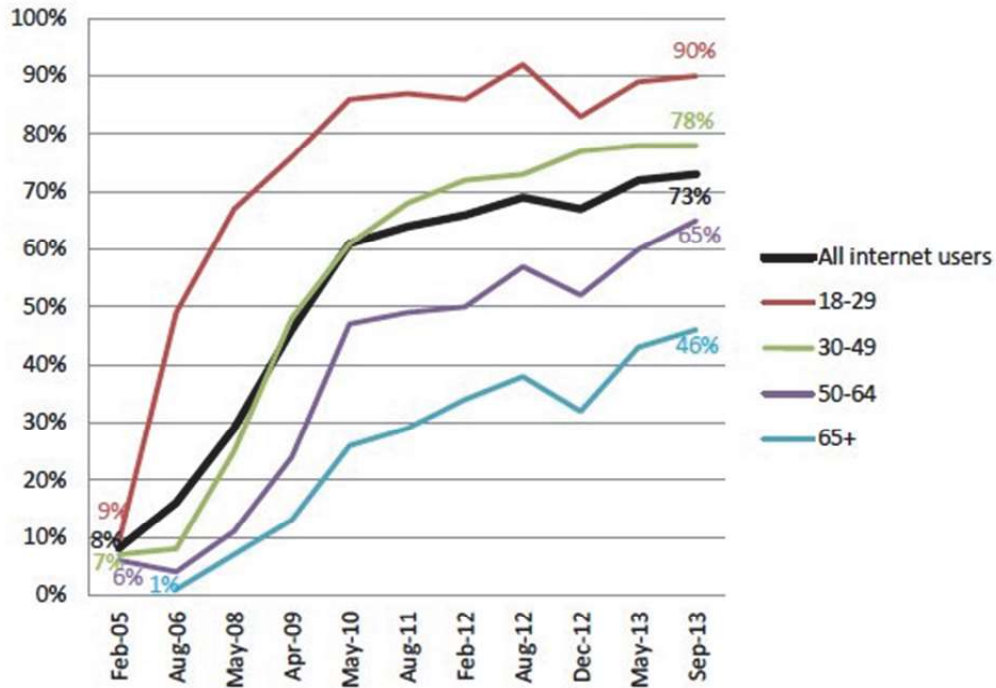
Social Media

As of 2013, 90 percent of Millennials use social networking sites, making 18-29 year olds the leading age demographic in U.S. networking site use ("Social networking," 2014).

FIGURE 1
**SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE USE BY AGE GROUP**

Source: Latest data from Pew Research Center's Internet Project Library Survey, July 18 – September 30, 2013. N=5,112 internet users ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on internet users is +/- 1.6 percentage points.

Overall, Facebook is the most popular social site, with 71 percent of U.S. adults surveyed reported using the site, while only 17 percent used Instagram and 22 percent used LinkedIn ("Social networking," 2014). Mobile phone use is also increasing, aiding the accessibility and popularity of social media networks in the U.S. As of 2014, 67 percent of Millennials use mobile devices to access social media networks ("Social networking," 2014).

In addition to a general increase in social media use and leadership in online networking for Millennials, corporations are also increasing use of social media. This trend indicates the importance for higher education to recognize necessary skill in social media for student success in the competitive job market. Approximately 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies are now on Facebook, representing a ten percent increase since 2013. Likewise, 83 percent of Fortune 500 companies are now participating on Twitter, representing a six percent increase since 2013 (Barnes & Lescault, 2014). In 2014, LinkedIn became the most used social media network. The increasing popularity of LinkedIn is partially due to the use of the social media site by company recruiters and human resources employees looking to hire. In 2013, 92 percent of recruiters used social media for recruitment (Beese, 2013).

FIGURE 2
FORTUNE 500 CORPORATE SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
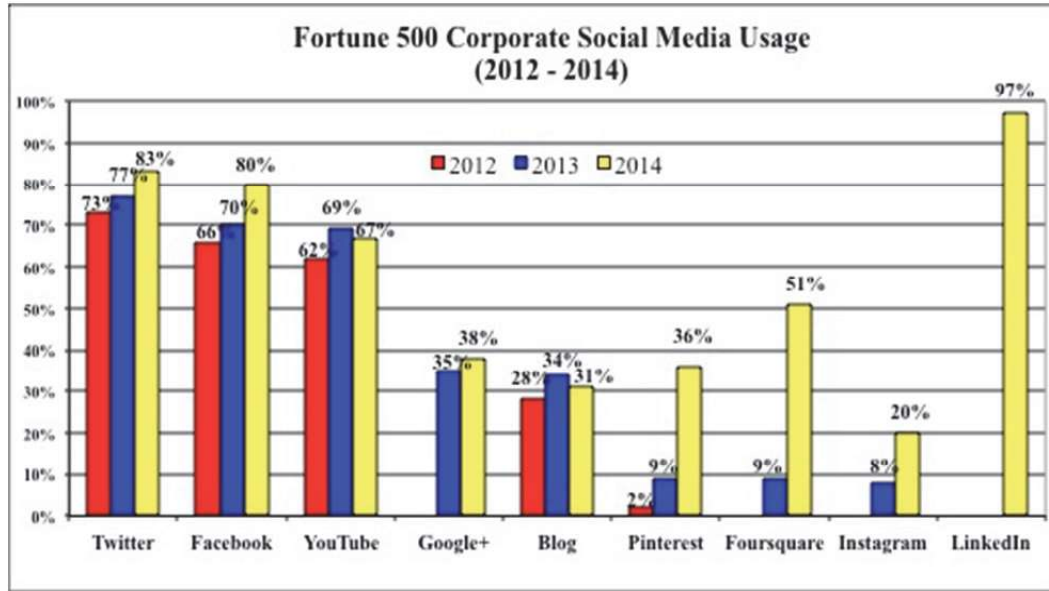
Learning and Engagement

Using social media is a particularly feasible and reliable method for student engagement. Many students spend considerable amounts of time browsing social media sites every day. By posting on social media, it is easy to reach a student audience. Studies show empirical evidence that once engaged, academic performance increases. Fourteen studies found that social media use by higher education was associated with improved knowledge, attitudes, and skills measured in exam scores, empathy, and reflective writing, respectively (Cheston, 2013). Another study found that when used for various types of academic and co-curricular discussions, students were more engaged in the course and explored topics more on their own (Junco, 2011). Examples of engaging content include: class discussions, extra study tips or exam notes, contemporary news relating to class topics, and relevant online videos.

APPLICATIONS

Facebook

Facebook is one the biggest social media sites used today. Each month an average user is said to be on Facebook about 336 minutes. Most social platform users' time is spent viewing statuses or posted pictures (Laudon & Traver, 2017). What if we could shift college students to use Facebook as an educational resource?

One suggestion could be encouraging professors to establish a Facebook group for all students to join. Each week, students would then be required to either post something course-related or comment on a post by the professor. Content requirements would need to be established by the professor, but could include guidelines such as "content posted should be insightful and must add to the discussion." In other words, students could not just repeat what is already said. This would allow students to stay engaged in course work, while building relationships beyond the basic classroom requirements.

For example, in MIS, the professor and his students discuss relevant business news over the last week prior to the formal course lecture. The purpose of this is to demonstrate how strategic decision making is more than decisions based solely on your company, but should be based on business activity across industry, as well. The professor provides approximately ten minutes each class meeting for discussion; however, this time is barely enough time to appropriately analyze relevant news stories. If the professor

established a Facebook page students would be able to effectively discuss news stories at great length, and in real time online, as each news story hits the public forum.

Facebook can also facilitate professional relationship building between faculty and students by featuring a student or faculty member weekly via individual department-created Facebook pages. The profile features would allow students to learn more about what faculty is working on, which could then increase student involvement in research and faculty-led projects. The department Facebook pages could also enable students to connect with specific faculty, leading to jobs or TA positions.

Twitter

Twitter, a micro blogging social network, offers advanced capabilities for higher education advancement. To allow students to engage online, while still relating online social media activities to coursework, faculty could consider the power of retweeting and accessibility to news sources. One suggestion for higher education's use of Twitter would be regular social media assignments to discuss trending news. Such assignments could be carried out through retweets and original tweets posted by each student's personal Twitter account using a course-designated hashtag. A course-designated hashtag would permit all student hashtags to populate on one stream for all other course members to read. For example, students could be challenged to retweet one piece of newsworthy content with the course hashtag each week, and be able to summarize it in class. Students could also be challenged to read an article or chapter for class and post one interesting fact or quote from the reading online, to educate their fellow students using the course hashtag.

LinkedIn

Faculty should pay special attention to integrating LinkedIn with class curriculum, as it is essential to future hiring. Faculty should encourage all class members to create a LinkedIn profile and build their professional experiences. One specific example of faculty facilitating LinkedIn profile development is creating a semester-long project that could showcase important skills in the LinkedIn "projects" section on the LinkedIn profile. All students would then be required to summarize their projects with important skills developed within the LinkedIn section. Professors could also require students to go into LinkedIn and endorse their peers on the platform.

Tumblr

Tumblr would be a great option for higher education to take incorporate in curriculum, by replacing "classic journal assignments" with a weekly blog post. The Tumblr blog posts should consist of responses from relevant, faculty-developed prompts within general career fields students are pursuing. For example, each week communication professors could post a prompt asking students to apply a communication theory to an aspect of social media culture. The creation and publication of these responses online, when written in the appropriate style of a blog would aid students in developing a profession portfolio, while still critically applying lessons learned from a course.

Students could leverage Tumblr posts prompted by faculty to improve their personal branding through use of Tumblr's hashtag capabilities. Such capabilities permit search engine optimization (SEO) in order for employees to find students in their respective industries by developing an online presence. For marketing and advertising majors, an online presence, website, and demonstration of writing skills is essential for finding a job post-graduation.

YouTube

Learn at your own pace video instructions are successful in many areas both inside and outside higher education. One of the most successful examples is Khan Academy, whose mission is "to provide a world-class education for anyone, anywhere." Their YouTube channel has over 480 million views and contains medium length videos (typically 4-8 minutes) that explain concepts on educational topics, particularly Math. This is a great example of a format that works and can be used as a reference for professors to create their own content. Perhaps a professor could make watching YouTube videos they create as part of

the curriculum or as extra credit; also, linking to relevant videos from other channels could also be beneficial.

Using YouTube in combination with class contests could also prove rewarding: encouraging or requiring students to make their own instructional videos or other films based on class related content could help students to learn more about a topic while also using artistic and creative processes. This could be particularly valuable in a Liberal Arts program as an addendum to traditional curriculum, or perhaps used in conjunction with already established Interdisciplinary Studies or "JINS" courses like at Truman State University.

Finally, using YouTube as a marketing tool for Universities is a common practice and should not go overlooked. Being able to convey rich content in a timely, visually engaging manner is an essential part of any college marketing campaign in today's academia landscape. Using video in an easily accessible format like YouTube allows prospective students to see and hear what a University has to offer in a way that no application, print advertisement, or word of mouth endorsement could ever hope to achieve.

CONCLUSION

Use of social media should be tailored for individual majors and future career choices. Social media has more capabilities for higher education than just the classroom collaboration and teamwork. Colleges and universities have quickly integrated social media into almost every aspect they can think of including admissions, alumni relations, and even day to day campus life. Leveraging the rich, engaging capabilities of social media would maximize the effectiveness of high education among millennial students.

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