Higher Education and the Social Media Technology: A Dilemma Unfolding in Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract

In this paper I unravel the technological dilemma that some higher education (HE) employees particularly lecturers are grappling with following the advent of the social media technology. It is no secret that quite a number of senior HE staff (e.g. University and College lecturers) especially those who were educated during the type-writer era have up to now not mastered how to use a basic computer, with jokes flying around that some cannot even move a computer mouse properly. Others still wonder what Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are all about. This study sought to establish not only the receptive levels of HE lecturers in using the social media technology but also their perceptions towards integrating it in the classroom and in their general everyday life interactions. The data for this study were collected through individual interviews with 20 purposively sampled HE lecturers from 4 South African HE institutions. The analysis of the data followed a thematic approach and the study revealed that while a quite a good number of the younger HE lecturers have embraced social media technology as part of their modern day social and professional life, there exists a high level of resistance to this new technology from the old guard and this resistance is not only confined to its use in the HE sector, but also in their everyday social life. Since many HE institutions in South Africa are now seized with the intriguing challenge of promoting technology in enhancing knowledge creation, the study recommends that the responsible HE authorities impress upon all levels of HE employees that generally the new media technology and the social media in particular have (finally) arrived to transform not only the educational landscape but also other spheres of society (such as the political, social and economic) and therefore embracing it has become an imperative for this educational era.

Keywords: Higher education, Social media, luddites, partnering, old guard, technology

Introduction

This paper unites what Prensky (2010) and Shaw (2014) would call three strands of current educational discussion that have rarely been considered together: First, that the students in our HE classrooms are changing largely as a result of their outside-of-school experiences with technology, and are no longer satisfied with an education that does not immediately address the real world in which they live. Second, that the telling and testing pedagogy we have, for the most part, been using in our classrooms has become less and less effective with today's students, the digital natives as Prensky (2001) calls them. A better pedagogy is needed, and the good news is that it's available and usable today. Third, that the digital technology now coming, more or less rapidly, into our classrooms if used properly can go a long way to help make HE students' learning real, engaging, and useful for their future (Prensky, 2010).Ironically, it is the generation raised on the expectation of interactivity that is finally ripe for the skill-based and-doing-based teaching and learning methods that past experts have always suggested are the best for learning, but that were largely rejected by the education establishment as being too hard to implement (Shaw, 2014).The happy thread tying the three strands together is that the same digital technology which caused the changes in our students also provides the tools to finally implement the most effective, real ways of learning.

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The popularity and growth of social media use continues to surge. In Shaw's (2014) contention, the advent of social media technology has ushered in a potential solution to our students' insatiable quest for new knowledge. In his view, what such technology envisages is to see the student in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the student. Commenting on the power of the social media technology in providing worthwhile knowledge, George Bernard Shaw (2014) and Bowers (2012) cite the example that WordPress 3.3 has been downloaded over 12 million times after only one year since its advent. This latest version of the software was released on 12 December 2011 and this implies that it enjoys or endures an average figure of 105,263 downloads per day (Bowers, 2012). WordPress is a global social media tool that has been translated and localized into at least 73 different languages. This has been achieved entirely on a volunteer basis, by passionate WordPress users in all parts of the world (Bowers, 2012; Ryan, 2014). These statistics demonstrate the growth and movement of social media globally not to mention the impact it has on digital literacy which Casey and Evans (2011) believe is still within an educator's current job description. As HE lecturers get down to work, they are faced with pertinent questions that demand answers. Among these questions are the following: is HE ready for the new social media? And whether senior HE lecturers (particularly those educated during the type-writer era) are ready for the revolution in information technology? Another pertinent question worth posing for this study is, which forms of social media technology should HE lecturer embrace as part of pedagogy and practice? According to Huni (2014), although the floodgates of social media communication have been opened through the Internet, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Viber, LinkedIn and the short message service (SMS) among many of the ever-changing media platforms that have shrunk the world and made education and learning excitingly accessible, there are some professional and veteran employees who have been overtaken by advancements in technology such that they have surrendered social media responsibilities to their junior staff and persona assistants who are fresh from colleges or universities (Gwagwa, 2014). On the other hand, several HE institutions are still vexed with how they can effectively incorporate the new media into their teaching and learning programmes. For the traditional media in South Africa (radio, TV, Cell phone and newspapers) proper mechanisms to co-exist with the social media are being experimented with time fast running out (Ryan, 2014). So we have luddites, not only in HE but all over the country (Huni, 2014). The concept of luddite is derived from the 19th century English textile artisans who protested against newly developed labour-saving machinery from 1811 to 1817 (Huni, 2014). Over time, the term luddite has been used to describe those people opposed to, or slow to adopt or incorporate into their lifestyle, industrialisation, automation, computerisation or new technologies in general (Huni, 2014). Otherscholars, for example, Collier (2012), Devitt (2010) and Levin (2013) prefer to use the term neo-luddism in reference to those opposed to technological progress for cultural or moral reasons.

It is common these days to hear parents, old professors and other senior employees (old guard) boasting that they could not do this or that on their cell phone or IPad and had to ask their sons, daughter or junior staff to help them (Huni, 2014). They want to sound like people who are proud of their children's or work subordinates' abilities to embrace new social media technology but in reality terms all they are doing is hide their inability to adapt to new technology (Huni, 2014;Ryan 2014). One of the theses in this paper is to sensitise such people that the new media is indeed upon us and that there is no doubt it is going to be a game changer in many spheres of our lives (De Andrea, Ellison, LaRose, Stein field & Fiore, 2012). As for the HE lecturers, there is no other choice but to embrace this new phenomenon lest they get consigned into academic oblivion (Elavsky, Mislan and Elavsky (2011)).

Background to the Problem

The paper makes reference to the role of social media as an important and now indispensable component of Educational Technology (Ed. Tech) that is dependent on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which students and communities share, co-create, discuss and modify user-generated content knowledge or information in their bid to improve their ways of life within communities (Baird & Fisher, 2006). Given that epistemologists such as Audi (2009) and Shope (2003) have given a great deal of thought in the last quarter century to the nature of knowledge arguing that it is not static but dynamic, the paper argues that modern day technology has made it imperative for institutions of learning to integrate social media as part and parcel of pedagogic content knowledge. This demand can be attributed to epistemologists such as Edmond Gettier's exposure to the defects of the received view of knowledge as justified true belief as outlined by Robert Shope (2003) in The Analysis of knowledge. Subsequent efforts to defend or amend the view of knowledge as justified true belief have generated debates that have sucked in new technological inventions especially the role of social media forms such as Facebook, Twitter, Skype and What's-upamong others (Gu, Zhu & Guo, 2014).

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks for the study

The study adopts a social constructivist epistemology as the theoretical framework. This approach as viewed by Mutekwe, Machingambi, Maphosa, Ndofirepi and Wadesango (2013) undergirds knowledge as a social construct or a product of human social interaction. Prominent social constructivists, Vygotsky (1987), De Valenzuela (2010), Kozulin (2002) and Wertsch (2004) maintain that tool mediated learning provides effective scaffolding of learning by transforming the students lower mental functions to higher mental functions especially if the mediation effort is provided within the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987). Vygotsky adopts the concept zone of proximal development to describe the difference between what students can do on their own and what they can do with the assistance of adults or more competent peer collaborators (Vygotsky, 1987). In the context of this study, social media tools such as Face book, Twitter, LinkedIn and Skype among others are construed as important learning tools that every college or university lecturer cannot afford to ignore in their everyday professional life especially if one considers how such technology has invaded the global villages (Casey & Evans, 2011). Constructivism is an epistemology many educators began to consider in the 1990s owing to its important premise that students construct their own meaning from new information, as they interact with reality or others with different viewpoints (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2007). Constructivist learning environments HE require students to use their prior knowledge and experiences, which Vygotsky describe as lower mental or psychological functions, to formulate new, related and or adaptive concepts in learning (Kozulin, 2002). Under this framework the role of the lecturer or educator becomes that of a facilitator, providing guidance so that students can construct their own knowledge (Donald, et al., 2007). Given that constructivist educators need to make sure that their students' prior learning experiences are appropriate and relevant to the concepts being taught, Jonassen (2009) suggests well-structured learning environments as useful for all mediated learning experiences.

The thesis of the paper is therefore that HE institutions such as Vocational Educational Colleges and universities can be most effective when they interact with their clientsthrough such contemporary modes of address or communication technology (Gu et al., 2014).This implies that usingsocial media technologyin the classroom helps them not only in motivating their students but also by developingrelevant and meaningful communication networks that students appreciate unlike the traditional chalk and talk approaches associated with the traditional pedagogy of the oppressed (Ferreira, 1979).Computer-mediated teaching and learning (Hardman 2005) involving such electronic gadgets as I phones, Tablets, I pads and Smart phones is certainly consistent with modern day ITC trends whose focus isendless connectivity. It fosters effective communication since today's students especially the Generation Y, a term Prensky (2001) and Ryan (2014) use to describe students born 1981-2006, are ever on-line. Social constructivist educational technologists such as Randy and Anderson (2010) are of the view that the concepts social media technology and social networks need not be confused with other ideas related to relationships or collectivism in society. They explain the difference in these concepts by arguing that in Educational Technology context, social media refers to interaction among people in which they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Stevens, 2013). This covers the interaction of lecturers and students in different districts, provinces, regions, countries and continents.Kaplan and Heinlein (2013) conceive social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Using such technology in HE offers a number of advantages which include ensuring the lectures, notes, announcements and feedback on assignments areeasily and readily made available to students by their lecturers and vice versa (Mutekwe et al., 2013). Social media technology has thus introduced substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals and HE employees need to tape into this innovation. Such technology (social media) differs from traditional or industrial media in many ways, including quality, reach frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence (Kaplan &Heinlein, 2013).

According to constructivist educational technologists (e.g. Amory 2010; Bernoff 2008; Nielsen 2012), there are many benefits educators can derive from social media usage in the classrooms because modern day internet users and scholars continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of sites and lecturers need to exploit this practice. Tang and Whinston (2012) add that the information emanating from the USA internet usage shows that the total time spent on social media by scholars in the U.S.A across PC and mobile devices increased by 37 percent to 121 billion minutes in July 2012 compared to 88 billion minutes in July 2011.

For content contributors, the benefits of participating in social media have gone beyond simply social sharing to building reputation and bringing in career opportunities, community development and monetary income. Seen in this light, it is important for HE lecturers to draw on the existing student interest in social media technology or internet use to advance their intended learning content to students (Friedman & Friedman, 2013). The relationship between social media and social networks is therefore that while the former offer platforms for human interaction in virtual communities and networks, the latter provide the scaffolding or framework upon which successful interaction, and community-building efforts are created. Reasoning from an educational technology perspective, it becomes plausible for us to argue that in the modern technological era, education's efforts to increase social support, social capital, civic participation, community building or collective efficacy will be less successful if undertaken without an attempt to identify and strengthen social networks because today's learners as digital natives, a concept used by Verran (2008), Rosen(2010) and Prensky (2001) to describe Generation Y (born 1980-2006, in the age of technology) students who prefer to receive information quickly from multiple media sources, have become so obsessed with technology that they can hardly carry out a mathematical or scientific operation in the classroom without reference to electronic gadgets (such as calculators, cell phones, tablets, I phones or iPads or PCs).

The above theorists distinguish among digital natives, digital immigrants and digital retards on the grounds that digital immigrants unlike digital natives are people born between 1965 and 1980, who can use technology but only after working hard at it (Verran, 2008). They are also referred to as Generation X and contrasted from Generation Y, who are the children born in the age of technology (Prensky, 2001; Rosen 2010; Verran, 2008). The generation of traditionalists born between 1925 and 1945, and who barely know how to use a toaster, PC or IPhone are regarded as digital retards by the above writers. Therefore given the digital native students' quest for educational skills such as parallel processing and multitasking, processing sounds and picture, video before texts, random access to hyperlinked multimedia information, preference for simultaneous social interaction or networking, learning just-in-time, instant gratification and immediate rewards, instantly useful or relevant content, using social media technology in the classroom it would certainly be excitingly fun for the digital natives and even some digital immigrants to embrace social media in their classrooms (Vigdor & Ladd, 2010).

Problem Statement

Social media technology has become such an integral part of our daily lives that we rarely take time to think about their many forms and the needs that they serve. Just as we do not spend much time thinking about the chemical composition of the air we breathe, we do not tend to analyse the social networks that sustain us. Yet, being able to identify different types of social media networks and their immeasurable role in transforming communities is an important first step in becoming intentional about providing opportunities to create and strengthen sustainable, positive social media networks. This paper maintains that HE institutions need to capitalise on the benefits of using social media technology to harness the potential derived from its use in the classroom in empowering students and lecturers to transform themselves in line with the global technological trends (Ryan, 2014). Given that many of these networks are active at the same time, rarely mutually exclusive and that they can be identified at different levels (e.g., individual, group, or institutional), with a variety of benefits (e.g., informational, material, emotional, or spiritual) and among many different people across content or programmatic areas (e.g., employment, health, education, or community development), HE communities can certainly tape from such a rich network technology to better improve themselves in terms of functions and relevance.

Social Media use in Classroom Pedagogy and Practice

In this section of the study the argument that there are advantages and disadvantages to social media usage in schools is advanced. The literature reviewed in this section foregrounds the view that benefits derived from social media use in schools outweigh drawbacks because in today's education the social media technology continues to seep into curricula and curriculum at ever increasing rates (Abe & Nickolas, 2013). Part of the responsibility of educators-lecturers, teachers and tutors is to prepare students for life. For this reason, considering the increasing prominence of social media in today's society, it should also be their responsibility to help students learn how to use social media in an appropriate manner (Dame, 2013). To do this there is need for institutions of learning especially HE to connect as educators and find ways and means to authentically use this technology within the many guidelines and policies surfacing in educational organizations (Hart, 2014).

Social media sites as defined by Boyd & Ellison (2008) web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection or view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. In contrast to websites dedicated to communities of interest, social media sites are primarily organised around people. According to Boyd and Ellison, (2008), the uniqueness social media websites is that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks, through the development and visualization of friends or contacts lists. Using mobile social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs enhance the possibilities of communication between and among users of diverse backgrounds. Many of these characteristics of the social media make it a potential solution to some of the problems confronting the in-service training teachers (Lin, Homman & Borengasser, 2013). These problems include feeling lonely or bored during the cause of the one year programme. While the application of technology-facilitated communication into teaching and learning differs from traditional face-to-face interactions, it offers users with opportunities to develop relationships among themselves and enables them to gain proper perspectives of one another and of the programme which otherwise would not have been possible through the use of traditional face to face only (Maccini, Gagnon & Hughes, 2002). According to Dubrovsky (2011) networking with others through the use of social media is magnified when time and physical space restraints are removed. Using online spaces may also help in removing some of the barriers to interaction among learners that are more reserved in face-to-face settings.

Furthermore, the use of social media by the in-service trainee teachers will enable them to build a community which is an important element of the teachers' education. Teachers within the same network can share information pertaining to their teaching methods and their experiences in the classroom (McNeill, 2012). Networking through social media provides a platform from which communities of practice among the participants can be developed; being a member of this community will help the teachers to achieve their optimal goals. Another attribute of social media that make it helpful to teachers' education activities is its inherent nature as an informal environment. The impact of informal learning (i.e. the learning that takes place outside the formal classroom settings) should not be underestimated in shaping socialisation processes among different professions such as teachers or trainee teachers (Selwyn, 2012). Moreover, in a report presented by EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (2007), the rate at which college teachers are using social media to support teaching and learning activities is increasing. For example, some teachers are encouraging students to use blogging platforms like WordPress, for developing e-portfolios which have become an important authentic assessment tool in higher education (Rosen & Nelson, 2008). Others encourage their learners to use Twitter to stimulate student engagement in the classroom (Rankin, 2009) and wiki software to engage students in collaborative projects that support the creation, editing, and management of content online (Hazari, North, & Moreland, 2009).

These conscious efforts by teachers and students in the use of social media for teaching and learning processes are creating new understanding of learning processes leading to the emergence of themes such as personalization, collaboration, social networking, social presence, user-generated content (Dabbagh & Reo, 2011). Hilton (2009) is of the opinion that higher education is being challenged by perceptions that social media are empowering students to take charge of their own learning resulting in what some interpret to mean that there is no arbiter of their knowledge, work, publication, or thinking. Others researchers such as Anderson, (2008); Cormier, (2008); Siemens & Tittenberger, (2009) argued that social media technologies are suggesting a pedagogical transformation to the researchers and teachers where the community is the curriculum rather than the path to understanding or accessing the curriculum and that higher education institutions should integrate social media platforms that enable the creation of personal and social learning spaces to support more learner-centred "personalized" education systems (Dabbagh &Reo, 2011; Selwyn, 2007). According to Inan and Lowther (2010, the educational use of social media in South Africa has been limited to blogging and other class resources; but mostly resulting from individual interests and in most cases the usage is to publish contents that were not presented in class, or to receive materials sent by students which are not related to what they learnt in the class. These types of actions are not innovative although they still contribute to the transmission of knowledge. This present study therefore attempts to sensitise communities on the need to harness the power of the social media technology as tools of transforming their role as change agents in their own lives (O'Brien & Torres, 2012). The study thus seeks to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

- What benefits do students and lecturers derive from social media use in the classroom?
- Which forms of social media technology should educators embrace as part of classroom practice?
- How can the use of social media technology in the classrooms contribute to students' active engagement in their learning process?
- Can the social media technology be used as a tool to facilitate effective collaborative learning in HE?
- What challenges do HE lecturers face in adopting the social media technology in their institutions?

Methodology

Design

The study followed a qualitative interpretive design and utilised focus group discussions for data collection.The choice of design was derived from Nieuwenhuis' (2012) suggestion that such a paradigm (interpretivist) generates realities whose ontology is inductive, subjective and multiple. Given the focus of this study, to explore the views of different HE lecturers' perceptions of adopting social media in their classrooms, this approach (qualitative) was considered ideal on account of its ability to elicit multiple perspectives, a feature that is not possible with the quantitative paradigm owing to its thrust on a single objective reality (Hesse-Biber, 2010). By adopting open-ended questions and posing them to the participants, I managed to generate detailed and comprehensive explanations that culminated in the thick descriptions presented in the discussion of the findings section of this study (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Data Collection and Sampling

The data for this study were collected through focus group discussions held with 20 purposively and conveniently sampled HE lecturers from 4 South African HE institutions. The criterion used to identify the sample was firstly, that one had to be an experienced university lecturer at either professorial, senior lecturer or junior lecturer level. This was designed to triangulate the findings and ensure trustworthiness in the findings of the study (Nieuwenhuis, 2012). The sample comprised 10 professors from 5 faculties and 10 junior and senior lecturers also from the different university faculties. The rationale for drawing such a sample size and composition was to ensure that the views expressed reflect the diverse perceptions of He lecturers on the subject under study. To ensure each of the three categories of HE lecturers was selected for the focus group discussions for this study, the lecturers in each faculty were first organized into 3 cohorts of professor, senior lecturers and junior lecturers. To come up with a sample size of 20 participants, the selection was carried out systematically in multiples of 50 from the total target population of 1000 lecturers in the four HE institutions. These were subsequently grouped into 4 focus groups of 5 participants stratified according to their professional levels (professors, senior or junior lecturers). Each focus group was interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. The data was then drawn on to discover their perceptions of the social media technology use in the classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher had to first obtain the necessary ethical clearance and permission to conduct the study from the university authorities as represented by the deans of faculties before going into the faculties to interview them The participants had to be at ease before the interview proceedings commenced, especially in the face of a voice or audio-recorder that was used to record the data. The focus group discussions initiated by clarifying the purpose of the research and the focus group discussion ground rules so as to give the participants an opportunity for informed consent. They were reassured of their rights during the course of the study and also made aware of the confidential nature of their interview responses, their rights to privacy, protection from harm, informed consent, anonymity and the right to withdraw from the research at any moment. However, none of the participants withdrew.

Data management and Analysis

Guided by Hesse-Biber' s (2010) assertion that data management and analysis in qualitative researches ought to be done in terms of meanings mediated through language and action tied to particular contexts, a descriptive and interpretive mode of data analysis was adopted. This involved the use of themes emerging from the focus group discussions, summaries, excerpts from the focus group discussions, narrative vignettes and direct quotes.

Consistent with Nieuwenhuis' (2012) advice that one of the most important tasks of data analysis is the identification of patterns, commonalities, differences and processes to constitute the themes to be used as the basis for the presentation, analysis and discussion of the findings, the focus was thus placed on breaking down the data into separate parts, examining it and making comparisons in the emerging themes which culminated in the final discussion and analysis of results.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are discussed under the following seven themes as they emerged from the focus group discussions used as the technique for data collection in the study: the attitude of HE lecturers towards social media use in the classroom, lack of familiarity with social media use in classroom activities, differential perceptions of social media use in the classroom-insights from digital natives and digital immigrants, benefits of social media use for pedagogy and practice, reluctance and ignorance of educators on the benefits of social media for pedagogy and practice, making learning real and not just relevant, social media as a form of partnering students in their quest for new knowledge and perceived drawbacks of social media use in the classroom.

The Attitudes of HE Lecturers towards Social Media use in the Classroom

The study revealed that the attitudes of HE staff or educators toward social media use in the classroom is among the strongest predictors of whether or not HE institutions would adopt or integrate it into their classrooms. Technology adoption was found to be a measured and multifaceted process influenced by many factors and thus requires a great deal of support from the stakeholders. However, despite many fears, worries and anxieties, it emerged that many HE lecturers and tutors are aware of the formidable tide of the social media technology. Their attitudes towards its implementation in the classrooms ranged from a keen interest especially for the youthful HE lecturers to a non-committal approach from the old guard HE lecturers most of whom professed ignorance on the use and benefits of social media in the classroom. Asked to comment on the different attitudes displayed by different HE lecturers and tutors, the following views emerged; basically almost all HE lecturers today know that digital technology is becoming an important part of students' education. But just how to use it in school is not yet completely clear, and most educators are at some stage of figuring out or worrying about how to use technology meaningfully for teaching and learning in their classrooms. As a result, these lecturers are right to be concerned, since depending on how it is used, technology can either help or hinder the educational process.

Lack of Familiarity with Social Media use in Classroom Activities

It emerged from focus group discussions held for this study that in spite the popularity of social media tools, many of the HE lecturers are hesitant to utilize it in their classrooms. Many claimed to sense the hazards within social media and are apprehensive that inappropriate student actions and possible online bullying may outweigh the positives. Other HE lecturers indicated a lack of understanding or familiarity with social media resulting in an unwillingness to employ it within their classrooms. An interesting observation from the participants was that some of them, particularly the youthful ones believe that the use of social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia, Google Docs, Google, blogs, Tumblr, Vine, Snapchat, Instagram, and Watt pad, provide students with a wider audience with whom to connect and share ideas on a variety of topics of educational interest. However, their concern was whether the ideas shared would remain the same if shared for example, in a face-to-face classroom situation. This view is vindicates Collier's (2012) fears when he advanced the notion of online disinhibition to suggest that students may act differently online due to the online distance perception, its virtuality and student naivete. This implies that although students may be digital natives, they may lack the maturity to make good online decisions regarding how it should be used. Therefore, HE lecturers and tutors might need to ask such questions as, what sites are acceptable to students and at what age? Who should the student share with? How much should they share and does age impact on these guidelines if any are in place? Although these are difficult questions in fast changing times since too much oversight and restrictive policies can eliminate the possibility of using some of these useful learning tools. The following sentiments were also expressed by some of the HE lecturers and tutors during the focus group discussions held to gather the data for this study; concerned HE staff were continually requesting more training and additional professionaldevelopment about using various forms of technology for teaching.

However, nine of the twenty participants (45%) of the sample paradoxically claimed that to be successful at using thesocial media technology in their classrooms, they did not necessarily need to learn to use itthemselves (although they can if they want to). According to some of them, what they do need to know is just how the social media technology can and should be used by students to enhance their own learning. The implications of this view for HE classroom practice is therefore that in a partnering pedagogy, using social media technology should be the students' job. The lecturer or tutors' job should thus be tocoach and guide the use of such technology for effective learning. To do this, the lecturers and tutors need to focuson, and become even more expert at, things that are already part of their job, including asking pertinent questions, providing situated learning contexts, ensuring rigor, and evaluating the quality of their students' work.

Differential Perceptions of Social Media use in the Classroom: Insights from Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

A generation of young university lecturers particularly those between the ages of 25 and 35 years identified the effective use of the social media technology as an important area for supervisory professional development, leadership and dialogue. In step with this important decision, they maintained that electronic communication and social media can be effective when used cautiously and professionally. According to these lecturers, social media technology thus serves a range of purposes, from helping students and lecturers to access assignments and resources related to classroom studies to connecting with classrooms in other communities and countries. However, the old guard or old professors and some senior lecturers cautioned the use of social media in the classroom on the grounds that it is difficult for them to monitor the responsible use of social media as teaching and learning tools and to make sure that the social media technology adheres to the code of professional standards. These participants thus warn fellow HE lecturers that anything they post on these sites can be forwarded, taken out of context, copied, manipulated and may also be impossible to remove from cyberspace. They claimed they can only support the use of social media technology in their classrooms if clear policies and stances are put in place for the use of social media in HE to prevent its abuse by both staff and students.The implications for this view are that although students and staff are expected to use the social media technology responsibly in a manner that supports the curriculum's expectations being addressed, chances are that without strict monitoring, the social media technology can be abused.One participant had this to say in her argument against the use of the social media technology in HE classrooms: If we focus on the social media sites and direct our attention towards a techno-centric instruction, our teaching becomesfocused ontechnologyratherthan thestudentswho areusingit and this causes us as HE lecturers to ask such questions as, does the technology drive the vision or does the vision drive technology? The implications of this view for social media in HE classroom is thus a fear by some HE lecturers that it would inhibit independent thinking among students and some lecturers especially if they allow it to drive the vision of education instead of the other way round.

Benefits of Social Media use for Pedagogy and Practice

Among the benefits cited by participants as derived from the use of social media technology in the classrooms are the following; it engages the students and lecturers in the content and thus allows them to be included as active participant as they construct a learning landscaperooted in social interaction, knowledge exchange and optimum cognitive development with their peers. This view is also shared by Baird & Fisher (2006) in their contention that social media increases collaborative learning, enhances participation and improve communication during the teaching and learning processes. Renfro (2011) shares similar sentiments when he asserts that current research into the use of social media in institutions of HE illuminates many benefits such as improving collaboration through increased connectivity as online classrooms become teaching and learning communities of practice that offer students and lecturers fresh and thought-provoking ways to connect. Although the bulk of the benefits of social media use in the classrooms were stated predominantly by the youthful HE lecturers, it was apparent that both categories of HE lecturers concurred that in deed the use of social media in the classrooms challenges traditional teaching and learning approaches by providing formal and informal learning opportunities. For example, one respondent had this to say in support of this view;

Professor Zacks (pseudonym): Instead of conveying a finished and complete package of information to students thereby spoon feeding them, through online participation lecturers and students co-construct knowledge with the former acting as facilitators. The above idea also lends credence to Kassorla's (2013) and Renfro's (2011) sentiments that through social media interactive activities educators and learners get to collaborate with a global audience and thus build communities of practice.

An elaborate view of the benefits of social media use in the classroom was given by one senior lecturer in information Communication technology (ITC) who maintained in the focus group discussion that through some social media forms such as Skype and Facebook messenger one may be able to book the virtual expert speaker from another country or continent, take a virtual field-trip or stage virtual presentations for others globally and this certainly generates and sustains the attention of many students in the classroom. Tis view also lends credence to the assertion by Dame (2013) who observes that social media technology such as Skype and Twitter are able to keep costs very low while generating vital knowledge for the students within countries and between continents. Another benefit cited by the focus group discussion participants was that HE research can be conducted online via survey monkey or Kwiksurvey, and if this follows proper ethical principles chances are that credible research results will be realised. Schachter (2011) shares this view when he notes that virtual field trips via such social media platforms as YouTube can be powerful motivational tools for the digital natives and even their digital immigrant counter parts. The implication for this is that when used diligently, social media technology has the potential to allow students and lecturers to speak to a world far beyond their local community. Twelve of the twenty HE lecturers (60%) interviewed for this study through focus group discussions concurred that social media usage in classrooms can have many positive side effects such as improving collaboration, greater participation and increased student engagement. They also pointed out that the authenticity of social media may attracts more and more students' attention by moving them from distractions to motivator thereby attracting attention to curricular activities. This view is succinctly expressed by Abe and Nickolas (2013) who argue that social media usage in the classroom leads to alternative participation and enhances inclusion. The following excerpt reveals the general feeling among the young HE lecturers who participated in this study.

Mr Gregory (Pseudonym): Our current interactions with university students in the classrooms already clearly show that social media are already affecting the ways in which the students find, create, share and learn knew knowledge, through rich media opportunities and in collaboration with each other. Students now compare notes on Whats'up, Facebook and other social media when given assignments and if we do not seek to catch up with this irresistible technological advancement, we will lose a vital opportunity to instil important ideas successfully in them. It is important for us as lecturers to harness this technology and take advantage of the students' motivation to learn through the social media technology to inculcate for example, a culture of research and hard work by disseminating instructions and communicating lectures, slides and other relevant content via the social media. This way we can be sure our students will access the information. If we fool ourselves by continuing to use some of the archaic modes of address, we risk losing touch with our students in HE.

The above view lends credence to Devitt's (2010) assertion that educational administrators and teachers can tweet, Skype, sent short message system (Sms) and create Facebook pages to contact staff, faculty and communities of practices to promote educational dialogues and other learning conversational platforms. This may include, among other interactive learning activities, pages to update, burning educational issues, news, announcements, pictures and links that are crucial to their teaching and learning situations (Schachter, 2011). In doing this each HE institution appears current, connected and a part of the digital culture. Klopfer et al. (2007:3) underscore this view when they remark that this is important since more often than not, there is always a sharp disconnectionin almost every country between the way students are taught in their institutions of learning, schools, colleges and universities, and the way the outside world approaches socialization, meaning-making, and accomplishment. For him, it is always important that educational activities not only seek to mitigate this disjuncture in order to make these two worlds more seamless, but of course also to leverage the power of these emerging technologies for instructional gain. The above view implies that social media tools have the potential to decrease any disjuncture as the social world of the student merges with HE communication, making education more authentic, meaningful and available (Casey & Evans, 2011). Baird & Fisher (2006) also suggest that this is crucial given that the current generation of students is hardwired to simultaneously utilize multiple types of Web-based participatory media. As a technologically savvy generation of students they would enjoy using the 26-volume set of encyclopaedias having grown up with the World -Wide-Web (WWW) or the internet as it is commonly called. It emerged from the findings of this study that the basically the benefits of social media use in the classrooms lay in its ability to boost student connections and interaction inside and outside of the school and curriculum. Participants pointed out that with social media technology, virtually all students can be involved regardless of ability provided it is well mediated by the lecturer or tutor as facilitators.

Social media is often asynchronous as it is ready when one is ready for tutelage in the form of homework chat rooms or bulletin boards all of which can be located online when students need them (Fawkes& McCabe, 2012). Another pertinent view that evolved from the focus group discussion was the need to make student learning not just relevant but real or authentic. The following section summarises some of the participants' views on this theme.

Making Learning real and not just Relevant

Among the participants who argued cogently about adopting the social media technology in HE classrooms, was the view that an important result of the introduction of such technology into their students' education is a much shorter span today between learning and meaningful action. According to their perspective, today's students know that when they learn something after school, they can immediately apply it to something real. When they learn to play a game, they can collaborate and compete with others around the globe. When they learn to download, text, and tweet, they can immediately participate in profound social revolutions, such as changing the music business and influencing government policies. As they learn to post their creations and ideas online, they become aware that even as young people they can truly influence and change the world. This gives new urgency and meaning to the, Why should I learn this? question that our students eternally ask, and demands that we have a better answer than simply saying, someday you will need it. Today's students expect the same thing from their formal education as from the rest of their lives, that it be not just relevant, but real.

Social Media use as a form of Partnering Students in their Quest for new Knowledge

The participants who wished to adopt social media in their classrooms maintained that it offers a form of partnering students in their quest for knowledge. One focus group discussant had this to say in support of this view of social media as a form of partnering;

Mr. Roy (pseudonym): It's not a new phenomenon per se; it's just what used to be called put your answer here. For me, to a great extent, partnering falls into the great pedagogical tradition known, variously, as: student-centered learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, case-based learning, inquiry-based learning, active learning, constructivism or co-constructing knowledge or better still, learning by doing. For HE lecturers who subscribe to this school of thought, social media plays a crucial role in the partnering pedagogy. Their contention is that the social media technology's role is to support the partnering pedagogy, and to enable each student to personalize his or her learning process. This view appears quite plausible given that all lecturers and tutors know that students get the greatest reward for their efforts when things are individualized and customized for each one of them. What is always needed in our class rooms is a way to deal with each student individually or, at the most, in extremely small groups in a way that is truly implementable and effective (Casey & Evans, 2011). Up until now, though, the combination of large class sizes and few resources outside of textbooks, outdated reference books, and limited library and lecturer time have made total individualization and differentiation difficult, if not impossible, for most lecturers and tutors to pull off. It is in this sense that the greatest single boon of the arrival, albeit slowly and unevenly of digital technology in our institutions of learning is that it will, in the long run, enable educators and learner to partner in this much more personal and individual way, for each student to learn on his or her own, with the lecturers and tutors' coaching and guidance. It will permit students not just to learn at their own pace, as is often heard, but to learn more or less in whatever ways they prefer, as long as they are in pursuit of the necessary and required goals.

Analysing the implications of the above views, it became clear to me that what the greatest philosopher John Dewey famously espoused as a form of pedagogy in the early 20th century was being reflected though expressed in a different terminology. It follows therefore that the constructivist pedagogy advocated by amongst others, Vygotsky (1987) and Kozulin (2002) will be encapsulated in the use of social media in the class room in one form or another. It also became clear to me that other terms for this pedagogy exist as well. This also reminded me of the constructivist teaching and learning approach implicit in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who call their pedagogical version technology-enhanced active learning (TEAL (Shaw, 2014). Or what the Chicago School regards as process-oriented guided inquiry learning (POGIL) or quest-based learning or challenge-based learning as it is called by Apple (2000). But while each of these pedagogies has its own proponents, principles, and peculiarities, it is clear from the above findings that they are all, at their core, very similar. In a sense, they are merely brands of the same general type of learning with the common thread that students learn on their own, alone or in groups, by answering questions and solving problems with their lecturers and tutors' help, coaching, and guidance. Some of the participants in this study preferred the term partnering to any of the others because for them it emphasises that the roles of each group, lecturers and students, are different, but equal.

Partnering thus underscores that each party must draw on its own particular strengths to improve the learning process as a whole. What I also liked most from some of the participants' responses was the view of partnering as the role of technology: that it is the job of the students, and not the lecturer, to use it, and the job of the lecturer or tutor to assess the quality of that use. Notwithstanding the above value of partnering students learning through social media use in the classroom, one concern raised by some of the focus group discussants was that they are constrained by a mandated curriculum, which somehow conflicts with partnering. According to their view, in many HE faculties, there is for every subject and level a required set of increasingly skills-based standards to be taught. What these participants did not take cognizance of was the view that these standards, more often than not just specify what and not how to teach. It is in this sense that partnering can, and does, work with today's required curricula though it demands a rethinking of those curricula on the part of lecturers and tutors from the notion of this is the material to be learned approach of textbooks, to an approach of guiding questions to which students need to find answers through online searches. Interestingly, textbooks, most of which reflect the old, telling pedagogy, have gotten things completely backward from the point of view of partnering (and, generally, student interest). Textbooks put the answers or the content up front and the questions in the back, while partnering reverses this by putting the questions first, which, as it turns out, is far more motivating to students (Prensky, 2010).

Perceived Drawbacks of Social Media use in the Classroom

It is important to begin this section by pointing out that some of the participants of this study, particularly the old guard HE lecturers exhibited some degree of resistance to change and in defence of the status quo of clinging to their traditional teaching and research approaches, many of them insinuated that using social media in the HE classrooms is wrongheaded, problematic and threatening to authentic teaching and learning. A total of nine of the twenty HE (45%) lecturers partaking in the focus group discussion claimed it would be difficult for HE lecturers to monitor and assess the value in use of social media initiatives in the classroom. Their contention was based on the view that first of all the tools (social media) are relatively new and thus many of them are still in the experimental stage, and secondly, social media initiatives are generally part of a broader communication strategy that is difficult to control given the rate at which it is emerging. According to the se participants, communication in education is something that has to be strictly controlled, filtered and measured; yet social media takes that control away from the authorities, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders. Their argument further claimed that unleashing the use of social media in the classroom has the potential tounsettle, rouble rouse and present a host of uncertainties through new communication pathways some of which might render the HE institutions ungovernable.

Critics of the use of social media in the classroom alleged that they can result in unwelcome outcomes some of which may result in increased time on tasks, diminished quality of work, privacy or security concerns in the institutions of HE. The above findings on the drawbacks of the use of social media in HE classrooms are consistent with the literature by Abe & Nickolas (2013), O'Brien and Torres (2012) who in their researches on integrating technological inventions in teaching and learning discovered that there is an overwhelming disadvantage of quickly embracing new technologies before subjecting them to critical scrutiny. One of the setbacks Obrien and Torres (2012) cited in their research, which has been corroborated by this study is the additional time commitment that new technologies would require for both staff and students in an educational institution. The participants in this study, argued that the time commitment needed for a full adoption of social media tools in the classroom are enormous and in order for an institution to effectively incorporate today's social media technology into class routines and curriculum; staff and students need to spend time learning and implementing the various components of the new technology. It would also be imperative that HE lecturers and tutors are able to provide their students with adequate time and support for them to become familiar with the forms of social media being utilized. This view collaborates Dame's (2013) assertion that in adopting any new technological development, members of an organization also need to locate additional time to monitor online behaviour. Another observation that emerged from the focus group discussion was the inability of some lecturers and tutors to access and navigate online due to lack of adequate knowledge. Some cited sluggish downloads, narrow bandwidth and time-consuming, old processing hardware as their reasons for opposing the use of social media use in their HE classrooms. The focus group discussion also revealed that some HE staff required basic computer literacy, practical support and lacked or misplaced resources.

They also argued that with limited time for a normal teaching day the use of social media technology would exacerbate the situation as it would mean that they have to be available to monitor learning and support their for effectiveness of whatever online learning activities set for the students if what they termed authentic learning is to take place. Aside from the demands for added time commitment, the study also revealed disadvantages associated with deficiencies in the quality and integrity of student work. While agreeing with the views implicit in Casey and Evans' (20110 assertion that social media challenges the traditional models of teaching and learning, some of the participants argued that instead of information moving from lecturers and tutors to students, social media creates alternative pathways as students facilitate their own learning. One participant noted that despite promoting student centred independence some students and staff may be more concerned about distracting edutainment within social media tools. For instance, if the facilitator wants her students to read and they are engaged in an online activity this can pose a challenge for her. Other drawbacks cited by the participants included privacy concerns as spyware and hacking tend to surface through social media use in the classrooms. O'Brien and Torres (2012) share this view in their contention that there is potential for student information and online activity to lead to adult sites, predators and essentially unlawful activity causing concern for lecturers, teachers and tutors. One participant from the faculty of information science in one of the HE institutions chosen as the site for this study claimed that this has become a global concern for educators hence some countries are putting in place strong measures to curb such cybercrime.

Conclusion

The findings reported herein explain the often-perceived daunting task of marshalling 21st century technologies for classroom instruction in a way that HE lecturers and tutors can easily understand and apply them immediately. The concept of partnering and allowing both lecturers and students to capitalize on their strengths in social media use clarifies the issues for educators. The glad tidings implicit in the paper is that HE lecturers and tutors do not have to be masters of the social media technology use to master the 21st century HE classroom. Drawing on Prensky's new map for a newer a of teaching and learning through a technology-partnered pedagogy HE lecturers will find a breeze to navigate a well-worth trip of teaching digital natives through the social media technology and to provide them with innovative, realistic, and clearly explained techniques that increase their engagement and learning. Seen in this light, the main conclusion drawn from this study is therefore that the benefits of the social media technology lie in its ability to boost student connections and interaction in and outside the school and curriculum and allow for inclusive education especially when all students get involved in social networks and engage in some of form of learning activities in the school and classroom.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are given; the results of this study plead for an enormous need for HE institutions to adopt clear guidelines and policies to integrate the social media technology for pedagogy and practice. The recommended guidelines and policies need to include issues of confidentiality, the role of staff as representatives of the institutions, HE boards and the enforcement practices in the event of a problematic situation. With appropriate guidelines in place, the HE institutions and board of administrators need to train staff on the types of social media tools ideal for their HE institutions. Once staff are competent in the basic skills necessary to use the technology, it is important that they stay up-to-date with the social media tools being developed or implemented in their organizations Furthermore, in order to ensure the appropriate use of social media in the classroom, HE lecturers need to be responsible for monitoring and controlling online activities for their classes (Ryan, 2014). Stakeholders also need to ensure staff and students are fully supported to get the most out of social media use in the classroom. Just as administrators must create Faculty-wide guidelines and policies concerning human and material resources use, HE lecturers also need to communicate such guidelines to their students at the beginning of the semester through the course syllabi lecturers and tutors should also establish and communicate a comprehensive rationale and purpose for social media use in their classrooms. Instead of simply adopting the social media technology because it is current, HE lecturers need to consider the logistics behind its implementation. Before using the technology, they therefore need to address privacy concerns before they become problematic. Separations between the students' use of social media as entertainment and for academic purposes need to be clearly established (Lin et al., 2013). In other words, HE lecturers should have students create entirely separate social media accounts for academic use, which will help to ensure that their individual information remains private while online. This clearly means that efforts need to bemade to regulate the social media use in schools and classrooms. Once a class starts using social media tools chosen, it is imperative that lecturers model appropriate online behaviour, while scaffolding students as they adjust to the new technology (Abe & Nickolas, 2013; Lin et al., 2013).

Lecturers and tutors also need to view social media use in the classroom as a way to improve pedagogy and practice and not as a simple replacement for past or traditional teaching and learning modes. This implies that lecturers using social media tools can continue to use some of the traditional teaching and learning modes through blended teaching and learning approaches.

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