

Social Networking Media as a Tool for Teaching Business Administration Courses

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Abstract

Internet technology has grown exponentially, spawning with it new opportunities to link people together. Computer software is being developed that serves a sociological function of fostering communication and building community. This phenomenon is collectively known as social networking media. How this technology can be applied to enhance teaching and learning and not hinder pedagogy is explored. This paper provides a definition and framework for categorizing six types of social media and discusses its growth and prevalence. Applications for the academic environment generally, and a business administration and management course more specifically, are discussed.

Keywords: social networking media, academic environment, business administration and management

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networking means something new these days. At one time it meant going to a social function such as a business luncheon, a conference, or an office-sponsored cocktail party. Now it means hooking-up, i.e., engaging in websites such as Facebook, Google+, MySpace, or LinkedIn. These technological marvels enable people to make connections, develop new friends, and upload personal information. Social networking has evolved into a new realm of person-to-person communications (Roberts & Roach, 2009). The addition of social networking websites has “transformed the virtual encounters of the past, that were technical and impersonal, to today’s virtual socialization that is truly non-technical, social, and interpersonal” (Agarwal & Mital, 2009). Generally, a social network includes any “interpersonal, non-hierarchical connection between individuals, business units, or organizations along which knowledge flows” (Smith & McKeen, 2007).

As a result of Internet technology and Web 2.0 applications, social media has evolved, expanded, and grown in ways that now link people of every race, background, and origin in ways unimaginable even ten years ago. Today’s social media platforms such as Facebook, Google+, Orkut, MySpace, LinkedIn and Twitter are used as hubs for people to meet and share ideas, as well as for businesses to promote and market their products. This vast source of knowledge is prompting academia to look for new ways to teach and communicate in a more innovative and tangible way. With recent research showing that 85% of Americans expect companies to interact with consumers by means of social media, its importance as a communication channel is growing rapidly (Facinelli, 2009). As an illustration of that importance, *Time* magazine named the phenomenon – or rather, our participation with the phenomenon – 2006’s “Person of the Year: You” (Grossman, 2006). *Time* called it a “tool for bringing together the small contributions of millions of people and making them matter”.

It acknowledges social media’s role in enabling people to share ideas, cooperate and collaborate more easily and more quickly than ever before (Grossman, 2006). Social media has had a significant impact on college students who acknowledge that they trust it more than company websites for critical information (Elmore, 2009). In the social space, users are in control as more people have the ability to tell you what they think about your business. That sentiment not only has the power to reach millions of people but also has the ability to leave a permanent record on the Internet (Van Den Dam, 2010). A popular saying has been varied slightly to reflect the social media phenomenon: “What happens in Vegas stays on Facebook”. As a result, social interactions are causing organizations to look to this medium as a research tool to understand stakeholder sentiment (Smith, 2009). This presents a major opportunity and challenge for organizations to engage their constituents and deliver relevant experiences in these social spaces. The purpose of this paper is to explore social media as a vehicle to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. The paper is organized into four sections. The first provides a definition of social media and establishes a six-category framework for classifying various applications. The second section discusses the growth and prevalence of social media. The third examines how social media operates in the academic environment and explores how social media can be applied to business administration and management courses. The fourth section provides some concluding thoughts.

2. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is defined 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” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). This definition builds on the literature in two fields: media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure). Social presence theory suggests that media differ in their degree of presence, which can be visual, acoustic, or physical (Short-Williams & Christie, 1976). The theory holds that as social presence increases, so does the social influence that communication partners have on each other’s behavior. Closely related to social presence is a concept known as media richness, a theory based on the assumption that the goal of communication is the reduction of uncertainty and resolution of ambiguity (Daft & Lengel, 1986).

The social process literature discusses the concepts of self-presentation and self-disclosure. According to Goffman (1959), people have the desire to control the impressions that other people form about them as a result of social interactions. This may be done to gain rewards or by a wish to create an image that is consistent with one’s personal identity. This presentation is usually done through self-disclosure, which is the conscious and unconscious exposition of personal information. The information may be likes, dislikes, thoughts, or feelings. This type of self-disclosure is critical to the development of close interpersonal relationships, sometimes even between strangers (as when one speaks about personal problems to the person sitting in the adjacent seat on an airplane). By combining both of these dimensions, Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) developed a 3x2 matrix classification for social media resulting in six categories. In that classification social presence/media richness has three levels: low, medium, and high. Self-presentation/self-disclosure has two levels: high and low. Figure 1 shows the classification matrix for social networking media, which is based on the original work of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

		Social Presence/Media Richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self Presentation/Disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., FaceBook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., You-Tube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 1. Classification Matrix for Social Networking Media

On the *low* level of the social presence and media richness dimension, we have applications such as blogs (high disclosure) and collaborative projects such as Wikipedia (low disclosure) because they are frequently text-based, which only allow relatively simple exchanges. On the *medium* level we have social networking sites such as Facebook (high disclosure) and content applications such as YouTube (low disclosure). These go beyond text-based communication because they allow the sharing of videos, pictures, and other media. On the *high* level of social presence and media richness we have virtual worlds such as Second Life (high disclosure) and game worlds such as World of Warcraft and hi5 (low disclosure). These applications replicate nearly all dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment. Using the self-presentation and self-disclosure dimension, we have blogs (categorized as high) relative to collaborative projects (categorized as low) because the latter focus on specific content domains. Similarly, social networking applications allow for more self-disclosure than content communities. Lastly, virtual social worlds require a higher level of self-disclosure than virtual game worlds because the latter have strict rules that force users to act in a certain way (e.g., as soldiers in an imagined fantasyland).

While the definition provided by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) and their matrix of applications may be complex, social media can generally be thought of as referring to digital media that shares some or all of the following characteristics. First, they are participatory in nature because they encourage contributions from everyone who is interested, so any user can create, edit or share. Second, authority is decentralized and no longer resides with media owners but is open to the masses with users in control. And third, whereas traditional media is one-way, social media is a two-way conversation where users can and are often expected to contribute to the conversation (Van Den Dam, 2010). One author describes social media as an over arching term that is defined as various electronic tools available to help accelerate and improve our ability to connect, communicate, and elaborate (Jue, Marr, & Kassotakis, 2010). It includes many inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tools that enable anyone to publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort and build relationships. The technology that makes the connection possible is commonly called Web 2.0, which lets anyone with an Internet connection create and post information online.

3. PREVALENCE AND GROWTH OF SOCIAL NETWORKING MEDIA

To understand the sheer power of electronic social media, and the enormous potential for connecting, some of the most popular and visited social media sites ever created will be discussed. Nielsen published statistics showing that “three of the world’s most popular brands online are social-media related (Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia) and the world now spends over 110 billion minutes on social networks and blog sites. This equates to 22 percent of all time online or one in every four and a half minutes. For the first time ever, social network or blog sites are visited by three quarters of global consumers who go online. The numbers of people visiting these sites increased by 24% over the last year, and the average visitor spends 66% more time on these sites than a year ago - almost 6 hours in April 2010 versus 3 hours, 31 minutes last year” (NielsenWire.com, 2010). While these statistics are helpful in perceiving the enormity of social network usage, they do not tell the whole story. Owyang (2010) states that the data underlying the statistics are like fire, which can be used for good and bad purposes. This suggests that analysis and insight are always required. Reliance on statistics can be problematic because members of the social networking industry use different methodologies, resulting in conflicting numbers of usage from many of the social networks themselves (Owyang, 2010).

It is obvious that the use of social media has helped companies become more aligned with the way technology is headed. Young adults have shown that there is no stopping what tomorrow will bring. Many people in their teenage years wish to compete with their peers in having the most accessibility to the latest cell phone applications. Investment advisors have also tried social media. They are becoming more aware of the advantages of using social networking sites to communicate with current clients and establish relationships with new clients. They are exploring it more than an hour a day according to Rydex Investments (Ivanova, 2010). Of the advisors, 42% favored LinkedIn because it is tailored for business use, as opposed to 27% who favored Facebook. The percentages are significantly less for YouTube at 15% and Twitter at 13%. A senior research manager at Rydex says that 62% of advisors think that social media outreach will have a lasting impact on their businesses (Ivanova, 2010). This type of social media has its advantages. It is fast and inexpensive and the message is sent instantly to a desired group of people. Major social media sites such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, Friendster, Google+ and Twitter all have capabilities to assist with getting messages to the desired parties.

It is predicted that social media will become more prevalent and the amount of users that engage in their websites will only increase (Fernando, 2007). Forrester Research, a marketing consulting company, found a 33% increase in social media use in 2008 as compared to 2007 (Nail, 2009). It was estimated that 70% of all online users utilized some form of social media. These statistics have changed the way companies conduct business. Initially, social media sources such as blogs were implemented as a fad, but they have become necessities, driving business plans and strategies. It is thought that social networking media usage will increase with the depressed economy due to the inexpensive manner in which consumers are targeted. Companies will build their brands by inviting consumers to provide feedback, listening to their thoughts and comments, and responding to these comments through the social networking community they have established. The future of marketing, advertising, human resources, in fact business in general, has changed permanently because of social networking media (Nail, 2009).

4. SOCIAL NETWORKING MEDIA IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Social networking media have extensive applications in today's society. Corporations have embraced these technologies, using them to recruit and train employees, market products and services, and even design and develop new ideas. With the rapid adaptation of these technologies by companies, it is important to develop coursework to prepare students for their entrée into the corporate world. Graduate and undergraduate courses should be redesigned to include a module on social media along with applications that relate directly to course topics. Social networking media are used by faculty members at universities and this technology is especially well suited for teaching and scholarly work.

4.1 Professorial Use of Social Media

According to a recent national study of 1000 university faculty members conducted by a major collegiate book publisher, more than four out of every five professors use social media in one of its varied forms. In addition, more than half of the surveyed professors use tools such as videos, blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, and wikis in their classes (Parry, 2010). Jeff Seaman, co-director of the Babson Survey Research Group, which conducted the study with the book publisher, said "at the moment, it's used primarily as another information resource, not as something which ... could only be done in social media" (Parry, 2010). Parry (2010) also reports that (1) almost 25% of professors surveyed have accounts on four or more social networks, and 59% have more than one account; (2) approximately 33% of faculty members use social networks to communicate with their peers, and more than 30% use them to communicate with students; (3) professors with more than 20 years of teaching experience use social media slightly less than their younger peers; (4) faculty members teaching in the humanities and social sciences report greater social-media use than do their colleagues in business, mathematics, and science; and (5) by a ratio of over four to one, faculty members report that social media have value for teaching (Parry, 2010). These data reinforce the fact that social media have been used to interact with students and teach in almost every discipline, including business.

A recent survey by Gartner, Inc., a research advisory firm, indicates that by 2014, social networking will replace e-mail as the primary form of communication for 20% of business users (Henneman, 2010). This has implications for teaching and for most if not all business administration and management courses. As a first step, academia must examine ways in which social networking can be integrated into graduate and undergraduate classrooms. To do this, it must explore how social media can be applied in two areas: teaching and scholarship. The first question has to address how social media can be used to educate students. The second has to focus on how social networking can be used as a tool to promote scholarly work and collaboration in the classroom.

4.2 Applications to Classroom Teaching

Social networking in higher education is certainly not new, but it has not been widely accepted as the typical way to educate students. However, one must recognize that the purpose of academia is to educate. If tools are available to help better engage and educate students, they should be incorporated into the curriculum, not exclusively, but rather, in a supplemental fashion. Historically, instructors have found that students with certain types of personalities have been difficult to engage in discussions. Social media offer a means to help these students. Research has shown that "shy individuals were more likely than non-shy individuals to report satisfying relationships established online" (Orr, 2009). Because collaboration and interaction are key aspects of learning in higher education, social networking tools can engage students who would otherwise be left out of the education experience and help the entire class by increasing the amount of interaction and exchange of ideas that would not have taken place had these individuals remained withdrawn.

Social networking media could likely benefit students with other types of disabilities, personality traits, or learning preferences. These media could be applied to topics in any subject, and certainly business management. The question of whether social networking media facilitates teaching is an important one. Detractors of social networking in academia often point out that social networking sites offer poor reference material often generated by unreliable sources. In general, the classroom can be used as a means to instruct how to responsibly use social networking as an educational tool. Just as all students have taken a course on how to use a library, courses on how to network, search, and filter social media would benefit students. Instead of regarding social networking as something of little to no value, academia could create a new medium by which reliable information could be quickly disseminated and learned. There is, in fact, an article describing how a team of neurosurgeons engaged with medical students and others over Twitter to describe an ongoing surgical procedure (Pinto, 2009). Surgeons not directly attending to the patient or performing the surgery responded with tweets to observers posing questions during the procedure. This online dialogue was well received by students whose understanding of the medical procedure was enhanced by virtue of the knowledgeable and immediate interaction with the participating surgeons.

Harris and Rea (2009) identify the major benefits and limitations of using Web 2.0 technologies, such as social networking media, in the classroom. Potential benefits include the following:

1. Students become part of the lesson. They participate and thus become actively engaged in the learning process, which enhances their understanding of the material being presented.
2. The world becomes the classroom. Today it is essential that students develop a global perspective. Due in large part to Internet-based technologies, a class need not be confined to a single room. Students can now easily work across boundaries with others who have different cultural backgrounds, values, and beliefs.
3. Collaboration and competition increase learning. The benefits of collaboration are well documented. Competition between teams or individual students also presents an opportunity to broaden their knowledge base.
4. The classroom is available 24/7. It is no longer confined to a Monday-Wednesday or Tuesday-Thursday meeting time on a university campus. Learning can occur asynchronously at whatever time the student-learner is interested in pursuing it.

Potential limitations include the following:

1. Availability of computing resources. Not all students have access to computing resources and the Internet when off campus. This presents a major disadvantage to students who cannot afford these resources or do not have access for some reason.
2. Web resources can be damaged or sabotaged. Web access is a wonderful convenience, but sometimes it is disrupted.
3. Plagiarism. The capability of online users to simply copy and paste text from existing sources makes plagiarizing easier, and even legitimizes the behavior in some users' view.
4. Level of openness. Written assignments and responses become available for many to see. Some students are very uncomfortable with this, believing that their work should be a private communication between them and their instructor (Harris & Rea, 2009). It is important to understand the benefits and limitations of technology and use them to one's advantage.

4.3 Classroom Ethical Concerns

It may be easy to think of social networking as operating in a bubble, affected only by outside influences. However, many potential ethical issues arise when social networking is used in the classroom (Foulger, Ewbank, Kay, Popp & Carter, 2009), one of which may be a conflict of interest. For example, "Stacy Snyder, an English education teacher candidate at Millersville University, was denied her teaching certificate and given an English degree rather than an education degree after campus administrators discovered photos on her MySpace profile portraying her as a "drunken pirate." This example supports two interesting and interrelated points. First, users of social networking sites should not expect that their posted material will remain private. In order for social networking to be effectively integrated into education, users must realize there can be no expectations of privacy. Second, there can be consequences when personal information meant to be private becomes intertwined with education. There may be few, if any, consequences for messages in poor taste if only the users' closest friends have access to the content. However, with less-intimate users having access, content on sites must be highly scrutinized. Information available should only reflect the user in a professional light.

A recent survey of undergraduate students at a Midwestern university found that 20% of the respondents had content on their social networking site that they would not want a prospective or current employer to see, which suggests that the material would likely be inappropriate in an educational environment (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). The most common types of inappropriate content, according to the study, were photo posts or comments related to drinking or alcohol consumption. Such content can be further complicated by the way third parties are able to post messages to users' accounts. As a result, it becomes a challenge to control not only what is created, but also what others who are associated with individuals create. This applies to students as well as professors. Another issue related to social networking has to do with age and prior experience. It cannot be assumed that all students enrolled in a course are social network savvy. According to one study, students above the age of 40 indicated little or no familiarity with social networking functions compared to younger students who indicated that they understood social networking functions relatively well (Foulger, et al., 2009).

This suggests there must be specific attention paid to the skills and abilities of students. Attempting to integrate social networking into a course in which many students are unfamiliar with its use would be no different than teaching calculus to a class in which some students had never studied algebra. Institutions must be sure that students are prepared with the requisite knowledge. If not, they must be provided with the appropriate remediation. A related issue is being prepared to take ethical, moral and social responsibility with respect to appropriate behavior when using the Internet and social media. According to Mitra, these are core traits that must be acquired and adopted by students. Underlying those traits are values that can and must be promoted by faculty while students pursue a business degree, but the foundation and development must begin at an earlier age. At the college level, ethics and social responsibility could be effectively reinforced by hands-on experience with actual projects (Mitra, 2009). Students could work in groups making use of social media to perform these projects in such classes as information systems, management, accounting, finance and marketing.

4.4 Classroom Legal Considerations

For those considering incorporation of social media into their teaching, it is wise to consider establishing institutional and/or personal guidelines so as to maximize the potential of social media based learning while minimizing potential legal liability. Mainly, the guidelines should recognize the tenets associated with FERPA—the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act – and respect the privacy of students and faculty:

1. Keep matters professional. Use a separate account for classroom communications. There is no reason for students to be aware of their instructor's rediscovered school chums on classmates.com.
2. Make thorough use of privacy settings and check them frequently. Plan ahead how to respond to "friend" requests from parents or relatives of students.
3. Disable the wall posting feature through privacy settings. Allowing students to post to faculty walls can have long-lasting consequences. All postings and archives can potentially be subpoenaed by courts of law going back to the beginning of time.
4. Be conscious of the unintended audience. What is published can be re-posted to other sites, including something out of context.
5. Be aware that off-campus speech may have First Amendment protection, but as the student teacher who was denied an education degree for posting a photo portraying her as a drunken pirate, sometimes this may not be the case. Thus, off campus behavior and documentation on social networking sites can be problematic.

By following a few guidelines and using common sense, faculty members can empower their teaching and communication with minimal liability risk to themselves or their institution.

4.5 Applications for Scholarly Work

Another aspect of social networking in the academic environment relates to the production of scholarly work. Too often, social networking is stigmatized because of its association with MySpace and Facebook. However, the definition of social networking encompasses a wide range of technologies that help individuals connect virtually. For a graduate student, this type of media can be invaluable, helping to overcome many obstacles. "These tools can expand discussion beyond the classroom and provide new ways for students to collaborate and communicate within the class or around the world" (Bryant, 2006, p. 61). To conduct meaningful scholarly work, collaboration and discussion among researchers is important. In the past, students have faced barriers that limit them to partners within close proximity. Consider, for example, a research project where the best partners are situated in the United States, Israel, and Russia. Using an old paradigm, these individuals almost certainly would not have been able to easily connect and produce productive research.

Had they done so, the cost of hundreds of hours of international calls and the amount of time wasted corresponding by mail would have been prohibitive. Language barriers may have also existed. Bryant (2006) makes the argument that with the advent of these new technologies research using social media is not only a reality, but also a common scenario. Social networking sites such as Facebook can bring together individuals with similar ideas and objectives. It does not matter whether these individuals are across campus or across the globe. They can communicate instantly over the Internet, regardless of location, by means of voice, wikis, or blogs. There are even tools available to translate languages to allow participants to remove almost all barriers to communication (Smith, 2007).

4.51 A Human Resource Management Course: An Application Example

Organizations have embraced social media for a large number of important HRM applications, including recruitment, retention, separation, and training. Elmore (2009, p. 3) found that “43% (of job seekers) wanted to use social networking to search for a job, compared to 8% who preferred a company website and 13% who would rather use a career fair”. The rapid increase in the number of users of social networking sites represents a challenge and an opportunity for companies that strive to recruit the best and brightest employees. Traditional methods of attracting these individuals, such as at job fairs or through company websites, are not necessarily the most effective. Competitive firms must be dynamic in their efforts to recruit the most qualified individuals. Social networking media may be an opportunity for firms. When used properly, social networking media can be significantly less expensive compared to traditional methods of recruitment.

Beyond recruiting, firms are monitoring employees’ social media profiles to ensure that employee messages are consistent with company messages. If an employee violates the messaging policies, he or she can be held accountable for the statements through disciplinary action and/or termination. Firms are also using social media to engage employees in training and professional development. This application increases the effectiveness of training and reduces the cost of production. While technology constantly changes, the goal for academia remains the same – to best prepare students to handle the challenges they will face in their chosen professions. To do this, academia must adapt new technologies and understand their effect on curricula. In a human resource management course, to best prepare students for topics such as recruitment, it is important to discuss how sites such as LinkedIn allow companies to network and identify potential recruits. It is important to teach students ways in which YouTube can deliver training videos in much the same way as other academic disciplines make use of video technology. In the past it would have been inconceivable to discuss the concept of employee self service in an HRM course because that technology had not yet been invented. Today, however, it is an accepted business practice and an important topic in HRM. Curricula must continue adapting to new technologies and practices so as to keep pace with the business environment.

Before presenting an HRM course, students need to be prepared for using social networking media. They need to be taught how to use it, how to comply with the appropriate user policies, and how to appropriately post and share content. Instructors then need to inform students about their expectations concerning the use of social media in and out of classes for learning purposes. Instructors also need to identify the purpose of the available social networks in order to support its integration into the classroom. Doing so facilitates the transfer of knowledge. According to David Eisert, associate director of emerging technologies at Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business, “you have to ensure that people understand this is the place to go get answers. When you’ve got people in the network engaged, sharing information and openly communicating, that’s where the meat of knowledge transfer comes from” (Henneman, 2010, p. 4).

Several social networking media are appropriate for the human resource management classroom. They include:
Twitter– This tool could be used for almost any purpose to quickly get information about any subject related to HRM by just asking students to post their questions. “Twitter breaks” could be included during class sessions in which discussion would be stimulated by questions posed at the beginning of the break.

YouTube – Videos could be selected that portray good as well as poor human resource management practices. Real situations could be found and properly screened for training purposes so as to support the student’s development in a specific subject area.

Facebook and MySpace – These media could be used to create a large community of current and former human resource management students. Within the community, new students would have the opportunity to network with past students in order to exchange information on how organizations handle specific situations. An internal social networking site could also be created.

LinkedIn and Xing – These media could be used to demonstrate examples of human resource management functions including recruitment and selection. This would promote discussion about the concepts and issues contained in the textual assignments.

4.511 Topics in HRM Appropriate for Social Networking Media

Social media is a young and powerful tool. It is part of a trend in technology that cannot be ignored (Horovitz, 2010). Many institutions are not realistic on what social media can and cannot do. However, experience shows that social media can be effectively incorporated into several topical areas in human resource management to maximize benefits for students.

4.512 Employee Relations

Employee relations are a common title for the industrial relations function within human resource management. It goes beyond the study of trade unions to embrace the larger pattern of people management, which includes systems of direct communication and employee involvement (Heery & Noon, 2001). As the interface between the employer and employees, the human resource manager must address issues that affect the motivation, morale and productivity of employees. HRM courses expose future managers to the “people” issues in organizations and present strategies for dealing with those issues. Social media can provide a means to share information on best practices related to motivation, satisfaction and productive efficiency. HRM instructors could also use social media to (1) post information or links to news items related to harassment or discrimination; (2) follow the blog of an industry leader to gain insight on that industry’s trends and development; and (3) gather employee relations issues for future class discussions.

4.513 Staffing

Social media has now become an integral part of an organization’s staffing process. During pre-employment screening, background and reference checks are conducted with the help of various social media sites. Personal information is available on websites that would not have been discussed during an interview. A person’s age, sexual preference, comments about past employers, or the prior use of illegal substances can sometimes be found. Human resource managers may use this information to decide whether or not to interview a job applicant. Making that decision could potentially violate Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act. For example, a human resource manager who has two equally qualified applicants under consideration for a position may decide to interview only one of them after consulting their Facebook pages. This might be the case if the first applicant’s Facebook page stated that he was seeking members from his 1967 high school graduating class while the second applicant’s Facebook page stated that he was seeking connections for a reunion with his 1988 high school classmates. If the HR manager interviewed only the younger applicant, did s/he violate the Civil Rights Act? How does the candidate who was not interviewed know that he may have been subjected to illegal age discrimination? In a *National Law Journal* article Jackson (2010) addresses both what is legal and what may be illegal when using information contained on social networking websites. An HRM course using social media needs to prepare future managers for these issues and concerns.

The use of social media sites may help companies determine a candidate’s potential fit with a company. Human resource departments have traditionally been a source for an organization’s talent. Knowing how to use social media to attract and legally screen that talent should be a topic covered in HRM courses. To assist current employees, organizations should have policies and guidelines for the use of social media. Issues can arise that may be discriminatory, defamatory about personnel or the company, trade secret violations, or that have the effect of reducing productivity (if access to social media sites is permitted at work). This is problematic because access to social media websites does not necessarily require a personal or laptop computer. Cell phones and off-site computers have the ability to connect to the web without going through the company’s computer systems. Another issue related to staffing involves recommendations solicited by past employees. Users of LinkedIn can request a recommendation from former managers. If the manager provides the reference without approval from the firm’s human resource management department, perhaps in violation of its internal policies, the company may be liable for the information posted by the former manager. These and other similar issues concerning the use of social networking media should be addressed in an HRM course.

4.514 Training and Development

Social media considerations should also be discussed as part of training and development in an HRM course. As companies look to reach employees more efficiently, they are beginning to explore the option of using social media as a form of distance learning. There are many ways to use social media in training.

From online chats to instructional videos, social media websites allow learners access to real-time knowledge and information whenever and wherever s/he chooses. Because of its potential and growing relevance for training, HRM courses should include social networking media as an instructional tool and substantive topic.

4.52 Legal Environment of Business course: Potential for application of social media

Since business law oriented courses at many universities have fairly large enrollments, social media and Web 2.0 technologies can be easily justified to supplement in-class meetings. Three examples are outlined below.

1. One promising use of social media is the formation of small project teams to collaborate on preparation of discussion questions and case study projects prior to in-class discussion. Social media tools would provide a convenient way for students to meet virtually since work schedules and long commutes to campus can make arranging face to face meetings difficult.
2. Formation of study groups would potentially motivate students to work together to more thoroughly prepare for midterm and final examinations. They could conveniently hold meetings in cyberspace by using Web 2.0 tools such as Facebook.
3. Faculty members could make use of Twitter, Facebook, Google+ or comparable social media during office hours. Virtual office hours would reduce or eliminate the need for students to physically go to their professors' offices at inconvenient times. Students whose conflicting class or work schedules prevent one-on-one communication with their instructors would be more readily able to communicate with them through social media.

Research by Li and Pitts (2009) indicates that students' use of virtual office hours is not significantly different from their use of traditional office hours. However, these researchers found that students experienced greater satisfaction in courses offering virtual office hours than in courses offering only traditional face-to-face office hours (Li & Pitts 2009). As business faculty make greater use of Web 2.0 tools in their courses, it will be increasingly important to understand the suitable uses of these technologies so as to effectively integrate them into the classroom environment.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media puts an interactive twist on traditional one-way media delivery methods. It is the interactive component that makes it valuable, but it can also be detrimental if proper monitoring is not applied. Social media is available in many formats. As a teaching tool it affords students the opportunity to access material and garner an understanding of new material in ways that best facilitate their learning styles. It is fast growing and ever changing, allowing users to be on the cutting edge of their chosen fields. Businesses are already utilizing social media and drawing benefits from its use. Whether used for internal training or public relations, its broad scope allows for creative implementation. The gap between business implementation and academic use must be bridged to help make social media a best practice. Professors can become more effective by using social media in their classrooms. Collaborative lectures between universities and additional learning options can better prepare students for entry into the job market. Many progressive companies recognize that younger talent is connected through social networking platforms and are using social media tools to attract the best talent.

The implementation of social media as an instructional technology at universities will be second nature to the student body. Many students already understand its power and breadth and would likely embrace social networking technology as a learning tool. In fact, it has been argued that the current generation of youth, often described as Net Geners or Digital Natives, may be resistant to traditional methods of teaching and learning. The use of the Internet for searching and retrieving information may have contributed to a fundamental shift in learning styles (Bosch, 2009). Social media websites, which include webcasts, podcasts, wikis, and blogs, are used every day. New applications continue to be developed. Almost every industrial and service sector of the world uses social media. As it becomes more refined, its role in the classroom and in business and management courses will expand and improve. While social media is still emerging, the availability of peer reviewed research studies describing its uses and evaluating its effectiveness as an instructional technology is somewhat limited. The providers of social media websites have copious writings on its potential and place in today's world. There is a need for quantitative and qualitative studies evaluating the role and efficacy of social networking media to facilitate learning in higher education. As Mazman and Usluel (2010) conclude with regard to future research on social network use by college students, one important area to examine is the shift from a structured learning environment to an informal and flexible environment where students usually feel more comfortable.

6. REFERENCES

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