

# LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the integration of social media platforms into higher education to enhance student engagement, foster collaboration, and promote meaningful learning experiences. Drawing upon a comprehensive review of existing literature, empirical evidence, and practical insights, the study investigates the implementation of various social media projects within educational contexts. The research examines the effectiveness of diverse social media initiatives, including infographics, memes, blog posts, TikTok-style public service announcements, and podcast scripts, in facilitating student learning and participation. Moreover, the paper identifies key challenges encountered during the integration process, such as technical hurdles, alignment with course objectives, and ethical considerations, and proposes strategies for addressing these challenges. Additionally, the study explores promising future directions for refining the use of social media in education, including integrating emerging technologies, evolving pedagogical approaches, and prioritizing ethical considerations. Through a reflective analysis of successes, shortcomings, and lessons learned, this paper provides valuable insights for educators, instructional designers, and educational policymakers seeking to leverage social media effectively in higher education. Ultimately, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of social media in promoting student engagement, facilitating learning, and shaping the future of education in a digital age.*

**Keywords:** social media, higher education, student engagement, educational technology, pedagogical approaches, digital literacy, social media integration

## PROBLEM

In today's digital age, college students are deeply immersed in various technological formats (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). The motivation for this project lies in our aspiration to improve writing skills through social media projects (Schmitt et al., 2012). As educators dedicated to fostering innovative and captivating learning environments, we acknowledged the significant impact of integrating social media projects into college classrooms (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Social media platforms

serve as potent tools for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing in today's digital landscape (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). Harnessing these platforms within educational settings boosts student engagement and interaction and fosters digital literacy skills essential for successfully navigating the modern world (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

The vision for integrating social media projects into the college classroom is multifaceted and encompasses several key objectives. First, we aimed to capitalize on the intrinsic appeal of social media

platforms among students, recognizing them as powerful tools for communication and expression (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Our goal was to harness this enthusiasm to create authentic learning experiences that resonate with students' interests and experiences, thereby enhancing their overall engagement and motivation (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). By strategically incorporating platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok into course curricula, we aimed to bridge the gap between academic content and real-world applications (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Through this integration, students were given opportunities to explore concepts and theories in contexts that mirror their everyday lives, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation for the subject matter (Junco et al., 2011).

Integrating social media projects into the classroom enabled students to develop essential digital literacy skills (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). As they engaged with various media formats, they learned to evaluate information critically (Garrison et al., 2001), communicate effectively (Popescu & Badea, 2020), and navigate the complexities of online discourse (Popescu & Badea, 2020). These skills were not only valuable in academic settings but also essential for success in the professional world (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). Additionally, by encouraging collaboration and interaction through social media platforms (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017), we aimed to cultivate a sense of community and shared learning among students (Schmitt et al., 2012). Collaborative projects allowed students to exchange ideas, provide feedback, and learn from each other's perspectives (Junco et al., 2011), thereby enriching their learning experience and fostering a supportive academic environment.

As discussed earlier, the research team believed integrating social media projects into the college classroom enabled students to develop critical digital literacy skills necessary for navigating the complex digital landscape (Popescu & Badea, 2020). By engaging with social media platforms purposefully and responsibly (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016), students learned to evaluate information critically (Garrison et al., 2001), navigate online discourse (Popescu & Badea, 2020), and cultivate a positive digital footprint (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). These skills were indispensable in an era of rapid technological advancement and pervasive digital connectivity (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

## READINESS

While implementing social media projects, our research team was committed to upholding principles of inclusivity, accessibility, and digital citizenship, as previously highlighted (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Recognizing the importance of creating safe and inclusive online spaces where all students felt valued and respected (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020), the team ensured that social media projects were designed to foster such environments (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Additionally, the team was cognizant of the digital divide (Bell et al., 2022) and strove to ensure that social media projects were accessible to all students, regardless of their background or technological proficiency (Popescu & Badea, 2020), aligning with our overarching goals for the project (Bell et al., 2022).

This reflective practice research project was framed through the conceptual lens of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, as guided by previous studies (Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning, developed in the early to mid-20th century, emphasized the role of social interaction, cultural context, and language in shaping cognitive development. By applying this theoretical framework, the research project sought to explore how social media integration aligned with the principles of social constructivism and its implications for student learning outcomes and experiences.

Social constructivism theorizes that knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). In integrating social media projects, students engage in collaborative activities, share ideas, and negotiate meaning with their peers, thereby contributing to the construction of knowledge within a social context (Daniels, 2001). Moreover, social constructivism underscores the significance of social interaction in the learning process, with social media platforms providing opportunities for students to engage in meaningful discussions, exchange perspectives, and interact with diverse cultural perspectives, enriching their learning experiences and understanding of course content (Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky also emphasized the importance of cultural context in shaping cognitive development, suggesting that social media projects embedded within cultural contexts offer students opportunities

to explore diverse perspectives, cultural practices, and societal norms, fostering a deeper understanding of course concepts within a cultural framework (Vygotsky, 1978). In addition, social constructivism highlights the importance of reflective dialogue in constructing knowledge, with activities such as online discussions, peer feedback, and collaborative problem-solving facilitated by social media platforms enabling students to engage in critical reflection, deepen their understanding of course concepts, and construct meaning collaboratively (Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

By employing Vygotsky's social constructivism as a theoretical framework, this research project seeks to investigate how social media projects incorporated into college courses can enhance collaborative learning and facilitate social interaction. The study aims to delve deeper into how these integrations accommodate and celebrate the unique cultural identities and perspectives students bring to the learning environment. By focusing on how these diverse backgrounds influence and enrich student interactions and learning outcomes, the research also explores how social media can serve as a dynamic platform for fostering cultural appreciation and reflective dialogue. This approach aims to uncover the nuanced processes and effects of social media use in education, providing insights into its efficacy as a culturally responsive teaching tool within the constructivist paradigm.

Despite the widespread use of social media among college students (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016), there is a gap in understanding how to effectively integrate social media projects into the college classroom to enhance student learning outcomes (Popescu & Badea, 2020). While the potential of social media for educational purposes is recognized (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016), there remains a need for research that explores the best practices and strategies for integrating social media projects into coursework (Popescu & Badea, 2020). This gap hindered our ability to fully leverage the benefits of social media platforms for enhancing student engagement, collaboration, and learning experiences (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Thus, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the effective integration of social media projects into the college classroom, focusing on enhancing student learning outcomes and experiences (Popescu & Badea, 2020).

This study targeted several key objectives (Popescu & Badea, 2020). First, it sought to investigate the impact of integrating social media projects into the college classroom on student learning outcomes and experiences (Popescu & Badea, 2020). By analyzing the effects of social media integration, the study aimed to provide insights into how these projects could enhance student engagement, collaboration, and overall learning experiences (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Second, the research explored how social media integration aligned with the principles of Social Constructivism and its implications for collaborative learning, social interaction, and cultural diversity (Daniels, 2001). Through this exploration, the study aimed to deepen understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of social media integration within educational contexts (Daniels, 2001). Lastly, the study aimed to identify practical strategies for educators to effectively integrate social media projects into their teaching practices while addressing inclusivity, accessibility, and digital citizenship (Greenberger, 2020). By identifying and elucidating these strategies, the research aimed to provide educators with actionable insights to enhance their teaching methodologies and promote equitable and inclusive learning environments (Greenberger, 2020).

The team examined empirical research that impacted the use of social media integration on student engagement, collaboration, and digital literacy within the context of higher education, playing a pivotal role in advancing our understanding of effective teaching methodologies in the digital age. Studies such as those conducted by Junco et al. (2011) and Manca and Ranieri (2016) provide valuable insights into the relationship between social media use and various student learning experiences. Through quantitative analyses, Junco et al. (2011) found that integrating social media platforms such as Twitter into college courses led to increased student engagement and interaction with course materials. Similarly, Manca and Ranieri (2016) explored the effects of social media integration on student collaboration and found that it fostered collaborative learning processes and enhanced students' sense of community within online learning environments.

Qualitative research studies, such as those conducted by Veletsianos and Navarrete (2017) and Greenhow and Lewin (2016), have delved deeper into students' experiences and perceptions of social

media integration in higher education. Veletsianos and Navarrete (2017) interviewed students participating in social media-enhanced courses. They found that students valued opportunities for peer interaction, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning afforded by social media platforms. Similarly, Greenhow and Lewin (2016) explored students' digital literacy development through participation in social media projects and found that students developed critical digital literacy skills, such as information evaluation and online communication, through their engagement with social media in academic contexts.

By synthesizing findings from these empirical research studies, the research team gained valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of integrating social media into higher education settings. Such evidence-based insights inform instructional practices, curriculum development, and educational policies aimed at fostering student engagement, collaboration, and digital literacy skills in the digital age.

***The following learning objectives guided our project:***

- A. What is the impact of integrating social media projects into the college classroom on student learning outcomes, engagement, and digital literacy?
- B. How does social media integration align with the principles of social constructivism, and what are its implications for collaborative learning, social interaction, and cultural diversity?
- C. What practical strategies can educators employ to effectively integrate social media projects into their teaching practices while ensuring inclusivity, accessibility, and digital citizenship?

## **WORKING IDEAS**

In response to the evolving landscape of higher education in the digital age, this project's primary objective was to investigate the integration of social media projects into college classrooms to enhance student learning outcomes and experiences. Recognizing the widespread use of social media among college students and its potential for educational purposes, this project sought to address the gap in understanding how to effectively leverage social

media platforms to enrich teaching and learning practices. By conducting empirical research and synthesizing findings from existing literature, this project explored the impact of social media integration on student engagement, collaboration, and digital literacy within the higher education context. Through quantitative analyses and qualitative investigations, this project shed light on the benefits and challenges of integrating social media into coursework. It also identified practical strategies for educators to incorporate social media projects into their teaching practices effectively. Ultimately, this project aimed to contribute to evidence-based instructional practices and inform educational policies aimed at fostering student success in the digital age.

Designing effective social media assignments involved comprehensively considering various factors to ensure alignment with course objectives, audience needs, desired learning outcomes, and the selected social media platforms. The initial step in this process was crafting content that resonated with the course curriculum and engaged students meaningfully. This content creation phase entailed developing compelling posts, videos, or multimedia materials that conveyed key course concepts and encouraged active student participation and interaction. Whether it involved posing thought-provoking questions, sharing relevant articles or resources, or showcasing real-world examples, the content had to be tailored to spark curiosity, stimulate discussion, and foster deeper engagement with the subject matter. Additionally, incorporating diverse media formats and interactive elements, such as polls, quizzes, or multimedia presentations, could enhance the effectiveness of social media assignments by catering to different learning preferences and promoting active learning experiences. Through strategic content creation, we laid the foundation for successful social media assignments that facilitated student learning and achievement of our course objectives.

We found that when designing social media projects, aligning assignments with course objectives was essential to ensure relevance and coherence with the overall curriculum. Clear instructions, objectives, and assessment criteria were provided to guide students through the assignment process and clarify expectations. Additionally, considering the targeted audience and selecting appropriate social media platforms that resonated with them were crucial steps in maximizing student engagement and



interaction. To foster creativity and innovation, we encouraged students to explore innovative content creation and engagement approaches, empowering them to express themselves authentically.

Furthermore, incorporating opportunities for reflection and self-assessment promoted metacognitive skills and continuous improvement, enriching the learning experience. Monitoring student progress and providing timely feedback were essential for supporting students' learning journey and addressing any challenges they may encounter. We found that throughout each assignment, emphasizing the value of ethical conduct, respect for diverse perspectives, and responsible use of social media was paramount. By implementing these design principles, we were able to design social media assignments that not only aligned with course objectives but also provided meaningful learning experiences for students. Through the strategic integration of social media, we were able to leverage its power to engage students, foster creativity, and enhance learning outcomes.

While selecting appropriate social media platforms for educational purposes, we had to carefully consider the characteristics of each platform and how they align with specific learning goals. One crucial factor to consider is the audience demographics of each platform. Different social media platforms attract distinct demographic groups based on factors such as age, interests, and preferences. For instance, platforms like Snapchat and TikTok are particularly popular among younger demographics due to their emphasis on short-form video content and interactive features. In contrast, LinkedIn tends to attract professionals and career-oriented individuals seeking networking opportunities and professional development resources. By understanding each platform's audience demographics, we could make informed decisions about which platforms were most suitable for engaging their target audience and achieving their educational objectives.

Integrating social media platforms into educational settings offered many opportunities for enhancing student engagement, collaboration, and learning outcomes. However, selecting the appropriate platforms required careful consideration of various factors to ensure alignment with course objectives and learning goals. One crucial aspect to consider was the content formats supported by each platform. Social media platforms differed in

their capabilities for hosting various types of content, including text, images, videos, live streams, polls, and interactive features. We found that we needed to choose platforms that aligned with the types of content we intended for students to create and engage with in their courses. For example, image-centric platforms like Instagram and Pinterest were suitable for visual storytelling, while video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Vimeo were ideal for hosting and sharing video content. Furthermore, we had to consider the engagement features offered by each platform, such as likes, comments, shares, polls, and live interactions. Platforms that facilitated meaningful interactions and fostered engagement among students and the instructor, such as Twitter and Facebook, were particularly valuable for educational purposes.

Privacy considerations were also paramount when using social media platforms in education. As a team, we had to evaluate each platform's privacy settings and data protection measures to ensure the safety and confidentiality of students' personal information. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram allow users to control their privacy settings and manage access to their content, providing greater control over data security. Additionally, we needed to assess how easily the platform could be integrated into our course curriculum and learning activities. Platforms that offered features specifically designed for educational use, such as class groups, discussion forums, and assignment submission portals, facilitated seamless integration with course content and assessments. Learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle, Canvas, and Blackboard integrated social features with course content and assessments, offering a comprehensive solution for educational integration.

Accessibility and usability were essential considerations, ensuring that platforms were accessible and user-friendly for students and instructors, regardless of their technological proficiency. Factors such as ease of navigation, intuitive interface design, and compatibility with various devices and screen sizes were considered. Platforms like Twitter and YouTube were widely accessible and offered intuitive user experiences, making them suitable choices for educational use. Ultimately, we needed to select platforms that best supported the specific learning goals and objectives of our courses. Platforms had to enable students to demonstrate their understanding,

creativity, and critical thinking skills in ways that aligned with course content and assessment criteria. By carefully considering these factors, educators could effectively leverage social media platforms to enhance student engagement, collaboration, and learning outcomes in educational settings.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, educators have continuously sought innovative ways to engage and inspire their students (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). One such avenue that gained increasing attention was the integration of social media platforms into classroom assignments (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Unlike traditional essays, social media projects offered a dynamic and interactive approach to learning that resonated with today's tech-savvy students (Popescu & Badea, 2020). From increased student engagement and collaborative learning opportunities (Popescu & Badea, 2020) to promoting digital literacy and embracing diverse forms of expression (Greenberger, 2020), social media assignments presented benefits for educators and students alike. In this discussion, we explored why educators should have considered incorporating social media into their teaching practices, harnessing its power to transform the educational experience and prepare students for success in the digital age.

### INCREASED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Social media platforms were inherently engaging for students in higher education, as they often represented an integral part of their daily lives (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). With a high degree of familiarity and active usage, students seamlessly integrated social media into their academic experiences (Popescu & Badea, 2020). The interactive nature of these platforms facilitated meaningful engagement, allowing students to participate in discussions, share resources, and collaborate with peers beyond the confines of the traditional classroom (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Furthermore, the multimedia elements present in social media content, such as videos, images, and interactive polls, appealed to students' diverse learning preferences and enhanced their overall learning experience (Greenberger, 2020). By leveraging social media, the researchers created dynamic and interactive assignments that resonated with students' interests and preferences,

thereby promoting deeper engagement with course content (Popescu & Badea, 2020).

Social media content's interactivity and multimedia elements captured students' attention more effectively than traditional essays, which often relied solely on text-based formats (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Through social media platforms, students could actively engage with course materials, explore concepts through interactive simulations, engage with multimedia resources, and participate in real-time discussions (Popescu & Badea, 2020). The dynamic nature of social media allowed for continuous interaction and feedback, fostering a sense of community and collaboration among students (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Additionally, multimedia content's visual and auditory stimuli appealed to students' senses, making learning more immersive and engaging (Greenberger, 2020). As a result, social media assignments served as powerful tools for enhancing student engagement and promoting active learning in higher education environments.

We strategically leveraged social media platforms to design interactive assignments that aligned with students' interests and preferences (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). By incorporating multimedia elements, such as videos, podcasts, and infographics, into their assignments, educators diversified learning experiences and catered to students with varying learning styles (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Moreover, social media assignments encouraged students to take ownership of their learning, allowing them to express themselves authentically and creatively (Greenberger, 2020). Through collaborative projects and discussions facilitated on social media platforms, students engaged in peer-to-peer learning, sharing insights, and exchanging ideas with classmates (Popescu & Badea, 2020). This collaborative approach deepened students' understanding of course concepts and fostered a sense of belonging and community within the classroom.

Integrating social media into higher education settings has proven to be a powerful tool for increasing student engagement and promoting active learning (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). By harnessing the interactive and multimedia capabilities of social media platforms, educators have created dynamic learning environments that cater to the diverse needs and preferences of today's students (Popescu & Badea, 2020). As technology

continues to evolve, it is essential for educators to explore innovative ways of leveraging social media to enhance student engagement and foster deeper learning experiences in higher education.

### **FACILITATED COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

Social media projects encouraged student collaboration, fostering a sense of community and shared learning experiences (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Through collaborative tasks and discussions facilitated on social media platforms, students had the opportunity to exchange ideas, share resources, and collaborate on projects in real time (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Platforms such as discussion forums or collaborative document editing tools provided students with a space to work together seamlessly, regardless of their physical location (Popescu & Badea, 2020). This promoted peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing, allowing students to leverage each other's strengths and expertise (Popescu & Badea, 2020). The collaborative nature of social media projects also encouraged students to engage in meaningful dialogue, providing feedback, and co-creating content with their peers (Popescu & Badea, 2020), thereby fostering a collaborative and supportive learning environment (Greenberger, 2020).

### **ENHANCED AUTHENTICITY AND RELEVANCE**

Social media projects connected classroom learning to real-world contexts, making assignments more meaningful and relevant for students (Greenberger, 2020; Junco et al., 2011; Popescu & Badea, 2020). By integrating social media platforms into course activities, educators bridged the gap between theoretical concepts taught in the classroom and their practical applications in everyday life (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Students had the opportunity to explore and engage with authentic content, perspectives, and experiences on social media platforms (Junco et al., 2011; Popescu & Badea, 2020), enriching their understanding of course concepts. This exposure to real-world examples and case studies gave students a deeper appreciation for the relevance and applicability of course content beyond academic settings (Junco et al., 2011; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Additionally, by participating in social media projects, students developed skills and competencies directly applicable to their personal and professional lives beyond the classroom, further

enhancing the authenticity and relevance of their learning experiences (Greenberger, 2020).

### **PROMOTED DIGITAL LITERACY**

Participation in social media projects cultivated essential digital literacy skills among students in higher education (Greenberger, 2020; Lawson & Murray, 2018; Popescu & Badea, 2020). As students engaged with various social media platforms, they developed the ability to critically evaluate information, discern credible sources, and navigate digital environments effectively. Students learned to communicate and collaborate responsibly in digital spaces through collaborative activities and online discussions. Additionally, they honed their skills in digital citizenship, understanding the ethical and legal considerations associated with online behavior (Lawson & Murray, 2018; Popescu & Badea, 2020). By actively participating in social media projects within an academic context, students not only developed a positive digital footprint but also learned to leverage technology effectively for academic and professional purposes (Greenberger, 2020; Lawson & Murray, 2018), thereby enhancing their overall digital literacy skills.

### **EMBRACED DIVERSE FORMS OF EXPRESSION**

Social media platforms offered diverse modes of expression beyond traditional written essays, providing students with opportunities to explore multimedia content, visual storytelling, and interactive presentations (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Students were able to express themselves creatively and authentically through social media projects, allowing them to showcase their understanding of course concepts in innovative ways. By leveraging the flexibility of social media platforms, students had the freedom to choose the most suitable format for expressing their ideas and perspectives (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Popescu & Badea, 2020). This not only encouraged active engagement but also enabled students to demonstrate their mastery of course content through mediums that resonated with their individual strengths and preferences. Moreover, by embracing diverse forms of expression, educators could cater to students' individual learning preferences and provide opportunities for personalized and differentiated assessment, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Popescu & Badea, 2020).



## EVALUATION OF IDEAS

The purpose of this reflective practice is to explore the potential of social media as a powerful tool to increase student engagement and reduce attrition rates of community college students. The role of social media as a relational space for students to stay updated with current events, share their opinions, and connect with peers will be examined. Drawing upon the foundation of Community of Inquiry (CoI) (Garrison et al., 2001), insights will be provided into leveraging social media to enhance student engagement with instructors, course content, and peers. The reflective practice will adopt the Gibbs (1998) cycle as a reflective framework to analyze the use of social media across community colleges.

The integration of social media into college classrooms significantly impacts student engagement, learning outcomes, and digital literacy, making it a valuable tool in modern educational settings. Social media offers a familiar and interactive platform that enhances the way students engage with content, promoting deeper involvement and facilitating the development of a robust community of inquiry—a concept crucial in blended and online learning environments highlighted by Garrison et al. (2001). Additionally, social media supports the principles of social constructivism, which posits that learning is a social process. Social media aligns with this educational theory by facilitating collaborative learning, enhancing social interactions, and fostering an appreciation of cultural diversity. Through regular interactions on these platforms, students can explore different perspectives, share insights, and refine their understanding of complex concepts. Moreover, using social media in the classroom helps students build essential digital literacy skills, preparing them for success in an increasingly digital world.

## COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY (COI)

Garrison et al. (2001) coined community of inquiry (CoI) to examine computer-mediated communication in educational experiences. Critical components of the conceptual framework include cognitive (content), social (learner-to-peer and learner-to-instructor), and teaching (instructor responsibilities) presence, extending the limitations of traditional face-to-face postsecondary courses to more accessible blended and online platforms. Each component has subcategories addressing targeted areas: cognitive (triggering event,

exploration, integration, and proficiency), social (affective contributions, open communication, and group cohesion), and teaching (instructional design, initiating discourse, intentional instruction, assessments) (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Instructors are challenged to orchestrate innovative ways to incorporate maximum online interaction with each component to simulate the quality and rigor of brick-and-mortar institutions.

Fornara and Lomicka (2019) investigated the role of Instagram in developing a social presence in foreign language courses. Students were instructed to reply to prompts over six weeks to monitor growth in social interaction, language development, engagement, self-efficacy skills, and increased confidence in expressive foreign language ability (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019). Observations and results indicated that Instagram served as a positive platform for vocabulary development, increased cultural competence, and scaffolded reading and writing skills (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019). Self-disclosure of personal information, hashtags, images, and expression brought humor and intimacy to classroom discussions that may not be duplicated in a traditional face-to-face setting as social media provides a screen of protection for shy, insecure, or socially awkward learners (Fornara & Lomicka, 2019). “Teaching presence” through content prompts and discourse engagement, “content presence” through expressive visual and written posts, and “social presence” revealing rapport between classmates provide evidence that CoI can be developed using visual media platforms.

Popescu and Badea (2020) presented contemporary uses of CoI that have been extended to a variety of social media platforms, including blogs, wikis, Facebook, Twitter, and SecondLife with a successful application to increase online engagement while providing evidence of an additional construct identified as “learning presence.” Shea and Bidjerano (2010) first identified “learning presence” as self and collaborative efficacy skills enhancing metacognitive tasks within mediated platforms differentiating from “teaching presence” directed by the instructor through explicit instruction, instructional design, the interaction between faculty and learner (Popescu & Badea, 2020). “Learning presence” yields intrinsically motivated students to monitor, engage with the content, and problem-solve individually and collectively to



confidently accomplish tasks within the course by leveraging familiar online tools (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Harnessing the versatility of social media through project-based learning provides freedom of choice, bolstering confidence in communication to showcase competence within assigned tasks. Nagel et al. (2018) reported the activity of college-age students using social media. They ranked usage by platform, indicating Facebook was the most widely used, gradually decreasing in rank from YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Google+, and Tumblr. Instructors should be familiar with the features of various platforms to maximize CoI components or consider cross-layering.

### **BENEFITS OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

Gamification, interactivity, and familiarity solidify the enticement to use social media as a learning tool. Personalized avatars, badges, rewards, and leaderboards help to increase engagement through gamification, increasing problem-solving skills while reinforcing community of inquiry (CoI) skills (Kilic, 2023). Polls, quizzes, surveys, and interactive activities break the typical lecture-based model of traditional post-secondary and shift toward student interests using authentic 21st-century skills. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media provided consistency and continuity with students in isolation and crisis, leveraging familiar daily habits to bridge the gap of crucial CoI components (Archer Olson, 2021). Lawson and Murray (2018) further identified four main areas in social media enhanced learning: acquisition of knowledge, increased student engagement, immediacy, access to experts, and continuous learning, yet ethical practices should be considered.

### **ETHICAL ISSUES**

While the benefits of social media are endless, institutions and faculty should have professional best practices for ethical considerations, including informed consent, privacy settings, student confidentiality, cyberbullying, and the digital divide. Students should be informed about the purpose of social media for course purposes, outlining potential risks, benefits, and opt-out assignments if they do not want to use the platform. Marín et al. (2022) recognized that cultural norms within institutions influence privacy issues and do not universally address the need for digital competence

frameworks. Information literacy, netiquette, and privacy settings should be addressed within the syllabus and explicitly modeled (Marín et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the magnitude of the digital divide became apparent as the world shifted to remote schooling, directly affecting marginalized and first-generation students' lack of reliable internet, personal devices, and resources to support online learning (Bell et al., 2022). It is incumbent on faculty to work with institutions to make responsible guidelines to protect learners while providing access to rich opportunities for social learning (Nagel et al., 2018).

### **GIBBS CYCLE**

Reflective practice plays a crucial role in promoting professional development and enhancing teaching and learning in educational settings. One widely used framework for reflection is the Gibbs cycle, which provides a structural approach to guide individuals in examining and critically analyzing experiences (Gibbs, 1998). The Gibbs cycle consists of six stages: description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. The framework encourages practitioners to reflect on their experiences, emotions, and actions, leading to deeper insights, improved decision-making, and the implementation of effective strategies for continuous improvement.

In the context of community colleges, applying the Gibbs cycle can be particularly valuable for faculty to reflect on their instructional practices. By engaging in reflective practice using the Gibbs cycle, community college educators can examine the challenges and successes they encounter in the diverse and dynamic environment of community colleges. This framework can help educators learn about how community college educators teach and how core assumptions drive instruction (Brookfield, 2002). Reflective practice using the Gibbs cycle can help educators meet the unique needs of a diverse community college student population.

### **DECISION**

Educators often encounter unforeseen challenges and discover unexplored opportunities in integrating social media into education. As we delved into this pivotal section of our research journey, we explored to unravel the most plausible explanations for our project's unexpected or unknown aspects (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu &

Badea, 2020). Through meticulous evaluation and critical reflection, we navigated the complexities inherent in leveraging social media for educational purposes (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020), addressing pedagogical shifts, student engagement dynamics, digital literacy considerations, inclusivity and accessibility concerns, and the ongoing need for adaptation.

The unexpected or unknown facets of the project can be attributed to the dynamic nature of social media platforms and their interaction with educational settings (Popescu & Badea, 2020; Greenberger, 2020). Despite the increasing favorability of social media among college students, integrating social media projects into the college classroom unveiled unanticipated hurdles and prospects. This juxtaposition highlighted the complexity of merging digital platforms with traditional educational practices. It underscored the need for educators to navigate the evolving landscape of technology-enhanced learning environments. Furthermore, it underscored the importance of adapting instructional strategies to align with the demands of a digital-savvy generation (Greenberger, 2020; Popescu & Badea, 2020).

The unanticipated complexity of implementing social media assignments within the educational framework emerged as a significant challenge during the project (Junco et al., 2011; Popescu & Badea, 2020). Despite the myriad tools for engagement and collaboration provided by social media platforms, seamlessly integrating them into meaningful learning experiences demanded meticulous planning and adaptability. This complexity stemmed from the need to reconcile the dynamic features of social media with the structured environment of academia (Junco et al., 2011; Popescu & Badea, 2020). We faced the task of ensuring that social media activities aligned with educational objectives while maintaining academic rigor.

Throughout the project, an unforeseen aspect emerged in the substantial pedagogical shift necessary to adopt social media as an educational tool (Greenberger, 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). This shift entailed a departure from traditional assessment methodologies toward more interactive and participatory approaches, necessitating a comprehensive reassessment of teaching methodologies and learning objectives (Greenberger, 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). We found ourselves compelled to explore novel strategies to cultivate collabora-

tion, critical thinking, and digital literacy skills through social media projects, all while maintaining alignment with academic standards and disciplinary norms. Negotiating this pedagogical transition required a delicate balance between embracing the innovative potential of social media and preserving the integrity of established educational practices.

We also discovered an intricate correlation between student engagement and digital literacy within social media-based educational initiatives (Lawson & Murray, 2018). Despite the inherent allure of social media platforms, stimulating substantive engagement and cultivating responsible digital citizenship posed persistent challenges. The research team noted discrepancies in students' levels of digital literacy, underscoring the necessity of scaffolded learning experiences, guidance on ethical conduct and online etiquette, and the cultivation of critical evaluation skills regarding digital content (Lawson & Murray, 2018). Negotiating this nuanced relationship necessitated a multifaceted approach aimed at equipping students with the requisite skills to navigate the digital landscape responsibly and effectively engage with educational content on social media platforms.

As the research continued, the imperative of ensuring inclusivity and accessibility in social media-based assignments became apparent (Popescu & Badea, 2020). While social media platforms provided avenues for diverse forms of expression, we were tasked with mitigating concerns surrounding equitable access, accommodating varied learning needs, and respecting cultural disparities (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Designing inclusive social media projects entailed a purposeful endeavor to offer multiple avenues for participation, cater to diverse learning styles and preferences, and cultivate a sense of belonging and community among all students (Popescu & Badea, 2020). Negotiating these considerations demanded a comprehensive approach aimed at fostering an inclusive educational environment where all students could actively engage with social media-based learning initiatives.

In retrospect, the project's unforeseen or unknown aspects find their most plausible explanation in the iterative nature of educational innovation. Embracing social media as a pedagogical tool entailed continual reflection, experimentation, and adaptation to evolving technological and educational landscapes (Junco et al., 2011; Veletsianos &

Navarrete, 2017). Educators and institutions were compelled to engage in ongoing professional development, collaborative inquiry, and data-driven assessment to refine practices, confront emerging challenges, and fully leverage social media's potential for enhancing student learning outcomes (Junco et al., 2011; Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). This iterative process underscored the importance of dynamic responsiveness to the ever-changing educational landscape, ensuring that pedagogical approaches remained relevant and effective amidst technological advancements and shifting educational paradigms.

### REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

Engaging in reflective practice entails a deliberate and systematic examination of one's professional experiences compared to existing literature. This process serves as a catalyst for the development of professional knowledge and competence, enabling practitioners to incorporate new ideas, refine decision-making processes, and enhance effectiveness in their respective fields (Connelly et al., 2020; Dewey, 1933; Donohoe, 2019; Fragkos, 2016; Greenberger, 2020). In the context of educational innovation and the integration of social media into pedagogical practices, reflective practice becomes paramount. By critically analyzing the iterative nature of educational innovation and the implementation of diverse social media projects within course content, educators gain valuable insights into the complexities and opportunities inherent in leveraging technology for enhanced learning experiences. Through this reflective journey, educators are better equipped to navigate challenges, refine practices, and chart a course toward continued growth and innovation in educational settings.

Throughout the research, the reflective process underscored the iterative nature of educational innovation. Emphasis was placed on the ongoing reflection, experimentation, and adaptation necessary to seamlessly integrate social media into pedagogical practices (Garrison et al., 2001). Educators recognized the significance of continuous professional development in this endeavor. It was imperative for educators and institutions to engage in collaborative inquiry and data-driven assessment to refine practices and confront emerging challenges (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2017). This commitment to ongoing learning and development

ensured that pedagogical approaches remained responsive to the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape.

### IMPLEMENTED SOCIAL MEDIA PROJECTS

As the project ended, we explored the implementation of various social media projects within the course content, reflecting on their design, execution, and impact (Junco et al., 2011). These projects, situated within the context of educational innovation, served as vehicles for engaging students, fostering collaboration, and promoting meaningful learning experiences (Garrison et al., 2001). By detailing each project's objectives, methodologies, and outcomes of each project, we aimed to provide valuable insights into integrating social media into pedagogical practices (Junco et al., 2011). We retrospectively examined the implemented projects to elucidate their effectiveness in enhancing student engagement, facilitating learning, and promoting active participation in course activities (Garrison et al., 2001). This retrospective analysis offered a nuanced understanding of the role of social media in education and informed future pedagogical approaches aimed at leveraging technology for enriched learning experiences.

*Infographics* have gained significant attention in educational settings due to their effectiveness in visually representing complex information (Cowan, 2018). By incorporating infographics into course materials, educators aim to enhance student comprehension and engagement (Cowan, 2018). Infographics utilize visually appealing graphics, icons, and charts to distill intricate concepts into digestible snippets of information, making them more accessible to students (Tufte, 2019). This visual representation of data facilitates understanding and promotes creativity and critical thinking among students (Tufte, 2019). Through creating and analyzing infographics, students are encouraged to explore innovative ways of presenting information, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Cowan, 2018). Integrating infographics into coursework contributes to a more enriching learning experience by stimulating student engagement and nurturing creative expression (Tufte, 2019).

*Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)* sheets were strategically employed within the course framework to address common queries and misconceptions,



furnishing students with easily accessible reference materials to bolster their learning. These sheets were meticulously curated to encompass a wide array of potential questions, offering succinct and informative responses to aid students in navigating challenging concepts (Cain & Blomeyer, 2019). By providing immediate clarification and dispelling misconceptions, FAQs sheets served as invaluable tools for promoting comprehension and consolidating understanding among students. However, despite their inherent utility, these projects did not yield the anticipated level of success. Despite efforts to streamline information and provide comprehensive guidance, some students still struggled to grasp complex topics or access the provided resources. This disparity highlights the need for ongoing refinement and adaptation in instructional design to meet learners' diverse needs better and enhance the efficacy of educational interventions (Merrill, 2018).

*Social media campaigns* were meticulously developed and executed to promote awareness of course topics and foster student participation and interaction. These campaigns leveraged various social media platforms to disseminate information, initiate discussions, and engage students in meaningful interactions (Chang & Wei, 2019). Through compelling content, interactive activities, and strategic messaging, these campaigns effectively captured students' attention and encouraged active participation in course-related discussions (Albayrak, 2019). The success of these campaigns was evident in their ability to engage students and stimulate ongoing dialogue around course themes fully. By harnessing the power of social media, these campaigns raised awareness of course content and facilitated collaborative learning and community building among students. Overall, implementing social media campaigns proved highly successful, driving increased engagement and fostering a dynamic learning environment within the course (Chang & Wei, 2019).

*Memes* were creatively integrated into the course as humorous and relatable content to reinforce key concepts and foster discussion among students in a lighthearted manner. By incorporating familiar internet memes into course materials, complex ideas were distilled into easily digestible and engaging formats, making learning more enjoyable and accessible for students (Cheung & Huang, 2019). Memes reinforced course content and sparked spontaneous interactions and discussions among students, further enhancing

their understanding and retention of the material. Additionally, the integration of memes tapped into students' creative side, encouraging them to express themselves in new and imaginative ways (Robson, 2019). This approach proved highly successful, as students enthusiastically embraced meme-based assignments, considering them among their favorite projects due to their engaging and entertaining nature. Overall, the integration of memes not only elevated the learning experience but also heightened students' creativity and enjoyment of the course.

*Blog posts* have become popular for fostering critical thinking and writing skills in educational settings (Mayer, 2019). By providing students within the course to explore a platform to articulate their thoughts and opinions on course-related topics, blog posts encouraged deep engagement with course material and the development of coherent argumentation skills (Mayer, 2019). However, the success of blog-based assignments in promoting active participation and meaningful dialogue among students may vary (Johnson & Smith, 2018). While some students excelled in expressing their ideas publicly through blogging, others struggled due to a lack of confidence or familiarity with the format (Johnson & Smith, 2018). Therefore, it is essential for educators to continuously refine and revisit blog-based projects to optimize their effectiveness and ensure equitable participation among all students (Mayer, 2019; Johnson & Smith, 2018).

*TikTok Style Public Service Announcements (PSAs)* represent a contemporary approach to engaging students in critical reflection on social issues (Johnson, 2019). By leveraging a format familiar to students and reflective of contemporary digital culture, TikTok-style PSAs assignments offered a unique opportunity to foster engagement and social responsibility (Johnson, 2019). PowerPoint-style presentations provided students with a dynamic platform to craft visually appealing messages that resonate with their peers (Smith & Brown, 2018). Moreover, offering students the option to present their announcements in front of the class or record a video caters to diverse learning preferences and comfort levels, promoting inclusivity and active participation (Smith & Brown, 2018). Despite the unconventional format, TikTok-style PSAs was well-received by students, highlighting the importance of providing opportunities for creative expression and meaningful

engagement with course content (Johnson, 2019; Smith & Brown, 2018).

*Podcast Scripts* serve as a dynamic method of delivering course content, catering to diverse learning preferences, and enhancing accessibility (Kumar & Johnson, 2019). By presenting information in an auditory format, podcast scripts engage students who may prefer listening to traditional text-based methods (Kumar & Johnson, 2019). This approach accommodates auditory learners and offers an inclusive learning experience for all students, irrespective of their preferred learning style or accessibility needs (Brown & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, developing podcast scripts allows students to refine their writing skills, particularly in crafting dialogue and understanding punctuation for effective communication (Brown & Smith, 2018). Integrating podcast scripts into course activities enriches the learning experience while fostering essential skills in written communication and audio production (Kumar & Johnson, 2019).

### EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA PROJECTS

Upon reflection, the effectiveness of implemented social media projects in enhancing student engagement, facilitating learning, and promoting active participation in course activities became apparent. Each project, from infographics to TikTok-style public service announcements, was meticulously designed to leverage the strengths of various social media platforms and cater to diverse learning preferences (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019). Integrating infographics provided students with visually appealing summaries of complex information, enhancing comprehension and stimulating creativity (Brown & Smith, 2018). Similarly, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) sheets served as accessible reference materials, addressing common queries and misconceptions to support student learning (Kumar & Johnson, 2019). These projects engaged students and fostered deeper understanding and retention of course material, demonstrating the efficacy of social media integration in higher education (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019; Kumar & Johnson, 2019).

Social media campaigns effectively raised awareness of course topics and encouraged student interaction, while memes injected humor and relatability into discussions, fostering a lighthearted approach to learning (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019). Blog posts offered students a platform to express their thoughts

and insights, nurturing critical thinking and writing skills (Brown & Smith, 2018). Furthermore, TikTok-style public service announcements and podcast scripts provided alternative avenues for delivering course content, catering to auditory and visual learners alike (Kumar & Johnson, 2019).

Despite these successes, it is important to acknowledge that not all social media projects achieved the desired level of effectiveness. While some projects, such as infographics and social media campaigns, fully engaged students and facilitated meaningful interactions, others, like blog posts, fell short of expectations and required further refinement. This variability underscores the importance of ongoing evaluation and adaptation in instructional design, ensuring that pedagogical approaches remain responsive to students' evolving needs and preferences (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019; Brown & Smith, 2018; Kumar & Johnson, 2019).

The effectiveness of social media projects in enhancing student engagement and facilitating learning was evident across various initiatives. By harnessing the power of social media platforms, we believe we successfully promoted active participation and fostered a dynamic learning environment. However, it is essential to recognize both successes and shortcomings, using them as valuable insights to inform future pedagogical practices and optimize student learning outcomes (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019; Brown & Smith, 2018; Kumar & Johnson, 2019).

### CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Several challenges were encountered when integrating social media projects into course content, yielding important lessons for future implementation. Technical hurdles, such as navigating diverse social media platforms and ensuring data security, posed significant obstacles (Brown & Smith, 2018). Additionally, aligning social media assignments with course objectives while maintaining academic rigor proved challenging, highlighting the need for careful instructional design (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019). Furthermore, some students faced difficulties fully engaging with certain project formats, underscoring the importance of considering diverse learning preferences and accessibility needs (Kumar & Johnson, 2019). Despite these challenges, the implementation process provided valuable insights that can inform more effective integration strategies in the future.

Lessons gleaned from these challenges emphasize the importance of clear communication and guidance for educators and students. Providing comprehensive instructions and support materials can mitigate confusion and enhance the overall learning experience (Brown & Smith, 2018). Moreover, incorporating flexibility into project design to accommodate different learning styles and preferences is crucial (Kumar & Johnson, 2019). This flexibility can empower students to engage meaningfully with course content while fostering a sense of ownership over their learning journey. Additionally, fostering a culture of continuous improvement through feedback mechanisms and reflective practice can drive ongoing refinement of social media integration strategies (Bennett & Lemoine, 2019).

Furthermore, ethical considerations emerged as a significant aspect of social media project implementation. The team discovered that we must navigate issues related to privacy, data security, and intellectual property rights when utilizing online platforms for educational purposes (Selwyn, 2016). Upholding ethical standards in content creation and dissemination is essential to ensure a safe and respectful learning environment (Hrastinski, 2019). Additionally, promoting digital citizenship and responsible online behavior among students is paramount in the age of social media (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014). Integrating discussions on these topics into course activities can foster a deeper understanding of the ethical implications of social media use.

While challenges were encountered when integrating social media projects into course content, valuable lessons were learned that can inform future implementation efforts. By addressing technical, instructional, and ethical considerations, educators can optimize the effectiveness of social media integration in promoting student engagement, facilitating learning, and fostering digital citizenship (Veletsianos, 2016). Adopting a proactive approach to instructional design and incorporating feedback mechanisms can drive continuous improvement and ensure the successful integration of social media projects into educational settings (Davis et al., 2019).

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Reflecting on the implementation of social media projects in educational settings, it becomes evident that there are promising future directions for expanding and refining their use. Emerging technol-

ogies offer exciting opportunities to enhance social media integration into pedagogical practices (Davis et al., 2019). For instance, advancements in virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) could provide immersive learning experiences that leverage the interactive and collaborative nature of social media platforms (Veletsianos, 2016). Additionally, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning presents possibilities for personalized learning experiences tailored to individual student needs and preferences (Hrastinski, 2019).

Furthermore, future directions for refining the use of social media in education should consider evolving pedagogical approaches. Integrating social media projects into the curriculum can promote active learning and foster critical thinking skills (Greenhow & Gleason, 2014). By embedding social media assignments within disciplinary frameworks, educators can create meaningful connections between course content and real-world applications, enhancing student engagement and relevance. Moreover, exploring interdisciplinary collaborations and cross-disciplinary approaches can enrich learning experiences and stimulate innovation in social media integration strategies.

Ethical considerations will continue to play a central role in shaping the future directions of social media in educational settings. As social media platforms evolve and new technologies emerge, educators must remain vigilant in safeguarding student privacy and promoting digital citizenship (Selwyn, 2016). Emphasizing responsible use of social media and ethical conduct in online environments should be integral components of future social media integration efforts. Additionally, promoting media literacy and critical digital citizenship skills can empower students to navigate the complexities of the digital world with confidence and integrity.

Moreover, fostering a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing among educators can drive collective innovation in social media integration practices. Establishing communities of practice or professional learning networks dedicated to exploring best practices and emerging trends in social media integration can facilitate continuous improvement and peer support. Furthermore, investing in faculty development initiatives and providing resources for educators to enhance their digital literacy and pedagogical skills can



strengthen the implementation of social media projects in educational settings.

In conclusion, the future of social media in educational settings holds great promise, with opportunities for expanding and refining its use to enhance teaching and learning. By embracing emerging technologies, evolving pedagogical approaches, and prioritizing ethical considerations, educators can unlock the full potential of social media as a tool for engaging students, fostering collaboration, and promoting digital citizenship. Through ongoing collaboration, professional development, and innovation, educators can shape the future of social media integration in education and create meaningful learning experiences for students.

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