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# **Social Media in Higher Education: The Effects of Social Media Use on Studying and Teaching**

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## **Abstract**

This research tries to examine whether there is a positive relationship between social media use and higher education from the aspect of studying and teaching through survey method. The research proposal contains a complete literature review, some hypotheses and research questions, and a proposal of survey method focusing on university students and teachers, including sample, procedures and measures. In addition, it attaches two questionnaires on Facebook use of university students and teachers, and a list of interview questions aiming at teachers.

## **Introduction**

Nowadays social media is playing a significant role in the whole world. It has become widely adopted by people of all ages, especially young students in the United States and abroad (Lenhart et al., 2010; Livingstone, Bober & Hesper, 2005). A study of U.S. college students (18-24) found that 85% of the respondents used social media to keep in touch with others (Salaway, Caruso & Nelson, 2008). According to the National School Boards Association (2007), young people spent an average of 9 hours per week within social networking sites.

Social media has become very popular within universities and gained much attention from researchers. The potential of applying social media to higher education is being developed by many universities to promote connections between teachers and students and among students.

This research contains a theory and research review of social media use in education, and presents rationale for hypotheses and research questions. In addition, two surveys will be conducted to examine Facebook use for academic purposes of university students and teachers, and evaluate the motivational factors and the effects. There are two major research units: university students and teachers.

This research topic is very significant to study. First, social media can be used as an effective learning tool by university students. Many of them use social media so frequently that it has even become an important part of their daily life. They can make friends, obtain information and have fun through social media. Furthermore, they may enjoy their study through using social media. Second, social media can provide a bridge of communications between students and teachers. They usually talk with each other through class discussions, e-learning system and email, which are a little rigid and stiff. However, social media can make the interactions between them more lively and effective. Besides, it can improve the relationship between them and increase the teaching effect to some extent. Third, it may promote the development of new social media applications and supplement related research fields. Although many published studies on social media have been emerging, the extant research stems mostly from communications, sociology, cultural studies, political science and information science. However, research on higher education has been relatively less so far. So this research makes effort to explore in this field.

## **Literature Review**

### **Social learning theory**

Social learning theory is stated that people learn within a social context (Ormrod, 1999). According to Brown and Duguid (2002), meaningful learning involves simultaneously developing a social identity which shapes what people come to know, feel and do and how they make sense of their experiences. It might provide inspiration for pedagogical practices to understand how such identity develops and how learning occurs in the social and technical contexts. Brown (2008) argued that education must not only cultivate young people's standards-based learning but also focus on fostering their "social learning", that is, how they learn and with whom, or their learning to be participants in a community of learners and contributors to the shaping of a local and global society.

"As social network technologies not only frame the way individuals interact and learn, but actually impact the learning process itself", notes Dawley (2009), "new pedagogies are needed to effectively integrate these communication mechanisms into the learning environment" (p. 110). Students and faculties immersed in social networking sites have promoted the transformation of education. The social context within which universities operate is moving away from hierarchically arranged, densely knit, location-bound groups to social networks where boundaries are blurred and hierarchies are flatter (Wellman, Koku & Hunsinger, 2006).

Social media can also provide peer feedback, including help with academic tasks. It may take several forms such as chatting online to mitigate school-related anxiety, asking questions about courses or deadlines, organizing study groups, sharing academic resources with one's network, gathering project materials, and brainstorming ideas (Greenhow & Burton, 2011).

It can be concluded that there is a positive relationship between knowledge and social interaction. We can learn from others and share information with others. Knowledge is socially

constructed through interaction, leading to social frameworks through interpreting the world around us.

### **Social constructivism**

According to Kelm (2011), knowledge is something constructed within a social context. People within a community can help with each other, lend support, interact with one another, and serve as shadow guides. Learning is not only the memorization of information, but also a situation in which people construct their own meaning. Thus social constructivism lends itself to student-centered learning. Learning works best when it takes place within a social context: It is a constructive and interactive process.

In terms of the features of social media technologies, their strengths agree with the principles espoused by social constructivists. Innovative technologies have the potential to promote active engagement, encourage people to work in groups, provide opportunities for feedback from a wide audience, and connect people to others who are knowledgeable in some certain areas (Fosnot, 2005; Jonassen, Peck & Wilson, 1999). According to Kelm (2011), innovative technologies can transform large class lectures to small group interactions. Traditional education without the use of social media is often teacher-focused and lecture-based. Similarly, students' work reverts to individual production.

In conclusion, the implementation of social media and innovative technologies into pedagogy correlates well with social constructivism (Kelm, 2011).

### **Social media use and higher education**

The research on social media has appeared since it came into being. Previous research on social media has mainly focused on social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), civic

engagement (Kim, Hsu, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2013), political participation (MacAfee & De Simone, 2012), advertising and public relations (Chu & Kim, 2011), etc. And social media applied to higher education has drawn some researchers' attention recently.

By 2007, there had been few studies exploring the relationship between social media use and education (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Several studies focused on how college-aged students felt about having their professors on Facebook (Hewitt & Forte, 2006), and how faculty presence on Facebook affected student-professor relationships (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2007).

There has been some research combining social media use and education mainly since 2007. Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007) studied the relationship between social capital and college students' use of online social networking sites in 2007. The factor of learning was examined when it came to social capital. Furthermore, Greenhow and Kim (2009) stated that the more intensely young people used their social networking sites, the more likely they were to view it as space for learning.

Most of the research on that field has been conducted since 2010. Some language and business communication courses started to apply social media into teaching. Dorrell (2010) cited an international study which found that language teachers were using social media and thought of such technology as a threat to their classroom teaching. According to Promnitz-Hayashi (2011), social media could make the language learning become student-centered rather than teacher-centered. It was observed that following the incorporation of the Facebook activity in education, many of the more introverted students became more motivated in class. Decarie (2010), an instructor of a business school, applied Facebook to her teaching practice and studied its challenges and opportunities. These studies can provide some evidence for the relationship between social media and higher education.

In addition, there was some research focusing on the relationship between social media use and education through qualitative and quantitative method. Johnson and Maddox (2012) studied the current use of social media and explored its potential use in the field of education. It presented some usage of social media in graduate education, such as classroom tool, student networking, community expertise, geographic networking, mentoring, alumni networking and advisory boards. Sacks and Graves, professors of Emory University, provided some examples for classroom usage that focused on different attributes of each medium: Facebook to teach network size and quality, LinkedIn to teach social distance, and Twitter to examine network diffusion and complexity (Dyrud, 2012). In addition, Lenox and Coleman (2010) identified the use of social media in Libraries. They studied how social media was increasingly being used to form linkages among professional library staffs.

In practice, social media has been developed by some universities to increase connections among students, faculty and staffs. According to Kaya (2010), the City University of New York (CUNY) utilized social media to foster academic connections across 23 campuses with its Academic Commons site (<http://commons.gc.cuny.edu>). The CUNY-only website allowed faculty, graduate students and staffs to write and share blogs, join subject groups, and participate in academic discussions. Besides, many universities have purchased premade software packages to maintain alumni networks online.

The extant research contained various aspects of social media use in education. Some of them tried to examine their ideas through research methods. The others described its application situations in pedagogy practice. The major social media forms studied were Facebook and Twitter. And some new media forms are also used for education and may be used more in the future. Furthermore, some universities have developed their own social media used for internal



communication. Though the research of social media in higher education is relatively less compared with other areas, there may be more research achievements, and it can become more popular in universities in the future.

However, there is something missing in this research area. First, most of the current research states the relationship between social media use and education and discusses its practical application through qualitative method, while there are fewer studies using quantitative method such as survey and experiment. Second, the previous research generally focused on one group, either students or teachers, and therefore it's a little unfair to draw the conclusion expanded in education field. Besides, it's hard to examine the effect of social media based on one research group. Third, the use of social media in education can be a broader topic which should include not only study group or class interaction, but also include knowledge and information obtaining through social media, etc.

Although there are many factors that can influence study such as working hard and completing assignments well, social media can still be regarded as a useful tool for study. With the help of social media, students may learn more from others and broaden their horizons. Social media can foster a class with a high level of energy, sharing and greater understanding. Undoubtedly, we cannot draw a conclusion that there is a causal relationship between social media use and university education. A student can certainly get a good score through working hard without using social media for study. But social media may have a positive effect on study when used appropriately and may have the potential to play a more important role in the future. In the similar way, a teacher can teach an excellent lesson without using multimedia tools, but we can't repudiate that multimedia tools can improve the teaching effect.

As there are fewer studies examining the relationship with quantitative method, it's valuable to conduct a survey research. To study two groups is more persuasive to demonstrate its effect.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

This research studied the relationship between social media use and university education through quantitative method. Two surveys were conducted to examine Facebook use in education among university students and teachers, and its effects. In addition, it tested whether the relationship varied according to gender, age, ethnicity, educational background and student status.

Based on the previous literatures, the current research posed the following hypothesis:

The major hypothesis: The use of social media can facilitate the higher education. And it can be divided into two hypotheses based on two groups.

H1: The intensity of social media use is positively associated with students' study.

H2: The intensity of social media use is positively associated with teaching effect.

Whatever association exists between Facebook use and studying and teaching, it may be contingent upon individuals' socialization (e.g., gender, age, educational background, etc.). Earlier research in this area, however, hasn't formulated specific hypotheses. Thus, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: Does the relationship between social media use and higher education vary according to gender, age, ethnicity, educational background and student status?

### **Method**

## **For university students: survey**

### **Sample**

The method of systematic sampling will be used. Some students and teachers at a large southeastern university in the U.S. will be selected as the research sample. To get a diverse and representative sample, the lists of registered students for the Spring Semester of 2013 will be obtained from the registrar's office of the universities through a formal records request. From the whole population, part of addresses will be randomly selected using SPSS's random sample procedure, and this list will be the sampling frame. The e-mail addresses of these students will be collected with the registrar's help.

### **Procedures**

A web-based questionnaire survey will be conducted. Researchers will post their questionnaire on Survey Monkey Website ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)), an online survey hosting site. Researchers will send invitation emails to the email addresses of the sample. All the participants will be asked to complete the online survey from February 1, 2013 to March 1, 2013. As the purpose of this study is to assess the role of Facebook among college-aged students, only respondents in the 18 to 29 age group will be selected for the analysis, which may reduce the size of previous sample (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). Finally, all the valid responses from the survey will be collected on the website. And then they will be compiled into a SPSS file and analyzed through SPSS.

They have to answer their frequency of use of Facebook for specific purposes including sharing academic resources, discussing academic issues with other students or teachers, etc. The frequency variable can be measured through time spent on it in a single day, online time each

time, the amount of academic application they are using and the number of contacts including students and teachers. The period of the first survey will last from the beginning of a semester to the midterm.

The demographics section concerns with basic information of participants such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational background and student status. The purpose of it is to test whether the sample could represent the university students group. In addition, the relationship between demographics and using behaviors of social media may be found through statistical analysis.

To alleviate privacy concerns, no identifying information will be tracked or requested of the respondents. And all of their responses and information will be kept confidential, and they will only be used in this nonprofit research.

## **Measures**

### **Degree of social media use**

The traditional approach for measuring media use in communication research is to gauge the frequency or duration of exposure to a medium, but this approach fails to account for the richer user experiences provided by interactive media (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). As Facebook is one of the most popular social media within universities, this research uses Facebook as the representative of social media. A more complete measure of intensity of Facebook use was developed by Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe (2007), who created a scale to gauge user engagement in Facebook activities based on number of “friends”, duration spent on the network in a typical day, and level of agreement with several statements gauging users’ emotional attachment to the site. The similar scale is used in this survey.

## **Behaviors related with social media use for education**

They will be evaluated by 5-point Likert scales, with 1 referring to “strongly disagree” and 5 referring to “strongly agree”. For example, share study resources, upload study resources, discuss academic issues with other students or teachers, join in study groups on Facebook, learn knowledge and information from what others uploaded or shared, use some applications on Facebook for study, etc. In addition, the factors for students to select some activities and not select other ones will also be asked. The factors listed include applications and functions related with study, people’s recommendations, reasonable expenses, user friendly, valuable information, etc. These can be analyzed as motivation factors to use Facebook for study.

## **Effect of social media use for study**

The degree of students’ satisfaction and evaluations will be measured by 5-point scales, with 1 referring to “strongly disagree” and 5 referring to “strongly agree”. In the survey, students’ evaluations of their interaction with other students and teachers will be measured. Besides, the degree to which they are satisfied with the courses incorporated with Facebook and Facebook help with their learning experiences will also be evaluated.

Course components were organized in ten one-week modules. It was operationalized by creating a 5-item Likert Scale measure. The scales will include: students’ satisfaction with the course incorporated with Facebook, evaluation with the interaction with other students and their teachers through Facebook, the degree to which Facebook help with their learning experiences, the degree to which the class was a positive learning environment, and the degree to which the class provoked heightened awareness of, and reading in, the topic area (Russo & Koesten, 2005).

## **Demographics**

All the demographics variables including gender, age, ethnicity, educational background and student status will be measured.

### **Statistical analysis**

The data obtained from the survey will be shown in a frequency distribution table and be transferred to some frequency curves. The percentage of each option for Facebook use will be calculated. The mean score, standard deviation and z-score of the responses to Likert-type questions will be calculated. Therefore we can know the sample distribution. Besides, the standard error and confidence interval will also be calculated. And then researchers will test hypotheses for statistical significance. Finally, the correlation and regression analysis will be conducted.

The reliability of each scale will also be tested. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of the variables will be measured. If the reliability of scales is not very high, it means they need to be improved in further researches (Li & Lin, 2012).

### **For university teachers: interview**

#### **Sample**

The sampling methods are purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Researchers will obtain the information of some teachers who have ever used Facebook as a teaching tool based on the last question in the questionnaire for students. And then we will send an email to each teacher provided by students to invite them to participate in an interview. In the email, a pretest on their basic demographics will be conducted with a brief questionnaire (see Appendix 2). Besides, they will be asked to recommend some other teachers having used Facebook as a

teaching tool to participate in the interview and provide their contact information. And then we will send emails to those new teachers in the same way. After collecting all the responses through email, we will select some representative teachers as the sampling frame. Only valid and representative responses will be selected as the sample. Those who rarely use Facebook for teaching cannot be selected. Besides, we will balance the gender, ethnicity and other features in order to make sure the sample is representative. As there may be not a great many teachers with that particular characteristic, and it seems difficult to find such sample, these types of sampling methods are needed. It can help us find the exact target teachers for the research. Besides, we need to know the profound thoughts and experiences of teachers who have ever used Facebook as a teaching tool.

## **Procedures**

Researchers will conduct a pretest for the teachers through email survey. They will be asked about basic demographics and their Facebook use as a teaching tool. And after the sampling frame is confirmed, an interview will be carried out among them. Each interview will be conducted in person and will be recorded, and it may last 60 to 90 minutes. The questions of the interview will include the Facebook using behavior related with teaching, the factors motivating them to use Facebook for teaching, their opinions on using Facebook as a teaching tool, the role that Facebook plays in their teaching experiences, the teaching effect of integrating Facebook into traditional courses, the advantage and disadvantage of Facebook used for teaching, the potential development of Facebook in educational field, etc. (See Appendix 3)

We will transcribe each interview, analyze the typed transcripts using open-ended, and then focus on thematic coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

## **Results: to be developed**

## **Discussions and Conclusion**

The purpose of this research is to examine whether social media use is positively associated with higher education from the aspect of university students and teachers. In addition, the relationships may vary based on certain personal information.

Social media has some features, which make it applicable to university education. First, social media is a useful social platform. It can help users interact with other students and teachers through social media. Besides, it combines personal space, interest range, school and location with various interpersonal relationships, and establishes a more multi-dimensional and diverse social platform. Additionally, it can make students know alumni and get their help through SNS. Second, in the social media communication, academic resources spreads through interpersonal communications at first and then through group communication. It can spread academic resources through the sharing function fast and effectively. Students can obtain vast study resources and information through social media. Third, the group function of social media provides opportunity for group study. The study groups can be formed based on similar interests, majors, classes or locations among students. Fourth, social media is a convenient application that students and teachers can use anywhere. With the development of smart phone, users can get access to social media at any time and any places. And they may use it more frequently during all the spare time like waiting time.

Social media can become the second class for university education. It can be applied to two major groups, university students and teachers. University students can constitute study groups voluntarily on social media based on their majors or interests. They can upload articles, pictures,



videos and other multimedia content. Besides, they can share study materials with each other through the sharing function. In addition, they may discuss academic issues through replying to others and commenting on their articles. Students can use social media as the platform of online cooperating study. Students can also make an appointment with their teachers and ask questions through social media, as most of them prefer this type of interaction to email.

University teachers and advisors can establish their own homepage on social media as the platform to communicate with students. Teachers can upload the course resources and reference book list, release teaching information (e.g., syllabus and schedule, etc.) and announcements, organize discussions among students and so on. When some issues related to the courses take place, teachers can instruct their students and lead them to think about it immediately. Instructors can also encourage students to follow current events on Twitter. For example, some news outlets such as National Public Radio usually provide at least 30 updates throughout the day, ranging from music to politics, and each tweet contains a link to the full story. Students could follow two different news outlets and then analyze the types of tweets they post (Moody, 2010). All the questions that students don't want to ask in class can be presented on social media. And teachers might give them an online reply soon. In addition, advisors can know students' questions through social media and instruct them effectively.

This research can provide some contributions. The first contribution lies in that it studies the relationship between social media use and higher education using quantitative method, including questionnaire survey and interview survey. The degree of relationship can be measured and analyzed exactly in this way. Second, it integrates several theories related with social media application in education. These theories are interdisciplinary in terms of sociology, pedagogy, communication, etc. Third, this research focuses on two correlative group including university

students and teachers. We can examine the relationship and the effect of social media dialectically. Thus we can argue that social media use can promote both studying and teaching, and therefore it can promote university education.

However, there are also some limitations in this research. First, it cannot conclude that there is a causal relationship between social media use and higher education due to the complicity of education. The dependent variables are very broad and complicate, and social media use may be only a small factor of it. Second, it's hard to evaluate the effects of studying and teaching. This research examines the degree of participants' self-evaluation and satisfaction. The criteria may be a little subjective, and therefore biased and unfair. Better criteria of the dependent variables are needed to be provided. Third, this research doesn't cover the university organizations such as library, student organizations, dining services, recreation center, student center, International services, etc., which are an important part of higher education. We may find the most powerful and popular posts in this way. And the effect of using social media can be tested by a survey focusing on students' feedback. It's easier to examine the effect of organizations using social media.

Future research can examine this topic through a variety of contexts and levels of facilitation. We need further study into how social media possibly contribute to students' academic persistence and achievement. In addition, they need to go beyond grades and GPA to include alternative forms of assessment such as portfolios, and to examine how what students are doing in such informal learning spaces may relate to, contradict, or suggest new approaches to pedagogy and formal education curriculum (Greenhow & Rebelia, 2009). They may also need to control other more powerful factors in the research. In addition, further research on social media

use and university organizations will be needed. They can conduct a content analysis on the Facebook pages of some organizations.

Overall, I hope the findings of this research may promote the development of applying social media into higher education in both research and practice field.

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***Appendix 1:***

***A Survey Questionnaire on University Students' Facebook Use for Study***

(1) Do you have a Facebook account?

- A. Yes
- B. No

**If your answer is “Yes”, then you can continue to answer the following questions. Otherwise, you can stop answering the questionnaire.**

(2) How many friends do you have on your Facebook account?

- A. 0~100
- B. 101~200
- C. 201~300
- D. More than 300

(3) How often do you usually log in your Facebook?

- A. Three times per day
- B. At least one time per day
- C. About three times per week
- D. Less than one time per week

(4) How long do you spend on your Facebook for academic purposes (eg. share study resources, discuss academic issues with others, etc.) in one typical day?

- A. Less than one hour
- B. From one hour to three hours
- C. From three hours to five hours
- D. More than five hours

(5) How long do you spend online each time when you typically log into your Facebook account?

- A. Less than 15 minutes
- B. About half an hour
- C. About one hour
- D. More than one hour

(6) How many times did you update your Facebook account in a typical week?

- A. 0
- B. 1~3
- C. 4~7
- D. More than 7

(7) Level of agreement with several statements on your emotional attachment to Facebook: (5-point Likert Scale, with 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.)

- A. Facebook is part of my everyday activity
- B. I am proud to tell people I am on Facebook
- C. Facebook has become part of my daily routine
- D. I feel out of touch when I haven’t logged onto Facebook for a day
- E. I feel I am part of the Facebook community at the campus
- F. I would feel sorry if Facebook is shut down

(8) Have you ever had the activities below on your Facebook? (5-point Likert Scale, with 1 refers to “very infrequently” and 5 refers to “very frequently”.)

- A. Share study resources
- B. Upload study resources and materials



- C. Discuss academic issues with other students or teachers
- D. Join in study groups on Facebook
- E. Learn knowledge and information from what others uploaded or shared
- F. Use some applications on Facebook for study
- G. Other activities related with using Facebook for study \_\_\_\_\_

(9) What reason(s) do you choose these activities for? (5-point Likert Scale, with 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.)

- A. Follow other users’ behaviors
- B. It’s cool
- C. Improve my study
- D. Kill time
- E. Other reason(s) \_\_\_\_\_

(10) What reason(s) don’t you select the other activities for? (5-point Likert Scale, with 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.)

- A. I have no interest
- B. I know little about them
- C. It costs too much
- D. They have little value for me
- E. Other reason(s) \_\_\_\_\_

(11) What factors will encourage you to use Facebook for study? (5-point Likert Scale, with 1 refers to “strongly disagree” and 5 refers to “strongly agree”.)

- A. There are more applications and functions related with study

- B. My friends or teachers recommend them to me
- C. Their expenses are more reasonable and affordable for me
- D. They are developed more friendly and conveniently
- E. There are more valuable information for my study
- F. Other factors \_\_\_\_\_

(12) Have your teachers ever had the activities below on your Facebook? (5-point scale, with 1 refers to “very infrequently” and 5 refers to “very frequently”.)

- A. Upload resources for teaching such as assignments, presentations, announcements, etc
- B. Share resources for teaching such as reference materials, current affairs related to teaching, etc
- C. Organize discussions among students
- D. Answer questions from students and interact with them
- E. Utilize some applications on Facebook for teaching
- F. Other activities related with using Facebook as a teaching tool \_\_\_\_\_

(13) To what degree do you think these activities on Facebook motivate your study? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean degrees from strongly disagree to strongly agree.)

- A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(14) How do you evaluate your interactions (such as discussing academic issues through replying to others or commenting on their articles, carry out cooperating study, etc) with other students through Facebook? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean evaluations ranging from very bad to very good.)

- A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(15) How do you evaluate your interactions with your teachers through Facebook? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean evaluations ranging from very bad to very good.)

- A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(16) How do you evaluate Facebook in terms of study? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean evaluations ranging from very bad to very good.)

A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(17) To what degree are you satisfied with the courses incorporated with Facebook? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean degrees from very dissatisfied to very satisfied.)

A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(18) To what degree do you think Facebook help with your learning experiences? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean degrees from strongly disagree to strongly agree.)

A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(19) What is the level of your academic score in your class right now?

A. Top level

B. High level

C. Middle level

D. Low level

E. I don't know

(20) Do you expect to get a good score in the final examination? (Scores from 1 to 5 mean degrees from strongly disagree to strongly agree.)

A. 1 B. 2 C. 3 D. 4 E. 5

(21) Do you know any teachers who have ever used Facebook as a teaching tool (for example, organize study groups on Facebook, upload study materials onto it, interact with students, etc) in your university?

A. Yes B. No

(22) If your response to the last question is “Yes”, could you please provide the contact information of these teachers, such as the name, department, email address or phone number? We will invite them to participate in an interview for research.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

### **Demographics**

#### **A few last questions for statistical purposes only:**

(23) What’s your gender?

A. Male B. Female

(24) What is your age?

A. Younger than 17

B. 17~20

C. 21~24

D. Older than 24

(25) What is your ethnicity?

A. White

B. Black or African-American

C. Asian or Pacific Islander

D. Mixed race

E. Native American/American Indian

F. Others \_\_\_\_\_

(26) What's your current educational background?

A. High school student or below

B. Undergraduate student

C. Master student

D. PHD student or above

E. Others \_\_\_\_\_

(27) Are you enrolled as a full-time student or a part-time student currently?

A. Full-time student

B. Part-time student

**THANK RESPONDENT:** That concludes our questionnaire. The results of this survey are going to be used in a non-profit academic research. And all of your responses and information will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your responses!

***Appendix 2:***

***The Pretest Questionnaire on University Teachers' Facebook Use for Teaching***

(1) Do you have a Facebook account?

A. Yes B. No

(2) What's your gender?

A. Male B. Female

(3) What is your age?

A. Younger than 35

B. 35~45

C. 45~55

D. Older than 55

(4) What is your ethnicity?

A. White

B. Black or African-American

C. Asian or Pacific Islander

D. Mixed race

E. Native American/American Indian

F. Others \_\_\_\_\_

(5) What's your current position?

A. Research fellow

B. Instructor

C. Assistant Professor

D. Associate Professor

E. Professor

F. Others \_\_\_\_\_

(6) Have you ever had the activities below on your Facebook? (5-point scale, with 1 refers to “very infrequently” and 5 refers to “very frequently”.)

A. Upload resources for teaching such as assignments, presentations, announcements, etc

B. Share resources for teaching such as reference materials, current affairs related to teaching, etc

C. Organize discussions among students

D. Answer questions from students and interact with them

E. Utilize some applications on Facebook for teaching

F. Other activities related with using Facebook as a teaching tool \_\_\_\_\_

(7) Which type(s) of students do you teach with Facebook as a tool?

A. Undergraduate student

B. Master student

C. PHD student or above

D. Others \_\_\_\_\_

(8) Do you know any other teachers who have ever used Facebook as a teaching tool (for example, organize study groups on Facebook, upload study materials onto it, interact with students, etc) in your university?

A. Yes B. No

(9) If your response to the last question is “Yes”, could you please provide the contact information of these teachers, such as the name, department, email address or phone number? We will invite them to participate in an interview for research.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK RESPONDENT:** That concludes our questionnaire. The results of this survey are going to be used in a non-profit academic research. And all of your responses and information will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your responses!



***Appendix 3:***

***A List of the Interview Questions on University Teachers' Facebook Use for Teaching***

1. Do you have a Facebook account especially for teaching except for your personal account?
2. How often do you usually log in your Facebook account for teaching? How long do you spend on it in a typical week?
3. What behaviors related with teaching do you have with your Facebook?
4. What factors can motivate you to use Facebook as a teaching tool? (For example, you are recommended by your colleagues, making your course attractive to students, etc.)
5. What is your opinion on using Facebook as a teaching tool? Do you think it helpful and effective?
6. What role do you think Facebook play in your teaching practices?
7. How is the teaching effect of integrating Facebook into your course?
8. What's the advantage and disadvantage of Facebook when applied into teaching?
9. What will be the potential development of Facebook in educational field?

**THANK RESPONDENT:** That concludes our interview. The content of this interview will be used in a non-profit academic research. And all of your responses and information will be kept confidential. Thank you very much for your responses!

**Branding of African-American and Hispanic/Latino College Students' Professional Images  
via Social Media to Seek Employment**

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**Abstract**

This paper discusses the social media aspect of digital culture as used by African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students. The research study focuses on these multicultural college students' use of social media to develop their own professional brands and market said brands to obtain employment opportunities. It also addresses the reality of the evolving relationships between job candidates and employers as both engage on social media platforms to fulfill their employment related needs. In this study, it was found that most of the African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students do not use social media to seek jobs.

**Introduction**

Since social media has increasingly become a frequented medium of choice for college students to express themselves, limited research has been focused on African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students' usage. As students engage in the rapidly developing digital culture by way of these platforms, they each build an image and establish a personal brand that

becomes a social reputation that follows them from the Internet to the offline world.

Additionally, employers have begun to search or request information regarding the social pages and personal blogs of potential employees, including college students, to determine viable candidates for coveted internship and entry-level positions (Valdez and McFarland, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to explore whether or not African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students utilize social media to seek employment and if there is evidence that these students' participation in social media increases their chances for employment.

The hypotheses that guide this study assist the researchers with the notion of whether or not a African-American and Hispanic/Latino college student's choice to establish professional profiles utilizing social media will not only be a catalyst to a professional image that they control, but also to obtaining job employment. The hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis I: College students who build professional images to establish their personal brands via social media are more invested in their careers than college students who do not.

Hypothesis II: College students who utilize social media to seek job employment are more successful at obtaining employment than college students who do not.

## **Theory**

This research discussed in this paper is informed by the theoretical framework of Uses and Gratification. Rubin (1994) states, "The principal elements of uses and gratifications include our psychological and social environment, our needs and motives to communicate, the media, our attitudes and expectations about the media, functional alternatives to using the media, our communication behavior, and the outcomes or consequences of our behavior." The theory has been used to demonstrate how Internet users navigate social media sites through two-way communication to serve their own purposes. This study revealed that the students used the social

media sites primarily for personal reasons, i.e. a large percentage post personal statuses and also identify their posts as entertainment related. However, a majority of the students do not use social media to seek jobs. Additionally, most interact with professionals or potential employers a rate of only 1-5 times per month on social media sites.

## **Methodology**

The study utilizes a quantitative research method, specifically the questionnaire/survey approach. The sample is a convenience sample of the investigators' former students, their colleagues' students, and all college students who chose to participate. The survey placed on SurveyMonkey.com, an online survey portal, where students were able to log on from the link provided. The survey had 20 questions and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. There were 189 African-American and Hispanic/Latino college student respondents in total. Seventy-one percent of the respondents were female and 29% were male. The racial breakdown of the students were: African-American/Black (70%) and Hispanic/Latino (30%). The classification of the college students were Freshman (28%), Sophomore (29%), Junior (26%), and Senior (17%).

## **Results**

The students maintain profiles on Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, YouTube, Blogs, ePortfolios, and Coursera. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram are the leading sites utilized by the college students. Eighty-nine percent of the students had a Facebook account, while 63% had Twitter profiles and 71% with Instagram accounts. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents maintained a LinkedIn account. Forty-one percent of the students

posted on average of one to five times per week while 20% of the students posted from 6 or more times per week.

On the social networking websites, the students shared initial comments (posts on their own pages); responsive comments (on others pages); articles; photos; music; videos; quotes; events; job announcements; and job searches. Seventy-three percent of the students shared initial comments while 64% responded to comments on others' pages. Only 8% shared job announcements and 6% shared job searches. Seventy-one percent of the respondents categorized the content of their posts as entertainment related. Sixty percent agreed that their posts were life events and personal achievement related while 49% categorized the posts and statuses as educational and 26% professional based.

The following questions were geared directly towards the students' professional image, potential employers and employment. Fifty-seven percent of the college students did not utilize social media sites to build professional images and reputation for themselves, while 43% did. Fifty-one percent of the respondents said that they decided whether to share certain personal information in their profiles based on what they thought potential employers and professionals would think of them. More than half of the students (53%) did not follow any employers (companies or professionals) on social media sites. Seven percent of the students did follow employers and 11% followed professionals. In addition, 30% followed both employers and professionals.

Thirty-six percent of the students agreed that no employers (companies or professionals) followed them on social networking media sites. Some students were followed by employers (6%), and others professionals (10%), or followed by both (14%). However, 34% of the students did not know whether they were being followed or if their profiles were being viewed by

employers (companies or professionals). In response to the question, “How many times per month do you interact (talk, message, chat, comment, tweet etc.) with professionals or potential employers on social media sites?” Nearly 87% of the students agreed that they interact with professionals or potential employers between one to five times per month on social media sites. The majority of the students (59%) said that they received no feedback—positive or negative on their posts, comments or photos from professionals or potential employers. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents received positive feedback, while less than 1% received negative feedback from professionals or potential employers.

Of all the respondents, 52% were actively seeking an internship and 23% seeking a full-time job. However, 61% of the students did not use social media sites to seek job employment, while 39% took advantage of the medium and sought employment opportunities. In response to the question, “Have you ever been invited for an interview or obtained employment due to your profile on a social media outlet?” Eight percent of the respondents said “yes” for an interview; 4% said “yes” for an internship; less than 1% for a full-time job and 2% said for an interview, internship and full-time job. In total, less than 7% of African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students received an internship and/or a full-time job through the use of social media. Eighty-five percent of the students agreed that they had never been invited for an interview, internship or obtained employment as a result of their profiles on a social media outlet.

## **Conclusion**

As the results revealed the majority of the African American and/or Hispanic/Latino college students (57%) did not utilize the social media sites to build a professional image and reputation for themselves. (However, more than half the students (51%) did make a conscious

effort to refrain from posting anything that may be deemed inappropriate by a potential employer or professional.) Also, of the 39% of college students who use social media sites to seek employment, it is evident that they are not as successful obtaining employment as are college students who do not use social media sites to seek employment. Eighty-five percent of the students had never been invited for an interview, internship or actually obtaining employment. Consequently, no correlation could be made between African-American and/or Hispanic/Latino college students who use social media to build a professional image being more invested in their careers than those who did not. The results from the survey data did not show substantial support for either of the hypotheses because it did not indicate that the students who built their professional images on social media sites were necessarily more invested in their careers than their counterparts who did not build their professional images utilizing social media.

Given the data on Generation Y social media usage, this generation (which includes the majority of today's college students) is most prepared to figure out how to use social media to best meet their needs—specifically when seeking employment. The 2012 survey by Jobvite reported that one in every six job seekers claimed to have found his or her current job through some form of social media. Job boards are shown to be the number one social resource for landing those jobs. According to the Kelly Global Workforce Index (2011), nearly one-third of Generation Y job seekers used social media to get their current position. In comparison, African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students in this study show a considerably lower rate (less than 7%) of job attainment through social media.

At this time it does not seem most beneficial to replace traditional professional networking skills with building a professional image and seeking employment on social media,

but instead they would prove most beneficial when used in concert. Essentially, the fusion of these tools could position student job seekers to invite job interviews and offers.

### **Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

Although this study contributes to scholarship surrounding African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students' use of social media, it does have a few limitations. The convenience sample did not allow for a broader sample of students. The restricted timeframe prevented a sample set larger than 189 respondents to examine. Also, for future research, it would be beneficial to include more questions to investigate more detailed information on what the students post to social media sites; what they consider to be online interaction with professionals and employers; and how well they actually know and understand the privacy policies of social media sites. In addition, future research could include how African Americans and Hispanic/Latino choose to identify themselves when seeking employment and branding themselves via social media outlets.

Looking forward to implications for future research, it would be imperative to investigate what is the cause of the discrepancy between the African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students rate of job attainment compared to the overall Generation Y population. Are there specific barriers that African-American and Hispanic/Latino college students face in accessing or using social media for employment search? Are these students more successful when using traditional means or other networking avenues in order to build a professional image and obtain employment? These are questions that should be explored.



**Continuing to Examine the Impact of New Media on Military Spouses and Families:  
Reflections and Next Steps for a Longitudinal Investigation**

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**Abstract**

This brief report presents the background and summative findings of an exploratory study conducted in 2013 examining the use of Facebook, Skype, and related new media platforms by married couples in the military during wartime deployment. Five key themes surfaced in the research findings: (1) mobility, (2) monitoring and surveillance, (3) community, (4) utility, and (5) uncertainty and urgency. With this initial study as a catalyst to further explore the intersecting phenomena of new media and communication technologies, wartime deployment, and technologically-mediated communication among military families, this researcher provides an overview of intended next steps to embark on a longitudinal investigation into the ongoing uses, perceptions, and effects of new media within the military-affiliated constituency.

**Introduction**

Constant technological innovation challenges the ability to capture a timely picture of the role, influence, and effects of new and social media on human communication and behavior. In

interpersonal relationships, obtaining accurate measures and truly understanding the experience of using contemporary online platforms is dynamic and, thus, difficult. For individuals in the military and their loved ones, reliance on technologically-mediated channels to communicate during deployment and geographic separation is especially important; perhaps more so than in civilian culture (Maguire, Heinemann-LaFave, and Sahlstein, 2013). Throughout history, civilian spouses of military personnel have utilized emerging technologies of the contemporary era to communicate when apart. At a most simple level, these tools included pencil and paper, and evolved over time to include communication vehicles such as two-way radio devices, telephones, and, most recently, the Internet (Schumm, Bell, Ender, & Rice, 2004; Merolla, 2010a, 2010b). This brief report will address the summative findings and highlights from an original exploratory study conducted in 2013 that examined the impact of new media, namely Facebook and Skype, on spousal communication during wartime deployment. Using a phenomenological research approach, ten military wives shared their lived experiences through interviews, revealing a total of five key themes: (1) mobility, (2) monitoring and surveillance, (3) community, (4) utility, and (5) uncertainty and urgency. Further, the immediate next steps to begin developing this exploration into a longitudinal research study are presented herein.

### **Overview of Review of Literature**

Existing research recognizes the presence of deficiencies in the value and effectiveness of family education programs within the American military which can influence how spouses and family members respond to the deployment experience (Drummet, Coleman, and Cable, 2003). Well-formulated family readiness programs and appropriate deployment awareness training becomes especially pertinent due to the correlation between satisfaction military lifestyle and spousal support for the military, both of which are highly influential in a service member's long-

term military commitment and decisions for reenlistment (Merolla & Steinberg, 2007; Van Epp, Futris, Van Epp, & Campbell, 2008). For these reasons, the assertion that strong and well-informed family relationships and marriages may benefit from the use of effective educational program development validates the basis for this study into communicative behavior and information acquisition online (Van Epp et al., 2008).

Increasing separations, reoccurring deployments, frequent relocations, and challenges of the present-day climate of war are trademarks of the current American military experience. Circumstances that come with each unique tour of duty compound many of the communication norms that exist within traditional marital relationships (Merolla & Steinberg, 2007; Van Epp et al., 2008). Admirably, military spouses have accepted and grown accustomed to frequent communication gaps with their loved ones, and oftentimes are forced to improvise with accessible technology to communicate while apart. Not having a stable channels or a regular means for reliable and immediate communicative exchanges can lead to frustration in the course of relationship, at times possibly leading to feelings of loneliness or abandonment. These civilian loved ones of military personnel represent a group of individuals with an exceptional incentive and commitment to long-term use and improvement of technologically-mediated communication and information-gathering channels (Lange, 2004).

Regarding the impact to the at-home spouse, Nevin (2006) discovered in a 2005 Army study that the most significant strain on service members and their spouses is not the fear of being killed in action or casualty; rather, it is losing the closeness of their relationship during deployments and separations. For the deployed spouse, La Bash, Vogt, King and King (2009) found that in combat situations, the need to restrain use of force can result in one experiencing feelings of anger, fear, or resentment, which can later convert into outrage or even violence.

Thus, having a more consistent emotional outlet to communicate with trusted loved ones who are compassionate and sensitive about what is being experienced by their service member is invaluable (La Bash et al., 2009).

Although the Internet and emerging new media platforms enhance the communication landscape, the availability of communication channels during deployment and separation presents its own challenges. Internet, telephones, and webcam capabilities are typically only available in areas where servicepersons congregate, resulting in a lack of privacy in conversation between partners (Merolla, 2010a). Additionally, Internet and/or telephone connections may be disrupted, or have poor or unreliable signal, interfering with the ability to have a seamless or substantive interactions. A 2005 study revealed that dependence on communication aided in coping with deployment. Unanimously, the findings emerged that technology and computer-mediated communication were useful and utilized agents in creating a feeling of closeness and intimacy with their spouse (Wheeler & Torres-Stone, 2009). These findings support the increasingly evident relationship between emerging communication technologies and their potentially vital role in military marriages and the American military community at large (Schumm et al., 2004). Even more recently, findings indicate that during deployment the dissemination of updates and reliable information is essential to foster a military marriage or partnership in military-affiliated relationships (Merolla, 2010b). It appears that the availability and use of emerging communication and information technologies has become a normal part of relational communication for civilians and military affiliated persons alike in this contemporary technologically-inundated and -deterministic world (Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Lin, 2007).

## **Research Questions**

Although research indicates that military spouses rely on communication technologies, the implications and consequences of these online platforms, features, and interactions are not altogether realized (Merolla & Steinberg, 2007; Merolla, 2010a, 2010b; Ramirez & Broneck, 2009). With this in mind, this study examined the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the effects of using Facebook and Skype on the communicative behavior and patterns between military spouses?

RQ2: Do military spouses perceive that the availability of Facebook and Skype enhances their communication during wartime deployment?

## **Procedure**

Semi-structured interviews with ten civilian spouses of United States Military personnel were used to gather data. The instrument was comprised of a series of open-ended questions to acquire responses about the participants' use of Facebook, Skype, and other new media platforms, their experience using these channels to communicate with their spouses during wartime deployment, demographic data, marital information, their perception of new media and other communication technologies. Additional questions sought data on the frequency and patterns of communication exchanges, topics of conversation and/or avoidance. Distance interviews were geographically necessitated with 90% (n=9) of the subjects and were conducted over the telephone. An identical protocol is followed for distance and in-person interviews. A six-step analytical procedure presented by Creswell (2009) was utilized to examine the qualitative data gathered and evaluate the findings for results.

## Summative Findings

The participants in this study were all women (n=10, 100%) between 21 and 37 years of age (mean = 27 years old) at the time of the interviews. The average length of the marriages at the time was 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  years, ranging between 6 months to 6 years married, and having dated on average for just over 3 years before getting married. Parental couples made up 60% of the sample. A total of six of the spouses were presently on active duty (60%), and 4 had been honorably discharged (40%) at the time when the interviews were conducted. Additionally, four spouses served in the Army (40%), four in the Marine Corps (40%), one in the Army National Guard (10%), and one in the Marine Corps Reserves (10%). The service member spouses' length of time ranged greatly from 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  -17 years. Between 2007-2012, the couples experienced 14 deployments, 11 of which were in Iraq and/or Afghanistan, and ranging in length between six months and one year.

The results of this study yielded five key themes: (1) mobility, (2) monitoring and surveillance, (3) community, (4) utility (access and preference), and (5) urgency and uncertainty. In response to RQ1, overwhelmingly the spouses revealed favorable effects of using Facebook, Skype, and related new media to enact their marital communication and relational maintenance while apart. In a particularly significant highlight of the study, three of the ten women had given birth with their husbands deployed, and so their spouses virtually "met" their babies for the first time via Skype. Despite this significant milestone, the wives noticeably reported more common and frequent use of Facebook compared to Skype or any other new media platform to communicate during deployment. Regarding RQ2, the military spouses overwhelmingly perceive the availability of Facebook, Skype, and similar platforms to enhance their spousal communication during wartime deployment. Although several wives acknowledged its potential

to be a double-edged sword, in their person experiences, having the ability to communicate so readily using contemporary new media channels was indicated to be highly beneficial, appreciated, and even “a life saver!”

### **Next Steps**

While these findings captured a relevant outlook by which to examine the intersecting phenomena of deployment, spousal communication and relational maintenance, and the use of technologically-mediated communication via new media among this community, there is a need to go beyond this preliminary study to elaborate upon this foundation of research in order to truly and continually understand the communicative needs and behaviors of military families. This information is essential in order to develop and provide appropriately modernized, best-suited educational programs for military spouses and family members, both when facing the deployment experience and the everyday military lifestyle.

As such, this researcher intends to conduct a second phase of this research study, launching a longitudinal investigation into the ongoing uses, practices, and effects of new media among military spouses and families. The rationale in continuing this body of work stems from the ever-changing nature of new media and the individual circumstances brought about by the context of each, individual deployment tour. Arguably, the data collected and analyzed in the original 2013 study is steadily becoming outdated, particularly as active users of new media continue to diversify among a variety of available platforms, and newer new media, such as Instagram and Twitter, evolve. The following series of steps will be taken in reparation for the upcoming chapter of the study, of which the approach will remain in the constructionist paradigm.

The initial task is to bring the review of literature to present, comprised of a summary of the most recent publications presenting emerging research across a variety of fields and sub-fields; including, but not limited to communication (namely, relational, interpersonal, and family studies), new media, information and communication technologies (ICTs), technologically-mediated communication, and sociological and psychological research related to present-day deployment experiences. New research questions will be formulated to reflect the most recent trends and technologies yet will align with the scope of the pre-existing questions (i.e. exploring uses, perceptions, and effects). The protocol will be revised for both currency and to consolidate the number of items in order to be less redundant and more direct; the changes derived from observations made during the previous study. Lastly, participants will be recruited using a purposive, snowball sampling method, wherein this researcher will specifically target online community networks comprised of military spouses, many of which were identified by participants in the earlier study, and utilize these spaces as recruiting vehicles for the upcoming study. Viral word of mouth was apparent among the previous sample, thus, a snowball sampling from the initial recruiting efforts is likely. Another relatively small, although perhaps slightly larger than the initial, group of participants will be sought.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the previous study examining selected new media platforms brought about incredible opportunities for future research and provided a wealth of valuable information which serves two purposes: (1) to better understand the needs and behaviors of military spouses deployed here and now, and (2) the background and foundation upon which to build an ongoing body of research dedicated to this highly-exclusive juxtaposition of variables. Undoubtedly new and social media platforms are only going to continue to evolve, and global conflict has been a



constant, yet unpredictable, historical cornerstone, thus requiring a well-prepared military who is readily prepared to deploy and serve their country at a moment's notice. Recognizing the potential impact of these two factors as they intersect, there is value in fostering this type of ongoing exploration, not only to the fields of communication and new media, but also to the many military- and community-related stakeholders who may also potentially benefit from having access to the most recent and ground-breaking information on this unique topic.

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