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Social Media as a Tool for Increased Student Participation and Engagement Outside the Classroom in Higher Education

Matthew Graham, University of Dundee

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the rise of social media networks and the potential they hold for Higher Education teaching and learning has not gone unnoticed by practitioners. There is now an increasing body of academic work that has set out to investigate the benefits that social media can have on the student learning experience. However, the vast majority of these studies have been carried out in American universities and largely focus on students enrolled in social science or science subjects. This study, building upon the findings of previous trials, sought to examine how social media platforms could be utilised to facilitate increased student participation and engagement amongst Humanities students at a British university. The project outcomes offered positive indicators about the potential that social media can hold for this form of learning, reinforced by the levels of interest and enthusiasm amongst students. Yet, the results also indicate that for social media to achieve its full potential, students need to be inculcated, nurtured and encouraged to engage with this form of learning.

Keywords: social media in higher education; student engagement; interactive learning; Facebook; Twitter

The rise of social media

Over the last decade, the rapid rise and uptake of what have been termed social media networks worldwide has been an extraordinary technological development. In a relatively short period of time, the digital landscape has been transformed, shaped and driven by two major companies: Facebook and Twitter. Recently, other forms of social media have emerged and begun to vie for space and users; however, these two websites continue to dominate the scene. The global statistics for these companies are staggering: in March 2014, Facebook announced it had 802 million daily active users and 1.28 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2014), while in November of 2013, Twitter had 232 million active accounts (Edwards, 2013). Both websites are primarily based around the open and mass sharing of content and information, either directly with friends, specific groups, or to a far wider public audience. While the vast majority of interaction could be regarded as frivolous, such as 'liking' a photo, social media networks have been accredited with much more serious functions in that they were used to help organise political protesters and disseminate information during the Arab Spring in 2008 (Wolman, 2013) and in the political unrest in the Ukraine in 2014 (Barbera & Metzger, 2014).

The central premise of social media networks is to provide individuals the opportunities and 'power' to create, collaborate and share ideas and information in an open fashion, all of which are important facets for nurturing student development. Subsequently, there has been a growing belief over the last few years that social media platforms have the potential to enhance teaching and learning in Higher Education (Chen & Bryer, 2012; Deng & Tavares, 2013; George & Dellasega, 2011; Junco, 2011; Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013; Selwyn, 2009; Welch & Bonnan-White, 2012). In spite of the enthusiasm, relatively little work has been conducted on whether these tools can actually be effectively harnessed and whether students really want to use them as part of their studies. With questions in the literature still remaining about the long-term viability and pedagogic use of social media in Higher Education, a project was designed within the School of Humanities at the University of Dundee that sought to add to the current debate. The premise of the project was to introduce social media tools into two undergraduate courses to address three broad questions: to assess whether the level of academic interest and excitement is justified; to investigate how the use of social media can be used outside the classroom in order to promote higher levels of collaboration, student interaction and interest in undergraduate humanities modules; and to examine the level of interest and engagement amongst students.

The potential of social media in higher education

As new technologies emerge and develop, they offer the prospect to progressively alter the way educators think about learning as well as our understanding of what knowledge actually is (Standish, 2008, p. 351). At face value, social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter have enormous potential for teaching and learning in Higher Education, with their core function premised on connecting groups of people worldwide and encouraging them to create and share information.

Why might Humanities lecturers be interested in adopting Facebook and/or Twitter into their teaching? On one level, a criticism levelled at Humanities lecturers by students at the University of Dundee is that our subjects appear to have only grudgingly accepted the most basic levels of technological intrusion into our teaching methods – especially as subjects like History and English are perceived to revolve around reading books and using physical primary documents. An initial questionnaire was used to elicit student opinion on ICT, technology and social media in Higher Education. One student commented:

> Most staff seem to have little ICT skills, and it is so frustrating when they can't even get the projectors working, let alone adding information to the VLE.

This was not a lone voice amongst the students questioned, with the perception being that lecturers in the School of Humanities were lagging behind the expectations of our learners in terms of technology use. It must be remembered that this is a generation in which technology has been a fundamental part of their lives and who have grown up using social media networks such as Facebook. Waycott, Bennett, Kennedy, Dalgarno and Gray (2010, p. 1202) observed that the new generation of students have a "low tolerance for… passive forms of learning, and expect technology to be an integral part of their education". This is an issue that must be recognised and addressed, because it could impact upon our National Student Survey (NSS) results.

Social media networks could be a part of the solution. Not only could they address the criticisms concerning a lack of technology, but platforms such as Facebook and Twitter do hold the potential to fulfil a number of important pedagogic functions. Maloney (2007, p. 26) asserts that the evolution of social media has encouraged a:

> New focus on innovation, creation, and collaboration, and an emphasis on collective knowledge over static information delivery, knowledge management over content management, and social interaction over isolated surfing… those new uses mirror much of what we know to be good models of learning, in that they are collaborative and encourage active participation by the user.

In fact, an important aim of Higher Education teaching is to encourage students to engage more actively and deeply with their subjects. Kuh (2009, p. 683), defined student engagement as "the time and effort students invest in their educational activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes". In another paper, Kuh (2009a, p.5) took this point further, in which he emphasised that student engagement is developed through a series of connected steps: the more time spent studying leads to a greater knowledge of a subject, which is then reinforced by feedback from lecturers and collaboration with others, from which students will subsequently improve their academic skills, that in turn will help foster deeper learning and provide them with the ability to problem solve effectively. How can these desirable educational outcomes be nurtured? Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, p. 602) argued that "because individual effort and involvement are the critical determinants of college impact, institutions should focus on the ways they can shape their academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage engagement". It has therefore been argued that the greatest impact on developing deeper student engagement is "institutional policies and practices that induce higher levels of engagement across various kinds of in-class and out-of-class educationally purposeful activities" (Kuh, 2009, p. 688). In searching for ways that institutions and academics can implement such structures to enhance student engagement, social media networks have become the subject of academic attention. Consequently, a series of studies have been conducted that examine whether Facebook and Twitter had positive effects on encouraging greater student engagement (Deng & Tavares, 2013; Junco, 2011; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Junco, 2012; Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Heiberger & Harper, 2008).

The overall findings from these studies are by and large positive, with the general consensus being that if used and managed effectively, social media networks can be linked to improved student engagement. Yet, there is a division within the literature. Although Heiberger and Harper's study (2008) of student usage of Facebook noted improved engagement levels, both Junco (2011) and Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found that on the whole, the greater the amount of time spent on this particular social network correlated with lower class marks overall. However, as Junco (2011, p. 11) argued "certain uses of Facebook mimic educational behaviour… related to positive behaviour", and that more research was thus required into whether it could improve student engagement. On the other hand, the results from various trials of Twitter by Junco, Heiberger and Loken (2011) and Junco, Elavsky and Heiberger (2013) have concluded that this social network was more likely to be associated with greater student engagement.

However, building upon the caution expressed by Junco (2011) and Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), a number of other observers have raised criticism and concerns about the introduction of Facebook and Twitter into teaching. The first and perhaps most obvious is that social media is simply a fad or a gimmick, and attempts by practitioners to utilise them are far beyond the curve; reports of Facebook's declining 'cool' and popularity amongst younger generations are appearing just as institutions attempt to climb aboard this bandwagon (Curtis, 2014). There are also some apprehensions regarding the actual benefit digital technology has on the learning experience. Friesen and Lowe (2012) doubted the potential of social media as a tool to generate debate and the engagement of

students, whilst Heiberger and Harper (2008, p. 25) have pointed out that the use of technology, due in part to the endless amounts of material online, can result in "information overload and overwhelm or intimidate some students". In fact, it has been contended that digital technology and associated tools such as social media in education actually have a damaging effect on the learning experience. Carr (2010) has vehemently argued that "when we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking and superficial learning. Even as the internet grants us easy access to vast amounts of information, it turns us into shallower thinkers".

Conceptual basis

There are several reasons why this project chose to investigate the use of social media in Higher Education. First, in 2006, the author was amongst the first generation of Facebook users in the UK and as a final year undergraduate used this social media platform regularly to discuss tutorial reading, ask questions and collaborate with classmates in our studies. Facebook served as an extremely effective tool for engaging with our modules – something which I am keen to cultivate amongst my students. Secondly, the sheer number of students using social media networks is enormous; a 2013 survey found that in the UK, in the age-group 18–24, 91% had a Facebook profile, and 64% had a Twitter account (Bennett, 2013). Furthermore, the prevalence of devices that students own that host social networking sites (laptops, mobile phones, tablets, kindles) has subsequently resulted in frequent accessing and checking of these sites (Hurst, 2013). This project sought to utilise the high-level use of social media to promote deeper levels of learning and understanding, in part by encouraging students to share links and information while they were spending time online. As the majority of students use at least one social network, they have the capability to share information and collaborate with one another at the click of a few buttons. For example, many websites prominently display a 'share' option, offering users the opportunity to immediately disseminate information via their favoured social media network.

A third factor for starting this project, which has previously been discussed, is that several largely positive academic studies have been conducted into social media and student engagement at Higher Education. These trials, mainly within American universities, have shown that using Facebook and Twitter educationally can have encouraging academic outcomes (George & Dellasega, 2011; Hrastinsk & Aghaee, 2012; Junco, 2011; Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013; Deng & Tavares, 2013; Selwyn, 2009; Waycott et al, 2010; Welch & Bonnan-White, 2012). However, it must be noted that there has been remarkably little academic work carried out in British institutions (the exceptions being Selwyn (2009) and Madge, Meek, Wellens and Hooley (2009)) and even less so trialling its use with Humanities students. Therefore, while this study primarily aims to contribute to the current debates about the educational potential of Facebook and Twitter, the project also offers an insight into the suitability of using social media with Humanities students at a British university.

It must be stressed that the purpose of this project was to test the use of social media as a tool for increasing student engagement outside of the classroom. The main intended purpose was to encourage students to be thinking about their studies outside formal contact hours and to be discussing, interacting and sharing information amongst themselves about their modules relating to African History and Politics. Furthermore, by engaging with specific Facebook pages and Twitter hashtags, it was envisaged that students would be independently creating a database of materials and knowledge, covering different aspects of the African continent; something almost impossible to achieve by a single lecturer (with no TA support) in an 11-week semester. The desired outcomes were that the project would stimulate a broader and deeper interest in African history and subsequently create a more knowledgeable and engaged student cohort.

Methodology

The project was established using two different test groups convened by the author at Levels 3 and 4, both of which focused on African History and Politics (N.B.: in Scotland most students take a four-year undergraduate degree, with each year at Dundee University being known as a Level, in which they 'specialise' from Level 3 onwards). The project commenced with a short questionnaire being distributed in the first week of each module to gauge student opinions about the introduction of a social media component. The questionnaire ascertained, amongst other things, the willingness to use social media as part of their modules and also which platforms they would most likely use. The results of the questionnaire were overwhelmingly in favour of the introduction of social media as part of the modules: the two most popular were, unsurprisingly, Facebook and Twitter. Given the encouraging outcome of the questionnaire, it was decided to formally add a social media dimension to both modules. Although there was a clear favourite at Level 3 – the use of Facebook as the desired platform (Twitter was introduced, but hardly used), there was a close split in the Level 4 class; therefore both a Facebook group and a Twitter hashtag were created. After these were established, a link was emailed to all the students, promoting these tools; a notice was posted on the Virtual Learning Environment; and students were informed about these platforms during classes. Furthermore, it was explained that these networks were to be used to post/discuss relevant information, and for social media to be a forum outside of the classroom. The platforms continued to be promoted throughout the semester to encourage students to utilise these networks.

The project adopted two different approaches for introducing social media into the modules in order to test which might work most effectively and how collaboration and interactivity could be best achieved. In the Level 3 module, students were encouraged from the outset to use the Facebook page and Twitter hashtag, with the class immediately set the task of posting information during the first week. By requiring the students to engage with the platforms, it was hoped that this might generate the interest required to drive the social media component forward. In the Level 4 module, a hands-off approach was adopted, with the hope that social media use amongst the class would evolve organically through gentle encouragement. One reason behind adopting such an approach is that there is a school of thought that for social media to work effectively it must have a sense of validity amongst its users (Thompson, 2013). Deng and Tavares (2013, p. 173) observed that when "Facebook is entirely student initiated and student maintained [it reflected] that the students are enthusiastic about and capable of using social software… on their own to meet learning needs collaboratively". By devolving ownership to the Level 4 students, it was hoped that they would utilise Facebook and Twitter in a way that would best fit their own learning needs. However, it must be noted that for both Level 3 and Level 4 social media components, the instructor did maintain a presence by posting and sharing a limited amount of material to ensure that they did not remain devoid of content.

Outcomes, responses and observations

In terms of encouraging students to use social media as part of their studies, the project was successful in certain respects. The data from the end of semester questionnaires (Table 1) clearly demonstrated that students from both modules overwhelmingly used the tools on a regular basis during the semester: 77.1% (Level 3) and 75.1% (Level 4) of students stated that they accessed the platforms daily or several times a week. These high rates of usage were verified by the data reports generated by the Facebook page, which underscored the students' frequent access. For example, the 'reach' for each item posted (i.e. the number of different people that saw the information) in the Level 4 class was on average 18 (out of a class of 32), and for Level 3 it was 33 (out of a class of 48). What this emphasises is that throughout the semester the students were regularly accessing the social media platforms and investigating the material.

Table 1 Select questions from the end of semester questionnaire

	Level Three (48 students)	Level Four (32 students)
Question 1: Did you use (one or both of) the social media components of the course during the semester at least once?		
Yes	95.8%	90.6%
No	4.2%	9.4%
Question 2: How regularly did you access/use the class social media tool?		
Once a day	39.6%	18.8%
Several times per week	37.5%	56.3%
Every few weeks	2.1%	9.3%
Once in semester	16.7%	6.3%
Never	4.1%	9.3%
Question 3: In what ways did you interact with the class social media in any of the formats (choose all that apply)?		
Post comments	2.1%	12.5%
Shared information/web links, etc.	56.2%	12.5%
Like or favourite items	41.6%	40.6%
Discussed issues with students	0	0
Looked at what others posted/did but generally did not interact	77%	62.5%
Never used	4.1%	9.3%

While there was very little difference in the frequency of access to the social media tools between the two test classes, the nature of the interactions was markedly different. Having been set tasks and encouraged to participate throughout the project, the Level 3 students were far more likely to have interacted; 56.2% posted information in the form of YouTube videos, NGO reports, newspaper articles and web links at least once (although this was entirely using the Facebook page). In addition, a sizeable number of students would 'like' the posts and links shared to the page. Over the semester, the quantity and nature of this activity did decline, but a core of

students continued to actively interact and engage with the page. In fact, a few students were still contributing material to the page after the semester had finished.

In contrast, the Level 4 class, which had not received the same level of encouragement or instruction, did not interact or participate to the same degree. The number of students that opted to share material via social media never rose beyond 12.5%. As the semester progressed, some students did increasingly 'buy' into the project and a proportion began to 'like' and 'favourite' items that were posted both on Facebook and Twitter by the module leader. Indeed, usage dramatically increased in the wake of Nelson Mandela's death and the flurry of media interest that this event generated; although it probably helped that his life and legacies were studied in class only a matter of weeks beforehand. Interestingly, some students were still continuing to 'like' posts more than six months after the module had finished – evidence that they were still checking the page and engaging with the subject matter long after they had stopped studying it.

While the students were evidently accessing the tools on a frequent basis, what did they gain from the project? One important aspect mentioned in the student feedback was a social component. Many enjoyed being brought into contact with one another, allowing them to identify and network with their new classmates. Although the vast majority of these interactions occurred away from the modules' 'official' Facebook pages or Twitter hashtags, the students' feedback stated that it helped to add a social dimension to the class. Moreover, the overall comments about what they gained from the social media project were extremely positive:

> The use of Facebook encourage[d] more participation, and broadened my interest in Africa.

> The links and posts were very useful in identifying information that I would never have come across.

> Superb idea. Found it really useful and had never seen this in a module before.

> I find the Facebook page a good way to reach out to students, it gets us more interested in the module and current African issues. Loved it!

> Really interesting and helpful, keeping me up to date with current information about South Africa. Shamefully I actually found out about Mandela's death through the Facebook post that [was] posted that night

> It assisted with reading around the topic even if not directly linked to that week's subject – it helped me gain a deeper understanding of Africa

Not only was the project enjoyable for the students, the process of engaging with the social media platforms for each module ensured that there was a positive academic outcome too. Through utilising and interacting with these online platforms outside of the classroom, the information that was accrued on the Facebook pages in particular assisted in broadening and developing their perspectives about the African continent. Encouragingly, a number of students recognised that using the social media component enhanced their own knowledge and understanding of the subject.

However, what requires further analysis is the *nature* of the students' usage of the social media tools during this project. While the data clearly demonstrate that students regularly accessed these tools, the statistics need to be unpacked, as the questionnaire results do not reveal the full picture. The first observation is that essentially all of the student engagement revolved around Facebook and not Twitter. The obvious explanation is that in Level 3 this was not the social media network of choice. Even though the Level 4 class had expressed interest in Twitter, relatively few students actually had accounts, and even fewer chose to engage through this medium. Furthermore, the project found there was an enormous degree of resistance in changing student attitudes towards different social networks and encouraging them to utilise different platforms. At the beginning of each semester, introductory sessions about using social media as part of their academic learning and development were held, outlining the potential that Facebook and Twitter had (as well as discussing other issues such as privacy). However, despite the obvious benefits that Twitter offers for collaboration, sharing, and interacting with people across the world, no student who was not already on that network said that they would join it. An important question that requires further analysis is why not? It is hard to discern individual reasons behind their choices, but in short, I would argue that such a stance is connected to ideas of validity concerning a social network (i.e. what is its prime function), questions of separating their private and educational spheres, and personal motivations about the learning experience more broadly.

The second observation was in terms of how students actually used the social media platforms. Although 56.2% (Level 3) and 12.5% (Level 4) of students added content at least once during the semester, these figures slightly obscure the broader picture. Perhaps the more instructive figure is that 77% (Level 3) and 62.5% (Level 4) did not fully interact with social media but instead chose to watch what others did. Granted, more than 50% of the Level 3 class added content at least once, but many of those did not do so again, with only a small proportion continuing to drive the process forward. The result was that the vast majority of students in both classes did not want to be part of the knowledge creation process. Instead, they simply wanted to be directed to where learning materials could be found. What was witnessed is a general passivity by the student body, who used the social media applications as a 'sponge' for easily accumulating more information with little or no effort on their behalf. Indeed, one student openly admitted that they used the page "for taking rather than adding", and such a sentiment was repeated in the feedback. Similar findings appear in the academic

literature. Carr (2010) argues that "we are evolving from cultivators of personal knowledge into hunters and gatherers in the electronic data forest", which does little to aid deeper learning and more rounded individuals. Selwyn (2012, p. 6) also raised a similar concern that social media applications do not actually encourage the innovative or communal participation that is often anticipated and are instead "most often appropriated for the one-way passive consumption of content… [that] encourages most people to free-ride on the efforts of a minority". However, such findings are not necessarily surprising when one considers the statistics concerning how people use social media platforms. For example, 40% of Twitter users worldwide use it only as a "curated news feed of updates that reflect their passions" (Holt, 2013). Put simply, although very few people might actually generate or create unique content, it does not mean that students who are 'spectating' are not learning or developing from what has been shared or posted via social media platforms.

As the project developed, it emerged that several factors prevented students from fully embracing social media as part of their studies. The first issue was privacy. Although an introductory session about social media use was held for both modules, issues of internet privacy amongst the students was a core concern, and many openly admitted to being worried about posting on open forums such as Twitter and Facebook. Furthermore, they were extremely wary about leaving a permanent and retrievable post online that might be deemed 'incorrect' or 'stupid'. The stats bear this out. In both classes, not one person debated an issue via Facebook or Twitter, while only 2.1% (Level 3) and 12.5% (Level 4) left a comment – those that were made were confined solely to asking classmates for books or lecture notes. Secondly, there was a tendency to wait until other students became actively involved before participating themselves. This trend was noticeable within both modules, with students remaining largely 'silent' as they waited to see a groundswell of peer-usage before interacting themselves. One Level 4 student commented that "for the Facebook page to work more smoothly more relevant information needs to be added by everyone in order to make it more helpful". Thirdly, the tasks set were not marked, and thus were regarded as optional by the majority. Most students are strategic in their academic studies, and because the project did not count towards their final grade, only the most conscientious were likely to contribute. Lastly, there was a minority who either never or rarely participated because they saw a 'work' based Facebook or Twitter page as an intrusion into their social lives – findings that chime directly with a study carried out by Madge et al. (2009). Although the boundaries between work and private lives are increasingly being blurred, there was a sense that the two should remain separate where possible. For example, several students commented that:

> My Facebook is personal and I don't want to use it for uni work.

> I use Facebook in my free time for enjoyment and non-academic purposes. I did not want to mix personal accounts with academic work.

> Social media is for social/personal purposes rather than work related things.

Potential solutions to some of these concerns would be to use web tools such as *Padlet*, *Ning*, or *Yammer*, websites that allow for the linking of information into specific online communities and offer collaborative discussion features as well as the important option of a private group function. Such websites provide alternative tools that would ensure the separation between academic and social spheres, while addressing questions of privacy. However, these platforms were not considered for this project, because using Facebook and Twitter has become a central part of students' day-to-day lives. It is precisely because students use these platforms so frequently that they offer a greater chance of them utilising them in their academic studies. This view is supported by Deng and Tavares (2013), who found that students showed little interest in using an alternative online forum to Facebook (in their case Moodle) and did so only when required.

The ultimate objective of the project was to encourage deeper learning and a greater affinity for their modules, aided in part through the use of social media platforms. However, many students simply want to pass their modules, rather than develop and broaden their understanding of a topic. It is difficult to motivate everyone to participate without resorting to grading their social media interactions, which is something the author is reticent to introduce. The challenge for lecturers is how to shift the majority of students away from simply passively consuming the efforts of others into innovative and active contributors to the social media platforms.

How can social media tools be utilised more effectively so that the majority of students are encouraged to engage actively with this medium? Comparing the outcomes of the two test classes is instructive. From the available evidence, the Level 3 class, which had been set tasks from the first week, participated far more frequently in the dissemination of information and were also more likely to contribute and interact than their peers at Level 4. It would appear that through a process of early acclimatisation, students in Level 3 became inculcated into using social media platforms, and a significant proportion continued to use and add material throughout the semester. As this project rolls over into a new academic year, this lecturer will encourage students to develop the habit of contributing material via social media on a regular basis through tasks which are connected directly to class discussions in an effort to overcome student 'silences' online. In fact, this was something requested in the student feedback:

> I am aware that at times I could have used it more – perhaps a few more specific tasks or questions?

> *Great idea, but participation needs to be forced by the lecturer.*
>
> *It would be better if participation was actively encouraged e.g. setting more tasks.*
>
> *With more direction from the lecturer it could work brilliantly.*

In response to these comments, assignments and questions relating to each week's tutorials will be introduced by: creating quizzes; requesting for students to find specific information; or asking for contributions to a debate question. Adding this dimension should ensure that there is a greater focus and purpose to the social media interactions and help students to recognise the benefits of their contributions. Furthermore, in a bid to increase the 'legitimacy' of these platforms and encourage greater 'ownership' of the project, voluntary page administrators will be sought who can keep the page updated and introduce student-led initiatives.

Finally, with hindsight, more qualitative data through interviews or focus groups should have been collected throughout the semester. This would have enabled corrective measures to be implemented and perhaps offered an insight into student motivations, especially given the paradox that there was a demand for these platforms to be introduced yet an unwillingness to 'actively' participate. Therefore, interviews and focus groups will be introduced to expand data sets as well as providing a mechanism that will allow for improvements to be made on a continual basis.

Conclusions

The social media project conducted during the 2013/14 academic year provided extremely useful and insightful evidence with regard to the use of these tools to facilitate increased student participation and engagement outside the classroom. Overall, the project demonstrated the potential these platforms have for teaching Humanities subjects to Higher Education students and adds another dimension to the ongoing debates. The use of Facebook was particularly popular, and far more so than Twitter, with the data indicating that the majority of students used and interacted with the social media tools on a regular basis during the study of their modules. For some learners, use of this dimension assisted them in developing a deeper understanding and knowledge of the African continent. The feedback from both classes was favourable, and those students who actively engaged with the project contributed some genuinely interesting and exciting material. What is extremely encouraging is that some students realised that this was an innovative process that made them think far more deeply about their studies – a crucial objective of Higher Education teaching.

Although many students did regularly access the social media tools, the next step will be to encourage them to participate far more actively in these platforms. One outcome from this project was that student engagement did not occur or sustain itself organically, and therefore specific structures must be implemented in order for it to work effectively. This goal can be facilitated through relatively small interventions such as: introducing specific tasks and incentivising student participation, connected to each week's intended learning objectives; a clear explanation of the benefits of contributing to the social media tools; and offering learners a stake in the 'ownership' of the project. Clearly, when the necessary conditions are established that inculcate and encourage participation amongst the student body, there is a greater chance that they will interact more effectively throughout the semester. Only once these steps have been implemented and taken root might the instructor be able to reduce their involvement. The outcomes suggest that through carefully planned tasks via social media platforms, these tools have the potential to nurture and develop increased participation and engagement outside the classroom for Humanities students.

Biography

Matthew Graham is a lecturer in History and Politics at the University of Dundee, with a particular focus on Southern Africa. As part of his teaching, Matthew is keen to utilise and integrate innovative methods into his modules such as social media platforms to enhance undergraduate learning.

m.v.graham@dundee.ac.uk

@SAhistoryMatt

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