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CONTENT & OPINIONS

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FROM THE EDITOR

Teaching Across Generations

When I began my teaching career over 37 years ago at a small Southern high school, my tools for the classroom included a chalk board and a filmstrip slide projector. I made copies on a mimeograph machine, and inhaling the blurred purple “hot-off-the-press” ink was the recreational marijuana equivalent of its day. As I continued to teach secondary and college students for nearly the next four decades, the tools of the trade definitely improved, and I noticed that unsurprisingly how students learned was changing as well. As classroom devices advanced—chalk boards were replaced with smart boards, film projectors were popped in the utility closet to make way for VCR and DVD players—the student learning experience also took on a contemporary expectation.

Today our business law courses are stocked with the latest of gadgets for content delivery—from Elmo Boards to HyFlex integrated systems—and students are simultaneously continuing to change in the way they access and process information. Traditional lectures have taken a back seat to experiential learning, and multimedia components are nearly indispensable to assignments and classroom exercises. With adult student attention spans of about 10 minutes, it is essential for the classroom environment to incorporate active learning, multimodal delivery, and create practical connections with the real world. This combination of technology and understanding of how individuals learn will help us as teachers with the ultimate goal: graduating students not only armed with a cadre of facts and skills, but with a sense of wholeness—a sense of themselves as being fully capable human beings with the ability to have a meaningful impact in the world.

In this issue of the *Journal of Business Law & Ethics Pedagogy*, the featured authors provide—through the use of technology and examination of important concerns—exercises and research we can apply to help our students develop this “sense of themselves” in the world. Volume 4 Issue 1 includes writings that explore business ethics; use social activism to generate student discussions of employment law, racial injustice, and freedom of speech; apply commonly used social media tools in business law teaching; and describe a practice-orientated, innovative new business degree program.

In the first article, *Content and Location of Business Ethics in the Undergraduate Business Curriculum*,

Professors Nancy Lasher, Donna Steslow, and Sue Kong discuss how the mission of including ethics within business school curriculums has been contemplated both historically and in the present. Through their research, the authors provide us with an understanding of how educators are incorporating the ever important lessons of business ethics into their respective programs, and add to our students’ ability to make better ethical and legal decisions in the workplace and life.

Author Brian Levey begins a conversation about freedom of speech and employment law through his case *Oh Say Can You Sit? Colin Kaepernick, Freedom of Speech and the Workplace*. Featuring the widely known social activism of sports figure Colin Kaepernick in 2016, Professor Levey provides this ready-to-use exercise to discuss speech rights—or the lack thereof—in your place of employment. Many students will be surprised to learn that most employees do not enjoy the legal right to speak freely at work (think *Dixon v. Coburg Dairy Incorporated*).

In the article *How Twitter (Unintentionally) Saved my Semester*, author William Murphy explores the use of the social media site *Twitter* as a learning tool to increase student engagement. Professor Murphy's experience with the content delivery changes associated with the pandemic was the impetus to apply this somewhat unorthodox learning platform. See the effectiveness of this clever method in the student responses he gathered, and decide if incorporating these contemporary tools would enhance the learning in your own F2F, Online, or Hybrid classroom.

Professors Spenser Robinson, Jeff Thomas, and Joseph Affholter describe an innovative new graduate degree program in their article *Case Study of the New Entrepreneurial Transactions Master's Degree: Filling a Gap in Business And Legal Education*. The authors explain in their writing that the literature identified a need for more practice-oriented, truly cross-discipline education incorporating legal aspects—and thus the “Entrepreneurial Transactions” master's degree was born. Read about the development of this unique program which blends both business and law, and provides future business owners with head start toward a successful endeavor.

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Christine Ladwig
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

How Twitter (Unintentionally) Saved My Semester

*William Murphy**

ABSTRACT

This paper explores dramatic increases in student engagement and performance while using social media as a learning tool both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic and demonstrates the potential of social media as either a supplement for face-to-face learning or a primary platform for intended distance learning. It examines the integration of social media into the lives of students while discussing its immense accessibility and functionality for educational purposes. Relying upon relevant empirical data and a specific case study, the paper additionally provides adaptable strategies for producing effective content through social media's many simple and free posting and live features to positively impact student engagement, participation, learning, and academic performance.

KEY WORDS: SOCIAL MEDIA, LEARNING PLATFORM, DISTANCE LEARNING, COVID-19, STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

I. Introduction

This is not your normal journal article. Then again, these are not normal times. Similar to actions taken by countless other colleges and universities across the country, on March 9, 2020, my university provided me with only three days' notice to transition my three face-to-face courses to distance learning for a period of three weeks. Only one short week later, I received notice that distance learning would continue for the duration of the academic year. After nearly a decade of teaching, I am somewhat reluctant to admit that I had never taught online before. To say I was intimidated would be a major understatement, but despite what you may be thinking, this story actually neither starts nor ends with COVID-19. It instead begins with an idea I had months before. Little did I realize at the time that not only would that idea save what would eventually become my socially distanced semester, but it would also provide a blueprint for accessible and successful distance learning with today's students moving forward.

Rewind to the fall semester of 2019. Teaching the same three courses as I did this past spring, I found myself growing increasingly frustrated as an educator, more so than ever before. Specifically, I felt ignored. Not ignored in my classroom, where laptops and smartphones are banned and I take great pride in the edutainment value and significant interactivity of my lectures, but rather outside of the classroom where important information is shared, content is cemented, and students learn for themselves. Countless hours were spent on carefully worded and detail-oriented syllabi, announcements, message boards, directions, etc. at the expense of time with my wife and newborn son in the hope that my students would engage with my courses more independently. Yet, I found myself repeating the same information and answering the same questions over and over more than ever before during lectures and through individual emails from students as if they were completely unaware that all the answers they sought were already in front of them. To be honest, at one point I even considered responding to the deluge of emails and questions easily answered by referring to one of the previously mentioned course resources with a short and simple one word response:

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“Blackboard.” In the end, though, I simply could not do it and reluctantly gave in with feigned pleasantries time and time again. Expectedly, the student engagement data, or lack thereof, for my courses’ Blackboard pages was the stuff of nightmares for any genuinely invested professor.

At the same time however, I grew increasingly observant of my students, intentionally arriving earlier than usual to my lectures. In my experience, a lot can be learned about students by casually observing their behavior outside of formal and structured class time. What I saw should come as no surprise to anyone who works directly with students. Whether sitting at a desk in the classroom, standing outside in the hall, or even engaged in a conversation with friends, every single one of them was glued to their phones until roll call began and again immediately after the words “that’s it for today” were uttered. When I would innocently ask my students what they were looking at that was so important, the answer always involved some form of social media, most often Instagram. My students’ seemingly compulsive use of social media truly hit home for me while chaperoning an annual October trip to Washington, D.C. In this truly remarkable program, participating students receive VIP tours of the Capitol, Supreme Court, and White House. Despite all of these once in a lifetime opportunities, the only thing the students seemed concerned with was taking pictures of themselves, ostensibly for posting on their respective social media.

As that semester endured, I continued realizing just how ubiquitous social media was in my students’ lives. After submitting my final grades, I began to reflect on my aforementioned frustrations and mused about captivating students the way their phones and Instagram feeds do. At the risk of being utterly cliché, I began mindlessly scrolling through my own social media, noting interesting things about friends and happenings across the world throughout the day, and that is when the idea hit me right in the face. What if I was on my students’ Instagram feeds? What if, between their friends’ photos, goofy memes, targeted advertisements, and personalized news stories, was me or something about one of my courses? What if an alert went off every time I posted something? What if students could respond to course curriculum and updates with comments, likes, and shares as they do other content? What if I could even turn each unit into its very own hashtag?!

Now, many colleges and universities and their individual departments are no stranger to social media, maintaining a strong and consistent presence. However, and this is wholly my personal opinion, they are not using the medium properly if the endgame is to effectively communicate information to students. Posting copied and pasted text from emails or photos of flyers hanging in the cafeteria simply does not cut it. Frankly, to the extent students even follow their institution and its subdivisions on social media, I think they are somewhat turned off by the inherent formality of it. In other words, while colleges and universities are already using social media, they are not using social media the way today’s students use social media. With this in mind, I set off on winter break determined to devise a way of translating my courses, and me as an instructor, into the social media language spoken by my students.

II. Literature Review

Full disclosure, in my conception, development, and subsequent implementation of an effective, educational social media account, I relied on absolutely no data, research, or studies. I had a gut feeling and “went with it” for lack of a better expression. Although I may have personally been flying blind, in hindsight, the resulting success I initially attributed to nothing more than dumb luck and my own good instincts actually possesses strong empirical support.¹ Specifically, as pertains to today’s college population, social media use overwhelmingly serves two critical life functions that prior generations performed and processed very differently: communication² and information.³ Distinguishable from their generational predecessors, the majority of current college students favor visual communications,

¹ Facundo Froment, Alfonso Javier García González & M. Rocío Bohórquez, *The Use of Social Networks as a Communication Tool Between Teachers and Students: A Literature Review*, 16 *TURKISH ONLINE J. EDUC. TECH.* 126, 128–29 (2017).

² Bumsoo Kim & Yonghwan Kim, *College Students’ Social Media Use and Communication Network Heterogeneity: Implications for Social Capital and Subjective Well-Being*, 73 *COMPUTS. HUM. BEHAV.* 620, 625–26 (2017).

³ Sydney Grant, *How Do College Students Get Their News?*, *SCHOLARSHIPPOINTS* (Mar. 12, 2019), <https://www.scholarshippoints.com/campuslife/how-do-college-students-get-their-news/>.

customizable experiences, and mobile technology, all preferences perfectly aligned with smartphones and social media.⁴ Notably, each of the aforementioned preferences also helps personify overarching themes that have come to characterize today's college students and their connection with social media, the need for community, and instantaneousness in all facets of life.⁵

Over ninety-eight percent of people age eighteen to twenty-nine use social media and, back in 2014, 27.2% of college students reported spending more than six hours on social media per week.⁶ In 2020, this number is likely far greater as more recent studies not specific to college students indicate that adults generally spend an average of two hours and twenty-three minutes per day on social media⁷ and anecdotal comments from current college students suggest anywhere from three to five hours of daily usage per day.⁸ Forty-four percent additionally report checking social media hourly, and ninety-one percent report having their devices in bed with them at night, suggesting that they are checking on digital devices both first thing after waking up in the morning and last thing before falling asleep at night.⁹ In contrast, seventy-two percent of students report treating emails from student groups like spam, over fifty percent ignore emails from the university and faculty, and forty percent ignore emails from advisors.¹⁰ Despite recent decreases in market share, the online learning platform Blackboard is nevertheless still used by tens of millions of college students nationwide. The platform has been so laughably incapable of maintaining student engagement that it spawned multiple "I hate Blackboard" meme campaigns even as it desperately proclaimed students wouldn't "hate" an upcoming software upgrade.¹¹

On an institutional level, nearly all colleges and universities are now attempting some form of student engagement through social media in light of these growing trends, doing so primarily for the purposes of attracting applicants, allowing students to share their experiences, answering student questions, and connecting with alumni.¹² The strategies employed, and their respective compatibility with students' typical uses of social media, often dictate success or lack thereof.¹³ Common missteps include sporadic activity, unresponsiveness, "hootsuite-ing" identical posts across multiple platforms, high quality but otherwise generic and occasionally archaic content created by paid publicists, and a lack of genuine interactivity and personalized touch.¹⁴ Research from the private advertising and marketing sector provides far more effective approaches for leveraging social media to drive student

⁴ *Social Media Use Among College Students and Teens—What's In, What's Out and Why*, MODO LABS: BLOG (Apr. 26, 2016), <https://web.archive.org/web/20200506080055/https://www.modolabs.com/blog-post/social-media-use-among-college-students-and-teens-whats-in-whats-out-and-why/>.

⁵ Elaina Loveland, *Instant Generation*, NAT'L ASS'N FOR COLL. ADMISSION COUNSELING, <https://www.nacacnet.org/news--publications/journal-of-college-admission/instant-generation/> (last visited Jan. 24, 2021).

⁶ Riley Griffin, *Social Media Is Changing How College Students Deal with Mental Health, for Better or Worse*, HUFFINGTON POST (July 22, 2015), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/social-media-college-mental-health_n_55ae6649e4b08f57d5d28845.

⁷ Marie Ennis-O'Connor, *How Much Time Do People Spend on Social Media in 2019?*, MEDIUM (Aug. 8, 2019), <https://medium.com/@JBBC/how-much-time-do-people-spend-on-social-media-in-2019-infographic-cc02c63bede8..>

⁸ Yasmeen Bannourah, *The Effects of Social Media and Technology on College Students*, MARYMOUNT UNIV.: THE BANNER, (Feb. 5, 2019), <https://commons.marymount.edu/tbanner/2019/02/05/the-effects-of-social-media-and-technology-on-college-students/>.

⁹ Ryan Jenkins, *How Generation Z Uses Technology and Social Media*, NEXT GENERATION SPEAKER, <https://blog.ryan-jenkins.com/how-generation-z-uses-technology-and-social-media> (last visited Jan. 24, 2021).

¹⁰ *4 Reasons Students Don't Read Your Emails—And How to Change That*, EAB (Apr. 24, 2019), <https://eab.com/insights/daily-briefing/student-success/4-reasons-students-dont-read-your-emails-and-how-to-change-that/>.

¹¹ Molly Hensley-Clancy, *Blackboard Promises Students Won't Hate Its New Software*, BUZZFEED: NEWS (July 21, 2015, 8:02 AM), <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/mollyhensleyclancy/blackboard-tries-to-win-over-students-with-software-overhaul>.

¹² Doug Ridley, *How Today's Colleges and Universities Are Using Social Media*, VITAL, <https://vtldesign.com/digital-marketing/social-media/how-todays-colleges-and-universities-are-using-social-media/> (last visited Jan. 24, 2021).

¹³ Umika Pidaparthy, *How Colleges Use, Misuse Social Media to Reach Students*, CNN: BUS. (Oct. 20, 2011, 8:58 AM), <https://www.cnn.com/2011/10/20/tech/social-media/universities-social-media/index.html>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

enrollment and engagement.¹⁵ As a guiding principle, understanding that social media use varies significantly from platform to platform and that reach—defined in terms of the number of followers—does not equate to engagement is critical.¹⁶ Put plainly, different content must be created specifically for each social media platform because each is used differently and also must include some opportunity for interactivity beyond a mere static view. When consuming content, students seek regularity, authenticity, value added beyond the underlying product such as insights or tips, and the ability to retweet, comment, like, or take some other form of passive action.¹⁷ Students additionally crave direct and ongoing communications individually customized to each of them through tags, mentions, and the messaging features of each platform.¹⁸

When properly used as a learning tool, data “suggests that social media assists students with acquiring new information, facilitates connections with course materials[, instructors,] and peers, and improves productivity.”¹⁹ “[S]ocial media communication devices facilitate students to retrieve information and interact with others in real-time regarding sharing teaching materials contents.”²⁰ Drawn in by attention-grabbing visuals common across all social media platforms, students are inherently more attracted to and interested in the embedded information or messaging than they otherwise would be and are, in turn, motivated to follow an appealing account and receive instant notifications on their smartphones whenever new content is available.²¹ Where said information or messaging is both correct and current, the simplified yet visually complex nature of social media allows for greater accessibility and ease in mastering challenging or difficult concepts.²² Learning is further enhanced by interactivity between students and a given account, either publicly through comments, reactions, and shares or privately in more intimate, direct messaging between an individual student and the account holder.²³ Shared articles, relevant livestreams, and surveys are among several other student-friendly social media features that may aid in driving enthusiasm, engagement, and performance.²⁴

From an instructor’s perspective, social media provides avenues for humanizing oneself and relating to students through strategically cultivated and subsequently shared personal information supplementing course curriculum.²⁵ By appropriately breaking down some social barriers between instructors and students, social media creates “a more informal, collegial, and interactive learning environment” as well as “deeper interpersonal connections.”²⁶ These connections correlate positively with increased participation and increased engagement, resulting in improved academic

¹⁵ *Attention Brand Marketers: Leverage these Insights into Generation Z’s Social Media Habits*, BARNES & NOBLE COLL.: BRAND P’S HIPS (Jan. 2, 2019), <https://partnerships.bncollege.com/2019/01/attention-brand-managers-leverage-these-insights-into-generation-zs-social-media-habits/>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Social Media in the Classroom: Opportunities, Challenges & Recommendations*, UNIV. WASH.: IT CONNECT, <https://itconnect.uw.edu/learn/research/ecar-social-media/> (last visited Jan. 24, 2021).

²⁰ Jamal Abdul Nasir Ansari & Nawab Ali Khan, *Exploring the Role of Social Media in Collaborative Learning the New Domain of Learning*, 7 SMART LEARNING ENV’TS 9, 21 (2020).

²¹ Samantha Brown, *How Social Media Can Benefit College Learning*, STANFORD UNIV.: COLL. PUZZLE (Oct. 15, 2019, 5:55 AM), <https://collegetpuzzle.stanford.edu/how-social-media-can-benefit-college-learning/>.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Using Social Media for Learning*, UNIV. ARIZ. GLOB. CAMPUS (Apr. 3, 2020), <https://www.uagc.edu/blog/using-social-media-as-a-learning-tool>.

²⁵ Julie A. Delello, Rochell R. McWhorter & Kerri M. Camp, *Using Social Media as a Tool for Learning: A Multi-Disciplinary Study*, 14 INT’L J. ON E-LEARNING 163 (2015).

²⁶ *Id.*

performance.²⁷ Similarly, collaborative active learning through social media increases peer interaction, relationship building, and a sense of academic community all beneficially affecting student retention and success.²⁸ Social media learning additionally provides the potential for creating inclusive and safe learning environments for disabled or introverted students,²⁹ more authentic and impactful distance learning opportunities,³⁰ and professional development.³¹ Nevertheless, a majority of instructors do not incorporate social media learning into their curricula, with one study finding that eighty-two percent of students “never or rarely used the technology to facilitate offline engagement within their academic communities.”³²

III. Methods

Choosing the proper platform presented the first important decision in implementing social media learning for my courses. Although Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube are the most popular social media platforms among current college students,³³ I instead chose to use Twitter for a variety of reasons. First, the mere nature of a college course, no matter how experimental or innovative, requires at least the occasional sharing of, simply put, textual information. Twitter’s functionality enables not only the creation of appealing visual content but the creation of straightforward textual content as well, whereas with Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, any information shared must take a primarily visual or even audiovisual form. That said, Twitter’s 280-character limit per tweet aids in stimulating student attention and focus while avoiding the dullness and tediousness typical of routine course announcements and emails. Second, content shared on Twitter remains on an account’s feed unless deleted and is easily re-emphasized through a timely retweet. In other words, by just scrolling through my Twitter feed, students could review a complete record of all activity throughout the semester. On some of the more popular platforms, considerable content is removed after only twenty-four hours. Third, marketing research shows that Twitter provides superior methods for direct, real-time interaction,³⁴ a key asset for captivating an audience craving customization and instantaneity. Fourth, Twitter possesses something of a professional credibility or legitimacy lacked by other platforms known more for showcasing users’ personality and private lives.³⁵ For example, news of major world events is likely to break on Twitter in current times while viral Instagram stories are more likely fodder for future memes.³⁶ And fifth, knowing many students do not prefer or even use Twitter,³⁷ I viewed it as an additional learning opportunity beyond my curriculum for enhancing social media literacy.

²⁷ Ansari & Khan, *supra* note 20, at 20–21.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 21.

³⁰ Manuela Willbold, *Social Media in Education: Can They Improve the Learning?*, ELEARNING INDUS. (Apr. 27, 2019), <https://elearningindustry.com/social-media-in-education-improve-learning>.

³¹ *Using Social Media for Learning*, *supra* note 24.

³² Karen Sutherland, Cindy Davis, Uwe Terton & Irene Visser, *University Student Social Media Use and Its Influence on Offline Engagement in Higher Educational Communities*, 9 STUDENT SUCCESS, Mar. 2018, at 13.

³³ Dennis Green, *The Most Popular Social Media Platforms with Gen Z*, BUS. INSIDER (July 2, 2019, 10:57 AM), <https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-loves-snapchat-instagram-and-youtube-social-media-2019-6>.

³⁴ Dominique Jackson, *Twitter vs. Instagram: Which Is Best for Your Brand*, SPROUTSOCIAL (Oct. 12, 2015), <https://sproutsocial.com/insights/twitter-vs-instagram/>.

³⁵ Sara Fischer & Bryan Walsh, *The Nerve Center of the American News Cycle*, AXIOS (June 9, 2020), <https://www.axios.com/twitter-downloads-george-floyd-misinformation-226ea16c-84a0-4e2e-a85f-dfade902ed01.html>.

³⁶ Jackson, *supra* note 34.

³⁷ Green, *supra* note 33.

Learning the basics of Twitter use was simple enough and aided by reviewing one of the many excellent “How To” guides readily accessible through a standard Google search.³⁸ Content creation during the face-to-face learning portion of the semester prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic was also incredibly uncomplicated; all course content normally shared through either the course Blackboard page or email (such as announcements, assignments, documents, exams, information, policies, resources, syllabi, etc.) was tweeted. Retweeted stories of interest relating either to the courses or to students generally, open questions soliciting responses and discussion, polls and surveys, and occasional livestreams involving extra credit opportunities or helpful hints for assignments supplemented the course content. Also included was personal information I felt comfortable sharing such as dining and entertainment reviews, sports rants, Disney news, inside looks at my “side hustle” as a professional mixed martial arts instructor, and pictures of my newborn son and sneaker collection. When the COVID-19 Pandemic forced the transition to distance learning for the remainder of the semester, my university aggressively pushed instructors to train on and make use of platforms like Zoom, Skype, and WebEx. However, given the apparent success with using Twitter until that point, I opted to double down and simply livestream my lectures using the Twitter Live feature at the normal class meeting times. Students were invited either to join live and comment in real time or to watch later at their leisure and tweet at me any questions which would then be answered at the start of the next live lecture. Logistically, I instructed students on the very first day of class to take out their phones, open or download the Twitter app, follow my account, and also set a notification alert immediately viewable on their smartphones’ lock screens for whenever I tweeted. Students were informed that they could contact me throughout the semester by tweet, Twitter direct message, or email. The course Blackboard page was used solely for tasks for which Twitter lacked appropriate functionality. Surprisingly, to me at the time at least, these tasks were very limited in both scope and quantity and included only the submission of written assignments, the submission of completed exams and quizzes, and the posting of students’ grades with individualized feedback.

Among the biggest concerns for students, as well as instructors, when using social media for learning is personal privacy.³⁹ To allay any such concerns with my students, I made it very clear that while they were required to follow my Twitter account, under no circumstance would I follow any of theirs and, should they deem it necessary, they were encouraged to make their accounts private. To protect myself, I created a Twitter account completely detached and independent from my other personal and professional social media accounts specifically for my intended interaction with students. Other potential challenges to student buy-in reasonably anticipated by an instructor are students’ objections to social media use generally based on personal beliefs and self-wellness,⁴⁰ the perceived over-politicization of the medium,⁴¹ or, in the case of older, non-traditional students, reluctance based on lack of usage and unfamiliarity.⁴² Intuitive workarounds inherent in the Twitter platform assist in overcoming these obstacles. Unlike some other social media platforms, if a Twitter user’s account is set to “public,” another user need not “follow” the account, or even maintain a Twitter account of his, her, or their own in order to view its content. Visiting the account’s standard internet URL through any web browser will allow non Twitter users, and, by extension, those without smart technology altogether, to view the exact same content as if presented on a static, informational website, albeit without the comforting convenience of receiving instant alerts. While these alternatives were

³⁸ See, e.g., *Getting Started with Twitter*, TWITTER, <https://help.twitter.com/en/twitter-guide> (last visited Jan. 24, 2021).

³⁹ *Social Media in the Classroom*, *supra* note 19.

⁴⁰ Derek Powazek, *Why I Quit Twitter, a List*, MEDIUM (Aug. 17, 2018), <https://medium.com/@fraying/why-i-quit-twitter-a-list-e9b90e40da52>.

⁴¹ Sarah Perez, *Just 6% of US Adults on Twitter Account for 73% of Political Tweets . . . and They Disapprove of Trump*, TECHCRUNCH (Oct. 23, 2019), <https://techcrunch.com/2019/10/23/just-6-of-u-s-adults-on-twitter-account-for-73-of-political-tweets-and-they-disapprove-of-trump/>.

⁴² Mary Madden, *Older Adults and Social Media*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Aug. 27, 2010), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2010/08/27/older-adults-and-social-media/>.

advertised and offered along with the option of using email for communications, it should be noted that not a single student objected to using Twitter.⁴³

Outcomes assessment centered around three distinct themes: student feedback, student performance, and instructor convenience. Student feedback was surveyed through a traditional Likert scale presenting students with statements about using Twitter as a learning tool throughout the semester and inviting selection among choices ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” A different set of statements tied to a Likert scale presented students with statements about using Twitter as a learning tool during the COVID-19 Pandemic specifically. Additional targeted questions calling for open-ended responses were included to obtain more qualitative feedback. Sixty-one students were surveyed in total. Student performance was measured by the difference in students’ collective final grades converted numerically on a 4.0 scale across all of my courses between the Spring 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters. Spring 2019 was used as a control group rather than Fall 2019 because it involved an identical course load and the scheduling and sequencing of the courses shared significantly more similarities. I evaluated instructor convenience by simply comparing the number of course-related emails I received collectively during the Spring 2019 and Spring 2020 semesters and other anecdotal observations.

IV. Outcomes

Students responded to using Twitter as a communication and learning tool in my courses throughout the Spring 2020 semester generally as follows:

- 96.4% agreed or strongly agreed that the use of Twitter to communicate course information or content enhanced their learning experience throughout the semester.
- 87.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they processed and retained course information and content better when received through Twitter and other social media instead of emails.
- 87.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they preferred the use of Twitter and other social media to Blackboard announcements when receiving course information and content.
- 85.5% agreed or strongly agreed that they processed and retained course information and content better when received through Twitter and other social media instead of Blackboard announcements.

Students responded to using Twitter as a communication and learning tool in my courses during distance learning because of the COVID-19 Pandemic specifically as follows:

- 94.6% agreed or strongly agreed that when courses were moved online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of Twitter, other social media, and their posting and live features instead of Blackboard, WebEx, Zoom, and other similar communication tools allowed for a more effective and seamless transition to distance learning.
- 90.9% agreed or strongly agreed that when courses were moved online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of Twitter, other social media, and their posting and live features instead of Blackboard, WebEx, Zoom, and other similar communication tools made them feel more connected to the course and its content.
- 90.9% agreed or strongly agreed that when courses were moved online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of Twitter, other social media, and their posting and live features instead of Blackboard, WebEx, Zoom, and other similar communication tools made them feel more connected to the instructor.
- 92.7% agreed or strongly agreed that when courses were moved online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of Twitter, other social media, and their posting and live features

⁴³ In fact, now three semesters into utilizing this pedagogical approach, only one student out of approximately 225 has objected and, in that case, it was retrospective occurring only after the receipt of an unsatisfactory grade. Moreover, older students have proved not only among the most enthusiastic with this method, but among the most adept as well.

instead of Blackboard, WebEx, Zoom, and other similar communication tools allowed them to better meet their course goals and learning objectives.

- 90.9% agreed or strongly agreed that when courses were moved online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the use of Twitter, other social media, and their posting and live features was more effective overall than Blackboard, WebEx, Zoom, and other similar communication tools.

Additionally, 100% found the ability to watch and re-watch lectures on demand while using Twitter for distance learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic very helpful. Qualitative feedback received in response to open-ended questions was also overwhelmingly positive. While I could just copy and paste several of the more noteworthy quotes into this paper, I prefer to let you hear from my students themselves. Directly after finals, my students assisted me with creating a vlog documenting our “quarantine semester” together by recording and then tweeting their experiences with distance learning on Twitter in my courses during COVID-19. Our vlog is available on YouTube.⁴⁴

Looking at student performance, the average of all my students’ collective final letter grades converted to numbers on a traditional 4.0 academic scale increased by 0.43 from Spring 2019 to Spring 2020. Almost as pleasing to me as the improvement in student performance was the significant increase in free time I enjoyed because collective course-related emails during the semester dropped from 416 in Spring 2019 to only 117 in Spring 2020—during a period of extensive distance learning no less—a difference of 299 emails in total. That is a whole lot of emails I no longer needed to answer ☺.

V. Conclusions

I am no data scientist or empirical researcher, but I believe that my little experiment, both the intended and unintended parts, makes very clear that social media possesses great potential as a learning tool and may even be significantly more effective than the platforms and systems that are intended to operate as learning management tools and that charge ridiculous sums of money to colleges and universities nationwide. Further, with my students anyway, social media provided a more effective learning tool than not only the traditional learning platforms but also communication apps like Zoom, Skype, and WebEx during COVID-19-imposed distance learning. There are two key takeaways involving—unsurprisingly given today’s college student population—technology and instantaneousness. Creating strong student engagement, participation, and learning through properly utilized social media seems rather obvious when accounting for the fact that social media is, quite literally, fully integrated into their lives. Thus, by integrating academics into social media, academics are, in turn, more integrated into students’ lives and done so with immediacy. Students may be incredibly tech-savvy; however, they still prefer using familiar technology they already use routinely on a daily basis.

For me, Spring 2020 may well have been the least stressful and enjoyable semester of my teaching career. Strongly consider that statement given the surrounding circumstances. The countless hours previously spent creating carefully worded and detail-oriented syllabi, announcements, message boards, directions, and answering emails, *all of those emails with questions already answered ad nauseum in available text or prior lectures*, were happily spent with my wife and son instead. Why? Because everything students needed was easily found on my Twitter feed in 280 characters or less, a photo, or a live lecture automatically saved for students to watch or re-watch at any time they pleased. Better yet, for the first time in a long time I did not feel ignored. On the contrary, the challenge of creating appealing content for my students on Twitter inspired creativity, pride, and purpose on a level I seldom experienced over several years. Using social media as a learning tool forced me as an instructor to adapt, change, grow, and innovate in ways I would have thought unimaginable only months prior.

In the subsequent two semesters, I adapted and evolved my educational Twitter usage to better overcome unforeseen functional shortfalls while leveraging the many less obvious functional

⁴⁴ Will Murphy, *How Twitter Unintentionally Saved My Semester*, YOUTUBE (May 13, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLLXs922sZs&t=28s>.

benefits discovered throughout the initial experience described herein. Using Twitter's "Live" function to livestream lectures, for example, is woefully prohibitive in comparison to not only similar features on alternative social media platforms, but also the aforementioned Skypes, WebExes, and Zooms of the world. Specifically, Twitter "Live" is limited to an often fuzzy, singular shot and incompatible with common and expected features such as "screen share," let alone with the incredible capabilities of more advanced livestreaming software. This essentially left me tied to a desk presenting into my phone's camera, armed with an old school dry erase board behind me, and utilizing occasional pans to my laptop (where I literally pointed the phone camera at my laptop screen) to demonstrate or visually represent a concept where my sloppy handwriting on a small dry erase board proved insufficient. With ample advanced lead time, I transitioned lectures to YouTube for the following semesters. Not only is YouTube more popular with current students, its "Live" feature synchs nicely with various livestreaming software, allowing not only for necessary screen sharing, but also the use of multiple screens, multiple cameras and camera angles, and embedded audio and video content. Though some may consider the inability to see students during a lecture on Twitter or YouTube a hindrance, our experience was actually quite the opposite and continues to be. I was and am free to lecture absent the now all too familiar disruptions and kinks of the more routinely adopted audiovisual communication platforms and strategically moderate the live chat and its questions at the most convenient and effective times. Students, in turn, are less distracted by the formalities of appearing "on camera," more imperative and severe for some than others due to the increasing prevalence of housing insecurity of varying degrees, and actively engage in the live chat with each other and me to a level rivaling that of an in-person class, only with a less formal and more approachable vibe.

On balance, the additional unexpected advantages of Twitter usage further outweighed, and continue to outweigh, the constraints on livestreaming lectures inasmuch as they rendered the few logistical uses that I initially made of a traditional learning platform like Blackboard irrelevant and, honestly, somewhat archaic. In other words, if I could tweet an assignment or exam out to students, they could likewise tweet or direct message their completed assignment or exam answers right back at me, and they have organically chosen to do so in significant and perpetually increasing numbers since the Spring 2020 semester. What is more is that Twitter is redefining for me what a learning assessment can be by allowing for far more creative and innovative design with which I am currently experimenting. In lieu of an oral presentation on a legal case, students may script, produce, and tweet social media content involving that same legal analysis or, instead of drafting a traditional case brief succinctly limited to relevant facts, students can choose to provide a thorough and accurate case summary via tweet within Twitter's 280-character limit. These examples represent early design attempts popular with students that have met and exceeded course learning objectives thus far. Through direct messaging, I can additionally share with students their grades and the same comments and feedback I would on a traditional learning platform, only now in real-time through the convenience of a smartphone and with the ability to sustain conversation when needed as though we were merely texting. Frankly, at this point of my experience, I look at a newer traditional learning platform like Canvas clearly attempting to model itself on the feel of social media, most blatantly in its smartphone app form, and wonder when a college or university may just directly approach an actual social media company with the idea of integrating its academics and student management directly into the platform.

Looking forward, several blatant limitations and extensions of my very informal "study" are better left to more accomplished, competent, and experienced scholars. Chief among them is the role COVID-19 played, and continues to play, in this equation. In other words, would outcomes change if Twitter served its intended purpose in my courses as a supplement for face-to-face learning rather than a lifeline during emergency distance learning? Researchers should consider whether my outcomes remain consistent using Twitter in a reduced capacity and, additionally, as a format for intended distance learning, or whether they were merely an outlier reflecting outlandish circumstances. Along the same lines, it must be questioned what impact, if any, I personally had in producing these outcomes. Given that I was intimately familiar with the technology and very comfortable with creating the proper content, were my results predicated on me simply being the most accessible and appealing option for students during COVID-19 and, if not, could other instructors, without the same skillset, reliably replicate my results? Extending beyond the scope of this paper, the highly nuanced functionality of social media merits exploration. Among the many inquiries that pique my curiosity are: What content is most engaging for students and how often and in what ways are they

actively engaging with it? At what times of the day is content most effectively shared? And other than final grades, does social media positively impact student success through measures such as attendance, punctuality, meeting deadlines, and extracurricular activity? While my contributions to this discussion are far from conclusive, at the very least it is fair to say that social media presents an interesting opportunity for higher education warranting a much closer look. Twitter saved my semester after all, but it may be capable of a whole lot more than that.