The Journal of Social Media for Learning 2025

Editorial

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Welcome to our latest edition of The Journal of Social Media for Learning, which showcases the Journal of Social Media for Learning Conference and Global Paper Collection 2024-2025.

The Social Media in Higher Education Conference is its 10th year and cultivating mutually beneficial learning relationships using social media for learning, this edition of our journal celebrates recent conference contributions, and a collection of submissions from authors across the globe.

Our first paper is from Purvis and Beckingham and fittingly explores the Using social media safely and appropriately in higher education: A reflection on the last 10 years. This reflective paper charts a decade of work at Sheffield Hallam University to promote the safe, professional and purposeful use of social media in higher education. Responding to rising concerns about student online behaviour, the authors describe the development of institution-wide guidance, openly licensed resources, and a vibrant cross-sector community shaped through the SocMedHE conference. They highlight how evolving digital platforms, shifting ethical expectations, and the emergence of AI-generated content continue to reshape the landscape in which students and staff engage.

Encouraging early career researchers, and the publication of work completed during academic study, our next paper by Chapman, presents an Exploration of Foundation Degree Student Experiences of Navigating Digital Communities to Inform Their Undergraduate Studies at the University of Northampton. Centred on a single academic module, it highlights how guided engagement with tools such as Twitter and Wakelet, and the use of immersive digital platforms support students in developing professional networks and a clearer sense of digital identity. Drawing on connectivist principles, the module positions online networking as a catalyst for reflective practice and pedagogical growth. The paper highlights that many students benefit from increased confidence and opportunities for continued professional development, whilst also noting challenges, particularly for those with limited technological experience. It concludes by emphasising the need for sensitive facilitation to ensure digital participation remains supportive rather than overwhelming.

Next up is a fascinating piece of work by Sum who explores Social media for community building and self-development within Higher Education. Drawing on a personal narrative, the author examines how engaging in online forums (particularly the #LTHEchat Twitter /X community) helped broaden disciplinary horizons, foster meaningful connections, and cultivate a stronger professional identity. These digital interactions became transformative, offering access to new ideas, collaborative opportunities, and real-world insights into academic practice. The paper highlights social media's capacity to enhance learning, encourage multidisciplinary thinking, and reduce barriers between early career researchers and established colleagues. It concludes by emphasising the value of social media as a dynamic, empowering tool for professional growth and encourages educators to consider its role in also supporting students' development.

Our next submission, an academic poster, illustrates our encouragement of dissemination of academic work and findings in various formats. Through this poster, Bass reports on a design-led intervention using 'Discord' to support First Generation Students, who often experience lower continuation and degree outcomes. The study reviews existing support mechanisms, identifies barriers to progression, and implements Discord as a community platform selected by students for its social and educational affordances. Early results from Bass' work indicate increased engagement with students using the space for academic and informal exchange, alongside the fostering of peer relationships with minimal staff input.

Sharing research from across the globe, in a collaboration between authors in Brazil and Canada, our next paper by Paniago and Moura examines how globalisation, technologies, and digital culture shape educational practices within graduate programmes across Brazil, Canada, and the UK. Through a series of semi-structured interviews, the authors explore how digital culture creates possibilities such as enhanced connectivity, empathy, flexibility, and innovative pedagogies, alongside challenges, including intensified workloads, digital inequities, and power imbalances. Participants highlight the need for critical, context specific approaches to innovation which acknowledge cultural experiences and resist one-size fits all assumptions. The study argues for intercultural dialogue, ecological pedagogies, and intentional, community-driven innovation to ensure digital practices remain equitable, reflective, and transformative within higher education.

Next up Shelton and DeBlasi from Roger Williams University, Rhode Island, USA explore the rise of the 'de-influencing' trend on TikTok and its significance for understanding Generation Z's shifting attitudes towards consumerism, authenticity, and sustainability. It explores how micro-influencers are reshaping purchasing behaviours by discouraging excessive consumption and promoting ethical alternatives. The authors highlight Gen Z's preference for transparency, social responsibility, and critical engagement with influencer culture. The paper also proposes classroom applications, demonstrating how analysing de-influencing can foster critical thinking, media literacy, and awareness of broader social issues within communication and marketing education.

In our next piece, Mallon analyses What's Up with WhatsApp: Reflections on the Evolving Use of a Messaging Service by Students in Higher Education, reflecting on students' increasing use of WhatsApp to build learning communities in higher education. Drawing on interview data and teaching experience, it highlights both the strong sense of connection students gain and the significant risks created by engagement in unmoderated spaces. While WhatsApp groups can provide motivation, peer support, and a sense of belonging, they also expose users to privacy breaches, misinformation, academic misconduct, and negative interactions. The author argues that the widespread, informal adoption of WhatsApp requires urgent scholarly attention and clearer institutional guidance to ensure safe, equitable, and pedagogically beneficial practice.

Our next paper presented by Nguyen and Simpson presents a cross-sectional analysis of the informational quality of retinol related posts on Instagram. Using the DISCERN instrument, a tool used to assess the quality of written information on treatment choices for a health problem, to evaluate c100 Instagram posts which were tagged #retinol, the authors found overwhelmingly poor-quality content, with an average score of 1.27/5 using the DISCERN scoring metric. Almost all posts were created by non-physicians, and many failed to reference evidence, explain mechanisms, or discuss risks. Educational posts scored slightly higher but still indicated significant shortcomings. The study underscores the unreliable nature of social media as a source of dermatological information and highlights the need for greater expert involvement when navigating online skincare advice.

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In a carefully crafted review Blythe, Berhane and Fowler explore a significant shift in the assessment of pre-registration Nursing Associate students, driven by the limitations of high-stakes examinations and the need for more authentic, practice-aligned methods of evaluation. Presented against a backdrop of workforce shortages and increasing digitalisation in healthcare, the authors argue for assessment approaches that better mirror authentic clinical demands while maintaining a human-centred focus. The paper presents a case study which details the replacement of an open-book exam with a group podcast assessment, highlighting its potential to foster collaboration, critical thinking, digital competence, and inclusivity. Through interdisciplinary collaboration and critical pedagogical reflection, the study demonstrates how creative assessment design can strengthen preparedness for contemporary healthcare practice.

Closing this edition is a thought-provoking piece by Acun who examines Social Media in History Learning: Findings from a Project Involving Active Engagement. This paper reports on an experimental project exploring how active engagement with social media can enhance the efficiency of history teaching and learning. A bespoke series of videos, combining documentary, drama, and educational formats, was produced and shared across YouTube and Facebook social media channels, generating 255,000+ views and substantial user interaction. Analysis of viewer responses indicated strong approval of the project's design, content quality, and emphasis on critical thinking. The paper highlights that well-designed social media resources can support meaningful learning and offers a replicable model for future research in digital history education.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the time, effort and patience of all of our reviewers and authors who have worked in collaboration to provide us with a diverse and informative edition of the journal. Special mention must be made in recognition of the ongoing support and work undertaken by Catherine Dishman at Liverpool John Moore's University, home of the journal, in assisting with the OJS system used to facilitate and publish the journal.

Kindest
Dawne, Sue, Matt, David, Sarah and Hala

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