Analyzing User Engagement in a Private Social Media Educational Group

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Problem Statement

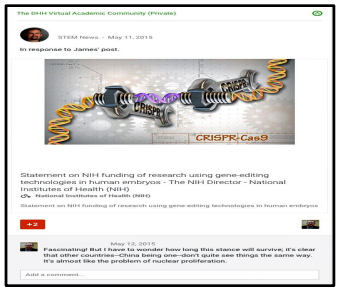
Educators often adopt social media platforms such as closed Facebook pages or Google+ Private Communities to facilitate course engagement [1]. IR professionals may be asked to determine if this strategy is effectively engaging participants.

Project Design

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Virtual Academic Community (DHHVAC) is part of a larger *iterative* and *incremental* model. This model includes the online community, and remote tutoring and mentoring programs. These features comprise a system designed to increase retention and GPAs of student participants. The model may be adopted by other organizations, especially those who serve students with other disabilities. The DHHVAC Private Social Media Groups were designed to decrease social isolation and present relevant and accessible information about STEM topics and opportunities to participants.

Background & Research Questions

Research on social media suggests that its primary function for young adults is image maintenance [2]. In mainstream social media, posts that have the most impact are usually posted on Tuesdays at 9:00am or 12:00pm [3]. *For this educational model, how does this closed group's activity differ from open mainstream social media? Can we use social media technology to provide information on STEM topics and decrease social isolation? How can we judge impact? What types of posts make the most impact?*



Methods

Materials. The DHHVAC uses both Google+ Private Community and Facebook Secret Groups as platforms to promote **socialization** and share **accessible media** with project participants. Posts reflecting participants' interests are shared 3-5 times weekly within the community. The G+ Community started in February 2013 and the FB Group began in October 2015.

Participants. D/HH and hearing individuals from RIT, Camden County College, and Cornell University and national and international community members. Google+ Community sign-up was mandatory, Facebook was optional.

Participants	Google + Private Community (n)	Facebook Secret Group (n)
Students (all D/HH)	48	9
Tutors (D/HH, Hearing Faculty, Grad Students, Upperclassmen)	19	2
Mentors (all D/HH STEM Professionals)	13	9
Staff (D/HH & Hearing)	12	7
Totals	92	27

Results

Lifetime Community Activity

Platform	Posts	Comments	Reactions/+1s	Views
FB (Oct 2015-April 2016)	S=18 T=3 M=22 SF=109	S=7 T=0 M=19 SF=108	S=33 T=0 M=67 SF=307	S=421 T=60 M=464 SF=689
G+ (Feb 2013-April 2016)	S=99 T=135 M=47 SF=627	S=133 T=223 M=242 SF=432	S=200 T=374 M=334 SF=757	N/A

High Impact Posts by Platform & Feature

Social Media Platform / Feature	Facebook (October 2015-April 2016)	Google+ (February 2013-February 2015)	Facebook & Google+ (October 2015-April 2016)
Day	Thursday	Tuesday	
Time of Day	12:00-1:00pm	1-3pm; 4-7pm	
Type of Post & Activity			Picture / View (n=651) Text / Reaction (n=236) Video / View (n=287)
Topic		Community (n=110 reactions)	Technology (n=465 total posts, comments, reactions, views)

Conclusions

- It is possible to create a community of practice using social media technology.
- Each social media platform has its benefits and its challenges.
- Timing of posts does make a difference, and the impact depends on the platform.
- Certain types of posts generate more reactions from the community than do others.

References
1 Wankel, L. & Blessinger, P. (2012). *Increasing student engagement and retention using social technologies: Facebook, e-portfolios and other social networking services*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Group.
2 Korpijakko, M. (2015). *Cracking Facebook: The importance of technology-based communication*. Boston: Sense Publishers.
3 Spasojevic, N., Li, Z., Rao, A., Bhattacharyya, P. (2015, 5 June). When-to-post on social networks. arXiv:1506.02089v1 [cs.SI]

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