Orchestrating the Student Experience with Social Media Tools


Paul Anderson, Kirsty Hughes, Hamish Macleod, Jessie Paterson

A PTAS funded project - http://edin.ac/14wOyMP
Project Aims

‣ What social media and related tools are people using in the University to support their teaching?
‣ How are these being used?
‣ What are the common general issues?
‣ (How) are they being used to facilitate explicit types of interaction?

“How can I choose a tool, and find a mode of using it, which will satisfy my pedagogical aims?

It can be difficult to identify an appropriate tool (or a mode of using such a tool) to meet specific pedagogic aims - sometimes the natural use of a particular tool is a good fit, and sometimes it needs creative abuse to make it fit.
Is it helpful to think about, and encourage specific interactions among students?

Can we classify the interactions supported by different social media tools?

If so, would this be useful in identifying different tools which may be helpful in particular situations?

Are there some useful interaction models which are not well supported by any existing tools?
What Are People Using?

We interviewed 12 staff members from across the University, with a wide range of experience in online tool use

› Semi-structured interviews
› Loose identification of themes/trends
› Workshop to discuss results

What, how & why?

› What tools do people use & why & how?
› Do people have an explicit pedagogical aim for any of these uses?
› What works & what doesn’t? what are the problems?
› Is there anything people would like to do, which they haven’t been able to do?
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Classifying Interactions

We attempted a very simple classification the interactions described in the interviews

- who is communicating with who, in what order?
- no analysis of message content
- email
- private blogs viewed by tutor
- assignment submissions
- lectures
- online videos
- student presentations
- web pages, Learn
- twitter
- e-portfolio
- reflective blog
» individual tutorial
» email exchange
individual feedback
(to or from the student)
- online polls
- MOOC multiple choices
- email feedback to web pages
- face-to-face group discussion
- skype, second life
- collaborate
- clickers
- twitter
Compound Interactions

There were quite a few cases of more complex procedures

- These are usually sequential compositions of individual interactions

For example ...

- Students prepare material which is presented and discussed at a tutorial. They then use the feedback to prepare an assignment which is submitted for assessment

- A closed collaborative wiki is used by groups of students to develop shared material. This is later made “open” to external comments
Non-functional Aspects

Synchronous?
› Does everyone need to be present at the same time?

Persistent?
› Do the contents remain visible indefinitely? (snapchat)

Anonymous?
› Is the poster anonymous?

Fluent?
› Is there a significant latency?
Is This A Useful Perspective?

There were very few cases where someone articulated a clear vision of an interaction which they explicitly wanted to initiate

- This makes it difficult to evaluate how useful this perspective is in designing interactions to meet a particular objective

But ...

- Feedback suggests that this can be a helpful way of thinking about tool use
- Other tools which perform a similar interaction may be useful alternatives

Is it worth a deeper analysis

- Of message content? Or sequencing?
- I don’t know!
Other Issues

Time & Effort

› Is it worth the time to investigate/learn/develop? for both staff and students?

› Learning multiple, constantly changing tools is not efficient tools can change quickly, requiring significant effort to keep up

Cultural or personal attitudes/preferences

› Some people have a natural tendency to share things (or not)

Privacy, Anonymity & Data Protection …

Internal vs External Systems …
Privacy & Anonymity

Students prefer to keep separate personal & work spaces
- eg. on Facebook
- This may lead to “exclusion” and other issues

Anonymity is an important consideration
- Can encourage people to participate (Peerwise? Wordpress aliases?)
- But can also be abused (Twitter?)

Accidental bleed between public & private spaces
- Lack of clarity about (eg.) staff membership of Facebook groups
- Postings on private Wordpress site then discussed in public Facebook

Tools are often deployed without a very explicit consideration of these issues
- Google hangouts posting discussions to uTube
Internal vs External Systems

Internal systems are good ...

- Access is restricted and students (and staff!) are not so exposed
- They provide data protection, and protection of ideas (copyright)
- We have some control over the availability and stability

Internal systems are not so good ...

- The privacy is unclear because staff have access and control
- Access is unavailable after students graduate
- It may not be easy to provide access for (eg.) external examiners, or job interviewers
- The need for stability and the lack of effort means that services usually lag behind those available externally
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