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SocMedHE21 Expert Panel.

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39

SocMedHE21 Expert Panel.

Introduction

At some point during the planning conversations for SocMedHE21, the idea of having an expert panel emerged. We decided that this was a good idea, and Sue, Suzanne, Dawne and Deb agreed to form the panel, with Sarah as the chair. We wanted this to be participant led, so we just suggested a few possible topics for an informal discussion rather than beginning with a presentation. This is how we announced it in the conference programme:

> *Join our panel of social media experts to find out how to make the most of social media for learning and teaching, for community building, for continued personal development and for professional recognition and advancement. Find us in the Student Union and join our informal conversation.*

We set up a Google Doc so that conference attendees could ask their questions in advance and linked that to the conference programme. We also encouraged people to tweet any questions, or to email them to Sarah if they preferred not to be named.

We all convened in the Student Union in Gather Town, as you can see from Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Tweet by @tavoer8

(https://twitter.com/tavoer8/status/1470878815299715073?s=20&t=8LgjHqMWOVLSxfjEOnRE9w)

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Question One

Sarah asked the first question:

> *How might educators use social media as a professional tool (and convince managers/ institutions that it was more than *just* sharing pics about what we ate for lunch)?*

Sarah chose this question because she had found during her own PhD research that people who do not use social media often think that it is only used for trivial interactions. As Joanne McNeil says: 'early criticism of Twitter could be distilled to a single (ironically tweet-like) sentence: "no-one cares what you had for breakfast"' (McNeil, 2019, p. 129).

The panellists took it in turn to answer each question:

Sue
The old saying "you don't know what you don't know" springs to mind! That's like saying a film or TV programme is rubbish when you have never watched it. Whilst it is true the quality or relevance of dialogue taking place within the many social media channels can vary, it is your choice who you follow or connect with!

As an educator to use social media as a professional tool it is important to consider what you want to achieve. A LinkedIn profile allows an educator to present a digital version of their achievements. By connecting with other educators they have the opportunity to read about items they share. This might include recent publications, the promotion of conferences, webinars or other CPD events, job openings, or interesting news in the sector. There is also an option to join a wide range of groups which allows for further discussion.

Twitter has long become my go to place for interesting information and discussions. My advice would be to follow educators you have shared interests with. Then look at who they are following, checking the bios to gain understanding of their role and interest. Look to see how they engage with others on Twitter and then decide if you would like to follow them too. Over time you will develop a personal learning network that is of value to you. Academic conferences often create a username and make use of a hashtag, for example @SocMedHE and #SocMedHE22. By following these, you can quickly keep abreast of information about the event, as tweets will take you to the relevant web pages. During the event attendees will share snippets of the sessions, utilising the hashtag. It provides a useful summary of the event and often a good way to revisit presentations where these are shared through SlideShare or the National Teaching Repository for example. In terms of CPD the weekly #LTHEchat is a fascinating and useful way to engage in discussions with other educators about topics relating to learning and teaching.

Dawne
This is a tough one but articulating the benefits of professional social media networks such as 'LinkedIn', that colleagues will be aware of and indeed may already use themselves, would be a good place to start - and to move forward from there.

Deb
I think for me, using twitter has been the most influential aspect of using social media as a professional tool as this has been instrumental in making connections and building my Personal Learning Network. I remember that before I started using it on a regular basis I just didn't 'get it' and couldn't see the point. It is definitely something that you need to experience for yourself. I think once colleagues can manage to get past the initial leap of faith that it takes to post that first tweet they would see the benefits. Granted there are of course a lot of downsides to twitter but for me the benefits far outweigh any negative aspects.

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For example, I'm particularly interested in how educators experience social support and wellbeing within social networking sites and this is something I am looking at in my own PhD research.

Question Two

The second question was from Gustavo Espinoza-Ramos. He asked:

> *Is there a specific criterion to select the social media platform? How effective would it be to provide more than one social media platform? I can see an opportunity to use a non-traditional (for example, Snapchat, LinkedIn) and a traditional assessment method (report) so that students can reflect on that experience (for example in case of professional development).*

Sue
Context is key. Social media platforms are used in different ways. Start with asking what do you want your students to achieve? For example if you want to focus on them developing a professional online presence then you can commence with a discussion about what this might look like. Then you can consider who is the likely audience you wish to communicate with or learn from. What channels are professional organisations using? LinkedIn is used by individuals (profile) and companies (page) so understanding how these are used is important. In one of my first year modules which focuses very much on employability skills, I see LinkedIn and more recently adopted Handshake as an essential extension to the CV. It is also useful for students to identify if potential employers are using other social media channels to gain an understanding of the organisation, for example YouTube and Twitter. Twitter is often used to promote job opportunities.

If you are wanting to encourage students to collaborate outside of the classroom for a group project, then this is where you can suggest they choose an agreed space to communicate. This should be student-led but it can be helpful to say that past student groups have chosen to use a variety of tools such as WhatsApp, SnapChat, Facebook Messenger, Discord and email.

I also make use of YouTube to share short video clips produced by others. The discussion of these then take place either in class or through a privately shared Padlet board. I choose not to ask students to do this in public, for example using Twitter.

Suzanne
Primarily you need to think about where your audience are. For example, when I'm using social media with my students, I ask them - "What platform do you want me to communicate with you on?" For personal/professional use, I use Twitter however my students are not on Twitter therefore it would be futile to attempt to communicate with them on Twitter. Since 2018, when I began asking this question my students have selected Snapchat as the platform they would like to communicate with me on. I created a Snapchat group that only students in that year group can see, contribute too.

For professional use I use Twitter, as that is where the audience that I am interested in are active and reside.

Dawne
From my perspective I would say no, there isn't a specific criteria per se. The platform, or platforms I use differ depending upon whichever approach I think would be the best to meet the needs of my students. It all hinges on the task we are undertaking. As you suggest in your question, sometimes using a combination of platforms can work well. If appropriate - and it is feasible to do so - some of the very best outcomes have been when my students have decided the approach (which platforms) to use.

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Deb

I think there are times that some platforms would be more appropriate than others, it depends on what you are trying to do and the intended audience. I think it also depends on how you use it. I suppose personal preference would also come into play as would previous interactions.

Question Three

The third question was from Edward Bolton. He asked:

> *How do you deal with designing a learning activity on social media and then a student does not want to use that platform?*

Sue

I encourage students to create a LinkedIn profile as an extension of their CV and outline the benefits. However if a student chose not to do this then that is their choice. With respect to other social media I think it is important for this to be optional. What can be very useful is having the conversations about how different channels might be used both in a social context and professionally; and what the implications of having a digital footprint might look like. I'd also remind students that university led social media led accounts, for example, Careers use of Twitter, can be very useful to follow as they are used to share information about careers fairs, CPD events, and job opportunities.

Suzanne

Whenever I use social media for learning and teaching it is optional, my students and I use it as a tutorial tool. This means that students can interact with me via traditional means, in class tutorials, after class or via e-mail. I respect the students' choice not to use, or limit their use of social media.

Dawne

In designing any learning activity it is always important to build in choice. So design the activity in such a way that it encourages your students to engage, but ensure that if they choose not to there will be no detriment impact on their experience and attainment.

Deb

For me I would probably want to think about designing the activity in such a way that alternative approaches would be built in from the start and that it didn't rest on a particular tool etc.

Edward also shared some resources with the conference, writing that:

I have created some basic guidance that I am presently developing which can be found here (this can be viewed as a guest without the need to login).

Question Four

Next we had a question from Nina Walker. She asked:

> *Just wondered if you have seen increases in confidence in students by using social media - thinking [about] helping to reduce impostor syndrome etc.....*

Sue

The affordances of social media through the chat function are evident in other social software such Zoom, MS teams and even Blackboard Collaborate. This option allows individuals to contribute and ask questions that seem to be less threatening to some then verbally doing so.

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So, in that respect this can develop confidence. The use of social media in group work has without doubt helped students that use it to keep in touch outside of meeting in person, allowing them to plan, share ideas, follow up on actions etc. The benefits are that they can respond to the conversations when it is most convenient and can do so wherever they are. Relying just on in person meetings can exclude those with caring responsibilities, work commitments or because they have to commute to and and from university. The use of Zoom over the last two years has given students the confident to organise their own online meetings.

Suzanne
Absolutely. I outline very early on when using Snapchat as a tutorial tool that there is no such thing as a stupid question and that if studnets don't understand an aspect of the course, it's my job to explain it in a different way.

Year on year the students have commented that they find communicating on Snapchat much easier and less stressful than communicating via e-mail. By the very nature of the platform and Snapchat group, when one student asks a question the whole group benefits from the answer and the interaction. Due to the fact that communicating using Snapcchat is less formal, students who might not usually ask a question in a classroom setting feel comfortable to ask it on Snapchat.

Dawne
Yes. I've seen students grow in confidence, particularly those who tend to be quiet and reserved in traditional teaching situations, for example group work.

To begin, you must create a 'safe space' so the students can undertake their work using social media within a carefully created framework of support, that scaffolds the activity.

Deb
Completely agree with Dawne, creating a 'safe space' for students is really important. I also think it is important for educators to model practice through their own social media use.

Question Five

Next came questions sent in from the audience. Sarah asked Sue to answer the first one:

Has anyone involved students in developing the use of social media for learning?

Sue: SMASH
I co-facilitated with students as partners a special interest group to look at the use of social media for learning. The students renamed the group SMASH which is an acronym for Social Media for Academic Studies at Hallam. This ran for four years during which time, new students joined and others graduated. During this time the founding group co-developed a framework and this was expanded upon. The framework was created to consider the different ways social media can be used.

1. Helping staff to identify and use social media tools for communication and collaboration within and beyond the classroom (Learning Activities).
2. Helping students and staff to identify and use relevant social media tools to curate and organise information relating to learning (Organising Learning).
3. Helping students to prepare digital portfolios to openly share outcomes and projects to develop a professional online presence (Showcasing Learning).
4. Helping students to find resources online to support their wellbeing & academic studies whilst at University. (Supporting Learning)

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The students went on to create a range of resources that were used in staff and student workshops to provoke discussions, and also at external conferences at the University of Winchester, Edge Hill University and the BETT conference. Other activities included writing blog posts aimed at students which included guidance on remote learning during the pandemic. Some of the students also went on to co-write a journal article reflecting on the skills they had developed being part of this students as partners project (Beckingham et al., 2019).

Sue also shared some links with the audience:

https://socialmediaforlearning.com/smash/smash-framework/

https://socialmediaforlearning.com/smash/7-ways-cards/

https://socialmediaforlearning.com/smash/reverse-social-media-card-set/

Question Six

Then a question for the whole panel:

> *What is your favourite social media app/tool and why?*

Sue
Considering this as an educator so from a professional perspective, I'd say my daily go to social media app would be Twitter. I have created a variety of Twitter groups which allow me to filter my view of the tweets I see. Having the app on my phone means I can quickly dip into different 'conversations' and I often come across useful resources that are shared by other educators or professionals relating to the subject areas I teach. In turn I can also share information that will be of value I hope to other educators. This could include links to articles, videos, publications or events. In other cases I might engage in a dialogue with other educators. This could be as a result of someone asking a question or wanting feedback. I choose the conversations I wish to engage in.

I personally make use of uploading my own conference presentations to SlideShare and the National teaching Repository and share links via Twitter (and LinkedIn). I also keep a list of both publications and presentations on my personal blog, highlighting where I have been invited as a keynote or guest speaker. This can be useful to draw on when preparing for annual professional development reviews.

Suzanne
Ooh, do we need to choose just one? I'm absolutely going to cheat here and give an answer for my favourite social media platform for working with students, my preferred social media platform for professional use and my favourite social media tool/app.

It may come as no surprise for me to declare that my favourite social media platform to use with my students is Snapchat. Not only do the students find this platform makes communication easier (and less stressful), this platform also allows me to communicate with many students at the one time. If one student asks a question on Snapchat the whole class benefits from the interaction. They can also answer each other's questions under my supervision.

With regards to my favourite social media app for professional use, it has to be Twitter. Twitter is a fantastic platform for expanding your personal learning network and finding your tribe! Actively participating in the weekly #LTHEchat has been the best way to expand my personal learning network with like minded individuals and has led to some fantastic opportunities professionally and lifelong friendships.

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Moving on to my favourite app to use with my students, I would have to say Padlet. This was particularly true during lockdown teaching. As a teaching fellow, teaching a highly practical hands-on course we faced many significant challenges. Having previously created Padlets with demonstrations of patient assessment techniques, we were able to continue our clinical teaching with our students at home. They watched the patient assessment videos embedded in the Padlet and then recorded themselves undertaking the patient assessment procedures on family/flatmates they were then able to receive feedback on this via the Padlet.

Dawne

It depends upon the purpose. So, for example, with my design students if they don't use it already I would introduce them to using Pintrest. The uses a ten-fold, for example they can search for images to build research folios and go onto create 'moodboards' to organize their ideas that help to shape their thinking. They can then share their emergent concepts with their tutor(s) and peers and refine what they do based on feedback received.

Deb

I guess mine is twitter really. As I mentioned earlier I think on the whole it is a really great tool for connecting with others and building relationships. One of the key ways that I got involved in twitter in the first place was taking part in the weekly Learning and Teaching in Higher Education twitter chat (#LTHEchat), I would highly recommend this to others. It can be a bit daunting when you first enter the chat but people are so welcoming and you soon get the hang of it. I would also recommend taking a look at the Social Media for Learning blog by the lovely Sue Beckingham, I found that so helpful in the early days.

I also really like the idea of using TikTok within academia too so that is something I am hoping to experiment with. If anyone wants to join me on that journey do reach out !

Question Seven

The final question, again from the audience, asked about how people might make the move from practitioner to researcher:

> *How might people start the journey from idea to publication? What steps might they go through to build up to a full journal publication?*

Sue

I have seen many examples where educators have begun by presenting at a conference innovative ways they are using social media in learning and teaching. One of the stumbling blocks to then progress to publication is where you want to include the impact from the students perspective but have not sought ethical clearance. It can be useful to create notes or a private reflective blog on the experience whilst it is fresh in your mind. Then plan ahead to evaluate the use of innovation for the following year. Your notes could help you plan how you will approach this research and what information you'd like to find out.

Suzanne

For me, the idea of publishing was quite daunting and not something that I had a great deal of knowledge about. The blessing, for me, was being part of a really supportive small group of people who suggested a joint publication. This meant publishing wasn't a huge insurmountable task faced alone but instead was a process where the burden was shared with gentle guidance and encouragement.

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Dawne

When I started out I found taking small steps helped to build my confidence. For example, sharing ideas with colleagues at a small, friendly conference via a poster presentation or round table style workshop. I used the feedback to shape my thinking and inform the next steps of my work. With more data, and more confidence, I ventured to present a conference paper and for me things snowballed from there. Sometimes, if appropriate, working collaboratively alongside colleagues can be a brilliant way to start out on your first research venture.

Then for publishing, find outputs where publication by new researchers is encouraged. For example our Journal of Social Media for Learning (JSML) would be an excellent place to start. If you have the opportunity, undertaking work as a peer-reviewer for a journal is invaluable. For Teaching and Learning an excellent place to share and publish your research and resources is the National Teaching Repository (NTR).

The National Teaching Repository (visit us on Twitter: @NTRepository), which is an Open Educational Resource (OER) hosted on a secure platform via Edge Hill University and Figshare. There are already a few resources in place so if you wanted to have a look please visit: https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/The_National_Teaching_Repository

Sharing is easy, please visit: https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/submit and select The National Teaching Repository. Work uploaded secures a DOI and citation, you can track engagement with your work via Altmetric data. you set the level of CC Licence permission you prefer and you work remains your intellectual property.

Good places to publish research articles and other outputs, useful links:

https://openjournals.ljmu.ac.uk/index.php/JSML/index

https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/articles/presentation/NTR_-_Welcome_pdf/12673016

https://figshare.edgehill.ac.uk/The_National_Teaching_Repository

https://twitter.com/NTRepository

Sarah

Deb mentioned #LTHEChat earlier, and tweetchats are a great way to gently put your opinions out there and get feedback on what others think about what you are saying. You can also think about longer social media forms such as blogs - maybe your institution as one like mine does for SoTL, or you could offer to write a post on your 'specialist topic' on a colleague's blog. As well as that, I would really encourage educators to set up their own online space and start writing - it is daunting to begin with, but having your own, unique voice is a great way to make yourself known (and, of course, to ask for feedback by posting a link to social media).

Last, but by no means least, don't forget to keep an eye on the @SocMedHE account and put in a submission to the annual conference so you can present to the friendliest audience in the whole wide world.

Final Remarks

We hope you find the advice in this article useful - and we'd love to hear from you all about your thoughts about what we have said. Please let us know, either by tweet, by email, or by whichever medium you prefer.

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