University of Dundee

Social Media

Robertson, Derek

Published in:
Media Education Journal

Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal

From the first pages of the introduction to *Social Media: Communication, Sharing and Visibility* Graham Meikle frames his subject in a thoroughly informed, insightful and accessible manner. The rise and rise of social media and the increasingly significant part it plays in our lives is very well illustrated by amusing yet powerful references such as the frozen food company that has taken a contemporary twist on alphabet spaghetti by creating Mashtags - frozen potato chunks in the shapes of common images fashioned from our everyday online lives. Such references are the mashed potato smiley face emoji atop a far richer and substantial body of work that is embedded in a critical take on the business models underpinning the social media services that we engage with. This critical take also allows us to explore the emerging and established cultures and behaviours that so many of us now take for granted. Indeed, as a Lecturer in Education with a real interest in the place and purpose of social media in the learning process I found this text to be a rich source of information that not only heightened my awareness of a series of highly relevant theoretical and cultural perspectives but it also made me question my own engagement with social media and how social media engages with me. I mean, who knew that Facebook recorded and kept the posts that you wrote but chose not to post to your Timeline or that Spotify not only records your location but how fast you move to your next one? Are we really as aware as we should be of how our everyday social media apps are tracking, recording and documenting our lives and behaviours? I thought that in this regard I was quite well informed but I have to say that this text was a real eye-opener for me and I am sure it will be for those interested in scratching the surface of the digital tools and spaces we use in order to view the hidden complexities that lie beneath.

From 2006 onwards many of us in Education have spoken positively of the flattening of hierarchies and the participatory culture that Web 2.0 technologies and Social Media platforms were said to have provided. However, did we really appreciate that both these terms were coined by the digital commercial world as it sought to pull itself out from the dot.com crash? Did we fully appreciate that it is we who are the product of the free services that we have given ourselves over to? Meikle makes this very clear to us as all the way through his text as he deconstructs the business model of the social media services we use and how, through mechanisms such as Critical Discourse Analysis, he looks at the language used to help positon Facebook et al. in the hands, hearts and heads of its users. What is the strategic thinking behind **Sharing**, the **Like** button and what does it mean to **Connect**? These seemingly straightforward terms and actions, that we willingly engage in, are critically analysed and framed in such a way that any reader will most certainly reflect on what it means for them after reading this book.

Chapter 1 of the book asks the question *What are Social Media*? In this chapter Meikle establishes his definition as one that sees a network, a database and a platform as central to these. The importance of public and personal communication also very much comes into play here and the nuanced behaviour that appears to have developed in these digital spaces and the importance of one's mobile phone as a means to access these is explored through notions of identity, lifestyle and culture. References to past players and services such as GeoCities as well as to the work of pre-social media thinkers such as Licklider and Taylor help create a comprehensive backdrop that pulls in those who lived through and

experienced these developments and will, I am sure, enrich the understanding of those new to what there was before the social media services available to us today.

In the subsequent five chapters Meikle continues to frame the narrative with the support of appositely chosen cultural references and a wealth of academic material that serves to illuminate topics such as: memes and remix culture; the convergence of computing, communications and content and the rise of citizen journalism; selfie culture, doxing (a technique of tracing someone or gathering information about an individual using sources on the internet), outing and acronyms such as NSFW (Not Safe For Work); and distributed citizenship and the emerging concept and practice of intercreativity.

To close the book Meikle discusses what all of this may mean for us engaged in learning and teaching about social media. He rightly identifies the need for us to be going past the functional aspects of how to become more technically adept in the use of a range of digital tools and services and for the need to be focused much more on developing a curriculum that is underpinned and informed by a critical awareness of of the learning culture, behaviours and attitudes that we need to cultivate in order for us and our students to become that increasingly critically aware user/learner. Having worked in a the field of digital technology in learning for so long I found it most heartening to read his strategic thoughts thoughts on this matter. Policy advisers and those in charge of decisions about curriculum design should take note

This book was an excellent read. If offers so much for those, across a range of relevant fields, who are already engaged in exploring the place of social media tools in teaching and learning and it should be a first point of call for those keen to further develop their critical understanding of social media.

Derek Robertson
Lecturer in Education
University of Dundee