

## EDUCATORS AND SOCIAL MEDIA: LEARNING MOTIVATORS IN CREATIVE MEDIA COURSES

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between educators' affinity, and students' motivation to learn with the support of social media. This research aims to enhance the educator's role in encouraging students' motivation in a creative media classroom as students strive to fulfill academic achievement—creating their media project. Creative media project requires students to undergo a long process of developing ideas, solving problems, and receiving feedback. Therefore, active interaction with educators is critical for the learning process. In a traditional creative media course, communication between educators and students happens in the studio, where students learn in a studio-based learning environment. However, with the rise of social media, this communication in studio-based learning can be enhanced and supplemented in cyberspace. In higher education, social media has become more common, changing educator-student interactions, breaking social barriers to build interpersonal relationships, and thus having a huge impact on students' motivation to learn. Through social media, both educators and students can build a relationship and foster a positive learning experience through informal and active dialogue sessions. Educators' availability and approachability on social media influence a student's learning experience and motivation. Hence, this study used action research project to enhance and improve a communication channel between teachers and students, who have engaged utilizing a designated Facebook group for two semesters. Action research allows educators and students to collaborate on the projects with an eye toward improving the learning experience. This paper discusses the findings from the action research project and identifies how educators can use social media to increase students' intrinsic motivation.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Social Media, Educators, Studio-Based Learning & Facebook.

### 1. Introduction

Motivating students is crucial and provides a constant challenge for educators. In creative media courses, the priority is to train students to be capable and skilled content creators by harnessing and honing their skill sets; thus, interactivity and engagement are considered essential characteristics of the discipline through the use of tutorial sessions (Oh, 2017). With the need to engage with students on a daily basis in order to oversee projects, it is imperative for supervisors to understand their students' needs and motivation for learning, and thus to reinforce their students' motivation to remain creative. Conventionally, design courses in art and creative media have relied heavily on a studio-based learning approach where learners engage in face-to-face tutorials, critiques and sharing sessions. Students learn by doing in studio-based learning, which allows students to engage in their studies and take ownership of their work (Ma, 2016). Taking ownership and becoming engaged help students to stay motivated throughout their

projects. Educators play key roles in the student learning experience (Christophel, 1990; Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer, 2014).

According to Thijs and Verkuyten (2009), for faculty members to improve as mentors, they must become behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in academic activities. This view is also echoed by Connell, Spencer, and Aber (1994), who suggest that engagement is associated with positive student outcomes, including academic achievement and lower dropout rates. Christophel (1990) provides a similar position regarding the educator-student relationship and students' motivation to work, stating that educators are key figures with the potential to motivate students. In essence, mentorship with trusted educators can have an overall positive impact on students and their attitudes towards their craft. The core teacher behaviors that most contribute to student learning were found to be a friendly manner, vocal expressiveness, and relaxed body language (Gorham, 1988). Researchers have shown that students respond more actively toward teachers who are personable, and who employ self-disclosure and personal anecdotes about their lives (Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds, 2009). Teachers seem more approachable and engaging to students through the use of social media, as both sides can communicate fluidly without physical limitations.

Daily communication between teachers and students has changed with the adoption of social media in the education system. The development of technology has allowed students in higher education to engage with social networking sites daily. They use social media to share ideas, have discussion sessions and get involved in online communities in order to learn and communicate with peers and faculty members.

This research proposed to investigate whether social media can supplement student learning and enhance interactivity and engagement with educators, who play a significant role in increasing the motivation of students. The key research questions are as follows:

- 1) How do students perceive the role of educators in their motivation?
- 2) How do educators motivate students using social media as a communication method from students' perspective?

## **2. Background Research**

Social media has been widely used as a communicative and pedagogical tool to supplement teaching and learning, with educators increasingly advocating for it (Mahmud et al., 2016). Therefore, we need to investigate how teachers utilize social media to become more efficient and effective in motivating students in creative media courses. The author's previous study (Oh, 2017) conducted preliminary interviews to identify students' perception of e-learning and found that the majority of students require a more interactive e-learning approach than in current Learning Management Systems (LMS) which they are using at school. The interview sessions specified that students want more engaging and interactive platforms with functions like social media, so that they can communicate rather than rely on one-way 'announcement' features. The researcher then developed a follow-up study to identify the function and attributes of social media per intrinsic motivation as well as the educator's role in increasing student motivation.

### **2. 1 Studio-Based Learning in Creative Media Courses**

Studio-based learning is the primary essential teaching mode for creative media courses, wherein students engage with their project on a daily basis over an extended period. It allows learners to access deeper levels of cognitive and social skills (Hetland et al., 2007). Students work in groups or individually to "conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem" (Savery, 2006, p. 12).

Students participate in tutorial sessions, where they interact with teachers and learn the set of sensibilities, beliefs, and idiosyncrasies of their particular community (Brown, 2005). Creative media students learn the practice of the entire project pipeline, which includes pre-production, production, and post-production, through regular review and consultation sessions. With their studio teachers who are practicing experts, they have an opportunity to learn and practice as for how professional would implement their projects (Brocato, 2009).

Through their projects, students actively engage with their teachers and peers in a designated physical space (Ma, 2016), with students encouraged to work in the studio (Cennamon et al., 2011). The interaction between teachers and students is prompt in the studio, where frequent and timely feedback from educators can foster a positive learning experience (Bazillio and Braun, 1998). Students experience different levels of engagement and interactivity with teachers and peers in the studio-based environment.

However, students need to make an appointment or set the schedule for the review sessions with educators within studio hours. Otherwise, they need to wait for their turn. Also, according to the focus group interviews, another disadvantage is that students start comparing themselves to their classmates who got praised by teachers who can lead to demotivation. The physical limitation can have some impact on students' engagement and motivation.

## **2.2 Intrinsic Motivation and the Relationship Between Teachers and Students in Studio-Based Learning**

Traditionally, the studio-based learning environment uses experimentation, problem-solving and tutorial sessions to expose students to creative thinking methods, encouraging them to be involved in their knowledge acquisition and to take control of their learning experiences. Flink, Boggiano and Barrett (1990) state that educators who actively support a student's autonomy in learning tend to facilitate greater motivation and curiosity while inculcating in the student a desire to take on challenges readily. With this autonomy in education, students have more opportunities to suggest, invent and propose ideas, to make connections and to be expressive and innovative.

The concept of sustaining motivation is a key factor for creative media students, as they need to remain creative regarding producing content. Chan (2007) argues that instructors who teach creatively use imaginative approaches to make learning exciting and compelling. These educators' efforts and confidence in teaching have been proven to have a positive impact on student learning. Taven and McCroskey (1997) state that students who believe their educators are caring tend to feel they have a more positive learning experience. Ma (2016) adds that students benefit from teacher-student interaction through studio-based learning and form interpersonal relationships. The relationships they build together affect classroom engagement and motivation levels, positive or negative. Students perceive teachers as a core motivational factor for their learning process.

## **2.3 Student Perceptions and Motivation for Using Social Media**

The active use of social media in higher education has become increasingly popular in recent years, as schools have adopted social networking to improve the student learning experience. Students believe that social media has a positive effect on their interactions with teachers and peers, as well as pedagogical benefits such as connections, social rapport, collaboration, learner-generated content and accumulation of attained knowledge (McLoughlin and Lee, 2010). The younger generations perceive the world differently with the support of technology (Pafrey and Gasser, 2008), and social media has become a communication tool for them. Thus, active dialogue sessions on social media platforms, which are not as formal as the traditional

classroom, can boost the relationship between students and educators. Being a Facebook ‘friend’ with teachers may grant the students a glance into the teachers’ daily lives, preferences, and network (Mahmud et al., 2016), allowing students to feel much closer to their teachers.

Building a rapport with teachers helps to break down the barrier between educator and student that is characteristic of a traditional classroom, allowing teachers to become more approachable and engaging. Shen et al. (2006) writes that the influence of teachers’ presence is crucial for student motivation, course engagement, academic achievement and the motivation to use social media. Teachers should be willing to integrate social media into the learning process to better student engagement and motivation (Dawkins, 2010). The student perception that teachers are trying to communicate with them through social media can foster a favorable and positive impact on their motivation.

### 3. Research Method

In this study, social media was used as a learning tool for two consecutive semesters. The purpose of this research was to identify how social media can affect interaction and engagement between teachers and students in order to increase intrinsic motivation. The researcher also aimed to propose suggestions for the use of social media to improve the student learning experience.

This study adopted the self-determination theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985). SDT focuses on an individual’s behavior, which is self-motivated and self-determined, as well as their personality. Ryan and Deci identified competence, relatedness, and autonomy as the motivators for a person’s intrinsic motivation. This action research was designed to determine whether competence, relatedness and autonomy can be enhanced by using social media to foster communication between teachers and students.

The researcher developed a conceptual framework as shown in Table 1 below. The right-hand column presents the adopted theoretical framework from self-determination theory.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework

Motivators in SDT	Motivational aspects for student-teacher communication when using social media
<p>Competence</p> <p>-Learners experience an effective interaction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students experience effective interaction with teachers through social network platforms.</li> <li>- Students feel they learn ample knowledge and information from teachers by communicating through social media</li> <li>-Students experience frequent constructive feedback and positive interaction with teachers through social media</li> <li>- Students feel that teachers have confidence in them by engaging in informal conversation</li> </ul>
<p>Relatedness</p> <p>-Learners feel connected and like they belong to the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students feel involved when teachers are friendly and caring</li> <li>- Students perceive teachers as more engaging and caring when they reply to messages promptly</li> <li>- Students feel connectedness and rapport with teachers when they become ‘friends’ on social networking platforms</li> </ul>
<p>Autonomy</p> <p>-Learners feel supported and become a source of action</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Students feel supported when teachers are willing to give them encouragement on their social media accounts</li> <li>- Students become more proactive when teachers express strong</li> </ul>

	<p>encouragement in communication through social media</p> <p>- Students want to commit themselves when teachers value their opinions</p>
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According to this conceptual framework, students' competence, relatedness, and autonomy will increase when they are encouraged and supported by warm, structured interactions and engagement with teachers (Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer, 2014). Engagement can lead to a better relationship with teachers and peers, resulting in higher intrinsic motivation for students. Enhanced relationships with teachers will produce positive results for the students' learning experience, helping them take ownership of and increase zeal for their education.

This study used an action research methodology, with a total of 60 student participants from two studio-based learning courses from the BA in Digital Media program at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The action research required students to join designated Facebook closed groups which were created for discussion, blogging, sharing information from both teachers and students, and most importantly, communication between teachers and students. The Facebook groups serve as a learning platform to identify the attributes of students' intrinsic motivation when using social media for their interaction with teachers.

Focus group interviews with participants were conducted after the completion of each course. The interviews were semi-structured and segregated into eight different groups. Each group consisted of 3-6 students with the total number of 34 for the face-to-face in-depth interview. The interview questions are based on the conceptual framework (see the table above), and the action research activities focusing on motivational aspects relevant to the study. The purpose of the interview sessions was designed to seek the students' perception of using social media for the teachers-students interaction for their intrinsic motivation such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

The analysis of the Facebook group activities was documented and embedded into the interview questionnaires. The common patterns identified from the interview data and the Facebook group activities by participants and they were analyzed for the findings. The findings help to develop a recommendation to nurture students' motivation through the active interaction and engagement with teachers on the ground.

#### **4. Findings and Discussion**

**Finding 1:** Students feel that using social media to interact with teachers is effective for their learning and motivation.

The action research and focus group interviews recorded positive feedback about having a Facebook group as a communication channel and learning platform. 32 students out of 34 stated that the flexibility of social media helps them share their thoughts, findings and useful information regarding events or funding opportunities for their projects rather than having one-sided information from teachers. Another benefit which they experienced is that social media has become very accessible due to technological advancements, allowing prompt feedback from teachers. Students feel connected to each other constantly, and they find it easy to interact with teachers. Unlike the traditional classroom, social media platforms do not have any physical boundaries, which helps both educators and students build a better relationship with the active dialogue and engagement which can happen in anywhere and anytime by using their smart devices. In the traditional set-up, students need to make a proper appointment or follow the tutorial schedule to have feedback sessions with teachers. However, in social media, they could have an instant feedback from teachers without delays. Students commented that this leads to higher motivation among students as they experience the opportunities for them and teachers to

manage the interactions, which can ultimately beget a positive learning experience for both parties (Mazer et al., 2007).

The action research and focus interviews also indicated that the motivation level of creative media students is already high before they join the program. Students stated they are aware of what they want to achieve, both at school and after graduation. The focus of educators should be to maintain and enhance students' intrinsic motivation level.

**Finding 2:** Engaging in informal chats through social media allows students to feel supported and welcomed by teachers.

According to the interview sessions, students believe that teachers play a critical role in their motivation. A majority of students (32) feel that teachers' conversations and friendly behavior over social media were a source of encouragement when facing difficulties with their projects or assignments, or issues with their friends or personal concerns. Conversely, six students mentioned that a teacher's stern attitude or facial expression caused them to worry or reflect on whether they had any performance or behavior problems. However, adopting social media for teacher-student interaction helps teachers become more relatable and approachable, and can shorten the psychological distance between teachers and students. If teachers disclose their personal lives and share their experience on social media account, students would feel that teachers are less formal and authoritative in the cyberspace. Ironically, students perceive the distance between teachers and themselves in social media is much closer than the physical classroom.

Conventional creative media courses conduct most classes through tutorials and critique sessions; thus, communication is vital for students to complete their project and assignments. In this essential teaching mode, it is crucial for teachers to maintain a positive and resilient attitude toward students to increase their motivation. This approach gives students the perception that their educators have confidence in them.

**Finding 3:** Students are more willing to engage with teachers, peers, and projects through continuous interaction on social media.

Another significant finding was that students feel demotivated when they have problems with peers and teammates. During their academic career, students spend most of their time together in their studio dealing with their projects, and their classmates are a significant factor in their motivation. Students can learn from each other, as they are able to see other's work and find inspiration. However, continually being together in the same physical space can also contribute to lower levels of motivation. Nine students commented that seeing classmates producing better work than themselves can lead to loss of motivation. They perceived this phenomenon as not meeting their self-made expectations and criteria, and thus lost confidence.

In this situation, however, students tended to seek advice from teachers or share their thoughts with peers to maintain a positive mindset. When they become demotivated out of school hours, social media platforms work as an outlet for students to express stress or anxiety and can ignite conversations with teachers and peers as it doesn't need to have any physical space for the consultation. Encouragement and recognition from teachers can help students be more proactive and committed to their projects and the overall learning process.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to identify and investigate how social media aids student learning and enhances interactivity and engagement with educators to increase motivation. Through action research and focus group interviews, we observed that most students enrolled in creativity media courses are eager to achieve their artistic goals; thus, the primary focus of educators should be maintaining and enhancing student motivation to enjoy the learning experience.

Students should be guided and mentored by teachers and educators who are motivated to help students, who are confident in teaching and mentoring and who demonstrate a self-sufficient attitude, which can have a tremendous positive impact on student motivation and engagement (Hill and Rowe, 1996). It is imperative that educators adopt creative teaching and communication methods in order to foster a positive classroom climate where students can actively become involved in acquiring knowledge and intelligence in collaboration with their peers.

The researcher observed more frequent interaction, suggestions and participation from students through the Facebook groups created for this action research than from face-to-face discussions in studio-based learning within a traditional classroom set-up. Students have a positive attitude toward using social networks in the classroom as they regularly use them in their daily life. Their interaction with teachers and peers in social media is much more active and constant for the feedback or communication session. Social media has become a large part of students' lives and can contribute to changing the dynamic of the classroom by promoting the interpersonal relationship with educators to maximize the learning engagement and boost their intrinsic motivation.

Educators across different disciplines should examine the effects of using social media as a learning platform and communication channel. For example, creating the virtual community of the class would be the first step to stimulate the active dialogue session between teachers and students. Another example would be promoting E-Portfolio with social media sites that would be another method to spark the interaction among the class. Teachers should participate actively in social media to increase the positive effect on student motivation and it will allow the learning experiences of students to be enjoyed, maximized, sparking their creativity.



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