

# Online adjunct higher education teachers' perceptions of using social media sites as instructional approaches

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to explore how online adjunct higher education faculty members perceive the role of using social media sites as instructional approaches. A purposeful sampling was used, and adjunct online higher education faculty members were invited to participate. An adjunct faculty member was defined as a person who taught part-time higher education courses; therefore, the faculty member was not hired as a full-time faculty member.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Qualitative researchers explore phenomena examining the lived experiences and participants behaviors; in this study, online adjunct instructors' perceptions on classroom instructional social media online approaches were examined. Participants in this study were trained to teach higher education online courses and these teachers were the experts on the topic. The design for this study was an exploratory case study in which the participants were online adjunct instructors who taught at online higher education institutions in the Northeast. The case study approach was the most appropriate. The focus was the external events participants' lives.

**Findings** – Three themes emerged from the analysis of the in-depth interview process. Based on the adjunct online higher education instructors' perception on the use of social media teaching approaches in the classroom, the themes that emerged were uniformity of purpose vs personal beliefs need for justification importance student engagement and facilitation vs direct instruction. Themes reflected online teaching approaches higher education institutional missions and student learning and engagement outcomes.

**Research limitations/implications** – In this study, adjuncts' perceptions expressed and themes found may not be characteristic of other adjunct instructors' views. In qualitative studies, participants are asked open-ended interview questions, which may have been a limitation for this study. Quantitative questions, such as the impact of using social media as an instructional approach, were not asked. In this study, adjunct online higher education instructors were invited to share their views on the study topic. Additionally, qualitative researchers are limited by the data collection method and the data analysis process. Therefore, researchers who would like to repeat this study on adjunct online higher education teachers' perspectives may be unable to duplicate the research.

**Practical implications** – The significance of this study is the need for a renewed global initiative in higher education to promote the use of social media training for online adjunct faculty members. Online higher education faculty members' reflections on using social media tend to be recorded from a personal rather than a professional point of view.

**Social implications** – The implication for online higher education leaders is to review mission statements and reevaluate how the use of social media may impact student learning outcomes, student career readiness and student engagement opportunities.

**Originality/value** – The need for a renewed global initiative in higher education to promote the use of social media training for online adjunct faculty evolved as the significance of the study. Because inclusion requirements and workshop training for the use of social media in online higher education classrooms vary among higher education institutions, online adjunct faculty social media classroom practices and perceptions widely vary.

**Keywords** Social media, Higher education online adjunct faculty, Perceptions on using social media, Qualitative descriptive design

**Paper type** Research paper



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### Problem statement

After 2000, the use of social media exploded. This explosion is exemplified by the number of daily social media users. Facebook is now over 10-years old and has over a billion users throughout the world. Moreover, Facebook and YouTube rank in the top 3 websites, and Twitter and LinkedIn are both in the top 15 (Boulianne, 2015). For clarity purposes, social media may be defined as a total of three major components including social interaction, facilitating collaboration and focusing on deliberation among the users and the members. Despite the explosion, social media has not grown at the same levels for use by instructors and students in higher education (Worthen, 2013).

In higher education, online learning is rapidly expanding, and, though leaders support technological innovations and connectivity, few higher education leaders institute faculty workshops and trainings designed to use social media sources as teaching tools, especially Facebook (Musbahtiti and Muhammad, 2013). The lack of recognition of the need for change is a major drawback for adjunct faculty members who focus on providing real-world connections by incorporating social media in the classroom, thus addressing virtual communication modes familiar to learners (Caruth and Caruth, 2013). Limited research exists which is specifically allocated to the adjunct higher education faculty members' experiences in using social media apart from faculty members' blogs and social media discussions. With social media becoming an everyday communication method for individuals and organizations, higher education curriculum developers and instructors should find the logical need to incorporate social media sites into instructional approaches (Griesemer, 2004).

Online adjuncts are in danger of isolation from the larger university organization, and, though adjunct faculty members use social media to teach, university leaders fail to fund research studies for adjunct instructors. Though adjunct faculty may struggle to engage students via Facebook, Twitter or blogs, few adjunct instructors receive grants or other funding to research the impact on student learning outcomes. Adjunct faculty members tend to believe that larger university leaders award research project funding to full-time faculty members (Randall and Gonzalez, 2012). The isolation and lack of research funding means the adjunct faculty member may miss training for most effective use of social media in computer supported collaborative environments (CSCL). Nevertheless, adjunct faculty members teach a substantial number of CSCL classes and the lack of support detracts from faculty efficacy and student experiences (Iinuma *et al.*, 2016). The specific problem is that adjunct faculty members are poorly prepared to take advantage of the possibilities inherent in social media. Therefore, online adjunct higher education faculty members' perceptions on the role of using social media sites as instructional approaches in the online classroom were explored in this qualitative study. Gaining insights into faculty perceptions as derived from experience could provide helpful thoughts for leaders in higher education, who are considering a change initiative intended to take advantage of the instructional potential of social media.

### Purpose of study

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore how online adjunct higher education faculty members perceive the role of using social media sites as instructional approaches. A purposeful sampling was used, and adjunct online higher education faculty members were invited to participate. An adjunct faculty member was defined as a person who taught part-time higher education courses; therefore, the faculty member was not hired as a full-time faculty member. The participants in this study had taught as adjunct higher education instructors for at least two years, and some participants taught at more than one higher education institute in the Northeast. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative method was used. Online adjunct higher education instructors'

perceptions as derived from lived experiences of social media sites-based instructional approaches were explored in the proposed research. A case study was used to examine the external events related to the phenomena of using social media as instructional approaches in online classrooms.

### **Conceptual framework**

Educational leaders that fail to prepare faculty members for change tend to face increased challenges and resistance during the change process (Fullan, 2006). Fullan (2006) developed a theoretical model change in education. According to Fullan (2006), before faculty members accept, implement and embrace change initiatives, they must fully believe in principles behind each step of the process. To promote and to willingly and enthusiastically accept the change process, higher education adjunct faculty members must be provided professional development trainings on using social media as a teaching tool.

Online higher education adjunct faculty who trust the change process will be more willing to engage in professional development workshops in which best practices for using social media in the classroom are modeled. However, because online adjunct faculty members are not full-time employees who may have a greater stake in online higher education initiatives, their reduced participation in the change process to using social media in the classroom may create increased instability and challenges. All stakeholders must be wholly invested in and value the change process (Fullan, 2006).

Fullan (2006) argued that educational leaders must begin the change process by setting a purpose for change, and the purpose benefit the entire group affected by the change. Higher online education leaders may provide change programs related to using social media instructional approaches in the classroom to benefit full-time online faculty members; however, online adjunct faculty members may lack opportunities to participate in change meetings focused on the use of social media instructional approaches. Therefore, the change may not benefit the entire faculty.

Additionally, change leaders create interactive environments that inspire all stakeholders to embrace change and to work to be enthusiastic about the process (Fullan, 2006). If online adjunct faculty members are not included in the change process, online full-time and online adjunct faculty members fail to share the same levels of enthusiasm for the use of social media as an instructional approach in the classroom. The major role of the higher education change process must be to integrate interactions among online leaders, full-time online faculty and adjunct online faculty members.

During the change process, leaders demonstrate new ideas and initiate discussions among all stakeholders (Fullan, 2006). Full-time and adjunct online faculty members may not receive equal funds to engage in research on new teaching strategies such as the use of social media in the online classroom. One goal of change is for stakeholders to be informed, to believe in the change and to look for new patterns that may improve outcomes. New patterns may be a result of research studies. Adjunct online faculty members may not be encouraged to be part of the research process.

### **Researchers**

The researchers are online adjunct dissertation chairs at the same university. During an online faculty discussion, using social media in the online classroom was discussed. Because the researchers wondered how online adjunct instructors use social media as instructional tools, they formed a research team and conducted this study. No conflicts of interests were present, and no personal gains were derived from this study.

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## Review of literature

### *Historical perspective*

From an historical perspective, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) postulated that a relationship between social media usage and academic performance existed. The question is whether or not instructors' use of social media and facilitation of social media activities would be beneficial to learners. What is needed is future research and study regarding how the use of social media can be encouraged to gain the benefits of the technologies and further develop sound best practices. The importance of this historical perspective is that the use of social media and the integration within the confines of higher education has great potential for the future success of both students and instructors (Wodzicki *et al.*, 2012).

### *Value of social media in classroom*

Though online social constructivist instructors use Facebook in classrooms to create an interactive community of learners, the value of including Facebook in online classrooms is debated by online higher education leaders. Those leaders who fail to see the value tend to view Facebook as a form of connectivity, and discussions are reflective of digital social discussions (Whittaker *et al.*, 2013), whereas Thalluri and Penman (2015) argued that specific content discussions and practices, such as reflections, are valuable activities to use as instructional approaches on Facebook. The significance of Thalluri and Penman's (2015) findings was the need to develop specific guidelines for using Facebook in online classes and how to prepare online instructors to effectively use the guidelines.

Skepticism is an obstacle for adjunct online instructors who lack training on the benefits of using social media in the classroom (Smith and Lambert, 2014). Disputes regarding online student and faculty relationships and possible abuses of academic engagement are common reasons online adjunct faculty members question using social media. Social media are tools to use for social interaction, which is philosophy that carries over into the classroom (Kemp *et al.*, 2014).

### *Digital challenges*

Digital gaps are challenges which online adjunct instructors identify as issues in using social media to teach in the online classroom. In online higher education institutions in which online adjunct instructors fail to view an alignment between course objectives and the inclusion of social media, social media, such as Facebook, blogs and Twitter, may be used infrequently; whereas YouTube may be used more frequently (Vie, 2015). The importance of Vie's (2015) study was found in the reasons online faculty members expressed for not incorporating social media in classroom teaching. The gap is increased by faculty attitudes. In these online institutions, issues were lack of knowledge about how to use social media in the classroom and the lack of motivation to learn how to use social media to expand online teaching practices (Moran *et al.*, 2011).

### *Privacy and integrity issues*

Privacy and the integrity of student submissions are the two barriers most often expressed by adjunct faculty as barriers for their use of social media in the classroom. Over 72 percent of faculty in higher education report that lack of integrity of student submissions is a challenge or a significant barrier, and 63 percent say issues on privacy are significant barriers in using social media in the classroom. Other barriers identified in the study include a lack of training, the amount of time that using social media takes and lack of institutional support. The conclusion from this report is that faculty members have not widely or uncritically embraced social media for teaching purposes and continue to have concerns about its use in the classroom (Surface *et al.*, 2014). Risks to the personal privacy of faculty

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and of students was of most concern of most faculty concerning the use of social media in the classroom, followed by concerns of allowing others outside of the class to view class-related content (Davis *et al.*, 2015)

#### *Lack of support*

The findings in Davis *et al.*'s (2015) study are similar to the data findings in Goktalay's (2013) study concerning the challenges of higher education faculty and their use of social media. Goktalay (2013) indicated that faculty members were concerned about not having enough support and not knowing enough about social media use in instruction. Faculty members with less experience had greater self-concerns than their peers with more social media experience. Results of the interviews obtained from her study supported the higher rate of self-concern. The faculty development and support activities were analyzed, and technology support and incentives were perceived as the most effective ones. However, in spite of those concerns, these faculty members believed that social media is valuable in teaching. The importance of training online adjunct instructors is to demonstrate that change is needed to show the benefits of using social media as classroom instructional modes (Kassens-Noor, 2012).

#### *Impact on teaching and learning*

Social media tools are rapidly changing the communications landscape. The emergence has impacted significantly how students learn and the way instructors teach. In higher education settings, instructors, students and others collaborate on the tasks of knowledge construction (Grover and Stewart, 2010). Incorporating social media into a course can allow a diverse group of interested individuals to engage in creating and developing content and to gather online to share knowledge, information and opinions (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media technologies offer the capability to both receive and create content with the hope that a collective intelligence emerges. The goal is to improve students' learning experiences to prepare them to enter a workforce that is not geographically constrained and expects them to have highly developed online collaboration skills. The pursuit of such benefits drives academics to incorporate new technological approaches in their teaching methodology (Goode and Caicedo, 2010).

Limited research exists on the correlation between students' use of Facebook and grade point averages in higher education. In existing studies, negative correlations have been found in secondary education (Junco, 2015). However, in higher education when evidence related to transfer of knowledge between higher education instructors and students during social media discussions is investigated, researchers tend to find a positive correlation if students are motivated to participate and interactions are perceived as meaningful and appropriate for the classroom (Suebsom, 2015).

#### *Failure to initiate a change process*

Chen and Bryer (2012) asserted that instructors do acknowledge that the use of social media has the potential for the facilitation of informal learning led by instructors and the transition into formal learning environments. The transition would focus on robust discussions, greater engagement and broader and more diverse connections. The proposed study is significant because it details the growth of social media but demonstrates that the growth in the use of social media for higher education is not comparable in regard to overall increasing numbers. The potential that social media has for higher education instructors is limitless, but higher education leaders have failed to initiate a change process that prepares instructors to fully embrace changing instructional deliveries (Laird, 2014).

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### *Integration debate*

Online higher education leaders and faculty members disagree on the significance of using social media sites and the merit of training online adjunct instructors to fully integrate social media activities in online classrooms (DeWitt *et al.*, 2014). Researchers debate the importance and benefits of both, and few studies exist that demonstrate the effects of training online adjunct instructors to use social media instructional approaches. Therefore, the empirical data may confuse online higher education leaders (Ozmen and Atici, 2014). When online higher education leaders dispute the advantages of using social media and do not receive training on how to effectively use Facebook, blogs and Twitter as instructional approaches, online instructors may be confused. The disagreements may lead to further gaps in online learning. When online leaders view using social media negatively, these instructional approaches are perceived as time consuming activities that may be unneeded or may infringe on individual instructor and student privacy (Tess, 2013).

### **Method and design appropriateness**

Qualitative researchers explore phenomena by examining the lived experiences and participants' behaviors (Yin, 2003). In this study, online adjunct instructors' perceptions on classroom instructional social media online approaches were examined. The quantitative method would not have been appropriate for this study. Quantitative researchers use numbers, instead of the examination of phenomena, to investigate the statistical significance of an event (Yin, 2003). Unlike in quantitative studies, numbers or statistics would not be significant when a researcher examines participants' perceptions about an event such as the role of using social media sites in the online classroom. Participants in this study were trained to teach higher education online courses, and these teachers were the experts on the topic. The use of numbers would be appropriate for a quantitative researcher who wanted to begin with a hypotheses and theories to describe a statistically significant comparison or correlation between types of social media sites, such as Facebook, blogs and Twitter (Yin, 2003). The design for this study was an exploratory case study in which the participants were online adjunct instructors who taught at online higher education institutions in the Northeast. The case study approach was the most appropriate. The focus was on the external events in participants' lives rather than on internal events in the participants' mind. Case study researchers examine participants' perceptions on external events, rather than internal events (Yin, 2003). In this study, participants' perceptions on the role of using social media sites as online instructional approaches were investigated.

In total, 14 online adjunct higher education instructors were selected to participate in the study. According to Yin (2003), 10–15 is an appropriate number of participants for a qualitative case study. At the time of the interviews, the participants in this study were employed as adjunct online higher education instructors, and they had worked as online adjunct higher education instructors for at least two years.

Online adjunct higher education instructors were e-mailed an invitation to participate in the study. The first 11 online adjunct teachers who responded to the letter of interest were invited to participate in the study. Data were triangulated through interviews, observations and artifacts such as reflections, lesson plans or online social media site activities. The researchers were the primary instrument in this qualitative study. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and data were coded to protect the identification of all participants. NVIVO10 qualitative software was used to identify themes and patterns. The study findings are not generalizable to other online adjunct instructors. In this qualitative study, the sample is too small to generalize the findings.

### **Research question**

The central research question was used to guide the study. The qualitative researcher's findings at the end of the data collection and data analysis provided answers to the

central research questions and the sub-questions (Yin, 2003). In this study, the central research question was:

*RQ1.* How do online adjunct higher education faculty members perceive the role of using social media sites as instructional approaches?

Open-ended sub-questions were the following:

*RQ1a.* How do online adjunct higher education instructors perceive social media sites?

*RQ1b.* How do online adjunct higher education instructors perceive social media instructional approaches?

*RQ1c.* How do adjunct online higher education instructors perceive the role of social media in the online classroom?

## Findings

### *Themes*

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the in-depth interview process. Based on the adjunct online higher education instructors' perceptions on the use of social media teaching approaches in the classroom, the themes that emerged were uniformity of purpose vs personal beliefs, need for justification vs importance of student engagement and facilitation vs direct instruction. Themes reflected online teaching approaches, higher education institutional missions and student learning and engagement outcomes. Overview of themes are identified in the below list.

Themes:

- (1) Uniformity of purpose vs personal beliefs.
- (2) Need for justification vs importance of student engagement.
- (3) Facilitation vs direct instruction.

### *Theme 1: uniformity of purpose vs personal beliefs*

The first theme was uniformity of purpose vs personal beliefs. Though participants shared differing views on the use of social media as a teaching tool in online adjunct taught classrooms, participants tended to focus on the student learning goals set by higher education institution leaders. P4 noted that "I do not believe it is in the best interest of a student to engage with social media while participating in online education." Though participants discussed the importance of meeting policies related to student learning goals, they expressed personal views regarding the use of social media as a teaching tool in adjunct online classrooms. P2 indicated, "I absolutely disagree that Facebook or any social media website should be used as an online instructional tool." Whereas P7 commented that "Though I am uncertain about university policies on the use of social media sites and student learning outcomes, as an adjunct, I strongly believe that social media sites should be used." The use of social media as a teaching approach was viewed as optional by participants who personally approved the use of social media as a possible valuable classroom instructional approach; however, lack of alignment to higher education schools' policies and student learning outcomes was not an optional approach.

Participants who viewed themselves as subject matter experts frequently noted they were hired to meet the needs of students based on the institution's vision, mission and purpose. P1 noted, "I do not use social media in courses unless the content is relative to specific curriculum or an illustration of the curriculum." P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P10 and P11 indicated they exclusively used institutional approved activities which were included in

course materials and aligned to the institutional mission. P3 stressed, "Teaching tools should be used to reiterate learning in alignment with the course goals and objectives, sole." Participants tended to feel if online curriculum leaders believed that social media was an expectation designed to support or explain curriculum, leaders would inform adjunct instructors of the need and set specific policies for using social media activities.

Participants who believed in the use social media sites as teaching approached expressed the need for higher education institutional change policies. Based on lack of guidance on the use of social media sites as instructional tools, these participants acknowledged ongoing concerns they experience as adjunct instructors. P9 added, "When a student complained about participating in social media activities in my online class, my supervisor questioned my use of social media. I was shattered." In this case, as an adjunct faculty member, the participant decided to forego the use of using social media as a teaching tool. Likewise, P10 shared, "In my online class, students loved using social media sites, but it affected my evaluation. I need this adjunct job, and I won't use them again." Participants acknowledged the advantages of using social media in their online classes; yet, the advantages did not always outweigh administrative policy and student learning outcome concerns. Overview of sub-themes for Theme 1 are included in the below list.

Sub-themes:

- (1) Adjunct flexibility.
- (2) Time.

#### *Sub-themes*

The first sub-theme was the extent of adjuncts' flexibility to use social media in the online classroom. Higher education institutional curriculum leaders failed to communicate to adjuncts the importance of and expectations for using social media as instructional tools. P8 commented that "I want to use more social media, but I don't really know how, and the school has not shown me." Without clarifications on policies related to the use of social media in the online classroom, participants debated how much flexibility they had in making decisions to use social media. Therefore, participants who were concerned about social media justification closely followed syllabi material and activities provided by the higher education institution. P5 commented, "I feel like my university does not respect the needs of adjunct instructors. We receive no guidance on using social media tools. Thus, I just ignore it." When instructional delivery flexibility was not well defined, adjunct instructors focused on learning outcomes rather than on instructional delivery best practices. Though P12, P13 and P14 noted that social media should play a role in online higher education classroom, P12 observed, "I doubt that leadership understand the opportunity and potential of social media and that is why it is not leveraged in the classroom." Lack of leadership communications and guidance decreases online adjuncts' use of social media as instructional tools. When instructional delivery flexibility was not well defined, adjunct instructors focused on learning outcomes rather than on instructional delivery best practices.

Time was a second sub-theme. P3 noted that "The logistics of adding social media to my already full course would be problematic, if not impossible." Though time was a concern, P5 noted that "I believe in student engagement and sacrifice sleep to engage students in meaningful blogs and Facebook discussions." Making time to use and align social media as an instructional tool was a personal choice for adjunct online instructors.

## **Theme 2: need for justification vs the importance of student engagement**

### *Blogging*

The second theme was need for justification vs the importance of student engagement. Though over half of the participants had not used social media sites in their adjunct online classrooms,



they were willing to evaluate the use of blogging in the online classroom. P2 commented, "Blogging could be useful if the blogging is secure and connected only to the specific online course instructional strategy activity or learning objective." However, P3 described the drawbacks of blogging and shared, "Too many challenges to keep students on topic and defining what is the purpose of technology (blogging), i.e., is it collaboration and if so, between whom, i.e., student-student or student-instructor?" Whether they expressed positive or negative comments, participants' perceptions were directly related to alignment and student learning.

Participant concerns centered on students having a difficult time separating the differences between social blogging and substantial, reflective classroom blogging. P7 shared, "I monitor blogs daily to make sure they are meaningful and on topic. However, students boldly complain that my expectations are too restrictive for blogging." Students' prior perceptions of blogging tend to affect their attitudes and learning outcomes. P9 commented that "My students begged me not to use blogs but to teach them what they needed to know. They were tired of socializing rather than learning." Though participants' perceptions on using blogs differed, they based the effectiveness of blogging on the meaningfulness of student responses.

### *Twitter*

Participants disagreed on the advantages of using Twitter as an instructional approach. P10 noted that the use of Twitter was "Not appropriate." Similarly, P4 interjected, "Twitter is too restrictive in that 140 characters is not sufficient to develop a comprehensive answer and does not support a dialectic learning environment." Overall, participants were concerned about substantial responses, student engagement and alignment. P2 stated that "I do not have experience as an online instructor using the tool, yet my view for any resources is always that the content implemented needs to be justified by the curriculum." Because higher education institutional leaders fail to demand use of social media as a teaching tool, participants concurred on the need for justification of Twitter in adjunct instructors' classrooms.

The impact of using Twitter in the adjunct online classroom was arguable; however, P14 commented, "I use short, quick comments to create engagement. A tweet is an excellent way to summarize learning, share the information with others, and follow other members for additional information." Though online leaders may fail to establish specific guidelines for using social media sites, online instructors are expected to use best practices. As a best practice, Twitter can be used after activities, such as discussions, group activities or presentation to summarize and measure what students have learned.

The impact of using Twitter in the adjunct online classroom was arguable; however, P13 commented, "I use short, quick comments to create engagement. A tweet is an excellent way to summarize learning, share the information with others, and follow other members for additional information." Though online leaders may fail to establish specific guidelines for using social media sites, online instructors are expected to use best practices. As a best practice, Twitter can be used after activities, such as discussions, group activities or presentation to summarize and measure what students have learned.

### *Facebook*

Participants' views on the use of Facebook as an instructional approach in the online classroom were more negative than positive. P1, P2, P4, P7, P12, P13 and P14 shared similar views. P7 summarized the perceptions, "I would never employ Facebook as an online instructional tool. It is too permissive and does not provide a safe learning environment." Likewise, P4 addressed potential policy issues and shared, "I would not encourage its use due to issues with privacy." P3 and P6 noted that other social media sites such as LinkedIn could better support student opportunities to learn, collaborate and discuss views on topics of interest. The use of Facebook as an online teaching tool was not ruled out by all

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participants. P5, P6, P8, P9, P11 and P14 suggested possible advantages of using Facebook, but these participants pointed out and emphasized the need for precautions and close monitoring. P3 noted that “Using Facebook can engage learners but should be used with caution. I might consider using it.” Increased student engagement and evidence of student learning were positive examples of the advantages of using Facebook. P8 stated, “On our Facebook, my students understand our ground rules, and they only share how they are transferring what they are learning in our classroom to the actual workplace. It is amazing!” Setting well-defined expectations and parameters for Facebook discussions increased student learning outcomes and adjunct instructor approval for the use of Facebook as a teaching tool. The sub-theme for Theme 2 will be included in the below list.

Overview of sub-theme for Theme 2:

- (1) Sub-theme.
- (2) Ethical concerns.

#### *Sub-theme for Theme 2*

The sub-theme of Theme 2 was ethical concerns. P8 noted, “Ethically, the use and delivery of media tools as part of the curriculum is the basis of the tools being effective.” Participants focused on maintaining high ethical standards when using social media as an instructional tool. Concerns were related to online instructor and student accountability. P, P, P and P agreed that “Justification of ethical issues such as privacy is a concern when using social media in the online classroom.” Though alignment to objectives may justify the use of social media, participants tended to question challenges related to privacy.

#### *Theme 3: facilitation vs direct instruction*

The third theme was facilitation vs direct instruction. Participants who preferred to use direct instructional approaches for teaching in the online classroom tended to reject the use of social media as an instructional tool. P6 commented, “I tried blogging. Students spent more time saying ‘I agree’ than on content. Never again. As an adjunct, my job is to focus on teaching business content.” Direct approach participants tended to contest the importance of using online teaching time to promote the use of technology via social media sites. P10 noted, “Is it ethical for me to sacrifice my valuable online teaching time just to say that I am using technology? I teach what students need to know.” Overall, participants who favored directly teaching concepts and skills through teacher lead instructional activities questioned the value of using social media in online classrooms.

Participants who taught content principle application tended to focus on direct instruction rather than on social media student engagement activities. P7 noted that “Though teaching students to network via the Internet may be important for business students, blogging and twittering do not teach students to apply business principles.” Additionally, P11 stated, “I focus on real-world business models that work. Most entrepreneurs do not use Facebook to organize and operate a business.” These online adjunct instructors were more focused on teaching students to use content, frameworks and models than on using social media to enhance teaching.

Participants who perceived their role in the online classroom was the role of facilitator tended to express that integrating technology such as social media enhanced student engagement and promoted student learning. P6 commented that “Using social media engages students in actual experiences and helps them personally relate to course readings.” Participants tended to express the importance of student engagement. P9 remarked, “Students often make powerful connections between what they are learning and what happens in their workplaces.” Participants focused on the benefits of using social media to

bridge the differences between real-world experiences and course content. Participants pointed out the relevancy and timeliness of using social media tools in the adjunct classroom to keep both facilitator and student engaged in real-world learning experiences. The sub-themes of Theme 3 are included in the below list.

Overview of sub-themes for Theme 3:

- (1) Sub-themes.
- (2) Ethical concerns.

#### *Sub-theme for Theme 3*

The sub-theme of Theme 3 was defining best practices for teaching online. One interpretation was that best practices for adjunct online teaching appear to be defined by higher education course-specific curriculum designers. P6 explained, "I teach at several institutions, and each course has very different best practices for instructional delivery, especially on the use of technology and social media. I have to be careful." Participants who prefer the direct instructional delivery approach benefit from clarifications of specific best practices guidelines that help justify the use of social media practices across the curriculum.

#### **Limitations of the study**

One limitation of this qualitative study was the ability to generalize the findings. In most qualitative studies, findings cannot be generalized to a larger group (Yin, 2003). In this study, adjuncts' perceptions expressed and themes found may not be characteristic of other adjunct instructors' views. In qualitative studies, participants are asked open-ended interview questions, which may have been a limitation for this study. Quantitative questions, such as the impact of using social media as an instructional approach, were not asked. In this study, adjunct online higher education instructors were invited to share their views on the study topic.

Additionally, qualitative researchers are limited by the data collection method and the data analysis process. Therefore, researchers who would like to repeat this study on adjunct online higher education teachers' perspectives may be unable to duplicate the research (Yin, 2003). In this study, online adjunct higher education faculty members' perceptions on the role of using social media sites as instructional approaches in the online classroom were examined. Though the participants in this study may not personally approve the use of social media sites as an instructional delivery approach, the focus was on adjunct online instructors' perceptions of the problem. Personal feelings may have played a role in participants' responses; however, participants were invited to respond to the interview questions in an honest and open manner.

#### **Summary**

According to the change theory in education model, a process must be in place for change to effectively take place (Fullan, 2006). Without undergoing a structured change process, higher education online adjunct instructors may not fully embrace the concept of using social media sites as teaching tools. Therefore, online higher education adjunct instructors may fail to fully implement social media sites, such as blogging, Twitter and Facebook, as teaching tools in the classroom, and the use of social media site challenges may outweigh digital opportunities to increase student learning outcomes through real-world applications (Fife *et al.*, 2014).

#### **Implications**

The significance of this study is the need for a renewed global initiative in higher education to promote the use of social media training for online adjunct faculty members. Online higher education faculty members' reflections on using social media tend to be recorded from a personal

rather than a professional point of view. The inclusion requirements and workshop trainings for the use of social media in online higher education classrooms vary among higher education institutions, and online adjunct faculty members may not have time to attend professional development workshops on best practices for using social media in the classroom (Kim, 2017).

The implication for online higher education leaders is to review mission statements and reevaluate how the use of social media may impact student learning outcomes, student career readiness and student engagement opportunities. Online higher education leaders need to reassess policies and include specific guidelines on the use of social media as instructional tools in the online classroom (Cao *et al.*, 2013). The use of social media in the classroom is a relevant and timely topic which is directly related to real-world applications of student learning (Jacquemin *et al.*, 2014).

If online adjunct higher education leaders determine that the use of social media sites is an appropriate instructional tool, leaders must provide online adjunct faculty members professional development on the use of social media best practices to promote increased student learning and enhance the teaching process. Additionally, more ongoing research must be conducted to ensure that privacy and student engagement concerns are addressed and processes are in place to prevent future issues (Neier and Zayer, 2015).

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