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The Cross-Platform Social Engagement of Students

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Abstract

With social media being a ubiquitous part of the way students engage with each other, this study explores how media, journalism, and publishing students use social media both in and outwith the classroom. It focuses on how cohorts use social media during class times – how they are speaking to each other and scrolling social feeds – and how they communicate about course related content after class. This research highlights the obligation that some students feel to answer questions that come into the group social channels, while linking that obligation to a sense of reciprocity. It shows how these issues are embedded it in the value exchange of emotional labour and its relationship to gender. Not all students feel obligated to take part and many indicate levels of frustration at the stream of questions, which can, in turn, exacerbate negative mental health issues in students.

Keywords

Social media, higher education, emotional labour, social obligation.

The Cross-Platform Social Engagement of Students

Introduction

Social media is a ubiquitous part of our lives, it helps to underpin the way we connect to each other, and how we build online identities and communities. 62.5% of people worldwide use the internet (We Are Social[1] , 2022) for an average of six hours and fifty-eight minutes a day. While this includes all access to the internet, including for work purposes; 58.4% of these people use social media (53 Million in the UK [Statista, 2022]) daily for two hours and twenty-seven minutes (We Are Social, 2022). The majority of users are accessing the internet from their smart phone. And, in Northern Europe 53% of social media users are female identifying, which is almost a direct flip from the world-wide average of 46.1% female- to 53.9% male-identifying.

The different social platforms have different gender dynamics, which affect how users engage with the platform and within the communities that make certain platforms their home. This is not to indicate that users of social media choose one, singular platform; instead there are high levels of crossover on social platform use. In fact, only .7% of Facebook users are unique to the platform. 72-78% also use YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram in varying degrees (We Are Social, 2022, 102). While this uptake is what we can expect from a legacy social platform such as Facebook, newer platforms such as TikTok, which Douyin rebranded as in 2018, also show high crossover of users. Only .1% of TikTok users are unique to the platform while 73-84% of TikTok users also use Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram; while between 32 – 56% use Telegram, Snapchat, Twitter, Pinterest, and LinkedIn (We Are Social, 2022, 102). The average number of social platforms used, across male and females, aged 16-44 is between 6-8 (We Are Social, 2022, 101).

In most audience profiles, the largest user base is 18-24 year olds, with Facebook being most popular with the 25-44 year olds. Instagram straddles these two demographics with their user base being equally by 18-44 year olds (We Are Social, 2022). With this general user base and gender dynamic in mind, this research explores the use of social media by higher education students in the field of media, journalism, and publishing.

There is much research on the role of social media in the classroom as a tool for learning with some finding that it 'can strengthen class material and positively influence discussions, collaborative work, and authoring' (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016); and others focusing on the use social media for 'small group learning' (Latif, et.al, 2019). Boateng and Amankwaa found that 'Social media provides students a new mechanism for a familiar exercise' which allows them to 'publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration, and fellow students in real-time' (2016). Chugh and Ruhi (2017) provided a literature review of Facebook and its use in higher education as a tool for student learning and teaching, while Luo, et.al. (2020) focus their research on how social media is being used by faculty for professional development.

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[1] For this research I use 'We Are Social' which produces up to date social research in conjunction with eight partners, including Statista and GWI.

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Research into the areas of teaching and learning uses of social media in higher education often focuses on larger platforms such as Meta and the use of messaging apps including Messenger (Meta), Twitter, and WhatsApp. This is beginning to change as more higher education professionals bring Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, and more into the classroom to support student engagement and learning (Manca, 2019). This engagement with social platforms could also 'facilitate deep learning in the creation of knowledge in e-learning' at HE institutions (Mnkandla & Minnaar, 2017), and can encourage students to be 'active participants or co-producers' of knowledge (McLoughlin & Lee, 2008). Becoming active in developing their learning environment to create Personal Learning Networks can 'extend beyond their face-to-face contacts' (Trust, et.al., 2017) and enable them to connect with other students and information at any time or place (Oddone, et.al. 2019).

Though a myriad of research has been undertaken regarding social use in the classroom, amongst academics as professional development, and as a means of developing personal learning networks, little research exists on how higher education students use social media platforms amongst themselves, during and after their classes – without the intervention of the academic, or the formalisation of platform use. This research addresses that lack of knowledge by identifying how a subset of university students engage with platforms and each other before, during, and after class, what they discuss and post about, and how gender and emotional labour come to the fore.

There are limits to the equality of access and ability to use social media platforms

There is always talk about the 'ease of access' (Seabrookes, 2020; Butler, N.D.) that is brought to the fore by the use of mobile devices. However, access to and use of social media platforms rely on much more than their perceived openness and accessibility. Though it may seem simple that users, both students of HE and the general public alike, only need to have an email address and device that connects to the internet to sign up for social platforms, there is much nuance to unpack within those affordances.

In their research on who uses social media, Blank and Lutz utilised twelve predictors that influence what an individual or group might experience 'digital inequalities' (2017, p. 745). These include 'classic' variables such as age, gender, income, and education (2017, p. 745).
In order to access social platforms a user must have the money, or access to, a device – whether that's in a university setting (of which they will also likely need to pay tuition for), owning a device, or using one in a public library or internet café. Users must have the time to access these devices, create an account, develop a profile, and scroll through the site to understand how it works and to interact with others, if they choose. In addition, users must have the mental capacity and knowledge in order to sign up for, and the skills to utilise these social platforms. And, while a large portion of society does have the time, money, and mental capacity to sign up for and use social platforms, this cannot apply across the board.

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Blank and Lutz additionally consider areas such as race, life circumstances (such as household status and numbers of people in a household), the device on which the platforms might be accessed, privacy and trust (2017). Beyond access to social platforms, Trust, et.al. indicate that in these 'digital spaces, learning experiences are mediated by these affordances, biases, and limitations of any platform' (2017), where users sign up and may not take time to read the small print. Butler notes that Facebook's initial privacy policy was 1,004 words, and by 2014 it had ballooned to 9,300 words 'with links to various sub-policies, 50 different settings, 170 options' (N.D., p.36); and in 2022, Facebook's data policy, cookie policy, and Terms of Service alone constitute nearly 11,000 words. While users often click to say they've read the TOCs, reading and understanding these terms requires a level of intelligence and literacy in addition to time, knowledge, and money to own/use a device. Though users often consider trust and privacy in relation to financial transactions mediated on the internet, they tend to care less when it relates directly to social media (Blank & Dutton, 2012).

Keeping the limitations of access in mind can enlighten educators and researchers on how some students use and engage with others on social platforms, both in and outside of the classroom. In addition, it can influence how we approach research into social media use among cohorts, and what methods, formats and questions work best for widest accessibility.

Methodology

The students that took part in this study were both undergraduates and post graduates in media, journalism, or publishing. The students across these programmes were sent a survey asking them about their social media use generally, how they used it during the classroom, and how they interacted with their cohort within it. The surveys were anonymous and were live at the beginning of the spring semester.
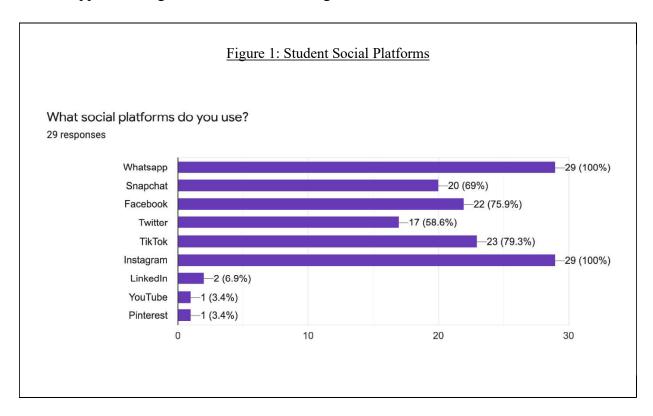
The results from the survey were coded in Nvivo for themes including mental health, social platforms, frustration, and content specific to the course, such as assignments.

Twenty-nine students opted to take part in the survey, meaning that this is a hyperlocal study that indicates that there is more, wider institutional research that should be undertaken in order to explore the relationships between social media use in the classroom, emotional labour, and mental health that came to the fore as a result of this research.

The majority of students who took part in this study identify as taught postgraduates (68.9%). The participants were further broken down by age where the largest group (52%) were 21-24 years old, while 18-21 year olds made up 34% and 26-30 year olds 14%. There were no students over thirty that took part. All of the participants were female -identifying. The media, journalism, and publishing courses are comprised of 80-90% female-identifying students, across all levels and backgrounds, which is higher than the UK average of 55.7% female entrants at UG level in 2019-2020 (Office For Students, 2021). However, the cohort demographics of this research is indicative of the wider UK-based demographics in publishing degrees, and the publishing industry at large, where the majority of students and the workforce are female-identifying (Publishers Association, 2021).

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The platforms students use are driven by communication and engagement

Users choose and reject social platforms for reasons specific to their lived experience and they do not select them at random (Horvát & Hargittai, 2021; Hargittai, 2015; Hargittai & Litt, 2011). This is valid whether at enterprise level, or in small, hyperlocal studies. When surveyed about their general social media use, all participants in this study indicated that they utilise WhatsApp and Instagram, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Student Social Platforms

Here, we see that the platforms on which most participants have a presence facilitate conversation or engagement, either in direct communication (WhatsApp) or in likes, shares, comments and views (Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Though the participants in this study are female-identifying, and Pinterest's user base is 77% female (Statista, 2022), Pinterest only has a reach of 2.9% of the population (We Are Social, 2022, 200), which does correspond to 3.4% of participants or 1 in 29, making use of the platform. The use of Snapchat by 69% of the participants links to their ages, where the majority were 18-24 years old, and the largest Snapchat demographic mimics this age group (We Are Social, 185).

When asked directly about their social media use in the classroom, 82.2% of participants stated that they did, in fact, use social media during class. They use it to chat to others in the class (62.1%), and to those who aren't in the classroom but are part of the cohort (44%). Almost 50% of participants indicated that they used social media to chat with family and friends not on their course, during class time. Of those that do use social media in a classroom setting, over 40% indicated that they use it to engage with platform content, such as scrolling, liking, posting, sharing, and commenting on posts.

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Tellingly, none of the twenty-nine participants actually asked the lecturer to repeat something they missed while engaging with social media during class, but 20.7% wanted to and felt they were unable for undisclosed reasons. These numbers are similar to those found by McCoy in his survey of digital distractions in the Gen Z college classroom, where he found that 84.6% of participants were texting and 56.9% were on social networks (2020, p.9). McCoy went on to highlight that the average student (undergraduate and postgraduate) 'used a digital device an average of 9.06 times each class day for non-class activities' (2020, p.9).

However, a postgraduate, 26-30 year old participant qualified her use of social in the classroom by stating that, 'I only do this in the case of an emergency. I don't like being distracted by social media in class and I also think it's disrespectful to both my classmates and my lecturer if my phone is constantly buzzing and my attention is focussed elsewhere. Hence, I most often refrain from using social media in class.' This links to the concept that students do not necessarily have to use social media within the classroom in a distracting manner. In fact, 20.7% of participants use social platforms to take group notes that a friendship group, and sometimes the wider cohort, can access later. Of this 20.7%, two-thirds are postgraduates, who are often committed to getting the most out of their modules and sessions as a means of attaining employability.

Part of doing well on any university course is to understand the content and satisfactorily complete the assignments. These topics were the most prevalent when participants were asked about what they discussed on social media during class. 82.8% of students admitted to asking other students questions during class. Assignments (89.7%) was the most prevalent topic asked about; this was followed by class content (reading, seminar work, guests' names, what they should be reading or doing in class – 27%). After the class has ended, assignments remained the most discussed topic (62%).

Though 89.7% of students in this study claimed that they are the ones who asked question/s about assignments during class, 100% of participants indicate that they have been asked to clarify some point regarding assignments either during or post-classroom session. 89.7% of students indicated that they have been asked by other students about what happened in class/what they should be reading or doing; while only 58.6% of participants say they were the ones asking their cohort this. The need that some of these participants feel to engage with, respond to, and help others, is linked to obligation to respond when a member of their cohort asks a question.

Students feel a social obligation to respond

'Everyone helps each other out by answering our questions because we usually respond faster than emailing a lecturer' (undergraduate, 18-21).

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In this study, 62% of students felt obligated, or sometimes obligated, to answer other students' questions regarding the class or assignments when it arrived via social media. Obligation here, is a motivation which has two features: a 'peremptory, demanding force, with a kind of coercive quality' which 'is often tied to agreement-like social interactions […] on one side, and apologies, excuses, justifications, and guilt on the other' (Tomasello, 2020). Individuals, in this case, classmates, hold each other responsible for a shared sense of answering by a system of 'mutual accountability' (Tomasello, 2020) where expectations are created as 'treating others the way I would like to be treated' (postgraduate, 21-25).

This sense of obligation is linked to social exchange theory, which has been utilised in studies of the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and how interactions between individuals and teams within an organisation react to specific obligations (Emerson, 1976). These interactions are governed by rules and norms of exchange where a 'normative definition of the situation that forms among or is adopted by the participants in an exchange relation' (Emerson, 1976: 351). These social exchanges come to the fore when students in these cohort groups consider their obligations to respond to one another as 'the nice thing to do' (postgraduate, 22-25) because 'everyone helps each other out by answering our questions' (undergraduate, 18-21). The rules and norms of exchange continue to exist in the digitally social world where the relationships between the wider group and the individuals within in it are shaped by the accepted 'normal' behaviours of the group and are more readily adopted by new users when they feel involved (Mazambani, et.al., 2015).

The ties these students feel to one another are usually strong, in that they also exist across platforms and often in physical spaces such as classrooms and extracurricular activities (Barnes, 2018). To a lesser degree there are weak or latent ties where students may know of each other, but not interact offline or take classes together (Barnes, 2018). It is within these ties, or relationships, in digitally social situations where students create exchanges of information, which can be considered a favour 'with a general expectation of a future return' (Chen & Hung, 2010, p.227), or reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). With the majority of participants indicating that they feel some obligation to answer others' questions, reciprocity becomes a theme where 'if I needed help in that aspect, I would hope my classmates would do the same and give me the same support' (undergraduate, 18-21).

41.67% of the twenty-four participants who elaborated on why they felt obligated to answer other students' questions on social media indicated that it was due to feelings of reciprocity. The commentary indicates that students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, would want and expect the same sort of help had they missed out on any information or had not understood a particular aspect of a class or assignment, because, as one participant wrote, 'We are all part of the cohort community so if someone is struggling it is only fair to help them' (undergraduate, 18-21).

Other students also indicated that they feel obligated to reply for the sake of that cohort community where they 'double check with my classmates to make sure that I have everything correct. I have a reputation for being organised and so other people then often turn to me. Sometimes even by me asking a question such as "The assignment is due on the 9th right?" it reminds people about it, so I feel an obligation to continue helping' (postgraduate, 22-25).

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These students who choose to answer and share their knowledge, may feel a higher sense of self-efficacy where they are able to share their knowledge to positively effect the way that others in the group may see them (Chen & Hung, 2010), as the above student, who feels they are seen by others as an organised individual.

It is this desire to help and be helped that comes through and develops a sense of community, strengthens ties, and reinforces the reciprocity of social exchange where students feel obligated to help one another; this is closely related to the emotional labour of taking part, which is always gendered.

The social obligation students feel is directly linked to their gender and its relationship to emotional labour

When student participants felt obligated to answer those in their cohort who were asking questions on social media, they are doing what Hochschild considers 'processing people' (2012, p.6) where the product is less the physical/digital output of their responses – though this is part of it – and is more 'a state of mind' (ibid.). Here, in these digital spaces it holds true that 'women adapt more to the needs of others and cooperate more than men do' (Hochschild, 2012, p.165). As mentioned in the methodology, 100% of the participants who opted to take part in this research were female-identifying or non-binary. This is important to note, as ''[e]motional labour is clearly distributed along the lines of gender […where] women overwhelmingly perform tasks [… because it] is seen as something that women do because they are naturally suited to it' (Müller, 2019, p.848). Furthermore, the 'construction of women as especially communicative digital consumers has found a welcome home in the social media economy' (Duffy, 2017, p.41).

As it exists outside of the marketplace and can relate to relationships, friendships, and cohort cohesion, the role of answering questions, caretaking, and emotional labour often fell to the women in this study. Emotional labour links to the concepts of immaterial labour and affective labour, the latter of which values human interactions, is heavily gendered (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008, p.98), and includes accessibility, being present, and connectedness with a group (Raun, 2018). The interactivity of receiving and responding to cohort chat across social platforms is the type of labour that women have been, and are more likely to, conduct (Raun, 2018). Where, '[females] are socialised into providing emotional support, empathy and care for others. Girls learn […] that they are the ones responsible for taking up the emotional work when required' (Müller, 2019, p.852). Because 'it is the presented gender that shapes the social interactions and dynamics'' (Shen, et.al, 2017, p.183) within these groups, we can expect to see a reliance on emotional, immaterial, and affective labour continuing.

This is not to say that all emotional, affective, and immaterial labours negatively impact those who undertake them. Emotional labour 'may have positive effects on the individual' (Lazány, 2010) and increase the level of satisfaction in a role (Wharton, 1993) and their self worth.

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Furthermore, these forms of labour can facilitate friendship building, sociality, and allow those who do the emotional lifting by responding to others in the cohort can find such a process highly collaborative and even exciting (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008. p.111).

The different types of unpaid, gendered, and emotional labour have an 'exchange value' (Hochschild, 2012 p.7) based in developing and growing social capital. Even though the 'underlying assumption seems to be that because emotional labour can also be intrinsically pleasurable and rewarding, it therefore cannot be exploited'' (Müller, 2019, p.849). However, it should be noted that not all students engage with answering others' queries. In fact, many actively do not. 'Excessive identification with emotional requirements often goes hand in hand with burnout' (Lazány, 2010), which can be seen in this research by the frustration of the participants.

Frustration among students appeared in two ways: the perceived laziness of others and in repeating questions

Some participants understood that as part of a cohort in these digitally social groups, they, as individuals, can be a ''giver or receiver [of knowledge] at different times' (Chen & Hung, 2010), as indicated by their consideration of reciprocity. Some students indicated that by being asked questions it helped them 'to keep on top of what I am doing and feel ahead of the game' (undergraduate, 18-21); and, 'because I ask others too and it is just you helping each other' (undergraduate, 18-21). However, 51.6% of participants indicated that they got tired of other students asking about the class or coursework, with some going further to highlight that this is especially the case when the answers could have been found elsewhere (such as in the module handbook). 48.3% of the participants believe that most of the questions come from those who do not attend class[2].

This sense of frustration comes through in two particular ways: the frustration of answering those perceived as lazy, and the frustration of repeated questions (especially from the same individuals).

Frustration, as exemplified in Table 1, ''can be viewed both as an external event that has an impact on the individual, or the emotive response that the individual experiences' (Hadlington & Scase, 2018). Though the questions and commentary by the cohort may be external events in and of themselves, the salient data in this research relates to the emotional experiences of feeling this frustration and how the students respond, where some respond by shutting off the flow of cohort social media saying '[s]ometimes I mute group chats to let someone else answer a questions as I feel like I want to focus on my own learning' (postgraduate, 22-25). In fact, 69% of participants chose to stop engaging with group chats because there were so many questions.

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[2] It is worth noting here that this study was completed in early 2022, when class attendance dropped internationally, even though most students returned to face-to-face teaching in the UK. See articles by Williams, 2022 (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/class-attendance-plummets-post-covid) and Samson, 2022 (https://er.educause.edu/articles/2022/3/students-often-prefer-in-person-classes-until-they-dont).

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Table 1: Examples of what students become frustrated about when others
in their cohort ask about the classes or coursework.

the frustration of answering those perceived as lazy
I feel it is sometimes unfair if the people asking don't have a substantial reason not to attend class or have never attended a class and still receive the same information as the people who do (undergraduate, 18-21).
…I find these questions can be frustrating, as the information is usually easily available (postgraduate, 26-30).
I find it tiring when people either don't pay attention to important information, or are too 'lazy' to figure it out by looking in the obvious places (postgraduate, 26-30).
I would get tired of it if it were someone who always misses information - start to feel like they don't bother to listen because they know you will tell them (postgraduate, 22-25).
the frustration of repeated questions
Many times people are repeating the same question over and over again and it's usually something that can be found in module guides or emails (undergraduate, 18-21).
Some other students just ask me and my friends the same questions over and over again (undergraduate, 18-21).
Often students ask the same question, even if it has already been answered early in an online chat. If that happens often sometimes you get tired of answering (postgraduate, 22-25).
It's tiring to keep repeating information that was said before and repeated other times in the group chat (postgraduate, 22-25).

Muting or non-engagement with cohort social media can be seen as maladaptive responses to a frustrating situation which could lead to students not seeing extra information shared by the cohort or feeling unable to ask their own questions if the need arises (Hadlington & Scase, 2018). This can precipitate the students lashing out, withdrawing, or feeling embarrassed for asking a question if they are mocked or not answered (or not answered swiftly enough).

Another aspect of the frustration students felt was rooted in the repetition of questions and the amount of messages coming through, where one student indicated that 'Sometimes when there's too many msgs to keep up with you just switch off' (postgraduate, 22-25). This echoes research by Zhang & Cranshaw who found that frustration exists in group chats where there is no better way to catch up with content than by scrolling. They go on to highlight how most chats 'contain a great deal of back-and-forth before reaching a conclusion, and intersperse important information with humor or chit-chat, providing little ability to distinguish the two' (2018, 196:6). Much like the student quoted above, their interviewees also 'chose to ignore missed messages, assuming they were irrelevant by then' (2018, 196:6).

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In a long stream of chat, DMs, or commentary online, recalling or finding information is not easy, especially if different aspects of it are being asked repeatedly, and either not answered in subsequent requests, or answered in a different manner by a different member of the group. This can lead to many answers being given to the same question, instead of students going to the source – either the lecturer via email, the handbook, or the VLE. An overabundance of questions and potentially differing answers can cause concern among the students over what is the 'correct' answer and can be the cause of anxiety which can have detrimental impacts on a student's mental health.

The expectations of engagement on social media has both negative and positive effects on students' mental health

Students who took part in this research mentioned tiredness, anxiety, panic, or stress twenty three times, indicating that social media can 'have a negative effect on mental health' (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020, p.239). With the ubiquitous use of smartphones, laptops, and tablets in the student population there will be 'challenges and opportunities for college student mental health' afforded by such continual connectivity (Lattie, et.al., 2019). It's worth noting that though studies have found that time spent on social channels can lead to poorer mental health (Lin, et.al., 2016), and those young adults who use multiple social media channels have 'substantially higher odds of having increased levels of both depression […] and anxiety symptoms' (Primack, et.al., 2017), that another, meta-analysis has found that the negative effect on well-being is almost negligibly small at 0.4% (Orben, 2019).

However, the findings of Orben cannot discount the feelings of stress and anxiety that some students feel when they are faced with their cohort asking repeated questions about their classes across different channels. One student indicated that '[s]ome questions are unnecessary and just cause stress amongst others' (postgraduate, 22-25), while another said that 'I only mute it when they are talking about topics that make me anxious, e.g., an assignment I haven't submitted yet' (undergraduate, 22-25). Others linked obligation to stress in saying that 'feel that if I know I should help people out to avoid others getting stressed' (undergraduate, 18-21) and '[s]omeone has to answer them eventually, I tend to be that person so that they don't feel ignored' (postgraduate, 22-25). These negative effects can be exacerbated by the university experience. University itself is stressful (Covid 19 aside) and this stress 'can impact […student] behavior and memory; more specifically, academic performance (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908)' (qtd in Iwamoto & Chun).

When a student mentions that 'I do not like to discuss the assignments with others – both in terms of avoiding plagiarism consequences and stopping other students' anxiety from having an effect on me' (postgraduate, 26-30), this student is making an active choice not to take part in the wider group chat in order to relieve the stress of the potential of someone else's work seeping into their own and to keep any anxiety of others from spreading. Much like Siemens and Weller found that 'conflicts and tensions arise as the structure of networks clashes with the hierarchical structure of traditional education' (2011, p.166).

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The tensions between what students are asking, sharing, spreading, and institutional knowledge found in the lecturer, module handbook, or VLE can give rise to anxieties in the student cohort. For those students who shut off their notifications and do not engage with cohort social media, including group chats, this could heighten aspects of isolation and loneliness, which, in turn, can drive poor mental health and anxiety (StudentMinds, 2014; Thomas, et.al., 2019).

However, it is not always the case that social media usage has a negative effect. It 'can be a form of social support' (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020, p.239) instead. Its use can promote both bonding and bridging social capital, where bonding creates more 'emotionally close bonds'' (Thomas, et.al., 2020) with others and bridging develops more loosely associated connections (Thomas, et.al., 2020). When students mention the obligation to respond to group questions, they are working within the internal, exclusive nature of the group by creating bonding social capital where 'classmates would do the same' (postgraduate, 18-21) because they are alike as students and 'in it together' (Claridge, 2018). 'Bonding social capital tends to help people "get by" and provides the norms and trust that facilitates collaborative action' (Claridge, 2018), the helping out of one another when questions arise in the cohort social media channels. The downside to this insular group connectivity is that it can breed negative emotions as seen above.

This is not to say that it is better for students to focus on bridging social capital, but it can enhance growth and development (Claridge, 2018) and provide outward facing and wider group opportunities in ways that bonding capital does not. The role of bridging capital is well-placed in student cohort groups as it brings together 'people with shared interests or goals, but contrasting social identity' (Pelling & High, 2005); however, the key here is that the groups are inclusive and not echo chambers, which can develop in smaller friendship and assignment groups and more widely across social media (Guess, et.al, 2018; Cinelli, et.al., 2020). By allowing students with different backgrounds, working habits, and anxiety levels to connect, share information, knowledge, and support, bridging social capital within these social media cohorts can keep students on 'top of what [they are] doing and feel ahead of the game' (postgraduate, 18-21).

TLDR (Discussion)

Many university students of all levels take advantage of the widespread use and connectivity of social media both in and out of the classroom. The types of social media they are using cross different platforms depending on whether they are communicating within their cohort groups, or with wider social connections. The students who took part in this study made the most use of Whatsapp and Instagram, followed by TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat. Most of them use social media during their classes to chat with others in the classroom, or family or friends outside of the classroom. Many spent class time scrolling, liking, and engaging with social content, but few (6.9%) took the time to post content of their own, even though 61% indicated that engaging with social media interfered with their attention on the class itself.

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Students tended to ask each other questions about the assignments and in class-content to clarify points, which led some students to feel a sense of obligation to answer those questions. This obligation links to aspects of reciprocity, where if they answer now, maybe someone will answer them later. It is also intertwined with the gender of the cohort taking part in social media, and the aspects of emotional, affective, and immaterial labour that are highly gendered. However, this emotional labours can lead to a sense of frustration, especially where questions were being repeated, the answers could be found in the handbook, lectures, or on the VLE, or where the answers were lost in long series of texts. These frustrations have a direct impact on the mental health of the students, where some switch off the group chats, which can, in turn, exacerbate feelings of isolation and anxiety.

Taking all of this into account, academics, and the university system more widely, should be aware of how students are using social media both within and without the classroom. One consideration is to look more closely at how groups are structured and how we approach seminar work in ways that can actively distribute the emotional labour involved. The fact that many students prefer to ask their cohort for information instead of the sources (lecturers, handbooks, VLEs) can start to be addressed by fostering a sense of community and communication within the classroom. Use of anonymous posting technology like Mentimeter and Padlet, can allow for live questions to be asked during a session. Likewise, an open document on the VLE where students can ask questions about the class or assignments can encourage students to post questions anonymously which will be answered by the lecturer. This creates a database of definitive Q&As for the cohort to refer to, and it allows the lecturer to understand what the most confusing or problematic aspects of the classes, assignments, or course as a whole, develop.

There is no one 'correct' way to approach the complex aspects of student use of social media, but it is vital for academics to understand that it is being used at all times. By starting with knowing how students are using it, perhaps academics can guide them to use it in ways that will benefit them, instead of causing excess emotional labour, frustration, or anxiety.

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