Social Media: Is it Good or Bad?

Jane Jeong

Abstract

Social media has been on the rise the past decade. There are many debates if social media is a good or bad influence on students. Interviews were conducted on two UC Davis students and one UC Davis professor. This research article will delve into what college students and professors think about whether or not social media does influence the way they write in an academic setting.

Introduction

College students have become accustomed to the life of using social media on a day to day basis. It is rare to see someone who does not use social media. As someone who grew up in the past years, there has definitely been a rise in social media usage. I, myself, use social media consistently throughout the day, checking for notifications, emails, and messages. Since my peers use a variety of social media platforms, I started to branch out more and started using not only Facebook, but also Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Tumblr. After spending quite some time on social media, I began to adapt the typing mannerisms such as slang that my friends used and ignored grammar rules. Compared to academic writing, social media is more casual and approachable. Academic writing, on the other hand, is more serious and formal. Because of the drastic differences between the two, I often wondered if social media had an influence on the way how we write and think in an academic setting.

As technology became more advanced throughout the years, there has been a rise in social media usage. From the findings of the Pew Research Center, nearly 90 percent of youth, aging from 18-29, use social media. Back in 2005, the percentage of youth that used social media

was around 12% (Perrin 2015). Over the decade, there has been an increase of more than 50%. There are many analyses on social media's influence on youth not only in the behavioral aspect, but also academically.

Educators utilize social media in their lectures, not only for the easy accessibility, but also because they believe that there are some positive aspects to using social media in an academic setting. For example, there are more opportunities for collaborative work and learning becomes more interactive. From this one research that was conducted, researchers tried to see if Facebook is a good social media platform to use in an academic setting. McCarthy found that Facebook helped students to build good peer relationships and develop more positive attitudes towards learning (Tess 64). Another study was conducted in Hong Kong, and students reported that by implementing social media in a class setting, it motivated them to be more interactive more because communicating is easier and faster (Chu, Capio, Aalst, Cheng 176). From the activities that the students have completed during the study, the results showed that the students not only fixed their own work but also helped others with their work as well (Chu, Capio, Aalst, Cheng 173). This evidently shows that the students were actively helping each other out in social media while being in an academic setting.

However, there are some drawbacks to social media in an academic setting. One reason is that not everyone has social media, so it would be difficult to implement the use of social media in a classroom setting. Another disadvantage is the possibility of students using this as an advantage to talk to their friends instead of focusing on lecture. Some studies showed that there is a negative correlation between Facebook and GPA (Tess 63). Participants from Kirschner and Karpinski's research said that Facebook negatively impacted their time management skills and caused quite a distraction (Tess 63).

Writing is not only important in the academic aspect, but it is an important skill to have for jobs as well. Some of the problems that Silicon Valley employers noticed from college graduates is that they need stronger writing skills and need to avoid the usage of slang (Stevens 5). Experts believe that people tend to use slang countless number of times on social media because it conveys the message in simpler terms and it's convenient (Clark, Araki 4). In addition, on these platforms, grammar, spelling, and punctuation do not matter (Clark, Araki 2). However, in a professional environment, it is preferred that employers do not use slang because it is informal. Being too adapted to the social media can potentially create some bad habits for students, especially when they are writing professionally whether it'd be for their job or internship. There should be a clear boundary between social media writing and academic literacy.

To look into this issue, interviews were conducted on students and one professor at UC Davis to get a different perspective and secondary research was conducted to get a perspective from experts and professionals. From the results of the interviews, there were similar perspectives upon this issue. They all believed that in social media, there are less restrictions on what they can write, but with academic writing there is a lot less freedom on what you can write about.

Methods

I interviewed two UC Davis students and one professor. They all differ in years as in sophomore, junior, and senior. The questions that I asked were:

1. How often do you use social media on a daily basis?

2. Do you think social media influences the way you write? If so, how?

3. Do you think there is a positive or negative influence on writing and thinking from social media?

4. What is your view on social media literacy?

5. What do you think are some disadvantages of academic writing?

6. Why do you think we write differently online vs. academic settings?

Each interview was recorded, so no important information was left out. A majority of the secondary research was done on Google Scholar to find credible sources for this research article.

Discussion of Findings

Overall from the interviews, students believe that there is not that much of an influence from social media on academic writing. The reason being is because students are taught how to write academically. They believe that students do not really care about what they write online versus when they write in an academic setting because professors read what they write and there are a lot more restrictions placed on academic writing. The only factor that influenced the way they wrote was when they write online because it does not have to be extremely formal or grammatically correct there is a lot more freedom when writing on social media platforms. Similarly, from a professor's perspective, he said that there is no influence from social media on academic writing. But there is a high chance of an outside information or opinions of entering into social media literacy because social media is open to the public.

Both students stated that they use social media on a daily basis. They all use Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. Student 1 stated that there is influence on the way she writes from social media. As she got exposed to social media, she stopped being grammatically correct and

formal. When she looked at comments on YouTube, she saw that the people did not show intelligence when they were writing about how they felt and thought about the content in the video. Because of this, she believes that social media gives negative influence. She believes that people would benefit more if people, online, are more grammatically correct. She said when looking at academic writing, she thinks that the language that is being used in papers are not used on a daily basis. Therefore, she thinks that it gives a negative stigma towards academic writing because of the lack of familiarity and people would avoid writing academic writing online because it is hard to understand. There is a separation between the writer and audience in academic writing, whereas on social media, the author has more of a friendly approach to their audience because of the lack of formality.

Similarly to student 1, student 2 has similar perspectives on social media. He thinks that social media did not influence the way how he writes professionally, but it has more of an impact on the way how he writes informally. He would use abbreviations and emoticons when he wants to express how he feels and get his message across to his peers. He stated that he would never use the language that he uses on social media when writing an email or essay because it makes it seem "incompetent". In contrast to student 1, he thinks that there is a positive influence from social media. Reason being that is because social media expands the people's speculative bubble from garnering information from the internet. He also stated that social media platforms are very important because they can help one to express themselves freely without feeling too restricted. People can express themselves through their personal style and emoticons. He stated that one disadvantage when it comes to academic writing is that there is less creativity in the way one can write in expressing themselves. He commented that a benefit that comes from academic writing is that students can present their thoughts in a structured format in a way that their

readers can understand. Student 2 believes that the reason why people write differently online versus in an academic setting is that there is more of a connection between them and their peers. In an academic setting, students need to structure their writing in a way that the main message can be conveyed to their unknown.

Based off these two interviews from these students, the main downside of academic writing is the lack of freedom. There are always some criteria that students need to follow to get those points to get that A on the paper. Because of the criteria or rubric that students need to follow, there is a lot more lack of creativity in papers whereas on social media, there is no specific structure that they need to follow. They are free to express themselves in any way. It can be clearly seen that it is up to the student whether or not they want to incorporate the style of social media writing into their academic or professional writing.

The UC Davis professor stated that he uses Twitter and YouTube on a daily basis, but he said that there is no influence from social media on the way how he writes. He does believe that since social media is a lot more open to the public and there is no rigid structure, there are more chances of opinions from outside sources that can influence social media literacy. Since social media is so impactful nowadays, people can be easily influenced by ideas that are online and believe those opinions. He also believes that there are many people out there who would write a certain way to get facts that they want and be manipulative. When asked about the disadvantages of academic writing, he said that academic writing exists in a rigid framework.

He mentioned that academic writing tends to create standards and definitions. The professor believes that if you read academic writing outside of context, it sounds ridiculous. When told about how students feel that there is a lack of creativity in academic writing due to the restrictions that are placed, he said that there should be restrictions placed, so that there is correct

thought. What he means by correct thought is correct information and argument. He stated if there were no restrictions to be placed in academic writing, students are not able to write a solid argumentative essay. However, he mentioned that there are some drawbacks to it because students are not able to convey what they want to argue, instead they need to write content that will satisfy their grader. He stated that he's not sure what can be done because one way or the other there will be consequences.

Experts looked into the most common errors that were made by students when writing formal papers. The most common errors turned out to be grammatical errors and spelling errors. The experts compared the students' papers to Facebook pages (Harris, Dilts 191). Because of the character limit on these social media platforms, experts believe that it is the source of grammatical errors and encourages students to use slang to fit their posts into the specific character count (Harris, Dilts 192). From this point of view, it can be seen that some people have gotten so used to the habit of writing abbreviations instead of writing the whole phrase down that they incorporate it in their academic writing. There are many factors to consider when thinking about if social media does influence the way how students write academically.

There were several limitations in this study which is the duration of study and sample size. If the number of students that were interviewed are larger, then there can be a general consensus of what the student population feels towards this issue. The research could have been more in depth if more time was given.

Conclusion

According to findings, students feel that there is not that much of an influence of social media on their academic writing because they are taught how to write academically in their classes. They do not have a problem writing in an academic setting. The main disadvantage with

academic writing would be that there are a lot of restrictions. More restrictions would put more pressure onto students which can lead to less creativity in papers. However, there are some drawbacks to social media. When looking at student 1, she stated that because of the amount of freedom there is on social media, people take advantage of it and do not incorporate grammatical rules, which makes it seem like people lack intelligence. But because of this freedom in social media, people are allowed to express themselves in any way that they want and are able to get information from all sorts of places that can expand their speculative bubbles, according to student 2.

On the other hand, looking at a professor's perspective, though restrictions do limit one's creativity, it would lead to less chaotic arguments. He stated that the way one writes is the way they would think. In order to prevent chaotic arguments from taking place, it is better to have some restrictions placed in an academic setting. He does believe that students are limited in what they want to say because they are more concerned about what the graders want. There are no solidified solutions to fix this problem according to the professor. One way or the other, there are bound to be consequences to follow. From the interviews, it can be said that there is no definite evidence of whether or not if there is an influence of social media on academic writing.

Employers believe that there is a negative relationship between writing and social media. Because of the lax system in social media, students will become more accustomed to not using professional language and grammatical rules. Because of this, employers have noticed that students lack professionalism in their emails. Since there is a character count in social media, experts believe that students are not able to fully convey what they want to say. Therefore, students use abbreviations and disregard grammatical rules to fit within that character count. However, there is no concrete evidence that social media does have an influence on literacy.

More research needs to be conducted to see if there is actually influence of social media on academic writing.

A suggestion that can be made for this particular issue is to get rid of rubrics that students need to follow. Having no rubrics would put weight off the students' shoulders. Contract grading is another suggestion to look into. Contract grading is a "written agreement between student and instructor that stipulates the work that student will do and the grade he or she can expect if the work is satisfactory" (Hassencahl 30-31). Contract grading will alleviate students' stress. There are many analyses in contract grading that proves that students' efforts increase significantly through this system. By utilizing this system, students will feel less stressed about what they need to write in their papers. There are some guidelines that students would need to follow, but students would have less to worry about because there are no specific guidelines to follow. As long as the criteria is met, then it is more than satisfactory. In conclusion, it all comes down to how much restrictions the instructors want to place on students.

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