Social Media Engagement and Domestic Intercultural Immersion Trips: An Examination of Social Media Platforms as Avenues for Assessment of Student Learning in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the extent to which social media engagement enhances domestic intercultural immersion trip experiences. Dumford and Miller (2018) examined students’ use of social media as an assessment of student learning outcomes and found that it is an efficient and convenient method for assessing such. While there is research in the literature related to the advantages of using social media as an assessment of student learning outcomes, there is a paucity of studies pertaining to social media as an assessment tool for immersion programs. The purpose of this study is to contribute to existing literature with a focus on social media usage to assess students who participated in the Student National Association of Student Broadcasters (SNASB) trip. Data was collected via a closed (by invitation only) Facebook group of students registered for the SNASB trip. Students were encouraged to create posts in response to eight prompts related to the university’s liberal education responsibility outcome. Data was analyzed via content analysis with thematic analysis as a secondary form of examining data. Results reveal that students engaged across a variety of social media platforms, utilizing multiple communication tools in sharing their immersion experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Among the group of 29 students who participated in the 2019 SNASB trip, 28 students consented to immersion trip experiences. Dumford and Miller (2018) examined students’ use of social media as an assessment tool for immersion programs. The purpose of this study is to contribute to existing literature with a focus on social media usage to assess students who participated in the SNASB trip. Data was collected via a closed (by invitation only) Facebook group of students registered for the SNASB trip. Students were encouraged to create posts in response to eight prompts related to the university’s liberal education responsibility outcome. Data was analyzed via content analysis with thematic analysis as a secondary form of examining data. Results reveal that students engaged across a variety of social media platforms, utilizing multiple communication tools in sharing their immersion experiences.

LITERATURE & CONCEPTS

ASSESSING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Dumford and Miller (2018) studied advantages and disadvantages of social media to assess student learning, finding that such tools are “efficient and convenient ways to achieve learning goals” (p. 453). They also noted that “most recent research indicates trends for the importance of incorporating social media into the classroom” (Dumford & Miller, p. 455). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, offer communication tools that resonate with the Millennials’ generation (born late 1981-2000, which applied to all of the students on the SNASB trip based on student demographic data of the trip). Chen and Blum-Morawetz (2017) found that members of the Millennials’ generation cohort have “a propensity for the creation and consumption of digital content” (p. 149) and are often divided by their experiences with digital cultural activities.

FACEBOOK AS A PLATFORM FOR ASSESSMENT

The desire to use Facebook stems from research conducted by Shane-Simpson, Mapara, Gaggi, and Gillispie-Lynch (2018), which has provided evidence that Facebook has remained the most popular social media site in the United States (p. 279) since 2005. The authors also stated that Facebook provides the largest array of features, including text-based posts, photo sharing, and sophisticated privacy settings that allow one to customize specifically who can view each post (Shane-Simpson, Mapara, Gaggi, & Gillispie-Lynch, p. 277). The variety of features that students can use to create their posts and the enhanced privacy setting options that can be implemented are characteristics of Facebook that are important for this study. The diverse array of features in Facebook provided students with a plethora of options for demonstrating liberal education competencies and reflecting on their experiences throughout the trip.

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS THEORY

Creating a new idea and exploring the ways in which the new idea is accepted is attributed to the Diffusion of Innovations theory. Everett Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations framework and found to be used to “study the acceptance and spread of all sorts of ideas and practices throughout the world” (p. 296). With this study examining Facebook as a platform of assessment throughout the SNASB trip, a new approach to evaluating the RI liberal education learning outcome was implemented. Writing a paper served as the previous form of assessment for SNASB trip participants, so utilizing Facebook instead allowed this study to explore a new approach to assessing throughout immersion experiences and evaluate the acceptance of this approach as based on student perceptions.

METHOD & PARTICIPANTS

Among the group of 29 students who participated in the 2019 SNASB trip, 23 students consented to having their Facebook posts analyzed for the purpose of this study. They were encouraged to create posts in response to eight prompts related to the university’s liberal education responsibility outcome. Data was analyzed via content analysis with thematic analysis as a secondary form of examining data. Results reveal that students engaged across a variety of social media platforms, utilizing multiple communication tools in sharing their immersion experiences.

DATA COLLECTION

The eight prompts that correlated with the UWECE R1 rubric, which is centered around perspectives, identities, and privilege (PIP), were created to assess student learning outcomes. There was free Wi-Fi on the immersion trip bus that served as the main form of transportation for students throughout the trip. There was Wi-Fi on the city bus that served as the main form of transportation in Atlanta. Thus, students who could not use their own personal Wi-Fi could utilize the city bus Wi-Fi. Students were provided with a list of social media tools they could utilize in their posts.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative

A coding system was created associating a number one through 11 to a list of social media that a participant used. A participant was provided with a list of social media tools they could utilize in their posts.

Qualitative

Content and thematic analysis were used to find common themes and patterns throughout students’ textual elements of their Facebook posts and their short answer responses in the Google survey taken after the SNASB trip.

RESULTS

Day One Prompt: Possible topics we will explore throughout this trip include race relations, civil rights issues, refugee issues, and class/economic/ethnic experiences. With these topics in mind, and information and experiences that you have received throughout your time in late 1981-2000, which applied to all of the students on the SNASB trip based on student demographic data of the trip. Chen and Blum-Morawetz (2017) found that members of the Millennials’ generation cohort have “a propensity for the creation and consumption of digital content” (p. 149) and are often divided by their experiences with digital cultural activities.

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