

# Social Media, Higher Education, and Community Colleges: A Research Synthesis and Implications for the Study of Two-Year Institutions

Charles H. F. Davis III

*Education Policy Studies & Practice, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA*

Regina Deil-Amen

*Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, USA*

Cecilia Rios-Aguilar

*Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California, USA*

Manuel Sacramento González Canché

*Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia, USA*

The boundaries between on-line and “real-world” communities are rapidly deteriorating, particularly for the generation of young people whose lives are pervaded by social media. For this generation, social media exchanges are a primary means of communication, social engagement, information seeking, and possibly, a central component of their identity and community-building. Given these realities, postsecondary educators should begin to seriously explore the potential to intentionally and strategically harness the power of these revolutionary transformations in technology use to better serve the needs of students to enhance their success. Therefore, this review of books, academic journals, higher education news, research reports, individual blogs and other online media on the use of social media technology (SMT) in higher education provides a baseline sense of current uses nationally, providing a descriptive overview of the social media phenomenon. Additionally, the review clarifies how colleges and college students use SMT and also challenges assumptions in two areas: how institutions can best exploit social media’s features and its impact on student outcomes. The review further provides a foundation to develop conceptual frameworks that would better capture the role and impact of SMT among colleges and college students, and community colleges in particular.

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Charles H. F. Davis III is now at the Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

Address correspondence to Charles H. F. Davis III, Director, Center for the Study of Race & Equity in Education, University of Pennsylvania, 3819 Chestnut Street, Ste. 130, Philadelphia, PA 19104. E-mail: [charles@hfdavis.com](mailto:charles@hfdavis.com)

information seeking, and possibly, a central component of their identity and community-building. Professor of psychiatry at UCLA, Dr. Gary Small, suggests these *digital natives*—young people born into a world of laptops and cell phones, text messaging, and tweeting—spend, on average, more than eight hours a day exposed to digital technology, and may experience fundamentally different brain development that favors constant communication and multitasking (Prensky, 2001; Small & Vorgan, 2009). Given these realities, postsecondary educators should begin to seriously explore the potential to intentionally and strategically harness the power of these revolutionary transformations in technology use to better serve the needs of students to enhance their success.

Social media [technology] is a growing phenomenon with manifold definitions. It generally refers to media used to enable social interaction. For our purposes, the term social media technology (SMT) refers to web-based and mobile applications that allow individuals and organizations to create, engage, and share new user-generated (e.g., personal photos, videos, writing) or existing (e.g., news, radio, television) content in digital environments through multiway communication. In addition to these features, SMT also contains design elements that create virtual social spaces encouraging interaction, thereby broadening the appeal of the technology and promoting transitions back and forth between the platform and face-to-face engagement. This SMT definition includes such examples as Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, YouTube, Wordpress/Blogger, Google+, and Instagram; however, it does not include educational learning and content management systems, such as Blackboard, eLearning Suite, WebCT, Desire2Learn, and ANGEL. These educational platforms are not designed to support user-generated content and sharing as the primary purpose of exchanges and interactions.

Commonly, the phrase *social networking sites* serves as an umbrella term for all social media and computer-mediated communication including the SMT interfaces stated above. Ellison and Boyd (2007) define social network sites as web-based services allowing individuals to construct profiles, display user connections, and search and traverse within that list of connections. The most prominent of social networking sites is Facebook, which allows users to create profiles, interact with other users, and express interests and discover commonalities between users through building and maintaining connections in online communities. Albeit very relevant, social networking is only one layer of SMT.

In the last decade, differentiated and cooperative services (i.e., Twitter, Foursquare, Yelp) have all worked collaboratively to provide totally new social media experiences, which have now become more accessible through mobile devices (Reuben, 2008). Social media technologies share the innate ability to enable social behavior through dialogue; not one-way but multiple-way exchanges providing the opportunity to discover and share new information (Solis, 2008). Therefore, SMT is a vast landscape of software with many different uses by application—uses not merely limited to social networking, video sharing, or blogging.

Despite the widespread use of SMT, research has not systematically explored the benefits of its use in postsecondary contexts and for specific purposes (e.g., marketing, recruitment, learning, and/or student engagement). Even less is known about the use of SMT in community colleges. Therefore, this review of books, academic journals, higher education news, research reports, blogs, and other online media about SMT use in general, and in higher education in particular, will provide a baseline sense of current uses nationally and a descriptive overview of the social media phenomenon. Furthermore, we clarify exactly how colleges and students use SMT, highlighting some assumptions that need to be challenged regarding institutional uses of SMT and its relationship to academic success.

First, how institutions choose to use SMT reflects their assumptions about how it can be best utilized as a one-way communication tool. Second, the attitude that SMT distracts from academics is quite pervasive, and therefore, its value in the academic realm is deprioritized. The review also provides a foundation for the development of conceptual frameworks that better capture the role and impact of SMT, especially for community colleges. We know little about the intent, strategies, tactics, and effectiveness of SMT to influence institutional and student outcomes. Included are brief details of our recent work on SMT use in community colleges and among their students. Lastly, this review can help us move toward the goal of paying enough attention to social media to begin identifying best practices that exist across community colleges and other colleges and universities.

### METHODS INCLUDING LITERATURE SEARCH PARAMETERS

Literature was gathered browsing book and article titles and abstracts (when applicable) across a seven-year period (2005–2012) using electronic retrieval resources (e.g., ERIC, Project Muse, and EBSCOhost Academic Search Premier). We flagged sources for review that engaged the following topics in relation to higher education actors (i.e., students, faculty, and staff): social media, social technology, Web 2.0, Facebook, Twitter, social networking sites, and any work otherwise related to the use of technology in higher education. In addition, Google searches were conducted for higher education news, blogs, and online media using the aforementioned topics in conjunction with other keywords (e.g., college, college students, university, faculty, and student affairs). Once the flagged sources were located, they were individually read and reviewed by our team, grouped thematically, and synthesized.

### SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Regarding institutional use of SMT, Reuben's (2008) survey on social media usage among post-secondary institutions shows Facebook and YouTube profile creation and use was reported by just over half of the 148 colleges and universities responding. However, in a more recent study of a proportional national sample of 456 four-year accredited U.S. institutions, 100% report using some form of social media, with Facebook (used by 98%) and Twitter (used by 84%) being the most prominent (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). The rarity of these studies is but one indication of the paucity of research on the extent of social media use at the institutional level. Unfortunately, with the exception of our recent report (Rios-Aguilar, González Canché, Deil-Amen, & Davis, 2012) detailed further below, community colleges have been left out of the research on social media use. Nearly all of what is widely known about types of SMT use in higher education has been documented in research on four-year colleges and universities. There, SMT tends to be utilized as a la carte communication tools for stand-alone departments, administrative offices, and individual faculty rather than being part of a larger, more systemic institutional commitment to its use. When used institution-wide, Twitter has provided an opportunity to create live, up-to-the-minute notices of commencement programs, homecoming events, class reunions, and live chat sessions (Wilburn, 2008) as well as campus emergency alerts (Swartzfager, 2007). Additionally, many NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) member-institutions have implored student

athletes, coaches, and athletic offices to utilize Twitter and Facebook as platforms to engage with fans (Watson, 2009).

Unfortunately, upon closer examination, most of this communication is one-way, from the institution to the student, shortchanging the potential for multiway interaction inherent in SMT. As another example, some admissions offices have begun to use student blogs to showcase current student experiences as a recruitment tool for prospective students (Harris, 2008; Mattson & Barnes, 2009; Rudolph, 2007; Tucciarone, 2009; Wandel, 2008; Violino, 2009). This is an effective public relations strategy because it appeals to millennial generation students (18–29 years-of-age) for whom personal, authentic, and real-time engagement with their institutions has become expected (Rudolph, 2007). However, a recent study also noted that college blogs are often deficient. Many do not offer e-mail subscriptions to posts or accept comments from readers, both of which severely limit two-way engagement (Barnes & Lescault, 2011). Many colleges and universities assume SMT is best utilized as mostly one-way communications tools, which limits direct interaction between institutions and students online.

One exception to this use as a one-way communication tool is reflected in pedagogical use of SMT by faculty. Recent studies have investigated the use of blogs in academic disciplines including the sciences (Brownstein & Klein, 2006); language learning (Ducate, Lomicka, & Lord, 2005); teacher education (Deng & Yuen, 2007; Loving, Schroeder, Kang, Shimek, & Herbert, 2007; Ray & Coulter, 2008); and business (Williams & Jacobs, 2004). Faculty members have also created Facebook profiles to connect with their students in a more personable and informal space (Sturgeon & Walker, 2009). This has further led to the use of Facebook groups for course offerings that previously used web-based forums for discussion (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Tweeting—the function of a status update (tweets) by users of the Twitter platform—has also found its place prominently in online courses as a discussion medium for faculty and students (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009).

## RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Recent research provides a strong foundation for understanding some effects of social media on four-year college students, specifically, the relationships between social media and students' social networks and social capital, academic performance, and student engagement and involvement. Such research challenges existing notions that SMT detracts from, rather than contributes to, student social and academic engagement and success. Although based on four-year college student populations, the literature reveals several interesting features of SMT use that are certainly applicable to thinking about community college students and future directions for research and practice.

Regarding social networks and social capital, one study finds that students' Facebook ties represent multiple dimensions ranging from intense, intimate, long-term, and emotional ties to short-term socially distant ties based on shared interests and information exchange (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). Also, another study finds students' online friendship networks tend to be more racially heterogeneous than more traditional offline relationships, which are often dominated by same-race friendships. Rather than racial/ethnic identity driving the patterns of establishing friendships on Facebook, Wimmer and Lewis (2010) find other commonalities such as living in the same dorm, sharing a major, and attending the same high school to be among the strongest

predictors of creating on-line friendships. Additionally, Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) showed how Facebook presents an effective means for college students to stay connected with members of their preestablished social communities with whom they share an offline connection. The use of Facebook to maintain preexisting relationships was overwhelmingly more common than the use of Facebook to make new connections. The researchers also found students who used Facebook more intensely reported higher self-esteem and satisfaction. Finally, Burke, Marlow and Lento (2010) found that the types of things students do on social media matters just as much, if not more, than the sheer time they spend on it. Students who engaged in more directed communication (the amount of posting, messaging, and commenting; the frequency of tags and “likes;” and the number of friends with whom communication was initiated) reported a greater sense of connectedness in college and lower levels of loneliness in contrast to students who engaged mainly in content consumption (viewing profiles and photos or clicking on stories and news feeds).

The implications of these studies are numerous for two-year colleges, which tend to have more student turnover and more diverse students with close connections to the local community. Given this and the fact that community colleges remain one of the largest points of access for students of color (McHewitt & Taylor, 2001; Roska & Calcagno, 2010), the potential is apparent for social media to support a vibrant, multiracial, multidimensional virtual community space characterized by feelings of belonging and connectedness and maintenance of ties within the college and across the local community.

Regarding academic performance, a few small recent studies across disciplines have focused on the impact of SMT use on academic outcomes and measures of college student engagement and involvement—dynamics that have been found in prior research to indirectly affect grades. The studies have shown mixed and seemingly contradictory results, possibly due to sampling and methodological weaknesses. However, taken together, the bulk of findings point toward a neutral or positive relationship between SMT use and academic success and other behaviors that facilitate college success.

Regarding the idea that SMT negatively affects student academic achievement, Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) found the average grade point average (GPA) of Facebook users was significantly lower than that of non-Facebook users. However, this study utilized a convenience sample of just 219 students at one university, self-reported data, and it relied on descriptive data and analyses that lacked statistical controls. Conversely, other studies show social media use has either a neutral impact or positive effects on academic performance in college. Kolek and Saunders (2008) revealed no relationship between use of Facebook or other social networking sites and GPA, but again data were self-reported and sampling procedures were problematic. Findings by Heiberger and Harper (2008) suggest students who utilized social networking sites, such as Facebook, were more engaged in offline activities (i.e., studying, face-to-face interaction, work), and they also reported greater life satisfaction and stronger connection to their institutions.

A 2007 study of first-year students and social networking sites conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (2007) at the University of California-Los Angeles revealed no relationship between time spent on social media and the amount of time spent on academic endeavors. This was particularly so when they compared students who reported spending less than one hour on social networking sites daily and those spending more than six hours. However, the study did find a positive relationship between more social media use and higher levels of campus social involvement. Students spending more time using SMT reported a stronger connection

to their institution, felt better about their social life, and were spending more time in such off-line activities as interacting with college friends and participating in student clubs or groups.

Studies on Twitter's particular impact on engagement and academic performance show positive effects. Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2010) found increased grades and increased levels of college engagement among students who used Twitter compared to their counterparts who did not. These findings are consistent with teaching tips provided by Dunlap and Lowenthal (2009) who used Twitter as a tool to supplement instruction and found it can encourage free-flowing just-in-time interactions and enhance social presence when utilized in online courses. Such findings are important to both two-year and four-year institutions alike as increasing numbers of hybrid and fully digital on-line courses are being offered to accommodate changes in student needs (for distance learning) and instructional costs (Ntiri, 2010; Shea, Picket, & Li, 2005).

Junco (2011) elaborates an even more nuanced take on the relationship between SMT use and academic engagement and performance. He finds that how students engage in social media is also important. While more frequent Facebook use has a negative relationship with college engagement, students who use Facebook frequently for noncommunicative activities (playing games, posting photos and videos, and checking up on friends) had lower levels of college engagement offline. Conversely, more frequent communicative activities on social media (commenting on content and creating or accepting invitations to events) were positively associated with traditional measures of college engagement. Junco's more recent study (2012) finds similar patterns—using Facebook to collect and share information positively predicts GPA while using Facebook to socialize negatively predicts GPA. Furthermore, he finds more time on Facebook is negatively related to GPA but not to time spent studying and preparing for class, suggesting that other behaviors may be causing both lower GPA and higher Facebook use.

Such findings challenge widespread beliefs that SMT use jeopardizes traditional college engagement (Astin, 1984; Kuh, 2009) and academic performance. For residential colleges and universities, these findings help dispel the notion that online engagement undermines the need for and participation in co- and extracurricular activities. Instead, institutions should consider how online and offline activities supporting increased engagement and involvement can coexist in mutually reinforcing ways. Also, the studies above clearly have implications for two-year institutions, and some briefly mention community colleges. However, has any such research focused exclusively on two-year colleges, either at the institutional or student level? Although sparse, existing scholarly and research work on social media and community colleges is explored below. In addition, directions for future research to expand this area of study are presented.

## RESEARCH ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Despite the nearly exclusive focus on four-year institutions among social media researchers in higher education, some research exploring the implications of social media technology in two-year colleges has emerged. Bajt (2011) discusses Web 2.0 technologies—a more broadly defined conceptualization of social media technology that allows users to create and modify content (e.g., Wikipedia)—and its promise for creating educational communities for traditional-aged college students. According to Bajt (2011), Web 2.0 technologies have provided a space for collective intelligence to be harnessed by students through the creation of communities and increased social

interactivity. Similarly, Diaz (2010) discusses the potential utilization of Web 2.0 technologies as online learning tools by community college faculty but cautions institutions from doing so without (a) gathering data on technology usage of students, (b) creating safeguards for student privacy, and (c) protecting the intellectual property rights of the faculty and institution.

Herndon (2011) discusses leveraging social media technology for student support services at two-year colleges, suggesting that career planning, academic planning (selecting a major or program), paying for college, planning admission, and college transfer planning could all be aided by utilizing SMT. Two years prior, the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE, 2009) found that many students utilized social media in similar ways. It showed that an overwhelming majority of community college students use SMT to communicate with faculty and staff and to connect with peers for both academic and nonacademic reasons. These behaviors resulted in higher levels of measured engagement (CCCSE, 2009). What were less prominent were instances in which institutions utilized social media to connect directly with their students to facilitate multiway student engagement.

However, recent work by Rios-Aguilar et al. (2012) surveyed community colleges nationwide regarding their use of SMT and the value they perceived social media technology to have for their institutions. This survey represents one of the first attempts to focus exclusively on gauging the actual social media use of two-year colleges, as reported by college leaders. Prior to the survey, Rios-Aguilar and her colleagues conducted a national pilot study—a brief poll—of two-year college presidents and college chief executive officers at 224 community colleges. The poll asked the college executives to describe (a) how their institutions are using social media, (b) the perceived value social media has for their institutions and students, and (c) their perspectives on the barriers to expanding the use of social media at their institutions.

So, for what purposes did community college presidents describe utilizing social media? Content analyses of the responses revealed that use of SMT as a one-way communication tool currently dominates all other uses, with the vast majority reporting use of Facebook pages and Twitter only to send messages to students. They utilize wall posts, event notifications, and tweets to inform students of upcoming events, activities, athletic games and competitions, deadlines, reminders, general college announcements, school closings due to inclement weather or other reasons, alerts, and emergencies. Use of social media in recruitment, marketing, or managing the college's brand image was the next most frequent purpose described. Use of social media to respond to student inquiries was noted by only a small handful of the colleges. To summarize, most do not use SMT to engage in dialogue with students, but rather, to generate content for students' consumption, confirming the assumptions noted in the prior section. Furthermore, few of the community college presidents reported that social media has value for student learning and improving academic outcomes.

Such one-way uses of SMT are vastly different than the espoused purpose and function of social media as tools for ongoing two-way/multiway engagement. There was one exception. YouTube was specifically named by approximately one-tenth of the colleges. In addition to its use for marketing, use of YouTube appeared to have a more academic, lesson-oriented focus. Faculty members were reported to be more connected to YouTube and blogs than to Twitter or Facebook in the presidents' descriptions.

Given these initial results, the researchers wanted to learn more about community college social media use in a more systematic way and with a larger and nationally representative sample of community college leaders. For these reasons, the more qualitative results from the poll

were used to construct items for a survey (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012) purposefully sent to numerous community college leaders—not just presidents. The following leaders were targeted based on recommendations by the League for Innovation in the Community College: presidents, chief academic and student services officers, chief academic officer, chief student services officer, marketing director, director of library services, recruiting director, admissions director, and online learning director. Using a stratified, proportional, and randomized sampling design (Sheaffer, Mendenhall, & Ott, 2011), 378 community colleges were chosen randomly from the 1,062 existing public and private not-for-profit community colleges across the United States. Using e-mail addresses attained from HED-Connect, a survey link was sent to leaders at the 378 colleges. A total of 763 leaders at 280 community colleges (a 74% response rate) (see Table 1 for sample) responded regarding the extent of their social media use for various purposes and the value they saw in each purpose.

Only 13% reported “substantial” use by their institution, and only 5% reported that their institution devoted “substantial” resources to social media implementation. Overwhelmingly, nearly two-thirds reported insufficient funds to support social media as the primary barrier to expanding their SMT use. Approximately a quarter of respondents noted resistance among faculty or administrators as a barrier, and lack of staff/faculty access to such technology was also reported as a barrier by approximately a quarter of respondents.

What about leaders’ perceptions of the value SMT adds to their institution and its mission? Overall most leaders responded in ways consistent with the initial poll results, with the exception of the survey revealing a high value indicated for use of social media for students to interact with peers (see Table 2). Generally, however, the greatest values leaders attributed to social media were the one-way delivery of information about the college to students and prospective students

TABLE 1  
Sample of Community Colleges

|                | <i>Number of Institutions in<br/>United States</i> | <i>% in United<br/>States</i> | <i>Number of Institutions in<br/>Sample</i> | <i>% in Sample</i> |
|----------------|--|-------------------------------|---|--------------------|
| City           |  |                               |   |                    |
| City Large     | 114  | 11%                           | 31  | 11%                |
| City Mid       | 87   | 8%                            | 21  | 8%                 |
| City Small     | 138  | 13%                           | 37  | 13%                |
| Rural          |  |                               |   |                    |
| Rural Distant  | 50   | 5%                            | 14  | 5%                 |
| Rural Fringe   | 238  | 22%                           | 66  | 24%                |
| Rural Remote   | 16   | 2%                            | 4   | 1%                 |
| Suburban       |  |                               |   |                    |
| Suburban Large | 148  | 14%                           | 42  | 15%                |
| Suburban Mid   | 25   | 2%                            | 9   | 3%                 |
| Suburban Small | 17   | 2%                            | 6   | 2%                 |
| Town           |  |                               |   |                    |
| Town Distant   | 94   | 9%                            | 21  | 8%                 |
| Town Fringe    | 8  | 1%                            | 3   | 1%                 |
| Town Remote    | 127  | 12%                           | 26  | 9%                 |
| TOTAL          | 1062   | 100%                          | 280   | 100%               |



TABLE 2  
Community College Leaders' Perceptions on the Value of Social Media

| <i>Perceptions</i>   | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std Dev</i> |
|--|-------------|----------------|
| 1. Delivering information about college events to current students   | 3.66        | .57            |
| 2. Student interactions with peers                                   | 3.61        | .62            |
| 3. Delivering information about college to prospective students      | 3.57        | .63            |
| 4. Delivering information about college services to current students | 3.56        | .63            |
| 5. Marketing and promotion   | 3.54        | .67            |
| 6. Campus announcements  | 3.52        | .66            |
| 7. Promotion of campus or online student activities                  | 3.50        | .66            |
| 8. Student engagement  | 3.46        | .67            |
| 9. Building campus community   | 3.42        | .70            |
| 10. Student recruitment and admissions                               | 3.34        | .72            |
| 11. Delivering information about college to alumni                   | 3.21        | .80            |
| 12. Student providing feedback to institution                        | 3.03        | .82            |
| 13. Student interaction with faculty                                 | 2.96        | .78            |
| 14. Student interaction with staff                                   | 2.81        | .81            |
| 15. Students providing feedback to division                          | 2.73        | .89            |
| 16. Student learning   | 2.73        | .80            |
| 17. Improving student outcomes                                       | 2.57        | .82            |

*Note.* 1 = No Value; 2 = Minimal Value; 3 = Moderate Value; 4 = Great Value

including marketing, promotions, campus announcements, and promotion of campus activities. Seeing value in the use of social media for student-faculty or student-staff interactions, for providing feedback to the college, and in the potential for social media to affect learning and academic outcomes took a backseat to the perceived value of social media for enhancing student social engagement, the building of campus community, alumni, and recruitment and admissions. The finding that student learning and improving academic outcomes received the lowest value ratings highlights the mismatch between prior research and leaders' perceptions.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a paucity of research on two-year colleges and SMT. Even our own work (Rios-Aguilar, González Canché, Deil-Amen, & Davis, 2012) is limited to institutional use rather than student use. Yet, prior studies of four-year students show promise regarding the potential of SMT to aid college engagement and academic success. Therefore, future research should study community college students' use of SMT to understand how to shape engagement and achievement outcomes in similar ways. As our previous work (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2012) demonstrates, community colleges are not yet valuing nor using SMT in ways consistent with how students are already utilizing these technologies for multiway engagement outside of academic purposes.

However, despite their one-way approach and their slight deprioritizing of the value of SMT for academic purposes, the survey results did reveal high awareness among community college leaders that SMT is valuable for student interactions with peers, and it also revealed that they

valued academic-related functions for SMT more than they used them. Conceptual frameworks need to be developed that seriously consider the potential of SMT platforms as a space for not just peer-to-peer but also student-to-staff, student services, and faculty interactions of an academic nature that extends beyond socializing.

Past research supports moving in this direction. The studies noted in this review show a distinct positive relationship between social media use and college engagement and academic performance if SMT is used in effective and appropriate ways. Decades of prior scholarship on college student engagement (Kuh, 2001), social and academic integration (Thomas, 2000; Tinto, 1993), and campus involvement (Astin, 1984) are all associated with various positive academic outcomes (e.g., student retention and degree attainment).

In addition, a large number of empirical studies support the idea that relational constructs, such as *social capital*, *social support*, and *social networks* influence educational outcomes relevant to college (for a review, see Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, & Rhoades, 2009). Essentially, social interactions are a crucial component of the educational experience of college students. However, few researchers have studied how these dynamics are relevant in a social media context, and no research has applied these concepts to SMT use among community college populations. Given that community college students have the highest dropout rates, lowest rates of retention, and lowest likelihood of achieving their baccalaureate goals (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006), the need for such research is pressing. More specifically, future research should consider if and how social media technology fosters the sense of community and connection so often lacking among commuter students at two-year colleges—perhaps a pivotal reason for their lack of persistence.

Considering that prior research has found higher levels of engagement among students who use SMT to communicate about academics with other students, instructors, and college staff, it is important for future research to explore whether social media interventions can serve a similar purpose for two-year college students. For instance, could such efforts to use social media to increase engagement and social capital indirectly improve academic and completions outcomes? To begin answering such questions, researchers should consider what prior research has shown regarding the dynamics of integration, involvement, and engagement among community college students. Two studies by Deil-Amen (2011) and Tinto (1997) qualitatively addressing integration—not through SMT—among two-year college students found that social and academic integration were relevant, but it was experienced differently among community college students, with more of an academic, classroom community focus. In contrast to what prior studies found among four-year residential students, fused socio-academic connections (Deil-Amen, 2011) and the quality and meaning of interactions within and just outside the classroom held more value and purpose for two-year students. Also, the frequency and depth of connection held less meaning for these students than did the mere presence of a connection and what it symbolized to students about a welcoming climate. These findings are consistent with what other researchers have found to be of importance in feelings of community and belonging for community college, commuter, and Latina/o students in particular (Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012; Rendón, 1994; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Torres, 2006).

Although not specifically focused on social media, it is important to relate this prior work to better understand how students use and find meaning in social media ties. This includes the ways in which students use SMT to gain and exchange information, expand their social capital, and foster a greater sense of belonging to academic and professional communities. All of these

processes have been shown to make a difference for educational and occupational advancement, particularly for lower income and underrepresented minority populations (Bourdieu, 1972, 1986; Coleman, 1988; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Granovetter, 1973, 1995; Lin, 1999; Perna & Titus, 2005; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). More particularly, further study of such dynamics may illuminate ways in which community colleges and their stakeholders are utilizing SMT and its effects on institutional and student success.

## CONCLUSION

It is evident researchers have begun to pay attention to the growth and relevance of social media. Overall, the use of SMT is continuing to grow rapidly among all demographics, with particularly heavy use among persons of color and millennial users—many of whom are college-goers. However, studies that directly explore the use of SMT among college students are limited in number, and those that assess the impact of SMT on particular achievement and attainment outcomes are even rarer. Lastly, very little empirical work focusing on social media and two-year colleges exists. While implications can be intuitively drawn about the potential impact and benefits of SMT for traditional-age college students at two-year institutions, research has yet to thoroughly expand the discourse to nontraditional-age students and actual uses of SMT in two-year settings.

Future research should examine the more detailed social dynamics and the effects of SMT use at two-year colleges. Given the evidence provided by previous research on the impact of social interactions on educational experiences of students generally, understanding the extent to which SMT supports such interaction in two-year institutions could provide meaningful insight toward reversing trends in low levels of persistence, retention, and degree attainment for students at community colleges. In conceptualizing such research, it is important to understand the ways in which students at two-year colleges define and experience college social and academic integration differently than students at four-year colleges and universities. In doing so, research can provide substantive findings to better aid community college faculty, staff, and administrators in the construction of positive educational experiences and outcomes for their students related to social media use both within and outside of the classroom.

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