The Impact Social Media has on College Student’s Emotions towards Social Justice

Ahmet Aksoy

Texas Tech University

Abstract

Emotions play a huge role in impacting the decisions and actions college students make in their daily life. In *The Seven Vectors: An Overview*, Chickering (2014) list managing emotions as one of the essential seven vectors within student development. The invention of social media has altered college students’ way of life allowing information to instantaneously present imagery, videos, and content that can emotionally impact and affect their decision-making. Impacting college student’s emotions through social media can be seen in the significant usage in verbiage, gestures, video, and images in events such as United States presidential elections, the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union, and the Arab spring,. University and college personnel administrators must be mindful and knowledgeable of social media trends and the effects they are having on their students on campus in order to effectively support them.

*Keywords: Social Media, Social Justice, College Students*

Statement of the Problem

With the increase of college students’ usage of social media, students are not only becoming more informed on social justice or current events but also emotionally invested in them. Communication spread around the world through the means of media – ‘mediate not only what we know but, on that basis, also much of what we feel’ (Greco and Stenner, 2008). The
strength of social media is it ability to mediate how students are being informed and how they feel. Along with mediating how students are informed and how they are feeling, social media provides an outlet in which students can mobilize in a short amount of time for causes they feel passionate about. This can be seen in the post 2016 presidential election were events occurred on Texas State University and the University of Texas at Austin where mass student populations mobilized to express their emotions and feelings towards the 2016 United States Presidential election results (Watkins & Blanch, 2016). Being observant of these social media trends, allows college personnel administrators to ensure the safety and support of students on their campuses during events such as these.

Addressing the Problem

According to the Pew Research Center Study, a total of 90% of young adults use social media with around 82% of young adults on Facebook and 55% of this crowd on Instagram (Modo Labs Team, 2016). With the numbers continuing to rise among the youth, the increase in how social media will emotionally impact them will only rise. Colleges must be aware of social justice and current event trends through social media and how their students on campus are affected by them in order to effectively support them. During the 2016 Presidential Election, tensions rose amongst college students between the Republican Candidate, Donald Trump, and the Democrat candidate, Hillary Clinton. The election rose debates amongst students on campus and even the creation of student organizations. The student organization, Students For Trump, started on Campbell University in North Carolina and by September 2016 had grown to over 250 chapters nationwide (Chason, 2016). The creation of these student organizations provide an avenue of support for those emotionally impacted. Encouraging students to join or create
organization that support their emotions and identity provides them a sense of safety and support on their college campus. Through campus programming, campus resources, and encouraging involvement, students can be provided an avenue in which they can be supported through what has emotionally impacted them on social media.

Potential Implications

The materials on social justice and current events that can be found on social media can ignite forms of anger, fear, hurt, anxiety, or other forms of emotions amongst students on a college campus. These emotions can be ignited based on how students identify themselves. During college, students begin establishing a form of identity on their campus. “Development of identity involves:

(1) Comfort with body and appearance.
(2) Comfort with gender and sexual orientation.
(3) Sense of self in a social, historical, and cultural context.
(4) Clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style.
(5) Sense of self in response to feedback from valued others.
(6) Self-acceptance and self-esteem
(7) Personal stability and integration.” (Chickering, 2004).

When a student has established their identity, they can be emotionally impacted if they feel their identity has been attacked on social media. Chickering says students must learn appropriate channels for releasing these irritations before they explode (Chickering, 2004).
Conclusion

The decision and actions of college students are heavily navigated and influenced by their emotions. These emotions are being targeted through the engagement of content, images, and videos seen throughout social media. This outlet, social media, shows its effectiveness as a tool in shaping students opinion through their emotions. It also shows that students can be and are emotionally impacted on social justice and current events through their social media accounts. Along with being emotionally impacted, we see that students on college campuses are taking further steps and are seeking out venues on campus for support. In order to meet students’ needs, colleges need to be aware and active to encourage spaces, events, organization, or services that ensure the safety of their students. Ensuring this safety and inclusive environment, will result in the overall success and development of their students on campus.
References


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