

Book Review

Microlearning in the Digital Age: The Design and Delivery of Learning in Snippets

Joseph Rene Corbeil, Badrul H. Khan, and Maria Elena Corbeil
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As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, it is evident that digital technology is ubiquitous in the lives of individuals throughout the world. Many of us depend on technological devices to receive our morning news reports, transport us to schools or places of employment, engage with colleagues in a diverse range of geographic workplaces, and entertain us during our leisure hours. These technological devices can vary from digital alarm clocks to semi-autonomous vehicles. Included within this broad scope of technological devices are smartphones, touchscreen tablets, smartwatches, and portable laptop computers. It can be argued that these personal mobile devices have had the most impact on our daily lives in the digital age.

If we accept the premise that personal mobile devices, specifically smartphones, have become essential to our way of living, then it is no great leap to propose that these objects can also influence how humans consume and transfer knowledge. In *Microlearning in the Digital Age: The Design and Delivery of Learning in Snippets*, editors Joseph Rene Corbeil, Badrul H. Khan, and Maria Elena Corbeil set out to create a volume that enables instructional designers and developers to integrate microlearning opportunities into a variety of learning environments through the use of these personal technological devices. The editors of the volume also contended that present-day individuals require “short, manageable bursts” (p. 2) of information, first referred to as *learning snippets* by Badrul Khan in 2007, that can match the way in which learners receive and send information in the digital age. Moreover, with the advent of these mobile technological devices, a fluidity has developed that enables instructors and learners to disseminate and consume knowledge both inside and outside of traditional classroom settings.

The proliferation of the term *microlearning*, or the process of learning during small periods of time, emerged in the lexicon of teaching and learning specialists in 2002. Although the term was first adopted by Theo Hug at Stanford University in the 1960s, the development of personal mobile devices, social connectedness via high-speed internet access, and a sense of time scarcity in the 21st century have created an ideal environment where microlearning opportunities abound in academic, corporate, and personal settings. Despite the fact that the vast majority of the chapters that make up this volume were written prior to the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, the shift to online work and e-learning environments has further deconstructed the division between formal and informal work and learning spaces. As a result, the pandemic has undeniably advanced the importance of microlearning in our digital age.

Microlearning in the Digital Age is strategically divided into four major parts. The first section of the edited volume is made up of two chapters that introduce the development of microlearning and the use of instructional snippets. This portion of the book outlined how microlearning can be designed, implemented, and assessed through Khan's e-learning framework, which he initially developed in 2001, as well as potential issues that should be considered prior to the execution of this pedagogical approach. This section broadly explored how to design learning snippets, and identified the settings in which these microlearning opportunities can be done. The roadmap by Corbeil, Corbeil, and Khan in the opening chapter provided a much-needed macro-level framework for the uninformed reader and is complemented by a rather helpful octagonally based visual aid. However, I find it surprising that the background information on the development and definition of microlearning is in the second chapter of the book, by Carla Torgerson. Additionally, Torgerson went on to briefly outline the development of microlearning opportunities and the settings in which these learning opportunities can be carried out, topics that are examined in much more effective detail later in the volume.

Part II of the book provided the reader with foundational knowledge of how to design microlearning opportunities and evaluate their effectiveness. It offered a plethora of helpful tips that instructional designers and developers can use to implement microlearning strategies, while also stressing the importance of intentionality when designing, developing, and implementing these learning snippets. Although Chapter 5: *Optimizing Microlearning Materials for Mobile Learning*, by Luca Kohnke, appears to be geared to individuals who develop instructional snippets for learners in fast-paced working environments, those who develop online courses in the educational sector can also benefit from reading it. More specifically, Kohnke stressed that the simplicity of design is a key factor in enabling the learner to produce the desired outcome, regardless of the complexity of the content. Kohnke also effectively encouraged instructors to remember that microlearning materials can exist on their own or as part of a larger learning objective, but they must be intentional; an important reminder as instructors seek to innovate their classes with mobile learning tools.

Part III of the text categorized the various fields in which microlearning opportunities can flourish. These environments include academic, professional, corporate, and personal settings. In this portion of the volume, a short subsection in Laura Sheneman's chapter, *Microlearning in K–12 Settings*, considered the applicability of microlearning when developing a foreign language. Here, Sheneman briefly celebrated how microlearning opportunities can enable non-native speakers to develop their new language skills through repetition, as well as how the use of personal mobile devices can attempt to duplicate the experience of being immersed in a foreign language. I would have certainly liked to have learned more about this topic. Additionally, in this section of the volume, Pamela S. Hogle brought the reader into contact with the use of microlearning in corporate settings. More specifically, Hogle effectively described how microlearning opportunities can benefit both workers and employers by providing flexibility; integrating these learning snippets into daily routines; and avoiding full-day training sessions, which are both expensive and adversely affect productivity. This process of taking microlearning outside of traditional academic settings increases its applicability and is an important contribution to this volume.

The final portion of the book considered microlearning in the present and provides a hypothesis about its applicability in the future. In some ways, this portion of the volume serves as a catch-all section, which explores dynamic ways in which microlearning has been, and continues to be, applied as we move forward in our digital age. More specifically, it focused on self-directed learning, the gamification of microlearning, the use of microlearning in Open Educational

Resources, microlearning to enhance curricular engagement through repetition and re-engagement, and the future of microlearning in the workplace. Although I was initially suspicious of the chapter written by Alexander Salas on the gamification of microlearning, it convinced me of the applicability of this approach, particularly regarding desk-based employees and the integration of learning snippets into their daily work routines. In the concluding chapter of the volume, Johnny Hamilton, Darci Hall, and Theresa Hamilton soundly considered how learners will evolve, and how microlearning can continue to adapt to their changing needs. Despite the fact that the chapter claims to focus on the workplace, I believe there is much that K–12 and higher education instructors can draw from it, specifically, the importance of realizing that learners are changing, and there is a belief among these individuals that “my learning adapts to me, not the other way around” (p. 241). Whether teachers and professors agree with this statement or not, this context is a developing reality. To be effective instructors, these individuals need to integrate flexible pedagogical approaches into their courses, and microlearning snippets that are supported by personal mobile devices may offer an avenue to do just that.

Microlearning in the Digital Age effectively examined the theoretical approaches to microlearning, the design of these instructional snippets, the various settings in which they can be employed, and the unique and innovative ways that they are being used. With all of that being stated, the volume has unfairly assumed that the learners under discussion have access to personal mobile devices and that those with this privilege have the pre-existing skills to use their devices to maximize their learning opportunities. Additionally, some concerns must be raised about the pros and cons associated with the omnipresent connectivity that is a reality in our digital age. This circumstance can undeniably benefit learners, as it offers the flexibility to learn when they want and from where they want. However, we must also be considerate of the fact that these levels of connectivity can lead to burnout for both learners and their instructors; something that has been well documented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these criticisms, this volume is an informative work that appeals to a broad audience of instructional designers and developers, academics, teachers, and corporate professionals hoping to integrate innovative, digital snippets into their diverse learning environments.

References

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