

The Implementation of Social Media for Educational Objectives

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-----ABSTRACT-----

This paper intends to highlight potential ways of utilizing social media for educational purposes. Social media in particular social websites have become a familiar trend especially among younger audiences. Information is spread rapidly through these websites which is an asset that can be taken advantage of in many ways. After a brief introduction about the emergence of social media, the ways in which social media is defined is then discussed. Social media utilization in knowledge management and knowledge sharing is then presented along with the various advantage and disadvantages in using social media websites. The current tendencies of adopting these websites in higher education institutions are then examined considering the appearance of modern learning methods. Organizations today are increasingly distributed and networked; making it more challenging to share knowledge therefore using social media has become more and more popular to increase efficiency within organizations which is discussed later in the paper. The final section of the paper is dedicated to proposing recommendations for the future.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Higher Education, Social Networks, ESN

Date of Submission: 16 December 2014



Date of Accepted: 05 January 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

Starting with emergence of the Internet as a public sphere, many unprecedented changes have occurred in communication types and formats in daily life. Face-to-face communication in interpersonal relationships has been gradually replaced with communications via technological devices. This change has also been associated with new types of relationships. Social networks within the scope of social media are almost at the heart of these virtual communication forms. Social networks are platforms for virtual social lives created by people over the Internet. Individuals define themselves in such networks so that they communicate with other people sharing same or different cultural backgrounds/dimensions through powerful communication opportunities provided by the Internet. The first known network in this area is considered the Six Degrees which was constructed in 1997. Particularly after 2003, rapid and important developments were experienced in social networks; consequently the number of users has increased quickly. The worldwide growth of social communication networks gained incredible pace and popularity. Among these networks, the most common one is known as Facebook. It is a fact that Facebook is the largest social network with the biggest audience compared to similar media, particularly because it enables people communicate with their friends and exchange multimedia-based information conveniently. Hundreds of people, unaware of each others, may gather around a particular purpose via social network and they may even decide to act together. This paper discusses the ways social media in particular social websites can be utilized for educational purposes.

HOW IS SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED? :

Social networking covers a wide range of online environments, with many formal definitions broad enough to encompass almost any Web 2.0 collaborative environment. While various public social collaborative environments existed on the Internet as early as the 1980s, the emergence of social networking as it is best understood today arose with the large commercially-supported sites such as Friendster (2002), LinkedIn and MySpace (2003), and Facebook (2004), along with content-sharing focused sites with limited social network features such as Flickr (2004) and YouTube (2005). Other social networking sites were developing which have

higher usage outside the U.S. including Orkut (2005), popular in South America and Asia/Pacific areas, Bebo (2005) in Europe and Australia, and QQ (2006) in China. With the development of Twitter in 2006, social networking took a new twist that increased immediacy and incorporated mobile phones into the social mix.

Boyd and Ellison (2007) include three criteria in their definition of social network sites (SNSs) which are web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semipublic profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Further, they note that many SNSs commonly allow users to leave persistent comments on “friend’s” profiles and send private messages although these are not universal features. In particular, rather than communities organized by topic, SNSs are “structured as personal (or ‘egocentric’) networks, with the individual at the center of their own community”. Perhaps more critical from an educational viewpoint, many of the SNSs are enhanced with multiple collaborative tools that go beyond the personal profile and “friending” links, including the ability to post and share files (text, images, audio and video), participate in discussions or blogs, co-create and edit content with wiki-like tools, and link in and tag external resources from other web sites paralleling social bookmarking. Sites such as Flickr or YouTube are in fact more commonly seen as environments primarily for sharing content, digital pictures and video respectively, rather than SNSs despite meeting the Boyd and Ellison criteria.

II. LEARNING VIA SOCIAL NETWORKS

Typically, institutions use a range of various educational approaches in the classroom, tutorial, lab and lecture hall. Activities can take place face to face, but may also be mediated by social networking technologies include peer assessment, discussions, and collaborative work. Course designers have been quick to spot such opportunities by way of chat rooms, discussion forums and collaborative work support tools which may be used in this way. The efficiency and effectiveness of such approaches is the subject of evaluation, analysis and debate. The study of social networks within a learning domain encompasses the processes of social learning that occurs when a self-selecting group of people who have a common interest in a subject collaborate to share ideas or find solutions. Observations of the processes and behaviors of self-selecting groups can be used to engineer interactions in groups orchestrated for specific educational purposes. Social networking applications which incorporate Web 2.0 technologies demonstrate affordances, which could be available to utilize within the classroom. These operate with paradigms which are different to those observed within conventional e-learning tools. However utilizing social networking tools with large student groups might present problems. An advantage of increased awareness or appreciation of the complexity of typical observed behaviors in a social learning environment may enhance the academic’s ability to manage the tools. A recent study of the potential for semantic modeling of learners explores using Semantic Web-based social networks to facilitate the automatic and dynamic creation of students’ networks within large online communities. Enriching the semantics of network and membership descriptions can provide valuable information. This can be used to assist in tuning group allocations, enabling the network to be used for specific educational objectives.

III. FIGURES AND TABLES ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Since the web is arguably better linked than the “real world”, finding people on-line with shared interests is easier, and more likely. Nowadays many applications allow users to keep in touch with long term friends, family and to find new friends. In addition, new relationships based on the links between friends, and friends of friends are created. These new relationships are not limited to people users already know. Indeed, links are created in the act of stating an interest, or joining a network; in this action, users find other people who share the same opinions, hobbies, or university. To maintain relationships, the computer-supported social network software provides various tools within the application (forums, tickets, online profiles, etc.). Thus users have more support options than when using one-to-one communications such as email. When a dedicated place is available for users to post specific comments, the opportunity to request information and gauge others’ interactions creates available norms that can more easily be applied. Viewing others’ comments and postings provides a double feedback to the user: first, they are using the right application at the correct place; secondly, other people have the same questions, interests, or ideas. This promotes a much needed sense of community. This reciprocating interaction applied to the university environment offers not only benefits to students but in the long term to the entire community.

Links among individuals based on trust, affinity, and expertise versus friendship are not as well defined as in the real world. As the definition of strong and weak ties are vague in their application to online relationships, social software struggles to model and implement real world relationships.

Online profiles can be a source of deception. Indeed, when a person misstates their true identity or intentions, trust is broken, potentially negating the foundation of their online relationships. It is much easier to lose contact online since online interaction is asynchronous communication. One party is invariably waiting for the other to reply. Conversely, interacting in close physical proximity exploits the non-verbal cues inherent in face-to-face communication. Naive students over-reliant on online communication can be unwittingly cut off from the necessary communities with possibly disastrous academic consequences. In terms of trust, the security of personal information online is increasingly important. Whilst the authenticity of online identities may be questioned, conversely the vulnerability of personal information online is generating increasing numbers of 'horror stories' covered in the mass media. Many social networking sites work on a basis of presumed trust, with users' profiles being displayed and available to registered users and guests (meaning non-registered users) by default, even if they do not belong to the same network or do not share the same interests. Progressively, many networks now give the users the facility to set their own level of disclosure, at a community level or to close friends only. However, this precaution is not yet available for all applications. Negative consequences of sharing personal data in this way include spam to private email accounts, 'phishing' attempts at fraud and identity theft and vulnerability to malicious real-world activity aimed at damaging individuals or their property. Standards and policy for protecting user information is a vastly researched area, and beyond the scope of this paper. However, for users to fully benefit from online applications in safety, it is clear that an evaluative understanding of online communities and online security issues is necessary.

IV. SOCIAL MEDIA ADOPTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Learners constantly seek information to address a problem at work, school, or to just satisfy a curiosity. To do so, they take advantage of digital and networked technologies not only to seek information, but also to share information. Thus, learners should not be considered as passive information consumers; rather, they are active co-producers of content. Additionally, learning in the context of social media has become highly self-motivated, autonomous, and informal, as well as an integral part of the college experience. However, higher education institutions are still primarily relying on traditional platforms such as course and learning management systems (CMS/LMS) that do not capitalize on the pedagogical affordances of social media for example allowing learners to manage and maintain a learning space that facilitates their own learning activities and connections to peers and social networks across time. While there is growing evidence that social media is increasingly supporting informal learning at home and in the community and that informal learning is becoming a vital element of education for learners of all ages, research has also revealed that PLEs can help integrate formal and informal learning in higher education contexts. Formal learning is described as learning that is institutionally sponsored or highly structured, i.e., learning that happens in courses, classrooms, and schools, resulting in learners receiving grades, degrees, diplomas, and certificates, whereas informal learning is learning that rests primarily in the hands of the learner and happens through observation, trial and error, asking for help, conversing with others, listening to stories, reflecting on a day's events, or stimulated by general interests. It is reported that in the workplace, informal learning through asking questions, observing coworkers, and other uncoordinated and independent learning activities accounts for 80% of an individual's knowledge about this/her job.

Faculty see considerable value in many social media sites for use in class. Faculty responses from various questionnaires around the world show that online video from either YouTube or other online video sites are seen as having the greatest value for use in classes. After online video, faculties report that podcasts are next in value for class use, followed by wikis and blogs. Not all social media sites are seen as being valuable for teaching; Facebook and Twitter are not seen as having value for class use. A large proportion of faculties believe that Facebook and Twitter have negative value for use in class. The dispute continues in terms of discussing the positives and negatives of using social in higher education but no one can deny its continuous rapid growth and efficient information sharing among peers.

V. ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORK SITES (ESNS)

Organizationally, ESNSs are utilized for sharing knowledge, engaging in organizational politics, understanding the work environment, and collaborating in the everyday work of teams, among other tasks. ESNSs are also used for social purposes, such as establishing ties, finding common ground and maintaining relationships with co-workers. Managers may use informal social networks to enable learning and gain access to information about new processes. Furthermore, social cues received from peers and supervisors within a communication network will have a direct effect on how team members respond to new information. Thus, network position will affect a team member's acceptance and use of collaborative technology, and ultimately will affect knowledge sharing practices.

Employees' relationships with one another also have a direct impact on the ability of organizations to coordinate work and discover new knowledge. When organizations are faced with situations involving complex knowledge, strong ties are needed to facilitate the effective transfer of knowledge. Weak ties, on the other hand, may provide an individual with access to non-redundant information sources, bolstering bridging social capital. ESNSs can support relationship maintenance activities with existing ties both strong and weak and can help individuals both identify relevant latent ties with valuable information and determine one's shared common ground with them. There are limitations however in that gains in network diversity often result in a decrease in the communication bandwidth, and the increased communication flow may limit individuals' ability to locate useful knowledge.

In summary, ESNSs provide affordances that aid in the distribution of information and the sharing of knowledge at the individual and organizational level. Importantly, ESNSs support the socialization and interpersonal interaction that provides a foundation for many knowledge sharing processes. This section has highlighted the value of an integrated approach to knowledge sharing in modern organizations that considers both social and task dimensions, especially in relation to the roles played by social capital dynamics, identity information, context collapse, and networked organizational structures in constraining, enabling, and reshaping knowledge sharing within the organization.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Social media use in educational institutions is not yet a sustainable solution for the traditional problems of education. However, they provide opportunities that are changing the way we learn. For example, in the realm of life-long learning during one's professional career, they facilitate the sharing of practical solutions and make colleagues aware of new trends and topics. The first step needed is to let teachers explore the potentials of social media and gradually test-drive some of their benefits in classroom exercises. This will illustrate for teachers the effects of social media on learning, rather than illustrate for students how they may benefit from them. Inherent to social media is the tendency to improve the learning atmosphere rather than the direct instruction. The current trend towards integrating social media with gaming is not encouraged in the scope of social media. Complex issues like growing social awareness are not easily covered by direct instruction. They need a curious mind and experimentation by the learner, as well as an evidence-based analysis by the teacher. Ethical issues like intertwining recent experiences with social media need to be rubricated and enlisted in best practices of social media for education. As school reports are coming out now, we see social media as bridges between individual education and mass education. The implications for teacher education need to be clearly defined. Freshly trained teachers forget their ICT specialties as soon as they start working in an actual school.

The reason is that students under a high-pressure regime in demanding courses tend to "escape" and "chill" in learning conditions that allow more freedom. Young teachers immediately feel this threat, especially compatible with the test-driven regime, and they forget about the more subtle advantages of learning with cognitive tools like simulations and social media. The prospects of social media for gender and cultural fairness, as well as the advantages they present for disabled learners, are still unexplored. Before attempting to consolidate the new practices with social media in institutional policies, at least two more years of co-evolution between social media and contemporary school innovation are necessary. The future trend is to privatize schools and let other stakeholders like parents and enterprises enter this process. Categories like lower vocational training, grammar schools and gymnasium are being introduced again. How far this trend continues will depend on socio-political factors. In this context, social media present a platform for educators and parents to express their opinions and priorities in this regard.

VII. CONCLUSION

Social networking is a tool, with both its advantages and problems for usage in teaching and learning. When used in a learning context where affordances of the technology are carefully evaluated in terms of pedagogical requirements and student learning outcomes, including those elements that result in a supportive and collaborative learning environment, these tools offer significant advantages for distance learning. Among the positive attributes are impacts on student engagement, motivation, personal interaction, and affective aspects of the learning environment. The direct contribution to student achievement remains to be proven, but when technology supports an affirmative, constructivist learning environment and contributes to successful pedagogical strategies without distracting from essential objectives for development of knowledge and skills, the result of formative evaluation of social networking potentials for learning is positive.

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