

Chapter 82

When Our Changing Society Meets the Social Media Era

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth and the popularity of Social Network Sites (SNSs) are increasingly attracting the attention of millions of students for many different purposes. The chapter reviews the background of the current social media research in relation to the international literature and tackles the most important findings. The practical part of the chapter outlines the results of a survey on social media services. The findings provide real research evidence on online social technology use amongst university students. The chapter has educational and theoretical significance and shapes future directions for research on this issue. A compendium of terms, definitions, and explanations of concepts is clearly explained.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter focuses on the use of social media networks, which have become a critical part of our everyday lives. Social networking was chosen because of its unique affordances, which are further explained in a subsequent section. An overview and analysis of the existing online tools will be discussed, as well as the issues surrounding this topic.

In particular, the book chapter makes a description of the phenomenon and demonstrates findings of different studies investigating the topic from a variety of perspectives. The literature review

presents studies that indicate the effect of online social networking and online communities on students' lives. The objective of the chapter is to draw on the existing body of background literature on this domain and synthesize empirical evidence of how these existing online tools are being used by university students.

The research part of the chapter examines five main parameters concerning the frequency of visits, the most dominant sites used by students, the general usage of SNS, the role of social media in communication and the potential of using social services as educational tools. In order to get advantage of the use of social media for

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educational purposes, we must first understand students' purposes for using these sites and then be able to introduce them into authentic learning contexts. The online social networking environments could be crucial in learning. When students realize the value in connecting with peers in the learning process, the better their learning would be. Numerous international studies still point out significant gender-based differences in students' computer use at home and school (Vekiri & Chronaki, 2008) as well as in their views about gender, technology, and computer learning. Even though gender differences in many cases exist to a lesser extent they may differ by country or age. As suggested by Vekiri and Chronaki (2008), despite the existing debates on gender equality, computer use appears to be a heavily gendered space. The worldwide popularity of these sites shows that it is crucial to conduct case studies investigating students SNS usage. It is, therefore, indispensable to draw attention to and examine the purposes of social networks use by student populations retrieved from a variety of sociocultural backgrounds.

Social media services and Web 2.0 are the subject of everyday attention in the mass media. Social networking sites (SNS) are cited as creating more attractive learning environments as they are infiltrating the educational arena (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Growing literature tends to focus on specific phases of social networking in the educational field and specifically examine the relationship between social media usage and academic performance (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Greenhow (2011) investigated how users' value social services for academic and non-academic uses. As Reynard (2008) mentioned, building on what is accepted by students as a familiar activity, we can encourage them to become engaged participants in their online connections.

Other characteristics of network diversity should be explored in addition to occupation, gender and ethnicity issues (Erickson, 2003). Due to the above statement, the research part

of this chapter aimed to investigate and present higher education students usage of social media services and to examine their perceptions towards the educational value of these sites.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

The term Web 1.0 appeared to characterize the state of Web (World Wide Web) since its appearance in 1991 until 2001, when new developments, trends and technologies led to the upgrading of its use in many different ways. The term Web 2.0, launched from Websites that only served static content and gradually passed through the constant upgrading of Web browsers and new technologies to support more interactive functions, increasingly serving a dynamic content.

This development has fundamentally changed the appearance of the Web (O'Reilly, 2005). For instance, blogs and wikis offer much more possibilities in relation to content management systems and discussion (Kim, 2008). However, despite the significant differences on a technical level, the main difference among the first and second generation of the Web is the role of users (O'Reilly, 2005). Specifically, the transition to Web 2.0 was characterized by the changed role of the user from "consumer" to "participant" and "co-producer."

Web 1.0 was first launched within books, news, music and anything else that could be handled in digital form. This happened due to the continuous appearance of new elements that had to be made directly reachable in electronic form. This point has lead us to Web2.0 where users could not just merely read the Web content, but also contribute to the content they are reading, indicating their dynamic feature.

Some examples of Web 2.0 applications are wikis, blogs, podcasting, live streaming, RSS feed, bookmarking etc. Generally speaking, Web

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