

Chapter 9

The Use of Social Media in Facilitating Participatory Design: A Case Study of Classroom Design

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the effectiveness of using social media as an aid to primary school students participating in the design of their classroom interior layout. It describes two different attempts to do this that achieved varying degrees of success. Where a blog and Facebook page were set up to provide a virtual space for classroom design to happen, and despite teachers' expressed enthusiasm for involving students in the design of their classroom layout, very few participants resulted. However, one school successfully used the virtual space to show the work of the children and this example is described in the chapter. Social media was of more use in a second example where it formed an additional channel of communication between the researcher in the role of architect and the students. However, here it built on face-to-face communication, suggesting social media can aid in participatory design but is not a substitute for the latter.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media is fast spreading among individuals with the result that people all around the world in various environments are becoming connected. People in their home, work, on the move, and even walking along the streets are checking their social media accounts and communicating with others to get the latest news, work on unfinished jobs, get in touch with relatives and friends, or just for fun and entertainment. Officially this social media is defined as a set of applications permitted by the Internet that allow individuals to gather in virtual locations, communicate easily, and share material (Reyes & Finken, 2012; Picaza-Vela et al 2016). Social media comes in different forms, such as mobile communication through Short Message Service (SMS) and picture messaging; social networking and media sharing sites as in Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube; or open blogging tools as in Wordpress and Tumbler (Hagen & Robertson, 2010). This chapter looks at how some of these applications can be used to enable users to become part of the building design process for learning environments—normally known as participatory design (DiSalvo et al, 2017).

At present, people do not need specialized knowledge to use the Internet, although they still need to become familiar with certain basic operations. This has parallels with the idea behind participatory design, where the end users become involved early in the design process and, in the case of a building, well before any construction starts on site. Just as instructions for using the Internet are normally given in the form of a manual or on-screen instructions that are easy to use, the use of online media in participatory design needs precise and sensibly designed tools that create environments that are attractive to their potential users. Another thing to consider in using social media in enabling participatory design is the openness of discussion within social media open forums (Näkki & Antikainen, 2008). The aim behind using social media for participatory design is to increase the quality of products or services through approaches where designers and developers can communicate with and involve the users (Johnson, 2013), and some of this may need to be confidential. This means careful setting up of social media situations.

In the research described in this chapter, participatory design was not just tested and observed in the design of primary schools and classrooms in New Zealand but social media in the form of a blog set up for the purpose was also evaluated to see if it was an aid to participatory design. The aim was to see whether having a blog would encourage more communication between school users, particularly children, and architects. This need for better communication came out of an earlier survey conducted to find out how teachers in New Zealand schools and local architects regarded participatory design (Alsaif, 2015). Both parties agreed teachers and children should be involved in classroom design but felt the need for better means

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