

# Chapter 34

## Social Networking in Education

**Niall McCarroll**

*School of Computing and Intelligent Systems, University of Ulster, UK*

**Kevin Curran**

*School of Computing and Intelligent Systems, University of Ulster, UK*

### ABSTRACT

*Social networking has become one of the most popular communication tools to have evolved over the past decade, making it a powerful new information sharing resource in society. To date realising the potential of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) beyond their leisure uses has been severely restricted in a number of areas. This paper focuses on the application of SNSs in a learning environment and the impact this could have on academic practices. While undoubtedly, due to the very casual nature of social networking, there are serious concerns over how it could be integrated in a learning environment; the potential positive outcomes are many and varied. As a communication tool, its effectiveness is already manifesting in the millions who use these networks to communicate on a daily basis. So it is conceivable that educators should be able to create a learnscape - an environment for formal and informal learning - that adheres to educational guidelines, but also harnesses the social support system of these on-line communities. This paper examines the risks involved in the creation of this new learning ecology, and explores the challenges faced by both technology experts and teachers in delivering a truly innovative and effective new approach to education.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Online learning communities are as old as the Internet itself. The internet started life in 1969 as the U.S. Department of Defence's ARPANET. This was the first global computer network and it allowed government engineers and scientists to conduct research anywhere on the network. In 1989 the World Wide Web (WWW) was created at the European Particle Physics Laboratory in Geneva. The Web facilitated learning by enabling

scientists to share information more efficiently over the internet using hypertext documents. Since then Web technology and knowledge communities have radically evolved. Web 2.0 and social networking tools are changing the environment and possibilities for education. Much of the focus of Web 1.0 activity was publishing static content for users to passively absorb. But with the rapid development of Web 2.0 tools and social computing, users can now be active participants in the construction of their own learning experiences.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6114-1.ch034

Technologies like blogs, wikis, media-sharing services, mashups and collaborative editing tools are harnessing the “collective intelligence” of students and teachers, promoting collaboration and the sharing of knowledge (Mason & Rennie, 2008). Modern students are already fully engaged with Web 2.0 technologies and confidently use social networking tools and online social spaces in their personal lives. This presents an opportunity for educators to harness this enthusiasm for technology and utilise these resources within an educational framework. Four Web 2.0 principles that are central to the development of a Web-based education infrastructure (O'Reilly, 2007) include:

1. **The Web as a Platform:** There should be a shift of focus from computer-based education to web-based education. The web is a platform for knowledge publication and sharing, referencing learning materials, conducting assessment and communication and collaboration between teachers and students.
2. **Harnessing Collective Intelligence:** This essentially is the underlying principle of all Web 2.0 activity. Users are no longer passive observers and have become collaborators and contributors to new content and sites. Hyperlinks connect to and from this new content as the Web grows organically through the collective activity of users. Both educators and students benefit from the new ‘gift culture’ of contributing as much as you take from your online experiences.
3. **Rich User Experiences:** The Web provides rich multimedia educational experiences for students. Lectures and other educational materials can be delivered in a variety of formats with the seamless integration of class-based and virtual learning content.
4. **Data is the Next Intel Inside:** As more people use the Web, more data is created and evolved. With more students and teachers involved in creating educational content, the quality, reliability and availability of

information improves. Subsequently every browsing session now becomes a continuous learning experience for the user.

Social networking is well established as a significant part of the world's communication structure. Social Networking Services (SNSs) such as Facebook, Google+, and Twitter, connect people through shared activities. SNS members can create personal profiles, join interest groups and upload videos, pictures and music. Social networks grow as user profiles are linked to friend profiles and other social groups. Online Communities with communal message boards can evolve from school networks, employment networks and other shared interest groups. A social network user can search for friends, add friends, share ideas, and events through posting public comments and sending private messages. SNSs incorporate recommendation systems linked to rating or ‘like/dislike’ preferences allowing users to make informed decisions when sourcing information. The advantage of social networks, as with all Web 2.0 tools, is the ease of use and accessibility. While these social information systems are essentially leisure focused, there is a growing emphasis on exploiting the tools for education and other productive pursuits (Olson et al., 2010). This paper begins by assessing the impact of social software on our changing relationship to knowledge. The Internet can now be seen as a research network, where knowledge is created through collaboration and shared experiences, and how this impacts the learning strategies of students shall be examined. Social software tools promote interactivity and create engaging learning environments, and two Web technologies that show great promise in the educational domain are wikis and blogs. The applications, advantages and disadvantages of these tools in an educational setting will also be assessed.

A Learning Management System (LMS) is a software application for managing teaching content and assessment. In relation to delivering education programs LMSs are considered

13 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

[www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-networking-in-education/115043](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-networking-in-education/115043)

## Related Content

---

### Social Media as Public Political Instrument

Ikbāl Maulana (2017). *Handbook of Research on Citizen Engagement and Public Participation in the Era of New Media* (pp. 231-247).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media-as-public-political-instrument/172235](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media-as-public-political-instrument/172235)

### Branded Podcasts: The Return of Aural Content With Examples From Turkey

Emrah Gülmez (2023). *Handbook of Research on the Future of Advertising and Brands in the New Entertainment Landscape* (pp. 135-168).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/branded-podcasts/316991](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/branded-podcasts/316991)

### New Media and the Changing Public Sphere in Uganda: Towards Deliberative Democracy?

Kennedy Javuru (2014). *Digital Arts and Entertainment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 855-876).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/new-media-and-the-changing-public-sphere-in-uganda/115050](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/new-media-and-the-changing-public-sphere-in-uganda/115050)

### Social Media and Public Participation: Opportunities, Barriers, and a New Framework

James Patrick Toscano (2017). *Handbook of Research on Citizen Engagement and Public Participation in the Era of New Media* (pp. 73-89).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media-and-public-participation/172225](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/social-media-and-public-participation/172225)

### Not Just a Pretty Face: The Cost of Performative Beauty and Visual Appeal in Beauty Pageants

Mariana Bockarova (2018). *Empirical Research on Semiotics and Visual Rhetoric* (pp. 32-43).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/not-just-a-pretty-face/197976](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/not-just-a-pretty-face/197976)