

# Chapter 90

## Students' Privacy Concerns on the Use of Social Media in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Social media is principally used by students in the private sphere. However, its implementation for educational purposes in higher education is rapidly expanding. This chapter looks into undergraduate students' perceptions of using social media in the university context. In particular, it examines students' privacy concerns regarding faculty use of social networks to support classroom work and video calling or online chats to meet for work discussion. Two-hundred-forty-four undergraduate students completed a survey and four focus groups were carried out. The results reveal that although students generally accept using social media in the instructional arena, privacy concerns can easily emerge. Educational institutions are encouraged to take these concerns seriously. Using applications specifically created for learning purposes and developing some guidelines for a correct implementation of these resources for the faculty to follow might contribute to alleviate these concerns.*

### INTRODUCTION

Blogging, Tweeting, Skyping or online chatting have become part of teenagers' and youths' daily diet. These activities respond to an unprecedented change in the interpersonal communication sphere: social media are colonizing the web thanks to the special appeal they arise among these collectives. Applications such as blogs, social networks,

content communities or virtual social worlds can all be placed under the umbrella of social media, which can be described as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010: 61). As social media expand in the market, the interest to study this phenomenon from disciplines such as

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Communication, Sociology, Economy, Computer Sciences or Law also increases (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008; Frau-Meigs, 2010).

Social media have also expanded into the educational arena. Educational institutions that apply these tools for communication purposes and faculty that use them to support classroom work are increasing (Alexander, 2006; Armstrong & Franklin, 2008; Anderson, 2007; Bennett, Bishop, Dalgarno, Waycott, & Kennedy, 2012; Conole & Alevizou, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2009). Lectures in YouTube, blogs or in the form of podcasts, Facebook class-groups, wiki building as classroom work, online chats for lecturer-students communications, Twitter to notify classroom changes or cancellations or Skype to teach oral communication are among the examples of applied uses of social media as teaching resources (Fernando, 2008; Jaya, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2005; Ricardo & Chavarro, 2010; Toro-Araneda, 2010; Weisgerber, 2009).

The fields of education and learning can benefit from social media. However, the implications of using these tools in the instructional arena need to be examined from an ethical perspective. Since most of these applications were initially created to be used for personal purposes, serious conflicts could arise if used inappropriately by faculty or students. Therefore, more research is needed to establish what applications are suitable for educational purposes. Furthermore, clear guidelines need to be outlined to provide faculty advice on how to implement social media that have been initially created for a different purpose, in the classroom.

In particular, it is crucial to examine the process of implementation of social media in higher education while considering students' perceptions on this matter. We dedicate this chapter to explore whether students experience privacy concerns when faculty intend to implement social media as a teaching resource in the university. Specifically, we examine students' privacy concerns regarding

faculty use of social networks to support classroom work and video calling or online chats to meet for work discussion. Accordingly, we carried out an extensive study that combined qualitative and quantitative methods to give response to these concerns.

## **STUDENTS AS YOUTH AND THEIR PLACEMENT WITHIN SOCIETY AND THE DIGITAL MEDIA LANDSCAPE**

In order to analyze privacy concerns it is crucial to identify students as part of the broader collective of *youth* and to understand their general relationship with the new media landscape.

The United Nations define youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (UNESCO: Acting with and for Youth, n.d.). Many authors consider youth as adults only after they reach 24 years of age, in the same way that marketing studies do, since youth normally live with their parents until this age (Pascual, 1995).

It is important to understand the idea of youth as a process. The concept of process is already implicit in the Latin etymology of the word *adolescent*, which comes from *adolescere*: grow up until maturity (UNICEF, 2002, p. 20). This process is associated not only to physiological, cognitive and intellectual development, but also with reaching independence from the family and with taking the own decisions. Youth is a crucial life stage of personal development and construction of self-concept. Young people look for their identity, learn how to put into practice values they learned in earlier stages of life and develop abilities that will allow them to become responsible adults (UNICEF, 2002, p.1).

Youth from the end of the twentieth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century has been categorized under all types of labels with reference to the key concepts of the digital age: "digital generation," "children in the information

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