Chapter 6

Profiling "User Bases" of Online Social Contexts:
Designing Learning With Social Media Integrations

ABSTRACT

One aspect of profiling to enhance teaching and learning involves the various contexts in which learners will engage, such as particular social media ecosystems and their attendant microcultures (the social norms and common practices in these spaces), particularly if learners will be engaging with individuals outside of the formal classroom. Understanding the larger online social context helps define the affordances and constraints of what can be effectively taught and learned. This involves profiling the current user base of the online social spaces where the learners will be engaging and interacting and co-creating knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

In various learning contexts—face-to-face (F2F), blended (including F2F and online elements), and fully online—social media platforms have been integrated for a variety of learning needs. For example, social connectivity with other learners and professionals in the field have been enabled through social networking sites. Information is exchanged through blogs, microblogging sites, and wikis. Learners may curate their own social presences online via social networks and leave trace information through searches and online purchases (Hernández-Serrano, 2011, p. 293). Digital objects, from various innovations, are shared through photo-sharing sites, video-sharing sites, music-sharing sites, code-sharing sites, simulation-sharing sites, slideshow-sharing sites, and others. Social bookmarking and social tagging sites are used to help both those labeling content to develop heightened sophistication of the contents, and to help those looking for contents find what they need. Serious games, including role-playing ones, are enacted in physical spaces with "augmentations" to reality, and in virtual immersive worlds and massively multiplayer online game (MMOGs or MMOs). Learning simulations may be enacted in digital laboratories. Team projects may be co-created using a variety of work-sharing tools. Online surveys and interviews may be crowd-sourced, based on micropayment sites; they may be conducted live on livestreams such as through video sharing sites; they may be conducted in invited groups on web conferencing tools (with video-based social presences). Research contents may be accessed through federated searches, informed in part by social user data. On news sharing sites, they may vote news and comments up or down and have a voice in the popularity of certain information (Hernández-Serrano, 2011, p. 293).

People's creations of digital avatars to represent themselves offer channels for self-expression, social presences, and identity explorations. These representational avatars may enhance intercommunications through virtualized nonverbals (Allmendinger, 2010). How learners self-represent—through their social presence—"determines the quality of the communication and perception of others" (Caspi & Blau, 2008, p. 323). How learners self-project, perceive others, and identify with the group in an online discussion group positively correlated with each other (as variables) and "with most aspects of perceived learning" (Caspi & Blau, 2008, p. 323). Instructors "should

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