

Social Networks as a Learning Tool

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Abstract--- *Social networks have become one of the most popular communication tools that have developed over the past decade, making them a powerful new resource for sharing information in society. Today, implementing the potential the social networking sites go beyond leisure purpose. This article is devoted to the use of social networks in the learning environment and the impact that may have on the learning process. However, due to the random nature of social networks, there are serious concerns about the ways they can be integrated into the learning environment, as the results are varied. The effectiveness of social networks as a communication tool is already evident today, so it is quite possible that teachers should be able to create an environment for formal and informal learning, which will adhere to educational guidelines [1]. Modern students are closely connected with social networks and use them in their personal lives, which makes it possible for teachers to use this as the part of the educational process. The article discusses the risks of a new learning tool creation such as social networks, and also explores the problems that teachers face during innovative and effective new approach application to education.*

Keywords--- *Virtual Network, Social Networks, Teaching Aids, Internet, Educational Environment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

There are four basic principles on which online educational system is based [2].

1. TheWebasa Platform: the shift of focus from computer education to online learning. The Internet as a platform for publishing knowledge and exchanging links to educational materials, the conduct of assessments and communication between teachers and students.
2. Harnessing Collective Intelligence. This is the basic principle of all network learning. Users are no longer passive observers, but have become co-authors and participants in social networks. The Internet is organically developing thanks to the collective activities of users.
3. Rich User Experiences. The Internet provides a rich multimedia educational experience for students. Lectures and other educational materials can be delivered in various formats with painless integration into educational and virtual educational content.
4. Data is the Next Intel Inside: the more people use the Internet, the more data is created. Students and teachers are involved in the creation of educational content, the quality, reliability and accessibility of information is improving. Subsequently, each material created on the Internet becomes a continuous learning experience for the user.

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II. METHODS

The study used quantitative methods, which included the survey among students to obtain the necessary data. The theory of activity was also used as the method of analysis and interaction, describing the phenomena and the results obtained on the topic of the study.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social networks have worked well for most of the global community. Social networks, such as Facebook, Google+ and V Kontakte, unite people through common actions. Social network users can create personal profiles, join interest groups, upload videos, pictures and music. Social networks are growing as user profiles are linked in friend profiles and other social groups. A social network user can search for friends, add friends, share ideas and events through publishing, public comments and private message sending.

The advantage of social networks is the ease of use and accessibility. Although these social information systems are essentially the means of leisure, still much attention is paid to the use of social networks as an educational tool [3].

Social networks as an educational tool promotes interactivity and creates an attractive learning environment, however, there are some problems in their use by teachers, since it is necessary to provide a virtual platform with the necessary information using this approach for learning. Giving students the right to choose learning on social networks, the teacher must maintain a balance between freedom and creativity, where the development of their own experience in learning should correspond to a certain structure with feasible goals and deadlines [4].

Social networks help users create communities and are of interest on a wide range of issues through communication. There are web technologies that make custom content development easy - these are wiki and blogs. Both of these tools are used to create learning experiences. Wiki are open for website editing that allow users to add and update content, make links to other internal and external web pages. The active participation of Internet users leads to the fact that inaccuracies in a certain kind of information are reduced [5]. An example of such a resource is Wikipedia, the most famous online encyclopedia.

Wikis give students the opportunity to co-sponsor educational content, which fits into the approach to the development of the educational process, where an exchange of experience is manifested in contrast to the passive absorption of fixed information generated by the teacher. Creation of wikis does not require high technical skills, which makes the environment accessible to teachers and students [6].

Some researchers claim that user-generated knowledge of open educational platforms, such as wikis and blogs, undermine the role of teachers. Information that is collected in this open and uncontrolled environment cannot be subjected to the same rigorous assessment, such as an abstract or test. To ensure accuracy, a decision must be made as to who is allowed to edit wiki content. This can be achieved using registered user groups with passwords to access the editing functions. Tsai has developed a wiki-based software development project for students to support group discussions. Pupils considered this approach a useful experience that motivated students to study independently.

However, Tsai noted that it was difficult to guarantee an unbiased assessment, because, as the students claimed themselves, it was inconvenient for them to evaluate the work of others [7].

A blog (weblog) is more dynamic than a personal homepage. This is a form of an online diary or a journal that allows the user to post entries in reverse chronological order (most of them are last at the top). Blogs may include links to other sites or articles of interest, and other users may leave comments allowing thematic discussions and sharing of information. Teachers can use blogs to look at topics in order to expand their knowledge by adding additional information and links to useful online resources. Students can use blogs to share ideas and provide feedback on the ways they study this course. Blogs provide quick access to new resources, encourage writing and self-study skills. Feedback from users allows bloggers to evaluate the accuracy and quality of their contribution, thus filtering and refining the information provided. But there is a problem of motivating students to exchange opinions and ideas, since blogs are freely available, less self-confident students may not be willing to express their opinions. Blogs can provide a rich learning experience, provided that the sources are reliable and trustworthy, and some researchers believe that students should be able to make judgments about the reliability of online information [4]. An important advantage of using social networks is that all educational content is stored in a single virtual environment. Content created by students on the Internet, such as blogs or wikis, can be fragmented and distributed throughout the web. This fragmentation prevents easy access to information and has a negative impact on the learning process [8].

Bubas, Coric & Orehovacki offer a more integrated educational virtual shell by merging the Moodle system with the built-in wiki tools and the Mahara e-portfolio system. The authors found that individual artifacts created by various tools were more efficient and managed within an integrated system. The authors conclude that integration of these current learning platforms with Web 2.0 functionality has the potential to create a more personalized learning environment for students. This is of great importance for a mixed type of training, which combines traditional teaching in the classroom and the online medium application [9].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

There is an opinion in the scientific literature that educational systems are not able to use the real possibilities of social network fully. Conole and Culver identify gaps in the application of social networking technologies for education and their actual practical use. They mainly focus on limiting new technologies aimed at new online teaching method application. They argue that the teachers lack the experience necessary to make full use of these technologies [10,13].

The modern education system, which is limited by curricula and assessment practices, is not developed in tandem with the advent of new technologies, which is a serious obstacle for teachers who lack knowledge about these new technologies and the ways of these new tools correct application in the learning process.

Social networks can also be used as a motivational tool to increase student self-efficacy. In a study by Bowers-Campbell (2008), Facebook was used as an academic motivation tool for students in a course study. A virtual gift system was introduced as a reward measure, which was recognized by students and improved relations between students and the teacher [11,14,15].

For example, the first student received a “balloon with congratulations” to master the task. The author came to the conclusion that the functions of giving gifts on Facebook create motivation for students in the learning process.

Here is another study. Mazer, Murphy & Simonds (2007) examined the impact of Facebook trust building. It turned out that the level of trust between the teacher and the student directly affects the level of performance. Most students who trusted the teacher were positive towards him, which affected academic performance [12,16].

V. SUMMARY

Social networks have a direct impact on our daily lives. Interaction with students lies at the heart of the virtual learning process, and social networking sites provide a platform for building collaborative learning, the nature of which is focused on the exchange of experience. With a focus on user-generated content, some experts are concerned about the reliability of digital social media content.

However, it is obvious that social networks integrate into the learning process where training courses are needed. In the future, more attention should be paid to student attraction for the joint creation of educational material, while teachers take on the role of mediators in a process where formal and non-formal learning are successfully combined. Teachers should provide an educational environment that will facilitate individual and group activities through social networks. This approach will stimulate students involved in the learning process.

The tools of social networks and social programs represent the evolution in learning as they change the way people access information. Knowing where to find information has become more important than knowing the information itself. Public forums are provided through blogs, wikis, and social networks that can promote, generate, and refine information. They also contain new information for both teachers and students. All this will affect the improvement of academic performance of students.

Social media is an evolving technology that is more than just leisure nowadays, but teachers are not able to use this potential. The novelty of these latest technologies, the lack of computer skills among teachers are the reasons of poor assimilation of these tools. Training and support structures should be created to inform teachers about new technologies, and the ways they are used in the educational environment.

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