

Social media as a new area of teaching in higher education

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Abstract

The term *social media* is defined as websites whose content form the registered users. Originally, the social media were used to stimulate the socialisation process of internet users. Currently, they are both a place of interpersonal communication and virtual spaces used to promote brands, products and services. Their use for educational purposes may be a new functionality of social networking. Paul Levinson (2010) in the book 'New new media' indicated the possibilities of using social networking sites and blogs for education. He considered portals as characterised by high availability, which allows to adapt the offered message to the rhythm of users life, and the ability to decide where, when and how their uses the offered text message or visual communication without the requirement of a physical attendance the event, e.g. a lecture.

This paper shows, from a historical perspective, the process of the creating the phenomenon of social media. The use of different types of social media (e.g. social video, interest WWW, virtual environment) in the teaching process is presented. Finally, a niche social networking, which support the promotion of science, is presented.

Keywords: Social media, web 2.0, higher education, new media

1. Introduction

Andrew Keen in his book 'The Cult of Amateur. As the Internet destroys the culture' wrote, that 'people should look for a way to use the best of the digital future, but it should also be remembered not to destroy the old institutions' (Keen 2007: 170). Nowadays, thanks to the development of Web 2.0 platforms, a convergence between new media and institutions of higher education, which brings benefits to both parties, is possible.

The contemporary on-line media not only allow the user to absorb the content, but also to create and spread much extensively than it was possible a decade ago. In the general opinion, the social media provide mainly entertainment. However, using the existing building mechanisms for attention on social networking sites, as well as knowing the destiny of these sites, the advantage of them may be taken in the educational process and the use of the virtual environment, obvious for contemporary students, can bring a number of benefits by enabling him to achieve a higher level of intellectual development.

2. Definition and the historical background of the Social Media

The term 'Social Media' is defined as websites, whose content form the registered users. Originally, the social media were used to stimulate the socialisation process of internet users. Currently, they are both a place of interpersonal communication and virtual spaces used to promote brands, products and services. A new functionality of social networking may include their use for educational purposes.

Detailed definitions of the Social Media are to be found in the following documents, which are the results of thinking of engineers, marketing managers, scientists and network leaders: RFC (1969), Desktop Encyclopaedia for Internet (Miller 1998) and - related to the Open Access phenomenon - in the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003). Heidi Cohen, one of the most commented network researchers, indicates more than 30 definitions of social media (Cohen 2011). Starting from marketing aspects: 'Social Media is a new marketing tool that allows you to get to know your customers and

prospects in ways that were previously not possible. This information and knowledge must be paid for with output of respect, trustworthiness, and honesty. Social Media is not a fad, but I also think it's just the beginning of the marketing revolution' (Burgess 2010). Some of them show the interpersonal aspect - 'SM is not about what each one of us does or says, but about what we do and say together, worldwide, to communicate in all directions at any time, by any possible (digital) means' (Chmielewski 2011), others are of a general nature, e.g. 'Social media is on[-]line text, pictures, videos and links, shared amongst people and organi[s]ations' (Kerpen 2012).

D. Boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007) define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to:

- (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system,
- (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection,
- (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

The nature and terminology of these connections may vary from site to site. While using them to describe this phenomenon, the term *social networking sites* also appears in public discourse, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. D. Boyd and Ellison (2007) suggest not to chose employ the term *networking* for two reasons: emphasis and scope. *Networking* emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication.

In their article, D. Boyd and N. Ellison (2003) indicate the social network sites alone are not what they allow individuals to meet strangers, but rather what they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. This can result in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made, although that is often not the goal, and these meetings are frequently between *latent ties* (Haythornthwaite 2005) that share some off-line connection. On many of the large Social Media Sites, participants are not necessarily *networking* or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network.

As shown by Kaplan and Henelein (2009), the ability to reach out to small and large audiences is a characteristic of social media. For example, both the blog and the TV can either reach nobody or a million spectators. Nowadays, however, the following differences appear:

- (1) reach – in which both technology of industrial and social media provide a highly scalable ability to reach a global group of people, industrial media using, however, a centralised scheme appropriate for the organisation, production and dissemination, whereas social media are (as a direct result of their nature) more decentralised, less hierarchical and differentiated by the various aspects of production and use;
- (2) accessibility – in which the measures and resources of production in the industrial media entirely belong to the companies that are owned by the government – rather the opposite of social media, where all the tools are publicly and widely available for little to no cost;
- (3) utility;
- (4) immediacy;
- (5) durability.

An important distinguishing element of the traditional (industrial) media from the social media is the fact they are relatively inexpensive and readily available to anyone who wishes to obtain or publish information compared to the traditional media, which, in general, require significant resources to publish information.

The beginning of the social media dates back to 1978. Then a programme CBBS created by Ward Christensen appeared on the market, thanks to which he and other computer enthusiasts could exchange information with each other. This programme is recognized as the beginning of the interactive nature of the network.

SixDegrees.com (having had a million users in its best moment), created in 1997, is one of the oldest social networking sites, being in operation until 2001. Recently it ran again, however, having an access only to those who were previously registered users or invited by their friends. It is planned to open the service to all but only after its reconstruction. The Blogger is also worth mentioning, which came on the market in 1999. Now it is a very strong brand that undoubtedly helped the Google acquisition and integration with the portal Picassa. Launched in March 2002,

Friendster has currently nothing like the site, which was at the beginning. Operating as a normal social network till May 2011, it attracts fans of computer games and music after being reformatting. Gained much popularity in Asia, where even in 2008 it was the most popular service of this kind. The number of its registered users is about 1,200,000 now, exceeding 8,000,000 at the height. The further history includes the emergence of the well-known: LinkedIn, MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter (Bahney 2006).

Now the following types of social media can be distinguished (Fig.1).

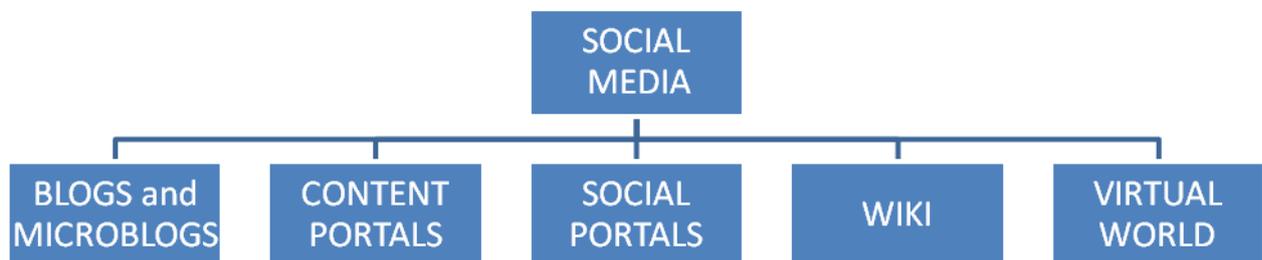


Figure 1. Main types of Social Media

Source: <http://www.howto.gov/social-media/social-media-types>

3. Forms of the Networked Learning

There are two basic methods of sharing knowledge in networked learning in the modern world, i.e. Massive Open Online Course and Open and Networked Research based on G. Salomon's (2001) definition: 'learning is built around learning communities & interaction, extending access beyond the bounds of time and space, but offering the promise of efficiency and widening access. Think of individuals as nodes on a network' (Salomon 2001).

First of them, named MOOC, engages networked learning methods within the typical structure of a course. MOOCs invite open on-line participation around a schedule or agenda, facilitated by people with reputation or expertise in the topics, relying on successful formations of learning networks to assist people studying the topics. In the Open and Networked Research method, researchers have used

networked learning methods to collaborate and support each other's research. (Michail et al. 2011).

There are few learning methods collaborating with the internet, dLearning and Blended Learning being the most popular. The dLearning is defined as a self-learning at a distance. It is characterised by separate the teacher from the student and a student from a group of learners, replacing direct interpersonal communication (typical of conventional education) by communication mediated by traditional mail and technology. One condition of d-learning is to provide communication in both directions, so as to enable a dialogue between the student and the teacher (Honeyman, Miller, 1993). At present this model uses video conferencing, Web seminars, instructional videos and tutorials.

The second method is Blended learning defined as mix of traditional classroom instruction (which in itself varies considerably) and instruction mediated by technology. The latter can engage one student with a tablet or laptop, or small groups of kids working together on the devices (Strauss 2012). Blended Learning is close to the Hybrid courses, which means blend face-to-face interaction, e.g. in-class discussions, active group work, and live lectures with typically web-based educational technologies, e.g. on-line course cartridges, assignments, discussion boards, and other web-assisted learning tools (Meyertons 2006). The degree to which the design of hybrid courses uses traditional classroom and on-line learning environments varies, being largely dependent on the subject matter and overall nature of a course (Mitchel,Forer, 2010).

The use of two social phenomena: gamification and edutainment is a noteworthy aspect of distance education using social media.

The use of social media as an educational tool is the next step in the development of distance education. The proposed uses can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Social Media in education

Type of Social Media	Proposed use in education
Blogs	They can be used in the promotion of knowledge and allow students to know the scientist's comments
Microblogs	Enable rapid exchange of interesting scientific articles, information and research reports published on the Web
Social Networks (e.g. Facebook)	Allow the exchange of opinions and the publication of the work
Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia)	Establish a credible wiki-encyclopaedias enabling precise definitions of the terms used in the global mainstream science
Video	Preparing instructional videos enriched with interactive elements, e.g. decision-making algorithm allows efficient acquisition of knowledge by students
Podcasts	Placement entire courses as a streaming podcasts allow to acquaint to the material presented in the classes to those students who, for various reasons, can not participate in the course
Discussion Forums	Enable the efficient flow of information, as well as the smooth conduct of the consultation with the teacher
RSS Feeds	Allow to showcase the latest information, important to the student, on mobile devices

Source: Author's

4. Conclusions

The change in preferences of usage of the media in every-day life and the need to publish interactive content seems irreversible. The emergence of a generation whose way of life is multitask rather than linear forces modern lectures to change the

paradigms of teaching at the university level. Now social media are used in communication at universities only informally. There have been cases of students recording lectures by mobile phones, exchanging informal lecture scripts as a file on contents portals or consultation in the form of informal conversations with instant messaging. The arrangement of this type of social behaviour and provides them with institutional forms, e.g. the creation of interactive platforms for the faculty or scientific units to be used not only as a part of promoting innovation, but also to increase comfort and allow teachers for more efficient flow of information in the academic environment.

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