

# Online Academia

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this contribution is to investigate the key notions characterizing the academia of the twenty-first century, especially the sphere of online learning. To present the mentioned relations and complexities within academic learning itself, the *5S Model of Online Academia* has been created and discussed by this author. The proposed model focuses the discussion about online academia on such elements as subject, situation, spirit, stakeholder, senses and subject, and their subcategories, to elaborate on the multilevel nature of universities. This framework provides an insight into the current complexities of online academia and offers an insight into its future perspectives.

## BACKGROUND

There are some important factors of modern academia that shape its current state. First, academia is characteristic of its dual nature, it *has been an institutionalized space struggling to secure time for thought, consideration and the slower, time-consuming and lengthy scholarly and scientific conduct deliberately detached from the faster pace of capitalist production, media, politics and their ideological apparatuses; at the same time, it has been a symbol of and an instrument of modern progress, where individual academics and scientists have formed disciplinary associations and alliances, and advocated (to various degrees, and in diverse incarnations), socio-political, economic, scientific and cultural change* (Vostal, 2016: 7). Modern academia can also be discussed by looking at it as a complex adaptive system. It

can be characterized, among others, by nonlinear behavior, visible in disproportionate responses. Other important features of academia are independence, intelligence, learning and self-organization. Moreover, universities are the places of faculty disagreements and different points of control (Rouse, 2016). Academia can also be studied through the prism of its key determinants. Examining the growing role of technology in the life of universities and high schools, non-living entities such as computer systems, hardware, software and mobile technologies determine the way teaching and research are conducted. These notions are studied in the work by Davey and Tatnall (2012) who discuss the notion of technological adoption, focusing on school management software. In the past, traditional dissemination channels were used to gather and share knowledge. Nowadays there are *networked scholars* who use participatory technologies and online social networks in their research (Veletsianos, 2016).

## ONLINE ACADEMIA- KEY ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Modern education differs from what could be observed some years ago; teaching and learning of the twenty-first century involve not only various learners in terms of their age, gender and background, but also diversified methods of encoding and decoding knowledge. As has already been mentioned, modern academia relies on technology in all spheres of activity. Murphy, Kalbaska, Horton-Tognazzini and Cantoni (2015) discuss in their contribution four categories of online learning: resources, tutorials, courses and

MOOCs. Apart from different materials and tools used in online learning, one of the key notions is connected with *online ludic corporate identity*, represented in the growing popularity of ludism among the broadly understood stakeholders. It is visible in, among others, fun and relaxation that accompany shopping or telling jokes and funny stories by workers (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2016). Analysing the sphere of teaching and learning, *ludic academia*, responding to the needs of stakeholders, is connected with using, for instruction, the tools associated in the past exclusively with leisure activities. One example is the application of online games in teaching and learning. Since games are not associated with spending free time as it was in the past, the appearance of serious games has changed instruction in the twenty-first century. The usage of serious games can be examined by using the 5P Model of Studying Serious Games (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2016). The first element is called *Problem-solving* and is connected with information processing and decision making. In the case of educational games, it can enhance the capacity of students to analyse and make decisions in virtual reality. The second notion is *Personae*; and is connected with elements reflecting organizational identity. In the case of educational games used for academia, verbal and non-verbal representations create the identity of a given university and show its mission and vision. The third element- *People*- stresses the lack of fixed hierarchy in games and interactions among people representing different levels on the real organizational ladder. Thus, serious games may be the place where students and professors interact in a more informal way. The next notion is called *Proficiency*; serious games are often offered in both synchronous and asynchronous ways, in a relaxed atmosphere and, consequently, their efficiency is higher than standard learning tools. The last element is *Persuasion*. Since the purpose of serious games is to advertise products or services or to evoke certain behaviours, they can be used

effectively in academia to attract new students or make current learners more interested in the instruction. For example, with the appearance of MOOCs and other educational offers available online, modern education is not restricted in terms of geography, prior levels of knowledge or types of accessible educational tools as it was before. Consequently, learners, teachers and instruction environments of the twenty-first century fail easy categorization. As has been mentioned earlier in this contribution, e-universities have become more and more popular nowadays. The reasons for this are mainly connected with technological development, including the growing popularity of the Internet, and the consequent needs and expectations of stakeholders towards educational services. Thus, nowadays students have the opportunity to have their courses run on educational platforms (e.g. Moodle), take part in massive online open courses (MOOCs) and participate in webinariums or chats with professors. The access to these resources is open or restricted only to the students of a given university or the participants of a given course. Although open online courses have many advantages, offering education to all interested in learning, Schulze, Leigh, Sparks & Spinello (2017) draw attention to the fact that MOOCs are characterized by low completion rates, taking into account the high number of registered users. Apart from MOOCs, gamification is used in online academia. It is defined as using the techniques and thinking characteristic of games for making people behave in a given way, promoting some learning styles and solving problems. In the sphere of education, such elements as points, virtual awards or leaderboards are used in courses to stimulate the interest of students in the learning content (Bielenia-Grajewska, 2015b). It should be mentioned, however, that apart from concentrating on education directed at many participants, online learning also focuses on individuals at the same time, offering online tutoring and mentoring (Berg, 2010).

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