

Chapter 12

Social Networks and Blogs as Educational Communicative Resources During a Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

This work aims at researching the use of social networks and blogs as resources of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in non-face-to-face educational environments, which, in this case, education centers have had to reshape on a large scale due to the pandemic. With this aim in mind, an analysis is performed about the most important aspects which make social networks and blogs into important educational resources in the classroom, which enable us to propose collective and individual activities based on digital technology. Such activities make it possible for us to undertake experiences referred to formal, non-formal, and even informal education, which have the potential to enrich the current non-face-to-face context thanks to their diversity. The conclusion is that these resources can serve as effective communicative tools to generate true learning communities within an online environment.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) has resulted in the transformation of all the sectors that make up our present-day society, education being no exception (Aguilar, 2020; Cabero-Almenara & Llorente-Cejudo, 2020). During the lockdown period, we had to replace face-to-face

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teaching with e-learning and, when the conditions allowed for a certain level of physical presence in the classroom, we continued with ubiquitous, blended or hybrid learning (Báez & Clunie, 2019; Tejedor et al., 2020). In either case, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) proved essential for the development of teaching in this pandemic context. This unfortunately already historic event has simultaneously provoked and favored the appearance of learning communities that only exist in online or blending learning environments (McPartlana et al., 2021). Such contexts require fulfilling a number of conditions which can ensure high-quality teaching, as specified by UNESCO (2020) not only for primary and secondary education but also for higher studies (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020). A need exists to have guarantees both from a political, social and ethical point of view and in pedagogical terms (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021), and it is there that ICTs can play a key role in the current educational reality (Cabero-Almenara & Roig-Vila, 2019).

Concerning possible uses of ICTs as educational resources, it is worth highlighting their status as tools for communication and socialization, hybrid (Mettis & Våljataga, 2021) and online, both of which emerge as essential aspects in a context where such actions could not be normally developed on a face-to-face basis (Sangrà et al. 2019). It deserves to be highlighted that these tools are not new; in fact, ICTs have already been present in this information society for decades (Salinas & de Benito, 2020). However, the pandemic undeniably accelerated their integration into every sphere of our society, including education (Roig-Vila et al., 2020).

ICTs have opened new ways of socialization in this 21st century within a dialogue that uses technology as their medium and where the participant is the e-citizen (or electronic citizen) (Singh & Hassan, 2017), i.e. the Net user who takes advantage of different platforms to communicate, along with the corresponding versions for mobile devices in the form of applets (Al-Harthi et al., 2020; Alhassan, 2016; Roig-Vila et al., 2021; Roig-Vila et al., 2020). New means to create and disseminate knowledge have appeared that rely on the reinforcement of networking, the use of technologies and the development of mass communication systems (Alston et al., 2017). In parallel, e-citizens have felt the need to interact with the information available to them, to communicate with one another and to offer “their own information” on the Net (Ávalos et al., 2019; Baena-Morales et al., 2020).

This approach was incorporated into the educational sphere, which also required the utilization of ICT resources at the service of education (Crespo & Palaguachi, 2020) and, more precisely, referred to communication (Vázquez et al., 2016). In this regard, it is our contention that the importance of two specific online products —blogs and social networks— should be emphasized when it comes to communication and information through the Net in the educational context, especially while facing today’s pandemic situation. We are going to analyze the characteristics of these resources in detail, additionally reflecting on their potential usefulness in non-face-to-face contexts like the ones where we are currently forced to work.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A RESOURCE FOR COLLECTIVE VIRTUAL COMMUNICATION IN THE TIMES OF A PANDEMIC

Social Networks and Their Importance within a Non-Face-to-Face Environment

The capacity of social networks to keep a large number of people in contact through the Net stands out as their first advantage that can be exploited for educational purposes (Wang et al., 2020). The concept of

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