Chapter 16
Academic Perspectives on Microblogging

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces the phenomenon of microblogging and presents the most relevant options for educators, like: What is a microblog?; What is microblogging?; What can microblogging offer in terms of teaching/training? This chapter has a descriptive character, and it is structured into two large parts that provide a general-to-specific approach of both theoretical and practical aspects related to the microblogging phenomenon and the impact of microblogs in the educational space. Two case studies are also presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Web, as a socio-technical environment, comprises various means of interactions, as well as the social practices related to their use. In the online landscape structured on four axes of interactions: communication, collaboration, creation and curation, the microblogging is seen as a new social media revolution.

It is quite demanding to write about microblogging in general, and writing a comprehensive study on its dissemination and pedagogical potential can present even more problems. Even if this social media instrument has come into use only relatively recently (the first platforms appeared six years ago, in 2006), more and more educators, practitioners and researchers worldwide are actively involved in finding, testing and sharing educational uses for microblogging.

This chapter introduces the phenomenon of microblogging and presents the most relevant options for educators:

- What is a microblog/What is microblogging? What are the resources needed to create a microblog and to explore the microsphere?
- What can microblogging offer in terms of teaching/training, learning and researching?
- Are microblogs educational instruments? How can microblogging be integrated into pedagogical practices?
- What are the theoretical principles (essential for guiding the integration of microblogs into education) and what kind of best practice models are there?
- If there is a *blogology*, the study of the social aspects of blogs, why could we not have a *micrology*, as a pedagogy of microblogs, as well? Could this be the proper term for a discipline dealing with the educational potential of microblogs?

MICROBLOG, MICROBLOGGING: POSSIBLE DEFINITIONS

Microblogging is a term in common use since 2006, when Twitter and Jaiku were launched[1]. From an etymological perspective the word *'microblog'* (also, sometimes written with a hyphen: *micro-blog*) comes from the conjoining of the terms 'micro' and 'blog'. The first one is a common used prefix which means 'small' whereas the second term represents a webpage with a continuous, regular and chronological series of information (text and/or multimedia content) about one or more subjects.

In other words, by microblog we understand a blog of small sizes, 'a severe space' with size constraints, as specifies Merriam Webster[2] Dictionary, composed by posts of maximum of 140-200 characters, that may sometimes include links, images or video clips and are available to be read either by any internaut or just by a group of people, named followers.

The person who creates and maintains the entries is called 'microblogger', entries are called 'microposts' and the activity of writing is called 'microblogging'.

The 'lilliputian' character of the notes and the fact that they may be posted from wherever you are (online, by phone, ipads or tablets, sent as SMS, e-mail or instant messaging) has not only changed microblogging into a fast-food writing experience, circumventing the usual editorial rigor, but may be considered as a possible explanation for its popularity.

In a world of hundreds of microblogging platforms, the most popular applications include Twitter, Plurk, Edmodo, Tumblr, Identi.ca, Yammer, Shoutem, Weibo in China or Cirip.eu as the most notable Romanian platform.

Summing up, we can state that microblogging is another form of social media, recognized as *Real-Time Web Publishing* (Winer, 2009), which has won an impressive audience acceptance and surprisingly changed online expression and interaction for millions of users.

In this context, the idea that microblogging is a form/an extension of real-time blogging on a smaller scale, which creates an interaction between users *by means of various devices, technologies and applications*, makes the topic itself delicate when it comes to finding a comprehensive definition. We say this because microblogging, as a means to express any type of message quickly, was practiced in several ways before the emergence of the well-known microblogging platform Twitter. Such examples of miniature digital communications are:

- Saving an online resource using a service of social bookmarking like Delicious (or Diigo), accompanied by a short explanatory/descriptive text – within a certain limit of characters (it basically provides a 'diet' for increasing the size of messages),

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