

Chapter 4

Classifying Facebook Usage in the Classroom or Around It

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ABSTRACT

Social Networking Services (SNS) focus on social relation cultivation among people who share interests. This chapter focuses on the educational uses of SNS, Facebook in particular. Examining the educational research area, one can see that it closely monitors the social changes, adapting to the current trends, and in the process can be updated and modernized. Consequently, an increasing number of studies and approaches that try to integrate Facebook into the classroom or the educational process, at any stage, are more or less to be expected. The core aim of this chapter is to operate as a collective source of information for the reader who wishes to become acquainted with the educational exploitations of Facebook at a glance, while understanding why and how the existing approaches are implemented. Furthermore, a qualitative case study is presented, as a demonstration of the design and implementation process of Facebook-related research.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, Web 2.0 technologies have introduced many benefits to the online communities, mainly concerning communication and interaction among users. The latter seems to be the main reason for the rapid development of the Social Networking Services (SNS). These employ mobile and web-based technologies, in order to create highly

interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user generated content (Kietzmann *et al.* 2011). SNS focus on the cultivation of social relations among people who share interests, photos and activities. Typically SNS, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, provide users with a profile space and the ability to make connections with other people (Joinson, 2008).

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-4904-0.ch004

This chapter focuses on the educational uses of SNS, Facebook in particular. Facebook is one of the most popular SNS with millions of users worldwide. According to Facebook statistics (Facebook, 2013) the monthly active users were 1.06 billion as of December 31, 2012, an increase of 25% year-over-year. The average daily active users were 618 million for December 2012, an increase of 28% year-over-year. According to Nielsen (2006) there is a 47% growth of SNS usage every year and the users spend significant amounts of time daily through such services (Pempek *et al.* 2009).

A U.S.-wide survey, conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project revealed that 41% of the 12–13 year olds and 61% of the 14–17 year olds use SNS (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Regarding college students, the corresponding SNS adoption is nearly universal. For example, an extensive survey involving college students from several universities in the Midwest, U.S., found that 91% of respondents were Facebook users (Wiley & Sisson, 2006). Despite the fact that Facebook has primarily been seen as a tool for connecting with friends, an increasing number of companies and organizations acquire Facebook profiles (Glynn, 2012). Institutes, companies, countries, schools and many others have enrolled in Facebook in order to advertize their products or promote major events. Firms enhance their organizational identity and many companies create a positive organizational image (Smith & Kidder, 2010). Nonprofit organizations use SNS in order to interact with volunteers and educate people about their programs (Waters *et al.* 2009). Overall, people can join the same group and communicate, share photos, news and be engaged in a dialogue concerning similar interests.

It becomes evident that Social Networking is becoming a global trend and Facebook is one of the most popular services. Educational research closely monitors social changes, thus trying to adapt to the current trends, be updated and modernized. Consequently, an increasing number of stud-

ies and approaches that try to integrate Facebook into the classroom or the educational process, at any stage, is more or less to be expected.

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature regarding the utilization of Facebook within the educational process. An approach-type based categorization of the corresponding studies or even the ideas, formulated through valid resources, will be made. The core aim of this chapter is to operate as a collective source of information for the reader who wishes to get acquainted with the educational exploitations of Facebook, at a glance, while understanding why and how the existing approaches are implemented. The latter will be facilitated by the proposed categorization.

Furthermore, a qualitative case study that was conducted at the Institute of Education of the University of London, during the Spring term of 2009, will be presented. The core aim was to examine how Facebook facilitated migrating students' assimilation to the new academic and social environment in a new country. This presentation aspires to operate as a demonstration of Facebook related research, especially as it is indirectly connected to the educational process.

The chapter is structured as follows; initially, an introduction to SNS will be made, focusing mainly of Facebook and the facilities it incorporates. The issue of social media development and the new phenomenon of Facebook communication will be discussed. Following this, a literature review regarding the various uses of Facebook will be presented, in an attempt to enumerate the different existing approaches. A brief description on the implementation and the results of the approaches will be made, thus providing an insight of their effectiveness. Then, a categorization of approaches in tertiary education will be attempted, as the literature review reveals no methodologically structured empirical studies at lower levels of education. Thus, three approach types are classified: *social use*, *academic use* and *other uses*. Following this, practical information concerning various educational uses of Facebook,

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