Microblogging in Higher Education:
The Edmodo Case Study among Computer Science Learners in Finland

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Microblogging, with applications in many domains, including education, is one of the social media technologies with the greatest potential. The features of a microblogging platform vary from sending and receiving messages via the web, SMS, instant messaging clients, and by third party applications. Even though social media networking sites are commonly used in Higher Education, very little empirical evidence is available concerning the impact of social media use on student learning and engagement, albeit some studies on the use of Twitter as a microblogging tool in educational settings Fei Gao, Tian Luo and Ke Zhang (2012). In this study, the authors analyse the level of familiarity, engagement and frequency of use of social media technologies among university-level computer science students in Finland. Additionally, the authors analyse the experience of using a specific microblogging social media, Edmodo, as a learning aid to support group work. The specific focus of the study is to examine the reception of the students towards the Edmodo platform. The data was collected through a social media familiarity questionnaire, Edmodo experience questionnaire and interviews. The main findings are that the cohort was not very familiar with social media at the beginning of the course. However, the use of the Edmodo as a microblogging social media networking sites, as a learning tool had a positive impact on the students. This study provides experimental evidence that microblogging social networking sites and more specifically Edmodo can be used as an educational tool to help engage students more in the use of more social media networking sites.

Keywords: Cooperative/Collaborative Learning, e-Learning 2.0, Media in Education, Social Media, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

The academic world has been experiencing a rapid growth in educational technology and more specifically social media tools, which have the potential to constructively comple- ment traditional education and even replace it in the cases of distance/online learning. Social media tools are used in many institutions for educational purposes in numerous, innovative ways (Conole & Alevizou, 2010) even to the extent of such tools being utilized in traditional

face-to-face classrooms (Redecke, Ala-Mutka, Bacigalupo, Ferrari, & Punie, 2009; Bower, Hedberg, & Kuswara, 2010). Of particular note is that the revised Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) has been extended to include the relevant terminology describing the learning process through the use of social media tools (Churches, 2007), which indicates the adoption of such tools in modern education.

The motivation for this study stems from the researchers' opinion that there is a lack of empirical studies on the specific use of Edmodo a microblogging social networking site as an instructional tool, particularly in higher education. In this research, the use of microblogging is based on the adoption of the social media driven learning frameworks by Chatti et al. (2007), which stress the use of knowledge networking and community building to leverage, sustain and share knowledge in a collaborative way. Echoing Chatti's assertion, this research similarly places emphasis on penetrating classrooms boundaries to involve students, partners, stakeholders and different types of frequently overlapping, formal and informal communities. The microblogging project encourages a participatory culture where students believe that their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with each other (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel, & Robison, 2006). Furthermore, microblogging sets the stage for learning as analogous to innovative processes of inquiry, where something new is created and original knowledge is either substantially enriched or significantly transformed during the process (Paavola, Lipponen, & Hakkarainen, 2002).

According to our understanding most of the existing studies related to microblogging in educational settings have focused mainly on the use of Twitter in teaching and learning (Fei Gao, Tian Luo and Ke Zhang 2012; Lowe & Laffey, 2011). Therefore, we argue that our study on the use of Edmodo provides new perspectives to the scholarly discussion related to the use of microblogging in education. The study has two main aims firstly, to investigate the familiarity of social media among Computer Science students and secondly, to analyse the experience of using one specific social media networking site, Edmodo.

A cohort of Computer Science students participating to an online course at University of Eastern Finland participated to the study. The students used Edmodo in their group work related to one of the topics of the course, Social Media. In the study, we collected data regarding students' views and experiences before and after the experience of using Edmodo during the course.

Their feedbacks on the use of microblogging were gathered through familiarity and experiences questionnaires and interviews. This paper will discuss the experiences and challenges faced by the researchers in designing, teaching and learning project integrating the use of microblogging. Also, there will be the inclusion of key reflections by the researchers on how microblogging can evolve from a purely recreational use to an authentic instructional use in higher education context of teaching and learning. Finally, the potential implications and recommendations for future implementations will be discussed.

MICROBLOGGING AS A SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE IN EDUCATION

Role and Benefits of Social Networking in Education

Integrating social media in the daily lives of people around the word had as a consequence the rapid growth of using social networking sites also in education (Downs, 2005). Social interaction and collaboration work plays an important role in online community applications, which must be also considered in the context of learning (Safran, Doerr, Sherman, Doerr, Flaxman, & Winkler, 2007). In the contemporary media and knowledge intensive era of collaboration culture centralized, one-size-fits-all, top-down, static and knowledge push models of traditional learning initiatives need to be changed with a

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