

Chapter 7

New Communication Technologies' Influence on Distance Education (DE) Environments: Changing Roles and Competencies of DE Experts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter considers the influence of communication technologies and new media technology through the new trend of distance learning environment design. The new communication technologies like Web 2.0 applications involve information sharing and collaboration between users. These technologies bring the informal communication and learning styles to the forefront. Under favor of the new communication technologies' enabled networking, the main driver for the learning process is shifting from instructor-centered approaches to carefully designed learner experiences with robust interactions between learners and content. In this sense, the chapter also explores the role of academics and media professionals as distance-learning leaders and distance education experts through this transitional stage. The chapter focuses on how distance education experts take part in distance learning environment design and what the main skills for distance education experts as leaders, instructors, and designers in the age of networks are, through the discussions of theoretical approaches.

INTRODUCTION

Definitions of Distance Education illustrate a situation where there is a distance between students and teachers or instructors in geographical means.

However, most of the definitions point out a separation between the learner and the instructor, distance education does not include using technology in private study or in on-campus programs where instructor and learner are separated (Keegan,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8119-4.ch007

2013). Accordingly for Holmberg (1989), distance education covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms on the same premises, benefitting from the planning, guidance and teaching of a supporting organization.

Schlosser and Simonson (2010) defined distance education as institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated, and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors. Within this context, communication technologies are the medium between learners, resources and the instructors in most of the distance learning environments.

In the 21st century, with the emergence of the new communication technologies, new distance education environments are derived in favor of the new media. Consequently, the definitions of distance education evolved, emphasizing the influence of media on distance learning environments design. The influence of new media on learning habits of individuals required redesign of the distance learning systems and organizations. Communication technologies referring distance education brings the concepts like Internet, Social Media, Social Networks, Mobile Learning, Web 2.0 in people's mind. All these concepts are repurposed to enable individuals' effective learning in distance education environment designs. There is a vast array of tools and applications or apps that provide designers with new innovative ways to address design challenges associated with helping the learner meet the learning objectives through these concepts (Shearer, 2013).

Institutions offering distance education programs consider redesign of their distance learning environments obligatory to catch the wave of paradigm shift on individuals' change of learning habits, communication activities and use of new media to obtain the information needed. As designers look at integrating new media tools into distance education environments, they must

consider the new view of information literacy and how comfortable the student audience is with the technologies. Designing new distance learning environments in parallel to the needs of today's new generation of learners, any institution needs communication scientists and media professionals set on work as distance education experts for instructional media and environment design. As the distance learning environments include more of new media based communication methods, the media specialists will increasingly take part in the design processes as distance education experts.

This chapter considers the influence of communication technologies and new media technology through the new trend of distance learning environment design. Due to its characteristics, the new media engender the transition of individuals' learning from formal to informal structures. The chapter also explores the role of academics and media professionals as distance-learning leaders and distance education experts through this transitional stage. In this sense, the change in the communication technologies used in distance education is discussed primarily in the chapter. Secondly, the transformation of learning in the digital era mentioned through new perspectives of learning approaches based on network forming. The chapter focuses on how distance education experts take part in distance learning environment design and what are the main skills for distance education experts as leaders, instructors and designers in the age of networks through the discussions of theoretical approaches.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES AND DISTANCE LEARNING: THE CHANGE OF MEDIUM

Communication technologies and media are the terms used as synonyms however; Moore and Kearsley (2012) mentions that the two terms are not substitutional. In this perspective, technology is the physical vehicle that carries messages, and

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