

# Chapter 11

## Web Use in Public Relations Education: A Portuguese Example

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### ABSTRACT

*The chapter relates several of the difficulties associated with public relations as an academic subject. Bearing these obstacles in mind, a public relations academic program has been defined, along with, a teaching strategy using Web-based social media (blog and Facebook profile) to communicate with students. The main purposes of the research are: to understand how university students see public relations as a subject and to ascertain their attitude toward the importance of using web-based communication tools in the assessment of public relations disciplines. The results have shown that students understand that the use of Web-social media is important to their academic life and to their relationship with the teacher. Nevertheless, it is also admitted that the use of technological tools must be followed by motivation, interest in the subject of public relations, and in general, academic work.*

### INTRODUCTION

The use of technology in education has caught the attention of Media Literacy and Education researchers. In the last years, computers have been identified as an instrument that would change

educators' goals and methods, although, practice has revealed the legal, financial and cultural difficulties of this promise. Besides computers have been seen as an add-on, and not as integral to the full educational process (Hargadon, 2009).

However, the advent of web 2.0 and the growing use of web-social media have changed

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the relationship with information and personal learning. This set of software tools is profoundly altering both learning processes and outcomes (Hargadon, 2009) and a new approach is required.

The educational use of web-social media has rarely been studied or accepted, because of the remaining doubts about its “informality” and “publicness”, privacy issues and diverting basis. Nevertheless, and as noted by Bosch (2009), some efforts have been made to understand how students feel about having teachers on *Facebook* and to perceive how this participation affects the student-teacher relationship, as well as how the use of web-social networks can be helpful to academic assignments.

This book chapter follows Bosch statement and will attempt to provide exploratory evidence about the usefulness of social media in educational field. Its main objective is to inform about the potential of web-social media in pedagogical approaches to subjects. We have used our teaching experience in public relations (but the same approach can be used for other subjects), and we present the results of our research based on a survey of three different classes, applied at three different time periods.

This chapter has been divided into four main parts: a critical appreciation of what has been said about social media and its use in education; a theoretical approach to public relations and to the difficulties in defining it as an academic subject; an explanation of public relations university program and its pedagogical approach; and empirical data collection and analysis about the use of the web for teaching public relations in a Portuguese public university.

## **1. SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION**

Technology is ubiquitous in our everyday lives. Yet, and according to Abreu’s K12 study, most schools lag far behind when it comes to integrating technology into classroom learning (Abreu, 2011). Many are just beginning to explore the true

potential technology offers for teaching and learning. Since, and as recognized by Abreu (2011), it is an opportunity to use what students know, enjoy and are entertained by to create dynamic lessons, develop critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and communication among students. Properly used, technology help students acquire the skills they need to survive in a complex, highly technological knowledge-based economy. Authors, such as: Griffith, & Liyanage (2008); DeSchryver, Mishra, Koehler, & Francis (2009) and Holcomb, Brady, & Smith (2010) have demonstrated that the benefits and drawbacks of using safe and secure social networking sites (SNS’s) in an educational setting outweigh the costs.

Technology changes the way teachers teach, offering educators effective ways of reaching different types of learners and assessing student understanding through multiple means. It also enhances the student-teacher relationship. When technology is effectively integrated into subject areas, teachers grow into roles of adviser, content expert, and coach. Technology may help to make teaching and learning more meaningful and fun. While the creation and collaboration within social networks provide opportunities to bridge informal and formal education, stressing new uses for web social media (Abreu, 2011, p. 52).

As stated by Boss (2011), Seymour Papert was the first to recognize the potential of technology in the learning process. During the 1960s, after collaborating with Jean Piaget, Papert developed the Logo programming language and began introducing it to children, who were able to gain a deeper understanding of geometry concepts, gaining programming expertise, as well as showing an engagement in learning rare in more traditional classroom activities.

Since Papert’s groundbreaking work, the tools available for learning have become increasingly powerful and widespread. At the same time, barriers to using technology have gradually diminished. Today’s learning landscape includes a wide variety of tools, such as: personal computers, tablets, interactive whiteboards, digital video cameras,

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