

Utilization of Modern Internet and Social Networking Services in Education — A Case Study of a Remote School

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Abstract: The rapid progress of ICT and its extensive use has affected the field of Education internationally. In recent years, efforts have been made to integrate computers into teaching, in order to adapt it to the new data of technological development. There are more and more studies on the use of social networking and Web 2.0 learning tools in education and learning. The use of social networks in educational and teaching contexts can be considered as a potentially powerful idea, solely because students spend a lot of time on these online networking activities. In Conclusion, the present study found that the use of Facebook can indeed have positive results in the field of education if its features and popularity are used appropriately.

Key words: ICT, social networks, Facebook & education

1. Introduction

The rapid development of both Information Science and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has led to a new reality. The need to adapt the educational process to the requirements of this new reality requires the integration of ICT in all stages of the education system, in order for the teacher to cope with the modern requirements of education and training and rapid developments in the labor market. The multiple uses and capabilities of the PC place it in the center of education (Newby et al., 2006). The traditional school, which was initially centered on the teacher who possessed the information and knowledge and passed it on to the student, now becomes a new type of school, where the teacher guides and counsels and the student acquires information and knowledge through the computer and new technologies, working as a researcher — guided by the teacher — thus cultivating their skills and special characteristics.

Our century could easily be described as a technological century, as the new data show an increase in the use of computers, the Internet and, consequently, social networks. This is because the traffic of social networks and user participation, both globally and in Greece, is particularly high. The innate need for human communication has made social media especially popular with the public; as a result, these networks are developing and evolving/growing day by day, following the modern way of life.

But what exactly are social networks? Social media are an online service which, in turn, is “personal space” for communication and content sharing. According to Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008, social media are characterized by ease of use and swift adaptation to changes in daily life; they facilitate the creation of spontaneous relationships and

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expand interaction and communication.

Users of these networks can create a public or semi-public profile on a system and make it visible to the world of the internet. In their profile, they describe personal information, interests, provide photos, etc. To put it simply, they allow someone to see their personal agenda and interact directly with the information it contains.

Another key feature of social networks is that users can connect and form an “online relationship”. Two users can either start a “friends” connection, which requires a mutual consent, or a “Follower” connection where one can follow the other, without having to do the opposite (Ellison, 2007).

In addition, it would be important to emphasize that users can access friends’ lists, view, and navigate their list of links and published activities, and even leave public messages on their profiles. At the same time, a private communication mechanism is usually provided in the form of text messages, like that of e-mailing.

Along with the ones already mentioned, users are provided with additional useful services such as content sharing (photos, videos, announcements), creating discussions, creating groups, providing blogs, using modern communication, mobile access, etc.

2. Use of Social Networks in Education — Facebook

Using social networks in educational and teaching contexts can be considered a potentially powerful idea, simply because students spend a lot of time on these online networking activities. Official studies have shown that social networks contribute greatly to interaction, collaboration, active participation, information, resource allocation, support for educational activities, while the new online era highlights new forms of culture and learning. Finding that young people learn much more easily through activities related to entertainment and creative participation in social networks is a strong incentive for integrating social networks into the learning process (Kyrgina, 2012).

This logic is highlighted through Web 2.0 services and social networks. Utilizing Web 2.0 web environments in Education goes hand in hand with the principles that govern modern learning theories. According to J. Piaget’s constructivism, students learn in an environment rich in external stimuli, which enables them to interact with it, as they actively construct knowledge in the various phases of their development. As stated in several socio-cultural concepts, notions, learning takes place within specific cultural contexts and is essentially created by the individual’s interaction with other individuals, in specific communicative situations and through the implementation of collaborative activities.

Social networking environments incorporate numerous student interaction and communication opportunities: they support the exchange of ideas, collaboration, content building, self - expression and at the same time they provide the opportunity to expand the physical space and time of the classroom, creating a different, complementary learning environment.

Facebook is a social networking platform founded in 2004. Users expand their social network not only by making “friends”, and using applications that bring them closer but also by participating in groups. The social network that is created, strengthens their already existing social capital and in that way users draw more and more diverse resources. Users discuss, confide and express feelings of trust.

Facebook is also a “virtual world” where students can communicate and interact in real time with native speakers of the language. It is considered as a favourable educational tool due to its structure and various public utilities.

Relevant studies on Facebook in education show that:

- We have active participation and interaction of learners (Ellison et al., 2007),
- Positive behaviour is developed during learning and quality of learning is improved (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).
- Participant interaction and critical thinking are developed (Lampe et al., 2008)
- Self-confidence and self-esteem are enhanced (Bosch, 2009),
- Scientists claim that social networks are pedagogical tools because people can use them for connectivity and social support, collaborative discovery and information exchange, content creation, knowledge, information accumulation and modification (Shields, 2003).
- Facebook's educational use is examined under three topics: communication, collaboration, and material exchange.
- Facebook's educational use for communication includes activities such as students and instructors' instant interaction, facilitating after-class discussion, easy and straightforward lesson announcements and easily accessible information about resources and links related to the lessons.
- Facebook's educational use for collaboration consists of activities such as individual participation in groups related to their schools, departments or classes, and group projects creation by exchanging plans and ideas promoting collaborative learning (Selwyn, 2007).

As people can share ideas and information on Facebook, they can provide its users with rich visual materials and resources for sharing.

3. Suggestions for The Inclusion of Social Networks in Teaching

The first step you can take as teachers is to create an online community or group using a separate account just for your class. Then, you can ask your students to do the same and encourage them to “follow” you. Accept friend requests from your students carefully, do so only in the classroom account and keep your distance.

At this point, it's a good idea to take a look at privacy issues and personal data protection. It is important to ask your students to limit access to personal information. Clarify your relationship and define it as a mentor-student relationship.

By following the above steps, while constantly explaining the reasons you guide your students this specific and persistent way, you will have an advantage in maintaining the relationship with them on a professional level. At the same time, you will be more likely to secure parent or even colleague approval in case the educational method you choose is in question. You are now ready to start using the online tool of your choice as the main or auxiliary tool of your teaching method.

Here are some suggestions on how to use Facebook in teaching practice — a starting point for your “new” educational project:

- Immediately after the lesson, “upload” the lesson plan you just carried out and at the same time upload notes of the lesson enriched with photos, videos, and links. In this way, students are given the opportunity to interact with the teaching material, without any space-time constraints and therefore fill in any possible knowledge gaps they might have.



Figure 1 Our Facebook Group for Students

- Encourage your students to publicly ask questions on Facebook’s “wall” or to upload links for some of the assignments you have given them or for some points in the theory you have explained to them in class. Answer through the social network; the answer will be read by all participants, so you will observe the principle of equal information distributed to all students.
- Create working groups and assign them specific tasks. Organize your students into groups and let them use the team to organize their work and only make interventions where necessary. Autonomous learning is something missing from today’s linear way of teaching and memorization-centred educational practice; Most importantly, learners’ autonomy cultivates emulation through healthy competition since the comparison of the progress of the teams by those involved, pushes them in greater effort.
- Create a closed group for each lesson in which only students can participate. One or two students will oversee each group per week, with the responsibility to write and upload the summary of the lesson of the day, highlight important points or even look for and post additional material.
- Establish days and hours of the week when you can send comments about the tasks you have assigned, possibly “upload” additional material, informally evaluate students’ progress or even announce the lesson. Being consistent with your time schedule ensures the reliability of the way you have chosen for the students to work, on the one hand, and on the other, it makes it more likely for them to actually do the assignments, as this is their favourite means of communication.
- Set days and hours of the week when you can get in “online” communication with those parents who wish to do so. This way, you avoid any possible distrust for the lesson, while at the same time you establish contact with some parents, something absent from education today, though undoubtedly an essential and integral part of all educational systems. In addition, online classroom activity will enable parents to follow their children’s progress.

In order to promote the school you serve, you can:

- Create your school’s website on Facebook. Carefully choose the style of the website, security settings and accessibility by third parties and send friend requests to students — users of the same social network. The number of positive responses is likely to be large. Encourage your colleagues for all kinds of interventions: articles, exercises,

notes, general reflections, educational links, updates on interesting events, photos, videos, etc. This way, you will have created a live website characterized by participation, extroversion and, probably, of great acceptance.

- Encourage your students to write articles on educational topics in various subjects, such as school, the educational process, science, current affairs, their neighborhood, their place using text, images, sounds and video.

- Organize polls on issues that concern your students in relation to the school environment — give them a stand, make them feel part of a “living” organization. After all, isn’t that one of the roles of the modern school?

- Present the school’s activities. More specifically, you can post announcements about excursions, celebrations, visits to museums/theatres, student awards and distinctions, social activities of the school, etc. In this way, the social activity of the school and the various events will become known to the public and especially to the parents. At the same time, you can upload photos and other material from all these activities. After all, isn’t that one of the roles of the social school?

There is a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/education/>) that promote and inform about the use of Facebook in education and a Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/130032510956456/>) in which teachers from all over the world meet and discuss various educational topics.



Figure 2 Facebook Group About Educators

4. What Did We Do at Our School?

In our school we did the following: we created closed groups, uploaded material (lesson delivery, worksheets, enriched media material such as video-simulations), established days and hours of the week when we communicated with students and their parents, encouraged students to write questions and add material on the wall, and we answered questions and queries.

So, I noticed the following in my students:

- They discovered the educational use of a social network, which, until then, was only used for communication and information.

- They had increased active participation, as cooperation and interaction are favored by the social network.

- There was immediacy in resolving questions either by classmates or by me.

- The positive attitude of the trainees was obvious, which, in turn, stimulated the interest even of those who

did not want to actively participate.

Finally, the experience from the educational use of Facebook showed beneficial results and progress in the teaching of Physics for students of both A and B grades of my High school. This is also proven by their improved performance in the second four months and their overall increased involvement with Physics.

For the next year, we will try to optimize the educational dimension of Facebook and we will aim at actions through Facebook for the promotion of our school, such as:

- creation of a school website,
- encouragement of students to write educational articles,
- presentation of the school's activities and events, etc.

5. Summarizing

Using Facebook can have positive effects on education if its features and popularity are properly exploited. It can be a complementary means of enhancing the educational process and communication between both students and teachers. Facebook is certainly a useful tool in the world of education as long as its users know the necessary safety rules so that its use can be safe and effective at the same time.

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