

APPLICATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION AND DISTANCE LEARNING

Athanasia Konstantopoulou

South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Department of Sociology, Faculty of Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, athanasiakonst84@gmail.com

Abstract: In last decade, a decade characterized by intense scientific development and technological triumph, Social Media has played an important role in human life, and has influenced all the social and professional processes that take part in people's daily life. The education sector could not be unaffected by the above fact. In particular, distance education seems to strongly encourage social media use and application in distance learning. Therefore, the research interest of the scientific and educational community has turned in recent years to the use of Social Media and its application in educational programs of primary, secondary and tertiary education. On the one hand, there is the view that Social Media offers a number of benefits for pupils and students, but also for teachers. Social networking media promote interaction between students and student-teacher interaction in order to resolve various educational problems in the classroom faster and to gain knowledge more easily. On the other hand, there are some who point out some important disadvantages such as the distraction of many students' attention by inappropriate publications, videos or images. This article studies the use of Social Media in education as well as in distance education. In particular, the findings are presented from an extensive review of the bibliography, as well as the empirical studies of researchers and educational institutions, which have applied Social Media in the traditional way of teaching but also in distance education. Initially the article examines some key concepts, such as Social Media, distance education. Next, views and researches are being presented by the scientific and educational community regarding the use of Social Media in education but also in distance education. Then, through the grouping of empirical research on the use of Social Media in education and distance education, an attempt is being made to extract the advantages as well as the disadvantages from the integration and implementation of Social Media. Finally, the judicious use of social networking media by students and teachers and the safe application of electronic programs always as an aid to the teacher's work contributes to the upgrading of the educational process and studies. That is why teachers must adapt to technology and be trained in special educational platforms and electronic programs, in order to integrate it into their teaching using the necessary electronic tools, since these media are undoubtedly an integral part of our daily life.

Keywords: Social Media, Distance Learning, student interaction, collaborative platforms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media and social networks (or digital social networks) are conquering more and more users at an astonishingly increasing rate (Zhang, 2010). The possibilities of social media are many, as it is the most modern concept and development in the internet space that allows, supports and relies on active participation and interaction between users. In today's era, Social Media have aggressively invaded the field of education and claim their utilization. Teachers, who are the main pillars for the introduction and use of social media in the educational process, have slowly begun to trust them. Social Media is a set of online applications, which are based on the ideology and technique of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of material, which is created and managed by users. Social Media are a powerful tool in the hand of the teacher, with which he can improve the quality of his work. The teacher using "distance education" is freed from the classroom and traditional teacher-centered teaching methods and moves to online social networking environments that incorporate a multitude of interaction and communication possibilities: they support the exchange of ideas, collaboration for the production of a joint project, content building and expression through multimodal texts (Gideon & Folake, 2020).

The use of ICT improves the educational process, the communication of teachers with their students and students with each other, increases the depth of learning through reflection and allows the formation of different opinions and perspectives to be utilized in various ways in the educational process, as long as their use offers interactivity and supports collaborative work. They promote literacy by writing texts in authentic communicative situations, they allow collaborative learning while supporting personalized teaching, they are accessible at any time and from any place, while at the same time they offer the possibility of an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge objects (Gautam, Khandelwal & Dwivedi, 2020).

The use of social networks in distance education contributes to the creation of an interactive environment in which teachers and students communicate and collaborate remotely to create content, which they share with each other. Given that the younger generations do not have a particular problem in using technologies with which they were not

previously familiar and that the teachers declare themselves satisfied with the fact that by making use of social networks in education they feel that they meet the needs of their students digital age, makes further research on the utilization of Social Networks in the educator imperative. Collaboration generally emerges as one of the most important reasons why social media can be used in many ways in education. Going a little deeper, it is found that when social media work in a pedagogical context, where collaboration is supported in the search, creation and sharing of information, socialization is strengthened, the cultivation of multifaceted communication skills and attitudes, critical thinking, creativity resulting in authentic learning products that are constantly evolving (Kumari & Kumar, 2023).

The rapid development of social networks in recent years contributes decisively to the formation of a new environment in the field of distance education. Social networks, due to the openness, ease of use and interaction they provide, can support the learning process, taking an important place in the demand for open education and continuous training. In particular, social networks introduce a participatory culture for both learners and instructors, contributing to the development of a dynamic and flexible learning and teaching environment (Bozkurt, 2023).

In addition, they appear to provide opportunities for content creation by users themselves by facilitating material sharing, communication and interaction, thus ensuring the transition from the expression of a learner's opinion to the emergence of a context for co-shaping opinions within the community. The cooperation between instructor - trainee, and also between trainees emerges as one of the most important reasons why social media can be used in many ways in education/ When social media are used as educational tools, it is important to ensure each individual's freedom of expression, respect for different opinions, and avoid negative behaviors such as cyberbullying. Also, all users should comply based on certain rules. Therefore, it is a challenge for an educational institution to carry out a curriculum that provides education, training and teaching through the Internet (Argyropoulou, 2017). Taking into account the above, it is considered important to investigate the way in which the social media act as a means of communication in the distance education..

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the conduct of this work, the methodology of the bibliographic review was preferred. Initially, the first stage in this effort was to carry out a continuous and systematic search for bibliographic sources and articles that have dealt with the same or similar topics. The search was done almost exclusively via the internet, primarily in scientific journals and, specifically, via the website scholar.google.com. The sources emerged after the introduction of key words in Greek and English. In particular, the keywords used to locate the bibliographic sources and articles were the following: "social media and education", "social networking and education", "social media and distance education" ("social media and distance education", "social networking and distance education"), "social media and university institutions" ("social media and universities").

Then the relevant articles and related publications were collected and after being studied, they were narrowed down based on certain criteria. The selection criteria of the bibliographic sources, which make up the diplomatic work in question, are the common or similar subject matter and the date of writing and publication of the articles. It was considered preferable to include in the bibliographic review mainly publications and articles from the last 10 years and as recently as possible (2010 – 2024), since both social media and distance education are constantly developing and evolving, without, however, excluding older ones sources that offer useful information to aid in understanding the subject. After the final selection of the sources and their careful study, a literature review was attempted, presenting the most important elements and findings of each source and essential information that interpret and enrich the subject the work deals with and answer the research questions raised. Upon completion of the bibliographic review, commentary and formulation of conclusions will follow, resulting from the citation and synthesis of the bibliographic sources.

3. RESULTS

Web 2.0 applications, under pedagogical conditions, can contribute to learning much more than the technologies of the first generation of the World Wide Web. Social networks, because of their openness, ease of use, and support for active participation and collaboration, expand access to resources, ideas, and communities to support learning. The use of social networks requires significant changes in the socio-technological infrastructure and philosophy of educational structures. In particular, social networks introduce a participatory culture for both learners and instructors, contributing to the development of a dynamic and flexible learning and teaching environment. In addition, they appear to provide opportunities for content creation by users themselves by facilitating material sharing, communication and interaction, thus ensuring the transition of a learner's expression of opinion to the emergence of a co-formulation framework within the community.

The collaboration between trainer and trainee, as well as between trainees, emerges as one of the most important reasons why social media can be used in many ways in education. Based on the fact that knowledge is a network of nodes and connections that are reshaped and reconnected to create new knowledge, networks and connections can be created with people who have common goals and interests, with learning taking place depending on the ability to exploit these networks. Tigas (2016) argues that, in a relatively short period of time, social media began to be considered educational tools, which raise theoretical and practical issues, such as supporting the construction of digital learning communities, and this is due to the new communication possibilities they provide. Recently, educational theorists have begun to focus their attention on the cooperative learning model, the basic principle of which is that the learner redefines his way of thinking and thus learns as he interacts with his environment. Utilizing social media as tools of collaborative learning, new perspectives are created for the field of distance education (Anastasiadis, Kotsidis & Markakis, 2017).

The work of Gautam, Khandelwal and Dwivedi (2020) explores the ways in which social media are used to achieve collaborative learning in higher education, as well as to deliver teaching. After collecting the opinions of professors and students, the conclusion was that social media do not enhance the collaboration between teachers and students. However, the teachers who participated in this research answered that the social media help them plan and implement their teaching in a collaborative way. In addition, both teachers and students agreed that social media can contribute to the educational process. For this to happen, however, Higher Education should realize the usefulness of social media in the learning process, take initiatives, overcome the problems that exist and face the challenges of the modern era (Muryukina, Pevneva & Poliakova, 2020).

In another research, carried out by Al-rahmi, Othman, Yusof, and Musa (2015), the influence of social media on education with the help of cooperative learning was examined. Cooperative learning means collaboration in the learning experience, the creation of new experiences through collaboration, the freedom to participate and create. Additionally, research studies the relationship between collaborative learning and academic achievement. Academic performance was investigated in terms of improvement in understanding of concepts and learning experience. The research findings showed that there is a positive relationship between the use of ICTs and academic performance, while at the same time, they are also positively related to cooperative learning. The more teachers and learners use ICTs, the more collaborative learning is achieved and vice versa, and collaborative learning works in a positive way on academic performance.

In Al-Sharqi and Hashim's (2016) research, student participants were asked about their opinion on the use of ICTs as communication tools in education. The majority of students, at a rate of 66.1%, answered that they would like to see the adoption of social media in the educational process, as learning tools. Most of them already use social media to find information, while others use them for educational purposes. The diversity that characterizes social media offers users the option of using the ideal social network for everyone, depending on their needs and opinions. Continuing, Rooyen (2015) wanted to study the views of students participating in distance learning programs regarding the use of ICT in education. The students who took part in the research process were undergraduates and postgraduates and, in the majority of them, declared positive in the utilization of the social media for the support of the distance education students. Since social media have become part of our daily life in recent years, they can also successfully contribute to the academic support of students.

Kumari and Kumar (2023), studied the enhancement of the educational process with the help of social media. In particular, the research addresses the experience adult learners had of using Twitter effectively. Adults who participated in the research process reported, at a rate of 71.70%, that the use of Twitter helped them participate and communicate with their colleagues. Also, a fairly high percentage of people expressed that engaging with Twitter led them to understand the issues being discussed. In conclusion, it appears that the utilization of Twitter in the learning process, as well as various innovative technological activities, can help learners overcome their passive role.

4. DISCUSSIONS

According to the researches that have been carried out, the social media have a tendency to be used by the university institutions and, especially, by the institutions outside of AE, as they contribute to the learning process. Rooyen (2015) emphasizes the usefulness of social media in distance education, noting that they help create discussion groups and thus enhance and improve communication. Through social media communication develops and improves, as does collaboration, student achievement, resource and knowledge sharing. Similarly, Argyropoulou (2017). emphasize that social media promote student participation, collaboration and interaction. In addition, Tufan (2016) states that social media can provide the necessary support needed by students abroad and flexible NCT technologies enable teachers and students to easily access learning from any electronic device, at any time.

However, the students in the distance education study alone, without being able to have the support they need at all times, often leading them to despair and abandon their studies.

Most of the studies studied conclude that the utilization of social media in the educational process contributes to the development of cooperative learning and the exchange of information between the participants. In particular, Cheek and Ferguson (2014) argue that social media facilitate collaboration and interaction between students, while Tigas (2016) notes that social media are used as tools of collaborative learning, help students redefine their way of thinking and to interact with other people. Greenhow and Lewin (2015) also note that with the use of social media collaboration is supported, students socialize, develop critical thinking and become more creative. In addition, Al-rahmi et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between the use of social media and academic performance. Social media are positively related to cooperative learning, which contributes to improved academic performance. In contrast to the above findings, the study by Tur and Marín (2015) showed that social media do not enhance collaboration, however, they facilitate teachers to plan and implement their teaching in a collaborative way.

Also, Muryukina et al. (2020), found that not all foreign students wish to collaborate with fellow students, while the opinions differ according to the gender and age of the individuals. Additionally, they come to the conclusion that despite the spread of social media in recent years, many students have not become familiar with them, but note that they are indeed useful for conducting cooperative learning in distance education. Finally, Van Wyk (2014), states that the creation of educational communities helps to develop communication and cooperation with the university, while Anderson et al. (2015), point out that the use of social media enhances the support of the students of the ESL, when the teacher is not available for help at all times.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In recent years people's daily lives have been modified and affected by the increasing development of technology and new ways of communication. Social media are now part of this everyday life and try to offer alternative ways of communication and interaction in all areas. Correspondingly, in the field of education, Social media strive to improve the learning process and teaching methods and, in addition, to reshape the relationships between teachers and students, in order to provide the required support to learners and to cultivate confidence, especially in distance learning programs. The limitation of training space and time, with the contribution of the Social media is not an obstacle to the carrying out of the learning process and these participants exchange information, opinions and experiences from different locations and having the flexibility of time. The main conclusions obtained from the study of the literature are related to communication, interaction, cooperation, socialization and student support. Social media in higher education and, in particular, enhance student freedom, enable the creation of learning communities – thus reducing the sense of isolation that students may feel – and provide support.

In addition, social media contribute to cooperative learning, enhance interaction between learners, promote socialization, effective communication, the development of critical thinking and creativity. In addition, social media help to form conditions of familiarity between teachers and learners, through the building of an educational community. Students strengthen their social presence, interact with fellow students and with their professors and in this way improve their academic performance.

The social presence of students and their participation in online discussions in distance education helps to eliminate the feeling of anxiety and isolation and makes them more active. As mentioned in Bozkurt (2023), the internet is a social space and not just a communication tool. Internet tools and content can be leveraged in such a way that effective communication is achieved, student expectations are met and, consequently, the educational process is improved. Higher education institutions can benefit from using social media in conjunction with the educational platforms they already use to achieve collaborative learning and effective communication between students and teachers. Social media eliminate the constraints of time and space, as does distance education, and therefore help learners and teachers, who are unbound from classrooms, more flexible and work mindlessly.

Also, the use of social media in education, complements the theory of social constructivism, which advocates respecting the opinions of learners and placing them on the same level as teachers. Summing up and coming to a more general conclusion, social media have the potential to reshape the educational process. The students, using the social media as educational tools, will be able to improve their performance, while through their participation in the educational groups and online discussions, they socialize and cultivate their critical thinking. In addition, teachers, through social media, can discover new ways of teaching and share educational material with their students, easily and quickly, without the limitations that govern traditional teaching. Social media can prove to be an ally of the educational process in HE, facilitating learning and the acquisition of knowledge.

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