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SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A TEACHING RESOURCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTERNETOWE SIECI SPOŁECZNE JAKO ZASOBY NAUCZANIA W SZKOLNICTWIE WYŻSZYM

Abstract

Technologies have advanced dramatically in all areas of society, gradually being incorporated into Universities, until they have become a very valuable educational resource. In this context of permanent changes, Higher Education is called upon to face the challenges posed by new learning methods, in order to improve the way of producing, organizing and disseminating knowledge. The use of ICTs in teaching process increases access, quality and good results.

Keywords: Social networks, student, learning, higher education, ICT.

Streszczenie

Technologie znacznie rozwinęły się we wszystkich obszarach społeczeństwa, stopniowo wkraczając także na uniwersytety, aż do momentu, w którym stały się bardzo cennym zasobem edukacyjnym. W kontekście ciągłych zmian, szkolnictwo wyższe musi stawić czoła wyzwaniom związanym z nowymi metodami uczenia się, aby ulepszyć sposób tworzenia, organizowania i rozpowszechniania wiedzy. Zastosowanie technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych w nauczaniu wiąże się ze wzrostem jego dostępności, poprawą jakości i polepszeniem wyników.

Słowa kluczowe: sieci społeczne, uczeń, nauka, szkolnictwo wyższe, technologie informacyjne i komunikacyjne.

Introduction

Social networks are having a great boom in the educational world. We are in a changing world where the generalisation of the use of digital platforms allows the consolidation of the process known by some as the "digital era". The changes experienced by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have led to profound transformations in the social, economic, political, cultural and educational order, even revolutionising the way in which individuals act. ICTs continue to be incorporated into the educational sphere, including universities and the field of higher education, in order to break with traditional educational schemes and generate new teaching processes.

In this context of constant digital change, education is called upon to meet the challenges of this new digital era by taking on new learning methods and

didactic resources. With the new technological approaches, learning has become more flexible and inclusive where the educational figures that participate in the learning process are still fundamental: the teacher and the student. Both play a leading role in optimising and innovating the construction of knowledge.

Already the Horizon Report[1] describes new technologies as emerging practices that are shaping the future of teaching and learning. The new digital society is a fact and so is the global extension of Social Networks, which have had constant growth since their creation, breaking down all kinds of geographical barriers and generating new communication paradigms.

Social Networks can be a very powerful tool to favour the teaching-learning process of students in Higher Education given their capacity to communicate and put multiple people in contact with each other, which is why their inclusion in formal education is fundamental[2]. The Social Networks can be considered great teaching tools for exchanging and transmitting knowledge as well as promoting collaborative work; their potential also lies in their functionality and versatility, thanks to the extension of mobile devices and wireless networks in universities, where most students have a *smatphone* from which to connect.

Social Networks are becoming particularly relevant in the field of education and this is demonstrated by recent studies on the use of Facebook as a complement to teaching and learning[3] or Youtube as a teaching resource[4]; also those researches centred on the use of Whatsapp to improve communication between teachers and students[5] or works centred on the limitations offered by this application in the educational field[6].

The University is called upon to face up to the new technological challenges posed by this "digital age" in order to improve the production and dissemination of knowledge. Universities remain in the search for online learning, with projects that enable virtual mobility and constant exchange of knowledge, through cooperative work between people in different places.

[1] M. Brown, M. McCormack, J. Reeves, C. Brooks & S. Grajek, *2020 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report, Teaching and Learning Edition*, Louisville, Estados Unidos: Educause, 2020.

[2] A. Sánchez-Oliver, A. Otero-Saborido & I. Fuentes-García, *Proposal for teaching innovation in Higher Education through the use of social networks*, "Infancia, educación y aprendizaje" 2018, no. 2 (3), pp. 356–362.

[3] I.T. Awidi, M. Paynter & T.Vujosevic, *Facebook group in the learning design of a higher education course: An analysis of factors influencing positive learning experience for students,* "Computers & Education" 2019, no. 129, pp. 106–121.

[4] C. Gallego & M. Murillo, *Teaching practice mediated by technologies. Youtube as a learning tool in Higher Education*, "Educational Forum" 2018, no. 31, pp. 11–29.

[5] L. F. De Paiva, A.C. Ferreira, & E. Feitosa, *The use of WhatsApp as a tool for educational communication in higher education* "V Brazilian Congress of Computer Science in Education" (CBIE, 2016).

[6] M.J. Vilches & E. Reche, *WhatsApp's limitations for collaborative activities at university,* "RIED. Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia" 2019, no. 22(2), pp. 57–77.

Social networks and their didactic implementation in higher education

The use of technology in almost all areas of our lives has come at an untimely moment. Specifically, in the academic field of Higher Education, we find young people who spend several hours a day using the Social Networks. Most students have access to more than one of these networks, including Facebook, with which they communicate, share personal information and similar interests, contact friends, join groups and sometimes also create their own content to share on the web.

Facebook groups allow users to connect with people who share similar interests in the same space; activities in these groups are content-based, allowing members to post and comment on the group's wall, set up events, attach documents, photos and videos, and create quiz surveys[7] . Facebook groups could be an educational resource for university students, with great potential for creating a joint identity that could encourage student motivation as well as creating roles that would help establish different "roles" and figures for the development of academic materials.

Facebook has great potential despite not having been created as an educational resource, although it is true that in its embryonic stage it was used by students at Harvard University to share academic information such as exams, tutorials or notes. It can be used to build and manage learning experiences; its implementation favours collaborative and informal learning and the generation of shared knowledge. Davidovitch and Belichenko[8] in their study on Facebook groups already showed that they were great instruments to facilitate communication between groups of students by creating a positive social climate where students shared learning materials.

YouTube is one of the most visited audiovisual resource portals on the web internationally. It is a tool with a high value in the educational field due to its motivating character[9]; it is a platform with a great capacity for interaction as it has a great variety of audiovisual contents encouraging the so-called "visual learning" that entails the improvement of the operative memory, in its visual and spatial components, increasing interest and the retention capacity of the visualised contents[10].

When using YouTube as an educational resource, studies that have confirmed the importance of the role of experts in filtering and selecting the videos used should be taken into account as they can generate problems due to their

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[7] A. D. Ahad & A.L. *Syamimi, Convenience or Nuisance?: The 'WhatsApp' Dilemma*, "Procedia-Social Behavioral Sciences" 2019, no. 155, pp.189–196.

[8] N. Davidovitch & M. Belichenko, *Facebook Tools and Digital Learning Achievements in Higher Education,* "Journal of Education And E-Learning Research" 2018, no. *5*(1), pp. 8–14.

[9] C. Gallego & M. Murillo, *Teaching practice mediated by technologies. Youtube as a learning tool in Higher Education*, "Educational Forum" 2018, no. 31, pp. 11–29.

[10] R. Posligua & L. Zambrano, *The use of YouTube as a learning tool*, "Refusal" 2020, no. *5*(1), pp. 10–18.

content reliability and the information they provide. YouTube is a meeting point for those who want to show and watch a video; a favourable circumstance for teaching and learning activities, and therefore offers a potentially beneficial option. One of the arguments that support the potential and capacity of YouTube as an educational tool are the continuous innovations of YouTube creating a perfect environment in which students and others interested can discover, observe and share materials of various kinds and types.

Educational studies on YouTube describe its usefulness in content management and the formation of learning communities, as well as in the formation of learning skills for the search, selection, storage and evaluation of content of own or third-party authorship; the network can be very valuable provided that there is supervision and critical review of the content.

Today, educational mobile technology is often used in online teaching at universities around the world, offering students greater choice and opportunities in the context of virtual learning[11]. In this context, we find Whatsapp as an application that has more than 1.5 billion users worldwide[12] and is being implemented in some educational projects as a teaching tool to improve the relationship between students and teachers.

The scientific literature has highlighted how the educational use of the messaging application improved relationships and communication; such as Yeboah and Ewur[13] who highlight that WhatsApp optimised the performance of Higher Education students when used positively by making communication easier and faster, thus improving the exchange of ideas and encouraging collaborative work.

In short, all these possibilities make this application a powerful educational tool with multiple qualities for group work; however, it is not exempt from certain drawbacks, as shown by Vilches and Reche[14] in their study on the limitations of the social network with university students, alluding to the discomfort of large group chats for long conversations and the conflicts when exposing confusing messages. Yeboah and Ewur[15] add further negative effects that the application and its didactic use can have such as interference with study time, a tendency to procrastinate, worsening of grammar and spelling, and lack of concentration during classes.

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[11] O. Bankole & I.M. Venter, *Insights into the use and affordances of social and collaborative applications for student*, "South African Computer Journal" 2017, no. 29(2), pp. 1–15.

[12] *Annual Social Networking Study*, IAB, 2019.

[13] J. Yeboah & G. Dominic Ewur, *The Impact of WhatsApp Messenger Usage on Students Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana*, "Journal of Education and Practice" 2014, no. *5*, pp. 156–164.

[14] M.J. Vilches & E. Reche, *WhatsApp's limitations for collaborative activities at university,* "RIED. Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia" 2019, no. 22(2), pp. 57–77.

[15] J. Yeboah & G. Dominic Ewur, *The Impact of WhatsApp Messenger Usage on Students Performance in Tertiary Institutions in Ghana*, "Journal of Education and Practice" 2014, no. *5*, pp. 156–164.

Discussion and conklusions

The inclusion of ICTs in the classroom faces different positions of acceptance; there are teachers who admit and even like the integration of ICTs into their professional work; and others, on the other hand, assume that it is a waste of time or that it encourages negative habits among their students when using virtual resources.

In spite of the different positions and attitudes towards social *software* as an educational resource, it seems undeniable that Social Networks offers at least new learning opportunities where the student appears at the centre of the teaching process, instead of being the traditional recipient of knowledge. Social Networks are one of the basic elements used in the knowledge society but it is true that they suffer from problems because, as Cabero and Marín[16] point out, we do not have enough research to show us "good practices" for their use.

Among the benefits of social networks in the classroom we could highlight that they encourage the development of new skills and technical abilities needed in the current technological context, they also improve social skills, creativity, collaborative work, bring the distance between teacher and student closer and allow for class monitoring. Among other advantages, it could also be pointed out that they stimulate autonomous learning, interaction with others; they encourage communication and mutual knowledge of the participants, revalue teamwork and favour significant learning.

Regarding their educational applications, the possibilities of these networks are numerous and depend on very different factors such as the content of the subject, the activities planned, the technological level of the students or the creativity of the teacher. However, we must not forget that there are drawbacks to the use of social networks in the educational field such as addiction, loss of time, problems derived from the security and privacy of information or the promotion of grammatical errors[17].

There is a lot of research and experience that indicates the convenience of incorporating social networks into university teaching, supporting face-to-face classes but there is also a negative view of them due to their low security and little privacy as well as problems derived from the platforms themselves such as little control by young people and their possible addiction or harmful use.

It is true that we cannot consider an education that is isolated and unrelated to what happens outside the classroom; there is no other option than to accept and integrate digital disruption so that education moves in the same direction and

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[16] J. Cabero & V. Marín, *Educational possibilities of social networks and group work. Perceptions of university students,* "Comunicar" 2019, no. 42, pp. 165–172.

[17] V. Marín-Díaz, E. Vega-Gea, & D. Passey, *Determination of problematic use of social networks by university students*, "RIED. Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia" 2019, no. 22 (2), pp. 135–152.

at the same speed as the world of work[18] so it is necessary to efficiently incorporate these technologies into the methodological and pedagogical practices of Higher Education and to discuss the competencies that concern these organizations in order to transform the traditional educational schemes and thus generate new teaching processes in which the active adult population is trained, updated and specialized.

Already Tierney[19], in her approaches, introduces the term *disruptive technology to* refer to the necessary adaptation of the educational world to technologies in order to progress and develop, as well as to increase and improve student performance. It is complicated to give Social Networks such a powerful qualification as "educational" but the truth is that they are necessary in this changing world on which the responsibility falls to offer an educational service with relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, adjusted to the new realities, in order to intervene successfully in the new scenarios.

ICTs have become a means of participation, causing the emergence of an environment that is constantly being modified and reconfigured as a result of participation itself. Social Networks continue to be at a crossroads if we talk about their use in the educational field, as they offer us multiple advantages such as student motivation and immediate communication, but new research is still needed to provide us with "good practice" manuals, as Cabero and Marín[20] pointed out, where Higher Education teachers know how to use them carefully in our professional activity, avoiding any hint of harmful or addictive use.

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