Chapter 2
Moving beyond the Basics:
The Evolution of Web 2.0 Tools
from Preview to Participate

Patricia Dickenson
National University, USA

Martin T. Hall
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Jennifer Courduff
Azusa Pacific University, USA

ABSTRACT
The evolution of the web has transformed the way persons communicate and interact with each other, and has reformed institutional operations in various sectors. Examining these changes through the theoretical framework Connectivism, provides a detailed analysis of how the web impacts individuals’ context within communities as well as the larger society. This chapter examines the evolution of the web and the characteristics of various iterations of the web. A discussion on the emergence of participatory media and other participatory processes provides insight as to how the web influences personal and professional interactions. Research on how the web has changed cultural contexts as well as systems such as education, governments and businesses is shared and analyzed to identify gaps and provide direction for future research.

SUCCINCT OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH
Technology has revolutionized the way we communicate, send and receive information. It has changed the way businesses sell goods and operate services by creating a means for exchanges to take place at any time and any place with the power of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8310-5.ch002

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stay connected in our personal and professional lives. With the power of the web, synchronous discussion, educational course delivery, and other professional training options now reach beyond traditional face-to-face models. This continual access and connectivity phenomenon provides users with the ability to stay connected no matter where they are. But has this movement to digitize our lives been driven solely by the Internet, or has the influx of Web 2.0 tools created a more socially connected web to engage users as active participants? This chapter examines the evolutions of Web 2.0 tools and technology and explores the influence of social and political perspectives in the evolution of participatory media.

Learning in a Digitally Connected World through the Theoretical Lens of Connectivism

The ability for users to interact, share ideas, and create content is at the heart of Web 2.0. Many believe the emergence of Web 2.0 tools has flipped the script from previewing web-based content to participating in it. Through the availability of Web 2.0 tools, people are able to do more than simply consume information - they are able to produce information and make it available and accessible to the world. This phenomenon is changing the very basics of communications. According to O’Reilly (2006), “The Internet for the first time gives us many-to-many and few-to-few communications. This has vast implications for the former audience and for the producers of news because the difference between the two are becoming harder to distinguish” (p. 26). In this quote, O’Reilly is referring to the former as the population at large or the many-to-many. The implication is that the few, in this case, newscasters, no longer have control over dissemination of information. Rather, dissemination is now available from the masses to the masses (many-to-many). The World Wide Web is no longer simply a read-only platform through which the user accesses and consumes information. Rather, it is an enhanced system with capability to not only access information, but also contribute to it. This read-write capability is available for all who choose to participate. This is also evidenced by changes in education. Social networking tools such as blogs, wikis, and other online collaborative resources have changed approaches to teaching to being more learner-driven. The student now takes charge of his or her own learning and uses Web 2.0 tools to make deep connections between what is known and what is to be known.

Examining the transformation of the web through the lens of a theoretical framework provides insight as to how changes may impact social, personal, and political contexts. The framework of Connectivism (Siemens, 2006) focuses on emerging individual and group knowledge through access to information online. One concept clearly delineated by Connectivism is the idea that the depth and degree to which we understand is directly related to the learner connecting to and exchanging information within the larger community. Siemens posits that the exchange of information begins with the clustering of similar ideas of interest that allow for interaction, sharing, and thinking together. Connectivism understands the powerful influence that culture, intelligence, perspective, and individual difference plays in any learning process. Connectivism assumes the continually changing nature of information in the 21st century. Knowledge is not static; it changes as quickly as information is updated to reflect culture, perspective, and individual experience (Bruner, 1987; Brown, 2002; Christensen, 2008; Gardner, 2006; Siemens, 2006). In knowing, we weave a “…bricolage of cognition, emotion, intuition, information, consumption, doubt, and belief” (Siemens, 2006, p. 59).

Traditional views of knowing are product-based rather than process-based. Product-based knowledge is knowing about things and knowing how to do things. These container-views assume a knowledge-in, product-out philosophy and align with behaviorist theories that humans