The Role of Social Media in Higher Education, the Use of Social Media as a Communicative Agent and Their Subsequent Effects to the Learning Process of Students

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ABSTRACT

In recent years Social Media have penetrated in all aspects of society in various ways. Higher education has also been a recipient of this penetration. This paper explores what is the impact of Social Media in the spectrum of education and specifically what are its implications in the specific field. The examination is provided through the presentation of reports that have been contacted on the issue, following a discussion and presenting the possible positive and negative effects of such a use in or outside the classroom area.

Keywords: Classroom Learning, Higher Education, Learning Process, Remote Learning, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

For Aristotle, a person’s education is an inclusive process that lasts for a lifetime, corresponds “with the goal of man”, (Hummel, 1993, p. 2), to be happy and it’s fundamental for his self-awareness. It is a process of active learning through which a student can learn different things only by doing them and includes the concepts of “imitation, experience and memory” (Hummel, 1993, p. 8). Only through education can a man truly fulfill himself and correct his flows (Hummel, 1993).

Generally, learning can be defined as “a relatively permanent change in behavior brought about by practice or experience” and

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a process “developed as a consequence of functional environmental interaction via the senses” (Lachman, 1997).

Learning can take up many forms and can be accomplished through many ways. An example of such a way is between the teacher and the students who communicate with each other and cooperate to create knowledge. The teacher is the source that transmits information to the students through various ways mostly in the classroom. The student is the receiver of such information and the outcome of such an interaction is the process that we call learning.

In addition one more way through which learning can be accomplished is with the help of technology. Nowadays, technology can further the communication between people, mostly through the use of the computer and the Internet, with its tremendous storage capacity of information of any sort (Chaves, 1999). The Internet and within it the web allow us “to create rich learning environments in which persons who are interested and motivated can learn almost anything”(Chaves, 1999, p. 4), by “discussing, analyzing evaluating and applying this information”(Chaves, 1999, p. 10), utilizing the various resources available (Chaves, 1999). Manuel Castells, suggests that the Internet transforms society to a new type where the “power of information, and therefore the possibilities of participation, are distributed throughout the full range of human activity” (as cited in Croteau & Hounes, 2014, p. 314) and in which the network becomes the message (Croteau & Hounes, 2014).

We can understand from the above statements, that it was impossible for education not to be affected and thus influenced by these developments. Croteau and Hounes (2014) suggest that the media have become so powerful in our society, that they have replaced “the influence of older institutions, such as the educational system and religion” (p. 6). The use of technology and consequently the Internet and the web, mingled with the educational process with an ultimate peak the use of Social Media.

Social Media can be defined as “Internet-based software and interfaces that allow individuals to interact with one another, exchanging details about their lives” (“Social Media”, n.d.), creating a huge number “of information that can be easily shared, searched, promoted disputed and created” (“What is Social Media?”, n.d.). They are a set of a new kind of online media that share the characteristics of “participation, openness, conversation, community and connectedness” (Mayfield, 2008, p. 5). Basic forms of Social Media include:

- Social Networks (i.e. Facebook)
- Blogs
- Wikis (i.e. Wikipedia)
- Podcasts
- Forums
- Content Communities (i.e. Youtube)
- Microblogging

(Mayfield, 2008, p. 6).

Understanding the tremendous changes that technology brings to our society as a whole, this paper examines how much the Social Media influences the spectrum of education. Particularly to what extent can Social Media provide insight to the field of higher education so as to communicate knowledge and help with the learning process of students. Furthermore what are the effects, positive and negative of using Social Media as a communicative agent inside or outside the classroom area.
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