Social Networks and Young People: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at stating the main advantages and implications of Web 2.0 by analysing popular social networks in Portugal and addressing some examples of their utility. The authors present results of an empirical study applied to young people, aged between 12 and 20 years old, in a specific Portuguese region. In the first part of the study, main characteristics and differences between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 are presented. In addition, results of empirical research and concluding remarks are presented and discussed. Achieved results seem to be particularly relevant for academics and industry professionals who might be interested in the application of new technologies for communication and socialization purposes.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Portugal, Social Networks, Social Web, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Social networking is based on people’s socialization in a virtual environment, where a person can chat with friends, show photo albums, see movies, listen to music and be a member of clubs and associations. Basically, it is what is done in daily life: socialising, talking, joining groups of interest and sharing with friends and family. According to Miguel (2009), we have witnessed, therefore, the passage from the era of the Internet based on consultation of websites for a few minutes, the use of the e-mail for advice and, later, the use of the mIRC – a full featured Internet Relay Chat –, which is based on knowing people and talking with friends, to the era of the Internet based on sharing in the production and personalization of contents. Initially, the cell phone was just a function of the portable telephone, and the photographs that few models could take were of mediocre quality, and accessing the Internet from them was too expensive. Today, with a very cheap phone we can take pictures with a high resolution, access the Internet easily and upload from it. It is in this stage that the microblogging (like Twitter), Youtube (mainly for video sharing) or Wikipedia (online encyclopaedia) arise. Following Miguel (2009), the networks provide a public image that we want to pass and we can make a personal media network (so there is no need to recur to traditional media to express ideas, opinions, photos, etc.).

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Based on a study carried out by Damásio et al. (2009, p. 29), the Internet is not only a simple reality because it is based on a complex activity consisting of the “e-mail, games, online newspapers, chat rooms, blogs and social communities such as Youtube or HI5, not to speak of the microblogging like Twitter.” The transition from traditional media to new media seems to be closely related to the activity that is done, not only with technology, being a constitutive aspect of the differences in Internet use. The same study (Damásio et al., 2009) shows, however, that people up to 18 years old continue to predominantly use the TV media, followed by the Internet, particularly upon the activities that consist of forms of customization and personal expression.

This study’s main objective consists of studying the possibilities of Web 2.0 and the activities undertaken by young people in online social networks in Alverca do Ribatejo, Portugal. In order to operationalize this, a questionnaire was administered to 100 young people aged between 12 and 20 years old. Then it will deal with the transition from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, and then there will be a key approach to social networks, followed by the presentation of the case study and final conclusions.

**CHANGING OF THE “WEB 1.0” TO “WEB 2.0”**

The so-called “Web 2.0” is very distinct from the “Web 1.0” and, according to Coutinho et al. (2007, p. 199), “people began to produce its own documents and publish them automatically on the network without the need for a further knowledge of programming and sophisticated computing environments”. The shift from the paradigm “Web 1.0” to “Web 2.0” was very fast, and it is therefore important to present some differences between them (Figure 1).

According to Table 1, it is possible to draw some conclusions: previously, individuals had a role as mere spectators, while now, besides the access to information, people can also produce it, create and edit Web pages, use the servers for free, and have numerous tools. Thus, blogs, Wikipedia and Hi5 are examples of some of these tools available on the Web. These tools can also be categorized as presented in Table 1. According to a study carried out by Cardoso (2007) at the national level, young people between 13 and 18 years old have at least one computer at home (over 50%), have Internet connection at home (87.3%) or use it at school (47.9%), friends’ or relatives’ home (20.3%) and even in cybercafes (8.3%).

In addition to these results, in terms of sociability, the majority of young people (82.3%) used chat rooms to communicate with people who they know from other places, including the school. It is in these virtual places that many admit to show themselves as they really are (62%), whereas a part admits pretending sometimes to be other people (mostly young girls). Moreover, half of young people participate in chats or newsgroups, 38.4% date or combine meetings with friends over the Internet, browsing blogs is done mostly by young people between 13 and 15 and about 20% of
Using Technology to Address Workforce Readiness Skills
www.igi-global.com/chapter/using-technology-to-address-workforce-readiness-skills/137274?camid=4v1a

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