The Use of Social Media in E-Learning

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Abstract

The rapid development of computer technology and the immense usage of the Internet has had a great impact on education. No longer are students' experiences with new languages limited to their textbooks or immediate environment. The rise of E-Learning changed the education system worldwide. To achieve higher levels of motivation, student satisfaction and interactivity, several changes should be implemented in online learning and one important issue is the use of social media paradigm for online course learning. Nevertheless, in Albania, online learning was first introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although social media is widely used for several purposes, it is not common for students and teachers to use it as a learning method. For this reason, there are two important aims to this study. The first aim is to understand the effect of using social media in learning to students. Another purpose is the implementation of social media for learning purposes and the challenges that it faces.
Complementing this, a mixed approach is used for the study, a survey through questionnaires to students. 215 students from different towns in Albania took part in the questionnaire.
Based on students' answers a mixed combination between traditional classes, online learning, and using social media as a learning tool is the most effective and motivating way of learning.

Keywords: E-learning, social media, motivation, impact, implementation.

Introduction

1.1   Topic, Background and Scope

The last years have witnessed an overwhelming change in education. This main reason of this is the immediate development of technology and its implementation in teaching/learning. The revolution of technology and the Internet era brought to the rise of E-Learning or online learning. E-learning is the application of electronic devices in learning so that any learning theory can be applied to e-learning (Bognar, 2016). Online learning in the 21st century has reached a crossroads in terms of credibility and student satisfaction where critical thinking skills and the ability to move through multiple online learning mediums represents a vital career skill (Pattison, 2012). Research by Brown (2000) indicated that online learning using social media co-mingles work and play in a way that leads to multi-processing and higher levels of creativity. Bernard et al. (2009) examined the level of interactivity in a meta-analysis on three levels (student-student-student-teacher, and student-content) where all three levels are critical for whom collaboration and mastering the content online. Considering the research and the necessity to improve the online learning experience, the need to incorporate social media learning is seen as a need for the improvement of distance learning programs.

The common social media for online classes includes blogs, podcasting, social net-

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working, and virtual environments, (Liu et al. 2009). Social networking sites incorporate social traits, technology, and high-level social networks that engage learners with interactivity as well as facilitate higher levels of knowledge transfers within the courses (Boyd, & Ellison, 2007). Callaghan, & Bower, (2012) developed the idea of engaging students in the online classroom using the inclusion of targeted social media tools and tested it with a comparison of courses that did not contain social media. Based on the study, students who were in the higher level Social Media course showed stronger abilities to complete the assignments intrinsically and "85% of students overall remained on task during each lesson." (Callaghan, & Bower, 2012. p.15). Taking into consideration these studies and the effect that social media learning has on students in foreign countries, the scope of this study is the implementation of social media as a learning tool in Albanian schools.

1.2   Statement of the problem, Study purpose and Study aims

The rapid development of technology and the Internet gave rise to E-learning. One of the online learning tools is social media. Based on other research and studies, students feel more motivated when using social media tools during their learning process. In Albania, students tend to use social media for their learning process. Nevertheless, there are not many studies made concerning online learning in Albania and more specifically the use of social media for learning purposes. For this reason alone, the purpose of this study is to understand the effectiveness and challenges of the implementation of online learning and what we can do to improve online learning in Albania by using social media tools. Therefore, there are some aims to the study. The first aim is to understand the effects of social media learning. The second aim is to see the challenges of social media learning and what we can do to improve its usage.

1   Literature review
1.1   Social Media

The latest decades have witnessed a huge development and a strong level of interactivity through social networking where they must use multiple learning platforms as well as build their problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Pattison, D. (2012) believes that in the online environment, social learning media contains text, videos, audio, photo, and a combination of media. The idea of interactions evolved from cell phones and texting to web-based programs such as Twitter and Facebook that promoted sharing photos, messages, and events that shaped their lives. In a short period of time, hundreds of millions of young people were depended on the levels of interactivity person-person and person-content in their virtual social communities. The effect has been a totally addicted generation who use the Internet and their smart phones in place of direct conversations as a natural form of communicating and discourse. There is a multiplicity of social media available to the online learning environment for social interactions, lectures, and group-based activities. Combining e-learning with traditional classes and social media allows learners to communicate with other learners with positive effect on their learning outcome. There are different perspectives on regarding social media utilization, which may vary from one student to another. Social media provides the robust personalized, interactive learning en-

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vironment and enhances in self-motivation (Al-Mukhaini, Al-Qayoudhi, & Al-Badi, 2014).

1.2 Social Media Tools

There are quite a few social media tools that can be used for formal and informal learning, providing a way to share, and encourage engagement and performance tracking.

Podcasts – Podcasts are a great medium for distributing content because they can be played on computers and mobile devices and appeal especially to auditory learners. They are quick and easy to record and can provide a little more hand-holding for popular support, help and learning topics.

Blogging – An easy way for students and users to write first-hand accounts of case studies and experiments, project results, lessons learned, cultural customs and travel tips, and more.

Facebook – An instructor can easily create an open group to share information, ideas, quizzes, questionnaires, pictures, videos and more, plus students can talk freely about any course issues or concerns.

Webinars – An easy way to initiate face-to-face collaborations through audio, video, Power Point presentations, documents, drawing tools, screen sharing, and chat. It only takes a first-time user around 2 minutes to set up a webinar account and get started. Meetings can be archived and replayed for further learning.

Google Collaboration Tools – Google's collaborative learning infrastructure includes word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, team website creation, videos, conversation, email, IM and photo sharing, and more. Because these tools are available via a web browser, authorized users can easily share knowledge, leave feedback and generate content.

LinkedIn – This professional network offers the advantage of quantifying users by their resume and accomplishments. Instructors and educators can engage with each other with how-to tips, recent development news, opinions and more.

Twitter – Twitter can be used to connect learning communities or classrooms to a specific event or topic, to share updates, insights, pictures and videos. A form of microblogging, communicating across individuals is as easy as creating a #hashtag.

YouTube – One of the most excellent resources for e-Learning, it's free and can be used by instructors to broadcast teasers or tutorials. Students can watch the videos at their own pace, and make comments and suggestions.

RSS Reader – A way for students to keep up to date in rapidly changing fields and topics. By aggregating new posts on web and news sites, students can save valuable time.

1.3 Impact of Social Media

1.3.1 Positive impact

Social media is considered to have a positive impact on students' learning, rather than a negative one. The potential use of social media leads to collaborative learning environments which allow students to share education-related materials and contents (Fisher & Baird, 2006). It allows students to participate in educational online communities by connecting with each other, connecting with their teachers, communicating, and sharing ideas and opinions and by creating and sharing content online. This makes students feel more motivated and encouraged. They feel more confident to share their content and opinions in online context rather than in classrooms. Information and communication technology (ICT), such as web-based application and

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social networking sites enhances the collaboration and construction of knowledge byway of instruction with outside experts (Zhu, 2012).

Another positive effect of social media learning is that it is easily accessible, and it is a faster way to contact people and share crucial information. This is makes learning through social media more convenient and it also improves the overall interaction between learners and instructors.

1.3.2 Negative Impact

On the other hand, using social media tools for learning purposes has some disadvantages. One of the negative impacts of social media learning is misinterpretation due to different limitations. There is a lack of verbal communication, deficiency of transmitting eye-to-eye contact, voice tones, gestures, exchange of feelings. This limits the interaction between students and teachers compared to face-to-face learning. Technology problems is another disadvantage of online learning in general. It also requires time and resources, training, and qualification. A major negative impact is that students might get distracted. Students tend to use social media for their personal purposes or staying in touch with friends. Using it for learning purposes might discourage students and distract them from their learning purpose.

2 Methodology

This chapter describes the different methodological procedures that were used to gather information for the study, including data collection and choosing the participants.

Research questions

1. What is the impact of social media as a learning tool to students?

2. What are the challenges of the implementation of social media for learning purposes?

These research questions were asked so that to understand how virtual classrooms function in Albania and how we can use social media to benefit students' learning and outcome.

Students and teachers in Albania have been using conventional learning techniques and they may find it difficult to transition to the online classroom and social media tools.

In other words, is this an effective way of learning according to Albanian students?

2.1 Data collection

Based on the nature of the research questions, a quantitative approach through questionnaires was used for both the collection and analysis of data. Fellows and Liu (2008) said that quantitative research methods are typically adopted because they are scientific methods and provide immediate results. Other reason for selecting this approach is that it is more efficient, can test hypothesis and always aimed at clarifying features, count them, and build statistical models to explain what is observed during research.

Furthermore, Berg (2004) argued that quantitative research is usually given more respect and acceptance reflecting the tendency of general public to regard science as it uses scientific methods and implying precisions.

An advantage of using questionnaire as a data collection method is they are a safe way of gathering data as they require a little involvement from the researcher. The

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main reason of choosing a questionnaire instead of interviews as a basis for the data collection was that the students express their opinions freely and for the information to be more reliable. It also made it possible for a large amount of information to be collected in a short period of time.

2.2 Participants

In order to conduct the research plan 225 high school students took part in the questionnaire. The students were between 15 and 18 years of age. They came from various cities in Albania such as, Tirana, Kavaja, Kukës, Elbasan, Korçë, Berat and Saranda. No participant had a direct relationship with the researcher that indicated a conflict of interest. Their mother-tongue is Albanian, and they come from different backgrounds and cultures.

The reason of this choice is to increase the validity and reliability of the research by having as many participants' opinions in different settings as possible.

2.3 Analysis, Verification and Validation of Data

The question of validity and reliability in the work, and in research in general, must be addressed so that to trust the outcome of the study.

Validity refers to the degree in which our test or other measuring device is truly measuring what we intended it to measure (NESH, 2006). This means that we must use appropriate methods to find the answer to the questions.

During the research period 215 questionnaires were conducted to students. This provided rich data as the questionnaires took place in different schools and in different cities. The students came from different backgrounds, age, and different levels of knowledge.

By using a questionnaire students can explain their feelings and opinions freely. Being completely anonymous makes it possible for more sincere answers than in interviews. The questions included in the questionnaire were based on the need to gather relevant information in relation to the theory. The questions are therefore a reflection of the theory presented in the second chapter.

3 Findings and Discussion

As mentioned in Chapter 3 Methodology, the basis of the research is questionnaires. This section will present the results of each question from the students' answers. The questionnaire sheets have not been divided according to the schools or cities. To secure the anonymity of the informants their answers are calculated all together. For the coding of the data the interval scale is used and the information is displayed through reporting the frequency of each response. A discussion follows the results.

3.1 Students' answers

Questions/Answers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Using social media for learning purposes make students confident in communicating and sharing ideas	36	**78**	51	20	5	25

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Using social media for learning purposes make students motivated and encouraged	25	**69**	62	33	6	20
Using social media for learning purposes distract students from studying	40	**69**	37	45	19	5
Using social media for learning purposes make students have better outcomes	41	**86**	29	28	20	11
Teachers have used once or more times social media for learning purposes in my classroom	19	53	26	**73**	40	4
Facebook, YouTube and Webinars are used as social media tools for learning purposes	47	**67**	5	62	34	
Podcast, Blogging and Google Collaboration Tools are used as social media tools for learning purposes		12	**109**	39	31	24
I have often had technology problems during online learning	31	**76**	30	59	19	
Traditional classrooms are better than online learning by using social media	15	39	51	**57**	20	33
Combining social media learning and traditional learning is the most efficient method	89	**105**	11	3		7

Results of the students' questionnaire. Represented in light blue highlight and bold are the

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answers with the highest score alternatives, in light gray highlight the second highest score alternatives, and in light pink highlight are the lowest score alternatives.

3.2   Discussion of the questionnaire results

Taking into consideration students' answers on the questionnaire, it is seen that the majority of students feel confident and excited about using social media for learning purposes. Most of the students think social media can be a useful way to increase their level of motivation and they feel more secure to express their opinions and communicate with other students and teacher. However, many of the students are afraid that social media might distract them from the real studying. Students confirmed they have had at least once technology problems, and this makes them feel doubtful and question whether using social media for learning purposes is a good idea or not. Most of the students that took part in the questionnaire come from rural areas and this probably explains the fact that most of them admit that their teachers do not make use of social media learning. This is something new to Albanian schools and that is why it needs research to be done. The most used tools are Facebook, YouTube and Webinars, while other tools are almost never used by students. Reuben (2008) concluded in his study on social media usage among professional institutions revealed that Facebook and YouTube used over half of 148 higher education institutions. When asked if traditional classrooms are better than online ones or when using social media many students were neutral and did not know how to answer. Nevertheless. They strongly agree that a mixed method of combining both traditional classes with social media learning is the most effective way.

Conclusions

Conclusions of research question number 1

What is the impact of social media as a learning tool to students?

Taking into consideration students' opinions based on their answers to the questionnaire, it is understood that using social media as a learning tool has a great impact to students and their learning techniques. Most of the students say they feel confident when using social media and they believe the usage of social media for learning purposes would positively affect their learning outcomes and they would feel more encouraged to study than in traditional classes. Social media leads to communicative learning environment, and it makes students feel more self-motivated. Student engagement in extra curriculum activities promotes academic achievement (Skinner & Belmont, 1993), increases grade rate (Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994), triggering student performance and positive expectations about academic abilities (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Nevertheless, many students are skeptical to using social media learning because they feel distracted and cannot fully concentrate to the studying. Another reason is the technology problems that they faced during online learning or when using social media. Based on the students' answers most of the teacher do not use social media for learning purposes and they stick to traditional classrooms. The most used social media tools are Facebook, YouTube and Webinars while other tools are almost not used at all. Students believe the most effective method is a blended one

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between traditional classes and online ones while using social media. The result of this research confirmed that use of social media for collaborative learning purposes, affect their academic performance positively, meaning that the implementation of such sophisticated communication technology would bring revolutionary, drastic changes in Albanian education system and more specifically to Albanian schools for international collaborative learning.

Conclusions of research question number 2

What are the challenges of the implementation of social media for learning purposes?

Albanian students were firstly introduced to online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Based on this fact, there were many difficulties students faced during online learning and they feel skeptical when using social media for learning purposes. Therefore, the implementation of social media learning should be made in a smooth and gentle way so that it does not affect students' motivation and confidence. It should at first be used in classrooms where teachers are present and they can observe, give opinions, and help students using the social media tools for learning purposes. Considering that Facebook, YouTube and Webinars were the most used tools from students, teachers should take this as an advantage and make use of it in an appropriate way. Combing traditional classrooms with social media learning is believed as the most effective way to students. A blended method would improve their way of studying and their outcomes. As previously mentioned, online learning was first introduced to Albanian students only during Covid-19 pandemic. For this reason, students are used to their traditional classrooms and some of them feel doubtful and insecure toward the idea of online learning or using social media for learning purposes. Despite this fact, they are welcoming to the implementation of social media learning. Many students have an intention of studying abroad and they see this opportunity as a very helpful and effective way to later adapt with foreign students who have already been using social media for learning purposes.

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