ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FACULTY OF PEDAGOGY AND INNOVATIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Internet means have delineated non-geographical territories for communication and meeting. Their accessibility as well their mobility are bringing people closer together through cyberspace. Internet enables a way of ubiquity for it makes physical borders invisible. This allows us to be in different virtual places simultaneously.

Social networks represent cyber scenarios for social interactions in which dynamic exchanges are performed in the Web. Networks are formed by people that share common needs and problems. For Digital Natives (DN) the issue of being active members of Networks appears to be a natural life fact. For DN personal motivations treated interactively in the Web, are public matters too, which plays a determinant role in certain physical behaviors.

Among the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Innovative Education there may be several individuals that could be considered as Digital Natives. In this respect, it becomes a relevant matter to investigate about the influence that social networks imprint on the students’ school work and professional formation. The information generated in this study will make possible to reflect over two functional postures, that the young people´s immersion in the Web is futile, and on the other hand, that the youngsters' immersion in the Web is driven by evident individual motivations and habits that are motivated by the need of information and communication. Also, this study seeks to identify better strategies that allow the optimization of the available resources in order to establish an effective communication as well as to create appropriate environments for the young students’ development.

Keywords: cyberspace/social networks/digital natives/ICT.

1 INTRODUCTION

At present, we all are undergoing a process of scientific and technologic increment that it is forcing us to face violent change in all areas of our daily life. Industry is one of the key leaders in the transformation of personal and collective life. Some of the concepts that impact the functioning of organizations is work and communication efficiency; delivery and assistance of services and products rapidity and comfort in everyday life.

In the latest years society has experiments great and ample changes related to the access to the information and in communication, which has transformed the way of life, particularly personal interests and necessities. In this context, schools are now facing the challenge to fulfill the community’s basic needs for learning, as well as to comply with the formation that will need the future citizens. Moreover, prepared educational institutions participation in the technological change is demanded to collaborate to improve the contextual advancement with a responsible attitude (Cuadrado, 2011).

In addition, schools ought to consider the adoption of emergent technological approaches and use them as tools to support the Teaching-Learning process, since the purpose is to prepare the citizens to learn along the life (Ruiz, 2004). Besides, Information and communication technologies (ICT) have become an important part of daily life. All kinds of electronic devices are at their reach to access all the information and to communicate as much as they require, at any time and at any place. This shows how evident it is that youngsters perform more assertively with the new technologies, without any problem, since they have grown familiar with the newest technology.

As a consequence of the emergent educational necessities, it is necessary that the teachers modify their teaching practices. Cuadrado (2011) suggests the teachers’ formation programs have to be
founded and oriented by the emergent reality in the daily life. This approach promotes the teachers’ capacities and abilities and favors the effective integration of technology in the professional practice.

2 THE PROCESS OF TEACHING-LEARNING AND THE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The difficulties that the teachers are facing in their schools to include the use of the ICT’s in their work are the lack of infrastructure, obsolete computers, Internet connectivity, among others. The presence and usefulness of the latest technologies for schools is undeniable. Therefore it is a must to recognize the strong alliance between the latest technologies and capable teachers to make them give out the maximum results. For this reason it is wise to train the teachers so they reflect on the better inclusion of ICT’s in their classrooms. Not just because teachers include ICT’s in their daily work it doesn’t necessarily mean that they make innovative classes (Cuadrado, 2011).

Cuadrado (2011) point out that it is clear that the ITC’s in-class positive effects is not only due to the technological elements that are used. But it is due thanks to the teaching methodology that the teachers are able to implement. Then, it is clear that the efficient performance in the pedagogical and didactic intervention where the ICT’s are involved, it also depends greatly on the teachers’ skills and creativity to plan the application of pedagogic materials in class.

Mendoza (2013) emphasizes that the educational success of the ICT’s will depend on plan that the teacher designs to use the technological resources, for these are supportive means that boost the richness of the learning experience. Technological resources favor the student’s interest and disposition to seek their own learning. They also have become very useful for teachers so they can construct their own digital materials.

Quintero, Fernandez and Gutiérrez (2007), mention that digital materials are also known as learning objects. These authors define them as “digital or non digital material that can be used or reused in any learning activity supported by technology.”

The Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Colombia (2006) states that a learning object is a set of digital resources which are self contained and reusable, oriented by an educative purpose, and conformed at least three components which are the contents, learning activities and contextual elements with emphasis in the use of ICT’s. Learning object are considered to be constituted by images, videos, Power Point presentations, computer programs, applications, software such as Blogger, Prezzi, Camptasia, Movie Maker, and more.

Quintero, Fernández y Gutiérrez (2007) emphasize that learning objects have to be digital resources oriented to support the educational purposes. Besides, they must include the following components: the instructional objectives have to be clearly stated, the content, curriculum information, didactic and pedagogic strategies, including evaluation and feedback to consolidate knowledge and to assure objectives achievement.

Though, in the matter Cabero and Gisbert (2005) comment that the design and the use of the didactic digital materials have to go beyond the mere exposition. These materials need to be diversified to stimulate and maintain the students’ interest on the topics in such a way that comprehension and assimilation are facilitated, that is, to look for a specific structure than guides and motivates the students while la interaction with the information.

3 DIGITAL NATIVES

Undoubtedly, the technological advancement has influenced the citizens’ way of life for many generations. Tapscott, D. (2009) states that the Generation Net (1977-1997), have grown along with the emergence of the personal computer, Internet and an array of peripheral technologies. These Digital Natives became the most active users; they became engaged in a world-long scale interaction. The generation “Next” or “Z” conformed by children and youngsters (1998-2014), is characterized by gifted geniuses that make technology function at its best.

In the matter, Cárdomo (2008) explain that empirical data show that most of the Internet users are mostly from the young population. At present, youngsters, specifically digital natives, show certain differences such as social, psychological, emotional as well as neurological that are caused to some extent by the way they have access to the ICT’s, that at the end, this situation has allowed Digital Natives to obtain positive and negative attention, among the rest of the society.
Technological advances have amplified young people’s technological skills that are immersed in this reality. Tapscott, D. (2009) explains that there are eight characteristics or profiles that describe Digital Natives. These characteristics are: freedom of choice; freedom to determine or organize their time as well as their activities; possibility of personalizing their own things; the possibility to do the thing by themselves; be distinguishable among the rest of peers or acquaintances; delight for chats, videos, forums and virtual spaces; be under the community and other organizations scrutiny over private lives, moral integrity, entertainment options, that is at home, work and school. Speed in the cyberspace is normal for Digital Natives, something different, is obsolete and continuous updating and systematic innovation is a great part of their lives.

Nowadays, personal computers are not the only way to access Internet. In the last decade new technological resources have burst in modern society’s life. Notebooks, tablets, iPads or smart phones, are some of the tools Digital Natives use naturally to get connected from any pace. They get updated through the social networks, for instance, Facebook. This is one of the most generalized ways they learn the daily news, about situations and facts are known at the very moment they are happening. They also access to unlimited relevant data and download useful applications, or watch videos, listen to music, and more, all through Internet.

All these changes in the family and school dynamics have evolved, too. Before the Digital Natives generation, young people weren’t able to establish good relations with their parents caused by the generation gap. On the contrary, Digital Natives get along well with their parents, and also they share interests and likes. Referred to the generation before the Digital Natives, it is also considered that the generation gap might be an abyss, instead (Tapscott, 2009). At present, children and youngsters have a better relation their parents and adults that surround them, in the community and in school.

Now, Digital Natives’ parents are being taught technological matters by their own children. This new social fact shows us that that the family dynamics are being altered positively. In this matter, a participative interaction with the family nucleus is being perceived, which is different than the way baby boomers related with their parents. The family seems to be more important for young people now than in the past. This situation makes possible to communicate more sincerely with adult people. There appears to be a genuine interest for other persons’ opinion along as well as a more sincere help from them. The recognition, by the youngsters about the importance of the participation of other people in the construction and reaffirmation of their identity, makes them want to be closer with their parents, brothers and sisters, even when they have become twenty- or more- year old.

Also, the way the interaction is carried on among peers is different these days. It is highly probable that who are chosen to be best friends, belong to an older segment of the population, and even it is more recurrent that the best friends are from opposite gender. This reflects the value of tolerance and the feeling of belonging among the individuals from present generations, thanks to the multidirectional and timely communication.

It is evident that for the present generation; Digital Natives, according to Cárdomo (2008), the main input is the high speed with which they learn immediately about the flow of communication and about social behavior acts. Therefore, the way people socialize and the way young people are learning, has been undergoing a large transformation.

4 THE SOCIAL NETWORKS’ DIDACTIC ROLL

The blossoming of the services of information and communication in the cyberspace have multiplied and diversified. Social Networks are a strong representation of human interaction within virtual communities. The accomplishment of the omnipresence might be considered to be the materialization of one of the human aspirations. In daily life the essence of the praxis use of the social networks is merely instrumental, so people get connected with peers with similar interests, knowledge and experiences. These instrumental resources promote collaboration and make possible the ideal exchange of communication and conviviality. Martínez (2010) expresses that the real idea of using the social networks is directly founded in productive activities. Social networks link the individuals in multiple networks defined by expectations, as well as worries, which are later are materialized in the collective learning actions. For Martínez (2010) Learning within the environment of the social networks requires an attitude.

De Haro, J. J. (2010) identifies different types of social networks. Some are focused in personal relationships, other are oriented to educational applications. There other social networks that are one of the services offered by some instructional platforms, oriented to children, families, youngsters and
specialized, about the adoption of social networks by teachers and students. Others related, put forward the importance of the realization of further studies, more extensive and specialized, about the adoption of social network by teacher and students.

For Gómez, M. T. and López, N. (2010) comment that social networks have turned into an alternative tool for educational purposes. They allow the individuals to practice the innate capacity to create communities. Social networks have turned into the ideal environments for the immersion and performance, thanks to the possibility to bring in personal computers, smartphones to practical any place, even to school.

One of the most popular social networks in the world is Facebook. The combination of the PC, cellular phone and Broad Band is responsible for the limitless and instantaneous interactivities (Martin, n.d.). Facebook is one of the most famous virtual communities since its invention in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. This social network was created for college students so they could form groups to keep in contact with colleagues and share information, as an alternative additional to the e-mail.

With the time the users oriented the social network to the family members, friends, and they were accentuated the communicative aspect by their owners, who incorporated different tools to facilitate this use, for example: sharing photos, friends search, etc. From the year 2006, Facebook was opened to all the users of the Internet and today this application is used by more than 400 million active users in the whole world (Gómez, M. T., y López, N. (2010). Perhaps this social network is the largest virtual community and is the one that is becoming larger every time. The Facebook growth rate is figured out on 25% in at least 47 countries, and in 28 countries numbers double every three months. On the other hand, it is translated into 100 different languages, thus it is present in the most developed countries. In Latin America the number of users has risen to approximately 40 millions of active users led by Argentina, México y Brasil (Martin, n.d.)

Martin (n.d.) presents an inventory of 19 most popular social networks: Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, Twitter, Slashdot, Reddit, Digg, Delicious, StumbleUpon, FriendFeed, Last.fm, Friendster, LiveJournal, Hi5, Tagged, Ning, Xanga, Classmates.com and Bebo. Often, new social networks show up in the world, since they answer to the different needs and specialties. In the Net, related to the social networks, there is no limit in their nature and type, besides they may be open or closed access.

At present, Facebook shares recognition with Twitter, which is the second social network used worldwide. The most active users in this social network are those who are between 35 and 44 years old. In the third place there is LinkedIn. This social network has been adding bigger numbers of young people from the age of 25 years old. Nevertheless, nowadays most of its users are between 35 and 55 years old. But still, Facebook is the social network is the most disseminated and approximately 61% of its users are 35 year old end older.

Facebook is not just a medium for entertainment for it offers useful characteristics that give support it as an instructional platform. The greatest benefit is that offers the advantage for the academic work. Besides it is easy to use, young and old people are familiar with it. So, to exploit Facebook fully, it is necessary to follow a structured approach, because the majority of the users need to realize online transactions as part of their learning (Gómez, M. T. and López, N., 2010).

One of the biggest utilities that Facebook offers is the application of friends search. It only needs the friends’ e-mail account. Through friends’ e-mail accounts invitation are sent through the Net so they join the virtual community. Then each recipient of the invitation can do the same with other friends or acquaintances, and in this way the friends net grows larger. Facebook seems to be the most convenient social net for educational purposes. This net gathers together persons with common interests or specific objectives under the management of one of the members. The submission to this social network may be open, private, or even, secret. Some of its most popular applications are discussion forums, calendar, and events board, message wall, and also it can add documents, pictures, videos and other types of documents.

Gómez, M. T. and López, N. (2010) affirms that the message wall is a kind of board where the users and his/her friends post their comments, ideas, advertisements, and so on. Each user can create their own web pages according to their likes and personality. Their pages can be followed by friends or other community members who are interested in the page content.

Due to the fact that the phenomenon of introduction of the social networks in formal education is very recent and it seems that there are not many experiences that have been submitted to research.
centers over this important issue. The region of Latin America, especially Mexico, appears to share this problem, too. There is scanty information produced by schools or educational systems.

In an investigation realized in Latin-American educational institution of top level, about students of master program and the use of Facebook for academic purposes, it was identified that it is not frequent that they use this social network to coordinate meetings, to do grupal work or to report on what happened in class. Gómez, M. T. and López, N. (2010) identified that most of the students use Facebook to share information and links about other persons and different organizations, also to be in touch with friends and acquaintances, also to receive opinions about topics of personal and general interests. On the contrary, only a few students use Facebook for academic purposes, in school hours or after school. That is to say, not many teachers neither student makes use of this social network to collaborate with colleagues and to comply with academic matters.

On the other hand, the most generalized use of Facebook is for solving and sharing study guides, to pose doubts, answer and questions about schedules and activities to do, also to post comments related to administrative proceeding. The scanty use of Facebook is for sharing curricular contents and class tasks. It is important to remark that most of the students know only a very limited number of applications for educational purposes.

Even though the strengths that Facebook has, there are several critical issues for the users. One of the problems is the lack of privacy is a compromising social and individual issue. Another problem is that social networks users reject their right to privacy in favor to the social network owners. There is even another problem, users may incur in the loss of intellectual property. In the case of Facebook, users could also commit plagiarism due to the misuse of the information. For Gómez, M. T. and López, N. (2010) there is one more problem, that is, the high dose of distraction generated by the very close friends, acquaintances and different types of organizations that bombard the virtual communities with products and services. This affects the optimum utilization of the school environment. Unfortunately the commercial utilization of Facebook is increasing and that will impede its adoption in the educative field.

Facebook is the social network that has a high communicative value. Most students from developed countries use it. It may be so because it has a variety of useful applications. It also can function as an online educational platform in itself since it contains open access applications which are handy to users. There is not much information, systematized investigation or experiences about the recent appearance of social network, especially Facebook, and its integration in the educational field.

To understand the useful service as well as and inconveniences of Facebook for the school work. This matter implies that an additional task is added to the teachers’ numerous pedagogic and didactic activities that they already have. Jonassen (1996) (cited in Moreno, F. N., 2012) raise some considerations of an instrumental nature about the PC. The author makes the difference between “to learn from, to learn about, and to learn through computers”. The latter proposition implies that an educational program is administered and conducted by the computer. This means that teachers ought to learn how to use them and consider them as an “intellectual partner” to foster learning and critical thinking. Moreno, F. N. (2012) considers that the teachers are the ones who are responsible to introduce the new technologies into the school. That is, it is in their hands to conduct the true transformation trough the application of the technological paradigm.

Nevertheless, the introduction of new way to work with the help of social networks, such as Facebook, faces hierarchical resistance, teachers are included. Certainly, the students are the least resistant to technological changes in school. They are accepting the integration of the social networks because they are part of their social and familiar environments. The core of the social networks is founded in collaboration and communication in real situations. Collaborative learning means social learning that promotes reflexive thinking, since it is achieved by joint efforts.

When a social network is adopted, particularly Facebook, one of the teachers´ emergent roll is as a generators and keepers of the students´ motivation. Additionally, it is evident that some students have taken more face to face courses than at a distance, including virtual ones. In this virtue, also teachers must promote the development of the value of responsibility and to build autonomy in their courses. It turns out to be aberrant that while the institutional speech from the educational systems keeps claiming the urgency and benefits that brings the inclusion of the ICT in the formation process, the social networks are roundly excluded. As a matter of fact, the real potential of Facebook it is not valued as it should be, for instance, it is an excellent medium to share not just information, but knowledge and rich experiences, even though they may be formally organized or presented in a non-formal way. The accented difference between the political, institutional speech confronts the
The students and teachers defy the institutional speech because they do a real integration of Facebook in their school work. This states clearly the true benefit of the new technologies for social integration and for the cultural development. There is no doubt that schools, teachers and students suffer the divorce of educational agents’ views over technological innovations in the school. This difference of views uncovers the problematic relation with some of the society’s transformations.

The dread combined with the fear of the educational, managerial and educational officials about the entry of Facebook in the curricular planning may be based upon the lack of compromise and low enthusiasm to design or utilize virtual educational environments. Moreno, F. N. (2012) says that fresh, interesting and innovative learning activities are not being rubbed off on them. Despite of that, students deploy their own strategies to collaborate in the accomplishment of tasks, to clarify doubts, to encourage peers so they maintain their motivation and interest. In the opposite way, some teachers still have a strong belief that the use of Facebook may turn into an oppressive load of additional work. However, while most of the education is delivered through the face to face mode, young students enjoy all the Web resources that allow them to live naturally and socially.

Even when the students spend part of their lives in the cyberspace trough Facebook, they appear to be not interested in participating in academic matters. Participating in study groups in Facebook seems to be not common practice among school peers, that is to say, they do not participate much in virtual debates or share knowledge related to their school courses (Moreno, F. N., 2012). They are not interested in the inclusion of academic discussion and debates with course contents in Facebook because the can access to knowledge directly into Internet, with no complications or imposed compromises. In this matter, Moreno (2012) comments that what would happen if schools and teachers decided to make good use the most successful social network which is Facebook.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Due to the fact that the introduction of the social networks in the formal education is very recent, it seems that there are not many studies or experiences about the integration of Facebook into the teachers’ didactic practices, at least in México and in Latin America. National educational systems, as well as schools, have produced scanty information related to the influence of the different social networks. For this reason, it is important to investigate about how the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Innovative Education-UABC use the available technological resources in the academic, labor, communicational or entertainment context. It is indispensable to determine which social networks use the students of the Faculty and why. Also, it is relevant to know the impact on the school’s work, on the learning and the on communication among the teaching staff and the students.

REFERENCES


