ISSN: 2146 - 9466
www.ijtase.net
International Journal of New Trends in Arts, Sports &Science Education - 2016, volume 5, issue 3

SOCIAL NETWORKS IN SUPPORTING EDUCATION

Uğur DEMİRAL
Hitit University
The Sungurlu Vocational School of Higher Education
Sungurlu/Çorum - TURKEY
ugurdemiral@hitit.edu.tr

Abstract
Information technologies have exhibited great progress. Not just too far back, when we consider the last 25-30 year period, in terms of comparison of previous and modern communication tools, inconceivable progress can be observed. Type and variety of inter-personal communication have displayed continuous advancement in this new era introduced by technology. Whereas new emerging communication forms remove the distances among people, they bring up new dimensions to interpersonal information exchange at the same time. Such an extensive usage of internet impels educators toutilize from social networksmore than ever. By forming various socialgroups in these networks,information share and communication within groups intensifies. Social Network Websites (SNW) which facilitate cooperation among users andenable them to form communities are products of Web 2.0 technologies (Balcikanli, 2010). As result of enhanced communication between teacher and student throughestablished SNWs, education process can be maintained more effectively.
Keywords: Social Network, Education, The Education System.

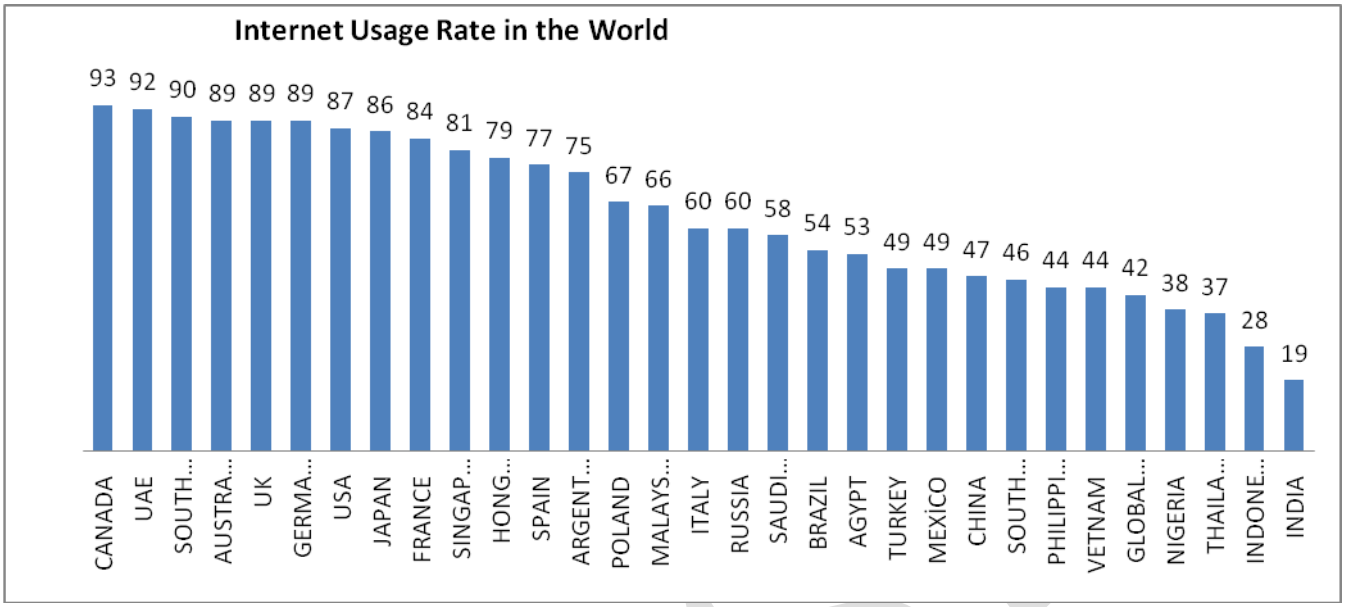
Introduction

Groups in established social networks, social support and accessibility andapplications such as Facebook and Twitter incentstudents to establish socialnetworks;and additionally, they enable them to make connection with these socialnetworks.By means of groups established on socialnetworks,while studentsdevelop their skills in digital environments, they could participate in actions such as informal learning,expressing themselves andidentity search. Owing to cooperation, information discovery and sharing among students, data sharing could be rather easy through numbers of applications in virtualenvironment. Virtual communities with common area of interests are formed and thus, information exchange among persons can be acquired through interpersonal interaction. Web-based information resources which continuously develop through information exchange emergeand flourish day by day. Content is created along the needs of these established virtual communities.In this context, it is commonly known that SNWs support informal learning and they are incredible communication tools in terms of information structuring by relying on socialrelationships, interactions, cooperationandtask sharing(Arroyo, 2011). When characteristics of SNWs are considered,it can be seen that it supports inter-personal communication, community, multi-environment sharing, and cooperation. These concepts correspond especially with socialcognitivetheoryandhypotheses of configurativelearningtheory concerning learningprocess (Kert and Kert, 2010). Furthermore, it is suggested for students who do not have chance for face-to-facecommunication with other students and teachers in the online environment that establishing community would beuseful for them (Brady, Holcomb and Smith, 2010).

Siemens (2005a, 2005b) suggested a modern learning theory called “Connectivism” which considersinfluence of technology on individuals and acquisition of information; and provided a framework to comprehend cooperation and learning in onlineenvironments. According to Siemens, learning in our digital age takes place among individuals who are connected with each other by means of interactions with various information resources beyond their understanding of accessing, storing and retracting information, participation into communities established on the basis of common areas of interest and participation into socialnetworks. In other words, individuals connect with each other through technology.According to the theory, effective learners are the ones who could deal with complexity,

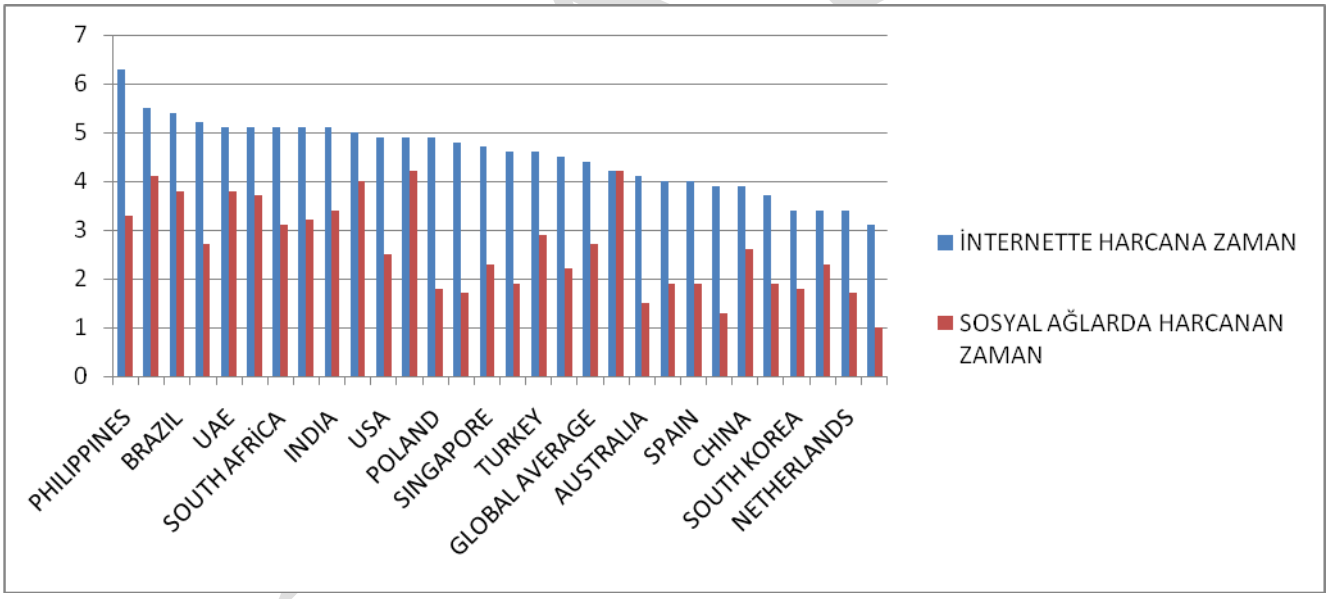
controversy and vast amount of data introduced by technology and who could maintain their learning ecologies (learning community and networks) by accessing into information from various resources. Similarly, Mason and Rennie (2008:11-13) claim that type of thinking, learning and information processing ways of todays' learners differentiated much more different than predecessor generations due to internet, cell phones, computer games and joining social media which have been complementary of the surrounding in which they have been raised. Hargreaves (2002:15),in the educational context, suggests that networkssupport change andits sustainability; users are attached with each other through internet;socialand professional networks are inter-connected through interaction, relationship and shared information; and these turn into professional support over the time. Proliferation of internet-based technologies introduces networking and eventually results in appearance of commercial, educational, professional andsocial networks. Particularly, accompanying with occurrence of Web 2.0 technology, a new version of social networks, online social networks has become popular. Individuals spend efforts to develop their virtual social relationships over socialnetworkswhich expand progressively andtheir virtuallives. From the educational point of view, participation into online social networks, in which majority of their users are composed of university students, offers a learning experience for students since it is an environment where members of university interact with each other in terms of academic dimension students. Participation of students into online social networks can be described as self-initiated learning type where individuals create and support an information system by establishing and developing personal connections (self-initiated learning) (Yu et al., 2010).

Beyond broadcasting to only limited portion of society through information and communication technologies, technologies for social network websites in which individuals gather to enhance inter-personal cooperation, learning and information structuring have been advanced remarkably. In a highly-accessible environment that can be reached without boundary of time and location and managed by personal preferences, it is necessary to expand scope of the social networks as a social process which users could actively participate or create the relevant content jointly; and thus, education process could support personal professional targets and fulfill needs by releasing people from position of passive consumer. In general, socialnetwork services arefounded on friendship, area of interestsand activities. However, these are not single functions of socialnetwork services. These networks provide opportunities to individuals such as allowing sharing information, establishing and developing relationshipsas well. Besides maintaining communication among professionals within organizations, socialnetwork websites allow them to establish relationship with their counterparts in other organizations. Technological opportunities such as internet and social network play significant role in strengthening cooperation between new and experienced members. Whereas social structure of social network environments include social structure, members, authors and readers who allow establishment of a network through different relationship and connections, content personalization, information sharing and cooperation constitute foundations of social dimension. Moreover, it is reported that social networks provide learning opportunity by refreshing social applications experience of members on continuous base in a non-restricted learning environment instead of utilization limited only with accessing content. Cooperation through social networks provides opportunity for information sharing between education practitioners and information developers. Accordingly, this share yields information to parties inboth policy making process and in developing application. While majority of conventional web applications are oriented on display of content, social networks such as network blog, wikiand podcast areoriented mostly on socialconnectivity; it is suggested that these tools strongly support information share and cooperation necessary for social and active learning since they are managed by user participation andinteractions. Thus, users are allowed to publish and share their opinions.



Resource: We Are Social, 2015

Figure I



Resource: We Are Social, 2015

Figure II

User profiles in social and mobile domains were reported in the 2015 social media usage statistics report regarding internet and media usage in 30 countries including Turkey published by a worldwide digital marketing agency called “We Are Social”.According to Figure I, 42% of world population, about 3 billion people, use internet.Whereas Canada is ranked as the first country with its 93%usage rate, Turkey is

ranked as the 21st with its 49% rate.The average world usage rate is reported as 42%.70% of internet users are active member of social media. If average world usage rate is taken into consideration, it is possible to consider Turkey as one of the active users ofsocial media and internet.The numbers of active internet usersare about 37.7 million of 77 million overall population of Turkey. Total number of social media account is about 40 million in Turkey. Parallel to expansion of smart phone usage, mobile social networksand internet usage have increased. According to relevant reports, about 70 million people have mobile internet access in Turkey. In comparison with 2013 figures, it is possible to conclude that total number of active internet user and total activesocial media user increased by 5%and 11%, respectively.

According to Figure II, Philippines spend 6.3 hour on the internet as the country spending longest period of time on the internet; and 3.3 hours portion of this is spent for social media. Turkey is ranked as 17th based on 4.6 hours of internet usage; and 2.9 hours of this time is spent for social media. Whereas average internet usage in the world is 4.4 hours, 2.7 hours of this period is spent before the social media. In terms of usage frequency of socialnetworks, Facebook, Twitter and Google plus are ranked in first three. They are followed by Instagram, Linkedin and Pinterest.A research conducted by an Online MBA institution under title of "Demographical Structure of Social Networks" provides detailed information on user profiles. According to the aforesaid research, majority of Facebook and Twitter users are women. Of the user accounts, 57% and 59% of Facebook and Twitter belong to women respectively.While data reported by this study considered as conflictive because according to public statement of Facebook,6% of user accounts are fake user accounts and majority of these accounts exhibit women profiles.

There is bilateral interaction in socialnetworks. Thus, individuals in socialmediaenvironments could have both information producer and consumer roles at the same time. Group members could create, organize, compile and share content subject to either their needs or other members of the group. Important point with the information content created on socialnetworks is ability of users to access any information that they pursue. Technologies oriented on cooperation and learning of individuals in SNW has substantially been increased. In an age enabling high accessibility without time and place limitation, it is necessary to expand scope of education as a social process inwhich studentsactivelyparticipate andbe part of content creation (McLaughlin& Lee, 2007, p. 95).

Structures of the SNWapplications enable users to acquire necessary information. Since socialmediatools such as Blog, wiki and podcast are managed by userparticipation and interactions, it is claimed that it significantly supports information share and cooperation required for socialandactivelearning (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008, p. 78). Appropriate utilization from the SNW develops students' learning efficiency. It allows students to usetheir own free wills andto create a dynamicprocess. It integrates students into management of learning by enhancing commitment among students and towards the process; and liberates both real and virtual community from geographical, physical and organizational limitations. In this regard, it provides studentsmore freedom. It is emphasized that social readiness naturally supported by SNWs has significant position in onlinelearningenvironments as well (Anderson, 2005; Cheung et al., 2011; Cobb, 2009; Dawson, 2006). Thus, it provides freedom to studentsin determination of content andeducation tools. Studentsare allowed to select and personalized learning formats appropriate for them; educators are allowed to view preferences of students to determine the technology elevating interaction among them.Although educatorsare not interested in socialnetworks asmuch as students,they could conduct educational activities by means of hundreds of social networks established by studentsin this regard. People usually sign in SNWsfor social interactionwith their friends (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009; Wodzicki, Schwämmlein and Moskaliuk, 2012). Today's students who use SNWs intensively establishSNWs toget to know, communicate each other and to establish own communities (Shier, 2005). In this regard, when the fact that numerous students participate voluntarily and frequently in discussions and group activities on SNWs is taken into consideration, potential of SNWs as an educational toolcannot be underestimated (Bosch, 2009; Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin, 2010; Odabasi et al., 2012; Selwyn, 2009; Tonta, 2009).Studentscreate blogs and add content in them without any educational agenda in thesesocial

networks;sharetheir photographs; participate in three-dimensional worlds;and in addition to all these, establish social community through onlinemessaging systems.These social networks attracting students could also be importanttool that can be utilized by educators.

Data Analysis

Within the scope of our research, 64 students who received Public Personnel Management Course at the Department of the Engineering Department of the Hitit University were included in the present study.Whereas 42 of participant students were male, 22 were female. No social network group was established within the scope of the study. Students were asked whether they were user in a social network in the designated survey study. Again, students were asked about purposes of their usage ofsocial networks. Each of students uses internetactively; uses at least one of socialnetworks. It was observed that students usually sign insocial networksforbusiness-chat \ friendship-game \entertainment – information exchange - photographand video sharing purposes. Within the scope of this course, students were assigned and applicationproject. This project includes conducting an interview andthen, preparing a resulting report regarding this interview.Amongparticipant students, whereas 28 did not prepared this homework project, 19 received grade 75 and above. During preparation of homework project, among students who did not understand how to prepare the project, 3 and 2 students asked the teacher about the issues which they did not understand through Facebook and e-mail, respectively. It was determined that these students who contacted with teacher and asked questions concerning the project prepared their homework appropriately according to the given standards.

Conclusion

In our contemporary period, accompanied with extension of internet usage, areas of utilization from internet have increased day by day. It was observed that students use internetactively. Additionally, educatorsdid not consider internetand online social networks as an auxiliary factor to the education process. The pace of the change observed in the internet social network is such a high level that education would find a sound and extensive position for itself in internet environment. However, it seems that it not possible to conduct education onlythrough online toolsoversocialnetworks. Making social networks an element of education processas an important tool supporting education would contribute in productivity, quality and efficiency of education. Especially in practical educations, there could not be chance for face-to-face education.Under such circumstances, tools that would provide easy-access and bilateral information flow would increase efficiency in education in cases independent from time and place and when there is serious distance between the institution and students.

Increasing rate of utilization from internet as auxiliary tools for courses by educators through establishing socialnetwork groups could yield better results in terms of education quality, productivity and efficiency.In the meantime, taking advantage of speed of communication in our contemporary information age and transferring this advantage into a useful education tool has now been a requirement. Educators are required to keep pace with progressing technology and not to lag behind it. For better understanding of new generations, it is necessary to know and be competent on social networksthat they use to have better control oncapability. Giving students rein in the internet world alone would result insort of adverse consequences and leave them defenseless against these negative factors. Educators are required to have comprehensive knowledge and skill about internet and extensive experience for using it effectively to prevent students to get harmed from adverse factor on the internet and toutilize from it more efficiently.

References

Hargreaves, A. (2002). Sustainability of educational change: The role of social geographies, *Journal of Educational Change*, *3*(3-4), 189–214, 2002.

Anderson, T. (2005). Distance learning – *Social software's killer ap? In Conference of the Open and Distance Learning Association of Australia (ODLAA)* (pp. 1–12). Adelaide, South Australia: University of South Australia.

Arroyo, C. G. (2011). *On-line social networks: innovative ways towards the boost of collaborative language learning*. In International Conference ICT for Language Learning 4th Edition. Florence, Italy.

Aydın, C. Ç., Biroğul, S. (2008). E- Learningde Açık Resource Kodlu Öğretim Yönetim Sistemleri ve Moodle. *Bilişim Technologies Dergisi, 1*(2), 31-36.

Balcikanli, C. (2010). *The effects of social networking on pre-service english teachers' metacognitive awareness and teaching practice.* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Gazi University Institute of Educational Sciences, Ankara.

Bandiera, O., Larcinese, V., & Rasul, I. (2010). The use of alternative social networking sites in higher educational settings : A case study of the e-learning benefits of ning in education. Journal of Interactive *Online Learning, 9*(2), 151– 170.

Büyüköztürk, Ş., Kılıç Çakmak, E., Akgün, E. A., Karadeniz Ş., & Demirel, F. (2012). *Bilimsel Araştırma Yöntemleri* (11. Baskı). Ankara: PegemYayınları

Durak, G., Çankaya, S., & Yunkul, E. (2014). Eğitimde eğitsel social ağ sitelerinin kullanımı: Edmodo örneği. *Dumlupınar University Journal of Social Sciences 41*.SayıTemmuz 2014 / Number 41 309-316.

Ekici, M., & Kıyıcı, M., 2012 Social networksneğitimbağlamındakullanımı. *Uşak Üniversitesi SocialBilimler Dergisi 5*(2), 156-167

Kabilan, M. K., Ahmad, N., & Abidin, M. J. Z. (2010). Facebook: An online environment for learning of English in institutions of higher education? *The Internet and Higher Education, 13*(4), 179–187.

Karpinski, A. C., & Duberstein, A. (2009). *A description of facebook use and academic performance among undergraduate and graduate students*. In American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting. San Diego, California.

Kert, S. B., & Kert, A. (2010).The usage potential of social network sites for educational purposes. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 2*(2), 486–507.

Kirschner, P. A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2010).Facebook® and academic performance. *Computers in Human Behavior, 26*(6), 1237–1245.

Mason, R., & Rennie, F. (2008). E-learning and social networking handbook: resources for higher education.

Mazman, S. G. (2009). *Social networks benimsenmesüreci ve eğitsel bağlamda kullanımı,* Yayınlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2009.

McLoughlin, C., & Lee M. J. W. (2007). *Social software and participatory learning: pedagogical choices with technology affordances in the web 2.0 era*, Paper presented at the Ascilite, Singapore,

New York: Routledge. Mazer, J. P., Murphy, R. E., & Simonds, C. J. (2007). I'll see you on 'Facebook': The effects of computer-mediated teacher self-disclosure on student motivation, affective learning, and classroom climate. Communication Education, 56, 1-17. http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a769651179

Odabasi, H. F., Misirli, O., Gunuc, S., Timar, Z. S., Ersoy, M., Som, S., …Erol, O. (2012). Egitim icin yeni bir ortam: Twitter. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International, 2*(1), 89–103.

Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 30*(3), 227–238. doi:10.1016/j.appdev.2008.12.010

Tonta, Y. (2009). Dijital Yerliler, Social Aglar ve Kutuphanelerin Gelecegi. *Turk Kutuphaneciligi, 23*(4), 742–768.

Yu Y. A., Stella, T. W., Doug, V., & Kwok, C.W. (2012). Can Learning be Virtually Boosted? An Investigation of Online Social Networking Impacts. *Computers & Education.Computers & Education, 55*(4), 1494- 1503.