



ORIGINAL PAPER

Education, Social and Media Communication

Andreea Mihaela Stoian*

Abstract

Education should represent for every civilized society a priority and the pillar on which development is based. The development of all domains of activity should be supported by education. In addition, each country should support and help the educational system to stay updated in order to satisfy and fulfill the demands of a world which is dominated by technology. The educational system is also facing challenges from the present labour market that has been transformed into a strong competition for the youths who seek a job. The evolution of technology, worldwide access to the internet (the largest and fastest way of communication) and the appearance of social media are important changes that have been adopted by the majority of educational institutions. Social media has a brief history and it is represented by different web platforms that offer the possibility of online communication between users. Social media can be easily accessed throughout the world due to the revolutionary technologies that have been developed in the recent years. Social media has become a very popular way of receiving and searching for information among the younger generations.

Keywords: *education; social media; communication; technology; development.*

* Senior Lecturer, PhD, University of Craiova, Department of Applied Modern Languages, Phone: 0723 543 559, Email: andreea_nedelcut@yahoo.com.

Social media has transformed real, face-to-face communication into virtual – online communication which is enabled by all type of *smart* devices.

This paper aims to detail the importance of social and media communication within the educational system. It will also mention some of the potential risks that this type of communication may bring to education. These risks can be eliminated if the sources through which the information is transmitted are verified. The veracity of the information should also be verified.

The paper is divided in seven sections and each one illustrates the links and connections between education and social media communication.

Education: definition and characteristics

Education is one of the most important factors that define a society. It represents the starting engine for all the activities that run within each society. The term education is all around us and we hear about it everywhere: on TV, on the radio and, recently, in social media – on social networks that have become so popular. In fact, we enroll ourselves in educational institutions because we want to be educated and prepared for our adult life. Today, the term *education* is strongly connected to the term *schooling*. We go to school in order to acquire the necessary knowledge that will help us in our professional career.

Throughout the years, the term *education* has been defined in many ways and it is perceived differently in many countries. For most Western societies education is “largely a methodical approach to a body of language agreed by relevant experts and then delivered to willing and unwilling learners alike” (Wood, 2011:1). This definition is closely linked to the idea of school from UK. Here “both state and private schools employ a curriculum, taught in stages to pupils of similar ages and with similar abilities.” (Wood, 2011:1). Unlike the UK education system, the Scandinavian have a different view on the same system. In countries like Denmark, Sweden, Finland or Norway, schools and curricula are organized in different ways and they have “different ways of teaching and put less stress on tests and examinations” (Wood, 2011:1).

Therefore education is made in different ways depending on each country’s perception of how knowledge should be transmitted to the learner. Even if education is made using different teaching methods in public or private schools through traditional paper based books or through online materials, the results of education should be similar – they should provide *new minds* for the existing activities from each society.

“Traditionally, education around the world has pursued three goals: a mastery of the basic literacies; learning the fundamentals of major disciplines (mathematics, logic, and music in an earlier era; history, biology and psychology today); and inculcating the fundamentals of citizenship and morality, often from a religious perspective. These goals remain today, despite the secularization of education in many parts of the world, but the task of educators becomes ever more demanding and complex” (Craft, Gardner, Claxton, 2008:5).

Coming back to the topic of my paper, I can say that the main characteristics of education have not changed throughout the decades but the role of the teacher/ educator has evolved and requires intensive hours of preparation and research. Social media is one of the factors that push the teacher to go online and communicate with his pupils/ students, to transmit information and to gather updated materials for his classes. This new revolutionary change in communication that is made through technology has

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reshaped every field of activity including the education system. In the present changing environment, education is striving through its institutions “to maintain goals of quality, efficiency, and effectiveness, information technology is now playing – and will continue to play – a critical role in this process... With the advent of easier- to-use and more cost-effective technology solutions, there is no longer the need to go through complex systems, intermediaries and analysts. For the first time, education leaders and administrators have direct access to the information processes and systems that they require” (Petrides, 2000: Preface).

The role of social media and of the internet has proven to be essential in the professional development of each teacher/ educator. Through the online world information is easily accessed within seconds, teachers connect with each other instantaneously and pupils/ students reach out to their teachers/ educators through online services like: e-mail and messenger. In fact, in an article entitled: *How is Social Media used in Schools? Statistics, Facts and Figures* (dated July 22, 2013) from the website *Adweek* it is estimated that “96 percent of students with internet access report using social networking technologies, and three in five (59 percent) use these tools to talk about educational topics online”(Bennet, 2013).

Taking into consideration that the data presented in the previous online article reflect statistics from 2013, we can only imagine that the impact of social media in education has increased, especially in countries in which the internet has boosted in recent years. Moreover, online social networks have broadened their audience with young people (perhaps the youngest are between 4-5 years old and for them the main attractions are funny videos and images that can be found on social networks) to adult users (here the age has no limits).

In conclusion, education has maintained its main objectives but it has changed its ways of transmitting the knowledge to learners. Education is versatile and the elements that are included in this term are permanently updating. The role of education is to develop competences for learning how and what to learn so that the pupil/ student is prepared for social integration through his profession.

Social media: definition and history

Social media represents the interface between the online users, the information and the online community that exists on the Internet. The online users can search for any type of information by a simple click. All they need is a computer/ smartphone/ tablet and an internet connection. The latest statistics (2019) regarding the use of the World Wide Web (www) and social media show that almost 4.4 billion people browse the internet in search of different things and 3.5 billion are active social media users. These figures highlight the massive expansion of the online/ digital world and a growing attraction for the social media.

While conducting my research for the present paper I came over the following, expanded definition of the social media: “Social media is the democratization of information transforming people from content readers into content publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people and peers. Social media uses the “wisdom of crowds” to connect information in a collaborative manner. Social can take many different forms, including Internet forums, message boards, weblogs, wikis, podcasts, pictures and video. Technologies such as blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-postings, email, instant messaging, music-sharing, group creation and voice over IP, to name a few. Examples of

social media applications are Google (reference, social networking), Wikipedia (reference), MySpace (social networking), Facebook (social networking).” (Evans, 2008, Chapter 3:1)

Today, we hear about social media everywhere, in fact, we are surrounded by it. Everyone refers to social media when they mention the latest news or want to share their opinion related to a certain topic. Social media represents the interface that the majority of us use in order to reach, communicate and share our thoughts, important moments or feelings. This huge popularity of social media helped online platforms like: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn gather users even from the most remote areas of the world. Today there is an important online community that communicates through social media. But, the things were not always this way- social media did not exist until: “The invention of the World Wide Web in 1991, when Tim Berners- Lee managed to connect hypertext technology to the Internet, formed the basis of a new type of networked communication. With the advent of Web 2.0, shortly after the turn of millennium, online services shifted from offering channels for networked communication to becoming interactive two-way vehicles for networked sociality” (Dijck,2013:5)

So, the history of social media is rather brief and it is connected to the developments from technology. Improving internet connection – going from wired to wireless access, replacing the desktop computer with a portable version – the laptop, the disappearance of mobile phones with buttons and the appearance of smartphones – with the touchscreen technology, - all these shifts had an impact on the way people communicate.

Social media has been gradually transformed in a major online platform that serves as a tool of communication and of information. Social media has revolutionized everything in such an amazing way that we (the 90’s generation) cannot remember for sure how it was before this online community entered into our lives. It is needless to say that social media has forever reshaped every society. Social media is part of our daily lives and it comprises everything from advertising, news, articles, statements, personal opinions, photos, songs, quotes and even the professional activity of institutions or public figures.

As mentioned above, social media could not exist without the Internet. This revolutionary online network that connects millions of people “has made accessing information as easy as lifting a finger. No longer do we have to make costly efforts to find the things we want. We can “Google” the old classmate, find articles online.” (Martin, 2012:24).

The Internet has become the most important and accessed source of information that shares everything to its community. Social media is just an extension of the Internet and it has pushed things further: meaning that every user can create his own public profile and he can send and receive online invitations from everyone who is active on social networks. Social media succeeded in getting closer to the Internet user, helping him to create his own profile and set his own interests on his personal page. Practically, everyone who uses social media has his/her own private online space.

Probably the most important social network which is an online platform that offers a personal profile for each one of its users is Facebook. Facebook accounts for more than 2.5 billion users worldwide; among its users we find: common people, public figures, public institutions (of any kind), businesses, magazines, journals; profile pages of: artists, writers, inventors, researchers, politicians, songwriters and so on. In other words, everything and everyone is on Facebook.

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The founder of Facebook is Mark Zuckerberg. In an online article entitled: *What is Facebook? Just ask Mark Zuckerberg*, I have found several statements related to the role of Facebook. One of Mark Zuckerberg's statements has drawn my attention because he linked Facebook with the idea of global community. In 2017, Mark Zuckerberg said that:

“Facebook stands for bringing us closer together and building a global community. When we began, this idea was not controversial. Every year, the world got more connected and this was seen as a positive trend. Yet now, across the world there are people left behind by globalization, and movements for withdrawing from global connection. There are questions about whether we can make a global community that works for everyone, and whether the path ahead is to connect more or reverse course. The most important thing we at Facebook can do is to develop the social infrastructure to give people the power to build a global community that works for all of us” (Gartenberg, 2019).

Two years after this statement, in 2019, we have to agree that Facebook's global community is still out there and it has produced a lot of important changes and it has influenced almost all sectors of activity including education.

Education and Social Media

Due to the massive widespread of social media which has conquered its popularity among teenagers, the educational institutions have to bring this new, digital world to courses and courses should somehow reflect our present digitalized lives. Technology is driving education; therefore we have to find innovative methods of integrating technology in the process of education. Education should focus on creating global citizens who can work with and develop technology. The learning subjects have to present their topics in an interesting way, they should make learning enjoyable and relevant and they should also prepare learners with 21st century skills. In fact: “Digital technologies and media are also recognized as implicit elements of the “informal” modes of learning that are stimulated by general interests, pursuits and hobbies outside the formal curriculum”(Selwyn, 2013:5)

Social media had an impact on ELT (English Language Training)

The teaching methods are changing and we are witnessing dramatically shifts in teaching.

In the domain in which I activate – ELT (English Language Training), the teaching methods are getting closer to the student's needs. English course books have a selection of texts that present fascinating topics about our planet and compelling ideas from around the world. Traditional English grammar books have been gradually replaced by English course books that mix reading, writing, grammar, listening and speaking skills. Moreover, English teachers have extended their listening practice – with audio or video materials that are able to provide an intelligent balance to that more frivolous side of the internet.

Furthermore, communication is also encouraged in English courses and students get the chance to communicate freely on topics that will interest them. Even the English grammar section has dramatically changed – in nowadays the grammar box is presented in a fun, information-rich and contemporary way of providing a springboard for the topic of each English class/ course. The range of English materials has been enriched by social media platforms that can be used for teaching English effectively. Writing

activities that are linked to social media can help students express their opinions and improve their vocabulary in English.

Students/ pupils are more attracted to writing activities that reflect their daily interests: for example – if you ask a student to write a review or a comment on a given topic he responds better to your proposal rather than asking him to write an essay. In nowadays, students are interested in the length of the activities suggested by the English teacher: they tend to lose their interest if the English activity is too long. This is why, modern English course books have shorten their reading activities and they focus more on the speaking and listening activities. This shift of attitude may be linked to the fact that social media is a fast changing online place. News, articles, photos, comments appear every second, therefore the user of social media is constantly updated – he does not have time to reflect on the information that he has just read because another one has just appeared on his digital screen. This permanent change has somehow reshaped the way an English learner perceives his English classes which should be in compliance to the active social media that surrounds him. Today, English classes should be: interactive, based on visual elements, enjoyable, fun, surprising and activities should be mixed and as concise as possible. In addition, social media and the world of the Internet can be used by teachers because all these online information offer students' a guided access "to a variety of local and global perspectives"(Parrouy, 2016:.52)

Moreover, today, communication is driving education and there is a transition of *ownership* from traditional education which was paper – based to the e-learning system; modern education is based more on the visual, practical and communicative part. If we take for example the English language we have to admit that, right now, communication is driving the language acquisition and not the grammar part. English has become the language of business, technology, medicine and other sciences and there is an imperative need to learn how to speak and write in English because people "are talking to each other more and more and English is the 'operating system' of that global communication" (online report, British Council:.2)

Encourage critical thinking in the social media era

Teaching students how to speak and write in a foreign language can be enabled by the development of their critical thinking. Critical thinking in education is a vast term that leads to many philosophical debates. A pertinent, concise description of critical thinking would be: "Critical thinking involves character as well as cognition. Students must be inclined to pursue "truth" over their own biases, persist through challenges, assess their own thinking fairly, and abandon mistaken reasoning for new and more valid ways of thinking"(Parrouy, 2016:23)

This means that students need to question things especially the information that they receive from the social media and from the Internet in general. Some of the information that can be found on social networks is sometimes inaccurate, full of mistakes and therefore misleading. Information has to be double-checked and the teacher is the person who can be asked if the student has doubts related to something that he reads online. This fast flow of information has to be verified because we have to take into consideration that on social media information does not necessarily go the traditional way – from the producer/ writer/ researcher to the reader. In social media, there is the risk that misleading information is taken over by thousands of users and shared as an authentic one.

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In fact, some students are not questioning the information that they receive from their smart devices and this where the teacher can intervene and clarify the veracity of online resources.

Nevertheless: “If used correctly, social media can have many benefits in the educational setting, depending on the task and the type of media employed. For example, they provide excellent tools for socializing students into the online world and for teaching them about appropriate online communication practices” (Poore, 2015, Chapter 1:3)

Encouraging the development of students’ critical thinking is a strategy that is meant to help the student acquire the necessary knowledge that he will use when he gets in contact with the ‘real life’. Moreover, current trends in education show that we are moving towards learner-centered approaches. Teachers are focusing their attention on students’ needs and interests and they are rethinking and readapting their teaching methods. Teachers are inserting in their classes, activities that are meant to encourage the student’s creativity, critical thinking and communication skills. Today’s teachers are trying to create a suitable learning environment in a digital world; they have included online resources as tools that support their class activity. The feedback is positive and students feel comfortable and support the idea of using social media and online resources during classes.

Bringing social media in classes and encouraging students’ critical thinking help the teacher establish a good connection with his students. The classes in which teachers chose to share materials from social media and debate them with their students; the atmosphere improves and students perceive the learning process in a different way: they see it as a fun and interactive lesson that is made to teach them.

Therefore, “In order to create environments that engage students in critical/ analytical processes, instructors might ask questions, encourage diverse opinions, and involve students in a variety of hands-on activities that force them to be involved in their learning... Social media facilitates easy discussions and peer review activities, hence, assisting students to get engage in higher level of learning” (Rezaei, Ritter, 2018:17-18).

Social media promotes Education

Social media promotes education or the other way around – education is promoted through social media. The most obvious example is represented by the public profiles that exist on different social platforms for our university – University of Craiova. These profiles are very active and the administrator updates them daily. The official page of UCV from social media has almost 30.000 followers. This public online profile of the University of Craiova presents the activity of the institution, of its teachers and students. Another example of education / research promoted through social media is the public profile of this conference: CEPOS. This profile presents details about pervious and future conferences and it is also very active on social networks. These two examples can be followed by a long series of national and international universities, schools, publications, conferences, workshops that chose social media as a way of promoting their activity. The most important reason in choosing social media as an advertising method is represented by the fact that social networks can reach out to all generations worldwide. Everyone, no matter his/her geographical position can read about, join or comment on a public profile. Using social media is the best way of showing that you (no matter if we are speaking about an institution or a professional) exist, you have opinions, you organize events and, more importantly, if you are part of

an educational institution, and you are either a teacher or an educator or a conference organizer, you encourage education.

Social media is a tool of communication as well as a tool of advertising. Online platforms have the power of gathering people in a large community. This large community has changed its options: it went from face-to-face interaction (which was a general habit before social media) to online interaction, communication. Education – with all that this term means – is present in social media and is opened to this new digital way of living.

This new way of advertising, of creating a name for your business, institution or conference is one of the most successful ones because it connects more people than it would be possible otherwise. In addition, for the education system it is very important to be close to younger generations – and this connection can be enabled by social media. Important educational institutions and members from the educational domain have realized the importance of being present on social networks – which means a direct contact with the targeted community.

Do we still need a teacher if we have online resources?

The teacher is and will remain a mentor and a guide for his students no matter the subject that he/she teaches. Today's teachers represent the contemporary school that has to offer balance – a balance between its curriculum and all the other alternative methods of learning. Among these alternative methods of learning, digital technology and the use of online resources are included.

Nevertheless," one of the dangers of the digital world is over-commitment and burnout of 24/7 availability of the technology. The culture of the school must ensure that students develop skills in balancing their responsibilities, managing their time and working in an efficient and economical way." (Lee & Gaffney, 2008:116)

Since the appearance of the Internet, social media and online platforms that share and debate all type of information, younger generations may feel like they no longer need a teacher because they can get their information from online resources. Although technology has been one of the most revolutionary things that happened to humanity after the industrial era, we should not fall in the trap of believing that social media or any other online website can ever replace a real teacher.

Even if "Children become aware of the promise of technology from very early on, but this promise only really begins to deliver during the teenage years" (Davies & Eynon, 2013:123), their online experience has to be guided at home as well as at school. The family and the teacher represent the elements that offer support and appropriate online materials that are meant to help the pupil/ student improve his knowledge.

The question *why do I need a teacher if I have Google?* can be the subject of many debates. This question was also the title of a book written by Ian Gilbert who "is an educational innovator, award-winning writer, entrepreneur and inspirational speaker, delivering training to schools and colleges in the UK and Europe" (Gilbert, 2011: preface).

Throughout his book, the author explains that the role of the teacher means "that the children you are (1) teaching science and (2) preparing to make their way in the world are going into direct competition with amazing, wonderful, highly motivated, highly skilled, technologically savvy people from anywhere in the world, and if you don't equip them to be world class people who else will?" (Gilbert, 2011: 14)

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Gilbert's approach on the role of the teacher/ educator reflects perfectly the reality that we are presently facing. Today, information is no longer a rare thing that can be found only in books, libraries or at school. Today, information is available, instantly, just by typing on your computer's keyboard the key words for the research and click on your mouse. After that, an entire world of information opens in front of you with several pages of websites that contain parts of or different views on the information that you looked for. In this case, in which the teacher or the book are no longer the main holders of information, the student/ pupil can start looking for information via social media. The element that defines the teacher is that he is able to inspire the pupil/ student in his research by sharing his own professional experience. The collaboration between the learner and his teacher has to be very productive and the teacher should choose his online resources according to his students' needs and sometimes even interests.

Moreover, education should embrace technology because:” The technology-filled environment in which today's students are immersed is both a challenge and an opportunity for educators.” (Martin, 2012:15)

The new, digital generations that are coming in the education system “ have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cameras, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age” (Martin, 2012:15). Today's teenagers spend less time reading a book and more time browsing the Internet and social networks. This is why education should bring through its teachers the digital media in classes in a supervised version. Still, there are challenges for teachers as they have “to leverage technology to create learning environments and experiences that mirror our students' daily lives as well as what the future holds for them.” (Martin, 2012:16)

In addition, the new, digital generations of students/ learners have to be aware that the learning process does not have to stop immediately after they leave the classroom. It has to be a continuous, lifelong process because information is rapidly and constantly changing and updating.

One other challenge is that, in search for information, students are tempted to “click on the first link, use only the information they find there.... Educators need to show students how to go much further in their search of information. Without high quality instruction, many students will continue to think that Google is a source, not a search engine” (Martin, 2012:24).

Conclusions

The evolution of technology, worldwide access to the internet (the largest and fastest way of communication) and the appearance of social media, all these, have revolutionized every field of activity. We can say that everyone is online and is interconnected with the world. Information travels fast and it can be easily accessed through smart devices. Right now, the majority of us choose the online research method as a primary way of finding out what interests us. Afterwards, if we are not satisfied or if in doubt we go to other sources like: books, specialists, doctors, engineers, teachers and so on. And, sometimes even if we receive an authorized response to our answer, some of us will probably *Google* the problem once again or start a debate on social media websites.

The fact that we use social media on a daily basis influences, even if in a subconscious way, our learning and teaching style. Education has reached social media and in this way it has opened the doors for digital technology to enter inside schools and

universities. "Schooling needs to become more student-centered, interest based, results oriented and personalized through digital technology."(West, 2013: 9).

Education is closely linked to technology because we have to admit that through education (this means schools, universities, teachers, professors, books, researches or projects), technology has evolved to this extent that it has conquered our daily lives.

Therefore, digital technology is a result of education and right now, education is using online resources and social media to reach out to present and future generations of learners and to us- the ones that are interested in the field of education.

In conclusion: "Society not only continues by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication" (Dewey, 2004: 4).

Communication is a key element in the development of every society and Alan Charlesworth explains perfectly what happened with communication before and after digital technology:"Before Internet technology made it possible, however, social contact between communities of like-minded people who shared views on everything from politics to the best way to grow tomatoes was restricted by the logistics of geography and limitations in communication media... Such restrictions do not apply to the digital generation, however. Be it on a PC, laptop or hand-held device, user generated content can be spread around the world at the touch of a keyboard or mouse." (Charlesworth, 2015, Introduction: 2).

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