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Creating Knowledge Sharing Culture via Social Network Sites at School: A Research Intended for Teachers

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Abstract. Social networks, like forums, friendship sites, music sharing sites etc., are gaining importance in a quickly changing world. They are also becoming a current issue on the agenda of an 'education' sector who wants to be harmonized with the changing world. Social networks which students admire make educators think about how a speedy, pervious and structured Internet could be used in an educational concept besides its entertaining aspect. Activating these features of social networks may clear away the obstacles of a knowledge sharing culture which originated from existing organization concerned with the individual and technology in educational organizations. This research aims at investigating which functions of Internet are preferred by educators and recommends what can be done to develop a knowledge sharing culture via social networks at school. Data have been gathered from 13 teachers via semi-structured and open-ended questions. The instrument used in this study was the interview. The data were coded and transformed into categories. The results showed that teachers mostly use the social networks Facebook, YouTube and Google+.

Keywords: Social networks, knowledge sharing culture, teachers, content analysis

1 Introduction

Social network lexically means "individuals (partnerships and roles in rare situations) that are connected to each other with one or more social relations, and thus form a social bond" [1]. These relational bonds can include affinity, communication, friendship, and authority. Social networks likewise establish a virtual "community" and act together, share ideas, produce solutions, and undertake similar studies.

Networks in an educational sense support change and sustainability of change. Social and professional networks connected by users via the Internet get connected to each other through interaction, relation and shared information and with time this transforms into professional support [2].

The first website examples fitting the social networking definition were "Classmates.com" (in 1995) and "SixDegrees.com" (in 1997). Whereas Classmates.com particularly offered a way to find ex-classmates, SixDegrees.com offered profile making and friends, listing opportunities to users [3].

Social network services can be defined as web pages that collect beneficial information online, share it with others and provide an environment to communicate with other people. Social networks such as “MySpace”, “Facebook”, “Hi5” and “Cyworld” enable their users to interact with other people with similar interests by participating in groups or creating groups [4]. Another social network system is the blog. Blogs are websites that can be updated regularly and display text entries in reverse chronological order (the most recent entry first) and cover text, images, news, etc. [5]. In contrast, the wiki is composed of web pages that allow users to edit them as they wish. It is a free environment where all individuals can reach and change information on any subject. Facebook, the most popular social network, is known as the social network used by students most [6].

Generally, social network services are based on friendship, affinity, interests and activities. However, this is not the only function of social network services. These networks enable individuals to share information, establish and develop relations, etc. Social network websites enable people working inside and outside of organizations to communicate with their colleagues. Cooperation, by utilizing social networks, provides opportunity to exchange information between education implementers and information producers (universities). Even though social networks are used in an informal manner, they bear the potential to be used to support teaching and learning activities. Besides providing more apparent identities for class discussion socially, social networks can host several learning styles inside and outside of a class by communicating with users in a more individual manner [7]. Social networks have properties such as developing student and teacher communication abilities, expanding participation, strengthening peer support, and enabling cooperation based learning [8]. Social networks can improve student learning, enable interactions between school-student and student-student relations, increase access of students with regards to lessons, improve writing skills of students, and these networks can be integrated into lessons easily [9]. Social networks form an environment where teachers participating associate their personal and professional identities and teachers also use Facebook groups so as to form a teacher network and cooperate [10, 11].

Children and young people gain basic skills and competencies necessary for schools and work places on their own by interacting with popular culture [12]. Social networks can be used for digital media sharing among students, asking questions, sharing lesson-related resources, creating study groups and communicating with classmates [13].

Knowledge sharing among individuals is defined as a process which covers exchange of knowledge with other individuals so as to make them understand, adopt and use it [14]. It is very crucial in knowledge sharing that knowledge comes out of one source and reaches a certain target. This is the way knowledge sharing distinguishes itself from knowledge transfer. Knowledge sharing behaviour includes the highest contribution to organizational activity and covers individual behaviours of working people such as sharing existing work knowledge, competencies and experiences with other employees [15].

Technological facilities such as Internet and social network websites play an important role in strengthening collaboration between new members and experienced members [16].

While many traditional web applications focus on the delivery of content, social networks such as blogs, wikis, and podcasts focus on social connectivity and since these instruments are managed with participation and interaction of users, it is stated that they highly support knowledge sharing and collaboration necessary for social and active learning [17].

2 Method

This research is designed with a qualitative method and aims at determining at which level and with which purposes social networks are used by teachers in their knowledge sharing with their administrators and managers, students, other colleagues and parents. To this end, a semi-structured interview form that included open-ended questions was applied to a working group consisting of 13 teachers. The population of the study consisted of randomly selected teachers working in primary schools in the İzmit/Kocaeli district. The data obtained were examined through content analysis.

3 Discussion

Teachers who participated in this study stated that they mostly used social networks “to share knowledge and resources with educators”. It was found that teachers widely prefer social networks such as Facebook, Google+ and e-school. E-school is an information management system prepared by the Ministry of Education enabling duplex communication particularly with parents. Teachers who follow policy makers, trade unions and government bodies on Twitter and establish contact with them, use e-blogs in order to create diaries for lessons.

Teachers pointed out that administrators and managers widely preferred Facebook in announcing school events and in-service training programs, developing project cooperation, reminding about the times of school meetings, discussing regulation amendments, and enlightening teachers and students about social issues. Teachers stating their administrators and managers did not use social networks noted that this stemmed from not trusting an informal environment, not delivering the content quickly and accurately, manipulation of knowledge, thinking of possible misuse of information due to virtual environments, and open characteristics of social networks.

Teachers explained that they mostly used social networks to share school activities and information regarding education and assessment processes. Apart from that, YouTube was the social network preferred by all of the teachers included in the study due to its educational videos that were used in lessons. Teachers share contents by loading course content, quizzes, homework, study forms, videos, and Microsoft (MS) PowerPoint presentations in the groups they

create with their students on Facebook, Wikispace and Google +. One of the obstacles of a knowledge sharing culture teachers try to establish in schools is students' lack of knowledge and desire to use social networks effectively.

Teachers indicated that they share files, records, audio-visual materials relating to lessons, and also establish networks in the preparation phase for assessment tools and share materials with their colleagues via social networks such as Facebook, Google + , and Twitter. Teachers also point out that lesson plans, materials, working papers, MS PowerPoint presentations, etc. prepared in collaboration with district schools are shared through Wikispace and additionally, seminar and training announcements among teachers are communicated through social networks. Schools create virtual networks where best practices are shared, by sharing photographs of school activities on Instagram. It is known that discussion groups are formed among teachers to discuss the future of the profession, improvement of conditions and sharing of up-to-date information in various forums. Teachers admit that they particularly benefit from social networks in knowledge sharing with colleagues living a long distance away and social networks are indispensable for them.

The teachers who participated in the study stated that they especially use e-school in knowledge sharing with parents. However, leaving aside the social networking function of e-school, they also expressed they use e-school as an announcement system that reports academic success, absenteeism and disciplinary status of students to parents. Most of the teachers do not deem it appropriate to share information with parents on Facebook. They prefer e-school since it is secure software and accessed with personal passwords whereas Facebook makes data accessible for everyone. Teachers think that parents should not know about their personal ideas and private life; this can lead to prejudices in parents. Besides, teachers put forward that knowledge sharing with parents on social networks can draw them into lazy practice and diminish their physical presence in schools and thus school-family collaboration will dwindle. Especially as the teachers received reactions by parents when they share visuals on Facebook belonging to students, they prefer not to share information on students or activities through these social networks. However, some teachers emphasize that knowledge sharing on such social networks increases a sense of belonging about their schools for each stakeholder.

4 Conclusion

Generalizing the use of social networks among teachers is crucial in terms of rendering education processes more up-to-date and functional. Considering that students use technology in more effective and beneficial ways than teachers, the outcomes of creating a knowledge sharing culture through social networks by the teachers keeping up with these trends will favourably affect education processes in schools.

As a result of this research, it is seen that the knowledge sharing through social networks is limited mostly in parent-teacher relations. In order to increase this sharing, parents should be informed of social networks and their consciousness should

be raised to the harmlessness of secure knowledge sharing. Moreover, it is understood from responses of teachers that teachers do not limit knowledge sharing for the purpose of education; they are concerned with sharing their personal information and thus they are afraid of change in the attitude of parents towards them.

Disapproval of knowledge sharing on social networks by administrators, managers and parents can be associated with organization culture. The bureaucratic structure of institutions and the formality of actions and procedures in Turkey do not match up with the informal nature of social networks.

Teachers should limit their knowledge sharing on social networks only to “educational” matters. In this way, preferring to use social networks in their sharing of knowledge with parents will not harm their private lives.

This study is a descriptive study demonstrating the creation process of a knowledge sharing culture by teachers through social networks. It is important in terms of highlighting the need for delivering solutions to the challenges in the process; it is one of the rare qualitative studies conducted on this subject.

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