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## Reinforcing social media based learning, knowledge acquisition and learning evaluation

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### Abstract

The birth of current students coincides with the rise of the first social media websites, making young people the most competent and the most frequent consumers and creators of social media content. Their savoir-faire in new technologies is a great motivation to intensively use various e-learning 2.0 elements in the process of learning, teaching and knowledge acquisition. This paper presents the experience from a study that stimulates the social media elements existing in the learning environment, and reinforces the use of various techniques intended to enable focused online collaboration and knowledge acquisition. In order to support cutting edge learning, the approach stimulates a pervasive access to scholarly articles, breaking news existing online, and open educational resources.

The study has been performed for almost a decade in computer ethics courses attended by senior undergraduates from the University of Skopje, Macedonia, and junior graduates from the University of Novi Sad, Serbia. The paper exhaustively overviews the simulation of the social media inclusion in the learning process, as well as the activities performed during its execution. The subjective student impression of all implemented techniques is contrasted with the teacher estimated amount of acquired knowledge. The paper also emphasizes the benefits of the implemented approach, suggestions to educationalists intending to employ it themselves, and finally the intentions of the further inclusion of social media in educational technologies.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, when the first real social media sites like SixDegrees.com were launched (Elison, 2007), the amount of active users raised from several million to more than two billion (Regan, 2015). According to various reports, 61% of the global online population worldwide actively accessed social networks in 2015. For most of them, and predominantly for younger adults, the use of social media is ubiquitous.

However, social media don't provide computer-mediated communication only (Elison, 2007), they also stimulate "the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Ever since Wikipedia was created in 2001, it has grown to more than 39 million articles in 290 languages visited by 374 million unique users monthly (Wikipedia, 2016). Even more impressive are the statistics about YouTube, which estimates more than one billion users who viewed or contributed to the creation of hundreds of millions hours of video content (<https://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html>). Finally, various independent blogs, and particularly the microblogging services and internal blogs within social media sites rose an enormous popularity in everyday activities, but also in education (Veletsianos, 2012).

Modern students, who were growing along with these new technologies and services are neither scared nor fascinated by pervasive computing. For them, the use of technology is quite a natural phenomenon, and they feel comfortable consuming the social media. Therefore, the reallocation of ubiquitous elements into learning management systems is considered an extension of their everyday activities in education (Jeon & Hong, 2013). Moreover, the research made with the students from three universities proved that social media offer new opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and content creation (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

First promising experience of intensive implementation of e-learning 2.0 techniques at the University of Skopje and the University in Novi Sad was reported by Zdravkova, Ivanović & Putnik in 2009. In the following years, the employment of social media features integrated in the learning management system continued (Zdravkova, Ivanović & Putnik, 2013), resulting in the permanent and concentrated application of role playing (Zdravkova, 2014).

Student favourable feedback and the gained familiarity with the approach were the crucial stimuli to reinforce the social media based knowledge acquisition, and to focus the assessment to social media implementation. Current experience is presented in this paper. The structure of the paper is the following: Section 2 is dedicated to the educational use of social media elements. In the Section 3, the implementation of the most important technology enhanced elements in both courses, which share a similar structure with two target students is presented in details. It is followed by Section 4, which presents student's subjective impression about the amount of acquired knowledge. Then it is compared with their final results. The closing section briefly introduces the major advantages and challenges of this approach, presenting the recommendations on how to successfully implement new educational technologies, which are derived from teacher's observations and student's preferences. The paper concludes with the future plans and intentions to maintain the same manner without risking to exaggerate with the implementation of social media.

## 2. Transformation of education in the digital age

Reinforced interaction, active collaboration, social networking, self-broadcasting, and massive sharing are the key features of Web 2.0. Bartolomé (2008) suggests that Web 2.0 enables learning at any place, social construction of knowledge, tag production, the concept of studying "any place, any time", learning from peers and use of e-learning 2.0 as commercial promotion. The altered role of teacher and student demand, the incorporation of new e-learning strategies and their optimal and effective absorption, in a conjunction with new infrastructure, support the mechanisms and services, which result in a more competitive education. It ensures full integration of rewarding, effective and technology enhanced learning (Gomes, Fonseca & Serrano, 2014).

Nowadays, learners are accustomed to technology, they have a very strong digital literacy, an intensive access to social media, and to all the resources available online via mobile computing devices or laptops. These typically digital age phenomena provide them with the opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and active engagement in content creation and communication (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Therefore, pedagogy should be reconsidered to fit into the digital era (Beetham & Sharpe, 2013). This also refers to education, which should be remodelled to enable active forms of learning where learners can take control of their own studying and knowledge gathering, generate inputs to digital repositories; participate to crowdsourcing, and benefit from the advantages of social media. Moreover, social media facilitate the creation of personal learning environments, providing learners with the opportunity to be

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