

Social Networks In Higher Education

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Abstract

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education imposes new demands on educators, and in general on all sectors of society, which requires a process of adaptation and transformation, which is reflected in new uses. cultures that lead to innovation. Social networks are tools that allow us to maintain constant communication, providing instant access to information regardless of distance. This study uses the Descriptive method in a participatory action research in the classroom with 91 students during two academic semesters, each semester divided into two groups generating the strategy of sharing knowledge in a playful way of a professional academic program in an official Colombian university. The result suggests that social media should be incorporated into higher education as an institutional policy, not just as an episodic event.

Keywords: Education; Social networks; Technology, innovation, communication.

Introduction

Virtuality leads to great technological transformations, it is in this scenario where social networks emerge; which have shown great growth dynamics in users and a greater positioning in society (Limas-Suárez & Vargas-Soracá, 2020). Different studies (Chacón and Limas, 2019;¹ Marín and Cabero, 2019; Cantillo and Moreno, 2016; Cornejo and Parra, 2016; Chávez, 2014) agree on the great influence of social networks on students. Their power in education increases every day, causing changes in educational models, opportunities and learning formats, turning them into innovative allies that require the sharing of knowledge as a tool in learning processes and educational quality (Cornejo and Parra, 2016). The introduction of ICT in the current educational system provides a completely different teaching and learning situation than a few years ago, this fact opens new lines of educational research.

The use of ICT in university education generates various possibilities in the educational field. According to Cabero (2016), "ICT can be used to facilitate access to information, promote collaborative learning, encourage creativity and problem solving, and improve communication between teachers and students." These uses benefit both teachers and students, allowing for more dynamic and interactive teaching, Ríos et al. (2020)

Social networks applied in higher education have become innovative and strategic allies in the educational process since they motivate students to use them, showing the power they take in the academic process. We believe that social networks should be incorporated into higher education as an institutional policy, not just as a temporary event. This requires a parallel educational process aimed at developing responsibility within the autonomy of students for the use of these resources. Social networks provide an opportunity to open new learning experiences, create pedagogical innovations, improve cooperation, promote dialogue and support among colleagues, as well as more active communication with teachers (Vargas-Soracá & Limas-Suárez, 2020) , (Ganino, 2018). As a strategy for sharing knowledge, social networks constitute a means of interaction between teachers and

innovative students, promoting the development of the educational process through the use of various applications. The advantages of using social networks in the classroom drive the search for information and favor the development of digital skills, but they are not the best source of knowledge or the only way to carry out educational activities, mediated by ICTs. Researchers Prato and Villoria (2010) propose social networks as systems that allow relationships to be established between users and spaces that exchange information and create relationships and interactions between different people. Similarly, Valenzuela (2013) refers to social networks as an immense hosting and delivery system, achieving the creation of connections between users, but this does not necessarily mean the generation of shared interests. In the same sense Cabello et al. (2016) conceptualizes that social networks have become a tool with enormous technological potential because they provide students with various services and benefits, including facilitating communication, breaking borders and providing access to distant communities in real time.

The digital era has represented real challenges and transformations in higher education and has permeated educational processes, modernizing the sector (Limas, 2019). In this sense, the incursion of social networks in the educational field is already the object of study because they are considered an innovative ally in higher education. ICT is a pedagogical construct of this era, which allows teachers and students to make decisive changes in the daily process of work and learning in the classroom (Gallardo and Buleje, 2010).

Social networks can be used in education as a competitive advantage to develop work collaboratively, since they are free and accessible platforms that promote the motivation and interest of young people, motivating their learning (Islas and Carranza, 2011); generating creation possibilities by sharing knowledge with students, becoming one of the most used forms of interaction (Limas and Jaimes, 2017; Merchán et al., 2018).

The use of social networks in academic activities supports teaching (Rojas, 2016), generates a predominant role in the different academic and training environments and contributes to the improvement of educational quality as a result of the incursion of ICT in education. higher (Ángel and Patiño, 2018; Escorcia and Jaimes, 2015; Martínez, 2014).

Among the most used social networks worldwide are Facebook, YouTube and Whatsapp, according to the annual Global Digital Report (We Are Social, 2019). In Latin America, Facebook, Whatsapp, YouTube and Twitter (currently X) stand out, according to Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2019). Locally, in Colombia Facebook, Whatsapp and YouTube are most used, according to the Global Digital Report and Digital News Report. In the study we selected the social networks Twitter (today X) and the social network Instagram. These being the ones selected by the students among the many current options.

Educational uses of Twitter could focus on information search and selection activities, as well as learning and identifying fake news. The application allows you to encourage games such as to help students learn to name or find the correct information. Due to the 140 character limit, Twitter also encourages creativity and the synthesis process. Meanwhile, Instagram, teens' favorite social network, offers fun and educational activities in the classroom, from uploading photos and creating photo albums to collecting activities and streaming live videos, to encourage students to participate and be creative. in their own way. Driven by knowledge sharing as a social construction and that depends on the interaction between the learner and the characteristics of the learning context (De Longhi, 2000), we decided to focus on the interaction processes mediated by these social networks.

Method

An investigation framed in the descriptive method of participatory action research is carried out in the classroom. Methodologically, according to Creswell, participatory action research establishes a complete and open inclusion of the participants in the study, as

collaborators in decision-making (2012, p. 583), applying these precepts to our study in nutrition and dietetics students of the Atlantic University.

Students in two groups per semester select a social network, these are divided into groups of 3 or 4 students who interact by sending their posts to a group coordinator. Day by day, information is generated and the activities developed are discussed weekly in the classroom under the Knowledge Sharing methodology. During the 2023-1 semester, students selected platform X (Twitter). The 2023-2 semester on the Instagram platform.

At the end of the semester, unstructured interviews were conducted with the students individually and in groups.

Population

GRUPOS	2023-1	2023-2
1	25	25
2	20	21
TOTAL	45	46

The population that participated in the project was 45 students in the 2023 -1 semester and 46 students in the second semester of 2023, who are part of the business development chair of the faculty of nutrition and dietetics of the Universidad del Atlántico.

Results

The results obtained suggest that social networks should be included in academic programs as an institutional policy, due to the advantages indicated for educational processes, for the benefit of students and teachers. The design of activities with social networks in the classroom makes the search for information a motivating exercise, allowing students to interact on different platforms to investigate and have the necessary resources to develop their academic activities. The pros and cons of social networks in the classroom are directly related to the role of teachers and institutional communication. The participatory and supportive actions of the student during teamwork to achieve the goals set reinforce learning, debate, contrast of opinions, cooperation and dialogue, which allows integration in the classroom and outside of it. ensuring that they better understand and integrate new knowledge.

Phrases such as “You learn better in a group”, “social networks facilitate interaction”, “a very motivating experience”, “the project united the group”, were consistent among the participants.

Discussion

Social networks generate opportunities for collaborative work in the classroom, continued interaction and the production of knowledge, increasing the possibilities of shared learning, achieving timely, agile and meaningful communication that motivates the student to active participation. It is necessary to control negative factors by avoiding inappropriate and/or uncontrolled use (Rial et al., 2014; Florido, 2016; Redem, 2017). Which can lead to harmful practices, so it is necessary to raise students' awareness about their use as additional learning tools and complement them with other information-generating tools (Educaweb, 2018). Another difficulty is the generation of excessive distraction and the overload of information on various topics. This lack, added to the previous one, generates the need to work on the safe use of social networks and establish clear rules and limits (Redem, 2017),

thus creating a culture of responsibility, in its use with which we can obtain greater benefits. of these tools, minimizing their risks (Marquès, 2008).

The use of ICT in education allows students to develop digital and technological skills to carry out different educational projects. The use of social networks in the classroom promotes the value of sharing and collaborating, allowing the teacher to transmit knowledge through these platforms, as well as promoting cooperation between students.

Conclusions

Social networks help students in a playful way to become aware of the importance of teamwork. Likewise, the use of these platforms, in a controlled manner, will encourage learning through different dynamics. In social networks, students find a creative and innovative ally of the educational process, which in addition to facilitating communication, contributes to their training, as dynamic tools that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge, managing to strengthen and enrich academic processes.

The result suggests that social networks should be incorporated into higher education as an institutional policy.

References

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