

USING FACEBOOK AS A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM IN A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN MEXICO CITY

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ABSTRACT

Since Information and Communication Technologies have been developed, many changes have taken place in society. Social Networks certainly have changed communication habits, especially among young people. Nowadays, Social Networks are used as a communication system every day. In most countries, university students use this communication and interaction media to share information, images, videos, music, etc. but essentially, they use Social Network to socialize. In Mexico, probably more than 90% of the students between 17 and 25 years old have their own Facebook space. In this way, almost every student in the university knows how to use the social network, especially Facebook, nevertheless, none of them knows how to use virtual classrooms like Moodle, for example. This is a big problem for universities which are interested in using virtual classrooms. That is the case of Metropolitan Autonomous University, in Mexico City that is interested in using Moodle to support academic activities.

That is why we decided to change the paradigm: if we can't take students to virtual classroom, we can take classroom to students. In this way we empowered Facebook as a virtual classroom.

In this paper we describe our experience in using Facebook, no just as a communication media, but as a real virtual classroom, in a public university in Mexico City.

KEYWORDS

Social Networks, e-learning, b-learning, educative Facebook.

1. INTRODUCTION

In July 2012, a survey was conducted at Campus Azcapotzalco of the Metropolitan Autonomous University. A random sample of 470 students was selected. The data collection was carried out during ten days, from July 9 to July 19, 2012. The survey was directly applied in each classroom. The target of the study was to identify the technological tools which are more used by students in their activities such as searching and exchange information, generate agreements, sharing tasks and interact and socialize with other students. Later, we could use those results to design and release didactic strategies for promoting the learning.

The results pointed out among any other things, more than 90% of students usually used the Social Networks every day. Nowadays more than 90% of the Metropolitan Autonomous University students use Facebook for socializing with their classmates. This average corresponds surprisingly with other studies (Chuck Martin (2009), Connie Varnhagen (2011), Nicola Cavalli,(2011), Marisol Gómez, (2011)) . It is interesting that while in 2006, Messenger was the most important media for socialize (with an average of 41 %), now, Facebook is the most important social media (with an average of more than 90 %).

On the other hand, the study, also let us knows that less than 25% of the students had used virtual classroom. Unfortunately, this average is too low if we consider that the Campus Azcapotzalco released a Virtual Education Office in 2006 to promote b-learning. This is disappointing that over the 60 % of our students have never used educational platforms and only less than 20% of them had used Moodle, which is our institutional platform in this Campus.

Considering the facts mentioned previously, we can conclude that we have an especial situation: students do not know how to use virtual classroom but, they are expert in using Facebook. That is why we decided to use Facebook as a virtual classroom. All that inside a b-learning model this is, to use virtual classroom and face-to face- education model.

2. ENABLING FACEBOOK AS AN EDUCATIONAL SPACE

Regarding the use of technology in academic activities and according to the study, there are two facts of particular relevance:

a) The extraordinary development of social networks that has become a phenomenon, especially, for young people.

b) The big potential of the Virtual Classrooms has not been used yet within the community of the UAM-A. In part perhaps because of the lack of a good design of the interface and the low level of usability and simplicity that is required. That is why so few faculty members have adopted Moodle in their courses.

Based on the above, we considered that it is necessary to incorporate strategically Social Networks to education to strengthen the contact and interaction with students and improve the education. In other words, we decided *to take the virtual classroom to the students* instead *to take students to virtual classroom*. With that in mind, we decided to get more information on previous experiences and background about it. We found, at that time (March 2012) that some teachers and professors in the world had already used Facebook to support virtual communication and education (for example Adán Griego, Shirley Arrieta, Luis Armando Miramontes).

Despite shared experiences on the web were scarce, they allowed us to drive our work. We found that Facebook allowed us to create groups (or "circles" in Google Plus) in order to organize our students to perform academic activities.

Since we wanted to take advantage of Facebook, we must to know better this Social Network and all of the tools that we can use, but first we had to answer the following question: Should professors and students be "friends" in the Social Network?

We analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of being friends. At the end we considered that if we were friends of our students, we may have some problems such as losing authority inside the classroom.

3. CREATING THE GROUP

In order to create the group and given we did not want to be friends of the students; we needed to get two Facebook profiles.

We created an "open" group with my two different profiles.



Figure 1. My two different profiles

It is necessary to create a URL (Group Address) for the group and provide it to students. This step is essential.

4. USING FACEBOOK TOOLS

Facebook offers many potential tools for learning like such as the possibility to upload and share, photos, images, videos, files, and recently, documents like word, excel, power point, PDF, etc. And we can also create “Events”, “Ask Question” and others. Nowadays there are many educational applications. We used “docs” for Facebook. Below we describe the use we gave to each of these resources.

4.1 Files and Docs

One of the most important document to start a course is delivering the study program to students. We used two ways: “add file” and the application “Docs”.

The difference between them is that if we use “Docs”, then our documents could be available for future uses. Furthermore, students can also download and edit them.



Figure 2. My documents in “Docs” for Facebook

We use this media to share the study program, exercises and assignments, tutorials in power point, etc.

4.2 Add Photos

It was a very important resource to generate *sense of belonging* among students. We took photos to groups twice or three times during the course. Actually, they enjoy watching themselves on Facebook.



Figure 3. Some photos of the students in the face-to face-class

On the other hand, students have used their cell phones to take pictures of the blackboard, then, we decided to do it as well and share them through Facebook. This was important to remember every topic seen in class.

4.3 Videos

During the course were recorded some videos explaining or repeating any of the exercises in class. This resource was useful for students because they could remember all topics of the course.

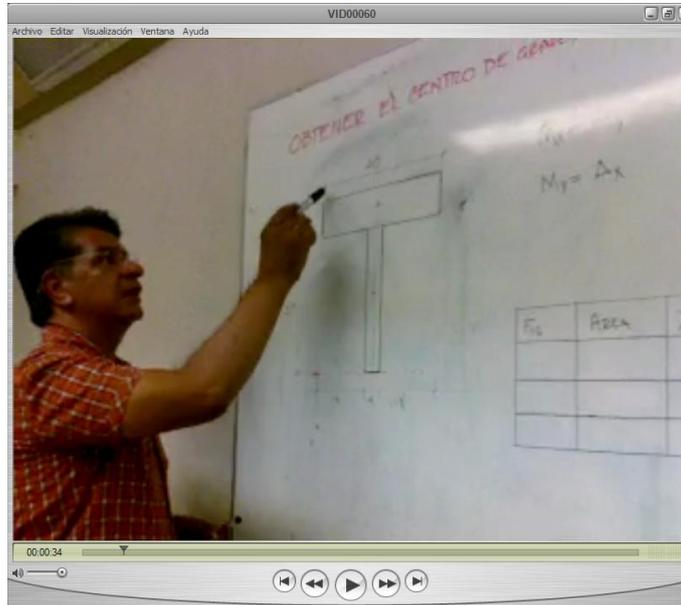


Figure 5. An example of a video taken during a class

It is very important that the students produce and share their own videos.

4.4 Other Tools

Creating events is useful for programming exams and any type of academic activities because in that way they will always be informed.

During course students and I had to generate agreements. We use Asking Questions and it was useful for it. In other occasions, we needed to use Inbox messages to send special task or feedback to some of the students.

5. RESULTS

In general, almost 90% of the students enrolled had an active participation. The platform served as an effective tool for bidirectional communication and distribution of educational materials fundamentally video tutorials and worked examples. Students were interested in using this media. Also it encouraged a sense of belonging in the group and class participation.

6. CONCLUSION

Many changes have taken place in society. Social Networks certainly have changed communication habits, especially among young people

Taking into account the increase of use of Social Networks and the development of mobile devices, it is necessary to take advantages about it and create new way to understand education, as a communicative, interactive and multimedia process that is able to improve the learning experience.

Therefore, teachers must generate instructional materials and digital didactic documents that encourage the ingenious and innovative use of the ICT in education, including the mobile devices as cell phones, i-pods, tablets, PDA, etc. Nevertheless, we must use them not only "as a tool that facilitates the storage, transmission and organization of the courses' content, without a significant difference between face to face courses and others courses supported by ICT " (Montes et al., 2006), but also as a way to improve the quality of learning and to support the development of thought skills (Jonassen and Yueh, 1998).

There are many reasons why the use of social networks, is appropriate for education, especially higher education:

- a) The environment of social media is widely known by the students, so the learning curve would be negligible compared with other virtual classrooms as Moodle.
- b) Facebook provides the ability for users to create groups sectioned.
- c) Facebook has a natural tradition for the use of photos and videos, resources that have great educational potential.
- e) The ability to organize and schedule "events".
- f) The ease of incorporating other educational applications
- g) The growing availability of mobile phones with direct access to social networks, especially Facebook, Twitter and YouTube contributes to the u-learning. That is why we still believe it is better to bring the classroom to students instead of bringing students to the classroom. In addition, Social Networks have always been part of education, even before the technological development of our days.

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