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## Social Media in Learning

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## **SOCIAL MEDIA IN LEARNING**

### **Topicality of the Problem**

Rapid development of technologies, Internet resources and networks cannot but attract attention of educators who are seeking for methods and techniques of improving quality of teaching, enhancing students' competences and getting them ready to face the requirements of a modern economy after graduating from their universities.

The perspectives for further development of education and society are based on the following principles: (1) Openness — with concepts like open content, open data, and open resources, along with notions of transparency and easy access to data and information — is becoming a value; (2) Massively open online courses are being widely explored as alternatives and supplements to traditional university courses; (3) The workforce demands skills from college graduates that are more often acquired from informal learning experiences than in universities; (4) There is an increasing interest in using new sources of data for personalizing the learning experience and for performance measurement; (5) The role of educators continues to change due to the vast resources that are accessible to students via the Internet<sup>1</sup>.

In view of the perspectives defined above, social media is regarded as a powerful tool which can contribute to realization of the principles of student-centeredness in learning, demands for enhancing students' competences and making learning open and close to real life conditions.

Social media which has already occupied strong positions in our life as a means of interpersonal communication is being viewed nowadays as a powerful instrument able to change our perception of learning and gaining knowledge, to make learning and reality meet in the classroom, and to prepare students for their future professional activity.

Meanwhile the question of the social media implementation in the formal learning is still disputable, arousing a lot of praising statements as well as negative remarks. Educational administration may regard it as something worthless of attention and efforts, teachers have fears and doubts about the process of learning, relations, ethics, etc., when introducing social media in their practice. Students who have been using social media for personal purposes for many years already, are hesitating to judge if it will help them in learning, how to behave with teachers and how to protect their personal space from teachers' intruding.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Lepi, *6 Technologies That Will Change Higher Education*. Edudemic website retrieved in February 2013 from <http://edudemic.com/2013/02/6-technologies-that-will-change-higher-education/>.

These and other issues determined the topicality of investigating practices of social media implementation into learning.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The central point of the study is the topicality of the problem of social media implementation in learning. It is therefore aimed at the investigation of psychological and educational issues of implementing and practicing social media for teaching students of higher educational establishments. To achieve the method of the research the following objectives were: (a) to analyze recent publications concerning social media and its impact upon the student's learning and personality; (b) to discriminate main tendencies and strategies of implementing and practicing social media in different learning environments; (c) to introduce the practice of learning through social media to the real classroom of the students from Dniprodzerzhinsk State Technical University (Ukraine); (d) to present an overview of the benefits provided by social media together with some considerations as for its practical managing social media in learning.

### **Methods of the Research**

The methods which were implemented to achieve the aim and objectives of the research include the following:

- scientific publication analysis,
- expert evaluation (analysis of the teaching practices with social media by experts),
- interview (interview was implemented to: 1) in-service teachers which are experienced in using social media in learning, 2) teachers without such experience; 3) students before and after the learning experiment),
- learning experiment (teaching with Facebook and Blogger),
- observation (learning and teaching processes were observed as well as the behavior in the virtual space),
- data analysis (answers to questionnaires were processed and analyzed),
- evaluation and self-evaluation (learning outcomes and teaching practices were evaluated, method of introspection and self-evaluation in teaching and experience of virtual communication was implemented as well),
- discourse analysis (students' and teachers' writing which concerned their activities were analyzed).

The experimental learning was organized with students of Dniprodzerzhinsk State Technical University who took courses of History of English, Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language by Means of Computer Technologies, English for Academic Purposes.

The social media implemented and practiced include Facebook and Blogger. Observations and practical recommendations provided in the text of the article are conditioned by the technical specifics of managing and operating social media used in the learning experiment.

## Analyses of Recent Research

Analysis of the recent publications allowed differentiating a number of directions in which researches concerning social media have been conducted. Among them: tracing dynamics of the society and learning digitalizing (F. Feiner<sup>2</sup>, P. Kommers<sup>3</sup>, B. Wellman<sup>4</sup>); educational and psychological aspects of e-learning and social media (P. Kommers<sup>5</sup>, I. Sekret<sup>6</sup>), social issues of managing social media and their role in our life (N. Jurgenson<sup>7</sup>), theories on selection of social media (RuiGu, K. Higa, D.R. Moodie<sup>8</sup>), distance learning and tools of its realization (E. Smyrnova-Trybulska<sup>9</sup>), etc.

Considering social media from the point of view of its correlation with communication, language and activity, Kommers claims that evaluating potentials of social media in learning it is necessary to take into account Vygotsky's theory on language and activity which assumes that intellectual learning rests upon social awareness and that social awareness rests upon language<sup>10</sup>. And in order to proceed in this direction two trends are defined as developing simultaneously. They are (1) Increasing and urging societal demands to develop a socially active education – including for example social commitment and citizen's awareness, and (2) Positioning education as a knowledge transfer organization<sup>11</sup>.

The power of social media to connect people from all round the world and bring them together is viewed from a positive perspective because it helps to unite minds and human resources to improve society and education as perceived by young people<sup>12</sup>.

At the same time researchers argue pointing upon the disruptive force of social media. The rise of mobile phones and social media may come to be historically coupled with a growing atmosphere of dissent that is enveloping much of the globe. Nowadays massive gatherings of digitally-connected individuals in physical space have recently become the new normal. In this respect N. Jurgenson argues that the digital and physical enmesh to form an "augmented reality" which links the power of the digital-creating and disseminating

<sup>2</sup> F. Feiner, *The Vision of an Inclusive Society in the View of Parents, Teachers and Young People and Role of ICT*. In: *E-Learning for Societal Needs*, Katowice – Cieszyn 2012.

<sup>3</sup> P. Kommers, *ICT and Trends in Life-Long Learning*. Retrieved in January 2013 from <http://cloud-works.ac.uk/cloud/view/2197>.

<sup>4</sup> B. Wellman, *Digitizing Ozymandias*. In: *Social Issues in Computing*. Retrieved 2.03.2013 from <http://socialissues.cs.toronto.edu/2013/03/digitizing-ozymandias/>.

<sup>5</sup> R. Voorn, P. Kommers, Social Media and Higher Education: introversion and collaborative learning from the student's perspective. In: *International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environments*, Volume 1, Number 1/2013. Retrieved in February 2013 from <http://inderscience.metapress.com/content-/g352526185534l94/>.

<sup>6</sup> I. Sekret, *Empirical Study of the E-Learning Impact Upon Students' Epistemological Beliefs*. In: *E-Learning for Societal Needs*, Katowice – Cieszyn 2012.

<sup>7</sup> N. Jurgenson, *When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution*. Retrieved 15.01.13 from <http://www.mdpi.com/1999-5903/4/1/83>.

<sup>8</sup> RuiGu, K. Higa, R.D. Moodie, *A Study on Communication Media Selection: Comparing the Effectiveness of the Media Richness, Social Influence, and Media Fitness*. In: *Scientific Research Open Access*, Vol. 4, No. 3. Retrieved from <http://www.scirp.org/journal/PaperInformation.aspx?PaperID=7488>, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> E. Smyrnova-Trybulska, *Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Educational Portal Design Based on CMS System*. In: *E-Learning for Societal Needs*, Katowice – Cieszyn, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> P. Kommers, *Teach – Tool – Learn: Social Media as a Tribute to Lev Vygotsky*. Retrieved 2.03.13 from <http://hetl.org/all-categories/teach-tool-learn/>.

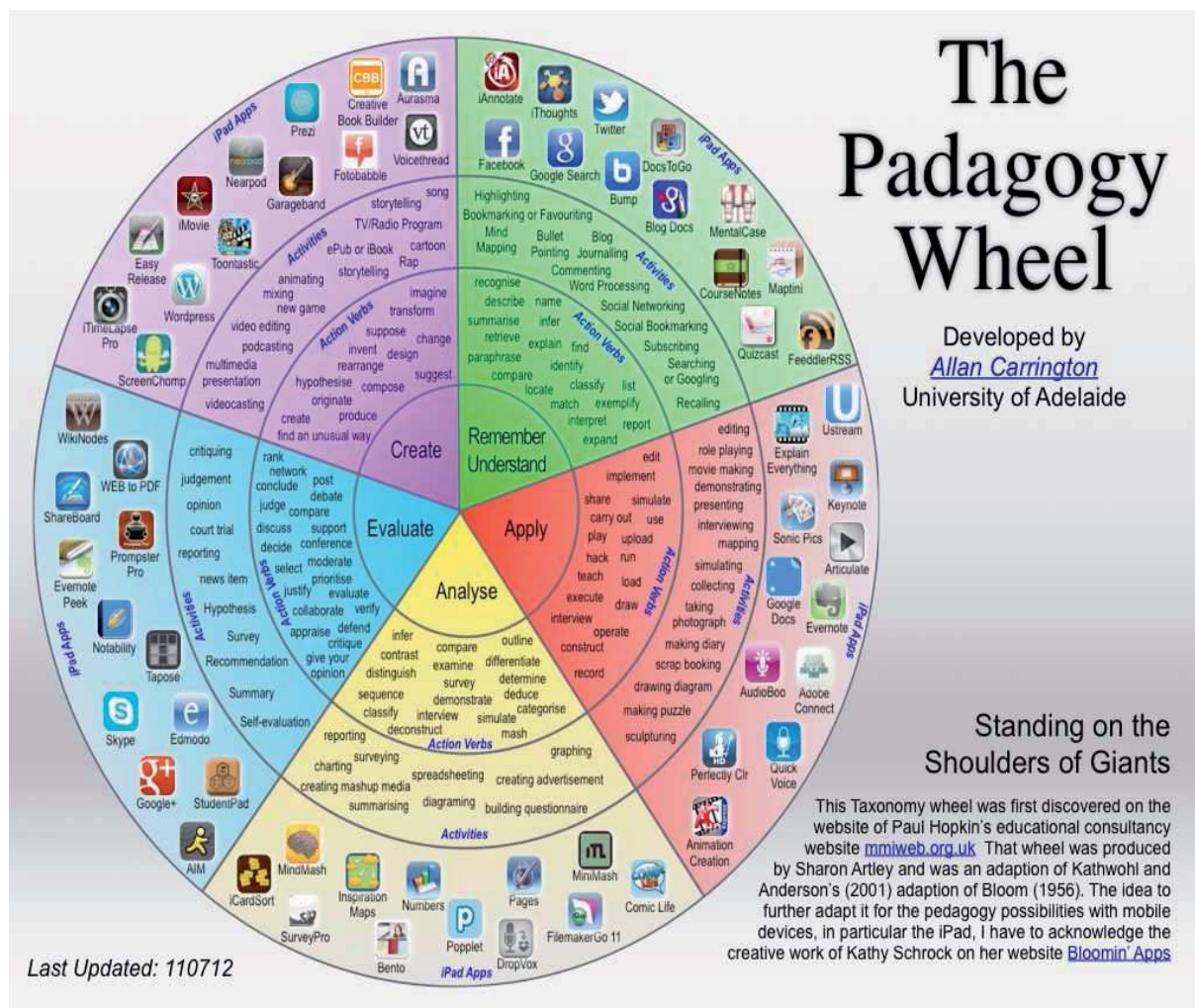
<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> *Social Media and Social Change: How Young People are Tapping into Technology*. Retrieved 15.01.13 from [http://blogs.worldbank.org/youthink/social-media-and-social-change-how-young-people-are-tapping-technology?cid=EXT\\_TWBN\\_D\\_EXT](http://blogs.worldbank.org/youthink/social-media-and-social-change-how-young-people-are-tapping-technology?cid=EXT_TWBN_D_EXT).

networked information—with the power of the physical—occupying geographic space with flesh-and-blood bodies<sup>13</sup>.

Considering great potential of social media to connect and to provide communication educators cannot stay aloof but try to use social media powers for the constructive development of the student's personality and enhancing their skills and competences in their professional domain<sup>14</sup>.

An overview of iPad Apps has been taken of the base of the Bloom's taxonomy of developing knowledge depicting how different social media can be implemented to develop a person's mental abilities and skills<sup>15</sup>.



**Figure 1. iPad Apps For Knowledge Development Based on Bloom's Taxonomy**

Source: The Padagogy Wheel.

Retrieved 3.03.13 from <https://dl.dropbox.com/u/3138780/padwheel/assets/fallback/index.html>

(P. Hopkin, Sh. Artley, K. Schrock, A. Carrington)

<sup>13</sup> N. Jurgenson, *When Atoms Meet Bits...*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> I. Sekret, *Enhancing Students' Foreign Language Professional Competence by Means of E-learning*. In: *Global E-Learning*, Universidad a Distancia de Madrid 2012, pp. 417–428.

<sup>15</sup> *The Padagogy Wheel*. Retrieved 3.03.13 from <https://dl.dropbox.com/u/3138780/padwheel/assets/fallback-/index.html>.

### **Difficulties and Fears Teachers Face in Implementing Social Media in Learning**

In spite of the fact that a lot of teachers all over the world are practicing social media in their teaching there are still doubts and fears among educators concerning its implementation into the practice of formal university education. Some of them are for objective reasons, and there are many which are rooted in the teachers' and students' epistemological beliefs<sup>16</sup>, as well as uncertainty how to manage social media in learning.

Interviewing teachers with different educational, cultural and professional background elicited the following objective and subjective obstacles to implementing social media into the practice of learning at the university.

- 1) Administration of the educational establishments block usage of social media networks in the campuses;
- 2) Educators regard social media networks as tools appropriate for entertaining, personal communication and take it unserious to involve students to learning by social media;
- 3) Teachers think that students who are active in social media are inclined to frequent and problematic drinking habits, have trouble managing their time and developing effective study habits<sup>17</sup>;
- 4) The social nature of social media may engage less professional thought and behavior than it is expected;
- 5) Professionals need to be able to manage their time well and know how to learn on their own if they are going to succeed in a rapidly changing professional landscape of social media;
- 6) Teachers should be very thoughtful and deliberate when utilizing it as an educational tool;
- 7) There is no reliable data confirming the claims that social media is indeed beneficial;
- 8) Teachers are unsure about procedures and strategies of conducting learning with social media;
- 9) They believe that social media can be appropriate for teaching only humanitarian subjects; etc.

Those who are experiencing social media face such problems as:

- 1) How to keep students' activeness and to enhance their involvement in the social media learning communication;
- 2) Which strategies should be used to motivate them to active, thoughtful and creative participation in the social media learning;
- 3) How to preserve the distance between a teacher and a student and keep relations and communication in a mode of learning;

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<sup>16</sup> I. Sekret, *Personal Epistemology as a Perspective Direction of the Educational Psychology Development*, Donetsk 2013.

<sup>17</sup> *How Students Benefit From Using Social Media*. Retrieved in February 2013 from <http://edudemic.com/2013/02/how-students-benefit-from-using-social-media/>.

4) How to preserve their virtual learning environment from intruding of strangers<sup>18</sup>, inappropriate and distractive comments and posts as from other people so from the students involved into virtual learning<sup>19</sup>.

Considering these and other questions below is the overview of the benefits of the social media practiced in a course of the experimental learning.

### **Why to Implement Social Media in Learning**

Analysis of the social media and practices which already exist in educational practice with implementing social media in learning proves that social media offers plenty of opportunities for learning which would meet principles of student-centeredness, individualization and interactivity. What is more important that the teacher is able to open the learning which is limited with classroom walls and curriculum restrictions to the reality and enlarge students' idea about the subject learnt and show how the obtained knowledge and skills can work in real life. Using social media students experience the world through more than just books and assignments; they have an opportunity to learn and adapt to the world using an alternative form of communication. It becomes especially important regarding the fact that in the modern world connections can play dominating role when it goes to employment, so graduates have a possibility to come into the workplace with a lot to offer and learn how to present themselves in professional society. Let's take a closer look at main benefits provided by social media in learning.

#### *Interpersonal Connections*

The prime purpose of all the social media networks is to provide opportunities for connecting with people. Nowadays students use international networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc. as well as some national social media networks (like VK, Odnoklasniki, Moy Mir on the territory of former USSR). If we analyze a user's connections we can discriminate there such groups of connections as relatives, friends from schools and universities, colleagues, etc. Now connections for promoting business and trading is rapidly developing. As well we can find directories of separate businesses, services, educational establishments presenting themselves in social media and building their networks on the one hand advertising their activity, and on the other manifesting themselves as influential body of numerous connections and participants as a sign of their reliability and prosperity. Social media users can interact and engage with each other only through a Web presence, without even meeting a person in real life.

Here we can notice that students establish their connections guiding by the principles of knowing a person, or liking him/her, or even chaotically moved by an instant decision.

In this respect the potential of social media in learning lies in a possibility for a teacher to make the process of social networking guided and purposeful. Therefore if the classroom learning is aimed at gaining knowledge in a certain subject, the circle of connections should

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<sup>18</sup> *Protecting Private on the New Facebook*. Retrieved in February 2013 from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013-02/07/technology/personaltech/protecting-your-privacy-on-the-new-facebook.html?smid=tw-share&\\_r=3&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013-02/07/technology/personaltech/protecting-your-privacy-on-the-new-facebook.html?smid=tw-share&_r=3&).

<sup>19</sup> P. Williams, *The Learning Web. The Development, Implementation and Evaluation of Internet-Based Undergraduate Materials for the Teaching of Key Skills*. Retrieved 3.03.13 from <http://alh.sagepub.-com/content/3/1/40.abstract>.

be developed through inviting professionals in this domain and other students who are interested in the same subject. Sharing ideas, discussing issues learnt, asking and getting answers, posting on the issues discussed contribute to establishing sound knowledge, flexible skills, developing communicative skills in the professional sphere.

### *Interacting in Social Media*

When people share their personal pictures, links to other sites or comment on someone's post, they become involved in extended communication, stretching beyond the social interaction purposes alone, but also for establishing professional connections and relations.

It is interesting to note that a person goes through a number of stages in his/her level of engagement into social media interaction. It is obvious that entering a new social network, like in a real life reality, a person has to "look around" searching for familiar things, places, people to get their support. It is meaningful for the success of his/her further engagement or reluctance to be engaged. Because as in any other activity a person needs someone to rely on, to be evaluated and get a feedback on the deeds he/she undertakes. It is especially essential when we wish to invite a student to a social media network for learning purposes which he/she has never tried before or has little experience of using it. In such cases the teacher who should give support to every of the student's try to manifest him/herself in a new virtual space.

The next stage of a person's engagement often implies getting acquainted with the surrounding and trying to present oneself. Here different means are used ranging from some symbols to very personal photos. The mode of presenting oneself in a virtual reality is definitely determined by social and cultural issues but if we are speaking about social interaction for learning and professional purposes, the students should be specially instructed upon the means which they use to identify themselves. They should be aware that in the virtual reality, especially in cases of dealing with fully unknown people, the image which they choose to identify themselves can play a decisive role for further failure or success of communication. As not knowing a person we try to evaluate him/her personality basing only on our visual perception of the images he/she presents<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, not only their own image but also the image of their friends can influence a person's decision to interact or not, to trust and rely on them or avoid interaction<sup>21</sup>.

Sometimes being so much concerned about their inner world problems and issues of personal character young people splash it on their pages forgetting about people in their network and that the message, which they send in this way can be misinterpreted, seem strange and inappropriate. As the result the people with whom they are connected may become confused about the person they are dealing with and take a communicative strategy which would not be beneficial for further communication, learning and development of professional relations.

Evaluating others' posts can be viewed as the next stage of the web engagement. It can range from simple choosing "like"/"don't like" options to a few-words comment. Motives of

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<sup>20</sup> *Looking Good on Facebook*. Retrieved 21.01.2013 from <http://scienceparis.over-blog.com/article-looking-good-on-facebook-christina-jaschinski-and-piet-kommers-103946371.html>.

<sup>21</sup> *Attractive friends make profiles more popular on Facebook: Study*. Retrieved in January 2013 from <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/04/23/attractive-friends-make-profiles-more-popular-on-facebook-study/>.



choosing “like”/“don’t like” options can be different. A person can choose such option when he/she really likes the post, also when he/she does not really like it but wish to keep in touch with a person who posted it, or to be polite. However, it does not imply that the post was viewed or read thoroughly or even to the end. Therefore, in a situation of the learning virtual interaction it can be hardly a reliable factor manifesting that students really worked through the teacher’s or anybody else’s post. So teachers should be invited to comment on what they have read or seen in the directory. The task what to focus on in the comment can be given either in the classroom, or in a form of instruction/question to the whole group exactly in the directory of the learning virtual space.

Multiple observations over the social media user’s virtual behavior strategies allow to state that extended comments in social media are quite seldom, as not many people like to express themselves openly. But still it is a very precious skill because it entails higher order thinking, abilities to evaluate, compare, see the core of the point, put one’s own idea in words and make it cohesive, well-grounded and clear for potential readers. These abilities are very essential for establishing oneself as a professional in one’s domain who is able not only to follow, but also to create one’s own content and attract other people one’s professional activity.

Interacting day in a day with their peers, teachers and other professionals about class-related subjects, they develop a sense of Internet presence and become experts in their domain. They gain knowledge and skills not only how to interact with others on the Internet, but also learn how to use basic and more complex functions in order to do so, try different communicative strategies developing their own style.

#### *Gaining Knowledge and Enhancing Competences*

Another benefit of implementing social media in learning is in the possibility to keep one’s knowledge up to date. Today, the information boom resulting from the rapid development of the Internet networks, distant countries, economies, cultures, sciences and scientific heritages become closer penetrating into each other. On the other hand, what is being discovered or just implemented nowadays, tomorrow it is becoming a traditional practice. So when we speak about learning science which is rapidly developing nowadays we must show this progress to our students, for them not to regard science as a dusty or frozen unity in heavy too sophisticated books which is unnecessary for everyday life and occupies an aloof place, being open to informational resources from different corners of the world they will learn to regard it as ever-developing organism which needs bright minds to reach distant horizons. It will evoke interest not only to study science and to follow innovation but to be more active and creative and believe that they can contribute to the further science development by their ideas and practices<sup>22</sup>.

Speaking about gaining knowledge while interacting in social media we should also keep in mind what knowledge is and how it is developed. It is not a matter of immediate grasping or memorizing. It develops in a course of time involving different modes of analyzing information, comparison, problem-solving and evaluation. It is a formation which develops in a manner of layers which cover each other, penetrating into substrata, and

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<sup>22</sup> *School Must Be Real Life*. Retrieved in February 2013 from <http://practicaltheory.org/blog/2013/02/19/-school-must-be-real-life/>.

enriched with the experience turn into competences. It is an on-going process which should be uninterrupted in order to make a person competent to reach substantial results in his/her professional domain.

Social media allows one to make learning not episodic from class to class according to a schedule, but continuously realized in interaction with peers, teachers and representatives of other learning or professional communities. Discussing the styles of learning messages and posts we should assume that it can be different – ranging from highly academic to conversational – as it contributes to flexibility of the knowledge and skills obtained, development of the students' communicative skills referring to the subject learnt and keep their interest in learning.

In the process of gaining knowledge and enhancing competence it is essential that implementing social media in learning helps to achieve the following aims:

- to organize the learning interaction with the regard of the students' individual styles and personal characteristics and learning strategies of the learners;
- to establish more personal relations between peers and in interaction between the teacher and his/her students – students overcome barriers in communication and can address the teacher directly with questions related to the subject learnt;
- to enhance creativity of both parts – teachers and students – as they have a possibility to create their own learning content and upload it on the directory of the social media learning<sup>23</sup>;
- to facilitate the interaction, at convenient times, between students and teachers.

Also, students learn to be not only good experts in their professional domain but also develop managerial and entrepreneur skills which are essential in modern ever-changing economy.

## Conclusion

Meanwhile we have to remember that social media is still a tool which helps to enlarge options for learning and not a purpose or demand for a teacher to be guided in his/her professional activity. At the same time being implemented it requires to review one's style of teaching, relations to the subject taught, students in the classroom and teaching paradigm as a whole.

Using social media should not be viewed as the ultimate aim to achieve but an alternative way of teaching which can be enweaved into the traditional classroom without drastic changes in the learning curricula, any significant financial contributions or professionals in computer technologies or web-designers. It is in powers of any teacher regardless of his/her subject being taught and wishing to refresh his/her teaching practice by disclosing walls of the classroom to the reality and the whole world.

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<sup>23</sup> I. Sekret, *Psychological Assumptions of Enhancing Students' Creativity within their Professional Competence at a Higher School. Creative Personality*, vol. VIII. A collection of internationally reviewed scientific papers. Riga: Scientific Institute of Creativity. RTTEMA, 2010, pp. 48–54.

Ирина Секрет (Iryna Sekret)

### **Использование социальных сетей в обучении**

Принимая во внимание стремительное развитие социальных сетей и их огромный потенциал для общения, обмена знаниями и сближения различных культур и сообществ, особенную актуальность получает проблема внедрения социальных сетей в учебную практику высшего образования. Данная статья посвящена проблемам внедрения социальных сетей в процесс подготовки студентов с учетом психологических и педагогических аспектов обучения. Кроме этого выделяются аспекты, в которых социальные сети предоставляют преимущества при организации учебного взаимодействия между преподавателем и студентами.

### **Media społecznościowe w nauce**

W związku z szybkim rozwojem mediów społecznościowych i ich ogromnym potencjałem ułatwiania komunikacji, dzielenia się doświadczeniami i pomysłami oraz łączenia różnych kultur i społeczeństw nastąpił także rozwój idei wdrażania mediów społecznościowych do nauczania. Artykuł dotyczy problemów wprowadzania mediów społecznościowych do edukacji studentów, szczególnie w odniesieniu do kwestii psychologicznych i edukacyjnych. Prezentuje także przegląd korzyści, jakie media społecznościowe zapewniają w zakresie poprawiania umiejętności komunikacyjnych studentów oraz kompetencji w ich dziedzinach zawodowych.

*Tłumaczenie: Kazimierz Wenta*

*Konsultacja językowa: Barbara Popiel*

### **Social Media in Learning**

In view of the rapid growth of social media and its huge potential for facilitating communication, sharing experience and ideas and bringing together different cultures and societies it could not but also develop the idea of implementing social media in learning. This article concerns the problems of social media introduction into the practice of students' learning, particularly with regard to its psychological and educational issues. It also provides an overview of benefits social media provides in enhancing students' communicative skills and competences in their professional domain.

*Translated by Iryna Sekret*