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ADVANCING EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

EMILY ORR

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Advancing Education Through Social Media

Societies in the 21st century are becoming more complex and multicultural; this is partially due to the advancement of ubiquitous technology and globalization. The increase of globalization and the advancement of new innovative technology have created profound effects in many nations. Some of these effects have physically manifested into ethnic violence, protests, apartheid, and other forms of racial violence and have created devastating effects.¹ The emergence of social media – Facebook, Twitter, blogs, discussion sites, and other forms of media interface, have helped raise awareness and understanding of issues that are affecting society today. Social media has helped educate many individuals to be more aware of cultural diversity. The increase of cross-cultural dialogue is one of the most important features that has emerged as a result of the use of social media. This has allowed individuals to communicate with others within and across their own borders more easily than ever before.

Cross-cultural dialogue through the use of social media is a new tool that allows users to understand diverse cultures and issues around the world. It is a new tool in transferring knowledge; it has raised awareness of cultural diversity, and has helped promote democracy in many nations. This proposal will define the meaning of social media and analyze one particular site as a case study – ExchangesConnect. In the overall examination of ExchangesConnect, this proposal will examine its effectiveness in the transfer of knowledge, sharing of ideas, and how the site itself can be improved to allow it to reach a greater number of educators found throughout the world. It will then explain how social media can be a powerful tool in advancing education in the 21st century and the benefits media education can bring for youth.

¹ In Amy Chua's book *World on Fire* she argues that as global markets open to other parts of the world, ethnic conflicts worsen. From the Journal of Conflict Resolution, Susan Olzak wrote an article *Does Globalization Breed Ethnic Discontent?* She also argues that there are components of globalization that affect internal conflicts within a country.

WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social media has become a part of many individual's daily lives.² Those who have smartphones can access the Internet and constantly review and contribute new information via social media outlets. With these new advancements of technology that enhance the ways we use social media, the term is constantly changing and evolving over time.³ However, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary today, social media is defined as:

Forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, two notable professors of Marketing at ESCP Europe who have analyzed and researched the social media framework, define social media to be, "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological functions of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content."⁴ Web 2.0 is a concept that was introduced in 2004. It explained how software developers used the World Wide Web in a setting where applications are no longer published by individuals, but constantly empowering every user to perform and collaborate with each other to create certain customizations within the design.⁵

Social media has set the stage for individuals to communicate and share information. People today are interested in networking and connecting with friends, reading the news, and using real-time information on the internet. Thus, it has significantly redefined how individuals

² In December 2011 the Internet World Stats reported that in North America there is an average of 108,096,800 people out of 347,394,870 that use the internet (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>)

³ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) *Understanding Social Media*. p.8

⁴ Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein. (2010) *Users of the world unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media*; pp 59-69

⁵ Retrieved online: http://www.digital-web.com/articles/web_2_for_designers/

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and institutions communicate. As stated in the previous definition, social media does include, but is not limited to a variety of social networking tools that have been developed and utilized by the public. The most common forms include text messaging, video and picture websites, micro blogging, tweets, Groupon, etc.⁶ Each social media website has its own features designed to meet the specific needs of individuals. Some of the most popular websites that have benefited individuals and groups domestically and internationally are Google, Facebook and Twitter. By enabling users to easily market and sell their products, share real-time news that are presently occurring from different parts of the world, and it allow users to express their opinions, these sites have emerged as leaders in the social media landscape. This paper will examine at one specific social networking site – ExchangesConnect – that is also used internationally and domestically in order to share information and exchange ideas. ExchangesConnect is not as widely used and known as Twitter and Facebook; nevertheless, for those involved in schools, international programs, academics, and educators, ExchangesConnect could be an ideal model to use. ExchangesConnect mission is “to connect potential, current, and former exchange program participants so that they can discuss application processes, programs, and living abroad.”⁷ Considering its’ overall objective, this website differs from most mass social networking sites by having a focal point on allowing users domestically and internationally discuss issues regarding diversity, globalization, and an array of studying abroad programs that the U.S. Department of State sponsors. With combination of the ExchangeConnect mission statement and increased participation, this website could become a powerful tool in advancing education in the 21st century. The website is primarily used by individuals who are interested in improving cultural

⁶ J.H. Kietzman, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, & Bruno S. Silvestre (2011) *Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media*. pp241-251; Taprial & Kanwar (2012) p.6

⁷ Retrieved from: <http://connect.state.gov/page/about-us>

competencies, English language skills, and applying for study abroad programs through dialogue. This type of cross-cultural communication allows users to be more aware about the importance of understanding diverse perspectives, seeing the connection of economic and ecological systems, and also developing a historical grounding.⁸

EXCHANGESCONNECT

Social networking has become a phenomenon that strengthens and develops ties with peers and has become a staple in many developed societies. It is a tool that can facilitate person-to-person connection and a direct transfer of knowledge and ideas within seconds throughout the Internet. ExchangesConnect is one example that can set the stage for individuals to communicate and share information. The website is administered by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). It was first created in order for the bureau's sponsored organizations to communicate with their applicants on questions regarding application processes and connect with potential candidates. The site grew to function as a platform to promote dialogue between users not necessarily affiliated with the United States government. It fosters understanding, awareness of cultural diversity, and even opens the door in allowing individuals to discuss pertinent issues affecting their country, as well as helping them to apply for study abroad programs. By providing and facilitating discussion between individuals with vastly different backgrounds it help users develop and understand how to prevent or find solutions for some of the problems found in their countries, such as cultural conflicts.

This website was created almost four years ago to complement the Bureau's goal of building mutual understanding among citizens throughout the world. The mission was fine-

⁸ Henry Jenkis (2009) *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture*. pp. 28-29

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tuned to focus on exchange program discussions to create a more niche and helpful community. By focusing the mission, members became clearer about how they could participate and help each other, sharing advice about the exchange program experiences and living abroad.⁹ This social network also provides a platform in creating discussions that allows users to share ideas and transfer knowledge. Examples of these types of discussions include: *what is culture; what does courage mean to you; what is the meaning of tolerance; Independence Days around the world* and even discussions that improve language capabilities such as, *answer with me to learn English*. Not only does it offer to communicate with users cross-culturally but creates dialogue for users on this website to take action in their country, for example: *how do you protect the environment?*¹⁰

ExchangesConnect is monitored by the U.S. Department of State. There are at least nine employees who regularly monitor and check the website on a daily basis for malicious content; this allows ExchangesConnect to provide a safe platform to discuss, advice, and educate oneself about other cultures by fostering people-to-people dialogue on a government-sponsored site. This site has provided users the chance to learn about each other and to understand how diverse exchange programs are. It has over 37,400 active users and it is constantly growing with an average of 800 new members joining every year.¹¹ Users on this site join for different reasons. For example, there are educational advisors who use this site as a resource in introducing different exchange programs to their students or to other professionals. They can also introduce members to different exchange programs. Others join this site in order to connect with other

⁹ This was stated by Michelle Neyland, the Administrator for ExchangesConnect

¹⁰ All found on the discussion tab from ExchangesConnect: www.connect.state.gov/forum

¹¹ Part of my job as an intern is to greet new members daily. Link to all the members: <http://connect.state.gov/profiles/members/>

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exchange program participants or to learn and understand cultural diversity. This can be successfully accomplished through the member-to-member information exchange. This website has also been used in classrooms for Social Studies teachers in the United States to learn about other countries and even teachers in non-English countries to use as a tool for students to practice their English skills online.

ExchangesConnect is a great example of how to educate individuals across borders by the exchange of ideas through the Internet. This is an effective website that provides students and even teachers opportunities to develop social skills through collaboration and online community engagement. It builds skills that allow users to understand multiple perspectives, diverse social norms, and appreciate varied viewpoints.¹² These skills are essential to have when students enter into the work field.

To understand the core functions on how ExchangesConnect is used or any other social media website, Kietzman et al published an article, *Business Horizon*, to explain a framework that helped define the many facets of social media and how they function.¹³ This framework allows educators, users, and institutions to better organize, engage with, and understand the functionalities of social media sites. The framework they introduced is called the honeycomb framework.¹⁴

HONEYCOMB FRAMEWORK

The honeycomb framework states that in order for social media to transfer knowledge and be successful it must focus on some or all of the seven functional building blocks - identity,

¹² Jenkins (2009) p. 101

¹³ J.H. Kietzman, Kristopher Hermkens, Ian P. McCarthy, & Bruno S. Silvestre. (2011) *Social Media? Get Serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media*. Pp 241-251

¹⁴ Taprial & Kanwar: pp. 31-33 & Kaplan and Haenlein: p59-69

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conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups (Figure 1). These seven functions are a useful strategy to evaluate the constant changes seen in social media, as well as the basics of developing well-used sites.¹⁵ Each function provides engagement and sharing of ideas between users. The honeycomb framework provides a great tool for institutions and educators to develop strategies that will enable them to understand, monitor, and respond to diverse social media activities.¹⁶

Due to the expansion of access to the Internet and the use of the honeycomb framework, social media has developed into an effective tool for promoting awareness and creating change in society. The phenomenon of understanding this social media framework can create a significant impact on an organization's reputation.¹⁷ With the vast success of this branch of technology, there is now a large array of classifications into which each type of social media can be placed. This includes internet forums, blogs, micro-blogs, podcasts, webinars, videos and more. Due to the ever expanding global level of internet access, the numerous types of social media have become the new form of communication. Today, almost ninety percent of Internet users use social media sites as a means of communication.¹⁸ Social media has now become the leading form of intercommunication between people throughout society. It is slowly becoming an integral part in public and private schools; some educators have realized the value social media plays in the 21st century. The New Media Consortium, has defined the *twenty-first century literacy* as “the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that

¹⁵ Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) p 59-69.

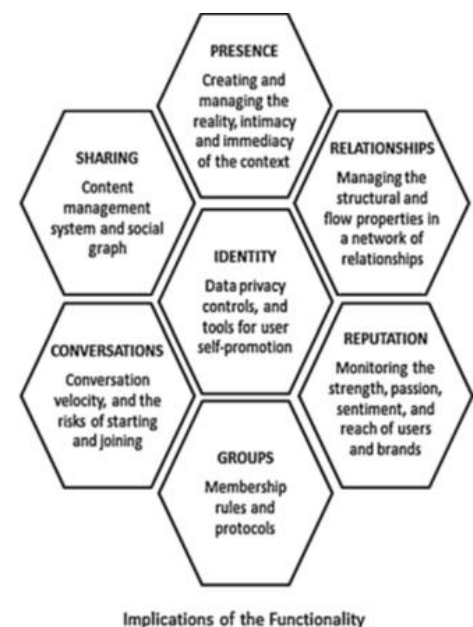
¹⁶ Taprial & Kanwar.(2012) pp.31-33.

¹⁷ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp.31-33.

¹⁸ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) p. 6.

power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms.”¹⁹

(Figure 1)²⁰



One of the seven functional building blocks, identity, is defined as the extent to which users reveal their true selves through social media.²¹ In most social media platforms, identity is one of the core functions represented; however, social media sites have different discourses and aims in using identities. For example, many bloggers are known by their nicknames. There are also some social media sites that require their users to reveal their real identity in order to set up a profile. Facebook, for example,

is a social networking site that requires users to give their true identity, as it uses identity as one of its core functions.²² ExchangesConnect uses identity to provide the user’s biography which allows every user to learn where others are coming from, what experiences they have had internationally and what they are looking for in this social networking site. This allows users to connect with others that may have similar interests as they do or bring together groups and individuals who otherwise might not be exposed to cross-cultural dialogue.

Many social media sites primarily operate to facilitate conversations between individuals and groups. Conversations, the second building block according to Kietzman et al, are defined as

¹⁹ Jenkins (2009) p.30

²⁰ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp. 31-33.

²¹ Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011). pp 241-251

²² Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre. (2011) pp 241-251

the extent to which users create dialogue between each other.²³ Other means that users can communicate through are blogs and tweeting. Tweeting is another form of communicating that is used on a site called Twitter. This is a micro blogging and social networking site that allows you to “tweet” your latest updates within 140 characters.²⁴ This communication is generated through exchanging messages, usually during real-time status updates. In order to tweet the issues and trending of topics in real-time information, Twitter provides feeds and trending of topics in real-time.²⁵ This is one of the reasons why Twitter has become such a success. ExchangesConnect also offers conversations; it allows users to assist one another on specific issues or topics, and is a resource for discussing questions regarding exchange programs.

The third piece of the honeycomb framework regards the content of conversations. This can sometimes be difficult to measure and analyze, especially with popular discussions. One tool used to help simplify the analysis process is called the “rate of change.” The rate of change is used to analyze the number of new conversations over a specific period of time. It looks at the continuity and discontinuity of conversations. Once these are measured it produces an overall picture of what is included in the general content of the discussions.²⁶ By helping users see opinions and thoughts on the topics in real-time, users gain increased awareness of the overall user community’s most pertinent issues.

Sharing, the fourth building block according to Kietzman et al is broken down by the extent to which users can exchange, receive, and distribute information between other users. For institutions to engage in social media through sharing there are two implications that exist: 1)

²³ Kietzmann et al (2011) p. 244.

²⁴ The New York Times; Dec. 19, 2011; <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/twitter/index.html>

²⁵ Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). p 59-69

²⁶ Kietzmann et al (2011). pp 241-251

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Evaluating the commonalities and users' shared interests, and 2) The degree in which the product or object should be shared between other users. These two aspects aid in providing a platform that allows connections between users by creating aims and objectives. Sharing also provides fluid communication that brings people together that may have segregated lives.²⁷ Take for example, sharing ideas with youth from the West consuming Japanese manga or Japanese youth, consuming American hip-hop. Sharing these ideas is a precursor for cultural understanding to those who do not have the opportunity to immerse with cultures that are different from their own. ExchangesConnect creates cross-cultural dialogue for youth and adults; this offers them the opportunity to share ideas and connect with other users from different parts of the world. It allows users to be more aware of the commonalities that other users have coming from diverse cultures and religions.²⁸

Social presence, the fifth fundamental building block, is the concept of media richness.²⁹ Social presence allows users to know if other users are available and allows them the chance to have real-time conversations from across borders.³⁰ Social relationships can help provide a higher presence. Relationships in the social media content is defined as the extent to which users have some kind of association that leads them to communicate, meet up, and/or relate to each other.³¹ ExchangesConnect builds relationships across borders by creating discussions of specific topics. Many users find others with similar interests but who come from different

²⁸ As a community manager with ExchangesConnect, I read discussions on a daily basis and some of the discussions have led to users eventually meeting during their exchange program.

²⁹ Media richness theory was introduced by Richard A. Daft & Robert H. Lengel. This theory provides a framework within which to describe the medium of the communication. Many believe that face-to-face conversations are the richest medium.

³⁰ Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) pp 61.

³¹ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp. 31-33

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backgrounds and countries. Many that are coming from a variety of areas learn that they are participating in the same exchange programs and sometimes even have the chance to meet face-to-face.³² This empowers and motivates users to become stronger individuals. One example is the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Abroad (YES) program. This program offers scholarships for United States high school students to study in significantly Muslim populated countries for one-year. The YES program is one of the most popular U.S. Department of States sponsored groups on ExchangesConnect. Discussions from this site reveal how relationships are created through online discussions. One of the semi-finalists stated, “Even if I'm not a finalist I'm so glad I will have had the opportunity to meet so many people with the same dream as me.”³³

The sixth piece of the honeycomb framework, reputation, is defined as the extent to which users can identify the social standings of others in social media. Reputation can also be an indicator of whether users can engage effectively in the social media platform. Using this function of social media as a means of communication with customers and other viewers also allows institutions to have measurable metrics. This also allows access to a great source of user content. Metrics allow institutions to view what the most popular trends are on their online platform.³⁴ This can be a great tool that allows the creators of social media sites to gain insight into what users are learning from their sites.

As the seventh piece in the honeycomb framework, groups, represent communities and sub-communities in the social media network. The more popular a social network becomes, the

³²As a community manager with ExchangesConnect, I read discussions on a daily basis and some of the discussions have led to users eventually meeting during their exchange program.

³³ Retrieved from: connect.stat.gov/group/KYLESabroad

³⁴ Kietzmann et al (2011) p. 247.

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larger the group of users it attracts. In the social media world, there are two types of groups. The first group comes into existence when users can create different types of groups for their specific friends and contacts. The second group can be specific groups in the real, tangible world. Social groups can vary according to users' preference. You can share specific details between specific users and also block certain information between other users.³⁵

ExchangesConnect provides a variety of social groups based on their interests. Furthermore, it facilitates groups for high school students, undergraduate, graduate, professionals and even special interest groups.³⁶ The basis for dividing individuals into major interest or educational level allows exchange between individuals who share certain key passions or personal development. By sharing with others around the same developmental stage an individual is better able to compare themselves to others who may not share any common ground other than their overall physical age. This type of communication can foster meaningful relationships amongst users.

The honeycomb framework provides a great platform for describing components of the social media landscape. Most of the larger and popular social media sites focus on at least three to four components of the honeycomb framework. Some examples include LinkedIn, Facebook, and YouTube.³⁷ Although each component of the honeycomb framework may be more dominant in one social media site than another, the framework illustrates that social media sites can operate on different levels and framed for specific users. At least one component must be

³⁵ Kietzmann et al (2011) p. 249 & Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) p 59-69

³⁶ Most of the sources on ExchangesConnect will be from the website: connect.state.gov. or based off of information that has been given to my while interning at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This link will provide you with the list of groups that are on ExchangesConnect: <http://connect.state.gov/page/groups-directory>

³⁷ Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre (2011) p. 249

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present in order for social media sites to be successful and allow users to connect and educate with other users. Advancing education during these austere times is daunting, but in using the potential power for students to learn and understand the skills that are effective in the real world through social media websites, students gain the power to transfer knowledge faster than any other form of education could previously do. There are currently websites that provide students with the tools to learn about subjects specifically in their field of interest and even offer student's one-on-one tutorial sessions on a variety of challenging topics.³⁸ Technology enthusiasts, John Anderson and his colleagues developed computer tutor programs in algebra and geometry. These programs observe the student's carefully as they work to solve problems. These types of programs have shown to be more effective than classroom teaching because when they are in trouble on a problem the program would give immediate feedback.³⁹

When drawing upon ExchangesConnect website, the five core functions that have enabled this website to be useful are: identity, relationships, groups, reputations, and conversations. The reason why members join can range from those who have an interest in other cultures and languages to those who want to participate and study with an exchange program. However, to give users an easier approach in understanding the array of social media programs and their main functions, a blogger and web consultant, Fred Cavazza created a social media landscape of the most used social media sites.⁴⁰

³⁸ Khan Academy is an example of one website that is a "free world-class education." Their mission is "to help you learn what you want, when you want, at your own pace" (<http://www.khanacademy.org/>)

³⁹ Allan Collins and Richard Halverson.(2009) *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology*

⁴⁰ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp. 33-34

BENEFITS with EXCHANGESCONNECT

Fred Cavazza illustrates an info graphic every year of the most used social media sites and their diverse uses (Figure 2). This info graphic that he created is comprised of seven families – publish, games, network, location, commerce, discuss, and share. These seven families also match the seven core functions of the social media platform. Cavazza refers to the seven families of social media as a rich ecosystem with emerging practices like social commerce.⁴¹ Based on this chart, Facebook and Google have managed to carry all seven of the services. This info graphic provides a great source for educators and youth to illustrate the variety of social media sites available in different categories.

(Figure 2)⁴²



Figure 3.4: Social Media Landscape2011

Using Fred Cavazza’s info graphic as a model, ExchangesConnect is under the network family because it is created using the Ning software platform. Ning is a free social networking platform that primarily appeals towards users who want to create their own community or network family with a specific interest.⁴³ Their main goal is bringing people together to allow individuals to collaborate and communicate about a topic. Although Ning is illustrated under the network family, it has the

⁴¹ Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp.33-35

⁴² Taprial & Kanwar (2012)

⁴³ Retrieved from www.ning.com/about

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capabilities to merge all the technologies into one such as: Wiki, a blog, photo/video gallery, forum, events calendar micro feed, and member management and more.⁴⁴ Ning's main objective is to be able to go beyond the normal online presence and boost interaction through portals that allow ideas and interests to be shared, aligning it well with ExchangesConnect mission.⁴⁵ It is imperative for students to think critically in a digital age and to challenge themselves to solve real-world problems.⁴⁶ With ExchangesConnect, students are learning to communicate with people who do not share the same assumptions and/or cultures; it allows users to boost communication, collaboration, and understand how to share information effectively across borders.⁴⁷

Although Ning provide diverse functions to satisfy users, it still lacks some of the quality and efficiency compared to websites like Facebook and Twitter. And with new functions and tools that are constantly changing to improve the speed and quality on Facebook, Google, and Twitter, ExchangesConnect is currently revamping its features and functions in order to maintain their present users and increase the number of members joining.⁴⁸

SOCIAL MEDIA – A PRECURSOR TO A SOCIAL CHANGE

The early days of the Internet led to the emergence of social media, where users began sharing information and communicating with each other. As technology started advancing, social media sites started booming. Social media has been one of the greatest innovations in the 21st

⁴⁴ <http://www.turbosocialmedia.com/what-is-ning-all-about/>

⁴⁵ Most of the sources on ExchangesConnect will be from the website: connect.state.gov. or based off of information that has been given to my while interning at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This link will provide you with the list of groups that are on ExchangesConnect: <http://connect.state.gov/page/groups-director>

⁴⁶ Collins & Halverson (2009) pp. 134-135

⁴⁷ Allan Collins and Richard Halverson.(2009) *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology*.p 13

⁴⁸ Most of the sources on ExchangesConnect will be from the website: connect.state.gov. or based off of information that has been given to my while interning at the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This link will provide you with the list of groups that are on ExchangesConnect: <http://connect.state.gov/page/groups-director>

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century; it introduced a new means of communication and a social change.⁴⁹ This form of communication eliminates most borders, allowing users to come into contact with anyone at the stroke of a key or a click of a mouse. Social media revolutionized communication and empowered individuals to express their thoughts and opinions online.⁵⁰ This new social change gave birth to a new culture – participatory culture – which many young active users are involved in.⁵¹ Participatory culture is defined as a culture where individuals do not act as consumers, but also producers. As new culture on the Internet, Web 2.0 has been defined as "young people creatively responding to a plethora of electronic signals and cultural commodities in ways that surprise their makers, finding meanings and identities never meant to be there and defying simple nostrums that bewail the manipulation or passivity of "consumers."⁵² A 2012 study from the Pew Internet & American Life project, found that more than 95% of teens from the United States use the Internet and 80% of those teens use social media sites.⁵³

Karl Marx, a German philosopher and revolutionary theorist, believed in the idea of a 'two way street'; a dialogue between society and man – in another perspective: between media and the participatory culture. Marx believed in the superstructure, that the real world creates a place where societies longingly strive for an ideal world.⁵⁴ In order for societies to progress towards an ideal world they must progress through the dialectic of a class struggle. And the only way this progression of changes can occur in our society is by a push for a cause – a revolution.⁵⁵

⁴⁹Taprial & Kanwar (2012) pp. 6-7.

⁵⁰ Catherine Burwell (2010) *Rewriting the Scripts: Toward a Politics of Young People's Media Participation* pp 382-385.

⁵¹Jenkins (2009) p. xi

⁵² Paul Willis (2003) *Foot Soldiers of Modernity: The Dialectic of Cultural Consumption and the 21st Century School* p.392

⁵³ Amanda Lenhart (2012) *Teens and Online Video* pp. 2-3

⁵⁴ Professor Phillip Hosay's International Education Lecture Fall 2010

⁵⁵ Anthony Giddens (1971) *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* pp. 76-91

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In this 21st century a revolution has already occurred in the media world; it has revolutionized communication between individuals.⁵⁶ Youth are already playing a prominent role in the participatory culture and soon they will be democratizing the Internet.⁵⁷ In 2006, Time Magazine acclaimed “You” as Person of the Year because the World Wide Web was a tool for bringing millions of people together to connect and making them matter.⁵⁸

Empowering youth through the use of social media can also make a positive impact in their communities. In 2008 a small group of youth Egyptian activists created a Facebook page called “The April 6th Youth Movement” to organize protest events. The youth in their early 20’s were demanding their rights to free speech and transparency from government authorities. From the first day the group invited 300 people; within weeks there were over 70,000 members that joined. Although these activists were employing non-violent protests, it has been known that this movement received a lot of attention and upset the status quo.⁵⁹ These facts have shown how youth have already started democratizing the digital world and can act as a catalyst to create changes in our society.

With the speed in transferring knowledge from one user to another, or from one student to another, social media is a powerful tool in creating social changes and advancing in education. Ray Kurzweil, an acclaimed inventor and futurist, commented to CNN that, “You can start (a) world-changing revolution with the power of your ideas and the tools that everyone has. A kid in Africa has access to more information than the president of the United States did 15 years ago.” Today with social media, the sharing of the knowledge is the final result. These social media

⁵⁶Taprial & Kanwar (2012). p 6-9

⁵⁷Catherine Burwell (2010) pp. 382-383

⁵⁸http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2019341_2019562_2019557,00.html

⁵⁹ Retrieved from: <http://gvisionaries.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/egyptian-protests-fueled-by-youth-movement-social-media-a-thirst-for-justice-and-the-will-to-do-it/>

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tools revolutionized communication and can easily be used for students and users to create a dialogue that transfers knowledge to one user to the next.

Social media is essential in advancing education in the 21st century. It has played an integral role for youth; therefore, educators should learn how to utilize these tools and incorporate these new forms of media education into their classrooms. Globalization has created the advancement of technology; all these changes and development that is occurring is because society is always longing for an ideal world and there will always be new creations in the digital world, as well as society. Digital technology has already revolutionized communication and created a new youth culture. This new participatory culture has democratized media production by empowering youth to make changes in their communities, and by collaborating and connecting with other users online. With youth engaging in social media and learning how to synthesize and disseminate new information from the Internet, new forms of collective intelligence will be created.⁶⁰

MEDIA EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Social media has revolutionized society via a new means of communicating. It brought about an emerging culture - participatory culture - where youth have played a prominent role. This new culture has also created new media pedagogy - media literacy. Media literacy is defined as the “ability to monitor and analyze media coverage and understand media’s role in shaping global issues. It can help people exercise their right to freedom of expression, a cornerstone of a democratic society.”⁶¹ Media literacy is a great source of discourse for teachers

⁶⁰ Catherine Burnell (2010) p.382 & Jenkins (2009) p. 91.

⁶¹ Jenkins (2009) p xiii

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to consider and realize the benefits that youth can have when using online media as a tool in improving their social skills.

In the 21st century, researchers have found that this new literacy will improve the development of student's social skills and cultural competencies through collaboration and networking. Students can learn to disseminate media messages and learn how to create the skills that are used to draw other user's attention and identify the values and points of view that are represented in these messages.⁶² These skills are important for them to master; "it prepares young people to participate fully in public, community, [creative,] and economic life"⁶³ This new media environment has changed our understanding of literacy; it requires new ways of learning about cultural diversity and interacting with the world around us.⁶⁴

These new forms of knowledge can be a challenge with the older generations who have been traditionally taught to teach in a classroom setting with books that allows students to understand specific topics. Although books empower youth with knowledge and ideas, technology has taken a discourse in the 21st century. In order to advance in this globalized era and not fall behind, media education should be an integral part in schools. It is ubiquitous technology with the means to create cross-cultural communication, games, online project collaboration and community engagements that will empower youth with the social skills they need to advance in the 21st century. "Youth need skills for working within social networks, for pooling knowledge within a collective intelligence, for negotiating cultural differences that shape

⁶² Retrieved from:

<http://www.facingthefuture.org/GlobalIssuesResources/GlobalIssuesTours/MediaLiteracy/tabid/515/Default.aspx?clid=CJDwjPPEi7ECFcrCOgodix5QvA>

⁶³Jenkins (2009) p.34

⁶⁴Jenkins (2009) p. 49 &91

the governing assumptions in different communities, and for reconciling conflicting bits of data to form a coherent picture of the world around them.”⁶⁵

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Social media is one of the bases in advancing education in this 21st century. It is a powerful tool for expression and information; it has revolutionized society through means of communication. With the advent of the Internet and growth of social media platforms, this has created astounding effects towards society and has impacted schools to rethink how digital technology can be used as an integral part of the curriculum. The emergence of the participatory culture has created a new source of power which Pierre Levy defines as *collective intelligence*: “the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal.”⁶⁶ In the participatory culture, collective intelligence has benefited youth education in collaboration, community involvement, and cultural understandings. These are important social skills when entering in the work field; it builds cultural competencies and develops student’s critical thinking skills.

The honeycomb framework allows users to understand the core functions of social media websites and helps to set the stage in transferring knowledge from user-to-user by providing social media platforms. These social networking sites help to transfer knowledge speedily and enable users to communicate and share different viewpoints cross-culturally.

Currently media education has been taking place in some schools, but it has not played a central part for all students’ education.⁶⁷ When it comes to media democratization, youth are at the forefront of this; the youth culture today is synonymous with digital technology and it is

⁶⁵ Jenkins (2009) pp. 105-107

⁶⁶ Pierre Levy (2000) *Collective Intelligence: Man’s Emerging World In Cyberspace*

⁶⁷ Jenkins (2009) p.107

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important for students who have access to digital technology to understand the benefits it can bring. Traditional forms of education have lacked the ability of advancing education. The advancement of social media sites revolutionized communication and gave from it emerged a new form of education – media literacy. These new knowledge sharing abilities are now in the hands of the world’s youth to whom it was previously unavailable. These new tools and knowledge can be a powerful tool in creating changes to individuals, as well as society. The trajectories of social media have educated youth to create an ideal world, and as advancement spreads throughout the world, the future will inevitably be better by ongoing usage and development on sites such as ExchangesConnect.

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