This minitrack, presents research that addresses leading edge use of technology, research methods and system design to analyze and support learning in social media. The ability to generate and maintain rich networked connections through social media, social networking, crowdsourcing, cloud technology, and social computing has a profound impact on the way we solve problems, learn, innovate and develop our identities. The presented papers further the research in the fields of networked learning, collaborative learning, viral learning, and social capital, in combination with social and learning analytics and social network analysis to help understand and facilitate learning.

The openness that characterizes social media in terms of participation, transparent dialogues and co-creation fades traditional boundaries and blends forms of formal, non-formal and informal learning. This raises new questions about learning in education, work and society. Openness also means that systems and social media environments that facilitate learning may not be owned by traditional educational institutes emphasizing that learning is ongoing and participation can be free from boundaries. The ability to participate in social networks and communities and its impact on co-creation and learning are also ongoing issues for social media and learning research.

In this minitrack we present papers that capture, analyze and show novel use of data produced from social media sites. The papers develop or test methods for analyzing social media and learning; address automated data collection and analysis in support of social and learning analytics, professional development and knowledge creation. It is interesting to note that the papers, perhaps as a reflection of today’s debate on the place and use of social media in education and learning, present various examples of making use of open social media systems for learning. Whether it concerns MOOC’s, Facebook or open discussion forums, they all seek to understand how they can facilitate learning in one way or another.

The first paper in our track on ‘Hei Mookie! Where do I start? The Role of Artifacts in an Unmanned MOOC’, by Ponti uses actor network theory (ANT) to help understand the role artifacts play in unmanned mechanical Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) to facilitate learning in these courses. Using online ethnography, this study attempts to explicate how the designers have delegated facilitation to these objects. The findings indicate that the artifacts do not play simply an intermediary role, but work to redistribute facilitation and reformulate social relations.

Judele, Weinberger, Tsoualtzi & Puhl in their paper on ‘Collaborative Learning in Facebook: Adverse Effects of Individual Preparation’ take a closer look at the way a specially designed Facebook app facilitates learners’ interaction and argumentation skills by making use of scripting. Facebook is used because of its popularity among University students and the authors study its potential use for facilitating collaborative student learning.

The next set of papers explore the use of social media for learning outside formal educational settings. The paper by Halavais, Kyounghee, Havener & Striker on ‘Badges of Friendship: Social Influence and Badge Acquisition on Stack Overflow’ discusses the advantages of badges to networked, self regulated learners. This paper investigates if badge earning is motivated by exposure to others’ achievements within an online community in the question-and-answer site Stack Overflow.

The paper by Velaseuz et al. on ‘Novice Programmers Talking about Projects: What Automated Text Analysis’ examines the possibilities of applying predictive analysis to users’ written communication, looking at comments in an open-ended online social networking forum: Scratch.mit.edu. This exploratory work contributes to work in educational data mining by broadly describing and comparing comments about projects versus other topics in Scratch.

The final paper by Anane & Whitty on ‘Social Network Enhancement for Non-Formal Learning’ argues that the emergence of social networks and their widespread adoption by students has opened new avenues for mediating different modes of learning. This paper proposes a framework for learning, making use of non-formal and informal modes of learning promoting a student-centred and community-based approach liberated from more formal and administrative constraints.