Introduction to Social Media & Learning Minitrack

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This minitrack, presents research that addresses leading edge use of technology, research methods and system design to analyze and support learning through social media. The ability to generate and maintain rich networked connections through social media, social networking, cloud technology, and social computing has a profound impact on the way we work, learn, innovate and develop our identities. The combined papers extend our understanding of networked learning, technology enhanced learning, professional development, and social capital. Especially the openness, accessibility and transparency that characterizes social media in terms of participation, and co-creation that fades traditional boundaries and blends formal, non-formal and informal learning approaches. This raises new questions about learning in education, work and society.

The diversity of papers in this minitrack highlight the various contemporary research trends associated with the capture, analysis and novel applications of social media today. The papers develop or test methods for analyzing social participation 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, Twitter, Facebook or discussion forums, they all seek to understand how they can facilitate learning.

We open our minitrack with a paper on ‘Tweet to learn: Expertise and centrality in conference Twitter networks’ by Gilbert and Paulin. The authors examined the use of Twitter as a discussion backchannel and learning tool at academic conferences. Gilbert and Paulin applied SNA on Twitter data from the LAK2014 conference to study learning networks and the position more knowledgeable others occupy within them.

The next paper by Hood, Watters, Halverstadt and Hood on ‘What happens when animals tweet: A twitter case study at Brookfield Zoo’, the focus is on how the zoo can use social media (in this case Twitter) to engage and stay in touch with the public. In this study, various tweets about the ‘animals’ were made. The tweets provided educational information and the implication of such processes for learning are then explored.

Vorvoreanu, Sears and Johri present a case study on ‘Teaching and learning in a social media ecosystem’. In this paper the authors were interested in how social media can be integrated in college courses in higher education. Based on a mixed-method in-depths case study Vorvoreanu et.al. found that social media use positively influenced learning, motivation, teacher relationship and career success.

The next paper by Di Valentin, Emrich, Lahann, Werth and Loos titled, ‘Adaptive social media skills trainer for vocational education and training: Concept and implementation of a recommender system,’ addresses professional use of social media in an educational context. The researchers argue that in a private context, users are competent in using these technologies, however the converse applies when the tools are used in an educational context (integrating social media in classes, preparing for homework, searching for information). This paper presents the concept and the prototypical implementation of a recommender system for vocational education that is focused on the development of social media skills to help both students and teachers to adopt social media. Recommendations are based on individual’s social media skill level and the current step in the teaching and learning process.

The final paper of this minitrack by Wu, Zhao, Ho and Liang presents work in progress on the ‘Effect of feedback on creativity in social learning contexts’. Based on an extensive literature review they develop a research model to study the effects of feedback through social interactions on creativity in the context of learning. Instead of only looking at direct feedback, Wu, et.al. also incorporated the perception of feedback within their model in order to examine the characteristics of feedback providers and recipients that influence learners’ mental reaction to feedback.

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