

Editorial

Carmen Holotescu and Gabriela Grosseck

University Politehnica/Timsoft, West University, Timisoara, Romania

This issue of Form@re proposes to its readers six interesting articles about one of the most fascinating technologies of the last years: microblogging. The authors, being university teachers, researchers and experts, discuss the implications of Twitter and other microblogging platforms and services in education.

Besides the generic authors' goals to explore ways in which microblogging can be integrated as a teaching technology, this number focuses in particular on the question whether and how microblogging can support learning and enhance students' education.

Thus, in the first article, Ilona Buchem from Beuth University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany, introduces the concept of serendipitous learning in the microblogging context and discusses the potential of unplanned and unexpected discoveries for learning. She underlines the fact that even if so far little is known about how users of Twitter and other microblogging services filter and make sense of the abundant information, the serendipitous browsing may provide valuable opportunities for learning. The paper also discusses possible factors facilitating serendipitous learning and concludes with recommendations for future research.

With the recent popularity of the Twitter microblogging application, a huge amount of frequently self-standing tweets became available for the educational community. From Technical University – Sofia, College of Energetics and Electronics, Malinka Ivanova writes about one of the most appeal terms of microblogging, the usage of hashtags during lectures or seminars and provides to learners some suggestions on how to form and extend their learning network, how to self-organize and how to become active participants in a learning process. Also the author examines several available online tools for hashtags management, underlining how they can assist knowledge gathering and learning network constructing.

As the technology of microblogging is adopted in a variety of contexts, its usefulness becomes more and more compelling and appealing for educational actors. The paper of Carmen Holotescu and Gabriela Grosseck, from University Politehnica and West University, Timisoara, Romania, aims to provide an overall analysis of the microblogging platform Cirip.eu for educational directions such as: information and knowledge management, courses enhancement, delivering online courses, hosting different scientific events, building PLE, etc. The paper presents also the facilities of Cirip.eu as a mobile Social Learning Management System (mSLMS) and how learning design objects can be shared, discussed, improved, and reused on the microblogging platform.

Even at first glance there seems to be only a linguistic connection between microblogging and events (conferences, webinars etc.), the recent literature registered an upward curve in the number of papers that analyse the usage of microblogging as a community event tool. While the vast majority of studies are investigating the use of the most popular microblogging application — Twitter — for group communication, the impact on group participants, quantitative analysis of message types, and motivational aspects, there have been few research and case studies that try to show whether or not there is a possibility to get significant information from a pool of postings. In this context, the paper of an enthusiastic team of researchers from Graz University of Technology, Martin Ebner, Thomas Altmann and Selver Softic, introduces a new tool that analyses the Twitter stream by keyword extraction. One of the biggest e-learning conferences (ED-MEDIA) is examined as an example.

As a result of the Amazing Web 2.0 Project Book, the paper of Terry Freedman explores the value of microblogging in education, by bringing into attention several successful projects, models and examples of good practices in teaching and learning with Twitter. He draws attention to the fact that you don't have to be on Twitter to microblog. Thus, he argues that other services, such as Edmodo or Cirip.eu, have more useful features, especially suited for education. He concludes that «microblogging seems at first glance to be little more than a solution seeking a problem. However, in the hands of a good teacher, it can be a vehicle for profound educational understanding and success».

Finally, the researchers Wolfgang Reinhardt, Matthias Moi and Nina Heinze, from two prestigious institutions from Germany, the University of Paderborn, Computer Science Education Group and the Knowledge Media Research Center, make an analysis of Twitter usage in university courses by illustrating the usage of Twitter with techniques from Social Network Analysis. The authors include in their courses several social media tools such as a social networking site for communication, Twitter for informal message exchange and involvement of external experts, wikis for an open and ongoing documentation of the students work, etc. To analyze the use of social media tools during the seminar the authors used Artefact-Actor-Networks. One conclusion is that: «students will need to get in touch with social media tools as early as possible in their university career in order to make use of the added value for their personal, university and workplace learning».

As the reader will note after reading the papers, the authors do consider that the success key in using microblogging platforms in education is to be aware of the fact that there is a relationship between the user, the technological environment and learning activities and also to avoid the risk of emphasising the technology and not the pedagogy.