An Analysis of Social Media Usage in Teaching and Learning: The Case of SEEU

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Abstract— Social media are becoming the most important tools for interaction among people, where everybody can share, exchange, comment, discuss and create information and knowledge in a collaborative way. The aim of this study is to analyze the use of social media in teaching and learning based on literature study and experiences in different faculties at South East European University. The study examines the impact of the social media applications on personal and teaching use. Based on a representative sample of teaching staff from all the faculties at SEE University, the study investigates their level of awareness and their experiences in the use of social media, as well as the opportunities and value they see for addition of social media applications as part of the teaching process.

The starting point of the study is to examine impacts of personal use of social media on teaching. In this examination phase we evaluate teachers' level of awareness of the various social media applications. Is the teaching staff as well-informed about the existence of the various social media applications as the general population is or their students are? Like the general population, the teachers might use social media for different purposes. This study attempts to differentiate between two different kinds of use: for personal use only, with no connection to teaching responsibilities and for use in teaching and learning. Further aspects on what value, if any, they distinguish in social media applications and how they use them in the teaching process are also explored.

Keywords— social media, teaching, learning, higher education

I. INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH the mission of higher education has remained the same for centuries, the environment in which that mission exists is changing dramatically. Consequently, teachers should come up with innovative strategies that anticipate and embrace this change. The main driver of this change is the digital revolution which has shifted many aspects of teaching and learning.

There is a growing recognition that the skills needed to succeed in the knowledge society today and into the future are different in kind from those that were required earlier. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to familiarize themselves with the contemporary social tools or they will simply not be prepared to serve the learning needs of their students.

Teachers exploring this moving landscape will also be able to discover the real potential of social media to transform drastically the pedagogical basis of their teaching experience, giving them tools that they can use in order to create truly adapted and flexible learning experiences for students [1].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many current studies suggest that the high take up of social media applications as an addition to formal educational settings offers new opportunities for innovating and modernizing education institutions and for preparing learners for the 21st century [1],[11], [12].

While social media's start was for personal use, it has evolved to be used in virtually all domains. From a preliminary check, it appears that almost every college and university in the world has adopted some form of social media, using it for general outreach, to attract potential students, maintain alumni relations, and increase institutional reputation and pride [2].

A primary reason to adopt social media in the classroom is because it is familiar to almost everybody and also because it doesn't cost and requires minimal training. One of the largest surveys of social media in higher education to date shows that universities can lever social media into the classroom and ensure its used more than it is now [3][4].

Some academic experts believe that social media can be used as an effective teaching tool in higher education because of its ease of use, ready availability, and individual affordability and network effects.

Facebook has been used in university courses to facilitate teacher/student discussion, and wikis and blogs have been used to collaborate on projects and receive rapid feedback [5].

Some courses have also used YouTube as a platform for students to create and share videos for their course [6]. In other courses, students have used Twitter to discuss course topics during class, with Tweets being displayed on a large screen to encourage cross group communication [7].

Not only can social media facilitate peer communication and collaboration, it can facilitate communication between students and teachers. Studies have shown that students are more likely to communicate with their professors if they are Facebook friends with them [8].

In general, the research conducted in the field identifies four main dimensions in which social media can lead to innovations in teaching and learning [11]:

1) Content. Social media allow students to access a enormous variety of learning materials in most of the cases free of charge. It supports teaching and learning in a lifelong learning scale; it contributes to fairness and inclusion and increases standards on Higher Education

institutions to improve the quality and availability of their course content.

2) Creation. Social media gives the possibility to the students to create digital content on their own and publish it online, increasing a vast resource of user-created content from which learners and teachers can jointly benefit, also encouraging more active and proactive approaches to learning.

3) Connecting. Social media is a network that connects students with one another, and to their teachers, allowing them to share their knowledge and at the same time have access to specific and targeted knowledge in a given field of interest.

4) Collaboration. Social media makes possible collaboration between learners and teachers on a given task or project or a joint objective, pooling resources and gathering the expertise of a group of people working towards a common objective.

III. STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Social media are becoming more and more widespread in higher education. The trend can be observed in many higher education institutions around the world [9][10]. There are many ways of appropriating online social media for teaching and learning. Higher education institutions including SEEU are putting their efforts into developing such environments. The aim of this study is to observe the personal (private) as well as the use of social media web sites for teaching by the teaching staff at SEEU.

In this study, teachers' use of social media as a tool for enhancing the teaching and learning process was explored. Like the wider public, teachers may use social media web sites for numerous reasons. This research will distinguish and observe the influence of the social media web sites for personal and for teaching use.

Additional information on the value that teachers identify in social media web sites and how they employ them in their teaching classes will be also explored.

A more detailed explanation of the survey sample and design is provided below.

A. General Information about the sample

The analysis is conducted by using data gathered from a survey carried out at SEEU on the years 2011 and 2013. The survey has been delivered by Google form via domain email to all academic staff at SEEU. Considering the sample size, the data consist of 82 observations for 2011 and 36 observations for 2013.

The survey covers several well-known social media like Facebook, Youtube, Twitter, LinkedIn, SlideShare. Blogs, wikis, video and podcasts were included as well.

This research involves academic and administrative staff engaged in the teaching process from all faculties at South East European University (SEEU). The survey sample represents 59% of all full time academic and administrative staff involved in teaching at SEEU what provided a sufficient number of responses for this study.

Additionally, in order to indentify the trends and drawbacks in the use of social media sites at SEEU, for several topics the study compares data from the survey carried out on 2011 with the latest results from 2013 among the staff.

B. Survey Design

The survey included a mixture of open and closed questions. The closed questions were check boxes where respondents could select one response from a range of possible answers. Open questions allowed respondents to fill in a text box with as much information as necessary. The survey questions were arranged into 3 sections as listed below.

Section 1 - General. On this part were gathered some general data about the profile of the respondents such as: teaching experience, department and age.

Section 2 - Social Media Usage. This section is the central part of the survey and included more detailed questions regarding the specific social media tools and their importance in improving teaching and learning process.

Section 3 - Interviews. This part had open questions regarding the use of social media in teaching and learning. The responders gave their personal opinions, experiences and views about social medial use in teaching and learning process.

IV. SURVEY RESULTS ON THE USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING AT SEEU

In this part are presented and discussed the results gained from the survey on the teacher's use of social media for teaching and learning at SEEU. These results include data from the survey carried out in 2011 and 2013.
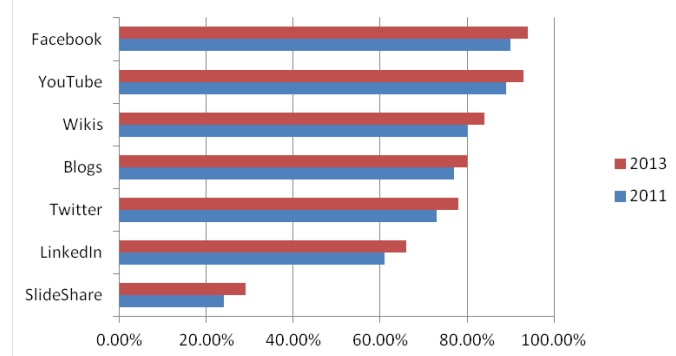

Fig.1 Teacher awareness of social media sites

A. Teachers' awareness with popular social media sites

Initially was observed the level of teachers' awareness for several most popular social media sites (Fig.1).

As it can be expected given the high level of awareness of social media among the general population, 90% of the

teachers report they are aware of social sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Around 80% report they know about blogs and wikis. The awareness level fails for other less common sites, with 70% saying that they know of Twitter, 60% LinkedIn and a lower percentage around 30% report they are aware of presentation-sharing site SlideShare. Also in general there is a slight enhancement of approximately 5% higher awareness for the social media sites from 2011 to 2013.
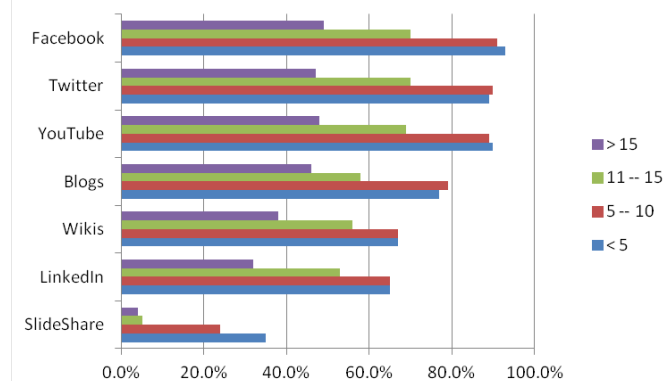

Fig.2 Teachers' use of social media in teaching by experience in teaching

Based on the fact that social media is a more or less contemporary issue, the survey also investigates whether contemporariness influences in differences in social media awareness by teachers age or by years of experience in teaching. When examined by experience in teaching, teachers' responses indicated that there is no significant difference in the awareness of social media. Regardless their experience in teaching the awareness levels among teachers was nearly universal. But there was a major difference on the level of usage of the social media in teaching process based on the years of experience. The study showed that the more experienced teachers were more reluctant towards application of the social media in their teaching (Fig.2). And on the other side the younger staff with less experience in teaching adopt a variety of social media in their classes.
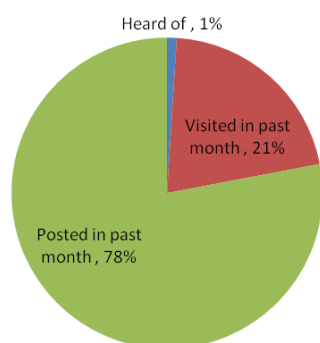

Fig. 3 Teacher personal use of social media

B. Teachers' personal use of social media sites

In this part of the survey was explored the teachers' personal use of social media sites. Actually it's not the same if you have just heard of some social media sites and if you make use of these sites.

To discover these elements, SEEU teaching staff was asked about their use of social media for personal purposes. With the exception of those "Heard of" with 1%, teachers' personal use of social media sites is quite high. As shown in Fig.3, 21% of all teachers just visited a social media site within the past month for personal use, and 78% visited and posted some content during that period. At the same time, teachers' use is not confined to a single site. The majority of teachers have visited more than one social media site, with nearly 28% visiting three or more sites.

Social media use among teachers does not consist only of passive reading and/or viewing. Teachers who posted some content during the past month are doing so on more than one site. However, even though the level of teachers' awareness does not vary with age or with experience in teaching, the usage level does.

Following on, as we can see from Fig.4, teachers have different patterns of personal use for different social media oriented sites. Based on the data from the survey carried out on the 2013, 70% of all teachers' visited Facebook during the past month. This is closely followed by visits to YouTube (62%). The visiting frequency is much lower for other social media sites, having 37% of the teachers visited Wikis, 30% LinkedIn and 22% Twitter, while the visiting rates for SlideShare is 11%.

The posting frequencies are much lower than the visiting ones. Almost half of the teachers who visited Facebook also posted (70% visited and 34% posted). Posting rates for other sites are much lower (Fig.4).
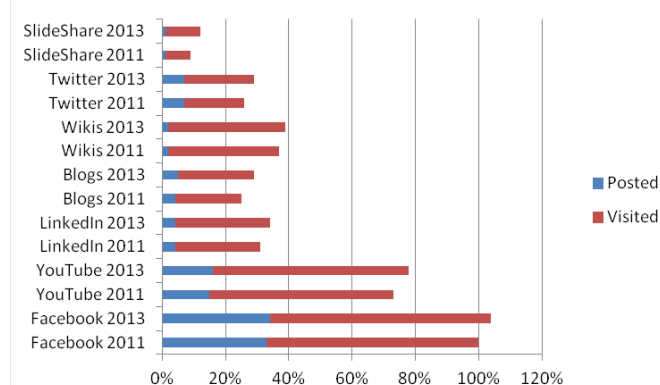

Fig. 4 Teachers personal social media use by site

C. Teachers' use of social media sites for teaching purposes

The majority of surveyed SEEU teachers are well aware of social media, and most are using them for personal purposes. But, in order to identify if they also think that social media can be a part of their course syllabuses, teachers were asked to identify their use of social media in their classes, posting for

student use out of class, and use as part of student homework or in class assignments. It is obvious, based on the results, that teachers include considerably social media in their teaching classes. Online video from either YouTube or other online video sites are seen as having the greatest value for use in classes. This corresponds with the usage pattern of those sites, where online video is the most-used form of social media in courses.

As shown in Fig.5, almost half of the overall usage of social media in teaching is on online videos and the other half is distributed among the other social sites (Facebook, Blogs, Twitter and Wikis). These results show good and active use for classroom and out of class activities and comparing with the results from the 2011 show a positive trend.
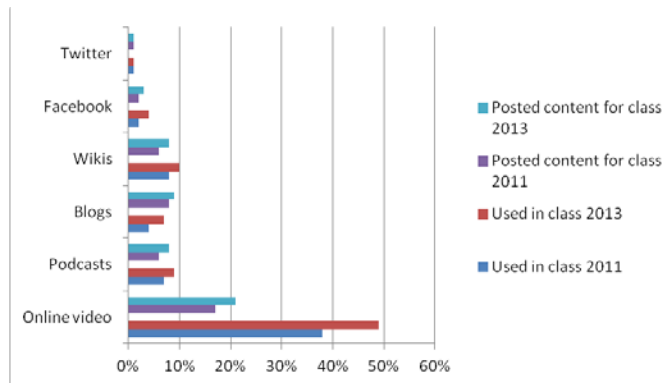

Fig.5 Teachers use of social media for teaching

The result is also strong for the level of integration of social media into course assignments (Fig.6). 23% of teachers have assigned students to read or view social media as part of course assignments and 18% have assigned students to comment on or post to social media sites.
In total, 52% of teachers report using social media for some aspect of a course they are teaching.
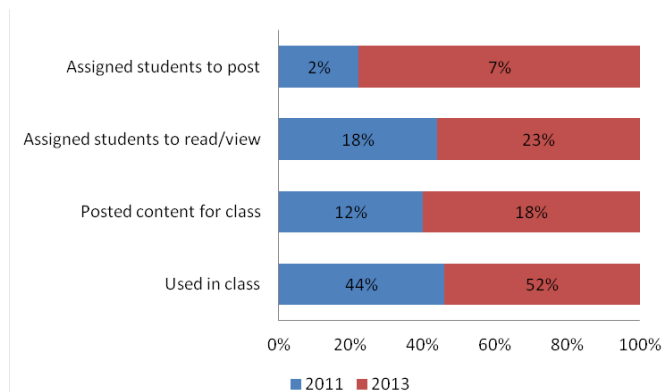

Fig. 6 Teachers use of social media for student assignments during the lesson

D. Estimations and barriers

Regardless the positive approach for social media inclusion in teaching and learning, the process itself is very time consuming and faces a lot of barriers. Participants of the survey indicated that their number one concern of using social media in the classroom is the truthfulness of student submissions, followed closely by concerns about privacy. The data from the 2013 are to some extend more positive than data from 2011, but yet more than 60% of teachers have concerns regarding the privacy; more than 70% do not trust the student submissions, around 40% are not satisfied with the support from the institution and the integration with the LMS (Fig. 7).
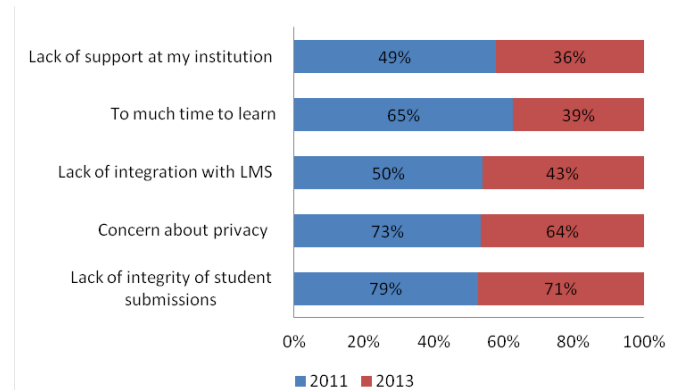

Fig. 7 Teacher views of barriers to use of social media in teaching

Even though teachers had a lot of comments on the barriers for the adoption of the social media into their teaching, still they find significant value in many social media sites for improvement of teaching and learning (Fig.8). When asked about the potential of social media for positive change in education, more than 70 % of the teachers answer agree or strongly agree. Teachers opinion on the overall value of social media for teaching via the statement "Video, podcasts, blogs, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching" is answered with 52% 'Agree' and 18 % 'Strongly agree', with 22% neutral and just 4% of them disagreeing with the statement. There is slightly less agreement but still a majority of teachers (68%) agreeing that social media can be valuable for collaborative learning.
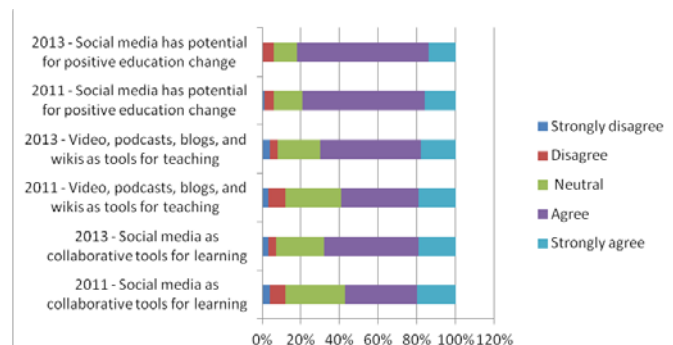

Fig.8 Teachers opinions on the value of social media for teaching

V. CONCLUSION

The study showed that social media are already affecting the ways in which teachers find, create, share and learn knowledge, through the media opportunities and in collaboration with each other.

Teachers find social media as a very useful tool for enhancing teaching and learning. It is important to think about the characteristics of social media that were mentioned above and think about how this relates to classrooms. Almost all teachers (participants in the survey) are aware of the major social media sites; more than 75% visited a social media site within the past month and nearly 25% posted content.

However there is a large diversity among the patterns of use from one social media site to another. For personal use, Facebook is both the most visited site. YouTube and online videos are almost half of the overall usage of social media for online videos in teaching.

The study also pointed out the teachers' difficulties and concerns in the use of social media. Most teachers are concerned with the time it requires. The main concerns in teachers' use of social media in teaching and learning are: privacy and integrity. More than 70% report the lack of integrity of student submissions, and over 60% report privacy concerns as an important barrier.

Regardless of those concerns, however, teachers believe that social media sites offer value in teaching. The majority report they believe that video, podcasts, and wikis are valuable tools for teaching and also that social media sites can be valuable tools for collaborative learning.

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