

## The Educational Social Network in the Structure of a University's Web Resources

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**Abstract:** The study shows different models an educational portal in a university and argues for the model of an educational social network as the correct choice. It describes the characteristics of an educational social network of a university as a portal based on use of Web 2.0 social services. It also describes the features of user registration, communication, collaboration, organization of educational materials and the role of these features in the development of educational sites. To illustrate the feasibility of the proposed approach for the development of an educational portal, we describe the educational social network of the Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University.

**Key words:** Internet, university's educational portal, social services, Web 2.0, educational social network, educational process

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### INTRODUCTION

On the internet which has arisen from a sub-soil of research laboratories and universities, a traditionally noticeable place has been taken by sites of educational institutions. This is true both for the history of the Internet in the world as well as in the context of the emergence and development of a global computer network in certain countries in particular the Russian Federation. The first mention of Russian university websites is dated 1994 which occurred only a year after creation of the first graphic browser and at the beginning of the explosive growth in popularity of the World Wide Web. More than ten Russian institutions of higher education are present in an archival copy of the internet of 1996. Now, all educational institutions of the Russian Federation have their own sites which is not only the tradition but also a legislative norm. Thus, large educational institutions (primarily universities) are not limited to creating only an official site but may create a series of related online resources that support the educational process, provide for the possibility of expanded representation in the global computer network of faculties, departments and other University divisions, various projects, etc. The key place among such resources often is taken by the educational portal of university, providing the possibility of learning with use of resources of the educational portal. Thus, on the basis of such a portal, the model of an educational portal is chosen as the one with educational materials (informational educational resource) or the model of a portal of electronic training (the automated training system).

From the point of view, the aforementioned models of creation of an educational portal while allowing important pedagogical problems to be solved, nevertheless badly

correspond to the requirements of informatization of education as they don't promote the strengthening of the motivation and personal orientation of the educational process and in general, substantially duplicate the informational resources of the internet which are already available to students. In this regard, we see the perspective model of an educational portal of the university based on use of Web 2.0 social services as providing new conditions of educational interaction of teachers and students on the internet.

### THEORETICAL BASIS

The appearance of the term Web 2.0 is usually associated with O'Reilly (2005)'s study in which the researcher discusses the features of a large number of sites of a new generation combined with some general principles for creation and development, calling it the Web 2.0 phenomenon. In the new principles of the internet, defining the essence of the second generation of Web technologies, the key principals are:

- Understanding the web as a platform. This principle means that internet sites should not be seen only in terms of the information they provide but also as a network application that allows users to place their own resources, customer interactions, algorithmic data processing, etc., Web 2.0 services according to O'Reilly (2005) act as intermediaries between users and their online experience. It is based on the principles partner architecture, meaning the users' resources are utilized in the organization of network interaction. Internet users in this case are co-developers of network resources and the Web 2.0 environment for network services

- The principle of a long tail which connects the features of development of the web sphere of the internet where a considerable part of all resources is provided by a large number of small sites. In this case, Web 2.0 makes new technologies available to each user such as social networks which are popular with a large number of people. Web 2.0 services are services for specific users they provide a special personal program environment which allows individuals and network communities to build activities in a computer network
- Using the collective intelligence: this is the principle of strengthening the capacity of web technologies through the experiences of many users, largely described as the principle of the wisdom of the masses or the smart crowd. The personal actions of many users in Web 2.0 allows for the saturation of the internet by the user content, provides for the formation of communications between separate pages and documents and allows the realization of many approaches connected with information processing on the basis of the opinions of a large number of people in the practice. At the same time, enriching the online resource with the users' information should be part of the network's architecture. This means that the Web 2.0 services become better only because they are actively being used.

### **JOINT WORK**

Accounting for the joint activity of users in the building of Web 2.0 services, determines that these services are known as social. According to Wodtke (2007), a social web is a digital space where the data about the relationship between people as well as other types of data which provides values is important (Wodtke, 2007). The development of this idea is presented by Patarakin (2006) who argued that Web 2.0 social services are the modern facilities and network software which supports group interactions (Patarakin, 2006). The actions of users in social services include: personal actions of participants and communications between the participants; records of thoughts, notes and annotations of other people's texts; posting links to online resources and an indication of their ratings; posting photos and videos; messaging, etc. (Patarakin, 2006). Patarakin (2006) calls such actions of users simple actions and connects them with the formation of network communities which are formed from the bottom up by the small efforts of a great number of independent participants.

We agree with Patarakin (2006) opinion that Web 2.0 social services had considerably simplified process of

creating materials and of their publication in the network. In Web 2.0 everyone can not only get access to digital collections but also take part in the formation of their own network content which is created by millions of people which in itself leads to the decentralization of network content. Activities and communications are closely connected among themselves in social services (Patarakin, 2006).

We find confirmation of the aforementioned views on the social type of development of the internet in works of other researchers which state for example that the main difference between Web 2.0 and the first generation web technologies was that the latter was weak in its availability of opportunities for users' self-expression (Dots, 2006). It is noted that until Web 2.0 users could communicate in forums, chats and other public places but only a few could create their own sites in order to express, themselves as fully as possible. The era of the traditional web is an era of sites, instead of people. The center of the second generation web are the people and the possibility of their self-expression. It is an era when internet is based not websites but on people, their knowledge and interactions (Sergeev, 2013).

### **IMPLEMENTATION IN PRACTICE**

Now in the social services of Web 2.0 we include blogs, wiki, social containers (photo and video services, bookmarking services, etc.) various content creating network services, work services with network documents, etc. (Sergeev, 2013). Each type of social services is focused on working with their type of content. In the fullest, complete look at the various types of content, the services of social networks which have become extremely popular in modern internet are included. Among such services in the Russian part of the internet, networks such as "VKontakte" and "Odnoklassniki" should be noted. The international leaders of services for social networks are Facebook and Google Plus.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICES OFFERED BY SOCIAL NETWORKS**

The attention to the services of social networks in relation to the development of an educational portal of a university is due to their opportunities and the special characteristics they have which create favorable conditions for the organization of interactions between teachers and students and the implementation of educational projects in a computer network. There is a list of possibilities of social network services that have a special value in the context of the development of an educational portal of a university:

- Registration of users and the formation of personal accounts. As a rule, registration in social networks means the use of a real name and surname, the indication of places with which the person is connected (school, higher education institution, the place of residence, works, etc.) and real photo must be uploaded. The reasoning for this is due to the fact that a social network is the means for communication between people with whom you have previously met or are planning to meet. This same feature of social networks permits the statement that the activity of users in social networks is less depersonalized than on the internet in general where it is possible to act under an assumed name and to keep all “virtual” activities separate from “real” life in the real world
- Searching for people and forming a network of personal relations. This is an important feature of social networking services, emphasizing the phenomenon of the internet as a social environment which is based not on sites but people. This model provides opportunities for the self-realization of each member, obtaining actual information from other participants of internet communications using opportunities of personal correspondence by means of a computer network
- Publication of notes, photos, video and other digital content. On social networks, these opportunities are given in a complex and provide various models of self-realization in an informational environment. On users’ personal pages, it is possible to place notes with thoughts, statuses, moods, various comments as well as photos, audio files, videos and other objects. Such resources usually necessitate feedback when other users can leave the comments to each other
- Creation of own thematic communities. On social networks, participants can create their own sections presented as thematic communities (groups) which can unite many users on the basis of common interests, collaboration in information placement, planning and discussion of common causes, actions, etc. Thematic communities on social networks have certain contours, membership and well traced communications with users and other communities. There are convenient tools for users on activity tracking in communities, recommendatory mechanisms for the invitation of new members

#### **THE EDUCATIONAL SOCIAL NETWORK OF VSSPU**

Considering the large potential and the characteristics of the services of social networks stated above in the Volgograd State Social and Pedagogical

University (VSSPU) within the creation of an educational portal an idea has been put forth of building the portal with a social network base.

The educational portal of VSSPU (<http://edu.vspu.ru>) is a socio-educational network based on the social development of the internet and the creation of online educational resources which provide the possibility of communication, self-realization, p which contains information and helps organize co-curricular activities between teachers and students on the internet.

As with any social network, the educational portal of VSSPU provides: the registration of users and the creation of personal pages; the publication of notes, documents, photos, videos and other digital content; the communication and exchange of electronic materials in groups; the creation of new groups; the creation of autonomous sites within the uniform platform of an educational portal.

As we see from a technical point of view, the offered educational portal includes the users’ pages, groups and also autonomous sites. Communications between users of the portal are based on a “friends” mechanism which allows information flow to be targeted at a specific audience in order to ensure the interaction of students and teachers in the implementation of educational activities and projects of the various contents. The concept of portal development suggests that the user and groups pages are also resources for members’ portfolios, wiki-pages, tools for completing school assignments, quality control of educational content development, surveys, etc. The portal should unite all participants of educational activities of the university which means that the use of its resources should be available to users of both that portal and other social services.

#### **RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

The development of the university’s educational portal has been conducted since 2011. In 2014, there are >3000 people registered on the portal students and teachers of VSSPU as well as teachers and pupils of Volgograd schools. The portal has created and actively used sections devoted to the study of specific disciplines, practices, total state certification, advanced training courses and regularly operating seminars. Current experience with the use of this portal shows the high efficiency of this approach for the implementation of e-support educational projects and overall educational processes, implemented in VSSPU.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The result of the introduction of a social educational network as a university educational portal gives the

chance to show visually that the ideas of the social development of a system of global communications actively finds ways of real implementation in practice. The modern concept of the internet, based on the phenomenon described by the second-generation web, provides real and extremely wide possibilities of the activity of individual users and online communities, communication and the building of social ties based on computer communications. As we see using Web 2.0 services and the participation of internet users in network communities is connected not only with opportunities of obtaining information but first of all with opportunities for communication, comprehension of other people's experiences and one's own self-realization all of which are extremely important for education and direct considerable attention from the pedagogical community to opportunities of new technologies.

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