THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN E-LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY. THE BLOG AS A FUTURE E-LEARNING TOOL

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Abstract
In the last decades, the information technology has developed at a rapid pace, changing people's perceptions, reality and needs. This has created a virtual environment, called social media, which is spread all over the globe and it is in a continuous expansion. The social media covers accessible web tools that people interact with, create, valorise information and have online reactions towards everything that happens around them. Some of these easily accessible web tools are blogs, initially called weblogs, with a short history in comparison with the internet, but very important in terms of social impact. Blogs led to the emergence of new ways of working and training for students and other interested stakeholders. Thus, in the recent years, they registered an increase in student recruitment. Long distance learning generated a high increase in the university environment, in terms of new technologies, elements of "e-learning", "virtual library" and/or "virtual university". The EC (European Commission) sustains this type of education for university studies in the context of creation a European knowledge-based society. The methodological section of this research contains an analysis based on questionnaires responses from University students in Romania, regarding e-learning, blogs, time spent on the internet, and how often do they use e-learning methods. The purpose of this research is to acknowledge to what extent the educational environment is influenced by blogs and how well known and attractive is the "e-learning" concept among Romanian students. As well as the sustainability of learning online. This study is useful for students, professors and all individuals involved in the academic and learning environments.

Keywords
Blog; social; e-learning; students; internet; online.

JEL Classification
L82, L86, I21, O35.

Introduction

The desire for something new and exciting conducted to the emergence of social networks. These networks offer an active virtual environment where people are involved in a continuous traffic, resulted by interactivity and information. The facility of communicating through a simple platform has become increasingly popular, having as a result an explosion of social media, in the context where more than half of the world's population lives in the urban environment (Barriuso and Urbano, 2020). On the web, social media is a complicated term that can have different forms, being often utilized to depict the social aspect or the art of communicating in media; a phrase of two words - that has one meaning. Media means advertising and transmitting ideas or information via different channels, while social implies the interplay between users in a community or group. "Social media" includes communication platforms resulted and maintained by interpersonal interaction between people, utilizing specific procedures or methods.

With the progress of information and ICT (communication technology), mixing teaching portfolios on sites like blogs have become very popular. A blog is a site where entries as text, image, audio or video are posted in a journal style and shared in reverse chronological sequence. A classical blog combines all formats (text, video, images etc.), and refers to other blogs, sites, or other content related to its topic. Teaching portfolios on blogs are, however, not just an exposure of digital assemblies of artefacts. The technical sketch of teaching portfolios on blogs produces opportunities for inquiry, discussion, reflection and feedback in a social web environment and allows collaborative information sharing and learning among users. The technology behind the blogs allows users to record their personal voice, to have critical thinking and to reflect more. It also unfolds a virtual environment to provide or maintain the learning action within a community of users who are connected by some common particularities such as values, interests, identity features, beliefs and goals (Hramiak, 2010; Ramage, 2010). This builds up an OLC (online learning community). Crosta and McConnell (2006) clarifies that 'a LC (learning community) is a cohesive group that incorporates a culture of studying' and the group members have a shared task with regards to learning. The learning method is learner-centred. Other participants such as instructors and mentors may also take part in a learning group and have the role of an administrator or facilitator. Group members act as one to work through and comprehend problems (Whalley, 1998) participating in significant exchange of ideas to build knowledge (Watkins, 2005). Through cooperation, the relationship between the members is consolidated and a powerful bond is created between them (McConnell, 2006; Vrasidas and Zembylas, 2004). Dewey (1938) says that learning is a dynamic process in which students are highly involved. Cognitive development is enhanced by interaction with the environment and others (Vygotsky, 1978). With the aid of social interaction, the more capable learners can lead others into cognitive studying that may not take place if they work separately (Sugar and Bonk, 1998; Barab et al., 2001). The aim of the blog is to 'encourage a reflective, cooperative and dialogic surrounding for academic and professional progresses of the learners (Tang and Lam, 2014). Is imperative for learners to elaborate their own teaching portfolios and effectively participate in interactions through their TP (teaching practicum). To create their portfolios, learners have to upload and save their curriculum, video-lessons, begin discussion and exchange opinions by writing and responding to different comments on the blog.

Theoretical frame of learning

According to Richard E. Mayer, "learning is the relatively permanent change in a person's knowledge or behaviour due to experience. This definition has three components: 1) the duration of the change is long-term rather than short-term; 2) the locus of the change is the content and structure of knowledge in memory or the behaviour of the learner; 3) the cause

of the change is the learner's experience in the environment rather than fatigue, motivation, drugs, physical condition or physiologic intervention".

Learning methods
The Internet is a source of resources for learning anytime, anywhere, which allows extensive flexibility in learning processes. However, face-to-face (F2F) communication is still considered the richest medium because of its potential for intensive interpersonal communication and building social relationships. According to the related literature, both approaches have some limitations. Dziuban, Hartman, Juge, Moskal, and Sorg (2006) and Rivera, McAlister, and Rice (2002) examined student satisfaction while using these learning methods, like F2F, fully online, and blended, and found that the blended learning model produced the highest satisfaction scores. Many research studies further suggest that blended approaches provide the most powerful learning opportunities for students by combining the benefits of both (Gedik, Kiraz and Ozden, 2006; Card and Horton, 2000; Osguthorpe and Graham, 2003). If teachers are going to be prepared for future generations, they need to be trained as confident and competent users of F2F, fully online, and blended learning environments. These are also the requirements for creating new talent pools, as stated by Foerster-Pastor et al. (2019). Researchers have suggested that a great manner to accomplish this aim is to encourage teachers to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in different classroom environments (Adelsberger, Bick and Pawlowski, 2000; Goktas and Demirel, 2012). The current belief is that this can only be achieved through appropriate training which provides ICT related courses designed for the individual's competency level. If that criterion is met, then scholars argue that ICT training should enable prospective teachers to more effectively transfer their knowledge, skills, and experiences to their future students (Brush, Greene and Hart, 2001).

Methods implemented in Romania
To be in trend with technology, most of the Romanian educational institutions implemented several new methods for learning. Pupils and students can access the internet from anywhere, reading important information about their study schedule and downloading files which contain homework, courses, slideshows etc. Most institutions use their own platforms, where courses and information about exams, degrees, schedule etc. is uploaded for students or groups of students, regularly. As well, students can download study materials anytime. Usually, students receive e-mails to verify the platforms. In some cases, the professors send study materials to several students who pass them further to their colleagues through e-mail. Students themselves get enrolled and create groups on different platforms, such as Google, Facebook, LinkedIn, Edmodo, Slack, Skype, Zoom etc., in order to discuss and share study materials between them. With regards to blogs, postgraduate students use them mostly, for their research. All of them are foreign blogs, written in English. Unfortunately, Romanian educational blogs do not exist for the moment that does not belong to any institution. There are just several blogs which offer general information about school.

Methods implemented abroad
In the developed countries of the world, such as Germany, Norway, Denmark, Austria, England, America, Australia etc., students are more open and use often blogs as study materials. Their openness is due to the different educational system (more emphasis on the practical part, to be in accordance with the theoretical one), quality of life, easy access to technology, mentality, perception, long distance. The easier access to technology offers the opportunity to present information in completely new and engaging ways. Their learning environments have changed. Educational institutions offer the infrastructure and technology in order to motivate young people in studying. The Rolex Learning Centre in Lausanne, is a

great example, measuring 20.000 square metres. This Centre aims for a successful symbiosis of creativity and learning through the creation of a modern space that makes it possible for individual and collective learning to flourish. SANAA Architects, Ryue Nishizawa and Kazuyo Sejima, have created a true learning environment. The floor of the Centre bulges accordingly, circular courtyards offer views out and back into the building and do away with the traditional split between the interior and exterior. The library of Lausanne College has similarly rejected outmoded rules to create an environment that encourages self-motivated and self-organized learning. As well as the study materials, students have access to 860 individual workstations, teamwork rooms, a career centre, modern technology, platforms, blogs etc. Students are able to study privately, with the help of professors and lecturers and of course with each other. They operate in a digital environment, with technology playing a central role. Similar conditions are at *The Ørestad College*, in Copenhagen, The Portsmouth Business School, UK, Campus O2, Graz, in The University of Wuppertal, Germany, and so on. Some of the foreign study blogs are futurelearn.com, theelearningcoach.com, open2study.com, distancelearningportal.com etc. They contain information about domains studied in universities.

The digital generations of learning
The new generations have been socialized in a world of digital media, so they are completely prepared regarding the digital study methods. This know-how made students competitive on external markets. A worldwide survey of students and recent graduates commissioned by Cisco found just how ingrained digital culture is with young people. New technology is changing the amount of information students are using, and its form. Therefore, technology is and will be a catalyst of knowledge.

Methodology
The methodology section presents the analysis of the survey type questionnaire answers. This questionnaire was addressed to Romanian students studying in Bucharest, and its purpose was to acknowledge to what extent the Romanian educational environment is affected by blogs and how attractive is the e-learning concept among Romanian students. As well its purpose was to find the future trends according to Romanian students' preferences, and the alignment to other European states. Thus far, blogs were less attractive as E-Learning instruments, and were used for personal purposes.
In 2016, Romania had 531.590 students, which 464.650 were studying in public institutions. In Bucharest were studying 172.038 students in the same year.
The number of faculties was 560, including Bucharest with 159.
General information about respondents
The number of respondents was 129. They are students who attend bachelor, master, MBA, and PhD. studies within the capital of Romania educational institutions. The most of them are attending master studies (48.8%) and the least of them MBA studies (4.6%). The ones who attend bachelor and PhD. studies have an equal percentage (23.3%). The general specializations they are pursuing are Economy (37.2%), Business Administration (11.6%), Engineering (23.3%), Science (9.3 %), Legal (7%), Marketing (4.7%), History (2.3%), Arts (2.3%), Human Resources (2.3%). Most of them have opted for campus learning (81.4%), the rest for distance learning (18,6%). Their age category is between 18-25 years (25.6%), 26-35 years (67.4%), and over 35 years old (7%). The majority of them are from the middle class (83.7%), followed by the superior class (11.6%), and the inferior class (7%).
Use of internet and blogs as e-learning tools analysis
According to figure no. 1, most of the respondents are using the internet between 4 and 7 hours per day (53.5%), followed by the ones who use it 1-3 h per day (25.6%), over 7 h per day (16.3%) and less than 1 h (4.7%). The preferred devices in accessing the internet are the

smartphones (64%), followed by the laptops or PCs (36%). None of the students is using a tablet. The preferred study instruments are the modern, digital ones, including blogs (19%), due to technology and younger generations.
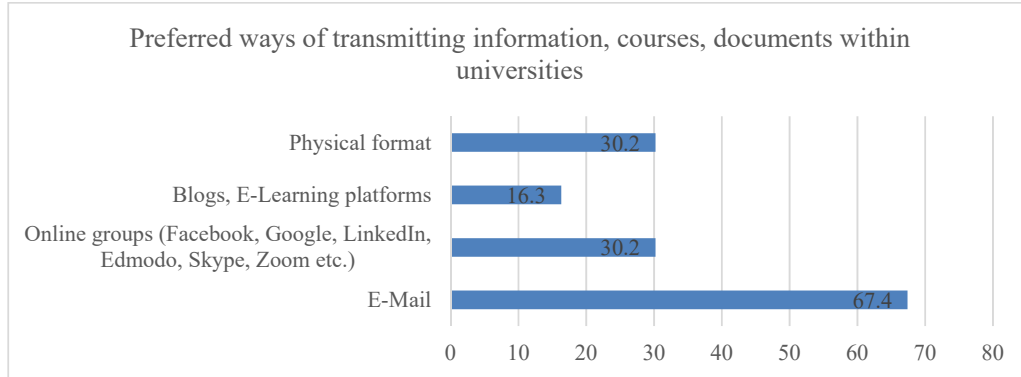

Fig. no. 1 Preferred ways of transmitting information within universities
Source: Author's own research

According to the figure above, the primary way of transmitting information, courses, documents and other study materials is via e-mail (47%). The majority of universities in Romania are using the e-mail as the primary tool of communication and distribution. Unfortunately, blogs are at the bottom of the list (11%).
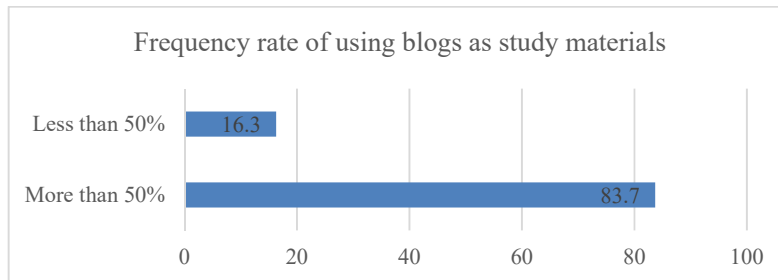

Fig. no. 2 Frequency rate of using blogs as study materials
Source: Author's own research

From the chart above results that students use blogs as study materials, but not necessarily for their exams, but rather for personal development and purposes.
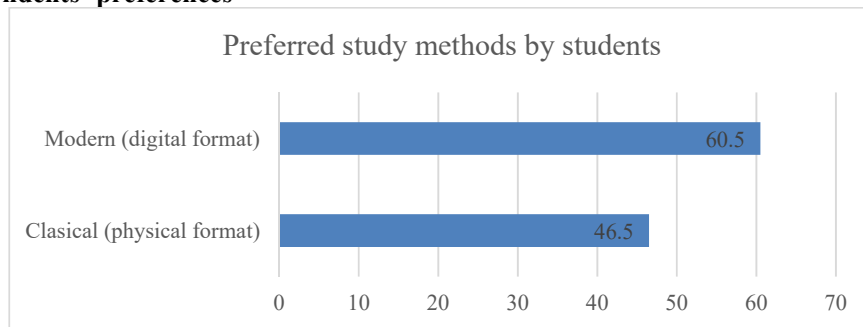**Respondents' preferences**

Fig. no. 3 Preferred study methods
Source: Author's own research

According to the values related above, Romanian students desire the modern methods for study being more interactive and attractive.
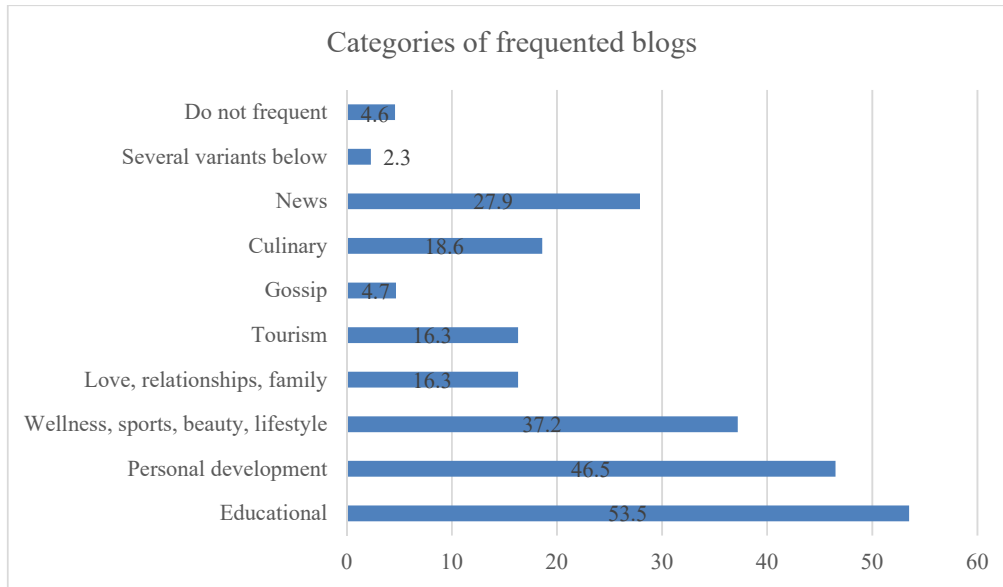

Fig. no. 4 Categories of frequented blogs
Source: Author's own research

From the values observed in the figure above, it can be deducted that students in Romania prefer educational blogs the most (24%), followed by the ones that contain personal development information (21%), and wellness, lifestyle (16%). The least preferred are the ones with gossip (2%). This means that they are interested in personal growth and life improvement.

Conclusions

To summarize, Romanian students use blogs for personal development and growth rather than university studies or matters. Usually, universities opt for e-mail or online platforms in order to distribute the courses and study materials. Some of them recommend different external blogs, for additional information and completion. But for the moment, the present infrastructure and conditions do not offer the opportunity for students to interact constantly with technology inside of the campus and apart from their own devices.

Blogs are perceived more like sites which are outside the university sphere and as a relaxing reading, in their spare time. This happens due to most bloggers, who are ordinary people. Some of them not being related with the university field at all.

In comparison with other European countries, many Romanian universities opt for the classical teaching methods, especially the technical ones, which is rarer abroad.

Blogs and E-Learning platforms are known among students but are not taken seriously as study materials or instruments due to the lack of information in this regard. Exceptions are those who are specialized in these domains and try to gather additional information for oneself.

Regarding future trends, blogs could be the future for studying. Romanian students are open to new and fun ways to study, that stimulates their mind and thinking. As well as helping them to memorize quickly interesting information easier, due to blogs' interactive nature. The new generations are more accustomed with the digital era. Therefore, the demand in this direction

will increase. Besides, the more will become sustainable aware, the merrier will embrace this kind of learning, realising it can be a method of reducing the use of natural resources by using less the car or other means of transportation. Students are sensitive to this kind of details and will incline being more active in the learning process.

In order to attract an increased number of students into E-Learning blogs, Romanian universities should enrich their campuses with different devices that offer interactive, fun experiences, along with the construction of different blogs. As well as to encourage the students within the same university or not, from different sections to create several blogs in this regard, promoting teamwork as well. Romania could easily align with other European states, due to its young great resources that are ready to withstand any challenges.

Acknowledgement

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