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Problems experienced on educational social networks: disorientation

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to identify the disorientation tendencies of students on social networks and propound the points which should be highlighted in order to avert disorientation while creating a learning environment in those areas. A finite sample size of thirty undergraduate students studying at the Department of Science Teaching at Faculty of Education of Gazi University in Turkey has been selected for the purpose of this study. As a result of this research, the steps which are noteworthy regarding disorientation on a social network will be clarified.

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1. Introduction

Thanks to growing technologies, social networks are defined as the entire activities used by a group of people (Hamid et al., 2009). Researches indicate that popularity of communication among people on social networks has been significantly increased in recent years (Levy, 2007). Usage of social networks not in daily life only, but in education also has become an excessively emphasized issue. In this case, to be able to create an effective education environment on social networks, some noteworthy problems one of which is “Disorientation” need to be considered.

Disorientation is defined as a case of unawareness of being situated in an environment, having no idea about how one has arrived there, how to move from there, and where to go (Elm & Woods, 1985; Conklin, 1987). According to Hammond (1993), the inability to understand the structure of the environment, and the failure in making relations among its parts are listed as some reasons of disorientation. Along the same line, Karadeniz (2005) has stated that medium related reasons of disorientation, which are poor system and interface design, ill-structured background, and redundant links, distract people and lead them to undesired areas on the social networks.

Experienced multimedia tools such as video, sound, and text, and expected some required information such as user id, and password can make social networks difficult to use. In this case, some navigation tools or help services should be included in a multimedia in order to prevent disorientations, provide users surfing safely and accessing the needed information without wasting time on those environments. Those tools can be listed as website maps, search engines in the related page, table of content, bookmarks, guidance-orientation tours, history of opened-closed pages, and some metaphors (Beasley & Waugh, 1996; Oliver & others, 1996; Dias & Sousa, 1997; Chou & others, 2000; De Bra, 2002). Even though, such instruments are available to make a learning environment more effective, the first step needs to be considered while determining the appropriate tools will be used on social networks is to identify the disorientation tendencies of learners. Otherwise, selected tools might not be useful as being expected.

1.1. Purpose of Study

This study aims to identify the disorientation tendencies of students on social networks, and to clarify the points to take into account regarding disorientation before creating an educational environment on those networks.

1.2. Significance of Study

In line with the goal and results of this study, it is expected that current research seems to be informative for educators and some designers in order to prevent disorientations while organizing such educational environments. Another desired contribution from this research is to take the opportunity of creating a scale instrument regarding disorientation on social networks.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

Phenomenology, a kind of qualitative research method, aims to facilitate forming an appropriate research base in order to observe the concepts which are not only totally unfamiliar, but also ambiguous for most of people (Yildirim & Simsek, 2008). In this study, a phenomenological method focused on disorientation, that is, an underrecognized phenomenon for current researchers, has been performed.

Questions in this research have been created via making a literature review and designating definitions and common issues related to the subject. Furthermore, some expert views were taken in order to extend the internal reliability and validity of study findings.

Twelve semi-structured open-ended interview questions related to disorientation on social networks were used in this study. Those questions are:

1. Which social networks do you often use?
2. Which factors make you distract and distance from your main purpose while surfing on a social network?
3. What kind of drawbacks do you often face while sharing a picture on social networks?
4. What kind of drawbacks do you often encounter while commenting about any event on social networks?
5. What kind of drawbacks do you often face while sharing a video on social networks?
6. What kind of drawbacks do you often experience while accessing a link on social networks?
7. Does a video you noticed gain your attention while you are chatting on social network? Why?
8. Does a link you saw gain your attention while you are watching a video on social network? Why?
9. Do you find yourself to be busy with another action while you are reading a shared comment on a social network? Why?
10. Do you have any obstacle to understand how to comment when you joined a group? Why?
11. After becoming a member of a group on a social network, what kind of drawbacks do you experience when you try again to attend the group?
12. Do you live disorientations when you are on a social network? Why?

2.2. Participants

Thirty junior undergraduate students studying at the Department of Primary Education Science Teaching at Faculty of Education of Gazi University in Turkey participated in this study.

2.3. Data Collection

In parallel with this study's purpose, a semi-structured interview form has been organized with the help of the related literature review. Some changes and additions on the interview form have been ensured in the light of the views and suggestions of the qualitative research expert. The final version of interview form has included twelve open-ended questions.

2.4. Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis, which is one of the qualitative data analysis methods, was conducted to make needed analyses for the collected data. Firstly, participants were applied to the interview form, and then, filled out forms were observed for many times in order to gain a holistic standpoint, and create new codes before starting data analyses. The next step was to identify the codes by reading all data included in the interview forms in detail. Some categories have been determined using those procured codes, and themes (shown in Figure 1) were specified depending on the categories. Themes produced in this study, and their relations have been analyzed within a systematic approach. Besides, to be able to follow a descriptive approach, participants' views have been directly quoted, and it has been attempted to move from the relations among descriptions to generalizations.

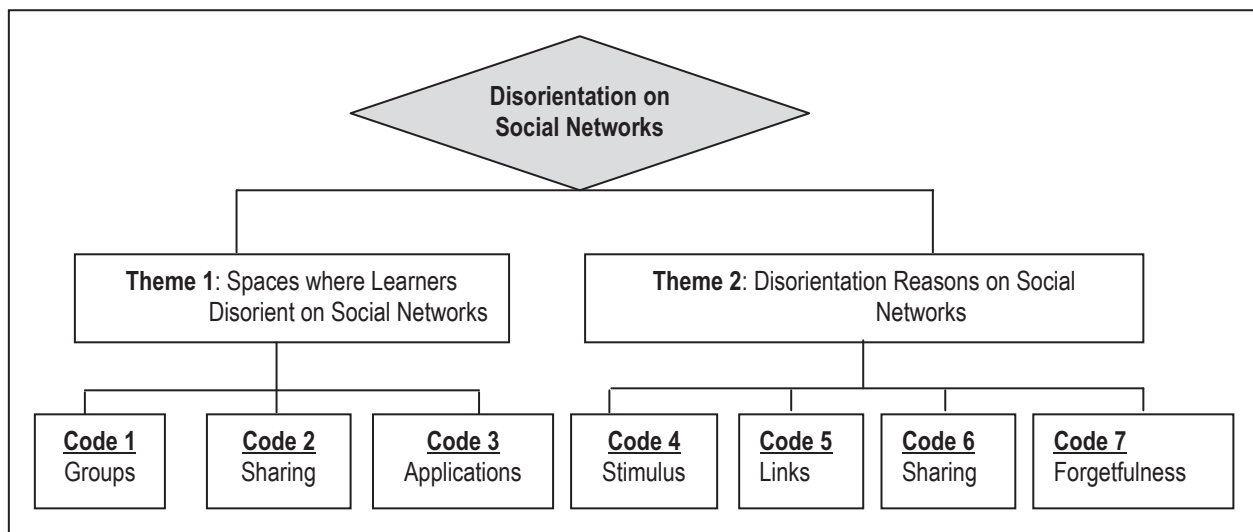


Figure 1: Indication of themes and codes regarding inductive method in data analysis

3. Findings

To be able to focus on disorientation phenomenon, the significant findings based on analysis results in the light of taken responses from students in order to identify which social networks they mostly use, where they generally disorient, and which reasons cause them to disorient on social networks have been categorized under three subtitles.

3.1. Social Networks used by Students

General distribution of social networks used by students in this study is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Social Networks used by Students

Social Networks	N
Facebook	22
YouTube	18
Twitter	10
Netlog	5
Others	4

According to the presented results in Table 1, the most frequent participants ($n = 22$) use Facebook. On the other hand, Netlog has the least number of participants ($n = 5$). Apart from shown social networks, 4 participants use other

social networks such as Flickr, MySpace, and Blogs. As a result, it can be concluded from Table 1 that a participant can use more social networks than one.

3.2. *Where do Learners Disorient on Social Networks?*

To be able to address to asked question, students participated in this study have stated that they mostly disorient while sharing a photo, or a video, while commenting for a sharing, and acting the online groups and applications such as surveys and games. The codes related to spaces where students disorient, and their written statements have been presented in Table 2

Table 2. Student statements and used codes related to spaces where students disorient on social networks

Code 1: Groups	Code 2: Sharing	Code 3: Applications	Used Codes
Ex.1	After my membership in a group, I cannot find that group again.		Code 1
Ex.2	There are a lot of redundant sharing such as videos, photos, advertisements, and comments		Code 2
Ex.3	Redundant questionnaires and games...		Code 3
Ex.4	I can find myself in another place when I met a comic video.		Code 2

Table 2 illustrates that students cannot find their groups after their memberships, and they do not know what to do while experiencing in redundant videos, photos, comments, games, questionnaires, or advertisements.

3.3. *Why do Learners Disorient on Social Networks?*

In order to specify that why learners disorient on social networks, their answers will facilitate accessing the results. In this case, their answers to the question which reads “*Why do you disorient on social networks?*” are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Student statements and used codes related to why they disorient on social networks

Code 4: Stimulus	Code 5: Links	Code 6: Sharing	Code 7: Forgetfulness	Used Codes
Ex. 5	...if it is a subject I care...			Code 4
Ex. 6	...I generally click the salient and current videos, photos, or news ...			
Ex. 7	Comments written in capital words related any topic...			
Ex. 8	Any flash advertisements introducing a product make me distracted.			
Ex. 9	I experience in dead links.			Code 5
Ex. 10	It seems there is a link, but not.			
Ex. 11	I cannot again access a link I accessed before.			
Ex. 12	There are a lot of comments; therefore, sometimes I cannot find my own comment...			Code 6
Ex. 13	I cannot remember the name of the website...			Code 7
Ex. 14	I sometimes forget my password...			
Ex. 15	I cannot find the groups that I became a member before...			

According to Table 3, learners encounter commonly attractive, gripping, current, and visual sharing when surfing on social networks. Hence, they might become distracted, and leave those mediums. They have stated that, sometimes, they might face dead links leading them to different spaces, or causing them to become disoriented. Another problem for learners is being forgetfulness. In other words, they have stated that they occasionally forget their user ids, passwords, or the groups' names.

4. Limitations

This research's results are limited to the responses of only thirty university students.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Today, designing an educational environment on social networks, to be discussed extensively, has become a tough situation, because management of those areas is not under control of educators. In other words, the design of medium controls any event on social networks. In this case, poor design distracts people, and decreases the efficiency of education environments.

The aim of this study was to identify the disorientation tendencies of university students, and to clarify the remarkable points to be taken into account while creating such environments. Students have stated that they are disoriented in some online groups, while sharing a picture, or a video, or while commenting for a case, and they become disoriented in some survey and game applications. Hence, such items and reasons should be considered, particularly for education before organizing a social network structure. For instance, an instructor expecting students to make comments about a topic should create a clear title for that topic, and should ensure learners discuss only under this topic, otherwise, to control learners and to prevent disorientations will be challenging. All content and materials for each subtitle should be arranged systematically in order to make sure each piece of shared information goes under the relevant subtitle. Moreover, learners need to be provided with guidance information through a “Help” section in case they have some problems. Controls should be done regularly, and redundant sharing regarding videos, pictures, links, and comments must be filtered just in time to prevent distracting and disorientation.

The next most significant disorientation reason was that students could be overstimulated due to redundant links, advertisements, flash applications, or pop-ups. To avert this irritating problem, such objects should be removed in a short time, and a simple interface must be provided for learners. Sometimes, learners could forget how they moved from somewhere to another, or could not decide where and how to go because of positioned wrongly links, that is why those links need to be controlled frequently and the connections among them should be ensured with correct addresses in order to prevent wasting time for learners, otherwise, it could be unavoidable to leave that environment. As a result, educational efficiency could be forced to decrease.

In addition to stated disorientation reasons, learners could forget the groups’ names at which they became a member, their user ids, or passwords. Even though, that problem mostly depends on user’s personal characteristics, some reminders related to their memberships’ information should be given on occasion.

All in all, the main reasons making learners disoriented on social networks can be listed as poor design, unclear titles, ill-structured background, guidance deficiency, redundant videos, pictures, and advertisements, dead links, some applications, unpunctual updates, overstimulation, and forgetfulness. To be able to decrease the rate of disorientations on social networks, and to increase the efficiency of those environments, the stated reasons need to be considered cautiously. Otherwise, it seems not to be so easy to overcome such problems.

In the light of this study’s results, it is expected designers and instructors become more sure-footed while creating such environments, above all, for education. Additionally, with also the help of further researches, it will be endeavored to create a scale instrument regarding disorientation using the codes and themes produced in this study in the future.

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