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Professional Development through Social Network Communities

Professional development has change thanks to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and the adoption and proliferation of the Internet. Social networks contribute to professional development through open experiences and communities or through more restricted and specific groups. In this paper we analyze multiple forms of communication in social networks and argue that professional development is based on the construction of shared knowledge. Taken into consideration different types of online communities, we focuses our study in massive online courses (open and massive networks) and in virtual communities (more restricted and closed groups), in order to answer the following questions: In what extend social networks are influencing individuals and promoting professional development? Are individuals managing the information and experiences from social networks for their professional development? By exploring the main changes that social networks provide for professional development we expect to contribute for further research and actions in this field of expertise.

Keywords
Communities of Practice; Education; Professional Development; Professional profiles; Social Networks; Virtual Communities.

Desarrollo profesional mediante comunidades en redes sociales: Entre perfiles personales y profesionales

El desarrollo profesional cambia gracias a las Tecnologías de la Información y Comunicación (TIC) y la adopción y proliferación de Internet. Las redes sociales contribuyen al desarrollo profesional mediante experiencias abiertas y comunidades o grupos más restringidos y específicos. El artículo analiza múltiples formas de comunicación en redes sociales. Se argumenta que el desarrollo profesional está basado en la construcción de conocimiento compartido. Considerando diferentes tipos de comunidades en línea, el foco de atención se centra en cursos online masivos (redes abiertas y masivas) y en comunidades virtuales (grupos

más restrictivos y cerrados) para responder a las siguientes cuestiones: ¿En qué medida las redes sociales influyen en los individuos y promueven su desarrollo profesional? ¿Gestionan los individuos la información y las experiencias de las redes para su desarrollo profesional?. Se exploran las principales transformaciones que las redes sociales proporcionan al desarrollo profesional para el futuro en este campo.

Palabras Clave
Comunidades de Práctica; Comunidades Virtuales; Desarrollo profesional; Educación; Perfiles profesionales; Redes sociales

1. Introduction

We live in an interconnected world expressed in accelerated rhythms of life and knowledge mutability. In last decades, technologies have been revolutionizing the way individuals interact with the world, create new things, construct knowledge and relate to each other's. The boundaries between personal and professional online profiles are increasingly blurred, real time information exchange has become a reality, and the use of virtual/social interaction for personal and professional development is more evident.

Access to information and collaboration through social network is one of the challenges of the current historical-cultural and scientific time. Social network importance is undeniable. They are the result of technology potential embedded in our daily lives and an important contribution for knowledge democratization, training and professional development.

Georgina and Olson (2008) on a review about integration of technology revealed that research points out that *"the most effective training occurs when it incorporates peer to peer training, manifesting in shared ideas and practices among participants"* (p. 3). According with these results how can social networks attend professionals' special training needs? In this paper we focus on literature review that advocates that professional development requires high levels of support in addition to mastering the intellectual and technical dimensions involved in the profession, mainly through communities of practices that share the same interest but also through strategic training and support structures.

Therefore, what kind of social networks contribute for professional development in education groups: open experiences and communities or more restricted and specific groups? And in what extend this social networks are influencing individuals? Are Educators managing all this change and complexity for their professional development? Are they critically interpreting all that data? Do they turn on all the information they receive into knowledge and skills?

As Area (1999) points out, you must have the economic and physical conditions to possess the technology, but not least important are the cognitive skills that enable the use and the critical appropriation of information that the technologies provides. Network society is becoming more demanding in cognitive skills. Therefore commitment to lifelong learning powered by social network is, in this context, one of the the most advantageous position of the individual in order to face the daily life and the professional challenges.

Several kinds of open and closed social networks already make part of individuals routines. Democratization of the mobile industry (smartphones and tablets) has help technology to transform the world even faster, by bringing to people access to information anywhere and anytime.

In this paper we explore some of the major transformation that social networks are bringing for training and professional development. We also analyse different kinds of users based on their communication online, and their behaviour/practices on different types of social network (open and more restricted groups/communities).

2. Open and massive social networks for Professional Development

In recent years e-learning practices have been studied and educational institutions have carried out actions in this field that had a major boom. It is argued that e-learning courses have the potential to provide support to transform education and to improve teaching and learning processes. By recognizing the performance difficulties of professionals with a single basic initial training, continuing education in a broader context (open and massive) is encouraged, in order to meet the training needs of education professionals.

2.1. Framework and context

Massive Online Open Courses (MOOC), in particular, have assumed an important role in the last few years and became popular among educators and students as open educational resources (Hew & Cheung, 2014). After the first MOOC called *"Connectivism and Connective Knowledge (CCK08)"* and other similar experiences, many open courses were developed, growing rapidly and gaining popularity.

MOOC seem to be especially attractive to those participants who need to acquire certain personal and professional skills, to the extent that this courses can help them promote their professional development through continuous training and, at the same time, meet their training needs thanks to the advantages of distance learning: asynchronous and online. Taking into consideration professional profiles, MOOC can also be an answer for accreditation of knowledge through most innovative and flexible ways, better adapted to the labor market needs, always in a constant evolution and growth. Zapata-Ros (2014) points out that MOOC matches an individual approach for learners, based on their interests, abilities and needs, together with a learning approach based on best practices, in order to promote learning and motivation of the participants. Personal development with professional development. Necessarily linked.

The phenomenon is based on learning platforms that allows creating connections and interactions, based on collaboration and exchange of materials and resources. First aiming to share knowledge and after to construct knowledge, founded on free access (except obtaining certificate), unlimited participation (anyone can join) and short periods of time (five to ten weeks) (Murray, 2014; Poy & Gonzales-Aguilar, 2014; Vázquez & López, 2013).

Among the factors that contribute for the implementation of these courses, besides those grounded on the interaction among its members, are those that aim participants to take control of their own learning. According to Hew & Cheung (2014), some of these factors are often individual: obtaining a certificate attesting the knowledge gained, the

acquisition of knowledge and new skills to improve productivity and performance. Similarly, removal of execution barriers also acts as a positive element for conducting and attending a MOOC, given that: lack of time, insufficient prior knowledge and the absence of a physical space for teaching and learning, are not barriers for the development of these courses.

Current developments in massive open courses are linked with the analysis of the participants outcomes. There are four typical final expectations for a student who successfully completed a MOOC course at Coursera (one of the major MOOC platforms): (1) certificate of accomplishment (with one of two levels), (2) “Signature” verified-identity version of the certificate, (3) credit recommendation, and (4) nothing. Johnston (2013) discusses each of the student outcomes, and the motivations for students to seek various outcomes.

Often participating in MOOC promotes the creation of Online Learning Communities with an important influence on professional development of the participants. And normally this guarantee that training doesn't end after the completion of the course.

2.2. Massive open online courses as an opportunity for Professional Development

When we talk about teachers and education professionals we must recognize that these individuals have specific characteristics has learners, due to their responsibilities and experience on teaching and learning processes. Therefore, what do teachers and others educational specialists are seeking when they sign up for a MOOC? What are their training needs? Further studies are needed in this line of research.

Teaching is an experiential process which demands holistic and integrative critical analysis of both, the theoretical frameworks that support it and, the context in which it develops. The result of this process is the construction of a professional knowledge that integrates a specific knowledge of the teacher profession, composed of multiple dimensions and modes of cognition (Montero, 2005). Thus, the professional knowledge that we report includes not only scientific and *pedagogical knowledge* (theoretical and conceptual knowledge), *know-how* (practical schemes of teaching), *the know-why* (the practical justification) (Garcia, 1999, 84), but also *how to be* (personal characteristics, emotions, values) (Tardif, 2002).

Recent experiences has shown that MOOC can promote professional development to enhance learning – which is freely accessible – in virtual environments. In these virtual environments, learners can cover topics of interest, developed based on the training needs of the course target audience (Fasimpaur, 2013).

Acquiring training in any subject, at anytime and anywhere it´s possible, nevertheless when these courses evolve is evident the need to maximize impact on participant outcomes. Professionals must select the MOOC more suited to their training and learning needs, taking into consideration the course design and structure. Vázquez & Luján-Mora (2014) consider that MOOC have not yet overtaken the virtual training models of e-learning and b-learning. Although MOOC possess characteristics of

disruptive innovation, new computer and pedagogical models should be consolidated to acquire that property. Added to this is also the need to define the MOOC regarding accreditation and certification is concerned, as it is questioned the authenticity of the participants, as well as the idea of free education.

Therefore, MOOC have yet to demonstrate three main arguments, democratization of education, reducing the costs of education (Pernías & Luján-Mora, 2014) and its effectiveness in terms of acquired learning, according to the results obtained in learning assessment (Gallego-Arrufat, Gámiz-Sánchez & Gutiérrez-Santiuste, 2015). We agree that to maintain these arguments we must learn from the best institutions and the best faculty by assigning quality improvement processes. However, to accomplish this it is necessary that training is linked to the formal education of each country, and that such training is available to all. Statistics show that this is not the case, most MOOC participants already possess higher qualifications, for example.

Latest development of MOOC platforms and their association with Agencies and Educational Institutions is one of the most recent outputs. Regarding professional development of teachers and other specialists this association might assure the necessary recognition of acquired knowledge of the participants by educational authorities, an important issue linked with successful completion of MOOC. Another important topic is to interpret the success or failure, based on the exam of instructional design details, in order to facilitate feedback and large scale interaction, naturally due to tutor's low participation (Poy & Gonzales-Aguilar, 2014).

The educational authorities seem to be responding to these needs of professionals through MOOC, with some ongoing experimental initiatives that must be subject to an evaluation. Meanwhile it is very difficult the existing parallelism between innovation and flexibility by one hand, and the inflexibility of the educational system on another, where it remains the distinction between university-level and non-university level, between permanent teacher and provisional teacher and between knowledge areas.

There are a number of key elements for participants' engagement in online courses:

- First the attraction of matters and suggestive content from the point of view of personal development;
- Secondly the need to obtain valid knowledge for their professional development that will allow a better performance and improvement of practices.
- Third, support and interaction with colleagues for a collaborative knowledge construction and shared learning;
- Fourth, the importance given to motivation, self-regulation and personalized learning.

These last two issues, encloses a dilemma themselves (mass versus custom) and must be solved at MOOC own design, combining individual and collective strategies for education professionals operating in communities of practice activities. It is also a key element recognize that in a MOOC, teaching methods must become, especially in learning methods concern, tailored to each student, and carried out by them (rather than

by the teacher). Students also play a more important role in directing their own learning, including reflection on him and about him (Zapata-Ros, 2014).

One of the key elements in the design of a MOOC is interactivity. MOOC that are being developed in educational platforms derived from Web 2.0 are those employing more tools of interactive participation. In any case, the MOOC courses are held in virtual learning environments, which are spaces that gather - of one way or another - the necessary conditions to help optimize the learning process, namely by facilitating the exchange and interaction between participants, and favoring the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Poy and Gonzales-Aguilar (2014) point out that the level of participation that involves a MOOC course differs from its interactive design, namely if we gather interactivity principles with inequalities in the access to the platform its normal to achieve elements of weakness that encourages learners dropout. Therefore, the balance between instructional design and quality educational platform is very important to MOOC achievements and optimized use of interactive tools. Therefore, since interactivity, instructional design and motivation are critical elements that directly affect the retention of participants, it must be taken into account in the construction of MOOC the existence of motivation and interaction systems between all participants of courses.

3. Virtual Communities: restricted networks and communities in social networks

People are social beings who tend to bond each other into communities, to ensure safety, survival and to achieve common goals (Klang & Olsson, 1999). Due to rapid technological change, the concept of community has evolved into virtual spaces (Lin, Lin & Huang, 2008), leading to the appearance of Virtual Communities and Social Networks.

Internet dissemination is changing communication and learning scenarios. ICT in general and Web 2.0, in particular, offers nowadays a variety of tools, which are becoming a key element for communication and interaction, due to its accessibility and costless nature. In this context, we have been witnessing the arising and proliferation of Social Networks and Virtual Communities (VC) based on computer-mediated communication.

A Social Network is a social structure set by people who share interests, common values and goals within the same virtual environment and without a common geographic location (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012). Social networks show the social relationships that are created from the interaction between people. According to Yen, Tseng and Wang (2014) it is relevant to analysed it through two different perspectives: a structural perspective refers to the links and relationships established between members and their position in it; and a relational perspective based on the quality of relationships. Both reflects the complex interaction that characterizes society and human behavior (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012).

Virtual Communities involves creating knowledge for the benefit of the whole group, and these benefits do not end over a simple definition of “social network”. Kimball and Rheingold (2000) explains that social networks provide a space to show projects, practices and experiences that can be harnessed to create knowledge, and therefore, from this perspective adopt the role of Virtual Communities. Vivian and Sudweeks (2003) pointed out that individuals are members of a virtual community that is maintained through social networks. It is also the interpersonal bonds created between individuals and the knowledge generated within social networks that promotes their analysis as Virtual Communities (Vivian & Sudweeks, 2003) .

Virtual Communities formed in social networks have different fields of action: education and training, professional subjects, sports, hobbies, etc, and are characterized as a shared knowledge space. Relationships between members start from the "content", i.e., *“sharing users’ personal information, affiliations, needs and aspirations”* (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012, p.148). In others words, any exchange of value includes exchanging profile information. Facebook, LinkedIn or Twitter, like other social network, are based on the exchange of informations, normally according two different profiles:

a) **Personal accounts:** the individual creates a user profile with personal data, through which he can share information, videos, photos, events, news and other resources with family or friends.

b) **Groups:** after creating the user profile, social networks offer the individual the opportunity to create or join a user group according to their individual interests.

Social networks have explicit forms of training content and topics related with professional identity. Taken these arguments into consideration, these questions appear: What is the role of social networks for Professional Development? Which social networks are driving the emergence of Virtual Communities, promoting opportunities for individual professional development? And how?

3.1. Role of Virtual Communities for Professional Development in Education

Virtual Communities are increasing and encouraging informal learning, i.e., learning that is not institutionalized, is not restricted to students or professionals of a certain age and is not structured or organized in order to obtain a certification (Chunngam, Chanchalor & Murphy, 2014). Moreover, the growing interest in enhancing the performance and meet the changing needs of professional training has led to the emergence of *Communities of Practice* (groups of people sharing an interest or profession who interact and collaborate in order to share knowledge and develop solutions for common problems). In an online environment the communities are virtual communities, online Communities of Practice and Professional Virtual Communities. The Professional Virtual Communities (PVC) provide to individuals an effective way of sharing knowledge and new mechanisms to manage information for their professional development (Lewis & Allan, 2005; Chen & Hung, 2010; Chunngam, Chanchalor & Murphy, 2014).

According to the literature, a *professional* is a person who possesses specific knowledge, domain of a certain field or area, has problem-solving capabilities, is

committed to his/her work and, throughout his/her career, develops their competences through critical reflection (Lin, Lin & Huang (2008). Therefore, we can define *Professional Virtual Communities*, as a group of autonomous, independent individuals that communicate and interact with each other, on a regular and organize basis, sharing values, interests, ideas and specific experiences in order to achieve common objectives (Ansari, Khan, Ahmad, & Suhail, 2012; Chen & Hung, 2010; Lin, Lin & Huang, 2008; Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009).

Since, Professional Virtual Communities promote informal learning, in which members share common interests and collaborate to achieve common goals. Lewis and Allan (2005) argues that Virtual Communities are especially useful for different groups of professionals: a) those entering a profession, to manage and establish their professional credibility, b) individuals in new situations, to develop knowledge and expert capabilities faster, c) individuals that have to address new problems and situations, d) individuals who are required to implement strategic changes, and e) those that detect a strategic liability.

Although the potential of Professional Virtual Communities to provide continuing professional development is not fully exploited, we can find this type of communities in different areas of expertise. The prediction of Howard Rheingold (1993), although fascinating, fails to predict the growth of virtual communities and multiple different corners of cyberspace two decades later. The growth of communities and active participation in business applications, medical, educational... has been higher than expected, thanks to Social Networking Sites (LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, YouTube...); Virtual Worlds (Second Life, Whyville...); and Information Sharing (Wikis, Google Docs, Blogs...).

In Professional Virtual Communities created on social networking groups, professional staff show their identification and affiliation, mark the challenges, standards and codes of professional conduct. In these cyberspaces related resources are shared, discussion, perception and reflection on professional issues is observed, generating a high level of feedback from users.

The potential of social networks for contact, display and send information continuously and permanently makes Professional Virtual Communities proliferate on social networks. Aspects related to the expression of professional status and professional identities seems to be linked to participation and commitment in Professional Virtual Communities social networking, as part of individuals professionalisation. Pimmer, Linxen and Gröhbiel (2012) study, who analyzed a Facebook page centred on medical and clinical topics, reveals how the participation in such virtual professional communities allows for the declaration and negotiation of professional status and professional identities. Moreover they also observed that social networks "*was mainly based on virtual relations where learning and participation appeared to be far more short-lived and ephemeral"* (Pimmer, Linxen & Gröhbiel, 2012, p. 735), this means that most community members, rarely takes central and active forms of participation. Nevertheless is important to unveil that social networks are being feed through mobile phones as a daily practice; and considered an appropriate tool for sharing professional

information, blurring educational boundaries and promoting redistribution of knowledge and power.

Therefore ICT put at our disposal a variety of tools and new ways for continuous training and career development. New technologies lead us to innovate in new training methods and Virtual Communities in social networks is the result of it, offering multiple advantages. Specifically, in some professional social networks like LinkedIn, Xing or Viadeo we can find Professional Virtual Communities that respond to users interests. Participation in these communities based on social networks is rising, for several reasons (Junta de Andalucía, 2013):

- Their collaborative model allows a permanent interaction among users, which leads to continuous improvement.
- Their virtual context offers a flexible methodology that fits the style of work and personal life, allowing a training organization adapted to personal needs.
- ICT are essential tools in the everyday life, therefore *Professional Virtual Communities* in social networks develop not only knowledge but also users' digital competences. The new digital literacy is essential (Aguaded, 2012).
- Strategic development of professional profiles, such as communication, creativity or information management skills are brought into play.
- Visibility and digital identity directly increases on our network due to "networking".
- Interest area scene is expanded, providing individuals' enrichment from different perspectives, situated in different geographical contexts. This is referred by specialists as *"a simultaneous interaction in both global and local".*
- Individuals *learn by doing* since participation in activities and group discussions are generating content from previous knowledge.
- Training resources, news and events offered in Virtual Communities not only allows individuals to be informed but also promotes the development of their professional profile, creativity and critical thinking.

Through social networks, members in the virtual community find a way to satisfy their needs, in a reliable and friendly user base, besides getting accurate, complete and updated information by other members (Lin, 2008). Virtual Communities are supported from a number of key elements that are crucial for their success, maintaining them over time.

An interesting line of research focuses on features that remain active Virtual Communities long term, such as: rules of reciprocity, shared knowledge for self-efficacy, trust, perceived benefits, perceived compatibility, users' adopted behavior to shared knowledge, loyalty (Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009; Chen & Hung, 2010; Lin, 2008) and even a sense of belonging, satisfaction and positive relationship between members (Lin, 2008). However, research has shown that the shared knowledge is not the base element that supports and ensures the virtual community success. According to Lin (2008), trust has a much stronger influence on the sense of belonging to a community, since mutual trust plays an essential role in reducing uncertainty and increased security.

3.2. Facebook and LinkedIn: strategies to promote professional development

Virtual communities in social networks or other collaborative tools arise from the need to join and interact with others. Information technology, in general, and Web 2.0, in particular, make this social need in cyberspace available and ready to use (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012; Chunngam, Chanchalor & Murphy, 2014).

LinkedIn is a professional social network from which specific Professional Virtual Communities are established from the strictly professional interactions. As a professional network, individuals can create lists that make up their network of professionals. These lists turn into a close network that will facilitate the access to information and help individuals to develop their careers through active participation, knowledge construction and interaction among members (Gerard, 2012).

On the other hand, Facebook is a social network where we can find different Professional Virtual Communities, although it is generally considered a social network in which social interaction based on leisure is promoted. Professional Virtual Communities in social networks establish a basic professional identity that increases according to participation and interaction in it, and although Virtual Communities in social networks are increasingly complex, recent studies unveil that Facebook provides activities that introduce users in a professional environment, where the information and knowledge generated promotes professional development of members (Gerard, 2012; Alexandrou, 2012).

These networks allow users to build a (public or private) profile and establish a list of individuals with whom to share content. Interaction among members and the opportunity of inviting and sharing content is based on democratization of Internet and open access since creating a profile on LinkedIn or Facebook is open to anyone with an email address. However access to certain groups into Professional Virtual Communities, according to their interest, objectives and main goals, may be restricted by its creators, so that participation, discussion and generated content in the group can only be seen by its members (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012; Alexandrou, 2012). There are also open groups where information is public, in this groups knowledge is provided for the benefit of all users that want to have access to it (Alfano, Carini & Gabrielle, 2012).

Groups in social networks can be considered as groups of users with common interests. There is a wide variety. These groups can become Professional Virtual Communities or not, depending if people are grouped and organized within a virtual space, in order to learn in a participatory manner by sharing information, conducting group activities, participating in forums and solving doubts among all members of the community (Junta de Andalucía, 2013).

Both in Facebook as in LinkedIn we can find groups that represents Professional Virtual Communities, normally they have explicit educational content and learning practices. The training contents appear in tools such as chat, forums or in the “wall” where a variety of resources are posted showing explicitly training purposes, such as: texts, images, videos, quizzes, cases studies, etc. (Pimmer, Linxen & Gröhbiel, 2012; Alexandrou, 2012).

Some examples of explicit content for professional development spread through LinkedIn and Facebook social networking are described below:

- **Practical Case Studies:** a specific occurrence (problem) or subject matter requiring discussion, decision or investigation is presented in the community along with brief scientific arguments (supported by texting; images; videos etc.). Member are invited to comment and discuss main ideas in order to shared knowledge among community. A practical case of a medical Professional Virtual Community in a Facebook group is presented on Figure 1.

Figure 1. Example of a Practical Case Study spread on a Facebook Group (Medical Professional Virtual Community) (Pimmer, Linxen & Gröhbie, 2012)

- **Multimedia resources:** photographs, images, audios, videos are examples of training resources that generates a training debate in the community in order to

promote professional and critical awareness. These multimedia elements are published in Facebook or LinkedIn groups and spread their “message” through the community members feeds.

- **Events:** publication of events (eg, contests or training activities such as courses, seminars or workshops) promote individual professional development. By disseminating multiple types of initiatives, connected with individuals specific interests and training needs, social networks or Professional Virtual Communities in LinkedIn or Facebook groups are facilitating access to information and promoting professional development.

- **Debates:** discussions are generated by members of Professional Virtual Communities in LinkedIn or Facebook groups through photographs, videos, in the form of news, articles, etc. The opportunity for sharing different point of views regardless of people culture, background or geographic location enriches and amplifies individuals’ formative experiences.

- **Employment opportunities:** in LinkedIn groups we can find information about companies and institutions for job search purposes, or gathering professionals with the same skills and promote or participate in certain activities.

Professional Virtual Communities on social networks count on with several educational tools for users, whether students or practitioners, promoting what is call “informal learning”. Therefore, Social Network nature such as: accessibility, friendly-user, tool-free associated with their increasingly sophisticated tools gives them a greater importance in the present and in the future of learning. Taking this into consideration, we advocate that Professional Virtual Communities encourage professional development through communication, interaction and shared knowledge on a specific domain.

4. Final considerations

We are witnessing a transformation in education and in professional development through social networks in parallel with the existing communication developed in social networks. Professional development has evolved thanks to the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and due to the adoption and implementation of the Internet. Social networks cause significant changes in the Networked Culture in general, and in the Networked Training and Educational Development in particular.There are also numerous new professional profiles that arise. It is the case of journalist, due to the process of adapting data to the new media in a complex and changing environment, marked by digitization and the emergence of the so-called “new media” (Ferreras, 2013).

New online scenarios bring several and rapid changes for individuals professional development. Besides offering completely different and innovative environments for professional development, social networks in particular, influence personal and

professional dilemmas, actions, and habits. It is an emerging modality and further research should focus on the models of professional development on social networks. It is necessary to design new learning situations covering both professional and personal aspects. Thinking and developing learning situations that help individuals taking advantage of the multiple opportunities available on the social networks, communities of practices, open access initiatives, but also stimulating strategies focused on individuals major difficulties such as lack of motivation, lack of self-regulated behavior; reduce uncertainty and also increase sources credibility.

Focused on the emergent transformation that is taking place in education and professional development, caused by social networks, we analyzed different users' profiles based on online communication, but especially the phenomenon of professional development network itself. Open and closed networks and both patterns of professional activity was discussed. Individuals spend a lot of time using social networks: sharing private and professional information, interacting with others (family and friends but also work colleagues and academic experts), keep up with institutional, professional and all kind of groups feeds. Without having total acknowledge individuals are sharing content and exchanging personal and professional information achieving continuous professional learning. Knowledge is shared, several skills are trained and lifelong learning occurs, naturally.

Promoting professional development on social networks involves both individual and collective behavior. It is personal, but also occurs in communities. We considerer massive online professional courses as individual and personal opportunities for professional development; the interaction occurs in open and massive networks and individuals have specific needs and face several challenges. In MOOC barriers between educational times (initial-training and lifelong learning), educational levels (university and non-university) and especially by types of participants (professionals and nonprofessionals profiles) are challenges that we need to embrace for achieving knowledge democratization and shared knowledge construction. Despite there are multiple forms of communication in Professional Virtual Communities we have exposed it as closed groups. Virtual communities are also an opportunity for professional development, but in groups and communities in which learning and shared construction of knowledge is more structured and focused.

Thus it is especially important, on the one hand, to analyze individuals behavior in online courses (open and massive), and on the other, in Virtual Communities or Professional Virtual Communities, in order to address the diverse needs of professionals when assuming social networks as tools for enhancing professional development.

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