
MEDICAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL MEDIA – SAMPLE OF HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to analyze systematically the metaphors related to the social media concept, used by 1st term students of Hacettepe University, Faculty of Medicine. Study group includes the students (N = 336) of the Faculty of Medicine of Hacettepe University in the 2013-2014 academic year. Research data was collected both via questionnaire. All data gathered during the research process were analyzed with frequency (f) and percentage (%) values related to metaphors and acquired conceptual categories.

According to the findings gathered in the research, 202 metaphors related to “social media” were read and analyzed using the content analysis technique. In the process of creating conceptual categories, related literature was examined by three researchers; and taking into consideration the studies containing social media descriptions, the metaphors created by first term medical students were separated into four categories. Of these categories (i) communication tool; the use of social media by individuals as a tool to interact with people they want, (ii) source of information; the use of social media by individuals as a tool to get information about any people or event, (iii) a threat; misuse of the social media and its possible harms and (iv) stirrer; the fact that social media has both beneficial and harmful features.

Introduction

Face to face communication has been replaced by technology-oriented ways of communication with Internet's becoming an indispensable component of life. This situation has introduced new relationships established via Internet (Murray, 2008). Social networking sites present themselves in the centre of this kind of communication established on a virtual platform (Tiryakioğlu & Erzurum, 2011). Social media, which has entered our lives as an expansion of *Web 2.0*, can be described as platforms expanding with social interaction by using Internet and web-based technologies, with high accessibility and including contents and sharing. This communication is established by using the sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace etc. These social media sites offer the opportunity to create a personal profile page and communicate with other individuals for free. Individuals can post their

photos, state what they are doing and where they are and send messages to people (whether or not they know them).

In the information age, the use of social media increases rapidly, especially among young adults (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2008). Especially a large segment (82%) of the university students described as young adults is a part of the social media (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). The use of social media varies according to individuals' characteristic features and why and how they use the Internet (Çetin, 2008; İşbulan, 2011). Thus how and for what purpose individuals use social media, good and bad experiences they have had and the effect of social media in terms of education are important matters that need to be analyzed. In this context, the point of departure of this study is the need arising from the former completed studies on social media because there is not a single research that metaphorically focuses on the ideas of students. Metaphors are a means of perception. Metaphors are described as *a strong mental scheme and modelling mechanism that enables individuals to understand and shape their worlds* (Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006).

Metaphors provide a mental framework for thinking about a concept (Shuell, 1990). In a metaphorical relation, three principals are said to exist (Forceville, 2002). These principals in question are explained below by using a metaphor sample in the research:

- The subject of the metaphor (The *social media* word in this sentence: *Social media is like a friend.*);
- The source of the metaphor (The *friend* word in this sentence: *Social media is like a friend.*);
- The features that need to be attributed from the source of the metaphor to the subject of the metaphor (The sentence starting with *because*: *Social media is like a friend. Because it is always present in the loneliest times of a person.*)

In this context, the main purpose of this research is to analyze systematically the metaphors related to the social media concept, used by 1st term students of Hacettepe University, Faculty of Medicine in Turkey. It is considered that these research results would open up an opportunity in the body of literature to look at the social media concept from another perspective. For this purpose, the answers to the questions below have been looked for:

1. What are the metaphors that 1st term medical students have on the *social media* concept?
2. How can these metaphors be categorized?

Method

Participants

Study group includes the students (N = 336) of the Faculty of Medicine of Hacettepe University in the 2013-2014 academic year. However after the elimination of people who do not wish to participate and who cannot participate and empty questionnaires, data from 202 participants was gathered. Out of the 202 people whose data was used during the research, 113 (56%) were males and 89 (44%) were females.

Data Collection

It was made clear that participation in this research was voluntary and that it was not obligatory for the students who did not wish to participate to fill in the questionnaires. The students were requested to answer in a given time the demographic questions and to write a metaphor clarifying their feelings and thoughts on social media. Perceptions of the students participating in the research were gathered by their completion of this sentence: *Social media is like..., because....* The relationship between the subject and the source of the metaphor was assessed with *like*. By using *because*, the meaning that was attached to the metaphor and the reason for that were aimed to be revealed.

Data Analysis

The metaphor sentences of the first term students of the Faculty of Medicine were typed in using MS Excel along with the other study group participants' information. After the input of all the metaphors, they were sorted alphabetically. During data input, empty questionnaires with no metaphors, questionnaires lacking metaphors' reasons and questionnaires with more than one metaphor were eliminated. In addition, some students just shared their thoughts on social media in general instead of providing a metaphorical image. And some provided a metaphorical image without stating a basis for it. Therefore 44 questionnaires of the 246 gathered in the beginning of this research were ruled out.

Then the metaphors provided by the students who participated in the study group and whose questionnaires were included and the source and subject of the metaphors were analyzed in terms of their relationship. As a result of this analysis, each metaphor was linked with a specific theme regarding the reasoning behind it. As a result, 4 different conceptual categories were determined. These conceptual categories were matched with metaphors. An expert in the domain of education technologies was requested to state opinions on final conceptual categories and matches determined by researchers. The credibility of categorizing the concepts was calculated using this formula:

$$\text{Credibility} = \left(\frac{\text{Consensus}}{\text{Consensus} + \text{Divergence}} \right) \text{ (Miles \& Huberman, 1994).}$$

Research data was collected both via questionnaires. All data gathered during the research process were analyzed with frequency (f) and percentage (%) values related to metaphors and acquired conceptual categories. Then 4 conceptual categories obtained in this research related

to the social media concept and each feature they possess were introduced with the assistance of the metaphor images provided by the participant.

Findings

According to the findings gathered in the research, 202 metaphors related to *social media* were read and analyzed using the content analysis technique. In the process of creating conceptual categories, related literature was examined by 3 researchers; and taking into consideration the studies containing social media descriptions and structured focused group discussions, the metaphors created by first term medical students were separated into 4 categories. Of these categories (i) *communication tool*; the use of social media by individuals as a tool to interact with people they want, (ii) *source of information*; the use of social media by individuals as a tool to get information about any people or event, (iii) *a threat*; misuse of the social media and its possible harms and (iv) *stirrer*; the fact that social media has both beneficial and harmful features. These categories were introduced below.

Communication Tool

It is apparent that the most often repeated metaphors in the communication tool category are pigeon (16), bird (8) and spider (7). Samples related to the metaphors in the communication category are listed below.

- Student no. 67: Social media is like a pigeon because it enables free communication between people.
- Student no. 87: Social media is like a bird because it can send a message to everywhere easily.
- Student no. 93: Social media is like a spider because even a little touch on the web it makes can be felt from everywhere and it allows us to reach everything.

Threat

Some other metaphors stated by participant university students come under the threat category. The most often repeated metaphors were concluded to be drugs (12), cigarette (5) and bacteria (5). Samples related to the metaphors in the threat category are listed below.

- Student no. 200: Social media is like drugs because it causes people to kill time and get numb. It also stupefies people and prevents them from thinking and using their time in useful stuff.
- Student no. 193: Social media is like a cigarette because it is considered harmful from the outside but when one indulges they become addicted to it. Despite the harms, one cannot live without it.
- Student no. 167: Social media is like bacteria because it is mostly harmful and spreads fast.

Stirrer

The most often repeated metaphors under the stirrer category are concluded to be sea (4), dumpster (3) and human (2). Samples related to the metaphors in this category are listed below.

- Student no. 219: Social media is like a sea because it is endless and enormous so it contains everything. When you go into it, you are aware of it but it is not aware of you. If you cannot swim, it becomes a grave for you.
- Student no. 215: Social media is like a dumpster because it may be useful or not useful. The things you like and dislike exist in it. It looks like a place where crumbs of ideas pile up.
- Student no: 228: Social media is like humans because you can trust no one.

Source of information

Lastly, the most often repeated metaphors under the source of information category are concluded to be tree (5), encyclopaedia (3), world (3), etc. Samples related to the metaphors in this category are listed below.

- Student no. 128: Social media is like a tree because it holds different kinds of information in various ways.
- Student no. 134: Social media is like an encyclopedia because it includes all kinds of information.
- Student no. 140: Social media is like the world because you can find what you look for in it.

Conclusion and discussion

The importance of the increasing interpersonal interactions as a result of developing technology paves the way for new communication platforms and methods. Social media is one of these new communication platforms. Individuals communicate, interact, share, cooperate and conduct learning activities through these networks.

In this research, the aim is to determine the perceptions of first term medical students in terms of social media using the metaphorical analysis technique. Of the participating students, 89% state that they use social media effectively. This percentage showed similarities to other research findings where 73.7% of Öztürk and Akgün's (2012) students, 79.3% of Toğay, Akdur, Yetişken and Bilici's (2013) students, 89.40% of Kert and Kert's students (2010) were determined to use social media effectively. Another significant and similar finding was obtained by Tiryakioğlu and Erzurum (2011). In these studies, it was ascertained that academic staff/personnel of the Faculty of Communication Sciences also used social media actively. It is determined that the academic staff/personnel of the Faculty of Communication Sciences especially prefer Facebook and use it a lot.

Perceptions of the students in terms of social media fall into 4 categories (*communication tool, source of information, threat, stirrer*). When these categories are analyzed, it is assessed that

students use social media mostly as a *communication tool*. The *communication tool* category (81) is respectively followed by the *threat* (48), *stirrer* (37) and *source of information* (35) categories. These findings are supported by few previous research results in the subject. This result is similar to these results: Toğay, Akdur, Yetişken and Bilici (2013) determined that 84.5% of vocational school students, Öztürk and Akgün (2012) determined that 81.6% of the students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences used social media to communicate.

In addition to that most of the students consider social media as a harmful platform. This finding complies with the research findings where Hergüner (2011) found that out of 180 Physical Training and Sports undergraduate students who participated in the research, 46.2% thought social media had more harms than benefits. These findings also show similarities to those in the literature where Öztürk and Akgün (2012), Kert and Kert (2010) conducted a study and found respectively that nearly half of the students (48.9%) and 30.13% of the students had negative perceptions of social media.

Even though students think that social media harms them a lot or it does not affect their academic success, the fact that they also think that they do not use social networks in a positive manner indicates that they do not benefit from positive features of social networks. This brings the necessity of social network consciousness and the use of positive features they possess into question. On the other hand when related literature is analyzed, a lot of emphasis on the fact that social media can be used as an education tool exists. It is considered that this kind of integration would contribute to lectures, enriching and sharing the sources and extracurricular group studies. This integration can assist in the use of extracurricular activities in favour of learning and create a platform enriched by technology and increase students' level of motivation and cooperation. Social networks can be used as an assisting tool for joint study groups (group study); for research, questioning and debating abilities; for creative thinking and problem solving abilities by sharing effectively materials (video files, audio files, pictures, tables, presentations, database and other websites containing information); following current news, people or groups; and participating in debate platforms. Ajjan and Harsthone (2008) suggest social media is an effective tool to use in the educational context, in that it boosts students' level of learning, enables the interaction between school – student and student – student, increases students' level of satisfaction for the classes, improves the writing abilities of the students and integrates easily with classes.

In a study where Yuen and Yuen (2008) conducted with undergraduate students, they created a class carried out by the mixed learning method on a social media platform and pursued a part of the learning on that platform. At the end of the term students were requested to state their opinions related to this process. Most of the students stated that the process where they discussed the topics related to the class on that social media platform facilitated their communication and enabled cooperative learning, that they felt themselves a part of a community and that it contributed to their professional development. As a result of the study, it is realized that students had positive attitudes towards these kinds of platforms, felt comfortable, checked the activities related to the platform easily and used them as a tool for

digital media sharing, posed questions in a common view and opinion based framework, shared class materials, created study groups and communicated with classmates.

Comparably, Toğay, Akdur, Yetişken and Bilici (2013) conducted a study through social networking tools on 60 students during a term to assess the effectiveness and accessibility of the social media in the process of university education; assisted the students with an active social media-based learning and made an assessment in terms of the impacts of this assistance based on student opinions. As a result of this study, it was recognized that the assistance of educational processes by social media had a positive impact and facilitated and improved learning processes.

According to the study conducted by Tekinarslan and Gürer (2011) after using social media, students stated that their ability to express themselves improved positively (57.6%). Especially the fact that even though the Faculties of Medicine have a large number of students, communication between students and instructors in the department is decreasing. The importance of communication between instructors and students is undeniable and any platform contributing to this communication should be utilized. In this context, the use of social media is considered to contribute to students' communication with their instructors. Moreover using it as a platform for academic and social announcements and conducting group studies there would contribute to the process. Thus, it is thought that communication between students and instructors can also be extracurricular. As a conclusion, the fact that almost all students use a social network should definitely be assessed in terms of educational potential.

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