

Is that me? Raising undergraduate students' awareness of their digital footprint

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Taking as departing point the important role that technologies have as mediators of identities and the assumption that "digital identity" refers to the aspect of digital technology that is concerned with the mediation of people's experience of their own identity and the identity as shaped by others, the main aim of this paper is to explore the implications that underlie in the perception of student's digital identity in the higher education context. As it focuses attention on critical questions about personal development and social relationships, knowing about the way in which identity is shaped will lead us to a better understanding of the nature of our students' social and cultural experiences.

While there is little doubt that technology is pervasive in the lives of college students today, their level of awareness of the data produced by their participation on the web may not always be the same. This article aims at investigating undergraduate students' awareness of their online identity, that is, the trail left by their interactions in digital environments, specifically, in the social network Facebook. Students will be asked to use the web 2.0 application "The museum of me", which converts Face Book users' data into an online personal exhibition. The application demands access to user's information account, pictures, videos, frequent friends' interactions and words used to produce a flash show that imitates a museum. The theme of this particular exhibition is the user him or herself, seen from a looking glass of the user's uploaded content to his or her Face Book account. In 2007 the Pew Internet Project released a report pertaining online identity management. It highlighted that the more content we contribute to the public or semipublic corners of the Web, the more we grow our active digital footprint. These are the traces of data we contribute voluntarily, often in specific contexts with specific audiences in mind. However, digital data is easily disembodied from the original context in which it was created—obscuring indicators such as time, place, and intended audience.

Pre and post activity questionnaires will be used to assess how close the exhibition meets students' perception of themselves, their feelings towards their digital footprint and their online identity management strategies. A mixed quantitative and qualitative methodology will be used.

Though any undergraduate students can be considered digitally competent, as they have become comfortable with the idea of authoring and posting content online, it is still relevant to make them aware of the responsibility they have at the same time that they receive proper guidance in the way in which they contribute voluntarily to the public or semi-public corners of the Web. Since digital identity poses attention on critical questions about personal development and social relationships, the results of this research will provide both quantitative and qualitative data which will evidence how students shape and also perceive their identity.

The expected results will lead us to a better understanding of the nature of their cultural and social experiences and will throw some light in the way in which we –as educators- can be of help in their learning process.

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