How is technology disrupting traditional academic practice? A look back at the NetworkED series

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The LSE's Centre for Learning Technology looks ahead to Anne-Wil Harzing's talk on the impact of citation analysis and **Sonja Grussendorf** *reflects on the course of the seminar series which has looked at how technological developments, particularly the internet, have led to changes in the way researchers and higher education institutions can understand their role in facilitating knowledge creation.*

Last year, the Impact blog did one of its 5 minute interviews with Professor Anne-Wil Harzing, whose software "Publish or Perish" allows academics to analyse their own (and others'!) citation data. The software is basically an interface for Google Scholar, making it quick and easy for academics to find and then evaluate their citations according to year, article, number of citations… But there are plenty of other uses. On a whim I might want to know what the most cited article in the British Journal of Educational Technology in 2008 was – a task made much simpler using "publish or perish".

Tomorrow at 3pm, Professor Harzing is coming to the LSE to speak at a CLT NetworkED seminar. Harzing will be giving a talk entitled "From publication to impact: using Google Scholar and Publish or Perish to measure research impact".

She will address why citation analysis should be on every academic's checklist in the first place. She will propose that Google Scholar must now complement traditional subscription-based sources of citation-data. And she will demonstrate her "Publish or Perish" software, showing how easy it is to track citations and how these results can be used to present a case for one's academic impact. Of course there will be the opportunity to question her approach, and also to share in what other ways her (freely available) software may be used.

Anne-Wil is the latest in a run of inspiring speakers we managed to secure over the past two years. From the outset we conceived the NetworkED seminar series – initially funded by the annual fund, now finishing a successful 2nd year run – as a forum to engage people on the topic of technology in education, and set out to attract high profile speakers from relevant fields.

We were clear that we wanted to extend the reach of these talks beyond the limited circle of learning technology practitioners, inviting speakers with topics of wider public interest: how is technology shaping the world? How is technology disrupting traditional educational and academic practice and enabling real improvements? How do we safeguard ourselves, our children, our future against the possibilities of negative outcomes of relying on technology? What impact and/or influence do educational technologists have on strategic institutional decisions regarding technology?

These and similar questions shape the overarching networkED theme of technology in education. Our contributors engaged us on a variety of issues. Demos think-tank collaborator Carl Miller spoke on internet myths and how to avoid them. Ellen Helsper from the LSE Media and Communications department explained the pros and cons of using social media in education, reminding us to be cautious and that our remit of care and responsibility towards students now extends into the social networking sphere. LSE's own Patrick Dunleavy introduced us to the idea of a 'republic of blogs' heralding a new age of the democratisation of knowledge; Lindsay Jordan from the University of Arts critically explored how technology may become a hindrance to academic flourishing if it is not aligned to changing institutional processes and teaching approaches. Due to the high quality of our speakers and their immediate relevance NetworkED has managed to grow a regular audience steadily through presenting digital scholarship lessons, a new information literacy curriculum, and the meaning of the internet.

Social media and social networking were a recurring feature in many of the seminars, and this trend is only going to continue. For future seminars we are hoping to explore this even more. Specifically, the use of social media in social science research, but also of course the impact social networking has ON and IN research. It is now common place to use social media to support research – be it using facebook to extend one's academic network and engage in informal discussions, or using twitter as a socially networked extended search engine, or blogs as a dissemination tool for research output and so on. Less common are case studies that show how social scientists are now using social media as data sources themselves, e.g. tweets as data to be analysed, twitter as a source to be mined. A good (and still rare) example to cite is the joint Guardian – LSE Reading the Riots project, a study into the summer 2011 unrests in various UK cities, which included analysis of 2.6 million tweets.

How was twitter used to spread the news? What was its role in spreading unsubstantiated claims? (As I write this, riots in Stockholm are in their fourth consecutive day – there seems to be little reporting on this in the British media, but a comparative analysis of social media use during the Sweden riots now and the UK riots in 2010 is surely begging to be made). Academics are moving towards using social media as analysis-worthy data sources, and there is much interest within the Social Sciences in particular. There is certainly much to explore: how can social media be mined for data, and could, should or should this be added to existing methodological frameworks? What are the ethical and legal issues surrounding this emerging practice? What are the benefits and what are the pitfalls of using social media for research data? And what is it that makes this emerging practice new and/or different? We would like to offer networkED seminar as a platform for academics who might speak on their use of social media in this way. So if you're one of them and would like to speak at a seminar next year, do get in touch!

We are always looking for speakers for next year on similarly relevant topics, relating to technology in education, the impact of technology on education, and so on (send your suggestions to clt-support@lse.ac.uk)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

About the Author

Sonja Grussendorf *is a learning technologist in the Centre for Learning Technology at the LSE. Her main interests are social media in education, theories of technology and interactive classroom technologies. Despite the job title, she maintains a critical stance towards technology, possibly due to having read Heidegger on technology once too often. She tweets, in a loose and personal way, as* @authenticdasein.