

# The Use of Social Media among Students of Technology Agriculture and their Role in Promoting Agribusiness

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**Abstract.** The world economy is changing due to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The ICTs affect and change the entire socioeconomic framework. Consequently, new forms of communication are created which facilitate the flow of information around the world, like “social media”. Social media brought people “closer” by facilitating the interaction between them. Social media appeal mainly to younger people since young generation mostly “exploits” Internet and new technologies.

The paper examines the relationship between the students and social media platforms. Thereby, it presents the use of social media platforms by students aged 19-31. Specifically it examines how much time they spend “socializing” through social media and the reasons they use them. Moreover, students evaluate the most important advantages and disadvantages of social media. In addition, the paper studies to what extent students believe that agribusiness can benefit by the “exploitation” of social media platforms.

**Keywords:** Social media, social networking, agribusiness, ICTs

## 1 Introduction

The exponential growth of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as the development of Internet during the last two decades has changed the business environment to a large extent. Governments, companies and organizations exploit through the ICTs new potentials and opportunities that are presented. The growth of the ICTs, the broadband technology and the wireless third generation technologies led to innovative ideas, new products and services and at the same time improved the flow of information in the companies. The companies, due to the new potentials, opportunities and new business processes offered by the ICTs, were able to reduce their costs and adapt to the new business and social framework that has been created by new technologies.

A major outcome of the growth and exploitation of the ICTs and the Internet was the creation of a new type of “website” that helped people create, share, chat and modify user - generated content, “the social media”. Today there are hundreds of social media platforms worldwide. There are different types of platforms that the user

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can join and use such as social networks, blogs and discussion groups. (Hanna, et. al. 2011, Xiang and Gretzel, 2010, Pitt and Berthon, 2011)

Social media are very popular especially among younger users. They are very easy to access since there is more than one way to log in social media platforms like mobile and computer-based technology. The most popular platforms of social media are the social networking platforms. These platforms allow users to interact through personal profiles they create and they can invite friends to access those profiles and send e-mails, share photos, videos and audio files with each other. The profile the user creates includes photos, various personal information, video and audio files. Examples of such platforms are Facebook, MySpace and MySpace. (Kietzmann, et. al. 2011, Yates and Paquette, 2011)

The popularity of the social media leads to a new communication framework where individuals have the power to interact, collaborate and share information. Through that process individuals create a new trend that influences on a large extent the way companies interact with the customer. (Hanna, et. al. 2011, Mangold and Faulds, 2009, Freberg, et. al. 2011)

In that way the social media democratized the on-line communication and shifted the power to the users since previously the companies, through their marketing strategy, could control the flow of information provided to the customer, create new trends and influence people on a large extent. (Kietzmann, et. al. 2011)

Social networks can also improve collaborative governance processes by facilitating, (i) the generation, acquisition and diffusion of different types of knowledge and information about the systems under management (Crona and Bodin, 2006), (ii) mobilization and allocation of key resources for effective governance ( Carlsson and Sandstrom, 2008), (iii) commitment to common rules among actors fostering willingness to engage in monitoring and sanctioning programs ( Scholz and Wang, 2006), and (iv) resolution of conflicts (Hahn et al., 2006).

The Greek reality of Social Networks according to research firm MRB, shows that a 72% of Greek users have profiles on Facebook, 36% have a personal page on YouTube and about 18% of Greeks have a Twitter profile. In addition, a 30% of online users have at some point start (and still maintain) a blog and a 52% of online users have made online purchases (MRB, 2009, 2011).

According to another survey approximately one third of the Greek advertising companies embody the possibilities of social media in marketing strategies while only about 26% of the Greek enterprises are using Facebook as branding, target marketing and promotional tool (Burson Masteller, 2010).

Today more agribusinesses are oriented to Internet, and use it as a tool for information, advertising and communication with their clients and colleagues. The on-line presence of agribusinesses is expected for those interested in establishing and growing their trade (Seretakakis et al., 2010). This presence has become more interactive and turns to new communication frameworks.

Twitter, Facebook and other social media have built their reputation by helping people keep in touch with family and friends, but this seems to change. A growing cadre of professionals, among them agronomists and farmers are harnessing social media as a tool for communicating with fellow colleagues, consumers and future clients about the business of agriculture.

This paper aims at exploring the level of social media use by students of agriculture and their opinions about the influence of social media on agribusiness.

## 2 Methodology - Materials

The survey was conducted in March 2011, by the Laboratory of Computer & Multimedia of the Department of Agricultural Development and Agribusiness Management (AD), of the Technological Educational Institute of Thessaloniki. The method used for this paper was the completion of questionnaires. A questionnaire with questions, of close and open type, was completed by each one of the students. Questionnaires were distributed to the students of the 2nd and 4th semester of the AD Department, attending the courses of “Informatics II” and “Database Management”. Questionnaires were delivered and collected by hand. At the time of the collection, there was maximum response level. The questionnaire includes fifteen questions, divided in three groups. The first set of questions aims at collecting information about the use of social media among students. The next set of questions focuses on social media and their use in education and communication regarding agricultural issues. Finally, the last group of questions concerns the presence of agribusinesses in social media and the outcomes.

The statistical analysis was performed with Ms Excel 2007 statistical package.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Quantitative Features

The sample of the survey was comprised 57,14 % by women and 42,86% by men. The use of social media by females reaches a 51,79% and a 37,5% by male as shown in Figure 1.

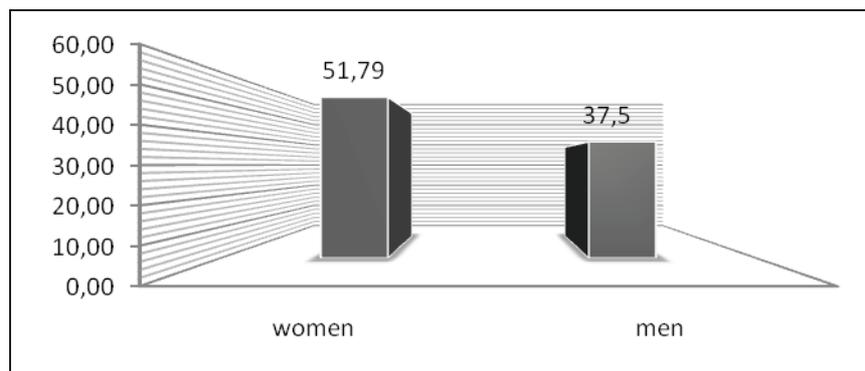


Fig. 1. Percentage of female and male students using social media

The number of male and female students that do not use social media is equal. Regarding the time spend on-line by students the majority of the students, a 41,07% stay on-line less than two hours daily. A 33,93% stay on-line for about two to maximum five hours and a 14,29% spend over five hours daily on-line.

In addition, a 62,50 % of students spend the majority of their on-line time in social media and stay on-line less than two hours daily, while a 19,64% of students spend from a minimum of two to a maximum of five hours in social media daily. At the same time a 7,14% of students spend over five hours daily in social media as shown in Figure 2.

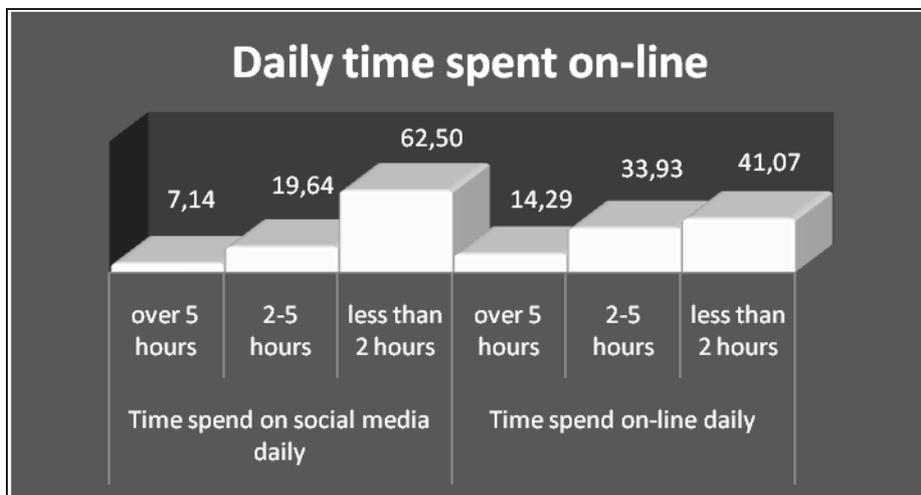


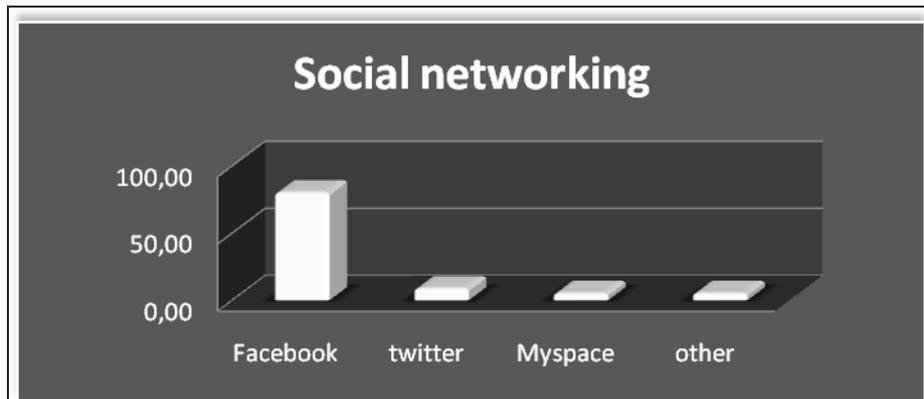
Fig. 2. Daily time spent on-line by students

One of the main reasons for using social media is spending time, as pointed out by a significant number of students (57,14%). The other reasons with descended order are networking (19,64%), sharing interests (10,71%) and other (1,79%) as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reasons for using Social Media.

Reason	Percentage
Networking	19,64%
Share of interests	10,71%
Killing time	57,14%
Other	1,79%

Regarding the most favorite social media platform, first comes Facebook with the devastating 80,56%, followed by Twitter (8,93%), and Myspace (5,36%), as shown in Figure 3.



**Fig. 3.** Most popular social media platforms

Among their social media contacts students, of the Department of Agricultural Development and Agribusiness Management, have at a 42,86% befriended with a contact of agricultural interest or agricultural occupation or agribusinesses as shown in Figure 4.



**Fig. 4.** Percentage of social contacts of agricultural interest

Students believe that the use of social media by agricultural firms can enhance and promote agribusinesses in a percentage of 85,71%. They suppose that encouragement of agribusiness can be achieved in certain ways like: addressing to a new and bigger

audience (31%), better advertising of the products (37%) and improved promotion of the image of the company (32%) as shown in Figure 5.

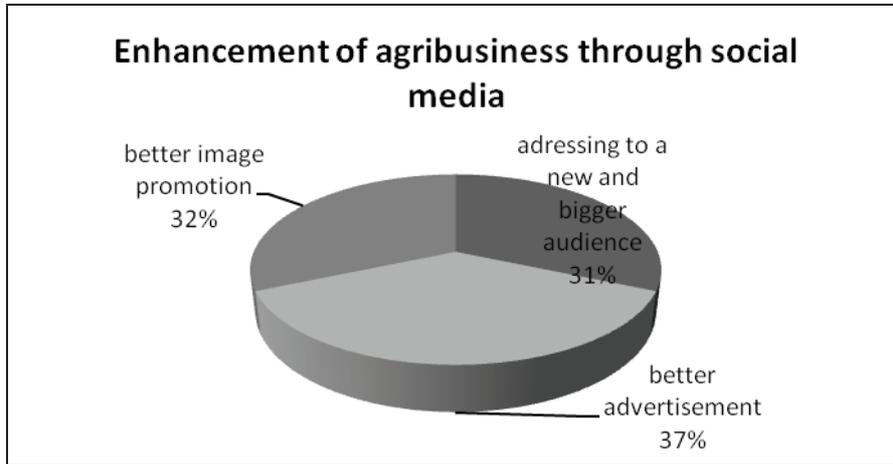


Fig. 5. Enhancement of Agribusiness through social media

### 3.2 Qualitative Features

Positive effects of the use of social media on students are considered to be enjoyment (58,93%), new ways of informing (53,57%), dating (44,64%), easier exchange of views ( 35,71%) and contribution to knowledge (23,21%) as shown in Figure 6.

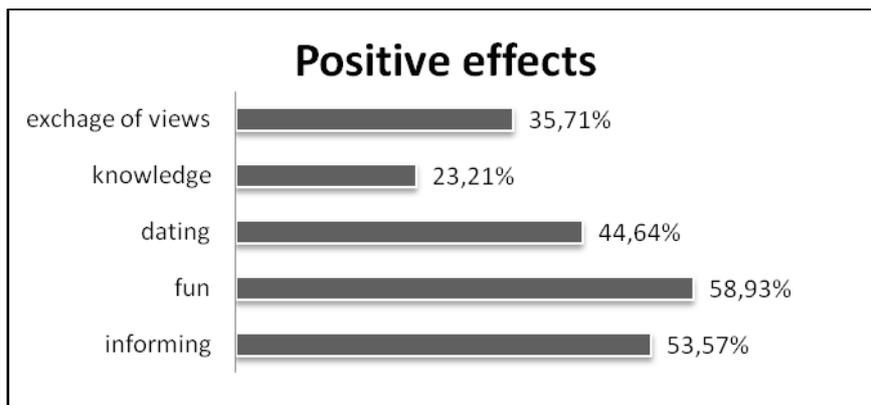
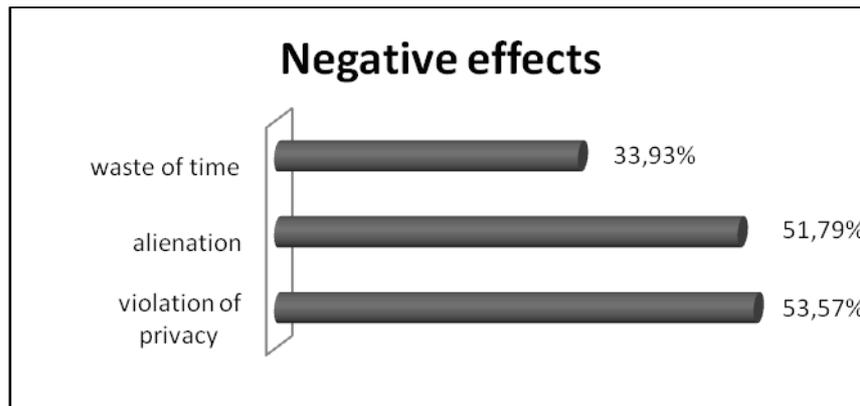


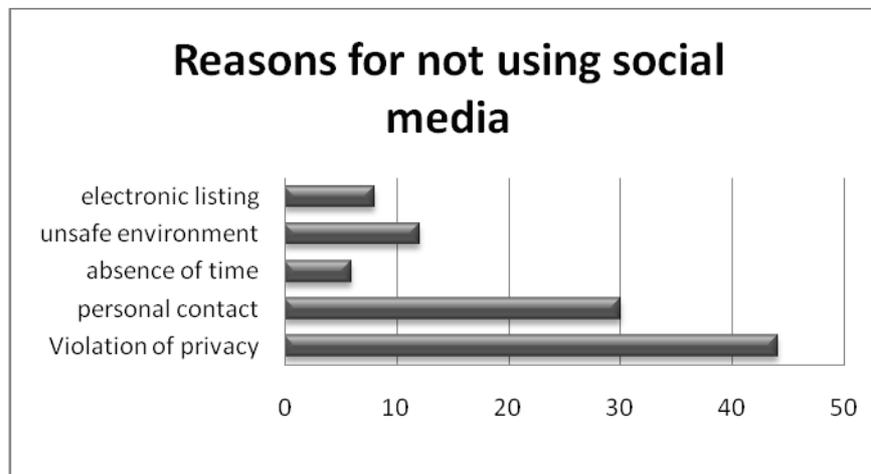
Fig. 6. Positive effects of the use of social media on students

Negative effects of the use of social media on students are violation of privacy (53,57%), alienation of people (51,79%) and waste of time (33,93%) as shown in Figure 7.



**Fig. 7.** Negative effects of the use of social media on students

Finally, students do not use social media for the following reasons in decreasing order: violation of privacy, personal contact, unsafe environment, electronic listing, and absence of time, as shown in Figure 8.



**Fig. 8.** Reasons for not using social media

## 4 Conclusions

The Internet has changed and became more interactive than it was before. Consumers' behavior is what defines the business strategy and if consumers use the internet more than ever to learn about new products, to shop online, to criticize and exchange views with other consumers, e-commerce is the channel through which is carried an advertising dialogue between companies and consumers. Nowadays a company's presence in electronic markets is inevitable.

New trends in communication technologies changed social contacts and lead to new forms of interaction like the online communities. The interest of agriculturists in social networks is motivated by the fact that social networks are an important channel that provides information to people and in addition can be used as a target marketing and promotional tool.

Young students, who study subjects regarding agriculture, are familiar with the recent evolutions in technology issues and use social media services mainly to communicate, to spend their time and to retrieve information. The percentage of the students who use social media to retrieve information is lower compared to the other two services. The interest of the students in social media is considerable and the need for a better and more systematic approach is requested.

The use and number of Social Media platforms dramatically increased and are showing great potential in issues such as:

- The expectation for knowledge / information and the identification (of people) against the contractually mass media. People can be open to new things like, socializing, entertainment, communication, innovative ideas, dissemination of good practices and governance techniques regarding all disciplines and sectors of economic development, including natural resources and agriculture
- The cheap advertisement of products and the creation of new Brands which can be an asset for agribusinesses
- The opportunity for small businesses to communicate with more clients than through traditional channels

The rise of social media can support efforts of open innovation and enable agro-companies to develop channels of communication with customers, academics and experts, which before could not be reached. Farmers on the other hand, are advised to first establish goals for how to use the tools, become familiar with what opportunities these tools have to offer and then develop a strategy for using these tools.

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