Radio 2.0 in Higher Education Communities.
An approximation of Aveiro University Members perceptions

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Abstract:
The web 2.0 raises new challenges and opportunities in many different fields of activity, namely because it introduces different approaches and possibilities to the relationship among participants both at institutional and individual levels.

On the Higher Education context many changes are occurring due to the introduction of new learning paradigms, many of them take advantage of web 2.0 technologies to configure more effective and diverse scenarios to support the work of students and teaching staff.

Social networks are currently being adopted in many Higher Education communities as platforms to support the interaction among community members, taking advantage of the potential of those networks to foster strong and meaningful relationships and support the awareness and consolidation of group identity. This potential is being explored to promote new possibilities for teaching and learning that include new approaches such as the personal learning environments.

This article addresses the potential that radio services have for Higher Education communities in a web 2.0, focusing on the case of the University of Aveiro (Portugal). The article explores the perceptions that Aveiro academic members have about webradio potentialities in terms of sense of belonging creation and community cohesion.

Keywords: webradio, university, community, social networks

Radio as a service of a university community

The incorporation of the radio in the university field, as well as their potential use by the academic community, is not a recent phenomenon. The first initiative of this kind took place in 1919 at the University of Wisconsin (Faus, 1973).

College radio refers to a type of station that operates within an academic community and presents characteristics of community radio and educational ones. These stations can be a global institutional project involving the entire university community or an initiative from a more restricted entity (faculty, student union, student-teacher of a specific subject...) (Sauls, 1995: 1).

In fact, the phenomenon of college radio has evolved from the first experimental stations and, nowadays, has multiple configurations depending on the technological support broadcast (FM, AM, web), audience (of a closed circuit to a wider community of listeners), aims (education, outreach, entertainment) or management models (Sauls, 1995: 2).

Amongst the features of college radio, González Conde (2001: 476-477) especifies the vocation of public service, specialized in scientific and cultural dissemination, the easiness of access to members of the community, the approach to a mostly young audience and the constitution of a support for publishing content that is educational. Characteristics that imply a programming for the college radio, different from commercial ones.

Teixeira, Perona Paez & Daher (2010: 179) include college radio stations within the cultural and educational dimension. This type of stations, to which also belong community radio stations, is characterized by uncommercial objectives and social vocation. College radio has also a cohesive feature that, combined with the fact that it operates within an academic community, gives it characteristics of community radio stations. Some of these features are the proximity of the target audience, the removal of a commercial pattern and the production of content by the members of the community (Caldeira & Simeone, 2006: 67).

Indeed the main goal of any college radio is to provide a service to the community, regardless of whether it is a strictly academic community or a wider community (Sauls, 1995: 2).

The purpose of this paper is to deepen into the perceptions that different audiences in the academic community of Aveiro have about the potential of a college radio for the community cohesion and the promotion of a sense of belonging,. The underlying conception of the university webradio is here a platform with links to social networks, a space to share materials among professors-students or students-students, and other kind of interaction tools.

Radio transposition to the Internet offers lots of potentialities for the college stations. University radios experience a major development in the web because of the technological and legal facilities of the web broadcast, which have led to the emergence of new forms of creation, issuance and dissemination (Teixeira, Perona& Gonçalves, 2001: 184). In fact, since the early college radio web initiatives that took place in the late 90's, this phenomenon has been expanding.

The radiomorphosis. A new paradigm based on the interaction

The mediamorphosis (Fidler, 1997) in radio renewed the audio product with the addition of components inherent to digital system. In the Internet, the radio implemented its communication strategies beyond the strictly sound field (González Conde, 2010: 55), by developing a new programming concept closer to the customization of content (Albarran & Pitts, 2001: 172), by losing transience and by encouraging the creation and cohesion of communities of targeted listeners (Prietsman, 2002: 226); listeners who benefit from new forms of participation based on interactivity (Priestman, 2002: 228; Tolson, 2006; Kidney & Ala-Fossi, 2008: 44).

Thus, webradio set up a platform where converge multiple features of the conventional media with those derived from its new multimedia essence like flexibility, ubiquity, synchronous and asynchronous communication, language and interactive multimedia. "Also, the website is a tool key to promote the contents on air and to contribute an additional meaning to the distribution of the programming based on the interactivity" (Moreno, Martínez-Costa & Amoedo, 2009: 131).

The phenomenon of radiomorphosis (Prata, 2008) was reflected primarily on the genres and on the interaction. Two connected areas that establish the essence of the Internet medium and alter broadcasting concept nature (Cordeiro, 2004: 15).

From the perspective of interaction, the transfer from terrestrial radio to the web has strengthened relations with the user through new forms of relationship. Interaction that has evolved from participation via email, an e-review of wiretapping tradicional model, to other nearish and instantaneous modes like social networks. "The enjoyment of these new tools weaves a web of sociability, by which the network of relationships of every person can be considerably increased. This is due to the return of listeners, interacting in relation to broadcast content and also due to the release profile on portals, directories and virtual communities" (Kischinhevsky, 2009: 234).

The interaction of these listeners in multiple social networks establishes a relation between them and the practitioner, a relationship which allows real-time feedback regarding the contents conveyed. This enables consolidation of collaborative media based on a single network that combines social networking and various web tools 2.0 (wiki, virtual galleries of photographs, audiovisual platforms, news aggregators, etc.).

Webradio listener / user can request songs, dedicate them, comment on news with other listeners / users, post messages, submit questions for interviews, link content to blogs or social networks, etc. In this context, prosumer figure rises up as a listener consumer and content producer at once (Toffler 1980: 275).

The multimedia nature of the web allows to push the limits established between the radio and its listeners. Webradio producers and consumers are not longer separated roles, and interact with new rules (Jenkins, 2006: 28; Moreno, Martínez-Costa & Amoedo, 2009: 121-122). A relation marked by the fact that, as Moare stressed (in Buffarah Junior, 2004: 6) there is no place on the net for passive recipients. "The listener is not the only target audience: the user networks, in general, is also the focus of content producers. The radio experience at that time, new concepts and gain time previously inaccessible devices "(Ahmed, 2003:11).

The concept of community of listeners requires a redefinition over the webradio field that, beyond the limits of spacial or temporal nature, is characterized by their interests or lifestyles (Evans & Smethers, 2001).

Broadcasters should take an active role in establishing new relationships with listeners / users beyond the strictly nature of sound (Evans & Smether, 2001). "Space is opening up for introducing the figure of the moderator (...) [That] should know how to feed a close relation between the radio and it(s) social network(s) in the Net (Vieira, Cardoso & Medonça, 2010: 25).

This new potential of Internet radio enables its use in a community college with multiple objectives. From a strictly educational perspective, webradios, as platforms for cultural and educational outreach, favour the creation and consolidation of virtual learning communities (Teixeira & Da Silva, 2009: 5).

Moreover, the incorporation of web radio broadcasting in the university area promotes connection to the new students generation, the "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Students are configured as the primary audience / users of Internet radio and other different services, especially social networks (Rose & Lenski, 2007; Baker, 2010).

The characteristics of this digital natives group can be considered convergent with the web broadcasting potentiality: "nomadism, individualism, customization and personalization, exhibition and voyeurism, public and private space, memory of the generation on demand and a young profile in transformation" (Rodrigues da Cunha, 2010: 182). This convergence should not be dismissed on college radio.

Methodology

To accomplish the aim of assessing the perceptions that Aveiro University members (from now on AU) have about webradio potential for academic community cohesion, an approach to its main audiences has been carried out: students and professors. An approach that adopted different samples, analysis tool and methodology. The selection of both convenience samples was done according to different criteria.

Students

According to Rose and Lenski (2007) and Baker (2010) students are configured as the primary recipient of a university webradio. This is a circumstance of special interest from the point of view of webradios potential for university community cohesion.

A test sample of 78 individuals belonging to three different groups of students in the UA was chosen: communication graduate students (masters and doctorates), students coursing other subjects (undergraduate and graduate) and foreign students-researchers in various scientific areas.

The first group of 45 graduate students in communication was selected on the assumption that, by their proximity to the communication field, they would present an active consumption of media as well as hold an interesting perspective on the possible contents of this web radio (which could be incorporated later in research).

The selection of the second group of 18 undergraduate and graduate in other scientific areas was due to the need for a sample of students from the AU whose media consumption, and ideas regarding the potential of an university webradio, would not be influenced by their proximity to the field. This sample could offer a different perspective from communication students.

The third group consisted on 15 foreign students-researchers (all of them users of the residence of the UA) as a representation of the relevance from this population in Aveiro university community.

These three groups of students have in common their status as active users of social networks (one or more). Indeed, 89% were connected at least once this week and 68% interact in social networks every day.

This volume of hits in the sample reveals a prevailing culture of networks that could be transferred to the university community realm. Transfer that would enable the establishment of horizontal links (between equals), vertical (students-professors) and even of diagonal type (with other audiences AU) encouraging the university community cohesion.
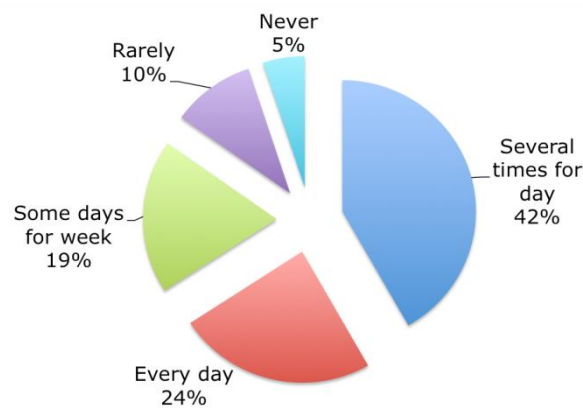

Figure 1. Frequency of use of social networks among students in the sample

The questionnaire was chosen as the tool to understand the precepts that students have about the potential of webradios for the university community. Data was collected quantitatively and qualitatively through different types of questions (depending on the type of response: open, closed, multiple choice, yes or no, Likert scale or hierarchy scale).

The last part of the questionnaire focused on students preferences and perceptions about webradios and their ability to establish relationships with other community members, to strengthen the academic community and to foster a sense of belonging. It also included other issues, regarding the use of social media, as other tools of web 2.0, and the interest in participating in a possible college radio. In order to validate the questionnaire, a control group of five individuals (belonging to the population under study) was used, which allowed the improvement of the formulation of some questions, as well as the overall coherence and organization of this data collection tool.

Professors

Professors are the other main public from college radio and, for this reason, it would be interesting to learn about their perception about college radio possibilities to strengthen of the academic community. Their inclusion

in the research as a another sample could offer a richer vision of students answers about college radio and its characteristics.

To evaluate the perceptions of professors about the potential of a college radio platform on the web for community cohesion, a convenience sample of five professors from AU Communication & Art Department was selected. This selection is based on the assumption that, given their expertise, these professors would present a broad knowledge of new media and its possibilities, as well as offers a critical perspective of them.

In this sense, to get as much information as possible about the idea that professors have over the university webradios, in-depth interview was chosen as a research tool.

An interview of 20 minutes was structured around three blocks of questions: their perception of web radio as a casual user, their perception of the possibilities of this platform for the university community in general, and their perception of potentials that this webradio could provide for their specific teaching. The contributions made by professors during the course of these interviews were recorded in audio format and revised. This review allowed to draw ideas for the next phase of this research.

Main results

The work developed allowed us to deepen into the precepts that, both students and professors, have about the benefits of a webradio implementation for the Aveiro university community. These results were structured in two blocks according to the sample and methodological differences.

Students

Surveyed students were particularly receptive to a webradio creation in the context of the Aveiro academy community. 84% of students considered interesting the implementation of the AU webradio and 71% even foresees the possibility that this platform could become their favourite station.

However, students are not so sure that this platform is a good way to establish links between the different audiences of university webradio.
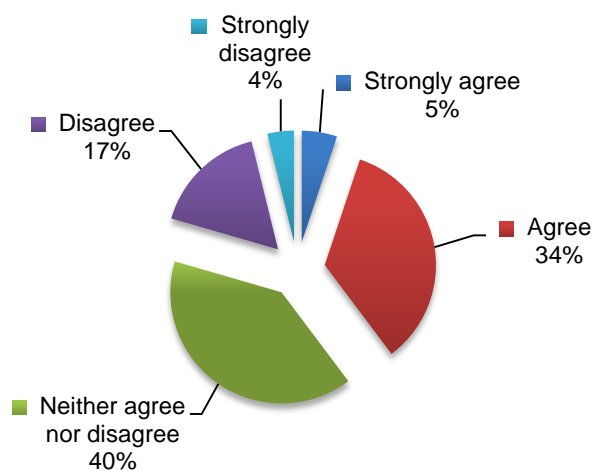

Figure 2. University webradio platform interaction is a good form to meet people

As shown in the chart above (Figure 2), although a relevant percentage of AU students considers positive the webradio interaction for meeting and establishing relationships with others (a total of 39%), most of the respondents believe that this platform is not necessarily a place to meet people, but do not dismiss it (40%).
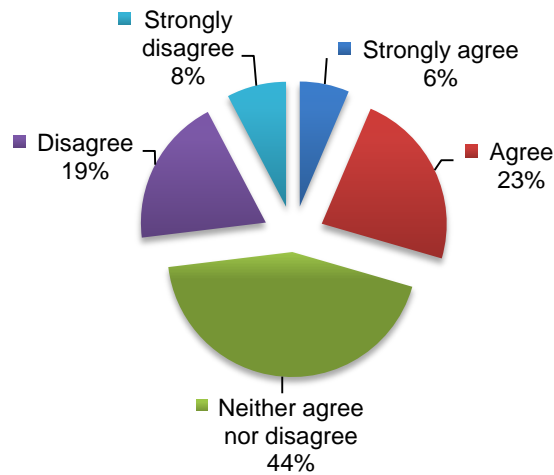
Figure 3. University webradio platform interaction is a good form to establish close relationships between university mates

Regarding to the possibility of webradio to strengthen relations between university colleagues, the percentage of students who consider that the platform may be interesting for establishing these links between people of the same course / subject decreases by 29% (6% is strongly agree and 23% somehow agree).

In this case, although the majority of individuals surveyed were indifferent to the proposition that a university webradio may be a good way to establish closer relationships between partners (44%), it should be noted an increase in the number students who dismiss this possibility (27%). This increase reflects a balance between those who advocate the potential of university webradios to establish relationships with peers and those who seem critics.
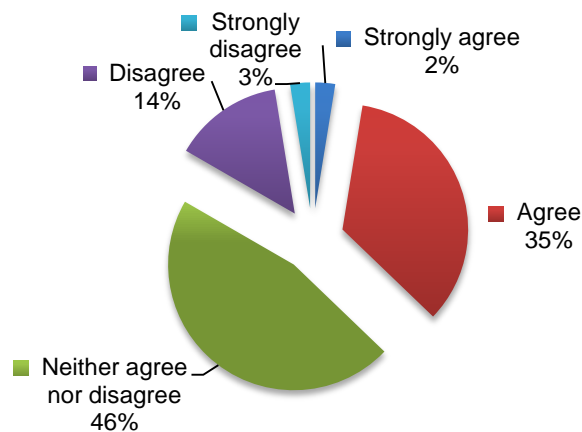

Figure 4. University webradio platform interaction is a good form to establish relationships with professors

The students concept about the webradio platforms potential to meet people or to promote a closer relationship with classmates is a reflection of their use of social networks. So the fact of coursing the same degree, course or courses, does not imply the need for online links.

A completely different situation is reflected in relationships with professors. The number of students who consider that college radio platforms allow students and professors to establish relationships increased to 37%, and 46% do not rule out this possibility.

The possibility to establish such relationships between two different audiences from the university sphere allows to foresee the perception of university webradios as a cohesiveness element for this kind of community (Figure 5).
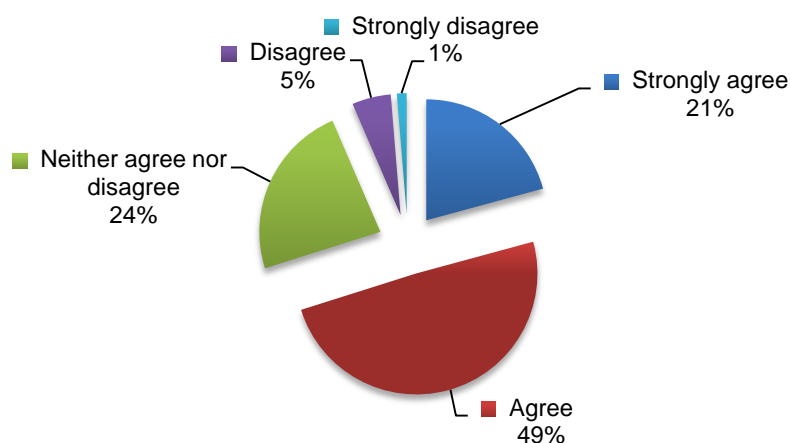

Figure 5. University webradio can promote university community cohesion

Although most of the students do not totally agree with the creation a webradio platform to foster interpersonal interaction among peers or among professors, this trend is opposite when they are asked about its chances for community cohesion.

70% of students consider that the creation of a webradio on the AU would be a support for community cohesion, encouraging the establishment of ties between members of the community and groups involved. A circumstance that is only contested by 6% of individuals surveyed.
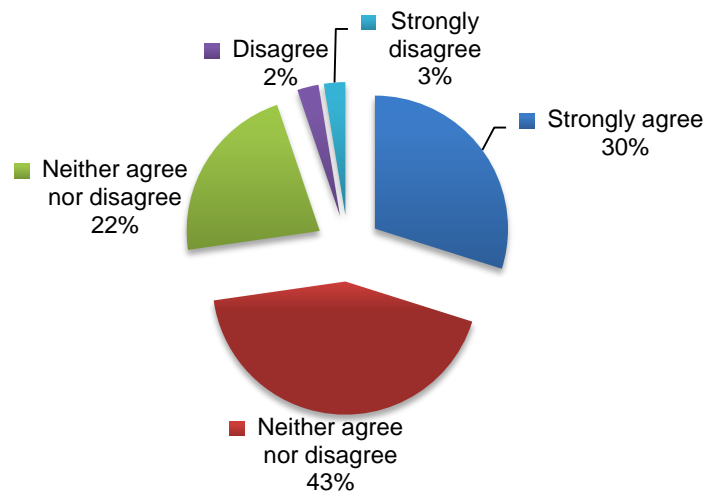
Figure 6. University webradio can promote the feeling of university community membership

The same happens with the feeling of belonging. Most students think that the creation of the AU webradio increases the identification of academic community members with the university.

Thus, 73% of respondents said that the launch of a platform with these features would help to promote pride of belonging. A similar percentage of those individuals also raises the possibility that this webradio become their favourite station. The sum of these realities would foster a community of loyal listeners that would still remain at the basis of a constant feedback process: the fact that the radio becomes a favourite station favours an increases of the pride of belonging, which in turn brings more listeners to the radio, etc.

However, despite their consideration of the university webradio for the cohesion of the academic community and of its high consumption of social networks, only few students would incorporate them into a platform of university webradio. Only a third of the sample (37 individuals) thinks that it would be interesting to include a link to the social networks.

Professors

Likewise students, professors interviewed considered interesting the implementation a webradio university in Aveiro academic community.

This interest was justified by the need to give visibility to the activities of the university and to the type of work done by its researchers. Visibility of internal type, as a channel to support the dissemination of daily activities beyond the university web (with low reading among students), and external, to engage a broader community in the events taking place in the academic institution.

Regarding the role of this webradio for the university community cohesion, all professors interviewed defended its value for the creation of a sense of belonging. In fact, for them, any new form of connection between the various groups of the university improves community cohesion. A connection powered in webradio by pride of belonging.

This pride of belonging is based, as targeted by professors interviewed in:

✓ Providing the community with a new channel that gives information about the events developed in the framework of the university quickly and efficiently. Professors indicated that, despite the many events held at the UA, there is some opacity of information. Any initiative that promotes the flow of information is optimal to increase this sense of belonging.

✓ Informing society about research, experience or other events taking place in the AU or in collaboration with it. The disclosure of the activities carried out in the university not only contributes to the creation, or enhancement, of brand image of the AU, but also increases the pride of belonging of its members. In this sense, one of the professors interviewed referred to a television program of the AU which, despite the early morning broadcast, contributed to the identification of members of the community with the university.

✓Fostering collaboration between community members in developing content for this radio. This radio manager should seek tools to review, create content, collaborate on the development of the grid etc. The fact that students have a channel to whose contents they could collaborate is an element of interest for an identification with the institution. "I am an official channel of the university and I contributed to it". Similar situation occurs when the voices of leaders are familiar.

Also, these professors believe that social networks are an essential element to make horizontal and vertical communication easy, and with it, to facilitate the cohesion of the university community. "It is inevitable that each program obtains feedback on social networks. Otherwise, any project is stillborn".

In short, professors defend the appropriateness of a webradio university for the academic community cohesion. In this defense, some respondents cited the RUM (University of Minho radio, Portugal) as an example of a station that encourages pride of belonging among members of the university community.

These professors based on webradio cohesive role of a university the possibility of establishing a medium to a large consumption by different audiences, sensitive to the tastes and interests of its members as well as a unique way of approaching what is happening in this community university.

In conclusion

The approach made about the perceptions that professors and students have of the potential of a university web radio platform, particularly from an educational perspective, has allowed the following conclusions:

Students and professors agree on the interest when considering the creation of a web radio platform in the area of the Aveiro university community, and even a majority of students (60%) foresee the possibility of this webradio becoming his/her prefered station.

Both groups believe that the radio platform on the web can be interesting for the cohesion of the academic community and foster a sense of belonging. But students do not give too much value to this platform as a place to meet people or engage in closer relationships between classmates.

Professors identified three issues which can build pride in belonging: to have a new channel of internal communication; the dissemination of University activities to the society and its recognition by the latter; and the involvement of different groups of the academic community in order to develop content for this radio.

When determining the type of social interaction tools that the webradio must configured, it is remarkable that, while professors consider a "must" to create a platform strongly connected to social networks, only one third of the students consider it appropriate.

In short, for students and professors, the implementation of a webradio university is an important element to foster the university community both unity and communication (a new channel of communication internal or external), by the participation in content production and with it, by the development of a sense of belonging. A feeling summed up in this sentence: "I am an official channel of the university and I have contributed to this".

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