Understanding Digital Education

Module 3
Engaging with Networks
The Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) is a programme designed to promote digital education environment in Commonwealth nations. It will engage with governments, educational institutions, teachers, and civil society organisations to assess digital education competencies and provide training opportunities for teachers and students to help them build digital education skills for lifelong learning. It will develop leaders who can demonstrate how to use ICTs effectively and influence others around them to use digital technology appropriately and effectively for learning (and earning) and support sustainable development.

This module is has been developed by the University of Cape Town (UCT) with support from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. UCT is South Africa’s oldest university, and is one of Africa’s leading teaching and research institutions.

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**About the Digital Education Leadership Curriculum**

The Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA) project is a programme of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) that intends to promote digital education in the Commonwealth nations. In order to develop Digital Education Leaders (DEL), these modules have been produced by the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT) at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in collaboration with COL. The Conceptual framework underpinning these modules has been published - see [http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2442](http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/2442). However some aspects from the Concept Document are foregrounded here to assist you in understanding how the modules are planned and work together.

A curriculum for digital education leadership requires two components: digital education and leadership in digital education, with digital literacies as the basis for both. The two components for the curriculum framework have been developed on the assumption that before an individual becomes a digital education leader, that individual must first demonstrate capability in the practices identified with digital education. In other words, the assumption is that a leader should be able to walk their talk and can only lead if they have the necessary knowledge in the “stuff” to be led. Hence, two linked frameworks have been developed: one addressing digital education and one addressing leadership in digital education.

**Overview**

The module overview gives you a general introduction to the module. We strongly recommend that you read the overview carefully before starting your study.

**Is modules of C-DELTA suitable for me?**

Digital education leadership is more than a set of digital abilities or skills; it is a method and set of processes for doing and thinking about digital education. In these modules we seek to develop you as a Digital education leader through fostering your digital literacy, in order to develop your influence of others through your creative pursuits and innovations in the effective use of ICT for teaching and learning. This view goes beyond skills and competencies, although digital education leaders need to be fluent in the use of ICT for learning and teaching. As a digital education leader, you must be able to translate literacy to leadership through questioning the status quo, providing direction and exercising influence.

We assume that leadership is an attribute of an individual and is not related to any position or roles they may have. Digital education leadership, from this perspective, will involve different players at different levels. However this initiative envisages primarily three sets of learners: students, teachers and policy makers.

The modules all contain a number of multiple choice questions (MCQs) that will give you a sense of what concepts you are familiar with and which are new to you. Depending on your prior knowledge you may choose to use these MCQs to construct a personal learning path through the curriculum. However given that the activities within the modules are aimed at
helping you develop capabilities and skills in digital education leadership we recommend that even if you are familiar with the content, that you engage in the activities.

The depth and the way you engage with the curriculum is likely to differ depending on your context and prior experience. We anticipate that these modules may be suitable for individuals to undertake as a self-study resource.

In addition, Governments, educational institutions and civil society organisations across Commonwealth countries and beyond may also like to use the framework, curriculum, courses and assessment tool developed in this project for workshops and group training. As the resources are published under a Creative Commons license, you are free to adapt them for your contexts under the license agreement. Many of the activities can be adapted to be done in a group and by working through the MCQs. It is also possible (at an organisational level) for the curriculum to be contextualised and customised for a group process.

**How Part 1 is structured**

Digital education has been defined here as the process of fostering people’s ability to live, learn and work in an evolving digitally mediated society by (i) developing digital identities, (ii) mobilising resources and (iii) engaging with networks.

Part 1 (Modules 1-3) of the curriculum are structured around these three interrelated themes.

**Developing digital identities** refers to working with the digital tools and networks to which you have access in your contexts in order to enable you to create and manage your own online presences and footprints, and to exercise control over your expression of this digital identity (or identities). By implication, this involves negotiating pathways within contexts.

**Mobilising resources** refers to the processes of finding out which resources are available to you in your context, which skills you need in order to acquire the necessary capabilities to draw on these resources, the development of understanding of how these resources are used in practice in your particular contexts, and the development of capabilities to evaluate, combine and create new resources.

**Engaging with networks** refers to interacting with networks in a manner that is meaningful and purposeful. This entails constructively sharing information, knowledge and resources. In the online space, this can entail building on your understanding of the social media ecosystem to enable choices regarding where and how you can create online profiles, interact with people across different networks and build of personal learning networks.

**How Part 2 is structured**

Part 2 of the curriculum comprises modules 4-7. It focuses on developing you as a Digital Education leader in order to work together with individuals, institutions, communities and networks to foster people’s ability to live, learn and work in an evolving digitally mediated society by:

1. enhancing access — i.e., environmental considerations;
2. making informed decisions appropriate to context — i.e., to choose from options in a given context and implement digital education;
3. developing capacity in individuals, curricula and organisations — i.e., operational dimensions; and
4. cultivating innovation — i.e. to reflect being a leader, foster collaboration and networks to accelerate innovation.

**The module content**

Each dimension comprises:

- An introduction to the unit content.
- Unit outcomes
- New terminology.
- Core content of the unit
- A variety of learning activities
- A unit summary.
- MCQ assessments, as applicable

**Resources**

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources throughout the modules these are usually online resources with further links to a range of multimodal resources. We are cognisant of different contexts and the variation in access to the internet and so have tried to provide a range of resources. The curriculum aims to acknowledge histories, bodies of knowledge and thought leaders from a range of Commonwealth countries and is designed to be sensitive to participants’ contexts and experiences. However we are few people and would welcome your suggestions and input in terms of resources and examples. The curriculum is CC BY-SA which enables you to adapt and modify the content and we hope that if you do so you will contribute your suggestions back to us.

**Your comments**

After completing these modules we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this module. Your feedback might include comments on:

- content and structure.
- reading materials and resources (including videos).
- activities.
- assessments.
- duration.

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this module.

**Study skills**

As an adult learner, your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days: you will choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities. Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource. Your most significant considerations will be time and space i.e. the time you dedicate to your learning and the environment in which you engage in that learning. We
recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web.

**Timeframe**
As described above, as an adult learner, you will make choices about how deeply you want to engage with the module. This will depend on your prior experiences and context. The modules range between 30 and 60 pages and include 3-6 activities which require further exploration, reflection, engagement and exploration from you. We estimate if you engage fully with the modules it will take you 16-20 hours.

**Assessments**
Each module also has a number of multiple choice quizzes. This will give you a sense of how well you have understood the concepts and content contained in each module. However it won’t give you the experience and skills you need in order to become a Digital Education Leader. The activities provided in the modules are for self-directed learning and development. Through engaging in these activities you will develop your own digital practices which will provide the basis for your development as a Digital Education Leader.

**Margin icons**
While working through these modules you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity. A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Icon</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Terminology</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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**MODULE 3: ENGAGING WITH NETWORKS**

**Introduction to module**

In Module 1 of this course we considered what it means to ‘be digital’. We looked at the range of different tools and technologies that can be used to interact with resources online. By online resources we mean people and content that are accessible through a range of tools and services available on the internet. Module 1 focused on developing digital identities. Module 2 focused on mobilising online resources.

In this module we will focus on interacting with people through online networks. This might be to communicate, share information or collaborate with others to take actions or produce content. This may be in a personal or community context, as part of learning activities or in relation to work and professional life.
UNIT 1: NETWORKS

Introduction

A great deal of current online engagement is mediated through networks - platforms or services that gather together users and content based on specific subjects, communities, geographical areas, professions, or personal needs. As the internet landscape has matured, these networks have begun to be differentiated according to their purposes, the forms of engagement in which they specialise.

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge of different kinds of online networks.
- Understand issues of power and influence in online networks.
- Identify the different forms of engagement that different networks are optimised for.
- Examine your current network usage against your desired functionality and explore the use of alternative networks.

Social networking: A range of online networks that support social activities such as communication, sharing and collaboration

Communication networks: Online networks that exist to support communication between individuals, organisations and communities

Sharing networks: Online networks that support sharing of digital content such as images, documents, videos, posts

Collaboration networks: Online networks designed to facilitate collaborative activities.

Open networks: Online networks that follow an open policy, allowing people to share, communicate and/or collaborate with the intention of promoting inclusion, access and altruistic sharing.

Subject networks: Online networks that focus on a particular or specialist subject area

Synchronous communication: Online communication in real-time (at the same time) enabling immediate and instant interaction such as instant messaging, chat, webinars

Asynchronous communication: Communication which takes place across networks intermittently (not at the same time) enabling communication across time zones and distance such as email, discussion forums, microblogging

What is social networking

Social networking is one element of the digital landscape that involves connecting with other
people online. People connect online for a wide range of reasons in their personal, learning and work lives. They use a range of technologies and tools to make these connections.

The range of tools grows and changes daily - some have very specific functions like:

- Sharing and broadcasting (publishing) particular kinds of content like music, videos, blog posts, photographs.
- Enabling particular kinds of communication like private messaging, discussion forums or online conferencing.
- Supporting collaborative activities like project management or learning activities.
- Online gaming and networking.

**Activity 1.1: Visual representations**

Here is one person’s visual representation of the social media landscape:

![Social Media Landscape](image)

**Figure 1: the Social Media landscape**

Look at the different tools they list next to each form of activity. Have you used any of these tools? Do you agree with this representation of the landscape? Would you have drawn it differently?

**Resource-constrained alternative:** N/A

**Teachers:** Have you employed or thought of employing any of the listed tools in a teaching context? Do you have any colleagues in your institution that could help...
demonstrate how they used a specific tool in a teaching context?

_Policy-makers: In teacher training or ongoing professional development, is there any discussion of a national or institutional social media usage policy? Are teachers made aware of any existing policies on social media usage in their professional context?

People have always had networks of people that they communicate and share with. From the days of telegrams, post (now sometimes called snail-mail) and the telephone, communication has always been an important part of our personal, learning and work lives.

Email has been around for a while (the first email was sent in 1971) and transformed the way we communicated at work. The **asynchronous** (not happening at the same time) nature of emails meant that people could communicate across time zones which really enabled global communication.

Email is still a key way to communicate, but we can now take advantage of more **synchronous** methods to have conversations in real time in online meetings, instant chat services, conferences and live webinars. There is a need for both types of communication and social media can facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous networking.

**Ownership and control**

Some of the networks that are available online have grown so large that they are now owned by big companies. Many of these were small start-ups by individuals who spotted the potentials of communicating online in new and different ways.

Whilst many networks appear to be free to users it is important to remember that network providers have some goal that they aim to achieve. They may aim to gain revenue through advertising, or to attract customers for other services, or have products to sell. Some network services may be free for small scale use but may have charges or subscriptions for extensive use. Some network providers may have particular messages that they wish to promote.

The owners of the networks usually define the parameters of the services they provide and set the terms and conditions. They may also set the rules and notify users of legal and privacy issues. It is important to consider who owns the networks that you use because it may affect who owns the content you share or post.

**Consider this example**

An educational institution provides a safe space in a **discussion forum** for students to communicate with tutors and other students. The forums are moderated to ensure that people follow the rules, and to provide help if people have problems. They are also be facilitated to encourage people to communicate and to help conversations flow.

How far do you think this would affect what people contribute to the discussion board?
Who do you think owns the content that is posted by students on a discussion forum?

Often a student owns the content they produce as part of their learning activities. But what happens when content is linked to other people’s content (as in a threaded discussion) and how far can the student access the content once they have finished the course and left the institution if they no longer have a log-in?

The complexities of ownership and control of social networks will be dealt with in later modules.

Networks owned and controlled by educational institutions are likely to impact on how they used by students. They may feel reluctant to post anything negative in case it affects their assessment. There are examples of students creating their own networks so that they can talk more freely. This might just be a few students on the same course setting up private groups on social software sites to communicate about the course, or could be a more organised network provided by Student Unions or other bodies.

In the UK there is The Student Room - a series of spaces for students to interact and communicate about courses, learning, careers, lifestyle, and entertainment. This is an interesting example where a community has taken control of their online communication mechanisms and created and own their own spaces and networks.

Some social networking services allow user communities to set their own limits and boundaries. For example there are open wikis (websites that facilitate collaborative working) that allow people to set up the content and define their user base (which may be completely open to all or may be for a closed group).

Several times in these modules we have linked to content on Wikipedia which is a collaboratively produced global encyclopedia on a wiki platform, translated into several languages. There are very strict rules and guidelines for people to add content but anyone in the world can contribute information to Wikipedia entries, as long as they follow the guidelines. It is in fact a very good, open peer-reviewed source of information.

**Challenges around ownership of content and privacy**

You may have noticed in the news that social networking sites can be challenged by government and security bodies for not sharing content that could impact on national security, such as in cases where terrorists have utilised services to communicate and organise their activities. This raises very interesting discussions about ownership of the content. If users of a service have registered under terms and conditions that guarantees privacy and encryption of messages, then how would they feel if this content was then shared with police or security bodies?
Activity 1.2: Privacy and social media

Have a look at these newspaper articles about privacy and social media
http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/features/whatsapp-encryption-what-is-it-how-does-it-work-why-ban-it-backdoor-access-secret-messages-a7652396.html
What are your thoughts about this?

Resource-constrained alternative: N/A

Teachers: Initiate a class discussion about how students feel about the changing security and privacy landscape affecting social media. Are views of all the stakeholders being represented? Did the class come to a consensus about how private communication should be monitored? Alternatively, divide the class into groups of three. In each group, one person represents the government or police service, another the device manufacturer, and a third a consumer. Have them discuss the ramifications of a proposed new law to allow government agencies to access private communications.

Policy-makers: Consider the current state of your curriculum in teaching students how to remain safe and secure online. Are the risks of unsafe online communication made clear without resorting to unrealistic scare tactics? Are issues such as third-party access to private communications dealt with in the curriculum, and do these materials attempt to represent all stakeholders (users and government) fairly?

Additional readings
Privacy in the developing world: a global research agenda - considers the interplays between privacy, the developing world context, the government & corporations, and the legal framework: https://www.privacyinternational.org/node/211

Different kinds of networks

Participation in social networks requires the following conditions:

- Access to the relevant technologies.
- Appropriate level of capabilities/skills.
- Trust in the network and the people who are participating.
- Knowledge and acceptance of network rules and etiquette.
- Confidence that their contributions are of value.

It is also important that the user understands the specific functions of the network and has joined the most appropriate network/s for their needs. Earlier we considered some of the different functions that networks can support.

Online networks for connecting and communication

One of the most obvious functions of an online networking service or tool is to enable you to connect with other people and communicate with them.

Some social networking services allow you to communicate with individuals in private whilst others connect people to others with similar interests or needs.

You can join some social networks and observe conversations without actually contributing anything. This may appear to be a passive activity but can still be of value to people in learning situations, who just want to get some information about something, or if someone is shy or not confident. This links back to Module 1 where we talked about consuming, participating and creating content. Most people probably consume content, but social networking tools can encourage people to participate and join in conversations if they feel confident enough to do so.

Here are some examples of different communication networks and the kinds of context in which they may be of value:

Table 1: Communication networks and their contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of online communication</th>
<th>Examples of networking tools</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one to one communication</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>Can be audio only or video, can ring phones as well as Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>Specialised encrypted private messaging service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Text-based, can add attachments of other media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Email</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private instant messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private messaging to Gmail contacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gmail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private messaging to Google+ contacts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private instant messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private instant messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paid for services to host webinars, and meetings incorporating chat, video, and audio (often used by organisations)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mailing discussion groups. Email newsletters, Work groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tweets to followers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posts to friends or public</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posts to friends and followers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals posting information online</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individuals broadcasting to public or specialist groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-author blogs posting information online and interacting in comments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-author wikis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>open chat forums, closed chat rooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Online networks for collaboration**

Online networks can encourage collaboration as well as communication and offer new ways for people to become active participants in their local and wider communities. They allow people to connect across traditional boundaries and to broaden their perspectives, learn new skills and take action with the support of others.

Educators can use online networks to broaden their student’s interactions during their courses and begin to establish links with potential partners, future collaborators and employers.

Using networks for collaboration in educational settings raises issues relating to pedagogical approaches and choices for different subject areas. It requires teachers to reconsider
assessment approaches, and to provide mechanisms for managing and supporting students during collaborative activities. Compulsory collaborative educational tasks may alienate or exclude some students who find collaboration difficult. Autistic students, in particular, may be disadvantaged if collaborative activities are compulsory. Other students may find online collaboration easier than face to face collaboration.

Online networks can support collaborative creation and curation (management) of digital resources across physical and time boundaries. Here are some examples of networks that support collaboration and the kinds of context in which they may be of value:

**Table 2: Collaboration networks and their uses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration tools</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Uses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open Wikis</td>
<td>PBwiki, Socialtext, Tikiwiki and Wikia</td>
<td>Collaborative spaces allowing users to edit and create pages. Example uses are Wikipedia, Wikitravel - travel guide, Foodista.com - recipe and cooking wiki, WikiEducator - open educational resources (OER).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative team software (often need a paid subscription as aimed at businesses)</td>
<td>Sharepoint, Slack, Yammer</td>
<td>Project management, communication, sharing across teams, collaborative document development, shared calendars. Free tools: Trello, Google Tools like Drive and Calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialised educational tools</td>
<td>Institutional software like virtual learning environments or institutional web spaces</td>
<td>Institutional tools may allow some collaboration but many institutions use free or educational versions of social media tools for collaborative activities. Any good examples - DS106 (not all collaborative though)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using communication tools to support collaboration</td>
<td>See communication table above for examples</td>
<td>Online group activities, meetings and communication methods to support collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using online sharing tools to support collaboration</td>
<td>See next table for examples</td>
<td>Online sharing networks can be used to manage, present and share collaborative activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Online networks for sharing**

It could be argued that most interactions that happen online are related to content that is being shared, whether someone is sharing information that people respond to, or digital resources that people can use or adapt.

Many social media networks support online sharing of content. This might be content created
by someone else, for example sharing a link to a news article, or content created by you like a photograph, video or blog post.

Sharing networks often include additional features like content storage and management, content editing, commenting, private messaging, and group management. Some may allow you to select a licence for your own content that suits your needs rather than impose one on you.

Sharing networks have become significant tools in people’s personal, learning and work lives. Blog posts and website pages now often include icons at the bottom of the page that allow you to share to your own social media pages with just one click. For example if you click on the Twitter icon it will create a tweet with a link back to that content and allow you to publish it if you are logged in to your Twitter account.

Some sharing sites have developed plug-ins for your web browsers so that you can share content easily as you browse web pages. For example a Pinterest plugin allows you to quickly add an image that you like to your own folders of images. People who create websites know the value of having their content shared, particularly if there is an economic value, so they make efforts to make this easier for people.

Here are just some examples of network tools and services that support sharing of different digital media:

**Text document sharing**
- Google Doc - collaborate and share
- Scribd - share text documents
- JustPaste.it - share text online
- Lulu - e-books

**Image sharing** (Photographs, drawings, animated gifs, infographics)
- Flickr - image and video management and sharing
- Instagram - photograph sharing

**Video sharing** (animations, films, presentations)
- YouTube - video storage and sharing
- Vimeo - video storage and sharing
- Flickr - image and video sharing

**Audio file sharing**
- SoundCloud - music and audio platform
- ccmixter - music community based on sharing and remixing music

**Presentation sharing**
- Slideshare - presentation sharing
- Easel.ly - create and share infographics
- Prezi - create and share presentations
Aggregation and sharing of content

- **Storify** - create stories or timelines using social media
- **Yummly** - web and mobile app that aggregates recipes and information about food and cooking
- **Reddit** - social and news aggregator
- **Digg** - news aggregator
- **Delicious** - social bookmarking service
- **Diigo** - social bookmarking service

Mixed media sharing (on web pages, blog posts)

- **Wordpress.com**
- **tumblr.com**
- **Blogger**

Specialised online networks

Some networks allow people with specific interests to connect and share resources and information about subjects they are passionate about.

For example many people now play games online with people from all over the world (although they may be limited to specific servers in different countries which means they may only be able to play in their own region). Even if people do not play with others online they may be members of gaming networks. These networks share game walkthroughs and tutorials, and often have well populated discussion forums and chat rooms.

This [list of social networks](#) provides an idea of the wide range of networks that exist.

Online networks for community action

We said earlier that online networks offer opportunities for people to connect with others and participate in communal or group activities.

As well as offering individuals a chance to find other people with similar views and goals, it enables different communities to connect and work together across geographical boundaries. This means that small groups that exist to take action for change can connect with others and exchange learning, experience and resources. Social networking offers opportunities to empower people who do not have the means to organise due to political, social, geographical or economic barriers.

Conversely social media also enables people to connect and organise for negative reasons such as crime and terrorism.

Some of the more positive examples of using social media for positive action and change include:
Digital Green

Digital Green is a not-for-profit international development organisation that uses a digital platform to share knowledge on improved agricultural practices, livelihoods, health, and nutrition, using locally produced videos and human mediated dissemination, in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)

Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) is a Commonwealth of Learning initiative linking the capacity building of farming community particularly women through Open and Distance Learning and flexible and blended learning and linked the process with social and financial capital.

Facebook Groups

Social networking groups that provide discussion spaces for people scattered over a geographically challenging terrain or islands such as the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Facebook group Sharp Talk and the Vanuatu Women’s Yumi Tok Tok Street group which aims to connect, educate, inspire, empower and uplift women of all ages and backgrounds by providing and promoting women’s interests. These sites cover a wide range of topics, including politically and culturally challenging conversations.

Open networks

Several of the networks we have considered earlier are known as open networks. This phrase is applied to networks which are established to encourage open practice and is often related to sharing content openly and freely for altruistic reasons. Open networks also often aim to encourage inclusion, collaboration and cooperation.
Wikipedia is an example of an open collaborative network although it is also an example that raises questions. There are challenges related to systemic bias which highlight that significant sections of the global community are excluded from having a voice on Wikipedia, related to gender (90% of editors are male - see this article on gender bias in Wikipedia), and other social, cultural, language, and economic factors which impact on the range of perspectives included.

This issue is a challenge for many open initiatives. As with any network it is important to consider who owns the networks and what the intentions and aims are. Even open networks with sound idealistic and altruistic intentions may be biased due to the cultural, educational and social contexts of primary contributors.

Open education networks

In the field of education, open networks have been established to facilitate sharing of educational content and courses. The overarching aim of open education is to provide inclusive access to education for everyone.

Some institutions offer open courses, which are available for anyone, anywhere in the world. However, not all open courses are actually fully open or free, for example some may charge students for certificates. Some educational institutions offer open courses to encourage learners to register on paid courses as they offer students a taster of the learning content and tutors.

The Open Educational Resources (OER) movement illustrates a commitment by educators (often acting in an individual capacity) to create and share educational content in a global way. The use of open licences such as Creative Commons licences (discussed in Module 2) has facilitated sharing, and the development of networks to connect educators with content is an important aspect of this movement.

Open networks encourage the sharing of educational practice as well as resources and often OERs include pedagogic wrappers or guidelines to help other educators reuse the content in their own contexts. Educators need to be supported to engage in open educational practices, by their institutions and by their peers and colleagues. Open education networks are one of the means to provide such support. For example the Open Education Consortium offers awards for excellent practice, courses, resources, webinars and a directory of open professionals. This is a membership organisations for educational institutions. OER Commons is another network which provides a digital library of OER and a collaborative network.
Activity 1.3: Analysing networks

Make a list of the networks you are currently involved in and what types of functions they provide and whether they are synchronous or asynchronous. Are you satisfied with the range of functions provided by your current networks? Do you use certain networks in ways for which they may not have been intended?

Resource-constrained alternative: make a list of the non-digital networks you are currently involved in and what types of functions they provide (for example, clubs and societies, reading groups, etc.). Are you satisfied with the range of functions provided by your current networks? Do you use certain networks in ways for which they may not have been intended? Do issues of ownership and control of information operate in these networks or are those issues unique to online spaces?

Teachers: do you engage with professional networks (digital or offline; synchronous or asynchronous) that support your teaching practice? Are there areas in which you would benefit from greater network engagement, and is the policy environment at your institution supportive of network engagement (through training initiatives, ICT support, etc.)?

Policy makers: are there locally-designed networks that provide the functionality that students and teachers in your context require? What additional functionality do they provide and/or what functionality do they lack?
In this unit you learned about different kinds of online networks for communication, sharing and collaboration. You found out what kinds of activities are supported by different online networks for personal, work or learning purposes. You were also introduced to how different networks are differentiated by content type and audience, along with a number of examples of specific networks used by different communities around the world.

However, networks are subject to the same issues of ownership and control that affect all other media. The potentially greater visibility of online content and communication requires an active, critical awareness of how and in what ways your information can be accessed by third-party users, including government agencies.

As a future digital education leader, you are potentially in a position to guide people through the range of networks available to them online and help them develop strategies for selecting which ones would be most useful and practical to their needs. You are also in a position to develop their critical awareness of issues of ownership and control of their digital content, and what this requires of them in terms of awareness over how their digital communications and engagement can or cannot be accessed by external audiences. Given this position, you should make a concerted effort to inform yourself of the laws governing access of user content and how that influences the degree of mindfulness users should have when engaging with online networks.
1. Which of these is not usually considered an aspect of social networking?
   A) Communicating with friends or family
   B) Purchasing goods or services through secure online payment services
   C) Spreading information or awareness about a specific issue
   D) Publishing an online CV

2. Which of the following is an asynchronous, collaborative network?
   A) Wikis
   B) Google Drive
   C) Twitter
   D) A & B

3. Choose the option below that best describes Twitter:
   A) An asynchronous communication network
   B) A synchronous sharing network
   C) An asynchronous open network
   D) A synchronous collaboration network

4. The following networks are examples of collaborative networks:
   A) Twitter, Google Docs, Facebook
   B) Wikis, Flickr, YouTube
   C) Reddit, ccmixter, OERCommons
   D) Google Docs, Wikis, SharePoint

5. A university's student-based (i.e. requiring valid student ID) discussion forum that employs moderators to ensure that participants are conforming to the rules of the forum is an example of:
   A) A closed-access collaborative platform
   B) A closed-access asynchronous communication platform
   C) An open-access synchronous communication platform
   D) An open-access asynchronous sharing platform

6. Which of the following best describes the limitations of collaborative networks?
   A) Collaborative networks do not provide content-sharing facilities
   B) Collaborative networks cannot provide one-to-one communication
   C) Collaborative networks are inefficient at profiling individual digital identities
   D) Collaborative networks have no limitations

7. Which of the following best describes online social networking?
   A) Developing software in a collaborative way
   B) Building telecommunications infrastructure to help people connect
   C) Connecting and sharing with others online
   D) Build professional online networks
8. Free-to-use services often sustain themselves through:
   A) Selling advertising space
   B) Charging for more sophisticated features
   C) Harvesting your financial information and draining bank accounts
   D) A & B

9. Which of the following social networks offers the most functionality for building a professional digital identity?
   A) LinkedIn
   B) Twitter
   C) Facebook
   D) Pinterest

10. Which of the following tools is most appropriate to gather a range of content types and communication modes for multiple audiences together?
    A) Twitter
    B) An institutional website
    C) A WordPress-based blog or website
    D) Email

11. Wikis are:
    A) Collaborative networks with asynchronous communication capabilities
    B) Sharing networks with synchronous and asynchronous communication capabilities
    C) Communication networks with asynchronous sharing capabilities
    D) Sharing networks with asynchronous sharing capabilities

12. Which of the following is NOT true about Wikipedia?
    A) Wikipedia is a collaborative platform
    B) Wikipedia is equally representative of all content areas and perspectives
    C) Wikipedia offers communal critique and fact-checking functions
    D) Wikipedia support asynchronous communication channels

13. An open education network:
    A) Acts as a production body for Open Educational Resources
    B) Offers open courses such as Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs)
    C) Serves as a sharing and collaboration platform to facilitate sharing of open content and open practices
    D) Is a commercial network aimed at producing proprietary content

14. Which functionality is not shared between Open networks and Open education
networks?

A) Sharing content freely and altruistically
B) Encourage open practice
C) Share and profile MOOCs
D) Support collaboration

15. Which of the following statements is most true regarding systemic bias (the over-representation of certain cultural, gender-specific or geo-political viewpoints) in open networks?

A) Systemic bias can be as much a problem in open networks as closed networks
B) Closed networks are always subject to systemic bias; open networks never are
C) Open networks are always subject to systemic bias; closed networks never are
D) Systemic bias is not real.

16. Which of the following does not allow for mixed media sharing?

A) Diigo
B) WordPress
C) Blogger
D) Tumblr

17. Which of the following is not a repository for Open Educational Resources (OER)?

A) Open Education Consortium
B) Open Educational Practices
C) OpenStax
D) OER Commons

Check Your Responses:
UNIT 2: SELECTING NETWORKS

Introduction

Due to the diverse range of online networks it is challenging to know which ones will be most appropriate for your needs. This unit offers some guidance on which networks to choose.

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- **Demonstrate** awareness of how networks can help you in your personal, work or learning lives.
- **Understand** how people might use networks for different aspects of their personal, work or learning lives
- **Select** the most appropriate networks for your needs.
- **Practice** using a social network that you have selected.

**Outcomes**

**Terminology**

**MMO:** Massively Multiplayer Online Game

**Which networks to choose?**

We talked in the previous unit about some of the different online network types. They all offer ways to connect with other individuals or groups but some specialise in different functions or subject areas, such as:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Sharing
- Subject or topic networks
- Open practice or resources

One way to decide which kinds of networks to join is to consider the areas of our lives where using online networks could help, as we did in Module 1. We considered a range of activities in our personal, learning and work lives and then looked at which technologies may help with these activities.

Although we will need to communicate with others across all areas of our lives, we may need to use different networks for each (or some) of these. This ties in with our digital identities, which we also considered in Module 1, and which platforms we should use for our online
personal, learning and work personas. You may choose to use the same social networking tool for two different areas of your life but have two usernames or profiles to keep them separate.

The choices you need to make are very personal and there are no right answers or blueprints to follow. You need to take a careful assessment of your specific needs.

Case studies

The following case studies highlight people with a range of different needs, which networks they chose to use and how they started using them:

Personal

Case study 1

sharing networks, subject networks, collaboration networks

Tadeus is a young man who is very interested in music. He particularly enjoys highlife music and also plays the guitar and composes his own pieces. He was born with cerebral palsy and has to use a wheelchair most of the time. Tadeus plays his guitar in venues in his home town but is keen to be heard in the wider world. One of his friends has suggested that he uses the internet to get his music heard.

With the help of his friends he finds some social networking sites that seem to offer some great opportunities to get his work heard by a much wider audience.

- He creates an account on YouTube and starts to make some video recordings of his latest compositions in his own home using his phone. He uploads them to YouTube.
- He also signs up to Facebook and joins some groups that are interested in African music and joins the Highlife group. He starts to make friends through the site and begins posting links to his YouTube videos.
- He joins the ccmixter site and uploads some of his compositions with an open licence so that others can use them. He also re-mixes some other people’s content and finds a singer who he really likes. They connect online and start to have regular conversations about music and decide to work collaboratively on some songs.

Tadeus has to work quite hard to promote his music but has found that his YouTube videos are shared quite widely and get a lot of views. Some fans have subscribed to his site now so that they can see when he has posted new content. He has also made some new friends and generated some useful contacts.

Case study 2

communication networks

Maria is a 19 year old autistic woman. She has finished her formal schooling and lives at home with her parents. She is thinking about going to university but is concerned about leaving the security of her home and knows that she will face many challenges that could impact on her ability to study.
She has been feeling very anxious and does not leave the house much. She plays a lot of computer games and has tried some online multi-player games. These have sometimes been challenging as people have been very rude to her online but she has also found some very supportive people online.

In one of the **MMOs** (Massively Multiplayer online game) Maria has become quite expert at the game as she plays it a lot. One day while she is playing someone invites her to join their guild (group that teams-up to play games together). She initially declines but later has a look at some information about the guild. It seems to be a small guild and includes people who are new to the game. She decides to join the guild but is very nervous. She gets a nice welcome message and an invite to join a game.

Eventually Maria starts to feel comfortable playing with people regularly and joins in the text chats during the game. One of the other people asks her to join a live chat which they use alongside the game. She already has a **google account** so it is easy for her to join in with the chat that they use. She does not speak at all for the first few times, but eventually does join in and also talks about non-game things.

One of the people asks her to join them for a private chat and to be their friend on Facebook. Maria is anxious about this and speaks to her parents about it. Her parents encourage her to try it but remind her to be aware of internet safety and to be careful about what she shares online.

Maria joins **Facebook** and connects with her gaming friend. She also joins **WhatsApp** so that they can exchange private messages. Some of the people that she knew from school also connect on Facebook.

Maria now enjoys connecting with people online and finds it much easier than dealing with face to face interactions, because she can control when she engages with people and can remove herself if she finds it too overwhelming. One of her online friends has suggested that she could do a university course or some of her studies online so Maria is looking into this.

**Case study 3**

**sharing networks, subject networks**

Pavel is a 44 year old man who works as a technician in his local college, helping teachers and students to use the different technical equipment. His passion in life is astronomy and he loves his job because it means he can sometimes use the college telescope. Pavel recently went on a computer course to find out more about the internet and he has become very inspired by all of the astronomy photographs that are available online.

He has made some favourites in his web browser so that he can go back and see the sites he likes again. One of the teachers helped Pavel join **Pearltrees** to save websites about astronomy and look at those saved by others. Pavel found some amazing sites and started making connections with other people. He joined some Pearltree groups so that he could add sites he found to their collections.

Pavel was inspired to start taking his own photographs using the college equipment so he
watched some **YouTube videos** about how to use a digital camera with a telescope. He joined **Flickr** to upload and organise the photos that he liked best. He joined some groups on Flickr and joined in some conversations about taking photographs with a telescope. He also started using **Dropbox** to store some of his photos so that he didn’t lose them and so that he could access them from anywhere on any device.

He also joined some online **Google groups** that he found through an **amateur astronomy website** for his region and has started contributing blog posts to that website about taking photographs with a telescope.

**Learning**

**Case study 4**

*sharing networks, subject networks, collaboration networks*

Mira visited an embroidery exhibition at her local museum and has decided to have a go herself. She cannot afford to go to any classes so she decides to see if she can find out how to do it online.

She decides to start by learning what equipment and materials she needs and also wants to see some basic stitches. She uses **Google to find some web pages** with guides and photographs. She uses **e-bay** to buy some second-hand materials and equipment.

Mira discovers a lot of videos on **YouTube** and finds it much easier to learn from these than from the photographs. She is amazed that people make these really helpful videos and freely share them to help others learn.

As she begins to practice she uses the comment areas of the blogs and videos that she has found to ask questions when she gets stuck or is unsure of something, and nearly always gets an answer from either the blog writer or another reader. One of the blogs uses a site called **Pinterest** to collect all the embroidery photos that they like. Mira joins Pinterest and starts to make her own folders. She begins to learn about the various different kinds of embroidery and makes folders for the ones she likes best.

She has become very interested in Malaysian Tekat embroidery and makes her own Pinterest board about this. She receives notices by email when someone likes the same pins (or photographs) that she does. She starts to follow some of the boards and discovers some people who are taking the traditional Tekat methods and adding a modern twist. She has also been trying this out, so she takes some photos of her own work and shared them on a **website that shares embroidery photos**. Through this she makes contact with a group who are committed to making sure that Tekat embroidery traditions are not lost. Mira joins the group and becomes involved in exhibiting and teaching in local schools. The group also creates its own **Tekat embroidery website** which Mira contributes to.

**Case study 5**

*communication networks, sharing networks, open networks, collaboration networks*

Vincent is studying for a degree in modern languages at University. He is in his final year and his tutor is encouraging him to start developing a professional digital identity. He receives some
support to identify networks that could help him and he establishes a profile on LinkedIn and joins some language related social networking groups so that he can practice his languages and provide help to others.

Vincent also decides to set up his own blog in a space provided by the university which provides an opportunity to publish work in his chosen languages. He also uses the blog to discuss issues around translation which he is very interested in.

His tutors designed some course activities around translation that utilised open networks. Vincent opted to do some translation of Wikipedia pages, which meant he needed to engage with the rules and guidance of the Wikipedia service. Students who opted to do this assignment checked each other’s work and shared suggestions for changes. Vincent found this task very intimidating at first because his work was open to correction by others and he was worried about making public mistakes. Working with the other students and the tutor made this easier because they provided support through the process.

Vincent also tried another assignment to translate TED talks, which proved to be very technically challenging. Vincent needed a lot of support to navigate the process for translating the talk he chose, but he found it very rewarding and learned a lot.

Vincent wrote about the process of both activities on his blog and linked out to his work. Vincent and the other students found that working with real-life services where their work was in the open was a great start to building their professional online profiles.

Case study 6
communication networks, sharing networks, open networks, collaboration networks

Emma has been working as an academic at a University in the department of chemistry for several years. She has been using several social media sites to link with other educators and has started to become recognised as an innovator in using technology to enhance her courses.

She managed to get some funding to try some pilot activities with her students to test how using social media could enhance their learning through open sharing with the wider scientific community.

She regularly joins in with a timed Twitter conversation using the hashtag #LTHE where people interested in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education have regular conversations and sharing sessions on different subjects.

Emma also set up some Google hangouts with a group of educators in the sciences to share ideas and practice. She has her own blog and uses it to share ideas and also produces academic papers describing her work with educational technology.

Emma has started to become recognised within her own institution as a leader and innovator in this field and has been asked to co-ordinate some staff development activities around educational technology and to contribute to institutional strategy and policy in learning and teaching.
Case study 7

communication networks, sharing networks, open networks

Francis has been working as an art teacher at his local college for about a year. His manager encouraged him to attend an international conference on art education as part of his professional development.

Whilst at the conference Francis attended some exciting sessions about using technology in art education and started planning to use some of the things he had learnt when he got back to work. Francis was not very confident about using technology for work but felt that he needed to embrace technology to move his teaching practice forward.

In one of the sessions he met a couple of teachers from his own country and swapped business cards with them. He noticed that they both had included their Skype names, LinkedIn and Twitter names as well as their email. One of them also had her own blog where she shared ideas about using technologies for art education. Francis arranged to visit her when they got back home to see what she was doing at her University.

When he got back to work Francis created an account on LinkedIn, and Twitter and connected to the teachers that he met at the conference. He found some other contacts in the art education field and started to join in conversations about the barriers that he experienced in using technology for art education. Francis discovered some sharing networks where he could find ideas and resources to use in his own teaching.

He took some of these ideas to his manager and other colleagues in his team. After visiting the colleague at the University Francis suggested to his manager that they invite the person he met at the conference to one of their team training sessions to talk about using technologies in art education.

Francis felt that he was lucky to have the support of her manager who was open to considering new technologies. Some of the people in the team were nervous about adopting new approaches and could not see the relevance to traditional art practice.

Work related

Case study 8

communication networks, sharing networks,

Asha works in a large pharmaceutical company as a legal advisor. She uses the secure company intranet to store and share information with other people in the company. The company has strict regulations about sharing information outside the organisation and is not happy for employees to use social media for professional practice.

As a qualified lawyer Asha feels it is important to maintain a professional online presence. She is unsure how to balance this need with the company restrictions. She speaks to her team leader and agrees to establish an online presence that fulfils both needs. She uses LinkedIn to develop a profile and connects to people she studied with. She also joins some LinkedIn groups focusing on company law. She establishes a Twitter account but stresses on her profile that she
is speaking for herself and not her employer. She is careful not to post any information about her work or company but does join general conversations about company law.

She makes a personal account on Facebook to keep in touch with family and friends but never posts any work related posts and does not connect with other lawyers on Facebook.

Case study 9

communication networks, sharing networks

Mathias has just joined a small company that makes surfboards. He has a range of duties and one of these is marketing and promotion. The company had previously developed a website but mainly connected with people on Facebook. Mathias realised that they needed to develop a coherent social media strategy that identified the various audiences they needed to connect with, and highlights the key messages that they needed to get across. Mathias held a meeting with all the employers and collectively developed a social media plan.

They agreed to integrate the website more with their social media accounts and used these to drive people to the website which highlighted the various board models. Mathias made sure that they had professional photographs of the boards and also wrote a story for each board. Mathias made sure that he created regular blog posts to keep people coming back and also set up general information pages on surfing.

Mathias also added an e-commerce section to the website to see if people would purchase online. By using Facebook to highlight new website content Mathias manages to drive customers to the site and people begin to order new boards. Mathias also spotted a need for people to sell and exchange boards so he set up an areas on the website to develop a community network where people could advertise second-hand boards.

Case study 10

sharing networks, communication networks

Grace has been running her own homemade cake and confectionery business for two years and is doing very well in her local community. She hires a market stall at weekends to sell what she makes during the week. Grace already advertises her products in the local newspaper but is unsure about how to do more.

She goes to a free meeting organised by the local government-funded business support service and gets inspired by their presentation on how to use social media to improve business. She arranges to have a one to one chat with one of their experts who looks at her specific business and helps her develop a new online marketing plan.

Grace had used ICT when she was at school but is a bit unsure of her skill level. She decides to go to an evening class about using ICT to sharpen her skills. She finds it much more interesting now that she has a real goal to achieve.

Grace has a friend who takes great photographs so she offers to swap some of her cakes for some photos that she can use to advertise her goods online. Grace starts by creating a Facebook page for her business and starts loading up her pictures. Family and friends soon start
sharing them and her page becomes very popular. People start asking questions about her cakes and Grace realises that if she posts a story with the cake they get shared further. She starts to get orders for special occasion cakes so she starts taking her own digital photographs to get them online quickly, and the customers share these widely online.

She decides to create a website so that she can organise her products into useful categories and to encourage orders (she finds one that is free and has templates that she can quickly adapt). She starts getting asked for recipes and details of how to make them. At first she is concerned that people may steal her methods and ideas and take some of her business. She begins to write a regular blog including general recipes for cakes and confectionary. She uses Facebook to share her posts to encourage people to visit the website. Grace had not realised how much time it would take to use social media to spread the work but the increased sales she has made allow her to employ someone to help her out.

Case study 11

communication networks, sharing networks

Steven works in a government office that looks after refuse and recycling. He uses the council information systems to share content with colleagues and generally uses email to connect with colleagues. The department has recently set up a system where local people can register with the department and they can elect to receive updates from the department by email. This is useful to let people know of new initiatives and of changes to refuse pick up times. Steven has set up a new system that sends out regular email updates to keep the local community informed of department activities.

Steven is also responsible for answering customer queries and complaints. Some of these arrive via a Twitter account that Steven has to monitor and respond to. The Twitter complaints need to be handled sensitively as they are fully open to the public.

In his personal life Steven has set up a Facebook account but he does not use this to mention work related issues. He also uses WhatsApp to connect directly with close friends.

Community networks

Case study 12

communication networks, sharing networks, open networks, collaboration networks

Jasmine is 16 years old and has recently become interested in climate change. She is very concerned that people seem to be ignoring the impact of climate change and feels that lack of education is the reason that people continue to do things that negatively affect the planet.

Jasmine does some searching on Google about climate change and comes across CARE - a Climate change information centre. She finds some information about activities in her country and finds some suggestions of what individuals can do. She looks at the CARE Twitter account and decides to make a Twitter account for herself that she can use to share information about climate change.

She also tries to encourage other students at her school to get engaged by holding lunchtime
discussion sessions. Jasmine collates information that she finds and shares it with her peers, family and friends.

Through twitter Jasmine connects to several online groups and joins in conversations and finds practical resources that she can use in her local community. She joins 350.org a global grassroots network which focuses on taking action for climate change. Jasmine feels that she can contribute in a positive rather than passive way in making the changes she cares about.

Jasmine’s parents are a bit nervous about their daughter connecting with people who they do not know, so Jasmine shows them the networks that she is using and demonstrates to them her awareness of online safety. She eventually persuades her mother to join the networks with her and to join her in some of her activities.

Activity 2.1: Communication and collaboration tools

The 12 case studies mentioned above showcase how different individuals use a range of platforms based on their communication and collaboration needs. Choose two users at random: can you spot any tools from the one case that could be useful to the other user? Can you think of other tools that they could have used in addition to or instead of the tools they ended up using?

Resource-constrained alternative: N/A

Teachers: do you as an educator employ any of these tools? Are you aware of any professional networks that cater to educators, or could you see room in your institutional context for developing such a network?

Policy-makers: in staff training and continuing education initiatives, is there any mention of existing professional networks or platforms that teachers could engage with to improve their practice? If there are no networks that address the specific educational concerns prevalent in your context, consider developing one (using existing platforms) to provide a space for teachers to discuss and demonstrate best practice.

Activity 2.2: Establishing interest based networks

Pick a subject or hobby that you are very interested in and see if you can find any online networks that you could join. For example you might want to find networks that share recipes, or gardening tips, or a network about a particular subject like astrology, or history.

Take a look at this list of social networks which includes generic networks, subject networks, and networks for particular geographic regions.
You may have to register to see the content so make sure you follow the guidelines we offered in Module 2 in relation to thinking about how joining the network will affect your digital identity.

Some of these sites may send you emails if you register with them although you can always ask to be removed from their email list if you do not want to receive them regularly.

Resource-constrained alternative: N/A

Teachers: Ensure that your students are familiar with online etiquette and the basics of internet safety before they begin engaging in unfamiliar online spaces or forums.

Policy-makers: N/A

Unit summary

In this unit you learned how to select online networks and considered how these might be used differently for different aspects of your life. Through the case studies presented above, you were made aware of how users from diverse contents can use ‘generic’ tools (Google, Facebook) in different ways according to their needs, and also how users can engage in specialised networks.

As a future digital education leader, you should begin engaging seriously in issues of the ownership and generation of knowledge. Many of the tools listed above are produced in a relatively small number of (mostly) developed, ‘Global North’ nations. Does this impact in the forms of content and engagement that feature most strongly on these platforms, or are they truly global platforms in which all voices are viewed equally? Would locally-created and owned platforms or forums offer an experience more suited to your context, or does using the existing functionality for user-created groups (or similar functions) provide sufficient localisation for your needs?

The long-term issues around ownership of networks bears some interrogation. While current services may not show an obvious bias to a specific national or political context, the constantly-changing nature of the laws governing internet accessibility could very well lead to considerable changes in how accessible online spaces will be in the future.
1. When creating digital identities, you should:
   A) Critically evaluate which networks will be useful to you and which you will be able to productively use
   B) Join the most popular and well-used networks as their popularity is indicative of their usefulness
   C) Limit yourself to one or two networks to prevent over-commitment
   D) Avoid networks except when required to do so

2. Fatima plays the violin and wants to reach a wider audience than she is able to in face-to-face concerts. Which of the following platforms offers her the most functionality in achieving in that goal?
   A) ccmixter
   B) SoundCloud
   C) LinkedIn
   D) A and/or B

3. Which of the following should not be considered a risk of joining too many social media platforms?
   A) An irregular/incoherent digital identity
   B) Losing control over how your personal information is being shared
   C) Emotional/psychological strain from over-communication
   D) Software incompatibility between different social media platforms

4. A teacher with limited access to the internet outside of work is looking to improve the way she shares confidential feedback about her students’ assignments. Which of the following types of networks fits her needs for confidential feedback?
   A) An asynchronous password-protected sharing network
   B) An asynchronous open sharing network
   C) A synchronous password-protected communication network
   D) A or C

5. A geology student wants to keep track of the new publications in her field. Which of the following networks least suits that need?
   A. Google+
   B. Academia.edu
   C. ResearchGate
   D. Instagram

6. Ahmad is a mechanical engineer who wants to engage with the engineering community and keep up-to-date with new innovations in his field. Currently he uses Google+, Facebook, Twitter and
7. Which of the following offers the most functionality for a gallery owner looking to profile her artists' artworks?
   A) Flickr
   B) YouTube
   C) Google
   D) Snapchat

8. Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr and Tumblr are all examples of:
   A) Synchronous communication platforms
   B) Image sharing platforms
   C) Video-sharing platforms
   D) Audio-sharing platforms

9. Nonkululeko uses Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr to profile her furniture business. Which of the following statements is most true given the need to visually profile her business?
   A) All of the above platforms can be used, but Facebook and Tumblr offer the most functionality
   B) Nonkululeko should abandon Twitter as it offers no useful functionality for her business
   C) Facebook is too socially-focused for business uses
   D) Tumblr can only share images and is useless for business networking

10. A government official wants to connect better with his constituents. His primary need is sharing complicated information about water-saving measures. Which of the following is the least appropriate social media tool for his need?
    A) A governmental website (no government websites are open to the public)
    B) Twitter (cannot share enough information)
    C) Instagram (more focused on image-sharing than conveying textual information)
    D) B & C

11. A social worker dealing with violent crime in her community is thinking of using social media to communicate with her constituents. Which of the following issues with social media is least important for her to consider?
    A) Using mobile-friendly services
    B) The need to ensure confidentiality of anyone she communicates about
    C) The provisions of the Berne Convention on copyright
    D) The availability of communications infrastructure (cell phone towers, etc.)

12. Which of the following pairs of tools or services would be best suited for a government official wishing to communicate new water-saving initiatives to their constituents?
13. A group of students at a local university wish to set up a network to discuss a course they are all taking. Which of the following features may be the least valuable for their needs?
   A) A ‘Like’ button such as provided by Facebook
   B) The ability to upload materials
   C) Access-control and user accounts
   D) Support for video or image embedding code

14. Which of the following could be used to demonstrate an awareness of online safety precautions?
   A) Using one extremely complicated password for all your social networking sites.
   B) Adopting someone else’s identity for your social media profiles.
   C) Threatening fellow users with litigation or other legal action if they infringe your online safety.
   D) None of the above.

Check Your Progress:
Unit 3: Engaging in networks

Introduction

Once you have identified which networks may be most appropriate for your different needs it can be daunting to engage with them for the first time. It can be helpful to take a staged approach. Initially you may choose to watch what happens without participating. It is a personal choice about how much you participate in your networks. There are different benefits to joining and contributing to networks for personal, work or learning purposes.

Upon completion of this unit you will be able to:

- Engage with networks in appropriate ways.
- Understand how different social networking activities can impact on your digital identity.
- Articulate the benefits of different kinds of networks for different needs.
- Articulate some of the challenges of using different kinds of online network.
- Understand issues around safety and wellbeing when using online networks.
- Be aware of legal aspects of using online networks.

Outcomes

Digital identity: How you present yourself, either personally or professionally online. Your online presence - the information that other people can see about you on the internet. It is possible to have more than one digital identity.

Communication network: An online network that is optimised for synchronous and/or asynchronous communication between participants.

Collaboration network: An online network that is optimised for collaboration between peers, which can include co-creation of resources, code or curriculum; sharing experiences; and collective problem-solving.

Sharing network: An online network that is optimised for sharing (uploading and downloading or posting links to resources), which can be open or closed.

Terminology

Benefits of participating in online networks

Earlier in this module we considered different kinds of social networks:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Sharing
- Subject or topic networks
Open practice or resources

Each of these bring their own benefits and challenges. Engaging with networks is likely to increase participation in local, national or global communities and has the potential to give people a voice where previously they may not have had one. Conversely, networks can exclude people or sections of the community either overtly by imposing access restrictions, or covertly through exclusive content, language or activities.

Communication networks

Most networks facilitate and encourage communication between members. Many services offer a range of ways to communicate either on a one-to-one, one-to-many or many-to-many basis. At the most basic level they offer people with access to technologies an opportunity to communicate with selected individuals.

At a personal level communication networks allow people to connect with chosen others across time and space constraints. We can communicate with people across the world instantly in a synchronous way or we can connect asynchronously at a time that suits us.

Immediate synchronous communication can be supported by text chat, video or audio mechanisms. Even email can be synchronous if all participants are online and connected at the same time. There are significant benefits to communicating synchronously. In work related contexts online technologies allow groups to have meetings, seminars and conferences with colleagues and partners and can save on the travel and time costs that face to face meetings incur.

In an educational context online communication networks offer students opportunities to connect with other students and tutors at times that suit them. Increasingly students have to juggle busy personal and work lives with their learning, and communication networks can allow them flexibility to manage their learning.

Whilst communication networks offer a wide range of benefits they can sometimes cause stress or anxiety for some people if they feel they always have to respond to people trying to contact them. It is very important to manage your commitment to online networks to maintain a healthy balance. This can be very challenging for educators who may be feel pressured to respond to student requests for help at all hours of the day.

One way to minimise stress is to adopt some personal approaches to managing your time and placing limits on how quickly you respond to messages. By making sure that people in your networks are aware of the limits and ways you engage you can avoid appearing rude and prevent some of the stress from being ‘always online.’

Additional resources:
Adventures in extreme productivity is a series of blog posts aimed at academics and students who are interested in working smarter and/or reading a little bit about strategy for improved learning.
Collaboration networks

The benefits of collaboration networks have already been illustrated with earlier examples of communities working together to improve information and knowledge sharing across rural areas. Collaboration networks can help to connect similar communities across geographical locations to promote co-operation and give strength to collaborative initiatives.

In work related settings collaborative networks can encourage creative approaches to managing projects and programmes and allow cross-fertilisation of ideas with colleagues around the world. They also allow organisations to engage with their audiences through interactive webinars and activities and to gather feedback on services and/or products.

In an educational context collaborative activities can encourage teamwork, cooperation and collective problem solving. Online networks make collaboration possible for distance and online students through shared resources and tools that facilitate collaborative knowledge creation. In educational settings, collaboration is often seen as a positive way to engage students in active learning, but some students find collaborative learning very challenging. This is particularly true when group work is assessed. Making collaboration compulsory can mean that some groups of students are disadvantaged.

Sharing networks

Online sharing networks bring their own benefits to different communities. Sharing information and resources with other people in a personal, work or learning capacity can bring recognition of skills and talents for the sharer and also benefits the person or people who can access the shared resource. Social networks enable people to share resources and information with family, friends and the wider world depending on which networks they chose. Once resources are shared it can be difficult to change your mind either about the way they can be used (what licence you chose to apply) or who can see them.

Public sharing networks can be useful in work related and educational contexts although people may be encouraged to use networks with restricted access so that sharing is within a controlled group. Companies can have legitimate reasons for protecting their resources and limiting accessibility. Educational institutions are publically funded bodies but have traditionally had some challenges with sharing, particularly with competitor institutions, but also in sharing across departments within the organisation. However the OER movement has led to increased sharing in a global sense. Open sharing networks have the potential to make educational opportunities accessible to a much wider range of people. These kinds of resources can be used directly by students or may be adapted by educators for different contexts.

Developing a social presence - building a digital identity

Finding a voice in social networks is closely related to developing an online presence or building a digital identity. It is possible to develop a digital identity without contributing to networks but social networking is an integral part of building and maintaining an online presence. Having online conversations is an important way to develop individual networks and to establish trust with others in the network.
Examples of how people may use social networks to develop a digital identity include making comments on other people’s blogs, joining in conversations in discussion forums, producing and sharing content on their own blogs or on other websites, posting online profiles on social media sites and contributing to work related or learning sites provided by an employer or educational institution.

Module 1 of this course focuses on developing a digital identity and provides some ideas to help you build and develop your own identity online.

**How to use different networks**

How you use different networks is usually indicated by the networks you chose to join. A public network to engage socially with friends and family will be used differently to professional or learning networks. Often it is easy to see how the network is used by observing how others engage with it. Most networks have rules or ‘netiquette’ to ensure that the network is safe and used appropriately by members. Network managers may take actions against people who do not follow the rules and can either block certain content or people.

It can be useful to spend some time before contributing watching how others post to find out what conventions are used and how people behave and respond in each network. It can also be useful to ask people in the network for help, because people may want to encourage and support new users. Some networks have people with specific roles to facilitate or support discussions or activities who may help new users adjust and settle-in. There are also often help pages which might address some frequently asked questions (FAQs) about how to use the network.

**Additional resources**

Using a network for the first time can often be an intimidating experience. Certain networks, especially established ones, have very specific conventions of how they should be used.

The Open University has a regularly-updated social media toolkit, available here, [http://www.open.ac.uk/community/social-media-toolkit/](http://www.open.ac.uk/community/social-media-toolkit/), which can help you navigate through the social media landscape and find tools that serve your particular needs.

**Safety and wellbeing in online networks**

In Module 1 we discussed issues around safety and wellbeing of individuals when online and also of making sure activities are legal and comply with terms and conditions of online services.

Behaviour in online networks is an important aspect of online safety because they are the spaces where people interact with each other. Power relations are as relevant online as they are in day to day life, but they can be exacerbated online due to various issues.

**Nobody knows you’re a dog**

There is a well-known saying ‘On the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog’
This originated from a cartoon by Peter Steiner that was published in The New Yorker newspaper in 1993

Figure 3: ‘On the Internet, no-one knows you’re a dog’

This illustrates the fact that it is very difficult to know who you are really talking to or to authenticate what someone presents to you as true.

It is important to maintain a level of scepticism when engaging in public or open social networks. This is equally true for some private or managed networks, where people may be more inclined to trust people they meet because they may assume that the network provider has carried out checks. This aspect of social networks is particularly problematic for young people who may be vulnerable to sexual predators and also to online bullying by peers. Adults can also be victims of online bullying, although network providers should ‘police’ behaviour on their networks to a certain extent.

One way to limit the negative potentials of social networks is to make sure people are educated about online safety so that they can protect themselves and others in the network from adverse behaviour.

Useful resource: The Internet Safety Tutorial focuses on staying safe online and includes a section on using social media safely.

Activity 3.1: Enhancing online safety and wellbeing

Enhancing online safety and wellbeing

Students: review your own network use. Do you use the same password with multiple different accounts? Do you share your password with others, and if so,
do you make sure to change it afterwards? Do you use your real name as your username, or do you share personal details on social networks?

Teachers: Review your online identity management techniques and identify any weak points, and then

Unit summary

In this unit you learned about the differentiation between the different specialisations of sharing, collaboration and communication networks. You also learned about how difficult it is to accurately determine identity in online spaces due to the ease of creating accounts and the difficulty platform-owners face in authenticating or verifying user identities. This emphasises the need for healthy scepticism when dealing with strangers online, both to protect yourself from unpleasant or harmful personal interactions (online bullying) and other threats such as fraud.

In your own practice you have likely used one of these platforms in ways for which it is not optimised (for example, using a sharing platform for communication purposes), or have witnessed friends, family or colleagues doing the same. It may be time to consider your communicative, collaborative and sharing needs and matching them against your current platform engagement and determining if the systems you currently use are the best fit for your needs, bearing in mind the cost (in time and familiarisation, if not money) of switching to a new platform.

You or others in your context may also have engaged in online communications without necessarily thinking through the problems of identity management and online bullying. By sensitising yourself to the unverifiable nature of online identity, you can assist others around you in maintaining an appropriate level of scepticism when dealing with strangers online, which can help prevent negative or unpleasant interaction.

Assessment
Assessment

1. Which of the following is a potential drawback of synchronous communication technologies?
   - A) The long delay between message and response
   - B) Anxiety or stress from ‘always being on’
   - C) Health issues such as hearing loss
   - D) The inability to communicate with people in different time zones

2. Which of the following functions is an online sharing network optimised for?
   - A) Collaborating with peers in a professional environment
   - B) Discovering new content
   - C) Communicating with diverse audiences
   - D) Developing new software

3. Which of the following statements is most accurate when it comes to determining the identity of a stranger online?
   - A) There is no way to be completely sure of a stranger’s identity online
   - B) You can use profile name and country of origin to determine a stranger’s identity
   - C) Personal profiles on social networking sites are accurate sources of information on strangers' identities
   - D) IP addresses and home language are sufficient to determining strangers' identities

4. Which of the following statements is most true regarding online bullying?
   - A) Online bullying can target both adults and children
   - B) Online bullying only targets children.
   - C) Online bullying is a misconception; people just take online criticism too personally
   - D) Online bullying exclusively targets adults.

5. Which of the following factors are most important in online power relationships?
   - A) None - everyone is equal online.
   - B) Age and ethnic background.
   - C) Language proficiency and digital proficiency
   - D) Political affiliation

6. Which of the following communities is least likely to practise open sharing?
A) Educational institutions
B) Companies and commercial organisations
C) Individual users (i.e. bloggers)
D) Military organisations

7. Which of the following statements is NOT true with regard to collaboration networks and open sharing?
   A) Collaboration can take place in closed environments with closed-access results.
   B) Collaboration always takes place in open environments with the results being shared openly.
   C) Collaboration can take place in closed environments for the purpose of open sharing of the results.
   D) Collaboration can take place in open environments with closed-access results.

8. Which of the following aspects of your digital identity are least dangerous to share with others via social media?
   A) Passwords.
   B) Personal details (name, age, gender, etc.).
   C) Physical location (i.e. home address).
   D) Work details (position, place of work).

9. Choose the best ‘true or false’ response to the following statement: “Using social media usually leads to emotional, financial or physical harm.”
   A) True; social media sites require you to share your personal details with other users, which can be used to harm you.
   B) False; using social media can lead to harm, but there are ways to minimise potential risks.
   C) False; using social media can lead to harm, but online criminals are always brought to justice.
   D) True; use of social media is inevitably emotionally harmful and improper use can result in financial or physical harm.

Check Your Progress: