Framing the Use of Social Technologies towards Social Constructionism
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1. Introduction
Social technologies came into view as a major element of the Web 2.0 movement. Prevalent software of this movement is blogs, wikis, podcasting, videoblogs, microblogs, digital artifacts sharing platforms and social networks. These types of software differ significantly from static web-pages in the sense that they are open to the world and editable by everyone. Recent years have shown an explosion of interest in using these technologies in all subjects of the curriculum. Thus, research investigating their use is becoming more and more widespread. Despite their popularity, their applicability is unclear, and their use is still not clearly framed in theory [Wang and Vasquez 2012]. This shows the need for a holistic framework that will ground their use. To fill this void, the current study sets off to develop a framework that will ground the use of social technologies for facilitating groups of learners to socially construct a shared, meaningful artifact. This framework will be based on the learning theory of constructionism. Constructionism assumes that knowledge is better gained when students find this knowledge for themselves when engaging in the making of concrete and public artifacts. In addition, constructionism supports that computers are needed, as an environment through which rich activities can be developed.

2. Our Approach
Three consecutive studies fed into the development of the framework focusing on the use of different social technologies as social constructionist tools in three different classroom settings: a) teaching Greek as a second language (L2); b) teaching Greek as a first/native language (L1) for academic purposes/dissertation writing and c) teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) for specific academic purposes.

In an attempt to implement theoretically designed learning environments in real-world classrooms, we employed Design Based Research [Barab 2006] as an overarching framework of inquiry. Figure 1 demonstrates the core elements (design, theory problem, real-life environment) of DBR and communicates that each of these components were taken into consideration in all studies. Each of these elements operates with one another in order to inform theory and strengthen the design of the framework [Barab 2006].

3. Results
The three circles of inquiry provided deep insights into the use of social technologies as social constructionist tools and informed a novel framework for their use. This inquiry provided three core dimensions that enabled learners to participate actively in the construction of artifacts within social technologies; that is exploration of material, construction and evaluation of the constructed artifact. The emergence of these dimensions open up a novel pathway for their use of social technologies towards the direction of social constructionism.

4. Conclusion
The findings of this study provided an in-depth understanding of how social technologies can be used for facilitating groups of learners to socially construct a shared artifact. The most important significance of this contribution is to move the discussion about the use of social technologies further in the direction of social constructionism. The emergence of this prospect is expected to supply designers, instructors, researchers and practitioners with a better understanding of the affordances of social technologies, leading to a new perspective of their use.

References