Chapter 9

Facebook Mediated Learning Environments in Pakistan: A Study of Teacher Immediacy

Tazeen Hussain
Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This chapter explores teacher immediacy in online learning environments, focusing on the use of social media - Facebook as a teaching tool in Art and Design education institutions in Pakistan. The study is based on existing teaching practice in Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and Department of Visual Studies, University of Karachi. Following a mixed method approach including observation and interviews with both teachers and students, the chapter identifies the reasons teachers use Facebook in teaching practice and explores the reasons that limit their use of this potentially immediacy inducing environment. It also includes a study of content including video, links to articles and popular culture manifestations like memes and emoticons, which could be used in teaching via social media and the implications for learning and cognition. The concept of immediacy is explored and the chapter proposes that it be approached more broadly in order to realise the full potential of social media and harness it for better learning and outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The educational sector all over the world, including Pakistan, is waking up to the possibilities the World Wide Web (www) and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) can provide for learning as SNS applications become increasingly embedded in our lives, particularly of the tech savvy young people as seen in studies by Ito (2010), Kim and Yun (2007), Livingstone (2002), Selwyn (2009), Siddiqui (2006) and Wang et al (2012). They enable new virtual forums, alongside the traditional classrooms, enabling cognitive and affective learning and overcoming space time barriers by extending the classroom to a

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virtual space as well as facilitating accessibility from homes, workplaces at any time. These forums are also described as user-centric due to their interlinking capabilities, which enable access and delivery of a variety of content, academic and non-academic, via multiple formats according to the preference and convenience of the learner. In this way these forums can be potentially egalitarian promoting a student-centric environment (Selwyn, 2007; Wood & Baker, 2004). It is also strongly believed that ICTs and the www can play a major role in overcoming global inequalities in education by enabling access to more educational sources and opportunities via online education (Kucuk, 2009; Richards, 2004; Said, 2006,).

As ICT enabled online forums begin to be used widely for the educational purpose world over there is a need to understand the difference between the online learning environment and the real time classroom. Wood & Baker (2004) highlight the salience of teacher immediacy and social presence in educational online environments and demonstrate positive co-relations of teacher immediacy behaviors to cognitive and affective learning.

In Pakistan there is a rising trend amongst teachers and students to use Facebook and other Social network sites (SNS), in an educational context (Hussain, 2015). There are 29, 128,970 Internet users in Pakistan out of which 23,000,000 use Facebook (Internet World Stats, 2015) and most are aged between 18-34 years (PAS, 2014). It is therefore not strange to see teachers of under graduate level institutions reaching out to students via Facebook.

Though existing literature covers various uses of Facebook in educational contexts including student engagement, student motivation, learning management system there is relatively less knowledge about the effects of interactions via Facebook for learning and even less with regards to the developing world. Rambi and N’gambi (2011, 2014) and Ahmed et al (2013) in their studies based in South Africa and Bangladesh point out this asymmetry and both suggest that Facebook’s efficacy in educational context might not be universal due to socio-cultural and infrastructural differences in the developing world. Their findings pave the way to the idea that using Facebook to communicate with students might be a means to developing a better understanding of students and overcoming teacher student distance - immediacy.

Facebook being grounded in new media networks allows and eases information sharing due to its interlinking capacity and accessibility via multiple means like PC’s, mobile phones and laptops. It is unbiased, that is it allows for information retrieval by individuals irrespective of hierarchy. Facebook sharing being profile-based also allows ownership of information shared. These features have the potential to aid affective and effective learning by allowing autonomy in information access - which is fed by multiple sources instead of only designated academic ones and multiple formats like video, audio, non-academic articles, like newspapers, magazines and blogs.

This exploratory and qualitative study will try to identify and establish immediacy behaviors in online environments by observing existing closed Facebook groups used by teachers in Pakistan as part of pedagogy. This will be followed by discussion with students who are part of the groups. In Karachi, Pakistan using Facebook to communicate with students is an increasingly common practice as the virtual world is as yet rather unregulated and there are no laws against its pedagogical use in educational institutions. Verbal and non-verbal content of Facebook groups will be identified and analyzed for immediacy potential. Results from the observation and discussion will be further explored by undertaking in-depth interviews with teachers to understand their motivations for the usage/non-usage of Facebook as pedagogy and to seek out their views on the merits of online learning environments for teacher immediacy. It is hoped that the study covering two art and design institutions in Karachi, Pakistan will provide an