A Study of the Predictive Relationship Between Online Social Presence and ONLE Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Open Network Learning Environments (ONLE) are online networks that afford learners the opportunity to participate in creative content endeavors, personalized identity projections, networked mechanism management, and effective collaborative community integration by applying Web 2.0 tools in open environments. It supports social interaction by integrating User-Generated Content, Participatory Web, digital identities, social and networking linkages, and collaborative learning community to allow learners manage and tailor their social presence. The purposes of this study were to assess the predictive relationship between online social presence and overall ONLE’s social interaction and examine the predictive relationships between online social presence and four dimensions of ONLE’s interaction (i.e., cognitive, social, networking, and integration). The results of this study did not support the role of online social presence as a predictor for overall ONLE’s social interaction. Although social presence can serve as a predictor for networking and integration dimensions, social presence cannot serve as a predictor for cognitive and social dimensions. This study suggests CMC and ONLE have different dynamics in social interaction. ONLE focuses on “social and “networking” linkages to transform online learners into “network learners” to project their ideal and preferred “network social presence” rather than online social presence.

Keywords: Interaction, Open Network Learning Environment (ONLE), Personal Learning Environment, Social Presence, Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have argued that educators should re-conceptualize learning from more individual to more collective and open resource model to prepare learners as 21st century’s digital citizens (Crocco, 2008). This emerging learning concept is referred to as Open Network Learning Environments (ONLE). These are online networks that afford learners the opportunity

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to participate in creative content endeavors, personalized identity projections, networked mechanism management, and effective collaborative community integration by applying Web 2.0 tools in open environments. Because of the strengths of Web 2.0 tools in open communication and collaboration, educators have integrated various Web 2.0 technologies, such as blog, wiki, social network sites, Twitter, etc., to support their existing online instructions. Social acts that elicit identities, develop awareness, cement relationships, ensure connections, and promote interactions among learners are necessary for interactive learning. ONLE is based on the socio-cultural learning theory. The aim of a socio-cultural approach is to comprehend the developmental processes involved in rituals (activities) at the individual (identities), social (interpersonal), and cultural (community) levels. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of an ONLE’s social interaction, one should examine it from the perspective of “online social presence” by evaluating interpersonal interactions. This study purposes to empirically assess the presence of a predictive relationship between online social presence and overall ONLE interaction. Furthermore, the current study also examined the predictive relationship between online social presence and the four dimensions of ONLE’s social interaction (i.e., cognitive, social, networking & integration) respectively.

ONLE

Tu, Blocher, and Roberts (2008) proposed four dimensions as constructs to conceptualize social interaction in ONLEs: cognitive, social, networking, and integration. These constructs represent different social interactions in ONLE related to online socio-cultural learning.

The cognitive dimension focuses on the process of the individual thinking about their engagement in and the culture within a meta-cognitive element. Learners think about what, how, and to whom they will contribute their contents through interactions. In ONLE, learners are commonly engaged in creating, editing, reflecting, organizing, remixing, and sharing their own and/or content of others (Greenhow et al., 2009). In collaborative wiki instructions, learners are engaged in creating, modifying, organizing, remixing, and sharing the learning process collaboratively with their teammates and other digital citizens as part of open educational resources (OERs). Network learners in ONLE do not consume learning content solely; they create and edit learning content collaboratively with other network learners. Additionally, while creating and editing content collaboratively, network learners “remix” identified network learning content to generate a new set of content with their creative ideas to personalize their learning. Remix is composed of processes that select cultural network artifacts and combine and manipulate them into new kinds of creative blends (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008). The Digital remix process makes the learning process more personalized, meaningful, and authentic.

Social dimension concerns the individual and the social contexts which constitute the relationships between individual, social, and cultural environments. In ONLE, learners engage in creating, and updating their profiles to maintain and manage their digital identities (Ducate & Lomicka, 2008) and social identities (Rogers & Lea, 2005), such as personal profiles, becoming friends, circles, fans, or followers, to build digital social relationships. Digital and social identities are the foundations of social relationships. Learners in ONLE frequently create and update their digital profiles with personal information, pictures, friend networks, etc. These digital profiles become part of their digital identities and are the forms that Goffman (1959) would call “self-presentation,” projecting ideal self images. In ONLE, some learners assume a more active approach by regulating and controlling information in social interaction, such as post and update their current status on Facebook, Twitter, reply to the status of others, or blogging about their thoughts, etc. These
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