

Challenges and opportunities for business communication: A Facebook approach conundrum

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Abstract. Facebook is currently one of the most popular platforms for online social networking among university students. The ever-growing prevalence of Facebook has led business educators to explore what role social networking technology might play in business training and professional development. Nonetheless, much is left to be learned about how Facebook is influencing student learning in the area of business communication. This paper examined the effect on learners' satisfaction of incorporating Facebook into business communication courses. A total of 147 undergraduate students from a national university in Taiwan participated in this web-supported study. To analyze the students' reflection quantitatively, a survey was employed. The findings showed that the incorporation of Facebook into coursework effectively assisted students' learning of business communication. Facebook worked as the social glue that connected students together in a learning community, provided opportunities for sharing, and transformed students' learning attitudes towards their business presentation projects. Students deepened their understanding of content knowledge learning not only from the class input but also via peer feedback activities on Facebook. In addition to the benefits gained, care should be taken not to over-privilege Facebook. Weighing the balance between social networking practice on Facebook and face-to-face interaction in class, pedagogical suggestions and recommendations are addressed for future pedagogical use and research direction.

Keywords: business communication, Facebook, web-supported learning.

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1. Introduction

The advance of digital technologies and social media has provided opportunities for business educators to develop new approaches to educational training in higher education (Alavi, Yoo, & Vogel, 1997). Today's students are exposed to ubiquitous Web 2.0 technologies (García-Ruiz, Fernández, & Pulido, 2014). Due to this wave, business educators are incorporating social media and technology, extending their capabilities to assist students in knowledge sharing, project collaborating and polishing targeted skills and expertise (Crews & Stitt-Gohdes, 2012). Thus, blended learning has revolutionized traditional lecture-based business communication classrooms.

Facebook is recognized for its potential in formulating online learning communities and motivating students to learn. Facebook, originally established for social networking, has received considerable attention in education because of its accessibility, convenience, and flexibility (Bowman & Akcaoglu, 2014; Prescott, 2014). Business communication is a specialized area of communication. Thus, business communication practitioners must consider the communication processes' key elements: messages, senders, receivers, feedback, context, challenge and interference as well as understand business requirements (Francis, Stricker, Russell-Dempsey, Morrison, & Winzenburg, 2009).

In this study, Facebook is used to archive students' class presentations, share their presentation materials from Prezi and allow them to provide constructive peer feedback for the presented business topics. Practicing pertinent real-world related business issues via a structured video- and text-based format enables students to practice varied business communication modes. Reflective writing activities help students think critically about business communication's key elements and write concisely (Decarie, 2010). Consequently, this study employs the following research questions. First, what is the relationship between learners' perceptions about course effectiveness, perceived usefulness, ease of use, the peer feedback system and satisfaction respectively? Second, does perceived ease of use affect the relationships among learners' perceptions about course effectiveness, usefulness, the peer feedback system, and satisfaction?

2. Method

This quantitative survey study investigated relationships among students' perceptions regarding the dimensions of course, technology, environment, and their satisfaction in a business communication class incorporating Facebook. The effect

of perceived ease of use on the relationships was examined. The study site was a Taiwanese national university's business school, ranked as one of Taiwan's best vocational-tracked institutions. Participants are generally highly motivated and self-regulated. The questionnaire items were selected to elicit learner satisfaction and underlying variables. The conceptual framework was replicated from Huang's (2012) research study.

Table 1. Questionnaire items, means and standard deviation ($N=147$)

Construct/Variable	Number of Items	$M(SD)$
Learner Satisfaction (LS)	6	4.14(.54)
Course Effectiveness (CE)	6	4.14(.50)
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	4	3.67(.70)
Peer Feedback System (PFS)	14	3.40(.45)
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)	3	4.43(.51)

The data were collected during the 2013 fall semester. The quantitative analyses had three main aspects. The purpose of the descriptive statistic analysis was to analyze the distribution of participants' basic information in order to obtain a preliminary understanding of their basic characteristics and responses to the five variables (Table 1). The correlation analysis and simple regression analysis addressed the first three research questions and determined which factors correlated with learner satisfaction. The hierarchical regression answered the fourth research question.

3. Discussion

The survey was distributed to all business communication students with 147 replies received (98% response rate). Of the 147 completed surveys, 20 males (13.6%), and 127 females (86.4%). Seventy (47.6%) participants were seniors; seventy-seven (52.4%) were juniors. One hundred and forty-two (96.6%) of them were international business majors, four (2.7%) were finance majors, and one (0.7%) was information science (see Table 2 for detail: overall, heterogeneous sampling).

Table 2. Demographic information about respondents ($N=147$)

Categories	Number	Percentage
Gender	147	100
Male	20	86.4
Female	127	13.6
School Years	147	100
Senior	70	47.6
Junior	77	52.4
Major	147	100
International Business	142	96.6
Finance	4	2.7
Information Science	1	0.7

In the correlation analysis, a Pearson product-moment was adopted to assess the inter-factor correlations (Table 3). A simple correlation and a simple regression measured the relationships among perceived learner satisfaction and each factor. The results showed that all three antecedent variables and one moderating variable, and the outcome variable had significant relationships. Course effectiveness was positively correlated with learner satisfaction ($r=.47, p<.01$), perceived usefulness was positively correlated with learner satisfaction ($r=.46, p<.01$), peer feedback system was positively correlated with learner satisfaction ($r=.36, p<.01$), and perceived ease of use was positively correlated with learner satisfaction ($r=.34, p<.01$).

Table 3. Simple correlation between variables

Variables	LS	CE	PU	PFS	PEU
LS	—				
CE	.47**	—			
PU	.46**	.57**	—		
PFS	.36**	.42**	.55**	—	
PEU	.34**	.23**	.25**	.31**	—

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

We examined the moderating effect of perceived ease of use on the relationships between learners’ perceptions regarding course, usefulness, and technology, and their satisfaction with this course. Table 4, Model 1 includes three independent variables: course effectiveness, perceived usefulness, and the peer feedback system. This model accounted for 53.2% of the variance in learners’ satisfaction ($R^2=.532$). Course effectiveness had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.293, p<.01$), and the peer feedback system also had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.230, p<.05$). However, perceived usefulness had no significant effect on learner satisfaction. Model 2 includes all three independent variables and the moderating item (PEU). This model accounted for 56.7% of the variance in learner satisfaction ($R^2=.567$). Course effectiveness had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.273, p<.01$), peer feedback system had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.214, p<.05$), and perceived ease of use had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.207, p<.01$). However, perceived usefulness had no significant effect on learner satisfaction.

Model 3 includes all three independent variables, the moderating item (PEU) and the three interaction items. This model accounted for 57.0% of the variance in learners’ satisfaction ($R^2=.570$). Course effectiveness had a significant positive

effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.269, p<.01$), peer feedback system had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.206, p<.10$), and perceived ease of use had a significant positive effect on learner satisfaction ($\beta=.210, p<.01$). However, perceived usefulness had no significant effect on learner satisfaction. None of the three interaction items had a significant effect on the relationship between learners' perceptions about courses, usefulness, technology, and their satisfaction.

Table 4. Examination of moderating effect of perceived ease of use ($N=147$)

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
CE	.293***	.273***	.269***
PU	.112	.066	.057
PFS	.230**	.214**	.206*
PEU		.207***	.210***
CE * PEU			.069
PU * PEU			-.008
PFS* PEU			-.016
R ²	.532	.567	.570
Adj R ²	.283	.321	.325
ΔR^2	.268	.302	.291
F	18.820	7.972	.238

Dependent variable: Learner satisfaction, * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

4. Conclusions

The results showed that the students' perceptions about course effectiveness, feedback system, and ease of use of Facebook had a positive effect on their satisfaction with the course. However, learners' perceived usefulness did not significantly affect on their satisfaction. Furthermore, learners' perceived ease of use of Facebook did not have a significant effect on the relationships among their perceptions about the course, usefulness, technology, and their satisfaction with this course.

Based on the proposed research questions and the correlational results obtained, a course can be designed to teach business communication, while considering and incorporating the appropriateness regarding Facebook's technology affordance and functions. Effective teaching and learning objectives and activities play an important role in students' attitudinal responses. Regarding Facebook's pedagogical usefulness, due to its social media features, a Facebook platform helps promote students' reading and writing interchange by cultivating their communication competencies. Students appreciate the supplementary online learning on Facebook as they become more active learners. Additionally, a peer feedback system should

be organized, as students perform online tasks and receive feedback from other learners. By connecting with classmates, students will better understand about their drawbacks and strengths in their business communication skills.

The hierarchical regression indicates no significant relationship between the perceived usefulness of Facebook and learner satisfaction. A possible reason may be the lack of authentic business communication-like exercises. Course effectiveness, perceived ease of use and peer feedback system lead to the positive increase of learners' course satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings also suggest that Facebook's perceived ease of use has no moderating effect on altering learners' course satisfaction. For today's digital native university students, social media is closely tied to daily life; they grasp Facebook's interfaces and features. This might explain the insignificance of the interaction among perceived ease of use of Facebook and course effectiveness, perceived usefulness and the peer feedback system.

For future curriculum design, a Facebook-utilizing learning design promises to provide teachers with a framework that will enable them to design effective, quality learning experiences for business communication students. Instructors should document teaching activities and scaffold processes on Facebook, reflect students' practice of learning and share instructional design that potentially improve teaching quality in business communication. For future research design, replication of this study in other university subjects or cultural contexts may furnish deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities of implementing Facebook.

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