
Language Learning Through Social Media Platform: Exploring Realities and Insights

Luisito M. Nanquil

Instructor, Bulacan State University, Philippines

ARTICLE INFO

Received: February 13, 2020

Accepted: March 2, 2020

Volume: 2

Issue: 1

KEYWORDS

Facebook, social media, second language learning, textual analysis, social communication

ABSTRACT

Products of modernity and technological enhancement led to invention of internet and social media networks such as Facebook, twitter, Instagram and other platforms widely used by netizens and students. Transactions are swifter now-a-days due to the impact of social media but still, observable disadvantages are seen by people. This research attempted to describe the life experiences of selected college students from a private higher education institution in the Philippines with regard to their exposure and involvement with social media site such as Facebook. It covered academic year 2019. In choosing the participants, purposive sampling was employed in which traits of participants were aligned to the primary goal of this study. For the method, this output adhered to qualitative research design with phenomenology as its main approach. Through this method, descriptions of the participants were examined by the researcher using their life experiences in relation to the use of social media platform in their everyday lives. The textual data from the participants were transcribed, examined, and interpreted using content analysis which is a process of meaning-making. The results of this research revealed that participants were active users of social media platform such as Facebook where they learn to speak and communicate in English. They enjoyed perks from being online users such as fluency in English, getting invaluable information, and expanding their intellect through social interaction. On the other hand, they also encounter downsides such as reading fake news, faulty grammar, spelling, and senseless information. It is recommended that people have to be cautious in using social media sites to protect themselves from possible perils. Likewise, only correct information has to be posted on their walls so that educational and pivotal ideas will reach online users. Parents and teachers, as suggested by participants, have to monitor their children as they use online sites and platforms such as Facebook.

Introduction

Qualman (2011) pointed out that the growth of social media is phenomenal. He exemplified in his book that 5% of Americans were reported being familiar with Twitter. In just two years, it increased into 87% familiarity. In another report from NBC as cited by Lichtman (2014), Twitter has already 175 million users.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined social media as a group of Internet-based applications that were formed on the foundations of web 2.0. Social media include online technological tools that allow people to communicate with one another. Bradley (2010) blogged that social media is a set of channels and technologies aiming to establish a community of participants for productive collaboration.

Launched in 2004, Facebook is a social networking website. Users can create their account, design their profiles, upload their photos, communicate with their friends and family, and send important messages. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg and went public in 2012. It started with more than 600 million active users at the early months of 2011. In 2010, a film with the title "The Social Network" documented the development and progress of Facebook. Based on media reports, more than 40% of US population had a Facebook in 2010.

YouTube was launched in 2005. It is a video-sharing website. In 2006, it was purchased by Google for 1.65 billion. It uses Adobe Flash Video an htm15 technology. More and more people upload their videos in the contemporary time to express their ideas, creativity, and traditions.

There has been wide debate about the effectiveness of virtual communication compared to face-to-face interaction. A common concern is the loss of non-verbal cues, which results to slow comprehension among users of media platforms. The differences between face-to-face communication and virtual communication are still being studied. However, some patterns are on the rise. People can look at some evidence of how virtual communication affects the development of interpersonal relationships.

Communication researcher Joseph Walther and his colleagues have developed a social information-processing theory that explains how people can develop smooth and quality relationships with others through e-mail and other electronic means. According to this theory, there is a key difference between face-to-face and computer-mediated interaction, and this is described by the rate of information reaching communicators and online users. If communication is done live, there is a lot of information sent and received by both parties. When people converse, they use mixture of body expressions, signs, and gestures supporting the ideas they intend to project or express. On the one hand, during e-mail interactions, the amount of information being processed is less because it takes time for communicators to respond and answer the words of other party whom they communicate with. The two persons involved in the process can hardly determine the likes, dislikes, and feelings of one another.

A study by Lisa Tidwell and Joseph Walther extended the application of social information processing theory. These researchers explored how computer-mediated communication effects how fast and how much people discover information about themselves and the whole impressions people make of one another.

Other than the books and journals offered by the physical space in the library, a wealth of information exists in cyberspace and on the Internet – the network of information stored by computers around the globe. It started as a network of only four computers in 1969; today the Internet consists of thousands of computer networks accessed by millions of online users in the world. The Internet can be a challenging venue on the information highway. It provides numerous opportunities but it also has possible drawbacks such as pondering on how all information that is available. As a huge system, the internet is evolving; the procedures for finding information may change overnight. An Internet address that you find today may be outdated within a short period of time. It makes difficult for users to find way to go because of the networks of and subnetworks that they have to click. If the researcher is not electronically literate then the assistance of the librarian or member of the research team may help. Web sources should be evaluated by users because anyone who has the skill to use Internet can upload or post information even they are not reliable or accurate.

Social media and education is a topic covered by some researchers. Khang, Ki, and Ye (2012) studied patterns and trends in the use of social media over more than a decade. They look into advertising, communication, marketing, and public relations as key variables. They discovered that 15% of the research they reviewed used qualitative methods and another 6% used mixed methods. Facebook and Google+ are great tools to expand people's personal and professional learning network about different topics. As netizens start to follow blogs, twitter, and meet others face to face and at conferences, they get engaged in the same topic or request friendship on Facebook or add them in their Google+ circle. Indeed, tons of benefits are being enjoyed by people from using social media engines and platforms. They can do educational activities such as sending or tagging their friends to links where they can get abundant information essential to their studies or career. Friends can comment on the posts if they like those or not. From these we can infer how the world became small due to impact of technology and social media (Nielsen & Webb, 2011). Apparently, people have the opportunity to express their views, save information, send information, and get in touch with other people from different parts of the globe through social media. Although in some instances, netizens are interrupted by the applications and games online, the easiest way to send and receive messages is through social media platforms. People can be connected with other networks, friends, and loved ones in one click only. They can also share videos, photos, blogs, and many other perks all they need is a stable internet connection. Surely, more technological advancements are coming in the future as globalization brought people together regardless of distance and diversities. Furthermore, because of modernity and technology, works and tasks of people have never been as doable and feasible as they are now. Even with business related activities, social media tools are very helpful and useful because they can attract potential customers who will purchase products and establish link with them. Indeed, the use and functions of social media are tangible and noticeable.

Philosophical Perspectives

Constructivism

Constructivism is based on the principle that individuals cannot simply be given knowledge. Rather, individuals must create knowledge as they interact with the world around them. Their constructions of knowledge are rooted in their prior knowledge. The theory holds that the mind is constantly searching with what they already know. Constructivism has several important implications. One is that the conditions that best facilitate learning are what might be described as learner-centered and problem-centered. This means that a teacher needs to provide learners with complex, complete, and authentic problems. Once this is done, guidance is provided to class members to help them gain the knowledge needed to solve problems.

Another assumption of constructivism is that members of the class need to be actively engaged in the learning process. They must actively seek solutions to problems and share ideas because the social and cultural context is important, and because it is not likely that any one individual can find the solution working alone, often learners will work in pairs or in teams (Armstrong, Henson, and Savage, 2009).

Perennialism

The term perennial refers to something that is recurring or everlasting. The educational perspective of perennialism views truth and human nature as unchanging or constant. So it is that perennialists view education as the discovery and teaching of those underlying and unchanging truths. Perennialists also emphasize cultivating reason and the intellect. Although perennialists grant that changing times bring surface-level alterations to the problems people face, they believe that human nature and the underlying principles of truth remain unaltered over time. Furthermore, they contend that the experiences of human beings through centuries have established those truths worth knowing.

The primary goal of education as viewed by the perennialists is that of developing the intellect and the learning of enduring truths or principles that have passed the test of time. They believe that such wisdom is important regardless of the career or vocation a person ultimately chooses to follow. Preparing individuals to be participating members of society who can cope with change is viewed as best accomplished by developing the intellect and learning enduring truths that can be applied to any problem (Armstrong, Henson, and Savage, 2009).

Progressivism

Progressivism has been an important educational philosophy for a considerable part of the 20th century. One of the main figures identified with progressivism is John Dewey, in (Armstrong, Henson, and Savage, 2009). Until the beginning of 20th century, education was designed primarily for those few who were going on to higher education. The general practice of education was that of extensive routine, authoritarian teachers whose word was law, memorization of facts, and no student rights. Progressivism identifies change as constant in the world. Rather than opposing change, progressive educators believe that individuals need to embrace the change and learn how to direct it for the betterment of society. Thus, progressives see a major purpose of education as that of helping individuals learn to solve problems. In this context, students need to learn the scientific method for defining and solving problems. This means that the active involvement of students is critical (Armstrong, Henson, and Savage, 2009).

Objectives and Questions of the Study

The main objective of this study was to describe and analyze the perks and downsides of using social media as participants learn a second language.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the existing ideas and information in English learned by the participants using social media network like Facebook?
2. What are the common problems of the participants in communication using Facebook?
3. How may social media network serve as an online environment in communication and language learning?

4. What intervening action could be developed in order to facilitate language learning using Facebook?

Methodology

The main goal of this research investigation is to describe how selected students used social network such as Facebook to communicate to others and at the same time, achieve fluency in English. This was conducted in 2019 in a private higher education institution in the Philippines. In choosing the participants, the researcher used purposive sampling in which he had the power and authority to identify the qualified participants for the information he needed. Phenomenology was the approach he employed, while content analysis was his method of analyzing and synthesizing textual data. The purpose of phenomenology is to describe and understand the life experiences of people who have experienced a particular event or phenomenon. On the other hand, content analysis is a way of making meaning from the data. It involves detailed analysis of the text. The researcher ensured all participants that their responses would be kept confidential. Identities were withheld instead; codes were assigned to the names. When all responses were transcribed, the researcher examined and described them as textual data. Content analysis is a detailed analysis and interpretation of data. It is meaning making.

The study strictly observed utmost confidentiality and privacy of the information and responses expressed by the students. Furthermore, this study involved the participants in an interview where their thoughts and reflections were carefully examined by the researcher as he did step by step observation. Four questions were constructed by the researcher and were scrutinized and validated by language education experts who have been in the field for more than three decades. The researcher obtained relevant textual data which he later examined, analyzed, and lastly, crystallized into concepts. The process of coding and categorizing was used before the researcher formulated synthesis.

Results and Discussion

1. What specific information in English do you get from communication using Facebook?

*“Facebook can help me **get ideas** on how things work. It can also help me be updated on how my overseas friends or relatives are doing.”*

*“Social and environmental **issues** are tackled online. Group works with **topics** are processed and discussed through chat helping people exchange or share ideas.”*

*“Through Facebook I get to know the latest **news and gossips** which are mostly written in English.”*

*“Facebook shows how people make their lives meaningful by **sharing pictures, posts** and so on. It also shows interactions of people.”*

*“The other people that post videos or article give the users **specific information**. I usually see posts about love. A blog is usually use in sharing their own thoughts.”*

*“The **latest news** in the society and **new vocabulary** are learned by users.”*

*“You can spread the **news** easily by sharing a post and liking a page.”*

*“The news that are shared and posted in English carries **vocabularies**.”*

*“I learn proper English with the right **spelling, grammar, and punctuations** by reading different articles.”*

*“I can see the **latest news and events** of different peoples and places.”*

As seen in the textual data, most participants claim that using social media like Facebook helps them gather or collect ideas, information, vocabulary and news. Moreover, they are getting updates on grammar, spelling, and punctuations from reliable sources. On the one hand, they encounter not so informative and educational items from the site just like gossips and fake news. With this scenario, it can be inferred that more and more netizens are becoming socially aware of what is happening around them through their social media account like Facebook.

Communication in using social media can provide online learners and users with plenty of information. Some are useful and some are senseless. But majority of the participants claimed that grammar, spelling, and vocabulary helped them to achieve competence and awareness in communication.

2. How can Facebook as an online tool help you learn English language?

*“Facebook can help me by the use of **news articles** posted by my friends. It can also help me by means of **communicating** with other people; it would be nice if you try to talk to other people in English.”*

“Nowadays, Facebook is the number one **online media** and communication system. I have learned about online teachers who teach learners how to speak and write in English especially for those who come from China, Japan, and Korea.”

“It can help me learn English language by **reading some interesting things** to help me improve. Also, I obtain information and ideas concerning related to English language.”

“It can help me learn to interact with many people. It can be a source of **news and information.**”

“Having a group in Facebook helps people **interact with others.** When you are included in a fan page, you could meet other people hence, you are using English when you **communicate** with them.”

“People share **journals, blogs, and news articles with grammar and vocabulary.**”

“When I write or post something online, there is a kind of spelling check that automatically corrects my errors.”

“Facebook is a **form of communication** which can help people learn other culture and at the same time have fun while using it. One can post pictures, images, and videos. Your writing is enhanced because you post online.”

“It helps me know what is happening in my surroundings and helps me interact with other people. It helps me improve my **communication skills** while I get information about people and places.”

“Some of my friends post articles that are interesting and update status that contain **issues and events** using English.”

According to the responses, many participants believe that using social media helps them to communicate with friends, relatives, and classmates. They are able to express their own thoughts and feelings through chatting, posts, and blogs. With their own accounts, they can learn other ideas and cultures of foreigners hence, they interact with others socially. Furthermore, participants underscored in their responses that using social media informs and updates them to the latest events in the country and the global world. They said in just a click, they are able to know the latest and recent activities of others.

It is crystal clear from the voices and insights of the participants that a social media like Facebook is a helpful tool in learning to communicate the English language because of many reasons and factors. According to them, most information available online are expressed in English so they have the opportunity to master the language. They also mentioned that they meet a lot of people from the platform who are conversing in English; hence, they will use one the same language for the purpose of communication and understanding. In other words, technology and social media served as powerful venues to air their ideas and express themselves.

3. What problems do you encounter in learning English using Facebook as a social network?

“**Fake news and misspelled words** are common things I do encounter in using Facebook.”

“Actually there many problems I encounter in learning English using Facebook but there are only two main problems and these are: reading the **wrong paragraphs and essays**, and encountering **difficulties in understanding** the said essays and paragraphs. “

“Problems that I encounter in learning English using Facebook are mostly **errors in grammar and wrong information and details.** “

“The problem is that sometimes people post a **non-sense thing** that does not help the viewers. Games in Facebook are also source of distraction.”

“Sometimes, the **grammar is wrong** and I thought that the grammar was correct and I even used it. When it comes to language, there are **obscene words** used by others.”

“When I am posting or commenting my ideas, I am **not sure** if my **grammar is accurate.** It leads to humiliation when other people correct my lapses.”

“I get confused with the **faulty grammar** posted by some netizens.”

“When posting status, I am **not aware** if the grammar is correct or not.”

“Not all articles posted online are correct in terms of **grammar.**”

“The problems I encounter are getting **wrong information and uncertain of my grammar.**”

From the thoughts of the participants, it can be emphasized that faulty grammar, spelling, and punctuation marks are the commonest problems they encounter when they use social media platform like Facebook. They also pointed out that misleading information and fake news are frequently spotted by them while they use their own

accounts. Since it is easy to share and spread items online, netizens won't even mind whether their posts and shares are reliable and valid. On the part of the readers and online users, they just read whatever they see on social media.

Using Facebook as an online media platform has its perks and downsides. If netizens and language learners are not aware of the validity and quality of their posts and views definitely, they will incorporate misleading and faulty information. Their language learning will move backward. There are awful information coming from various sources and it takes patience in verifying the contents of the information. It is noted that most participants are in one in saying that faulty grammar, fake news, senseless posts, wrong punctuation marks, and misspellings are the downsides of using social media especially when chunks of information simply comes to the accounts or walls of the users.

4. What suggestions do you have to make English learning (using Facebook) more meaningful?

*"The problem is that sometimes people post a **non-sense** thing that does not help the viewers."*

*"My suggestion is to use Facebook to learn English by **sharing correct and relevant information and ideas.**"*

*"I suggest that English should be used properly in order for us to know what we are reading or writing. Also I suggest that English should be written with the **correct grammar and punctuation marks.**"*

*"For me, I suggest that people should try to be more aware of what they are posting. Moreover, they should practice using the **correct words** when they post."*

*"I suggest that Facebook should have a separate privacy setting to filter and hide non-sense posts and only share the **meaningful posts** of people."*

*"People should avoid offensive posts. People should post correct language which includes **spelling and grammar.** Furthermore, netizens have to be aware of their limits."*

"Before posting something on Facebook, make sure it is correct. They can also share ideas."

*"People should share more posts with **useful vocabulary and relevant ideas.**"*

*"Online sites should be **stricter in posting information.**"*

*"English could be more meaningful if netizens have **fora or groups** that can help connect people."*

Participants stressed that if netizens will only post and share accurate information and news, social interaction online will be fruitful and informative. All users of social media platforms have to be aware on whatever they want to post and as much as possible they have to include only correct and important information. If all posts on social media will carry correct spelling, correct punctuation marks, factual information, and appropriate vocabulary then interaction will be dynamic and informative always.

If problems arise instantly then solutions can be made properly. Charging from their own experiences in social media interactions, participants believe that posting and sharing of information on social media should be monitored and regulated by users themselves. In schools, group pages could be formed by the learners together with their mentors so that only relevant and sensible ideas and information will be uploaded and shared. If all posts are filtered properly then there is assurance that quality and meaningful social interactions will take place.

Implications of the Study

Language learners are curious in discovering their own potentials and skills to speak the language. But there are those who could hardly follow the trends offered and dominated by technology and media. As students attempt to explore the possibilities and opportunities to learn the English language, and of course to interact with others, they try using the Internet with all the possible social networks they could use. Science and technology made the world smaller in the sense that people nowadays can easily send and receive messages in just one click. However, even if we see perks and comforts in using technology adverse effects are also clearly noticed. One of them is fake news in which students do not know anymore which source should be trusted. The other concerns are errors in spelling, punctuation marks, and grammar. Language learning can be dynamic if teachers and parents will carefully and properly follow up the activities of the students as they use social media network such as Facebook. In the same way, only proper and factual information must be emphasized by the teachers when they communicate with the students virtually or online so that learners are aware of the importance of reliable and plausible exchange of thoughts.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Parents and family members should be vigilant in monitoring their children in using Facebook and other social media sites. Reports in many instances showed how terrible events and situations were when children and teenagers did transactions with people they did not know. In addition, personal information such as profile and pictures must be kept confidential and private as identity theft may happen unknowingly. Perks in using social media includes socialization, exchange of ideas, and fluency in English language. For the participants, they added that new and fresh words are taken from social media together with vocabulary, correct usage and other essential things.

1. The results of the study revealed that participants were able to get large pieces of information and ideas from Facebook in the forms of news and events, social issues, grammar, and vocabularies which are mostly expressed in English.

2. Participants opined that some prevailing problems in using Facebook for social connection include: (1) faulty grammar and punctuation marks, (2) faulty spelling, and (3) senseless information; and (4) fake news. Facebook users who are language learners have difficulty in understanding messages and posts that contain errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuations.

3. Participants attested that they learned to communicate in English properly and confidently through their interaction in Facebook. According to their responses, Facebook is a rich source of ideas and information which motivated them understand and master the English language helping them develop fluency and accuracy.

Participants believed that language learning using social media would take place if people would only post and share correct and relevant ideas and information in English. In addition, they (the participants) said that correct language includes accurate grammar, spelling, punctuations, and vocabulary.

5. Facebook as a social media network and platform help learners acquire English language competence through the pieces of information shared by users (netizens) which include vocabularies, grammar, punctuations, news articles, and spelling. Future researchers may conduct similar studies with bigger number of participants and may explore other essential variables related to social media and language education.

The researcher recommends that English language instructors may come up with a group in Facebook where they could share and post information in English grammar, spelling, punctuation, and other relevant ideas needed by ESL/EFL learners. Since many students are oriented and centered with technology, it is about time that educators will use it as their tool for transmitting knowledge and ideas among learners. As a powerful platform for speedy communication, social media site like Facebook can be an instrument for learning English and at the same time for communication in all aspects. A lot of materials can be read and viewed via Facebook. As critical thinkers, netizens especially Facebook users, should be more cautious in selecting the apt and right information they need so that they will not be misled.

Training and seminar on social media communication can be offered by the departments of English and information technology to students, teachers, and personnel for them to be aware of the opportunities and challenges of using the Internet and social media networks. Boundless opportunities and perks await online users but all our actions should be monitored by discipline and verification of facts that we search using these online tools and sites.

Through proper use of social media, students and professionals could maximize their time and effort in making communication and other purposes meaningful. They should be mindful on what they post and share. There should be mechanism on how messages and information are being screened or filtered. Proper orientation to students is also advised so that the former is guided on what to do and what to avoid. Language learning is exciting and fun if learners are guided and oriented properly with the outcomes and disadvantages of using social media. They should also be placed with students with awareness on the effects of social media platform like Facebook in that way, there would be meaningful products and outputs whenever they search or make use of any social media platform not only for pleasure but also for doing their homework and in connecting with their friends and loved ones. It would be productive media literacy to all students after all. On the part of the teachers, they can also

monitor their students on how they use their social media accounts by asking them about their critical reflections or including them in a group where facts and information are shared.

References

- [1] Armstrong, D.G., Henson, K.T., and Savage, T.V., (2009). *Teaching today: An introduction to education*. (Eight edition). United States: PEARSON.
- [2] Bradley, A.J. (2010). *A new definition of social media*. Gartner (Web log). Retrieved from http://blogs.gartner.com/anthony_bradley/2010/01/07/a-new-definition-of-social-media/
- [3] Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2003). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.
- [4] Hug, C. (2004). *Group dynamics: Custom edition for ITT Technical Institute*. Boston, Massachusetts: PEARSON Custom Publishing.
- [5] Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business horizons*, 53(1), 59-68.
- [6] Khang, H., Ki, E., Ye, L., (2012). How scholars have responded to social media phenomena in advertising, communication, marketing and public relations research from 1997-2010. Association for education in journalism and mass communication. Retrieved from <http://aejmc.org/home2011/06/mcs-2011-abstracts/>
- [7] Lichtman, Marilyn. (2014). *Qualitative research for the social sciences*. Virginia Tech. SAGE.
- [8] Qualman, E. (2011). Social media revolution 2011. [You tube video]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?=3SUNx0UrnEo>
- [9] Nielsen, L and Webb, W. (2011). *Teaching generation text: Using cell phones to enhance learning*. San Francisco, CA: JOSSEY-BASS.