


Chapter 5

Social Networking and Language Learning: Use of Instagram (IG) for Evaluating Oral Communication Skill

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ABSTRACT

This chapter gives a brief overview on the use of social network sites (SNSs) for language learning and presents an empirical study of the use of Instagram (IG), one of the most popular SNSs, to assess learners' oral communication skills in the foreign language classroom. Several studies have mainly revealed the perceptions and preferences of learners in regards to using SNSs for learning grammar, vocabulary, L2 writing, reading, and speaking. In the current study, the performance scores of participants on an oral communication speaking task delivered both on IG and in class, as well as their scores on the Big Five personality traits as measured by the Quick Big Five Personality Test (QBFPT), were examined statistically. The results demonstrate IG facilitated students' performance in oral communication skill significantly and that personality traits do not predict the performance on IG, but the extroverted and conscientious are highly likely to achieve high scores in classroom.

INTRODUCTION

The world has become increasingly interconnected as people use devices and social platforms to form communities, at the same time mobile phones and tablets can also increase isolation as multiple political, ideological and cultural contexts both within and across communities intrude and place demands upon our attention and time. Today's era has marked itself by not only increasing the speed of information exchange dramatically but also increasing interconnectedness of people via mobile technologies. Digital tools and social media (often referred as social networking sites) are premised upon emergent mobile

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technologies that have made feasible a whole new potential ecology for language learning. When well-configured, these SNSs can provide immersive connections between individuals even when they in fact exist in disparate spaces. In the first decade of the 2000s, Web 2.0 was introduced and enhanced the experience of active social media participation. It enhanced social connections and interaction with one another by introducing liking, posting, connecting, and blogging through the use of various platforms such as blogs, wikis. This enhanced experience increased user participation and social networking sites became commonplace. Over time the idea of mobility has evolved from initially referring to the devices to gradually include the mobility of people and shared exposure to the data underpinning different forms of digital social networks and media. This has allowed users of mobile media to become collaborative and interactive content sharers. Activities such as blogging, wikis, pod/screen casting, multimedia sharing have evolved as ways to stay connected with others (Zeng, 2018). By the end of the first decade of 2000s the social dimension of CALL got the attention of CALL scholars with two publications: *The Handbook of Research on Web 2.0 and Second Language Learning* by IGI Global, and *The next generation: Social networking and online collaboration in foreign language learning* by CALICO (Reinhardt, 2019). A volume of articles on the social impact of teaching resources employing Web 2.0 technologies and platforms for digital communication, information sharing and digital collaborations also emerged. This emergence of the social web has created an opportunity for learners to move from data acquisition to data creating and sharing and to connect to other people digitally. Since 2009, social network sites (SNSs) have attracted the attention of researchers and practitioners in the field of language teaching and there has been explosive growth in research publications on social media use in learning (Mao, 2014). This growth has been accelerated by the continued technological advancement in mobile devices, mobile network bandwidth and increasing mobile internet penetration in our lives. The research has explored effectiveness in regards to the learning outcomes, perceptions of learners as users, illuminated design issues and considerations when using social media tools for language learning. However, there has been less emphasis on theoretical and empirical studies on learning in general (Merchant, 2011) and a lack of experimental or longitudinal studies of the use of SNSs specifically (Ellison & Boyd, 2008; Lomicka & Lord, 2016). This chapter aims to provide a brief review on the use of Instagram (IG) as one of the most popular social networking sites for language learning and presents an empirical study of the use of IG to assess learners' oral communication skills in the foreign language classroom.

BACKGROUND

SNSs are online environments where people create a profile on public display and get connected to other people in the same environment for self-representation and data acquisition through personal connections (i.e., followers, friends, etc.). Additionally, the profiles display posts (self-representation data) marking users' connections, and popularity and appreciation data achieved through social activity in the SNS (Zourou, Potolia, & Zourou, 2017). The interactive experience of posters with their audience forms connections and can provide a feeling of attachment in the social world (Merchant, 2011). In another broad definition, SNS refers to “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site.” (Ellison & Boyd, 2008, p. 211). Such services encourage individuals to make visible connections among people who may

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