



## Social Media for Language Teaching and Learning

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### ABSTRACT

This article illustrates how Social Media has influenced teaching and learning English at present. Originated in the world of Social Networking, the Social Media has already been integrated into an informal education system for decades; i.e. teleconference and distance learning before it has evolved into a more sophisticated system, e-learning. There is also a controversy of using new Social Media such as Facebook or WebChat. The discussion is varied by many studies. In the end, it is time to re-consider the roles of teachers and learners as well as their affective and attitudinal effects on Social Media used for education, since it will be or is now unavoidably integrated into our daily lives.

**Keywords:** *Social Media, Language teaching and Learning, Learning Style*

### THE RISE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media, the so-called Social Network as referred to in the relationship among users, are rapidly growing types of digital media. They emerge in various forms to bring people together as communities: Blogs (e.g., WordPress), Social Networks (e.g., Facebook), Microblogs (e.g. Twitter), Wikis (e.g. Wikipedia), Video Podcasts, Discussion Forums, RSS Feeds, and Photo Sharing (e.g. Flickr) (GSA's Office of Citizen Services & Innovative Technologies, 2012) as examples. In Thailand, the Social Media have played a vital role for decades. The statistics show that about 20.6 million out of 66.7 million Thai people have access to the Internet (Neilson, 2011) The popular social media among teenagers, who are the majority of the social media users, include



Facebook, Hi5, Twitter, Linked in, and Foursquare respectively. The top five online activities online include e-mailing, reading news, sending private messages, reading reviews and sharing content. From 2000 – 2011, the number of Thailand’s internet users has soared to more than 700% (NECTEC, 2012) The dramatic rising of the new online community affect all dimensions of Thai society from politics to economics, from culture to lifestyle, and from entertainment to the realms of teaching-learning.

## THE TYPES OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media are digital applications varied by their purposes of use: communicating, discussing, private chatting, selling products, etc. In this article, the social media are divided into two categories for further discussion as follows:

### ***Synchronous and Asynchronous Communication Tools***

Ashley (2003) defined the synchronous tool as a tool which “enables real-time communication and collaboration in a "same time-different place" mode”, while the asynchronous “enable communication and collaboration over a period of time through a "different time-different place" mode”. The synchronous tools, e.g. audio-video conferencing, chat and instant messaging, Twitter, Skype, etc., have some advantages in that they offer spontaneous reaction, updated data and immediate feedback, while the asynchronous tools, e.g. e-mail, web board, web blogs, streaming video-audio, etc., have less immediate interaction, and the delayed response will cause information to be out-of-date. However, it’s not always plausible to respond quickly because in some cases, message receivers need some time to digest the information (Technology Solutions for Teaching and Research, 2012) The selection of synchronous and asynchronous depends on the purposes of correspondence between senders and receivers, hereby; the teachers and the students whether they want to communicate in real time or share information for later use.

### ***Educational or non-educational Tools?***

There are three types of learning environments apart from formal education due to the new communication technologies: Distance Learning, Online Learning and



E-Learning. Distance learning creators are trying to design the existing course to overcome the matter of “distance”, i.e. time and place (Guilar & Loring, 2008 ; Newby et al, 2000). Moore et al. (2011) stated that there were inconsistencies of the terms, Online Learning (so called Blended Learning) by Asian region scholars, and E-learning. The difference between them is that online learning seems to get connected to the learners through the social media on the Internet, while E-learning (or e-learning) covers both electronic media used on the campus and off the campus. The content of these educational tools are purposefully crafted as instructional media, and in most cases, evaluation is needed to fulfill the course assignment.

However, Mark Zuckerberg’s initial idea for the Facebook page was not aimed at education, but for pleasure and social connection in leisure time. The Facebook policy states clearly that the application is to, “...create greater understanding and connection. Facebook promotes openness and transparency by giving individuals greater power to share and connect...” ([www.facebook.com/principles.php](http://www.facebook.com/principles.php)). If purpose is not for education right from the start, then how can we expect students optimize the use of Facebook as a learning tool? This idea was supported by a survey of Roblyer et al (2010) who found that students did not consider Facebook to be a means for education. Chen and Bryers (2012) also claimed that “a low percentage of students and instructors use them for educational purposes”.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ANTICIPATION

The digitized social community phenomenon has definitely triggered English language teachers to conduct research through the uses of Social Media. The research topics on social media are wide and varied. Some studies focus on the use of specific media, i.e. Blogger and Facebook to aid students’ assignments, or Webinar (Seminar on the Website) to discuss and share intriguing teaching materials (Anderson, 2010) The other studies emphasize the relationship among the users, or Social Network that assists learning. For example, the British Council conducted a research project into “how the Internet has affected the preferred learning styles of young people wanting



to learn English around the world”. The result revealed that 69% of learners said that they found the Social Network had helped them learn more effectively because of its informality and relaxing atmosphere (Dalton, 2009) As a consequence, these new media and their impacts on English learning should be carefully investigated and monitored.

## IMPACTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH

Social Media create a new community where teachers and students do not have to communicate by means of the traditional face-to-face classroom environment. The brand-new changing way of teaching-learning environment definitely brings about impacts. The impacts of Social Media for teaching and learning are reflected by the teaching-learning styles, teacher-student roles, and affective-attitudinal effects.

### *Teaching and Learning Styles*

The formal use of Social Media can be recognized as a combination of online and traditional classroom teaching as proposed by Schmidt and Brown (2004) They believe that such a combination could enhance the teaching and learning environment as well as technology literacy of both students and teachers. The quality of experiential learning needs to be achieved by examining the teaching style; assessing the students’ preferred learning styles; knowing about online and traditional teaching and learning tools and how to select them; and lastly, reflecting, implementing and revising the online teaching plan. The process will be more effective if classroom action research is implemented by teachers along the way (Schmidt, 2002)

For learners, independency and autonomy are necessary learning styles to be successful online language learners, especially in the distance learning context (White, 2004). White also claimed that online learners’ characteristics must include the ability to “identify, participate in and manage learning experiences, which match their individual learning needs” in order to gain any benefit from the new learning mode.



Identifying online learner's learning styles can be obtained by online instrumentation. Graf et al. (2009) developed a tool; "Detecting Learning Styles" (DeLeS) is a computer program that helps find out the learning styles of students participating in online courses. They found that students have the sensing/intuitive dimension, the active/reflective and sequential/global dimension in learning online respectively. This means more students like to learn facts and concrete material from their sensory and predictive outcome than get involved in discussing and reflecting on the provided information. The step-by-step learning or holistic learning of knowledge, however, is seen as a last resort.

### ***Roles of Teachers and Learners***

With the social media integrated as the new environment of learning, the role of the teachers is altered to be less controlled as Dalton (2009) implied from his research result that "teachers should change their role into 'facilitator' rather than the 'giver-of-knowledge' and promote more group work and relaxing learning environments". For Online Distant Learning (ODL) teachers, Easton (2003) claimed that the teachers had two roles in particular, starting from an instructional designer at first to an interaction facilitator when the online course begins. Duncan and Barnett (2012) found that, besides the roles of directing and leading the online learning class to reach the goal, the online teachers also had to be aware of a balance of flexibility of the teaching time and problem-solving tasks that might occur anytime while working on a lesson.

As to students' new roles, they have to engage in online task-based learning or discussions. This has eliminated the general chatting time better than face-to-face discussion (Dalton, 2009) Craig et al. (2008) asserted that students' views of the best online language learners consisted of self-motivation, punctuality of assignment and originality of work. They also expected that the best online teachers must be able to provide useful feedback, advise them for discussion and encourage them to have critical thinking.



### ***Affective and Attitudinal Effects***

The affective response or attitudinal effect of using Social Media for education is also usually addressed in both positive and negative aspects. As an illustration, one research reveals that Facebook Social Network allows students to overcome their shyness in asking questions outside the classroom, and they feel unrestrained by boundaries between lecturers and themselves, creating a good rapport in some ways (Bosch, 2009)

Some misuses of the Social Media are also reported. The online activities between teachers and students can cause negative impacts to teachers themselves such as the obsession of social networking or false teacher-student relationships (Vasagar & Williams, 2012; Bloxham, 2010) The language and culture are also being discussed. The different forms of language used to communicate in Social Networking sites among students, their peers and lecturers need to be carefully monitored; otherwise, some misunderstandings will occur and interfere with the learning-teaching process (Rembe, 2011)

### **CONCLUSION**

More than 100 social media are being used for language learning and educational purposes (C4LPT, 2012). The number of uses of the media cannot predict the efficient or effective result of the latest teaching-learning tool. More research needs to be conducted and tracked down regarding the never-ending evolution of technology in terms of educational implications. However, it is the teachers' own premise to select what is considered best for their students. It might well be the case that what works best for others may be the worst for oneself.



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