“KEYWORDING” IN FACEBOOK GROUPS: A CASE STUDY ON GROUPING POSTS IN AN INFORMAL ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY

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Abstract

Facebook groups have been used formally or informally in educational contexts all over the world. These groups allow users to share texts, videos, images or files. However, in these groups, when new posts are shared, previously shared posts go below, if they are not liked and commented constantly. As a result, group members have to make an extra effort to reach those posts. That is, it is difficult for people to access the group posts later, and eventually information quickly consumed and goes out of members’ sight. Considering the prominent use of Facebook in learning environments, this issue becomes a major problem. For this reason, this study aims to suggest post design principles, which allow students to search and access information easily and fast, after examining the information search behaviors of graduate students in an informal Facebook group environment named “Botegrad” and the keyword recommendations of other graduate students for the selected posts. This study aims to answer: how Facebook group posts should be structured so that students can find and reach the information easily, effectively and fast? Botegrad is a community-based Facebook group consisting of the members who are the graduate students studying at the Department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology at a state university in Turkey.

The study consists of two stages. The first stage focuses on information searching behaviors of graduate students in Botegrad. In this stage, the screen of the participants were recorded using a screen capture program in order to obtain comprehensive data for the evaluation of participants’ search experiences. The second stage provides the keyword recommendations of other graduate students for the selected posts. In the first stage, 10 graduate students participated in the information searching task and in the second stage of the study 18 graduate students provided their keyword recommendations. Information search task consisted of 7 steps, and students were asked to think aloud while they were carrying out the tasks to triangulate the data. Then they were asked 5 structured interview questions regarding their use of Facebook groups. The recommendation form included 21 questions, of which 19 focused on the real posts on Botegrad and 2 focused on date and language preferences. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data were coded thematically.

In the first stage, all of the participants (N=10) completed the 7 steps of the task successfully. Their information search patterns were similar. They mainly used the search box with keywords and section of photos. In the second stage, participants recommended various keywords for the posts. Half of the participants (N=9) agreed that the posts should include the date as a keyword as well. Almost all of the participants (N=17) stated that the keywords should be both in English and Turkish. It can be inferred from the study that certain keywords should be added to the posts, and those keywords should consist of mainly two sections: the type of the post (video, picture, pdf, link etc.) and the content of the post. Designing the posts in this way can help students’ search and access information easier and faster. Consequently, information cannot be consumed quickly in the Facebook groups through utilizing the keywording. Implementations, recommendations, limitations, and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Facebook, online learning, informal learning, informal learning environment.