STUDENTS’ PREFERENCES FOR TEACHERS’ ONLINE SELF-DISCLOSURE IN OUT-OF-CLASS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

For past decade technology has dramatically shaped modern education, especially, in communication between teachers and students both in and out of a classroom. Out-of-class communication plays a vital role in student-teacher relationships and positively correlated with perceptions of instructor immediacy, student motivation as well as learning outcomes (Dobransky & Frymier, 2004). Thus, in this digital era, it is important to understand the experience that students perceive through online communication. In the present study, we investigated the phenomenon of teacher-student out-of-class communication on social network sites and messengers from the vantage point of students by examining both their level of online self-disclosure (OSD) and its preferred level for their teachers.

Both quantitative data gathered via a survey from 203 Taiwanese university students (53.2% female, with an average age of 23.5) and qualitative data gathered via selected interviews revealed that the participants were aware of the difference in the amount of self-disclosure using different social media. They perceived social network sites, e.g. Facebook, as more personal information revealing and messengers, e.g. LINE or Whatsapp, as more private. Moreover, students’ OSD level significantly correlated with their choice for online communication platform. Students from high OSD group significantly preferred social networking sites for interaction with their teachers while students with medium and low OSD level were more comfortable using messengers. Students’ preferred OSD level for teachers also significantly correlated with their expectations and past online communication experience. Students who wanted their instructors to share less personal information online have less experience of online communication outside of their classroom, no matter whether the experience was positive or negative, and also showed higher expectations for teachers’ participation in the classroom than students who wanted their teachers to be more open.

Most importantly, the current study also found that students’ preferences for the amount of personal information that teachers disclose online and in a real classroom are not the same. Moreover, even the same information mentioned on social network sites and in face-to-face interaction may be perceived by the students differently and lead to different conclusions. The findings suggest that there are several categories of information that tend to be ambiguous: children, accomplishments and traveling.

This study is an important first step in documenting the relationships between online self-disclosure and preferred way of communication with teachers in Taiwan. Most of the studies limit their investigation by focusing only on the communication via social network sites, e.g. Facebook, or concentrate on teachers’ self-disclosure positive outcomes (e.g., DiVerniero & Hosek, 2011; Harper, 2005), forgetting about possible drawbacks. This research, however, clearly shows that high level of teachers’ online self-disclosure is not suitable for all students and that there are some types of information which may be perceived differently in online space. The evidence of this study revealed some promising potential consequences of adjusted communication teacher-student interaction from the students’ perspective.

Keywords: Out-of-class communication, social media, social network sites, messengers, online communication, self-disclosure.