ABSTRACT

GUTSCHMIDT, ADAM M. A Case Study Investigating the Use of Facebook as a Learning Management System in Higher Education. (Under the direction of Dr. Deanna Dannels).

This dissertation addresses the issue of using the social networking website, Facebook, for educational purposes by examining how it was used in an upper-level public relations course. Research on education suggests instructors should find ways for their students to take a more active approach in learning and can do so by having them engage in additional dialogue. Social networking technology affords users the opportunity for extended communication on shared concepts. Popular social networking websites, like Facebook, have primarily been used for social and entertainment purposes, helping friends and family members remain connected. While the communicative effects of social networking have been examined, little is known about its impact when used within an educational context. This study intended to discern the uses and interactions that would transpire when students and their instructor used Facebook for pedagogical purposes.

In this case study, all participants were interviewed prior to the semester to identify their familiarity with and perceptions of Facebook. Participants were observed in the classroom over the course of a 15-week semester to determine how they were using Facebook. Interviews were also conducted with all participants at the conclusion of the semester to gather their reaction to the application being used in this new context. Interview responses and observations were coded and analyzed to draw conclusions on the success of this implementation. Results from the study reveal the instructors’ efforts to integrate the technology into his curriculum waned as the semester progressed. Students exhibited and expressed both apathy and uncertainty towards using Facebook as a learning tool. Most
students were also observed using the social networking website for non-pedagogical purposes. It is suggested that the results of this study were due to a flattened hierarchy that was created by the presence of Facebook. Joining in a social network with students, the instructor was unable to exhibit the authoritative role necessary for communicate to them how Facebook should be used in an education context. Future attempts at adopting social networking within the classroom will require clear objectives and role identification.
A Case Study Investigating the Use of Facebook as a Learning Management System in Higher Education

by

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DEDICATION

To my parents, George and Donna
BIOGRAPHY

Adam M. Gutschmidt is a communication scholar with interests in mass communication, digital media, and pedagogical technology. Born and raised in Brook Park, OH in 1980, he attended a private Catholic school for his primary education and public school for his secondary education, both of which were located in the neighboring suburb of Berea, OH. He received a B.A. in Communication from the University of Dayton in 2003. Brought on as a graduate assistant, he remained at the University of Dayton and received his M.A. in 2005, also in Communication. He began teaching at the collegiate level for the University of Dayton in 2003. Since then, he has taught college courses at every level at multiple universities. Adam joined the doctoral program at North Carolina State University in its inaugural year in 2005. During that time he has given presentations at conferences for the National Communication Association (NCA) and the Southern States Communication Association (SSCA), as well as at the Kern Conference on Visual Rhetoric and the North Carolina State University Graduate Student Research Symposium.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When walking into the D.H. Hill Library at North Carolina State University, it may surprise some to see students playing video games. Even more astonishing is the fact that the video games are actually being provided by the library staff. Some may consider the offering of video games in a library as counterintuitive to the primary function of a library. Those who work for the library, however, believe it fosters collaboration among students, while also providing them with a break from their traditional studies. This is just one example of how factions within academia are getting creative in their quest for student learning outcomes.

Pedagogical literature has recently begun to stress the idea that currently, students are not learning the same ways as previous generations. Terms such as the ‘net Generation’ (Tapscott, 1998) and the ‘conceptual age’ (Pink, 2006) are being used to help describe this new group of thinkers. What sets these young minds apart from previous students is utilizing technology to help them think, collaborate, and create. Speaking from the student perspective, Windham (2005) stated,
with the hole in the ozone layer growing, peace shattering, and disease raging, many of us feel that older generations have simply stepped aside to make room for our ingenuity and creativity. And, largely, we feel that we are up to that challenge. In our eyes, our technological savvy makes us smarter, easily adaptable, and more likely to employ technology to solve the problems of past and present generations (p. 5.5).

They feel a sense of invincibility that has been provided through the use of these technological tools.

However, in the realm of education, student technology needs are not always being met. A primary reason is that the adoption process for new technological trends and tools has typically been slow in education. Meanwhile, outside the classroom, the past twenty years has seen trends in socialization technology shift repeatedly - from message boards, to chat rooms, to instant messenger, to blogs, and now social networking sites. During that same time span in education, students are still utilizing the same PowerPoint application to give a presentation. This generation of learners has become inundated with technology, yet they have been conditioned to only use a small subset of the tools available to them within the classroom. Furthermore, the tools in this subset tend to be presentational rather than interactive.

There are several explanations for this. In K-12, many schools have placed filters on the computers, which severely limits the number of websites that students can access. Younger students are blocked from blogs, wikis, and social networking sites because of the restrictions added by school administrators. In higher education, professors who are set in their current pedagogical methods often stifle technology use. New technological devices
and trends go largely unnoticed by these instructors and thus are never suggested or integrated for their students. It becomes an ongoing cycle of instructors continuing to teach students in the same manner in which they were taught (Gordon, Dembo, & Hocevar, 2007).

This has created a digital divide where there is disparity between the technology students are using for recreation and the technology they use for education. If educators continue to allow this divide to spread, learning experiences for future students may be negatively impacted. While it is unreasonable to expect those in education to suddenly embrace all available forms of technology and immediately implement them into the classroom, exploration of these tools that students are frequently using to determine if and how they foster learning in the classroom must begin.

Social networking sites are currently very popular, particularly with younger generations. These websites, such as Facebook, allow people to create a personal network of friends, family, and colleagues where they can communicate and collaborate. Created in 2004, Facebook was initially designed exclusively for students at Harvard University to stay connected with one another. The site achieved instant popularity and within a few months was expanded to include all of the Ivy League schools. Just one year later, the site had grown to 5.5 million users including 800 collegiate networks, as well as some international and high school networks. By September 2006, the site had opened up its access to anyone over the age of 13. Facebook reached over 900 million active users by March 2012. Today, Facebook users can connect with people worldwide through various networks and affiliations. According to its website, Facebook develops “technologies that facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world
social connections.” Upon joining, Facebook participants create a personalized page, which collects some basic bibliographical information. Other users can then search Facebook’s numerous networks in order to locate family, friends, classmates, and colleagues.

Not only has the site grown in its number of users, but also in the frequency with which members visit the site. According to Tong, Der Heide, Langwell, and Walther (2008) Facebook has brought more than 52 million visitors to their website and it is the sixth most trafficked website in the United States. Similarly, through an informal poll that I conducted with college students, I learned that most of them not only maintained a Facebook account but were visiting their page five to six times a day. Most instructors would be equally thrilled if students visited their online course page as frequently as they seem to visit Facebook.

Given Facebook’s current popularity, it seems reasonable to consider investigating its potential for integration into a classroom setting to facilitate more student involvement and interaction between each other and with their instructor. One way to achieve this integration is by using it as a learning management system (LMS). LMS is a term used to describe software-based tools designed to manage user learning interventions. These systems give students a ubiquitous learning experience by providing them with learning content and administration at any time and any place. Ideally, these systems can provide a course with better organization, as they provide students with a central location to find all course-related materials and information. An LMS can also provide another avenue for communication between students and their instructor.
Currently, one of the more commonly used LMS services in education is offered through Blackboard. The Blackboard Learning Service is used in many classrooms as a virtual learning environment to help students with course management. While used at many universities, Blackboard’s popularity has more to do with its lack of competition rather than the quality of its services. In fact, it has received criticism both from open source advocates and from those who find Blackboard’s interface to be poorly designed (Beatty & Ulasewicz, 2006). In addition, Woods, Baker, and Hopper (2004), interviewed 862 faculty members who used Blackboard and found that they primarily used the system as a way to manage course grades and make course documents easily available to students. There was little indication that they used Blackboard as a means to encourage communication or foster a sense of community amongst the students in their course.

Facebook, on the other hand, is more likely to be used a communication tool outside of educational contexts. Facebook users have several different options available to them that permit communication with other users. They can engage in a synchronous chat with other members, send private asynchronous messages, or publicly write a post on another member’s ‘wall.’ If these communicative characteristics were combined with the administrative tools of more common LMS services, such as Blackboard, Facebook could have the potential to be an effective educational tool.

Certainly, there are many hurdles that an instructor would need to address if they have any desire of using Facebook as a pedagogical tool. One of the issues is privacy on Facebook. Instructors who have made the initial attempts at using Facebook in their courses have found that the site did not necessarily comply with all Family Education Rights and
Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines. Established in 1974, FERPA is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. As the interest in using Facebook for educational purposes has grown, efforts have been made by Facebook, as well as some additional third-party organizations, to install applications on the website which allow it to be used in the classroom and still apply to FERPA regulations.

The other problem related to Facebook’s use in the classroom, and the one primarily driving this research, can be best categorized as “the unknown.” Because education has been slow to integrate mainstream technological tools in the classroom, it is unclear how all parties involved will react when they see something like Facebook used in an educational context. Will it be a welcome sign of change? Or will its pre-established use and reputation prevent people from accepting it in a different capacity?

I am reminded of a notable 1995 episode of the television series, Seinfeld, where a character discusses his fear of the life he has with his friends (his independent self) and the life he has with his fiancée (his relationship self) becoming intertwined. Strangely, how he acts when he is around his fiancée is different from the way he acts when he is with his friends. If, as he puts it, his ‘worlds collide,’ then ultimately, the way he acts around his friends might cease to exist.

Students, upon seeing Facebook listed as a course tool, may express a similar fear. This implementation may be seen as a threat of their personal world and educational world colliding. In which case, students may immediately reject the notion of Facebook as an educational tool. On the other hand, they may view its presence in the classroom as a great convenience. By having web access to course material, fellow students, and their instructor
on a site that they are already frequenting, may prompt a favorable reaction whereby they view the implementation of Facebook as a valuable time-saver. Because there are so many unknowns related to Facebook’s educational potential, an investigation into its implementation is needed. The purpose of this project is to conduct a case study where Facebook is implemented into a college course as an LMS in order to answer some of these unknowns and learn about its potential viability.

To prepare for such an investigation, a literature review on this topic was indicated, which will be covered in the next chapter. There are three primary areas of research that will be explored. The first will cover the preliminary research on social networking. The next section will address some of the literature on pedagogical technology. Because this case study will involve examining Facebook within higher education, it will be important to look at other research that has examined using technology within the classroom. Finally, research on instructional communication will be reviewed. This will be an overview on some of the existing literature on how instructors effectively communicate with their students. Each of these areas provides a critical component to establish the analytical framework that will be used to conduct this case study.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Regardless of the fact that Facebook was founded in 2004, it only recently started to be considered for educational purposes. As a result, there has not been much research published on the social networking service and its scholarly usage to date. However, there are broader issues related to the implementation of technology in the classroom that exist and must be also reviewed. It is important to understand the implementation process and the issues produced by it, which influence the educational context. Classroom interactions affect and are affected by how new technological tools are introduced. In this chapter, I review literature that speaks on adopting new technology and the impact that has on how a classroom is run.

This literature review will consist of three areas vital to this study, beginning with an examination of the research on social networking. The next section will cover research on pedagogical technology and its implementation. I will investigate the approach other educators have taken when attempting to introduce new pedagogical technology into their classrooms. Instructional communication will be reviewed in the third section of this chapter. Because Facebook is a socially based technology, it is important to review existing literature on how instructors and students socially interact and communicate with each other in the classroom. Combined, these sections provide a basis for understanding with regard to
what should be examined when Facebook is implemented into the classroom for this study. By reviewing this literature, an analytic framework for this study will be established. That framework will be used to develop the research questions for this study, which will be stated at the end of this chapter.

Social Networking

A new technology trend that has recently begun to receive attention from scholars is social networking. Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, allow users to communicate with a network of friends or colleagues that they intentionally choose to include. With their rising popularity, scholars have begun taking an interest in the potential of this technology. Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) examined social networking sites, including Facebook, and how college students are using them in general. The authors spoke positively about social networking sites because their research found that they were assisting college students to gain social capital. Social capital involves the resources one gains through personal relationships. In their conclusion, the authors discerned,

The strong linkage between Facebook use and high school connections suggests how SNSs help maintain relations, as people move from one offline community to another. It may facilitate the same when students graduate from college… Such connections could have strong payoffs in terms of jobs, internships, and other opportunities. Colleges may want to explore ways to encourage this sort of use (p. 1164).

The authors acknowledged the potential privacy issues associated with using a social networking site like Facebook in the classroom, but believe it is worth the associated effort in
dealing with those matters, especially if it facilitates an increase in social capital for college students.

More recently, a group of 35 scholars collaborated to create a website called The Facebook Papers (2011), which contains their research on integrating Facebook into freshmen writing. Topics on the website include the impact the presence of Facebook has on students meeting learning objectives and forming identity. Opting to forego the format of a traditional academic paper, the website was designed to have a layout similar to Facebook. The color and style of the font is the same as Facebook’s and posted content is published in reverse chronological order. While the website’s aesthetics gives readers the feeling that they are consuming content in the same way they would on Facebook, the authors claim that their research still possesses many of the attributes of a traditional scholarly essay. Notes posted on the website frequently are longer than a typical Facebook Wall post and there is the presence of other formal features, like a table of contents, to help users navigate through the website’s content.

The research conducted by the Facebook Papers’ authors spanned over three years and examined students using Facebook for an assignment in their freshmen writing course. For the assignment, students were asked to examine a fellow student’s online identity on Facebook and synthesize their findings in a written report. Several benefits to using Facebook for this assignment were reported. The authors believed the assignment helped students effectively synthesize and develop arguments. Another outcome of using Facebook in the classroom was the students gaining a heightened sense of awareness about their public personas. In the conclusion to their research, the Facebook Papers’ authors noted changes
between the initial set of students who participated in the study and the ones who used Facebook years later. They noted that as privacy concerns grew, the newer set of freshmen students became more selective of whom they chose to be friends with on Facebook. This caused the instructors of this study to question the viability of an assignment that requires students to access each other’s Facebook profiles.

Privacy concerns were also present in the research done by Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, and Liu (2012). Their study involved examining students using Facebook as a LMS in a pair of elective courses at a teacher education institute in Singapore. Used in this manner, Facebook afforded students and their teachers the opportunity to share resources and communicate in an online discussion forum. In this study, students were able to use Facebook for the course without requiring them to become friends with their teacher. Based on their observations, the authors concluded that Facebook has the ability to be used as an LMS. However, they did note that students did not always feel safe and comfortable using it in fear that their privacy might be revealed.

Concerns of privacy were found in almost every study on social networking examined for this literature review. If students do not feel comfortable sharing information or having their accounts made available to their peers and teachers, that poses a serious threat to the viability of the technology as an educational tool. Even if the implementation of social networking in the classroom does not violate any privacy laws, students may have personal concerns about how much of their information is being accessed by others, as was seen in the Facebook papers research. A communication network cannot truly be established if its members are unwilling to share information with everyone else in the network. Addressing
any concerns of privacy should be a priority for anyone interested in creating a social network.

The studies reviewed here have attempted to identify the potential short-term and long-term benefits to including communicative technology, like those experienced via social networking sites, in the classroom. By having an auxiliary means of communicating with one another, students have additional opportunities to discuss course matters with their classmates, which can lead to a better understanding of the material by all. Students can discuss homework solutions, share class notes, and collaborate on group projects quickly and easily with electronic communication tools. Being a member of a social network in the classroom can also provide benefits once the course has concluded. If desired, students can remain connected with each of their classmates. As these students transition to career exploration and employment, they could potentially utilize the connections made through Facebook or other social networks as resources to assist with networking opportunities in the marketplace.

Because these possibilities exist, the method in which initial connections are established is important. The next section of this literature review will identify research that has been conducted on the adoption of pedagogical technology. An examination of this literature can offer insight as to how an instructor could proceed with effectively implementing social networking into their classroom.
Adoption of Pedagogical Technology

As new innovations are developed, there is a growing interest from educators to discover how these applications can be used within the classroom. From a research perspective, the focus is on how the introduction of these innovations into the classroom will affect an instructor’s teaching routine (Gayle, 2006). When considering the implementation of a new technology within the classroom, the focus must begin with the instructor: how they choose to introduce the technology will play an integral role in how well the students will perceive and use the technology. Research on the instructor’s role in adopting technology has focused on the preparation needed for using those technologies (Hedberg, 2011; Vrasidas & Glass, 2005). To effectively supplement their lessons with technology, teachers should first consider which technology to use, based on three variables: ease of use, participation, and community (Eldred, 2008). Ideal pedagogical technologies are easy to learn and utilize; they foster student participation, and they create a sense of community between users. Eldred believed that the instructor who properly prepares by focusing in these areas would more likely realize the technology’s full potential in their classroom.

Lengel and Lengel (2006) also focused on the role of the teacher in their examination of the implementation process. They offer some suggestions as to what instructors require in order to take full advantage of classroom technologies, such as: access, encouragement, inspiration, organization, underpinnings, and youth. The first four items are fairly transparent. With underpinnings, the authors are referring to the technology’s infrastructure (i.e. hardware such as cables and servers), which, being out of sight, can be taken for granted but nonetheless are integral to the operation of technology. Youth refers to the instructor
finding that youthful inner spirit and enthusiasm that motivate them to try new things and discover exciting ways to use the technology effectively. In addition to these items, the authors also provide examples of lesson plans, such as Webquests, which an instructor can use to help integrate the technology into their course.

When an instructor considers the implementation of a specific technology into their classroom, it is also important to consider their previous experience and understanding of the application. According to Brooks-Young (2006), there are five distinct levels of use teachers experience as part of a successful integration process:

- **Entry** – Learn the basics of using the new technology.
- **Adoption** – Use the new technology to support traditional instruction. Focus is often on personal use (e.g., making a worksheet) or teaching basic technology skills to students (e.g., keyboarding).
- **Adaptation** – Integrate the new technology into traditional classroom practice. Here, teachers often focus on increased student productivity and engagement by using word processors, spreadsheets, and graphics tools.
- **Appropriation** – Shift focus to cooperative, project-based, and interdisciplinary work; incorporate the technology as needed and as one of many tools.
- **Invention** – Discover new uses for technology tools; for example, developing spreadsheet macros for teaching algebra or designing projects that combine multiple technologies (pp. 42-43).
Understanding these steps can assist a teacher in identifying which level they currently are at and what is necessary to progress to the next level.

For a successful implementation, instructors must become increasingly familiar with the technology. As Ferdig (2006) notes,

there are times when well-designed software helps someone teach because of the built-in pedagogy steeped into the design of the tool. There are other times when a knowledgeable person can take a technology and make it pedagogically sound ‘on the fly.’ In both cases, one drives the other (p. 756).

A strong relationship between technology and the instructor needs to be established before the technology can be implemented into the classroom.

Part of becoming familiar with a new technology tool involves an instructor determining how that technology will assist in meeting the pre-established course objectives. This can be difficult when instructors are preconditioned to skepticism when it comes to new tools helping to achieve those established objectives. Remarking on studies that dealt with instructors attempting to integrate technology into their courses, Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon, & Byers (2002) noted “these types of studies tend to neglect the messy process through which teachers struggle to negotiate a foreign and potentially disruptive innovation into their familiar environment” (p. 483). It is this messy process which leads certain instructors to improperly integrate technology into their course and for others, to abandon any notion of the attempt altogether.

In relation to the comment made by Zhao et al., Ertmer (2005) concluded in her research that there is a strong connection between a teacher’s pedagogical beliefs and
successful technology integration. Those who strongly believe in their current pedagogical methods are unlikely to succeed at integrating technology, if they even try at all. Ertmer notes, “given that teachers’ decisions are more likely to be guided by familiar images of what is proper and possible in classroom settings than by instructional theories, the challenge becomes one of finding the most effective ways to alter these images” (p. 36). She goes on to say that research is one of those effective ways to alter their images. It is clear that when instructors are open to trying new technologies in their classroom, scholars need to seize the opportunity and research the implementation in order to inform the academic community about the potential changes in pedagogy that could be made.

Once an instructor makes the necessary preparation for integration of a new technology in their course, they must then properly introduce the technology to the students. Studies show that the means in which an instructor introduces technology to students will have a bearing on how that technology is perceived and subsequently utilized by the students (Mercer & Fisher, 1992; Schofield, 1997; Brosnan, 1998). This introduction is critical due to the influence effective communication has on the teacher/student relationship. Staton (1989) believed that learning could only be achieved when an instructor and student had a shared understanding of a concept. Being knowledgeable on a certain subject is not enough to be a good teacher. Successful instructors are content specialists and capable communicators. If an instructor is incapable of articulating a concept in a manner that their students will understand, he or she has failed.

If reaching a shared understanding is the key to good communication between students and their instructor, then everyone in the class must understand the instructor’s
intended purpose and use for a new technology when it is introduced. Achieving that understanding will involve what Biggs (1999) identifies as constructive alignment. As defined by Biggs, constructive alignment involves the alignment of the teacher’s intentions for a course, students’ activities in the course, and the exam’s assessment. The same would hold true for technology. Hence, if a teacher’s intentions for the technology, student’s use of the technology, and how the technology functions all align, the implementation process is successful. The critical factor and most significant step is the instructor’s introduction to the technology. If a shared understanding is not established during the introduction, it will hinder the potential for the technology to achieve any level of effectiveness.

Once a new technology has been introduced, researchers studying the adoption process shift their focus toward how the technology is being used. In quantitative studies, researchers will frequently use students’ grades as a measure of the technology’s impact. However, this data can often be misleading. Evaluating a student’s grade does not provide a complete picture of their performance in the course. For a better understanding of how a student performs in the classroom, one must observe the student in action to determine which tools they utilized in their learning process during the course.

In qualitative studies on pedagogical technology the focus is on student performance rather than test scores or final grades (Wolf, Bixby, Glenn III, & Gardner, 1991; Tolmie & Boyle, 2000). While performance may be a rather broad concept, it can be helpful in determining how a student is progressing in the course. Performance, as defined by Wolf, et al. (1991) “is a combination of humility and risk,” “involves rehearsals, revisions, criticisms, and new attempts arranged in nothing like the straightforward orderings we offer in
discussions of the scientific method or the directions for writing a term paper,” and “involves interpretation” (p. 34). By defining performance in these terms, they are stressing the active approach a student must take in order to learn.

The active approach is particularly important as it relates to student communication in the classroom. Several researchers have studied the relationship between student communication and the implementation of new technology (Hiltz, 1986; Dufresne, Gerace, Leonard, Mestre & Wenk, 1996; Reiss & Young, 2008). Students are likely to have a more fulfilling educational experience when they actively communicate in class. Being active involves writing, performing, and communicating in the classroom (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Bonwell & Eison, 1991). When students assume a more active approach, they assist themselves and others by creating a learning community.

If education, as Pink (2006) contends has entered into a “Conceptual Age” where students who actively participate instead of passively absorb information are more successful after graduation, then an effective assessment of student performance is needed. Penrod (2008) provides an example of how a researcher can examine a student’s performance in order to determine what, if any, effect technology has on their actions. In her paper, she outlines several points that one should consider if they were evaluating student’s written work in a computer-enhanced writing course.
The points include:

- Writing is multidimensional
- Writing is an observable process
- Writing reflects social exchanges influenced by numerous causes
- Writing depends on experiences, values, and technological access

Research like Penrod’s illustrates the importance of knowing what the expectations are for students in a course and then being able to observe if the introduction of technology alters the outcome of how students meet those expectations.

**Instructional Communication**

Since the introduction of classroom technology tools, the number of ways that a student can interact with the instructor and other students has increased (Althaus, 1997; Earle, 2002). Scholars have studied students using technology to communicate in order to learn what impact it has on the way they learn. For example, Althaus (1997) set up special electronic mail accounts for students to conduct computer-mediated discussions related to the material they were learning in their sociology course. These mail accounts consisted of the same basic features that would be found in a listserv mail system. After the course had concluded, the students completed a survey that asked them to evaluate their discussions. A test was also designed to examine the relationship between a student’s participation in the discussion and his or her class performance. The results, based on student feedback and observation, indicated that they enjoyed taking part in the on-line discussions and learned more when being involved in them.
McComb (1994) conducted a similar study which produced similar results. In addition to improving student learning outcomes, she suggested that computer-mediated communication extended learning beyond the classroom by increasing everyone’s availabilities to communicate, allowing educators additional opportunities to demonstrate caring towards their students and including outside experts in classroom discussions. Computer-mediated communication also provides the means to create a balance of power between instructor and student by increasing a student’s responsibility and requiring initiative on his or her part.

An instructor’s communication can be just as significant as the students’ in providing researchers with evidence of the impact of a new technology in the classroom. While relatively new in comparison to other areas of research in communication, scholars have been studying instructor communication for the past forty years in order to determine the effect an instructor’s communication has on his or her students (Staton-Spicer, 1982; Staton-Spicer & Wulff, 1984; Friedrich, 1987). Early research in this area was criticized for being too heavily focused on quantitative studies. Likewise, Staton-Spicer (1982) criticized the few qualitative studies that were being conducted at this time for merely identifying relationships and examining more extensive analysis. Friedrich (1987) agreed that more methods needed to be utilized in instructional communication studies, particularly using interpretive and critical frameworks. While the number of qualitative studies in instructional communication has improved since then, more studies are still needed to continue studying how an instructor’s communication affects students.
As the presence of technology in the classroom continues to expand, more research in instructional communication has been devoted to the role it plays as teachers attempt to dialogue with their students. Thus far, studies on the effect of instructor communication through technological means have produced mixed results. Mazzolini & Maddison (2003) investigated the instructor’s involvement in online discussion forums and the impact it had on student usage. Their research found that frequent posts by the instructor in the forum did not result in higher participation from the students. They stated, “instructors who were active in initiating discussion threads did not appear to stimulate more discussion, and may actually have limited the amount of discussion (with the more advanced students) and the length of discussion threads (with all students)” (p. 252). Students were more interested in holding discussions with each other on the forum than they were with their instructor.

Conversely, Waldeck, Kearney, and Plax (2001) produced dissimilar results when examining instructor and student communication via email. Students responded favorably to teachers that would communicate with them through email. Specifically, they found that “students are more likely to communicate with teachers online who employ message strategies which stimulate immediacy behaviors” (p. 66). The presence of immediacy in these email messages allowed students to feel a connection with their instructor and thus viewed their communication using this medium as positive.

The differing results found in these and similar studies could be attributed to a number of factors, one being the type of technology that was used to communicate between instructors and students. It may be that students favor one-to-one communication with an instructor, but not one-to-many; or perhaps the level of immediacy that the instructor exhibits
in his/her communication. While no conclusions can readily be ascertained, the imperative thought is that instructor communication via technology will definitely affect students in some way.

One aspect of an instructor’s technology communication that has been studied is how the power dynamic between students and their teacher is affected (Hawisher & Selfe, 1991; McGrath, 1998; Finlay, Desmet, & Evans, 2004). These studies indicate that no generalizations can be made about how power is affected when technology is implemented, but the power relationship is affected nonetheless. Certain technology may eliminate an instructor’s power status by providing a forum in which students and teachers have an equal voice. In other instances, both instructors and students may gain new power as a result of the introduction of technology into the classroom. As Hawisher & Selfe (1991) point out, instructors inspecting electronic spaces and networked conversation have power that exceeds our expectations or those of students. In addition, many students who know a teacher is observing their conversation will impose self-discipline with their prose in ways they consider socially and educationally appropriate. Constructing such spaces so that they can provide room for positive activities… requires a sophisticated understanding of power (p. 43).

Over time, instructors and students will begin to recognize the shifts in power that occur as a result of the presence of technology and will react accordingly.
Research Questions

Reviewing these three key areas of research, a framework for guiding this case study begins to develop. The section on social networking reveals the technology’s potential value. It offers users the opportunity to gain social capital while sharing information and ideas with each other. However, concerns of privacy also arose in the research. If users value privacy over social capital, the value of social networking cannot be realized. For that value to be realized, adopters must be mindful of how they introduce the technology to other users.

The research on pedagogical technology emphasizes the importance of the early stages of adoption. Several factors pertaining to the relationship between instructor, students, and the technology are important to identify when evaluating the adoption process.

- Eldred (2008) identifies the importance of adaptability. Teachers must be flexible enough to find ways to integrate the technology. Likewise, the technology needs to be easy to use for everyone to be willing to accept it.
- The instructor’s temperament is another key factor. Lengel and Lengel (2006) identify characteristics needed in an instructor, like youthfulness and inspiration, that determine how willing that instructor will be in adopting new technology.
- Experience also plays a role in the adoption process. Identifying an instructor’s level of familiarity with any technological device can influence how they use it in the classroom (Brooks-Young, 2006).
- There also should be an alignment between the technology and an instructor’s pedagogical philosophy (Ertmer, 2005).
These factors will be helpful in determining how effective Facebook is introduced within an education context for this study.

Beyond a successful adoption, the research of instructional communication suggests that there is mixed results when it comes to effectiveness of the communication between instructor and students when they communicate through technological devices. The majority of the research in this area has focused on communication through email. In this study, the communication that takes place on Facebook between the instructor and his students will be carefully studied.

The purpose of this study is to begin to investigate the pedagogical potential of Facebook. Using the existing research discussed in this chapter as reference, several research questions were crafted for this case study. During the study, the focus of my observations will be based on these research questions. My observations will then be compared with the claims made in previously existing literature, to help guide future research in this area. The research questions that will be used for this particular study are:

**R1**: How is a socially-based technology (Facebook) used for academic purposes?

**R1a**: In what capacities is the instructor using Facebook?

**R1b**: How are students using Facebook within a course that employs it as an LMS?

**R2**: What social interactions occur when Facebook is used?

**R2a**: What characterizes students’ social interactions about Facebook?

**R2b**: What is the power dynamic between students and their teacher when Facebook is used in the course as an LMS?
Summary

While research on the adoption of educational technology is extensive, the development of new innovations requires an ongoing investigation as to how they should be used and what benefits they offer. As stated in Chapter I, Facebook has become an increasingly popular social networking website for (primarily) younger people. Instructors are constantly seeking new ways to communicate with their students, and also increase their communication with each other. The structure and layout of the Facebook website potentially make it an ideal virtual space where ideas and information can be shared by those involved in the course. The literature on pedagogical technology and instructional communication provide a framework that can be used to evaluate the adoption of Facebook in an educational context. In order to effectively evaluate its implementation, I will conduct a case study where I will observe college students and their instructor using Facebook throughout the course of a semester.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods that will be used in order to conduct this case study. I will review who the participants for this study are and where I will be observing their actions. Finally, I will explain how the data from the study were collected and analyzed.
CHAPTER III

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of the social networking service, Facebook, within the contextual framework of education. I used an ethnographic framework guided by two primary research questions; “How is a socially-based technology (Facebook) used for academic purpose?” (RQ1) and “What social interactions occur when Facebook is used in an educational context?” (RQ2). Two sub-questions were created for each of these research questions. Under RQ1, I’ve added “How are students using Facebook within a course that employs it as a learning management system?” (RQ1a) and “In what capacities is the instructor using Facebook?” (RQ2b). As part of RQ2, the two questions I devised were “What characterizes students’ social interactions about Facebook” (RQ2a)? and “What is the power dynamic between students and their teacher when Facebook is used in the course as a learning management system?” (RQ2b). For this study, a public relations course conducted in a computer lab served as the setting for the study. The participants for this study included the instructor, Dr. Tides and the twelve students enrolled in his course. Using this ethnographic framework, I collected a variety of data from field notes, surveys, and content added by the participants on Facebook. I also conducted interviews with the instructor and the students throughout the semester. The responses from these interviews were used in

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1 A pseudonym will be used whenever a participant is specifically named in this study
association with the textual data and observations I collected, to gain a better understanding of the actions and interactions of the participants. Once my data was collected, I used thematic analysis to discover the emerging themes and patterns from the discourse. Those themes were then used to help answer the research questions. This chapter consists of five sections, which illustrate in greater detail the methodological framework used in this study: rationale, site description, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Methodological Rationale

While spending an entire semester observing his class, I got to know Dr. Tides fairly well. We frequently chatted about this experience, both formally and informally. He often spoke about how excited he was to be using Facebook in his course. He was also proud of the fact that he was trying something innovative that had not been previously attempted by many others. Given the novelty of this, he spoke with me about how he often discussed the study with his colleagues. In our final formal interview, he shared,

    I’ve talked to quite a few people throughout the semester that I’ve been involved with that I’ve said ‘Hey, we’re having a Facebook Day’ and ‘we’ll see how this [using Facebook] goes’. They’re very interested in it. There’s a strong group there that’s very interested in seeing how it goes.

From the way he described these conversations with his colleagues, it was clear that there was a general interest in the outcome from other professors. They were excited that someone was trying it, but most expressed a personal reluctance for being the test subject classroom.
The unwillingness of Dr. Tides’ colleagues to try Facebook is illustrated by the hurdles they perceived in attempting to implement it in their courses. First, the instructor would need to have enough familiarity with the technology to understand how to use it effectively. They would also need to assure that their students would have sufficient access to the Internet to be able to use it for the class. Finally, there are privacy issues related to FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) that an instructor would have to clear in order for the school to allow its use. These issues make some educators reluctant to try this technology in their classroom. Other educators avoid using Facebook because the advantages it has over other educational tools in engaging students remains unclear. For this study, I was able to provide a thorough depiction of the events that occurred when Facebook was implemented into a classroom to show educators how it can be used.

This was an ethnographic study intended to describe the actions and interactions of the students and their instructor while they used Facebook for educational purposes. Patton (2002) says, “ethnographic inquiry takes as its central and guiding assumption that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (p. 81). Seeing first-hand the evolution of that culture required intense fieldwork on my part. Powdermaker (1966) said,

to understand a strange society, the anthropologist has traditionally immersed himself in it, learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture (p. 9). I immersed myself within their culture by attending class, taking notes, and making observations so that I could view the participants’ actions from both an insider’s and emic
perspective (Pike, 1954). This involved observing what participants do and say, as well as looking for any tension that exists between what they actually do and what they ought to do (Spradley, 1980).

My being immersed in their culture was important in order to help answer both of my primary research questions. To begin with, I could witness the actual implementation of this technology in their course. Being in the classroom allowed me to hear Dr. Tides introduce the idea to the students and observe their initial reaction. I then used this information as a reference for RQ1 when I analyzed how everyone was using Facebook in the course. Also through this immersion, I was able to witness the participants’ face-to-face interactions.

Creating a Facebook group for the course meant that the participants had become part of a social network. I was able to answer RQ2 by examining if the virtual interactions exhibited on Facebook extended into the classroom, as displayed by participants’ in-person communication. I wanted to join the research study participants every step along the way, experiencing with them what it was like to use Facebook within this new context; using an ethnographic framework allowed me to do that.

I would not have been able to appropriately analyze Facebook within an educational context by simply examining the posted content made by participants. By immersing myself into their culture, I was able to address any issues that were not clear from strictly Facebook textual data. For example, without having a formal background in public relations, there was marginal concern with understanding the content of what participants discussed if I only utilized their Facebook posts as my data. Being in the classroom on a regular basis, however, allowed me to have a better understanding of the terminology that was unique to this culture.
For material that remained unclear, I was able to ask participants for clarification. Because it was unknown as to how open students would be to using Facebook for educational purposes, I did not want to rely on participants heavily using Facebook to ensure I gathered a sufficient amount of data for this study. Thus, including observations and interviews with the Facebook content in my data set, I had enough evidence to properly analyze Facebook within this context.

Using an ethnographic framework on this particular case study was also the best way to share this experience with others. Critics argue that by opting to use this methodology, absolute certainty of the knowledge gained from the research cannot be claimed. Huberman and Miles (2002) argue that while certainty may not be attainable, that does not invalidate the findings. They state,

While we can never be absolutely certain about the validity of any knowledge claim, and while we may sometimes be faced with a choice between contradictory claims that are equally uncertain in validity, often we can be reasonably confident about the relative chances of validity of competing claims. Assessment of claims must be based on judgments about plausibility and credibility: on the compatibility of the claim, or the evidence for it, with the assumptions about the world that we currently take to be beyond reasonable doubt; and/or on the likelihood of error, given the conditions in which the claim was made (p. 73).

The goal of this study is not to be able to make claims with certainty. This is a study examining the use of Facebook for educational purposes from the perspective of one college course. The reported results are from my perspective, and thus are considered reflexive. I
accept that the findings here will not be applicable to every situation in which Facebook is used in a classroom. However, I chose to conduct this study with an ethnographic framework in order to provide the most accurate representation possible.

Analyzing data from an ethnographic framework involves identifying emergent themes from the data. My full participation in their culture allowed me to identify those themes and report them. These themes properly summarize the participants’ experience in being a part of this culture. It can be used to help others who might consider using Facebook for their course. Identifying these themes was only achieved by being able to observe all of the actions and interactions that took place in this classroom, rather than merely what was written on the Facebook course page. To gain a complete picture of the participants’ experience I needed to conduct this ethnographic inquiry and participate in the experience.

Site Description

The setting for this ethnographic study was an upper-level college course in public relations at a large university in the southeastern United States. The course was designed for students to apply theories, principles, and problem-solving techniques used in public relations to organizational case studies. This was one of the final courses students take as part of their public relations concentration, so they should already possess extensive familiarity with most of the material. Each class session was 75 minutes long and the class met twice a week.

The course was held in a computer lab classroom. The room was configured with four rows of seats, each equipped with a desktop computer (See Figure 3-1). In addition, the
instructor had a computer at the front of the classroom that could be displayed to the students via a ceiling-mounted projector. All of the computers in the classroom were connected to the university’s network and Internet.

In this classroom, students tended to sit in scattered clusters. While the instructor could see all of them from the front of the room, the setup of the room prevented some students from easily seeing each other. During one of the formal interviews, a student said, ‘It took me until last week to realize who all was in the class because if you’re sitting on one side you literally can’t see who’s sitting on the other side.’ As a result of this setup, students tended to sit next to friends so that they could socialize during class. This classroom configuration also forced me to move around more during my observations in order to adequately observe what students were doing on their computers during class.

In addition to the physical classroom, there was also a virtual classroom established on Facebook. Facebook is a social networking website that allows users to interact with family, friends, and any other acquaintances who are also users. Users make official connections with each other by becoming Facebook ‘friends.’ Connecting in this manner allows users to communicate with each other and view each friend’s personal Facebook page. Users can also form groups on Facebook. Groups are created for a wide variety of affiliations including members of a fraternity, fans of a television show, or childhood classmates. It is up to the group’s creator to decide who can join. The creator can establish a public status, allowing anyone to join, including users who are not friends with the group’s creator. If the creator chooses a closed membership, it restricts participation to exclusively friends of the creator who received invitations to join. Once the group is established, a page
is created on the website, designated for the group’s members and their interactions. Membership in a group allows users to interact with fellow group members and receive email updates when new content is posted on the group page.

In order to use Facebook in his course, Dr. Tides created a group for himself and his students. This served as the course page for the class (See Figure 3-2). On the first day of the course, students were told that they would be using Facebook as a means to complete certain assignments for this course. Dr. Tides stated on his syllabus that students’ work on Facebook would represent 25% of their overall grade in the course. The syllabus also listed the ways in which students would use Facebook for grading purposes, including weekly discussion topics and five scheduled ‘Facebook Day’ online debates. Students were instructed to join the Facebook group after their first class session. To avoid any potential violations with FERPA guidelines, Dr. Tides was not personal friends with his students on the Facebook site. He created the group page with an open enrollment designation. Once all of the students had joined the group, Dr. Tides changed the group access to closed membership to prevent any outsiders from joining or seeing the content on the page. I was the only person, outside of the instructor and the students, who was permitted to join the group.

As seen in Figure 3-2, the top of the course page listed Dr. Tides’ contact information, as well as a description of the function of this course page, which was written by Dr. Tides. The group page is described as being ‘created to demonstrate to students the impact that social media are having on the public relations industry.’ The members of this course page (i.e. the students and myself) were also identified at the top by our names and
Facebook profile pictures. Below all of this information was the Wall and discussion board. These were two separate sections that allowed members to communicate with each other. The Wall was primarily intended for singular announcements that all members can see upon visiting the course page. The discussion board was a place where students could engage in a dialogue with each other and complete assignments, like the ‘Facebook Day’ debates. Dr. Tides set aside five dates throughout the semester, known as ‘Facebook Days,’ where the class would not meet in the classroom, but rather meet virtually on Facebook. On these days, Dr. Tides would post in the discussion board a topic, related to course material, that students were required to research and debate on with each other. Any of the discussion board topics could be accessed from the course’s main page. Finally, at the bottom of the course page there were sections for participants to add additional photos, websites, and videos. Participants could add content that they felt related to the course in these respective sections. While both students and the instructor could add content to the group page, the instructor’s administrative privileges gave him the final say in what was allowed on the page.

Participants

In this section, I will profile the participants involved in this study. First, I will review the instructor for this course, Dr. Tides, and his history with using Facebook for educational purposes. I will also cover how his use of the technology changed for this particular course. The second part of this section provides some background information on the students who were enrolled. This information came from a survey the students completed for me at the beginning of the semester. In addition to some demographic
questions, the survey also included sections on student motivation for academic success and their willingness to communicate. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of this culture. By asking them about their motivation and willingness to communicate, I wanted to have a general idea of the educational culture that would be created by these students. I could begin to anticipate how, and to what degree, they would use Facebook in this course by the answers they provided. The final part of this survey asked them about their familiarity with various technological tools. This information provided me with some insight into how much these students used technology in their everyday lives and if that use would transfer into the classroom. Results of the survey are presented in this section.

**Instructor Profile**

When deciding on a potential site for my study, Dr. Tides and his course were an appropriate choice. He was already familiar with the technology, which made him a good candidate as the instructor. In addition to already having a Facebook account, he had used Facebook for previous courses, albeit in a different capacity. He believed that using Facebook in public relations course was appropriate, given its rising prominence in the public relations industry. He began using Facebook in his courses after students expressed to him that they did not frequently check their email accounts. They did, however, check Facebook, so Dr. Tides chose that as a more immediate way to communicate with them. Since he already had a Facebook account, Dr. Tides was open to the idea of using it as a learning management system in his course for this study.
His first attempt at integrating Facebook into a course was with a newspaper writing course. The course only had four students who were in charge of designing a department newsletter. When he used Facebook for this course, Dr. Tides was not really an active participant on the page. Once he set up the page, he let the students use it however they liked. He explains,

I tended to stay in the background more often than not, because this was something that… I created it for the class but really it was for the four people enrolled in the class to stay in touch better, because that’s what they said they wanted.

Taking this approach turned out to be very beneficial for the students. He goes on to say,

I really saw where they were communicating with one another, bouncing story ideas back and forth and when someone got into a situation where they couldn’t cover a story by deadline, would use that [Facebook] to find someone else who could cover it.

From his observations, he saw students use Facebook as an effective communicative and organizational tool.

For the course used in this study, Dr. Tides took on a much more active role as it relates to Facebook. Instead of simply letting students use it as a communication tool, Dr. Tides used Facebook in six specific ways to help teach this course. First, he established collective learning between the students by having them engage each other in homework assignments on Facebook. He then enhanced his in-class lectures by referencing material he had posted on the course page. Dr. Tides’ use of Facebook also allowed him to initiate more in-class discussions with students. Further, by observing the students’ behavior on Facebook, Dr. Tides was able to adapt his teaching style to better accommodate them. Since
most students were already frequenting Facebook for social purposes, Dr. Tides additionally utilized it in this course to encourage students to become more active learners. Finally, with Facebook, he was able to better illustrate to students the role social networking has in the public relations industry. He said,

I’ve [personally referenced social media more] on purpose; to try and incorporate more examples of Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and everything into the class, because it is one of those things that organizations are using in much greater numbers than even last year. So it’s something that they will have to be familiar with.

Dr. Tides had a desire to implement Facebook as a learning management system in his course and did so through these multiple applications.

Student Demographics

The full study received human subjects’ approval from the twelve students enrolled in this communication course. I presented these students with the informed consent form on their first day of class. After signing the consent form, I provided the students with a survey to complete. At this point, none of the students had used Facebook for any course-related purposes. By administering this questionnaire so early in the semester, I limited the influence both the instructor and Facebook would have on their answers. This survey included questions on the students’ basic demographics, their use of technology, their motivation to succeed in school, and their willingness to communicate. The information from this survey provided me with an understanding of the learning culture these students created over the course of the semester.
Demographic questions were included on the survey in order to gain some basic background information on the enrolled students. Simple summation calculations were used for this data. Results from the demographic section of the survey are presented in Table 3-1. Based on the responses, all twelve of the students were communication majors with a concentration in public relations. Only two of the twelve students were male. Ten of the students were seniors and two were juniors. 83% of the students reported having a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

On the questionnaire I also asked the students about their use of some specific technological tools. Once again, summation calculations were used on the data. Table 3-2 presents the results of these questions. When asked how often they checked their email account, all of the students said they checked it at least once a day and 58% reported checking multiple times a day. They were also asked if they had a social network account. Everyone responded affirmatively and 92% stated their account was with Facebook. As a follow-up question, students were asked how often they visited their social networking account. 92% of the students said they went at least once a day, if not more often. Based on their responses, the only other electronic services they used frequently were online chat services, such as AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) or Yahoo Messenger.

I further inquired about the students’ previous usage of technology for educational purposes. For this question, students were provided a list of twelve assorted technology tools and asked to circle any that they had used previously in a college course. They were also given the opportunity to include additional tools that were not mentioned in the list. The data from their responses is displayed in Table 3-3. All of the students said that they had used the
learning management system, WebCT Vista, previously in one of their courses. Some of the other technology tools frequently listed by students as being used in their college courses were email (92%), YouTube (58%), Google (58%), and message boards (50%). None of the students indicated that a previous instructor had ever utilized Facebook in any capacity within a course. However, three of them acknowledged to me (in person) that they had used Facebook personally in some way for a college course.

In addition to the questions on their use of technology, participants were asked about their motivation as it relates to their education. The questionnaire included a 16-item student motivation scale (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Each item was a pair of words (i.e., interested/uninterested) that represented a positive and negative view of education. Students had to choose the word, using a Likert scale, from each pair that best represented feelings about their education. Answers from these questions were tabulated and averaged. Table 3-4 presents the data from these questions. Based on their responses, the words - important, useful, and helpful - were the ones they felt most strongly represented their college education. These results indicate that the students see a value in obtaining a college education. For 94% of the word pairs, the average score indicated students picked the positive word in the pair. The only pair where the students’ average was closer to the negative side was for want to study/don’t want to study. Even though they see the value of higher education, this result shows that they do not necessarily see the value in the practice of studying. Since studying is a personal activity, the result here may indicate that these students are not self-motivated when it comes to their school work.
Finally, there was a section on students’ willingness to communicate with other people. A 20-item unwillingness-to-communicate scale was included on the questionnaire (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). Each item provided a statement with which the participants had to indicate agreement or disagreement, using a Likert scale (i.e. ‘I talk less because I’m shy’). Once again answers were tabulated and averaged. The results of these responses are presented in Table 3-5. The results were valid as participants were consistent in their responses, confirmed by unanimously agreeing with the statement ‘my friends and family listen to my ideas and suggestions’ and likewise, disagreeing with the statement ‘my friends and family don’t listen to my ideas and suggestions.’ The statement on the scale that they most strongly reacted to was ‘talking to other people is just a waste of time.’ Everyone responded with ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to that statement. This result shows that students see the value in communicating with others. The students also disagreed with statements such as, ‘I don’t ask for advice from family or friends when I have to make decisions’ and ‘I don’t think my friends are honest in their communication with me.” The results of this scale suggest that the students enrolled in this class are willing to communicate. Part of this study will be observing these students to see if that willingness will also occur when it comes to communicating on Facebook.

Data Collection

This section reviews the data collection procedures used for this study. The data I chose to collect came from sources that provided me with the best possible understanding of who the participants were and how they acted in this particular setting. When I collected
data, I was always mindful of the study’s two research question topics: uses of Facebook for academic purposes and participants’ social interactions. The collected data were primarily qualitative. Any quantitative data was for demographic purposes. In this section, I first review my role as the researcher during the time of data collection, and then conclude with an explanation of how data for this study was collected through interviews and observations.

Researcher Role

With only twelve students enrolled in the course, everyone got to know me fairly well over the span of the semester. I was an observer in their classroom for nearly every class session, with the exception of test days. Typically, when I entered the classroom, I sat in the back of the room, as it provided me with the best view of most of their monitor screens. The unique configuration of the room prevented me from being able to see what everyone was doing simultaneously, so I would frequently have to get up and move about during each class session. Students quickly grew accustomed to this and it never appeared to be a distraction or annoyance.

For the most part, the students seemed to view me as an as an additional student rather than some outside observer. I never perceived any alteration of a student’s behavior or activity when I sat down next to them. During a particular class meeting, one of the students initiated a private Facebook chat with another classmate. They began talking about the class and their most recent exam. Some of the comments made during this discussion were ones that they likely would not want to instructor to see. However, the student apparently had no problem typing the comments while I was in plain view of their computer screen. For the
most part, I was able to blend into the background and observe these students exhibiting typical behavior.

While I remained a quiet observer during the class, Dr. Tides was extremely helpful in providing me with time to talk to the students whenever I requested it. He would check in with me before each class session to see if I wished to make any announcements. If I needed to discuss interview times or anything else related to my data collection, he would leave the room and allow me to talk privately with the students. Having these opportunities provided me with a chance to gain an added rapport with the students that was helpful when it came time for me to interview them. The students felt more comfortable in talking with me because they were familiar with me and also perceived that I would not betray their confidentiality with Dr. Tides or any other outsiders.

I was also able to form a beneficial relationship with Dr. Tides over the course of the semester. In addition to providing me with time to talk with his students, he made himself readily available to me whenever I had questions. I considered him to be very approachable whenever I required clarification. Through his availability, he facilitated me having complete access to everything that went on during that semester.

On a few rare occasions during the semester, I needed to step in and help with the class with some unexpected technical assistance, when Dr. Tides or the students would have difficulties with the computers. Being very familiar with the technology in the room, I was able to solve the problem rather quickly. For instance, during a student presentation, a student was having difficulty with the sound on the computer while trying to play a video clip. Dr. Tides was trying to listen to the presentation and grade the student, so I stepped in
and fixed the problem, which everyone appreciated. In general, however, I tried not to have an active presence in the classroom.

One area where I never made my presence known was on the actual Facebook group page. While Dr. Tides granted me membership into the group, I never contributed to the content posted on the page; I was purely an observer. I took note of what was being posted and when it was posted. Given that Facebook archives all of the material posted, it made my job much easier. Knowing that all material would be time-stamped, I didn’t have to spend continually monitor the site to see when students would post new content. By simply visiting the page regularly, I was able to observe all activity.

**Observations**

The bulk of the data collected came in the form of my observations of the interactions, both between the students and with their instructor. Participant observations provide knowledge of an event that cannot be obtained from the insight of others (Patton, 2002). Becker and Geer (1970) argued that data obtained from observations give the researcher “more information about the event under study than data gathered by any other sociological method” (p. 133). Being in the classroom, I not only witnessed the participants’ interactions, but I also learned more about their actions on Facebook. Often, there were interactions that began on Facebook and eventually spilled over into the classroom. I integrated what I saw in the classroom with the content on Facebook to give me a more complete understanding of how this technology was used in an educational context.
There were two areas in which I conducted my observations. In person, I sat in on almost every class session for this public relations course. This 400-level college course typically met twice a week for seventy-five minutes. While there, I took copious handwritten notes on the actions and interactions of everyone present. The notes included my personal observations and whenever possible, transcriptions of important quotes and conversations made by the participants. After each class session, I would type up and expand on my field notes. These expanded notes included any additional observations, opinions, or questions I had about the events I witnessed during that class session. At the end of the semester, I had 104 typed pages of notes from my observations. These observations assisted me in understanding the social interactions (RQ2a) and power dynamic (RQ2b) that were created as a result of the participants being in this environment.

Online, I was able to observe all of the activity that took place on the course’s Facebook group page. The instructor included me as a participant in the Facebook group, thereby allowing me to see all of the content that was posted on the course page by both the instructor and the students. All of the content on the Facebook course page remains there, regardless of when it was posted; therefore, no archiving of the content was necessary on my part. However, for the first month of the semester I used Camtasia software to video capture the course page whenever any significant additions or changes were made to the page. In total, nine short videos were made documenting the course page’s content. This was done as a backup in case anything should ever happen to the course page.

Having the ability to observe classroom activity from both areas enabled me to have a greater understanding of how participants used this technology tool within an educational
context. Not only did I see additional social interactions (RQ2a), but observing participants’ activity on Facebook really helped when it came to understanding how students and their instructor were using the technology (RQ1a/b).

**Interviews**

Both formal and informal ethnographic interviews were conducted with all participants throughout the duration of the semester. This type of interview is employed to see what cultural meanings the participants have learned while being in their environment (Spradley, 1980). I conducted informal interviews with Dr. Tides and the students whenever I needed clarification during my observations. Spradley (1979) describes these interviews as “a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants” (p. 58). An example of one of these informal interviews occurred after one class when Rachel approached Dr. Tides to discuss something he had posted on the Facebook course page about internships. At the time, I was out of earshot when the conversation took place. After they finished speaking, I asked Dr. Tides if the nature of their conversation was pertinent to my study. The information I obtained from this and all other informal interviews were included in the field notes on the day the interview occurred.

Formal ethnographic interviews were also conducted with the participants. I chose to conduct formal interviews in order to allow participants to explain and elaborate on the actions and interactions I witnessed by them during their time in this course. I met with the students in focus groups for these interviews. Using ethnographic interviewing techniques, I
was able to have students personally respond to my questions and also comment on what everyone else said. In order for these interviews to come off more like friendly conversations as opposed to interrogations, I made sure not to conduct any of them until at least midway through the semester. This way, I was able to pre-establish a rapport with the participants, which made them feel more comfortable when it came time for me to ask them questions.

These interviews consisted of me asking a variety of descriptive, structural, and contrast questions to the students (Spradley, 1979). Descriptive questions allow informants to talk about the culture in their own words. When I interviewed the students, I asked them to describe Dr. Tides and what they thought of him as an instructor. Structural questions are asked to learn how informants have organized their knowledge. During one of my first interview with Dr. Tides, I had him explain to me all of the ways his course changed as a result of using Facebook. Finally, contrast questions give informants the chance to define terms used in the culture by contrasting them with other terms. The students were asked in their first focus group interview to compare their experience of using Facebook for educational purposes to other learning management systems, like WebCT, that they have used in other courses. For each interview I conducted, I attempted to use all three types of questions to learn more about the participants and what I observed of them throughout the semester.

All of the formal interviews were audio recorded. Participants were made aware, before each interview, that I would be recording their answers and each participant acknowledged their consent. In addition to the audio recording, I composed notes relevant to
the participants’ answers. After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed and the written notes were included.

I formally interviewed Dr. Tides twice for this study. The first interview occurred near mid-semester and the other was conducted about a month after the course had concluded. By waiting to interview the instructor until a month after the course was finished, I was able to give him ample time to reflect back on what had transpired over the semester. The wait also allowed me to ask him some questions on how he planned to use technology in his upcoming course. For each of the instructor’s interviews, I composed several specific questions based on my observations of how he was using Facebook and communicating with the students. My first interview with Dr. Tides was sixty minutes long, while the second one was nearly ninety minutes in length. From these two interviews, I had fifty-eight pages of (typed, double-spaced) transcribed notes.

I also interviewed the students twice during the semester. These interviews were conducted using a focus group style, as opposed to individual interviews. Focus group interviews can be an efficient means of collecting data, particularly when the interview topic is not sensitive in nature (Warren & Karner, 2005). I chose this style of interview hoping that participants would not only directly answer my questions, but also respond to statements made by their fellow students. In a focus group, participants can collectively reaffirm or refute statements made by one of the other participants. By having them discuss these issues collectively, I had a greater opportunity to learning what the general consensus on Facebook was by the group as a whole.
Midway through the semester, I conducted the first interview. The goal of this interview was to examine their initial reactions to the technology and how they were adjusting to using it in the classroom. The second interview took place a week before their final exam. Here, I asked participants to reflect back on the semester. They were asked to identify any changes they had made in their actions or communications since the last interview. They also were given the chance to provide their overall assessment of Facebook as a learning management system.

Attendance for these interviews was voluntary. In order to accommodate the students’ schedules, two dates were given for each of the interviews. I did this to maximize the number of participating students. For the mid-semester interview, six students attended the first offered session and two attended the second, for a total of eight out of twelve class students participating. These interviews lasted forty-five and thirty minutes respectively. These two interviews resulted in forty pages of transcribed (typed, double-spaced) notes. The end-of-semester interview was conducted the same, with two scheduled sessions. This time, four students attended each session. Each of these interviews lasted about a thirty minutes. I had an additional thirty-five pages worth of notes (typed, double-spaced) from these interviews. While I had eight total students attend each of the mid-semester and end-of-semester interviews, it was not the same eight who attended both.

Data Analysis

The research questions in this study focused on how Facebook was used in an educational context and the interactions that occurred during that time. The data gathered
represented naturalistic texts within the culture of a communication course gathered through observations and interviews. The cultural themes, patterns, and meanings of the data were explored through an ethnographic framework. This section will specifically explain how the data collected from the observations and interviews was analyzed.

**Interviews and Observations**

The data collected from the observations and interviews provided me with more than two hundred pages of typed transcriptions. This data needed to be reduced in a systematic approach, in order to determine the emergent themes. I initially arranged all the notes in chronological order so that I could observe all of the data from a broad scope. Next, I reviewed all the notes and identified every statement that was relevant to my discussion questions. These became my units of data. In most cases, a single sentence of observation or dialogue represented a unit of data. However, there were both sentence fragments, as well as complete paragraphs that were classified as units of data as well. Each unit of data was placed onto a notecard. When necessary, handwritten notes were added on the notecards to provide additional context to the unit of data.

After all of the data had been copied to the notecards, I began another review of the cards and re-categorized them by the research question they addressed, forming two piles. These piles were then divided once again, sorting the cards by the sub-question they answered. Once they were divided into the four groups, I reviewed each set of notecards using Glaser’s (1965) constant comparison method. By doing this, I would compare similar units of data in order to identify descriptive regularities (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Cards
were then categorized by these regularities. For example, there were several instances throughout the semester where Dr. Tides had mentioned to the students how Facebook was being used more and more frequently in the public relations industry to promote awareness for businesses. Looking through my cards, I would look for phrases like ‘public relations industry’ or ‘once you have a job in PR’. Notecards with data that fit these criteria formed the ‘professionalizing’ category under the research question that asked how Dr. Tides used Facebook in his course. Responses in this category represented Dr. Tides’ attempt to illustrate how Facebook is now being utilized for professional purposes in addition to its use socially.

Cards were compared with each other in order to hone the categories and organize the cards accurately. Using the example of the ‘professionalizing’ category, I initially placed cards here that mentioned Dr. Tides’ discussion of a nonprofit organization that used Facebook. However, looking at these cards in a broader context, they more appropriately belonged in the ‘initiating in-class discussion’ category. Dr. Tides’ mention of this organization and its presence on Facebook was intended to get students to discuss this organization rather than provide the students with an example of how Facebook was used in the corporate world. Getting the cards in the appropriate categories involved conducting this comparison process several times. When comparing the units of data, Glaser (1965) explains,
One starts thinking in terms of the full range of types of continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimized, its major consequences, the relation of the category to other categories, and other properties of the category (p. 439).

I kept going back and forth between sorting and conceptualizing until I was fully satisfied that the cards were in the correct categories and the categories represented the main ideas that defined this culture.

Twice during this process, I conducted validity tests on my categories. For each test, an outside reviewer was given 10% of the note cards along with a list of the categories devised for each of the research questions. The reviewers were asked to place the cards in the categories shown on the list. On the first validity test, the reviewer correctly placed 78% of the cards in their categories. The second validity test was conducted after a re-evaluation of the cards’ placement. 94% of the cards were correctly placed when the second reviewer tested for validity. After each validity test, I discussed with the reviewers the cards they incorrectly placed and asked for their reasoning. These discussions allowed me to understand the problem and how to address it. I once again re-evaluated the categories and distributed the notes cards accordingly for the final time.

With the categories finalized, I began to look at how they attempted to answer my research questions. Comparisons of the categories, both within and between research questions, were made in order to develop the emerging themes of this study. Identifying the themes often meant going back and altering the categories of data. For example, “expedient communication” was an idea that emerged in data from both RQ1b (student usage of
Facebook) and RQ2a (students’ social interactions about Facebook). Some of the data represented evidence of students using Facebook to quickly communicate with Dr. Tides. However, there was also data involving students discussing how they liked Facebook because it allowed them to get in touch with Dr. Tides in a hurry. In this case, I had to compare the data related to “expedient communication” for their similarities and differences, in order to learn if there was enough evidence to create categories within each research question or if it should all remain in one. I did this for all of the data, going back and forth between similar data until I was fully satisfied that I had arrived at the best possible themes to report as the outcome of this study.

**Summary**

In this chapter, the methodological framework for this study was described in five sections. First, I provided a rationale for why an ethnographic framework was the best methodology to use in order to answer the research questions. Next, I reviewed the physical and online sites that provided the setting for this study. I then identified the study’s participants and provided some key background information on them. The various ways I collected data over the semester were then reviewed. Through interviews and field observations, I was able to obtain the necessary data to analyze this culture. Finally, I detailed how the data was analyzed, both from the broad conceptual framework and from the specific methods used on the collected data.

The next two chapters of this study will attempt to show all that I gained by observing the class for an entire semester. They will reveal how technology can be implemented into
the classroom and what affect it will have on how students and instructors communicate.

During the final student interview, I asked the students to give me their opinion of Facebook as a learning management system now that they had used it for that purpose for one semester. One interesting response I heard was,

It’s what you make out of it. Like if you use it to check for all of your classes and post stuff on it, then it’s a 10. But if you want to go on there just to look at all of your friends, then it’s a 1. So it’s kind of like what you make of it.

In the next chapter, I will explain what the participants of this study ‘made of it.’ I will review the results from RQ1, which questions the use of Facebook in an educational context. The categories developed for RQ1a/b describe how Facebook was used by the students and their instructor throughout the semester.
Figures

Figure 3-1. Diagram of Classroom Used in Study

= computer station
Figure 3-2. Screenshot of Facebook Group Page
Table 3-1. Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>GPA range</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>2.99-2.75</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.49-3.25</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.49-3.25</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.74-3.5</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>2.74-2.5</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.74-3.5</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.24-3.0</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.24-3.0</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.24-3.0</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.24-3.0</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.24-3.0</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Comm.</td>
<td>3.74-3.5</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-2. Students’ Familiarity and Use of Technology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Check email</th>
<th>Have blog?</th>
<th>Created podcast?</th>
<th>Listened to podcast?</th>
<th>Frequency of chat</th>
<th>Have social networking account?</th>
<th>Which social networking service?</th>
<th>How often do you visit it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>1 or 2 times a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Multiple times a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Once every 2 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Every day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>Once a day</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>4-5 times a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>#11</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Every few days</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>Once a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#12</td>
<td>Multiple times</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>1 or 2 times a day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-3. Students’ Use of Technology for Educational Purposes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Blog</th>
<th>Message Board</th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Chat program</th>
<th>YouTube</th>
<th>Vista</th>
<th>Podcast</th>
<th>MySpace</th>
<th>Twitter</th>
<th>Wiki</th>
<th>Google</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
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#1 – Motivated/Unmotivated  
#2 – Interested/Uninterested  
#3 – Involved/Uninvolved  
#4 – Not Stimulated/Stimulated  
#5 – Don’t Want to Study/Want to Study  
#6 – Inspired/Uninspired  
#7 – Unchallenged/Challenged  
#8 – Uninvigorated/Invigorated

#9 – Unenthused/Enthused  
#10 – Excited/Not excited  
#11 – Aroused/Not aroused  
#12 – Not fascinated/Fascinated  
#13 – Dreading it/Looking forward to it  
#14 – Important/Unimportant  
#15 – Useful/Useless  
#16 – Helpful/Harmful

* - denotes reverse scoring
Table 3-5. Students’ Responses to Unwillingness-to-Communicate Questionnaire

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1. I am afraid to speak up in conversations
2. I talk less because I’m shy
3. I like to get involved in group discussions
4. I talk a lot because I am not shy
5. My friends and family don’t listen to my ideas and suggestions.
6. I think my friends are truthful with me
7. I don’t ask for advice from family or friends when I have to make decisions
8. I believe my friends and family understand my feelings
9. I have no fears about expressing myself in a group
10. My family doesn’t enjoy discussing my interests and activities with me
11. I avoid group discussions
12. My friends seek my opinions and advice
13. I am afraid to express myself in a group
14. During a conversation, I prefer to talk rather than listen
15. Other people are friendly only because they want something out of me
16. I find it easy to make conversation with strangers
17. My friends and family listen to my ideas and suggestions
18. Talking to other people is just a waste of time
19. I feel nervous when I have to speak to others
20. I don’t think my friends are honest in their communication with me

* - denotes reverse scoring

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CHAPTER IV

FACEBOOK USAGE

Overview

In this chapter, I present the results of data analysis for RQ1: How is a socially-based technology (Facebook) used for academic purposes? The participants used Facebook in a variety of ways for both immediate and long-term purposes. In the first section of this chapter, I examine the data categorized for RQ1a, which describe the methods in which the instructor used Facebook for the course. I observed Dr. Tides using Facebook in several ways as he attempted to integrate it into his classroom. The analysis revealed six specific means in which the instructor utilized Facebook to improve the educational experience for both his students and himself. The second section of the chapter focuses on the data from RQ1b, which cover the students’ use of the technology. Throughout the semester, I witnessed students using Facebook for both scholarly and social purposes. Inductive analysis revealed eight recurring uses of Facebook by the students, which will be chronicled in the second part of the chapter.

Facebook Usage by the Instructor

This section covers the six emergent categories that describe the ways in which the instructor attempted to use Facebook for his course on public relations (RQ1a). Dr. Tides had previously taught this course and had also used Facebook in an educational context.
However, this was the first time he was using Facebook for this particular course. When he decided to incorporate Facebook, he quickly identified several uses for it that would take advantage of the technology’s strengths, while remaining true to his established course curriculum. Dr. Tides admitted to me that he believed Facebook belonged in education, but its use was “a fine line to be walked on.” Knowing this, Dr. Tides attempted to find ways to use the technology that would engage the students and also demonstrate how it can be used for other purposes.

RQ1a asks “In what capacities is the instructor using Facebook?” From my data analysis, I have identified six common uses of Facebook by Dr. Tides and organized them into the following categories: establishing collective learning, enhancing class lectures, initiating in-class discussions, adapting to students’ behavior, encouraging applied learning, and professionalizing.

Establishing Collective Learning

The course used for this study was a subject that Dr. Tides had previously taught. Before the semester began, Dr. Tides altered some of his established assignments so that they could be completed on the Facebook course page. By changing these assignments, Dr. Tides was able to use Facebook to establish a culture of collective learning in his classroom. This category reviews how collective learning was established through these Facebook assignments.

One method that Dr. Tides utilized to establish collective learning was by requiring students to post weekly comments on the Facebook course page. He would provide students
with a topic each week and then create a thread on the discussion board of their Facebook course page where the students would write their responses. Most of these weekly posts were connected to the material that had been presented in class. During one week of the semester, the students were learning about how to react to situations from a public relations perspective. Dr. Tides showed the students a story about an animal attack at a zoo and how the zoo officials responded to the situation. Dr. Tides then asked the students to develop their own reactive strategy solution to this incident and post it on Facebook. In another assignment, Dr. Tides posted a video on the Facebook course page involving an incident that had occurred at Disney World. Students were to watch the video and then create a post on Facebook that involved them applying the public relations perspectives that they had covered in class that day to the video. In one instance, the weekly post was based on an in-class group assignment. Students had spent the class session working in groups on an activity about awareness strategies. Dr. Tides asked the groups to post their work on Facebook once they had completed the activity.

Dr. Tides had two reasons for including these weekly posts. Having students respond on a regular basis provided him with a way to assess whether students were attending class regularly and understanding the material. More importantly, the weekly posts attempted to have students collectively engage in critical thinking about the public relations industry by sharing their responses in a public forum. When I asked Dr. Tides about these weekly posts, he told me that he had envisioned them to be “something where [students] can take it, come up with their own ideas…and really see how they are thinking things through and then I would hope they’re coming and looking to see what other people have done.” It was not only
important that the instructor read what they wrote, but also that students were reading what each other had to say on these topics. This way they could learn from each other about the many facets involved in these public relations issues being discussed openly on Facebook.

In addition to those weekly posts, Dr. Tides encouraged the students to cooperatively learn through the five ‘Facebook Days’ he set up throughout the semester. Whenever a ‘Facebook Day’ was scheduled, students did not meet in the classroom. For four of these ‘Facebook Days’ students were asked to engage in debates on current issues in public relations. On the night before each ‘Facebook Day’, Dr. Tides posted the debate topic on the Facebook course page. One example of a debate topic was, ‘spin is an essential part of public relations.’ In his post, Dr. Tides would also indicate whether students were on the pro or con side of the debate. Students then spent the ‘Facebook Day’ researching their side of the debate. Dr. Tides encouraged them to look at academic journals, blogs, and other various social media to help them investigate the topic. He also suggested that they look for pictures, videos, and links to include in their post. Once finished with their research, Students were required to post 2-3 paragraphs on Facebook explaining their findings. After everyone made their initial post, Dr. Tides required everyone to make a second post that was a rebuttal to the opposite side’s argument. Dr. Tides indicated that students would need to do further research in order to make an adequate rebuttal. These rebuttals were important to establishing the culture of collective learning. Students needed to read the posts from the students on the opposing side before they could write their rebuttal. It was important that they had an understanding of the opposition’s main arguments in order to present an informed response.
The fifth ‘Facebook Day’ took place at the end of the semester and had a slightly different format. Instead of a debate, Dr. Tides created a more open-ended discussion that had students talking about the use of social media sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter, and their impact on the practice of public relations. While everyone was free to take any stance they wanted on the subject, students were still required to make two posts, with the second one being a response to a fellow student’s initial post. Even though students were not debating each other, Dr. Tides maintained that collective learning element in this final assignment by having students read their peers’ posts and provide an adequate response.

When a student asked Dr. Tides to clarify how he was grading these ‘Facebook Day’ assignments, he told the class that he was “not concerned with your grammar and punctuation so much.” Rather, his criteria involved evaluating if the students were responding to the side of the debate that they were assigned and how thorough of an argument they made for their position. He added that he was also looking to see if students made a second post that was a rebuttal to the opposite side’s argument. Dr. Tides stressed to the students the importance of the rebuttal posts during the semester after he had seen some students fail to do this during the first two ‘Facebook Days.’ A sufficient rebuttal from each student was necessary for these assignments to be considered debates. By stressing the rebuttal portion of the assignments, Dr. Tides was reinforcing that culture of collective learning that he set out to establish.

Through both the weekly posts and the ‘Facebook Days,’ Dr. Tides had created assignments that were allowing students to exhibit their knowledge and comprehension on various public relations concepts and then share what they learned with others in the course.
Dr. Tides felt that if students would visit the Facebook page frequently to read what their classmates had posted for the assignment, it would be of benefit to them in the course. He said, “by having everyone exposed to everyone else’s thinking, they’re not just typing something up and turning it in on paper, but hopefully they’re seeing how other people process things and see things differently.” These assignments were created by Dr. Tides in order for students to not only understand the course concepts, but more importantly, learn how their classmates interpreted these concepts as well.

Having these assignments take place on Facebook, Dr. Tides had provided the students with a forum in which they could work together to learn about public relations. This also meant that students had a place where their thoughts, opinions, and information could be permanently stored. All of the content added onto Facebook is archived, so students could return to the Facebook site at any time and refer back to the historical log of what everyone had contributed to the assignments. The permanence of the information allowed students to continue learning from each other throughout the semester.

**Enhancing Class Lectures**

Having content permanently remain on Facebook was also helpful for Dr. Tides, who could post his own material on the course page to share with his students. The Facebook course page became a centralized location that Dr. Tides used to add material that he would reference in class. Throughout the semester, there were several times during his lectures when Dr. Tides pointed out pictures, videos, or links he had uploaded onto the course page.
During one particular class period, Dr. Tides discussed an incident that occurred at Disney World. The incident involved one of the costumed workers being accused of attacking a child. Dr. Tides found a video of the incident on YouTube and posted it on the course page. As he discussed the incident and how Disney had responded to the situation, Dr. Tides brought up the Facebook course page on the projector and played the video for the students. Following the video, Dr. Tides shared with the class a couple of quotes from Disney officials regarding the incident.

Dr. Tides also used Facebook to provide links to some current PR campaigns. As part of the course, several weeks were spent teaching students how to create effective public relations campaigns. To help students witness these campaigns in action, Dr. Tides uploaded information onto Facebook from a few current campaigns being run by major corporations. One link sent students to a news story on Taco Bell’s giveaway of free tacos during the World Series. Another link was for a press release regarding a chicken giveaway being sponsored by Chick-Fil-A. Dr. Tides referenced these links in class to show students the various ways in which companies generate interest in their products. Students had an extra incentive to view these links as they not only provided examples of effective public relations campaigns, but also contained information on how the students could take advantage of the promotional offers.

Dr. Tides continued to use Facebook to help students understand PR campaigns as they prepared for their final group project. This assignment involved students analyzing, in detail, a specific organization’s campaign. To help students understand this analysis process, Dr. Tides selected a different company and conducted an investigation of its most recent
campaign. The company he chose was Movember, an organization that encourages people to grow mustaches during the month of November in order to help raise funds and awareness for men’s health. In an attempt to get their message out to a larger audience, Movember had created their own Facebook site page. As he conducted his analysis of this organization, Dr. Tides showed his students Movember’s Facebook group page. He added a link to it on the course page, as a quick reference for students conducting the investigations of their assigned company’s campaign.

Dr. Tides was not the only contributor of content or links on the course Facebook page. During one class, Dr. Tides began discussing the website PRwatch.org, a website run by The Center for Media and Democracy, which aims to promote awareness of corporate spin and propaganda. Dr. Tides prefaced his comments about the website by informing the students that this website had been posted on the course page by one of the students in their most recent ‘Facebook Day’ post.

While there were several ways in which Dr. Tides incorporated some facet of Facebook into his lectures, he admitted to me some frustration in not being able to do more. In particular, he was disappointed that he could not find more Facebook applications applicable to the course material. Dr. Tides made an effort to seek out these applications, but did not have much success in finding many that would be useful. Dr. Tides said,

The only other thing that I found (on Facebook) that I thought actually might be helpful for a particular topic would be a logo quiz, to help with branding and those sorts of messages. But it was one of those that by that time, after going through twenty, thirty searches to find one thing, that’s going to turn anyone off.
Most of the applications that came up in the search results were, in Dr. Tides’ opinion, too “socially-oriented and on the fun side of things” to be used effectively in the classroom. Dr. Tides said that he hoped there would be more educational applications available the next time he chooses to use Facebook in a college course.

**Initiating In-Class Discussion**

Facebook not only enhanced Dr. Tides’ lectures, but also provided him with an additional way to engage the students in discussions when they met in class. Dr. Tides was able to utilize both the content he had included on the course page and the comments made by the students on their homework assignments to encourage increased discussion during class sessions. Recognizing students’ proclivity to interact on Facebook in general, Dr. Tides shared, “where I think they’re truly going to benefit (in this class), is from interacting with one another on [Facebook].” Through the various assignments, Dr. Tides initiated conversation on Facebook and then re-introduced it back into the classroom.

The ‘Facebook Days’ provided ample opportunity for in-class discussion. During the class session following each ‘Facebook Day,’ Dr. Tides set aside time to have the students discuss the topic more thoroughly. He was able to initiate discussion with his students by displaying some of the comments made in their ‘Facebook Day’ posts. The topic for the first ‘Facebook Day’ was on spin. When they discussed this in class, Dr. Tides began by having students provide a summary of how they interpreted the concept of spin. After a couple of students shared their thoughts, the conversation shifted to a discussion on how spin is essential in the public relations industry. Several students indicated to Dr. Tides that they felt
it was essential. In order to extend the conversation, Dr. Tides displayed on the projector some of the students’ comments that had been posted on Facebook as part of the assignment. He did not include the students’ names on the comments in order for everyone to have an open mind about what was said on both sides of the issue. Dr. Tides talked about some of their comments and played some of the videos that they had linked to their posts. Once they finished watching the videos, Dr. Tides continued dialoging with students about the use of spin in public relations. Dr. Tides concluded his discussion on spin by asking the students if they had any further questions for him on this subject.

A similar format was used for each class session that followed one of the scheduled ‘Facebook Days.’ Dr. Tides would begin by asking students for a summary of the debate topic. He would then offer the students an opportunity to share their general opinions on the topic. This in-class discussion on the ‘Facebook Day’ topic provided an opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts on the topic. Dr. Tides would also provide his experience and personal opinion on the debate topic, as well. This provided the students with an additional perspective on the topic. By sharing his own thoughts on the topic, Dr. Tides would also cover any aspect of the topic that may have been overlooked by students when they posted their responses on Facebook. Finally, to make sure everyone had a complete understanding of the topic, Dr. Tides would finish the conversation by asking if anyone had any other questions. Typically, there were none, but if questions were brought up, Dr. Tides provided answers.

The ‘Facebook Days’ were not the only assignments that facilitated in-class discussions. Anytime that students were responsible for posting content on Facebook, Dr.
Tides made an effort to discuss what they wrote at the next class meeting. In some cases, these discussions needed no prompting from the instructor. For example, after Dr. Tides assigned students to write about response strategies regarding the Disney World incident video he had shown in class, students were eager to discuss their thoughts. While Dr. Tides often had to ask students probing questions in order to get them to talk about what they posted on Facebook, this particular assignment generated a lot of unprovoked discussion. As soon as Dr. Tides mentioned their comments on the video, students were eager to discuss the incident and what they had written about it. It was apparent that students found this particular topic engaging and were excited to share their thoughts on it.

Finally, in-class discussions were initiated by random questions posed on Facebook by any of the students. Whenever a student indicated in their post that they were unsure about a concept or asked a question regarding a particular topic, Dr. Tides would take the time to address this question in class. For instance, Sally had mentioned she was having difficulty identifying the difference between strategic and tactical research. Assuming there would be other students confused by this, Dr. Tides took time during class to explain the difference and ensure that everyone understood the differences and how to conduct each type of research.

When discussing the Facebook assignments, Dr. Tides certainly made an effort to get the students involved and his efforts were met with enthusiasm. Specifically, when class discussion was focused on the Facebook assignments, the amount of participation from the students was considerably higher. It was apparent to me that students were more open with Dr. Tides whenever the discussion was focused on the Facebook content. They would
comment about what other students had written in their posts and really enjoyed discussing the videos posted by their peers that Dr. Tides would then present in class. By integrating content from the Facebook course page, Dr. Tides was able to get the students to really open up and discuss these public relations issues.

Adapting to Students’ Behavior

Dr. Tides tried to be flexible with the students in this course by using Facebook to adapt to their behavior in the classroom. Facebook provided students with a variety of ways to share content and express their opinions. As Dr. Tides explained, “And with this (course), it’s very much an open-ended type of thing where from week-to-week the Facebook thing is very different.” He elaborated on this saying,

I said at the very beginning that if people found things that were interesting to them that applied to any aspect of what we’re studying, any aspect of public relations, to feel free to post it. And in that way it would give me some insight as to where they were or what they were interested in, so I could kind of tailor the course better. Over the semester, Dr. Tides used the feedback he got from his students on Facebook in order to adjust his teaching methods and adapt to their behavior.

One way that Dr. Tides adapted to his students was in how he communicated with them. In his previous courses, if Dr. Tides needed to contact his students he would simply send out a mass email to them. However, Dr. Tides indicated to me that he had previously received feedback from his students saying that they did not read their email very frequently. With Facebook, he had an alternative method for sending out information. Knowing that his
students may not read his emails, Dr. Tides was faced with the dilemma of determining which method would be best for contacting them. Elaborating to me on how he chose to communicate with his students, he stated, “if it’s something I know they’re going to Facebook that day for, I tend to go there first.” For example, Dr. Tides had some information on a free web-based seminar on public relations that he wanted to share with his students. Explaining his decision to post the information on Facebook, he told me, “that one in particular I just posted it online because it had the URL for them to click through and sign up. I figured that would be easier, especially since they don’t really check their email messages.” Another example of choosing a communication medium based on student habits and preferences occurred when he had to share some information about the first ‘Facebook Day’ debate topic with the students. He opted to post it on Facebook because “when I was late in getting it posted, I knew that they [the students] were going to Facebook for the information, so that’s when I went directly there, rather than sending an email.” Dr. Tides examined his students’ behavior and made his decisions accordingly. Since he believed that they were checking Facebook more frequently than their email accounts, he tried adapting to their preferences by sending more messages to them through Facebook.

At times, Dr. Tides also had to adapt the assignments he made on Facebook in order to better suit his students. An example of this was the changes he made in how he ran the ‘Facebook Days.’ For the first four ‘Facebook Days,’ Dr. Tides asked students to debate various topics on public relations. Students were expected to make an initial post arguing their side of the debate and then later in the day create a rebuttal post that commented on the opposite side’s argument. Based on their work during the first four ‘Facebook Days,’ Dr.
Tides was somewhat disappointed with both the depth of their answers and their lack of interaction with students from the opposite side of the debate. For the final ‘Facebook Day,’ Dr. Tides abandoned the debate format and asked a more straightforward question. The question he chose also connected with some subject matter that would be on their final exam. Dr. Tides shared with me, “I was operating under the assumption that the students would then be more inclined to take time to look things up rather than a quick and dirty memorization.” The change seemed to be effective as Dr. Tides said, “looking back over their responses, it seemed that I was able to get deeper answers from a larger number of students.”

Students recognized the fact that Dr. Tides had adapted the ‘Facebook Day’ assignment and believed it was in response to their efforts on the previous assignments. When I asked the students why they felt Dr. Tides made the change for the final ‘Facebook Day,’ many students had opinions. One student said, “he probably was starting to notice that nobody was really debating. Everyone was just kind of stating their own opinion. And it was kind of pointless to do that pro or con.” Another student added,

I think he kind of knew that we were maybe tired of debating things that we didn’t necessarily agree with. I can recall a couple of times in class I said I had a hard time because I wanted to say what the other team was arguing. So I think he did it just to make it easier for us since it was the last one.

Finally one student pointed to the fact that some students took too long to make their first post for the debate format to be effective. She said, “I’m sure he also notices how many people were posting after 11:00 p.m. and how hard this part would be to post responses.” For
all of these reasons, trying to conduct a debate on Facebook was not necessarily working as anticipated. Dr. Tides recognized this and adjusted the assignment accordingly in order to provide more benefit to the students.

The personality quiz assignment was another example of Dr. Tides’ adaptation to student behaviors. This quiz was a Facebook application that students completed on the website. Completing this quiz provided students with an added opportunity to be engaged on Facebook for educational purposes. Dr. Tides did not originally have this as part of the course, but decided to use it since it was one of the few Facebook applications he found that could be applied to the course. He conveyed to me, “I had no intention of doing the ‘My Personality’ thing at the start of this semester. But it was one of those that I wanted to see if doing something like that could trigger some more discussion, some more involvement.” By getting the students more involved, the quiz was also helping Dr. Tides to better organize the course.

Dr. Tides used the students’ results on the quiz to place them into groups for the final project in the course. Based on their personalities, Dr. Tides created groups consisting of students who were most compatible with each other. Reflecting back on it, Dr. Tides was very pleased with this decision. He said,
It actually was very helpful in coming up with the group assignments, to have them do their personality profiles. Because probably the biggest complaint I have in that class right now is that when it comes time for group work, everybody just sort of looks around and nobody wants to be the first one to move or do anything. So they always default to the same groups, until today. Today (after putting them in groups based on their quiz results) I was more pleased with where they went and how quickly they got there.

From his perspective, he was happy that he chose to use Facebook to gain some additional information about the students. Using the Facebook quiz results, he was able to adapt the way he grouped students, so that each group would be more productive in their work.

In some cases, the adaptations Dr. Tides made resulted in a decreased use of Facebook. One example of this was in the way he approached the study guides for his exams. For the first exam, he created a thread on Facebook for students to create their own study guide. Dr. Tides suggested they post questions that they thought might be on the exam. Dr. Tides also told students that if they were unsure about any of the concepts covered up to that point, to post questions about them in the study guide thread. This thread was intended to help students focus on specific concepts while preparing for the exam. It was also intended to assist Dr. Tides in understanding the students’ current comprehension level of the material as he created the test. Very few students, however, posted anything in this study guide thread.

For the second and third exams, Dr. Tides once again adapted, based on the previous outcome, by opting to eliminate the Facebook study guides. When I asked him why he told
me, “now that they’ve seen the way that I write the test, I didn’t think that there were as much need.” I inquired if he had been frustrated by students’ lack of involvement on the first study guide thread and if that affected his decision. He said, “yeah, I was a little discouraged by it.” Seeing the lack of effort that students had put forth on the first study guide thread did not give Dr. Tides any confidence that they would be more involved if he attempted another Facebook study guide. Knowing that his students were now familiar with his tests and believing that they were not interested in participating in a Facebook study guide, Dr. Tides adapted his approach to helping students prepare for the second and third exam.

Including Facebook in this course provided Dr. Tides with many opportunities for instant feedback from his students, which he was able to use to help develop this course. Whether it was in their communication with him or their actions on assignments, Dr. Tides was always up-to-date with how students perceived him and the course. Based on their input, Dr. Tides knew when adjustments were necessary and make them appropriately. He then used Facebook to adapt to the students’ behaviors in order to make his course more beneficial for each of them.

**Encouraging Applied Learning**

Given that none of the students had previously used Facebook within an educational context, Dr. Tides was able to present it as a new concept to entice students toward additional participation in his course and beyond the graded assignments. Most of the students were already using Facebook on a regular basis as part of their social life, so Dr. Tides hoped that they would be just as active using Facebook as a learning mechanism in this course. Dr.
Tides wanted to see if students would become more involved in his class than they normally did as a result of the Facebook presence. He stated, “So it’s one of those, ‘yes, this is your fun space, I understand that.’ But we’re trying to see how [Facebook] also can be used.” For this reason, Dr. Tides tried several ways to use Facebook as a place where students could apply themselves in learning the course concepts.

Dr. Tides encouraged applied learning for his students by promoting Facebook as a forum for course content. At the beginning of the semester, he told students that Facebook would be a “source of relaying information.” Dr. Tides frequently suggested to the students that whenever they found something, be it a relevant video, photo, article, or link, to post it on the Facebook course page. This was not a requirement, per se, but an opportunity for them to openly share additional resources with others in the class. He also wanted students to freely share their opinions. Students were instructed that they should always feel comfortable expressing their opinions honestly on Facebook, even if it went against someone else’s belief (Dr. Tides included himself in that statement). Dr. Tides understood the popularity of Facebook, particularly with college students. In his previous experience using Facebook with college students, he saw them use the site effectively to share resources. When describing the students he taught in a news writing course using Facebook, he shared with me, “[Facebook] did evolve more into a resource. People would upload links to websites that had files there. And as people starting writing news stories, they would link to the AP style guide.” He hoped that his public relations students would display that same enthusiasm for sharing outside content on Facebook when they applied what they had learned in the course.
Students also had the chance to be applied learners during the Facebook assignments created by Dr. Tides. For their ‘Facebook Days,’ Dr. Tides suggested that students try to go above and beyond the listed requirements. He indicated that he favorably evaluated any student contributions when they properly integrated outside sources. Their arguments would be bolstered with the inclusion of scholarly articles or visual examples in their posts. Dr. Tides told me in our interview, “I, throughout the classes, tried to encourage people to find video clips, YouTube clips, those sort of things.” With these assignments, he really wanted them to explore these topics and do the necessary research. He also encouraged students to provide material or sources for both sides of the debate, even though they were only assigned to one side. He added that if they decided to add information for the opposing side, they should also produce an argument against it to show that they were thinking critically about both sides of the debate. Through these reminders, Dr. Tides tried to get the students to do more than post uninformed opinions on these topics. He wanted them to apply the course concepts with outside content in order to make the strongest argument.

Dr. Tides always made an effort to positively acknowledge students who exhibited applied learning in order to encourage other students to do the same. After their second ‘Facebook Day,’ Dr. Tides made a particular point to compliment the students on their excellent use of including video links in their posts. He also said they did a good job of adding links to pictures as well. However, he did suggest that students should not simply include links in their posts. Since the Facebook course page had a section that photos could be uploaded to, he told them that they should start putting the pictures they found there.
With comments like these, students knew they were performing well, but could also do more with the site when it came to displaying their knowledge of course concepts.

Dr. Tides wanted students to regularly visit the course page so that they could apply what they learned in preparation for his exams. Leading up to exam days, Dr. Tides suggested to the students that if they had missed a day of class, the Facebook course page would serve as a “viable means of getting the information” they missed that day. The Facebook study guide thread was initially created for this purpose, as well. Dr. Tides wanted students to go there in order to share their knowledge of certain topics with everyone else. By adding content to the study guide, students would confirm what they already knew and discover what they still needed to study.

Dr. Tides felt that applying what they learned from the Facebook course page would be important for students when it came time for the exams. “It is one of these things that I’m not just having them do as busywork, but this is part of the test,” Dr. Tides said, explaining his efforts to have students frequently read the content on Facebook. Dr. Tides created his exams based on what was being discussed on the Facebook course page. Those who applied what they learned from the course page were rewarded on their test scores. Those who contributed outside material and carefully read everyone else’s content were able to apply the information and perform better on the tests.

In some cases, Dr. Tides wanted students to take the information gained from the Facebook course page and apply it beyond the classroom. In our interview, Dr. Tides told me how he sent students to the Facebook course page to look at pictures he posted of businesses with misspelled signs. He said,
There were a couple of times where students had major spelling mistakes that I did mention to them one-on-one personally.  [I told them] make sure you check out the spelling because it’s pretty important to edit and proofread. Just look at the [Facebook] pictures. It’s pretty embarrassing to have ‘shrimp’ misspelled on your restaurant wall.

By using Facebook in his course, Dr. Tides had given his students a centralized location of information that they could apply to the course and to the future, once they began a career in the public relations industry.

Professionalizing

Dr. Tides’ motivation for using Facebook in his course extended beyond the immediate effects it would have on his students in the classroom. He hoped that by introducing this technology from a different context, it would better prepare students for entering the public relations industry. “But this social media, whether [students] like it or not, is going to change how they work in public relations. So being exposed to it in an institutional setting of social media will hopefully be beneficial to them,” Dr. Tides told me during our interview. Dr. Tides recognized the growing usage of Facebook by organizations and wanted to familiarize his students with it, as well. He explained, “[Facebook] is one of those things that organizations are using in much greater numbers than even last year, so it’s something that [students] will have to be familiar with.” This was a 400 level course in public relations, so all of the students enrolled intend to pursue employment in public
relations upon graduation. Knowing this, Dr. Tides tried to use Facebook as a bridge between the classroom and the workplace.

In order to demonstrate how Facebook could be utilized as a professional tool, he frequently referenced its current applications within the industry during his lectures. Facebook often came up when Dr. Tides would discuss advertising with his students. This began during their second class session when he informed students that Facebook has great potential for organizations as a means of getting their information out to the public. Throughout the semester, he reinforced how Facebook was increasingly being used in the industry. For his lecture on the Diffusion of Innovation theory, Dr. Tides talked about how early adopters were needed for organizations to consider using Facebook for advertising purposes. In another class meeting, he explained how companies are placing ads on Facebook in order to gain publicity. Representing themselves on Facebook is an inexpensive method of gaining widespread name recognition. He went so far as to say that some organizations have begun to release breaking news on Facebook, as opposed to traditional press releases.

Dr. Tides really tried to enforce the idea that Facebook was becoming a sought after form of advertising for organizations. During one class, Dr. Tides rhetorically asked students “how are companies perceived if they do not have a presence on Facebook?” He explained to them that companies who do not advertise on Facebook are missing out on a great opportunity to present their message to a broader audience. Of course, Dr. Tides also reminded students that they must keep in mind their target audience. He elaborated that Facebook would not be the best communication tool if the audience they are trying to reach
is senior citizens, who are not a group known to extensively use Facebook. However, for companies who have target demographics that do frequent Facebook, this technology can be an excellent resource for advertising.

In addition to using Facebook to discuss the public relations industry, Dr. Tides also used it to specifically help the students find jobs in public relations. Many of the assignments Dr. Tides had in the course were designed for students to work on together. Dr. Tides suggested that when they worked together on Facebook, it should be a “group collaborative effort.” By having them work in groups, Dr. Tides was helping them prepare for the real world. He explained that when they enter the workforce, they will “rarely do anything in isolation.” By working together, whether it was to complete an assignment, debate an idea or create a study guide, Dr. Tides prepared them for collaborating with others in the real world in order to assist them in understanding ideas and concepts.

Dr. Tides also tried to help students by posting relevant job information on the Facebook course page. For example, he posted a link to an internship in the public relations industry. After he had put the information on Facebook, Rachel approached Dr. Tides after class and began to ask him questions about the internship. Since she had expressed an interest in the position, Dr. Tides told her that he would be happy to email her some additional information. Dr. Tides also listed on the Facebook course page information on when the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) held meetings on campus. While this was not specifically related to a job, students who attended these meetings established connections, which could be of benefit when seeking jobs in the future.
When I interviewed Dr. Tides about using Facebook in this course, this idea of showing the technology to students from the perspective of the public relations industry frequently came up. He believed that more organizations are using tools like Facebook and Twitter to help run their companies and he wanted to make sure students understood this trend, as well. Describing the public relations industry, he expressed, the part about social media in the industry, that’s something where you go onto any public relations-oriented trade magazine or blog and all you see is social media this and social media that. I think it is going to give [students] a bit of a leg up, seeing [Facebook] from a different perspective.

By different perspective, Dr. Tides implied that he wanted students to stop seeing Facebook as simply a fun, social diversion and begin to see it as something that could be used professionally. Reflecting back on its use in his classroom, Dr. Tides felt he accomplished that. “I think this experiment, for lack of a better term, will help a good number of [students] recognize that [Facebook] is not just ‘hey look at the party pictures from last weekend,’ but there are other functions that it takes,” he said. He also admitted that integrating Facebook into his course helped him learn more about social media from an organizational perspective than he had ever known before.

**Facebook Usage By the Students**

This section covers the many ways in which the students used Facebook within Dr. Tides’ course on public relations (RQ1b). There was only one student in the class who did not already have a Facebook account prior to this course. However, none of the enrolled
students had ever taken a course where a professor had utilized Facebook in any instructional capacity. Because the course was held in a computer lab classroom, students had extra opportunity to engage with Facebook in addition to any time they spent on it recreationally outside of class. Several of the ways that students used Facebook were a direct result of the way Dr. Tides structured the course. However, some of the students exhibited uses of Facebook in the course that were not intended by the instructor. Like Dr. Tides, the students also had to struggle with discovering how to use Facebook in a new context. While some successful adaptation was observed, students admitted that the technology’s potential, as it relates to an educational context, was not fully realized during the course of the semester.

RQ1b asks “How are students using Facebook within a course that employs it as a learning management system?” From my data analysis, I have categorized seven common uses of Facebook by the students. The uses identified in these categories represent a combination of students’ previously learned behavior with Facebook and new uses, gained through this course. These categories are: obtaining a grade; following along with lectures; communicating with the instructor; coordinating meetings; sharing resources; understanding course concepts; and diverting their attention.

Obtaining a Grade

At the beginning of the semester, students were told that Facebook would be a part of their course and that they would be evaluated on their activity on it. 25% of their overall grade in the course would be based on their Facebook content. If students wanted to receive a favorable grade in the course, they would need to actively participate in the Facebook
assignments. The graded Facebook assignments included responding to weekly discussions and participating in the five ‘Facebook Days.’ Dr. Tides covered the requirements for these assignments on the first day of the course and provided the students with frequent reminders throughout the semester.

Knowing that one-fourth of their overall grade in the course was dependent on the Facebook assignments played a significant role in how the students used the technology. Many of them discussed that point with me when I interviewed them. One student said, “it definitely helps tacking on 25% of your grade to the Facebook page. I mean, I can’t say I would go (on Facebook) if it was 10%...or I would still try, but it wouldn’t be like such a big issue.” Another student also recognized the fact that Facebook would weigh heavily on their grade. “He said he was just grading it for completion and it was 25% of our grade. So that was…it was worth more than our final project. That’s a lot of extra points that might have been harder to get otherwise,” she said. For some, it was intimidating to have so much of the overall grade based on one thing. Rachel told me, “I just get nervous sometimes because Facebook is worth 25% of our grade.” Regardless of whether they viewed the Facebook assignments being such a large percentage of their overall grade as positive or negative, they all realized that they were going to have to complete the assignments if they wanted a high grade. As one student put it, “I mean, it’s a grade. So it’s not really forcing us, but we kind of have to and once we do, we have to research and we have to do all that so we can learn.”

Making sure they received a grade for their work was the primary reason students visited the Facebook course page. When we talked about their use of Facebook, most of them only mentioned going to the page to complete the assignments. Some of the replies I
heard from students included, “I pretty much only visit on ‘Facebook Days’ or when we have to post something for an assignment,” “I guess I only visit it when I get emails that say Dr. Tides posted something to the course page,” “I just did the discussions, that’s it,” “I’m just trying to get [the Facebook assignments] done with. I don’t spend a lot of time on it,” and “I feel like something I just do it just to get it done.” Nothing in their responses indicated to me that they were doing anything on the Facebook course page outside of the assignments. Dr. Tides also sensed this. He told me, “I feel like they’re probably visiting it once a week, when I get out that one assignment or on those Facebook Days.”

When I talked to the students about some of the other content of the Facebook course page, most of them indicated to me that they either did not know about it or did not care about it. For instance, I asked them if they read the information about the internship Dr. Tides posted or if they visited the links to the examples of PR campaigns. Based on their responses, most of them did not bother looking because it was not a graded aspect of the course. One student said, “if we don’t have to look at it for class, then I’m probably not going to.” Another student told me, “every time I went on the group site, I would just go right to the (discussion) topics.”

The students’ comments were supported by what is seen on the Facebook course page. The graded assignments were typically completed by all of the students. However, there was very little added to the other areas of the page. As will be discussed later in more detail, students would occasionally add something that they discovered on their own. For the most part though, when it came to contributing on Facebook, the students’ primary concern was completing the grading assignments.
Following Along with Lectures

Being in a computer lab classroom, all of the students had the advantage of using a computer during class. Sitting in on their sessions, I was able to observe how students used the computers while Dr. Tides gave his lecture. As I noted earlier, Dr. Tides would frequently use Facebook to enhance his lectures. Whenever he did this, I often saw students visit the Facebook course page in order to better follow along with what he was discussing.

One of the most common times that students were observed visiting the Facebook course page was when Dr. Tides discussed what students wrote about in their ‘Facebook Day’ assignments. When he would start talking about the topic, students went on the course page to look over everyone’s responses. This did not happen all at once, however. If some students were not paying close attention to Dr. Tides’ lecture, they did not immediately realize that the discussion had turned to the ‘Facebook Day’ topic. Some students were seen going onto the course page only after they saw another student nearby logged onto Facebook.

While it was not necessary for students to be on the course page during this time, some students found it helpful to have everyone’s comments in front of them. Dr. Tides would frequently reference quotes from students’ posts or ask students to elaborate on their answers, so having the ‘Facebook Day’ discussion thread on the screen aided students in the discussion. During my interviews with the students, one told me, “if we’re talking about the stuff we discussed on a ‘Facebook Day,’ I would pull [the Facebook course page] up because I always want to know what I wrote.” Students also found it helpful to review what the other students said as well. During one discussion, Marie was talking about what she wrote. As
she talked about her post, I observed another student scroll through the page to find Marie’s post so she could follow along with what she was saying.

Outside of the ‘Facebook Day’ discussions, there were many other instances where I observed students visiting the course page during Dr. Tides’ lectures. If Dr. Tides referenced a photo or video he posted on Facebook, students would frequently navigate to it. For instance, some students re-watched the Disney World incident video as the class discussed the PR strategies to the attack. Another situation that resulted in a lot of students navigating to the course page occurred after Dr. Tides had posted information about PRSSA on the website. After mentioning it to the class, two of the students immediately logged on to the course page to read what he had posted. On the other side of the classroom, that domino effect was once again observed. One student had initially pulled up the course page and as she looked over the PRSSA information, another student seated nearby logged on, as well, to read the information herself. As more of them shifted their attention to the course page, a discussion with Dr. Tides about the organization ensued. They wanted to know more about PRSSA and where to find certain information on that website.

When I inquired to the students about the frequency of their visits to Facebook during class, I received an assortment of responses. Some of them indicated that the only time they pulled up the course page during class was whenever Dr. Tides talked about the ‘Facebook Day’ responses. Bonnie though, admitted that she would visit the Facebook course page “anytime I’m in class.” The students’ reasons for why they visited the course page also varied. In general, the students that I spoke to were split between those that visited the course page to follow along with the discussion and those that brought it up simply to
appease Dr. Tides. The most interesting response was from a student who said, “I’ll pull [the Facebook course page] up for [Dr. Tides’] sake, but then I’ll end up actually reading it.” So even though some students did not have the best of intentions for looking at the course page, they still ended up gaining something by having it up during Dr. Tides’ lecture.

Communicating with the Instructor

Facebook offers users a variety of ways to communicate with each other. For example, a user can post a note on another user’s personal page. They can send them a message through Facebook’s email client. Users can also synchronously chat with other members when they are online. Students took advantage of all of these options when communicating with Dr. Tides outside of the classroom. Dr. Tides admitted he is partially responsible for students choosing to speak with him via Facebook. He told me, “throughout the semester, I kept telling them, ‘send me messages over Facebook if that’s more convenient for you, if it’s something you’re more used to’ - in part just to see how they would respond.” While they did not communicate exclusively through Facebook with Dr. Tides, students did take advantage of the site’s various communication tools.

Dr. Tides would often suggest that students contact him through Facebook if they had any questions. When students were working on their individual case projects, Dr. Tides told them that if they needed help, they could post questions on the Facebook course page and he would answer them. Not all of the students opted to seek his help, but those that did received the assistance they needed. An example of this was when a student contacted him through Facebook to discuss her results on the personality quiz he had assigned. The student felt that
her results were not accurate, so she wanted to make sure she had done it correctly before they discussed it in class. Dr. Tides reviewed her work and provided her the assurance that she had completed the assignment correctly.

For some students, they only communicated with Dr. Tides using Facebook when it was required. At one point in the semester, Dr. Tides asked students to contact him privately through Facebook to share their preferences for which topic they wanted to research for their group project. When I asked one student about this particular request, she told me, “I think the only time was when he told us to message him with the order for the groups. That’s the only time I sent him a [Facebook] message.” There were not many instances where Dr. Tides required students to contact him through Facebook, but when he did, they had no reservations with using the technology to do so.

Eventually, the students initiated some of the Facebook communication with Dr. Tides. Near the end of the semester, a student contacted him on Facebook to inquire about her grade. In the message she expressed her dismay over the score she received on the first test and wondered what she could do for the remainder of the semester to improve her grade. In relaying this story to me, Dr. Tides expressed how surprised he was to get a message like this through Facebook. He said,
I never would have imagined getting something like that over Facebook. To me, and I don’t know why, but to me that would have been more the email route, but that was what she was comfortable with. Clearly it’s a one-on-one virtual communication; the same risk that someone’s going to be hacking into on Facebook exists in email also. It surprised me that there was that level of communication and concern about her grade that was sent over Facebook. That threw me for a little bit.

Despite the initial shock over the student choosing Facebook to communicate with him on this subject, Dr. Tides responded to the student’s concerns using Facebook as well.

The chat feature was the least used by students when they communicated with Dr. Tides on Facebook. Dr. Tides indicated that most of the students contacted him by private email message on the Facebook site. However, he did say that “a couple students did ask me questions if I remember correctly over Facebook, you know when I had been logged in, [they] opened up a chat window to ask me something really quickly.” Most of the students, however, never had urgent situations that required immediate responses, which is why the chat feature was not used more frequently.

Communicating with their instructor was something that students did not immediately embrace. Having never used this forum to contact an instructor before, some expressed to me their hesitancy to try it. Those who were initially skeptical of Facebook in the classroom eventually conceded to communicating with Dr. Tides through it. One student admitted, “at first it was emails, but now that I’ve [communicated] with him on Facebook, I would probably just do it through Facebook now.” The students came to appreciate the numerous options Facebook provided as ways in which to contact Dr. Tides. Given that, during the
group interview, so many of them had expressed the problems they experienced in trying to communicate with instructors in their other classes, they were thankful that they could use Facebook as an effective alternative when needing to speak with Dr. Tides.

**Coordinating meetings**

Near the end of the semester, Dr. Tides placed students into groups to work on a final project. Dr. Tides had not included any aspect of Facebook in this project, so I was curious to learn if any of them would utilize it to assist in their work. Having been exposed to Facebook in an educational context for the entire semester, I wanted to see if the students were beginning to view it from a new perspective and whether they would consider using it for their final project.

When I interviewed the students before the project, some of the students informed me that while they were not planning on using Facebook for the actual work on the project, they did intend to use it as a way to establish when and where their group would meet to work on the project. Dustin said, “Yeah, I mean, when we all go to do the project, we won’t do it over Facebook, but me and my partners have talked about when we’re going to get together and everything [on Facebook].” Communicating over Facebook, these students planned on coordinating meeting times to work on their project.

I spoke with the students again after their projects were complete and some of them confirmed to me that they had used Facebook to coordinate their project meetings. They said that they contacted their group members through Facebook in order to set up times or answer quick questions. Bonnie told me that she had used the chat feature a few times while
working on the project. She explained, “yeah, and it was just like brief questions, like ‘have you finished this?’” Through both the chat and email features, Facebook assisted the students in conducting these short conversations to coordinate their efforts.

The students once again used Facebook for coordination purposes when it came to prepare for their final exam. Bonnie told me that she had used Facebook to organize a study group for the final exam. She said, “Yeah, I mean, I use Facebook just to…talk to people to see if they want to get together before the test, just a little bit beforehand at least, to get together or whatnot.” While her group would study for the exam in person, she used Facebook to iron out all of the details of when and where they would meet.

Dr. Tides also told me that he got the sense that students used Facebook as a means of coordination. He said,

I got a sense from a couple of students that they used [Facebook] more as a ‘gotomeeting.com’ like where they communicated back and forth over Facebook about setting up times to get together, but not necessarily on the actual deliverable final product for either the project or the test.

He also added, “But I get the feeling, and a couple of them told me, that they used it to arrange times to get together because they had all ‘friended’ each other by that point.” Based on these comments and what the students told me, students feel comfortable communicating with each other on Facebook for quick, basic conversations, but still require face-to-face interactions. When working on more involved tasks, the communication functions available on Facebook were not sufficient for the students.
While they appreciated Facebook’s ability to help them coordinate their meetings, none of the students expressed an interest in using Facebook to work on the actual project. Pam said the reason her group was not going to use Facebook was because it was too difficult to collaborate with multiple people on there. She said,

See, what we did was we got each other’s phone numbers cuz I mean, I think the Facebook chat thing always kind of messes up for me for some reason. It’s like [my group members] had mentioned ‘why don’t we all go on Facebook at 8:00 this night’ and I was like ‘I’m not going to do that, because it’s not going to work and if I get disconnected, then I’ll feel bad.’ Plus, we all three can’t talk at the same time, so we just did phone numbers to like meet somewhere.

Students did not believe that Facebook was suited for involved, collaborative tasks like the group project. However, they found it convenient to use Facebook when it came to speaking briefly with each other in order to coordinate meetings.

**Sharing Resources**

The network created by the Facebook course page allowed members to easily share resources with each other. Students could post content on the course page to share with the entire class. The ‘Wall’ on the course page served as a bulletin board where any student in the group could post information for everyone to immediately see. They also could send resources directly to another person by contacting them through Facebook. Facebook served as an electronic forum that students could use to share both course material and outside content related to the course.
Most of the resources added by the students were found in their ‘Facebook Day’ posts. Dr. Tides had encouraged students to seek out additional resources to support their arguments, so many of them included links to articles, photos, and videos in their posts. Reflecting back on this assignment, Dr. Tides told me he was pleased with students’ efforts to find outside material. He said, “the one thing that the students did do well with the [Facebook debates] that I thought, was going out, doing the research to find arguments to support their side, whatever it may be, pro or con.” He liked that they were finding information that they may not have discovered otherwise and sharing it with the rest of the class. “A lot of the websites that they pulled are ones that are of the watchdog groups for public relations, the industry. So it’s exposing them to things that I might not have ever brought into the class,” he said. Dr. Tides also was impressed with the fact that students were not duplicating resources. They were able to find unique sources based on their personal search methods. He said, “some of the topics were pretty narrow in their scope, but they seemed to be coming from different resources and backgrounds. I didn’t see a lot of people using the same websites over and over again to support their claim.”

While everyone made some effort to contribute, there were some students who provided more than others in their posts. Dr. Tides could tell based on students’ posts, which ones were making a real effort to find sufficient evidence for their argument. This effort was reflected in their work on other assignments. In speaking about the students who used Facebook the most extensively for the course, he said, “they are the ones who have taken those extra steps to go find YouTube clips, to find resources to back up their arguments. They seem to be doing better. I know on test #1 it was reflected in it.” Those that took the
time to find and post extra material ended up having a deeper understanding of the course material and experienced better success on the exams as a result.

Occasionally students would add material to the course page outside of their ‘Facebook Day’ posts. For example, Marie posted links on the ‘Wall’ of the course page. These were links relevant to the course, but not directly related to the ‘Facebook Day’ topics. One link was for an article discussing the PR tactics by the 2008 presidential candidates. Another link went to a website that detailed different types of PR people. It is interesting to note that Marie was the only student who did not have a Facebook account prior to the start of this course. She also never spent any time on Facebook during class unless it was specifically course-related. Despite her inexperience with the site, she took the initiative to seek out information related to the course and share it with the rest of the class.

It was apparent that Marie took pride in her work and wanted to share her discoveries with the other students. After adding a link to the course page, Marie approached Dr. Tides after class and asked him if he read the article she had recently posted. He said, “I’ve only read a little bit about it.” Even though he admitted that he had not yet read it entirely, he seemed pleased that she had made the effort to add the article to the course page and share it with the class.

In some cases, students shared resources at the request of their fellow students. These requests most often came prior to an exam. The students would visit Facebook before each exam in search of content that they sought to help them study. Marie told me she went to Facebook “before the test to review to see if I need anything, like one of our ‘Facebook Days’ to make sure I understood what people were saying.”
student needed some information that was not posted on the course page, they could still use Facebook to obtain it. Students contacted one another through the site to see if anyone else had the information they needed. Rachel explained how she assisted another student who needed material from a day when they had been absent. She said,

I like the discussion boards because I remember one time someone in the class missed something and she put up a post and I wrote back and told her what she had missed.

So I feel like if I had been sick, it was something I could have done or it would have applied to me.

Examples of this were also seen in the study guide thread. Dr. Tides told me how he saw requests posted in the thread by student seeking copies of lectures from a class session they had missed. Dr. Tides did not upload his PowerPoint lecture notes to the course page. If a student deleted or never received the email containing the PowerPoint lectures, they did not have the information. Using Facebook, they asked the class if someone could send them the notes they were missing. Posting requests like this in the study guide thread provided students with an easy way to reach the entire class quickly in hopes of getting the required materials. The community of students created through the Facebook course page provided everyone with an easy way to share and receive important course information.

Understanding Course Concepts

While there was evidence that students did not read everything that was posted on the course page, I did find examples of students going there and seeking out information in order to help their performance during the course. I saw students navigating through the Facebook
course page searching for content that would give them a better understanding of the course’s concepts. By reading the posted information, students had a clearer idea of what it meant to work in the public relations industry. They would use the information they read to help them complete assignments or prepare for exams.

Students varied in how selective they were when choosing to consume content on the Facebook course page in order to help them understand the course concepts. Some of the students stated that they only took the time to watch the videos that were posted on the course page. Jim said he did this “because it doesn’t take as much effort.” Pam gave a similar explanation while talking about looking at the various ‘Facebook Day’ posts. “If I’m skimming through and I see a link, I’m more likely to click on the link than read the response.” Instead of reading what students personally wrote, she preferred checking out the content provided by the external links in students’ posts.

The students who chose to limit themselves to only watching videos on the Facebook course page still gained some additional understanding of the course’s concepts. They were able to use the information they learned from the videos to answer questions on the exam. As Dr. Tides explained,
I actually put one question on the test that I figured nobody would actually get right because it related very specifically to one of these YouTube videos. And surprisingly almost three quarters of the class got it right. And it was probably one of the more difficult questions, that if I had not been someone who had watched it, I would have chosen a different answer because what was the right answer didn’t seem like it would be right given the question. I don’t want to think that they all cleverly guessed it because it went against logic. So while some people are writing some short answers at times and others have longer ones, they’re watching videos at least to an extent I’m guessing.

It may have been the easier option, but students did benefit from simply watching the posted videos. They used the information contained in this content and applied it to the concepts covered in this course.

Other students made more of an effort to read what their peers had posted on the course page. Even among those who admitted to reading content on Facebook, students varied in how much effort they put into digesting the content. Some opted to superficially read what their peers had written. As one student put it, “I would say I’m just kind of skimming over other people’s answers.” Another student had a similar approach to what they read. She said, “I’ll read someone’s (post) right before mine, but to be honest, I’m not going to take the time to read everyone’s responses.” For Rachel, she chose not to read everything because she felt there was too much information to sort through. She explained to me,
It’s just information overload when you open [Facebook] up. I just don’t even know where to start, which is why I typically just look at the pictures or look at a video and then maybe read one or two just to try and figure out what’s going on and then I’ll write my own.

Rachel had to be more selective about what she chose to consume in order not to get overwhelmed by the extensive content that was posted on the site. Even with only twelve students in the course, there was still a considerable amount of information for the students to sift through in order to find the specific information that they would find most beneficial.

There were some students, however, who appreciated having everyone contribute opinions and information in a public space like the Facebook course page. As one student said, “I think [Facebook] is pretty effective because you can also look at other people’s responses if you need help.” Sharing her enthusiasm for having the discussions take place on Facebook, Sally said, “I just like hearing other people’s opinions, because otherwise if they just emailed Dr. Tides, I wouldn’t have any idea.” These students particularly appreciated the ability to read what everyone else wrote when it came time to do the ‘Facebook Day’ debates. Rachel told me, “I usually read [students’ posts] right before I’m getting ready to do my own so I don’t go out and duplicate what they’re saying.” Students, like Rachel, who took the time to read everyone’s response, were able to learn what their peers had to say and then build on those ideas in their own post.

Learning collaboratively is exactly what Dr. Tides hoped would happen when he used Facebook to create these assignments. Instead of understanding a concept strictly from a personal perspective, each student was now reading about these public relations issues from
multiple perspectives. In our final interview, Dr. Tides mentioned how he saw students benefitting from having to read each other’s posts on Facebook when learning about these concepts. He said,

Some people viewed [the debate topic] as a problem, some people viewed it as an opportunity, and I think for some people it took them by surprise that you could look at it from that other mindset. In an ideal world, they are looking at these [Facebook posts] and saying, ‘OK, well maybe I don’t have the answer, but there are different ways to look at things.’

Unlike those who merely listened to Dr. Tides’ lectures, the students who fully read all of the posts gained an understanding of these public relations concepts from multiple perspectives.

**Diverting Their Attention**

Being in a computer lab classroom, students were afforded the opportunity to visit Facebook during class. However, time spent on the site by the students was not always exclusive to the course group page. I frequently observed students visiting other Facebook pages as a distraction, particularly during Dr. Tides’ lectures. Facebook provided students with an escape from listening to their instructor.

During the time that I sat in on this course, I witnessed students using Facebook in a variety of ways as a diversion. The most common activity involved students visiting their friends’ profile pages. Most often, I would witness them visiting the personal pages of people who were not enrolled in the course. However, students would occasionally visit the personal pages of classmates if they were already ‘friends.’ On on particular occasion, I
noticed one of the students viewing Dr. Tides’ personal page, checking out his latest photos. Typically, when students visited their friends’ pages, their activity consisted primarily of idly looking at that user’s posted photos. As one student explained to me, “You get bored in class. It’s something to do.” For these students, flipping through Facebook photos helped pass the time as Dr. Tides would lecture.

Students would also use Facebook’s numerous communication tools, like their email client and chat function during class time. Students communicated with both their fellow classmates and outside friends. While I typically avoided seeing what students were writing in these messages, so as not to invade their privacy, sometimes I caught a glance at the content. During one class, I saw a student creating a mass email that served as a party invitation. I also was able to briefly witness one Facebook chat conversation that took place between two students. I did not look long enough to see the entire conversation, but I did see one of the students type ‘this class is so boring’ to another student. Students typically kept these communications brief, so as not to arouse suspicion from Dr. Tides.

Days on which Dr. Tides primarily lectured lent to providing students with more time and interest in perusing Facebook for purposes that were unrelated to the course. Dr. Tides sent students an email before each class containing the PowerPoint presentation for that day’s lecture. The lack of attention most students showed to Dr. Tides while he talked about these PowerPoint notes indicated that these students felt they did not need to listen to his lecture. Dr. Tides tried to curb this inattentiveness by specifically omitting certain pieces of information from each PowerPoint presentation that the students would have to add once
they heard it in class. Using this format, I frequently saw students flip back and forth between Facebook and the PowerPoint presentation while Dr. Tides lectured.

The time students spent on Facebook as Dr. Tides spoke varied. For about half of the class, the majority of time was spent on Facebook or other websites. The only time they would flip over to the PowerPoint presentation was if they sensed that there was something important that they needed to add to their notes, or if Dr. Tides was nearby and could see their computer screen. Four or five of the students primarily stayed on the PowerPoint presentation, but occasionally would visit Facebook if there was a lull in the lecture or if they had finished writing their notes. Finally, there were three or four students who never visited Facebook during class unless Dr. Tides asked them to for course-related reasons.

Those students who spent a lot of time on Facebook for non-pedagogical purposes did not limit their visits to only when Dr. Tides lectured. They would also go on the site when Dr. Tides would give the class time to work on class assignments or activities. During one class session, Dr. Tides had given the students an in-class activity to complete in groups. While most students worked on the activity, I observed Pam ignoring her group and instead looking at various friends’ photos on Facebook. She eventually stopped browsing Facebook to help her group, however she had to call Dr. Tides over to the group and ask for his assistance on some of the questions. This likely would not have been needed had she been paying attention to him originally when he explained the assignment.

Most students who used Facebook for non-pedagogical purposes typically made attempts to hide this from Dr. Tides. Since Dr. Tides walked around a lot during his lectures, the students who used Facebook as a distraction had to flip over to the PowerPoint slides
whenever he came near. This was particularly true for any students who chatted on Facebook. If Dr. Tides saw a student with Facebook open, they could justify that they were on it for course related purposes. However, there was no justification for chatting with someone during class. When a student was chatting, they had to remain vigilant in their flipping. There was no visual cue on the screen to indicate someone has replied to a chat message unless Facebook was on the screen. Students were eager to see if there was a reply, but also did not want to be caught by Dr. Tides, so they ended up being the ones who I viewed switching screens most frequently throughout class.

Despite their efforts to guise their activity, most students assumed that Dr. Tides was wise to their activity. As Bonnie put it, “I mean, there’s no way he doesn’t know.” I heard a similar response in the other interview session when a student said, “I feel like when [Dr. Tides] looks out and he sees everyone staring at their screen all typing, he knows we’re not looking at his notes.” Dr. Tides confirmed these assumptions when I interviewed him. He mentioned how he frequently saw students looking at photos and doing other activities on Facebook that were not related to the course. He also told me how he observed students changing what was on their screen when he would walk near them.

Some students were more overt than others in their non-pedagogical usage of Facebook. The most egregious example of this came from Dustin, who was not content on simply visiting Facebook to stave off his boredom. During one class Dustin brought his laptop with him and set it in a chair next to him in an attempt to obscure it from Dr. Tides’ view. As Dr. Tides lectured I saw Dustin visiting Facebook on the lab computer while using iTunes on his laptop. In addition, he would also sporadically text someone on his cell phone.
Between all of this activity, it would have been impossible for Dr. Tides not to realize that Dustin’s focus was not on the lecture.

There was also a unique instance where a student purposefully switched onto Facebook when Dr. Tides approached him. I observed this student working on a course paper that was already past due. This student felt it would be more favorably perceived if Dr. Tides saw he had Facebook on his screen rather than working on the late paper during class. I do not know if Dr. Tides actually saw his screen or not, but if he did, he did not make a comment about it to the student. It is interesting, though, that the student did not even attempt to have the PowerPoint presentation for that day’s lecture open. Even though he was working on a paper instead of paying attention, he still chose to have Facebook open to occasionally distract him from his work.

Dr. Tides was well aware of the students who spent the majority of their time on Facebook for non-course related objectives. Referring to one of them he said, “I don’t think there has been one class where she hasn’t been on Facebook looking at pictures and doing everything else but paying attention. And I think, to an extent, it’s reflected in her grade.” By the end of the semester, Dr. Tides was fed up with her behavior. In our final interview, he told me,

You know, one student in particular, if I could have turned her computer off with a remote control I would have done it every day. It was clearly one of those that was there to be there, but not really to get the lecture.
While Dr. Tides did not appreciate students using Facebook as a diversion from the lecture, he also admitted that he felt students would be doing this regardless of whether or not he had incorporated Facebook into his course.

When students visited Facebook in class as a way to divert their attention from Dr. Tides’ lectures, it was not merely a distraction for them, but also for the student who sat next to them. Students’ Facebook usage had a habit of becoming contagious. A student would see one of their classmates on Facebook and it would prompt them to stop listening to the lecture and navigate to Facebook, as well. Other times, the distractions would be deliberate. Students would attract the attention of someone sitting nearby and prompt them look at something on their screen. One time, I saw Laura say to the girl next to her, ‘hey, did you see this?’ referring to a Facebook photo displayed on her screen. Soon, the girl next to her logged onto Facebook and was checking out the photo, as well. Dustin and Bonnie were two students who were particularly connected in their usage of Facebook. Both students used Facebook as a regular distraction tool during class. However, if one of them was absent, the other did not spend as much time on Facebook during that particular class session. When they were both present, however, they would talk to each other on Facebook, prompting each other to look at certain photos they found of interest. Together, they heavily relied on Facebook to avert their attention from what Dr. Tides was trying to teach them.

I talked with the students at great length about their use of Facebook during class that was not related to course material. Most students were very open about the fact that Facebook served as an easy distraction when they were in class. “During class, I would go to [Facebook] a lot. And it was like you would pull [the course page] up because you’re in
class, but then you would start to wander around,” one student admitted. Another told me, “When you’re on Facebook, you get distracted and you’re looking at everyone’s stuff.” With all of the features and activities available on Facebook, it was easy for the students to find something that was more entertaining than listening to the lecture. As one student said, “I know now you can chat on Facebook, so when I’m sitting in class bored and I see one of my friends is on, rather than sending text messages, you can just be like ‘hey.’ I admit, I do that.” The fact that they were supposed to be using Facebook for class purposes did not seem to deter some from continuing to use it for external entertainment during class. One student firmly stated, “I would be on Facebook [while Dr. Tides lectures] whether we had a group page or not.” Other students were not as resolute about how much they would use it. If Facebook had not been integrated into this course, one student said, “I’d be on it, but maybe a little bit less; maybe a bit more discreet about it.” Regardless of how appropriate they believed their activity on Facebook was during class, they continued to do it anyways, in part, because Dr. Tides never said anything about it.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the many uses Dr. Tides and the students had for Facebook throughout this course. These various uses illustrate the different ways in which the participants integrated Facebook into an educational context. I began this chapter by listing the ways that Dr. Tides used Facebook to help students learn about public relations. With Facebook, he attempted to have students learn as a community and become active learners. He also used Facebook to enhance his lectures and foster more discussion with his students.
inside the classroom. It was also useful in helping Dr. Tides adapt to his students’ needs. Finally, Dr. Tides was able to use frequently use Facebook as an example when discussing the public relations industry.

The students also found several additional uses for Facebook once Dr. Tides had introduced it into the course. Many of these ways were in response to Dr. Tides’ actions with Facebook. They were able to obtain a grade in the course from the assignments Dr. Tides put on Facebook. Students also used the material Dr. Tides posted on the Facebook course page to assist them in understanding the concepts from the in-class lectures. Facebook also provided students with an efficient, new way to communicate with Dr. Tides whenever they had a question.

Collaboration between students was also realized, because of the inclusion of Facebook. Students used Facebook during the semester to coordinate meetings with their group partners, share outside material with the class, and gain additional perspectives on the course concepts from their peers. Finally, because this class took place in a computer lab classroom, students took advantage of the opportunity to visit Facebook during class time as a social diversion during Dr. Tides’ lectures.
CHAPTER V

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

Overview

In this chapter, I present the results of data analysis for RQ2: What social interactions occur when Facebook is used in an educational context? During the semester, I observed the participants’ social interactions and the power dynamic that developed between Dr. Tides and his students. In the first section of this chapter, I present the results for RQ2a (characteristics of participants’ social interactions). Through my observations and interviews, I detected five common features in the participants’ interactions – either about using Facebook or on Facebook. The second section of the chapter focuses on the data from RQ2b (the power dynamic between the students and the instructor). At times during the course, I observed the traditional teacher-student hierarchical relationship. But there were also examples of how Facebook facilitated a flattening of that hierarchy. Over the semester, the relationship between Dr. Tides and the students varied as they all tried to learn how to use Facebook in this new way. I report on how role negotiation, role maintenance, and role defiance were all displayed at various times during the semester.

Characteristics of Students’ Social Interactions

This section covers the various interactions exhibited by students with each other and with their instructor (RQ2a). As stated in the results of the pre-course survey, students were
unfamiliar with how to use Facebook in an educational context prior to this class. This new experience provided all of the participants with additional ways to interact with each other. The data analysis revealed two subsets of results related to their social interactions; participants’ social interactions about Facebook and their social interaction taking place on Facebook. Each subset seemed relevant to RQ2a, which asks, “What characterizes students’ social interactions in a course using Facebook?” In their interactions about using Facebook, participants illustrated uncertainty and concern. The participants’ interactions on Facebook were defined as expedient, apathetic, and unidirectional.

Interactions About Facebook

Uncertainty. While most of the students were already active members on Facebook, using it for educational purposes was something new. Facebook was presented from a different perspective that was not familiar to them. This produced a level of uncertainty in the students seen throughout the semester and expressed to me during our interviews. Through their communication, they indicated several times that they were unsure of how to act on Facebook now that it was a part of the course’s framework.

This uncertainty was displayed immediately as Dr. Tides discussed with the students on the first day of class as to how Facebook was going to be used in the course. Several students mentioned this general sense of confusion with me when I interviewed them at the end of the semester. Rachel said, “I didn’t really understand it at first…just like how it would accomplish anything.” Jim added, “I didn’t understand how we would have our class on Facebook…like I didn’t understand how we would participate and work it out.” Students
did not have a reference point to help them understand how Facebook could function in the classroom.

As Dr. Tides outlined the various Facebook assignments on that first day, students tried to figure out how radically different this would be from their normal use of Facebook. During that class, one student asked Dr. Tides, “Is this just in a Facebook thread thing?” referring to the discussion assignments. Dr. Tides tried to explain how the group page would have a discussion board where students would post their responses. It was difficult for the students to fully understand what he meant, though, because he was not able to provide any visual reference for them. This course was originally in a different classroom, which did not have any computers for Dr. Tides to use. While Dr. Tides was able to move the class into a computer lab classroom by their second session, it was difficult explaining how Facebook would be used on that first day. Students had to initially rely on his verbal explanations to try and comprehend exactly how Facebook was going to be used in the course. This posed a particular problem for Marie, who was the only student in the course who did not already have a Facebook account. After Dr. Tides assigned students on that first day to join the Facebook course page, Marie contacted him, unsure if she had properly signed up for Facebook. Dr. Tides explained to me,

she sent me a message over that first weekend just asking to make sure that this was the right thing she was supposed to be doing and I was like, ‘Yep, this is a new environment for us all to have class here.’
Never having done this before, Marie wanted to be certain that she completed everything necessary to join the course page. In his response, Dr. Tides did his best to assure her she had done everything correctly.

This uncertainty continued to be exhibited by students during the initial assignments on Facebook. Before the first ‘Facebook Day,’ one of the students had Dr. Tides take time in class to go over, once more, his expectations for the assignment. He once again explained how each student was to make two posts on the course page; their initial argument - which needed to include outside sources, and their rebuttal post - which needed to address the argument made by a student from the opposite side of the debate. Even after this review, some of the students still felt the need to contact Dr. Tides to see if the videos they had selected were good examples for supporting their debate argument before they posted them on the Facebook course page.

Likewise, students occasionally expressed confusion over the weekly Facebook discussions. When Dr. Tides reminded students to do their discussion post before the next class, one student, Monica, said she thought the response was due that day. She also claimed that she did not know that he wanted their responses to be posted on Facebook. It was unclear as to why she had such uncertainty over completing this assignment. Even though she had completed Facebook discussion assignments previously in the course, there was something about this particular one that she did not understand. Dr. Tides explained to Monica, once more, the guidelines for the assignment.

While Dr. Tides always helped students who came to him, unsure of what to do, it was his initial explanations for assignments that often led to students experiencing confusion.
In my dialogue with the students at the midpoint of the semester, one spoke about a recent Facebook discussion assignment that they had recently been given. She said to me, “he posted something the other day, too, and I was like, ‘what are we supposed to write for that?’ I didn’t know if we were supposed to or not.” At the end of the semester, this same student shared with me her frustration over the vague nature of the final ‘Facebook Day.’ “I was overwhelmed because there was so many ways you could go about it,” she shared. Students wanted better explanations from Dr. Tides about these assignments, particularly since they had never previously completed homework on Facebook.

A lack of evaluation on any of the students’ Facebook assignments contributed to some of their uncertainty. Dr. Tides never provided the students with specific grades or feedback after individual Facebook assignments. The students had no indicators to help gauge the quality of their work, aside from Dr. Tides’ general explanation that he was “not concerned so much about grammar and punctuation” and just wanted students to properly respond to the topic. Unless they specifically sought his feedback, students had no way of knowing whether or not they were doing acceptable work.

The assignment that caused the most uncertainty was also the one that most heavily relied on the use of Facebook. When Dr. Tides assigned students to go on Facebook and complete a personality quiz, there were several students who were unsure of what they needed to do. The problems began with Dr. Tides’ in-class explanation of the assignment. He informed students of this assignment at the very end of a class session and showed them his results, which were displayed on his personal Facebook page. However, his explanation was not entirely clear, prompting Dustin to come up to him after class and ask if he could
explain again how to find the personality quiz on Facebook. At the beginning of the next class period, several students told Dr. Tides that they were unable to find or complete the quiz on Facebook. Other students elaborated during our interview that while they eventually found the quiz, it was not easy to locate. As Bonnie put it, “if he had posted the link to [the personality quiz], if there was one, it would be easy to click on it.” Instead of providing a link to the quiz, Dr. Tides instructed students to locate the quiz using Facebook’s search function. A current search for the term personality quiz yielded 298 results on Facebook. Students who did not pay close attention to Dr. Tides’ in-class demonstration were then uncertain as to which quiz he specifically wanted them to take.

Even the students who were able to locate the quiz had some difficulties. Due to technical glitches with the quiz, some students were unable to obtain their results. Without this information, they did not know what to report to Dr. Tides, who had asked that they submit their results to him for the assignment. One student expressed the inability to locate where it listed your personality type. Bonnie, specifically, explained the problems she had with it. She stated,

Well, I had a problem with finding it, and then when I did, I answered it, but it didn’t, like I guess it was supposed to show four or five letters, which showed the abbreviation of what your personality type was, but mine didn’t pop up, so I pretty much took this twenty question quiz and didn’t have an answer. So I Facebook messaged [Dr. Tides] and I was like…I can give you all of this and that, but I can’t tell you what my [personality] type is.
The technical glitches with the quiz left Bonnie unsure of what to do. She knew Dr. Tides wanted this information to help place the students in groups for their final project, but she could not access the information and was left wondering what she should do.

Even though the students had been using Facebook in this course for several weeks, this was the first assignment that required students to explore other parts of Facebook beyond their course page. Faced with this new assignment, the students were looking for some more specific directions from Dr. Tides. From their perspective, the instructions were not clear enough, leaving them uncertain of how to proceed on the assignment. However, according to Dr. Tides, the problems with the personality quiz assignment were more of a result of absenteeism. When I asked him about this quiz in our final interview, he said, “the people who reported having trouble finding it, and I think there may be some posts in there like, ‘where did you find it?’ - something along those lines…the ones who made those statements…were the ones who weren’t in class.” On the day he discussed this event, a quarter of the class was absent. While the students who were not there would have been at a distinct disadvantage from missing Dr. Tides’ in-class explanation, the confusion exhibited by the students extended beyond those who were absent that day. Ultimately, there were a number of contributing factors that led to the students expressing such uncertainty about how to complete the assignment.

Dr. Tides also suffered from uncertainty at times when trying to use Facebook. He particularly had a problem when it came to figuring out how to communicate with the students. There were times when he was not sure whether to contact them through email or Facebook. He did not want to over-saturate the students with messages, so he tended to only
contact them through one medium. “The way that I looked at it was, when I’m sending a message...their Facebook account is automatically kicking you an email. So I didn’t want to send them yet another message [through email],” Dr. Tides said. Complicating things was the fact that there are several places on Facebook where you can post your message. He told me,

I just wasn’t sure which forum to use to actually get the information across, because you’ve got [Facebook] messages, the Wall, you’ve got the discussion board, which a lot of students used as just posting basic messages, rather than trying to have a conversation. So it was a little confusing in the way that you could send messages and what actually was preferred.

The Wall on the Facebook course page, in particular, made it difficult for Dr. Tides to decide how to communicate with the students. As he explained,
The Wall I had a problem with; not necessarily that it was there, I just really didn’t know how to use it. It was one of those where I understand the function and the purpose of the Wall…A lot of the things that I would post on there, like announcements and webinars and things like that, I would typically get through email. And [I] never really understood what I should be posting on a Wall vs. sending on an email. And the same when I would send a message to the group as a whole. I mean, because it comes across as an email. So it was kind of one of those that I found myself throughout the semester trying to figure out what to do with it. Like what information do I post here, versus posting it in the discussion board? So I had a little bit of difficulty with that; trying to figure out exactly what information they wanted, they needed, and what was the best deliver mechanism for that.

There were just too many choices for Dr. Tides and not enough evidence to determine the best method.

Dr. Tides also suggested that the students suffered from a similar problem. They had difficulty knowing where to put information on the Facebook course page, as well. He mentioned to me, “there were a couple of students who, for whatever reason, posted things, that I asked to be sent to me, to the Wall, or to the discussion board.” Facebook has a lot of different areas and many of them have similar functions, so students were not always clear as to what belonged in what area. Explaining the students’ decision-making as to where to place content, Dr. Tides said, “I think part of that just falls back to…you’ve got so many options where to post things, text space, ‘where do you want me to send it?’; and you know,
they chose to put it wherever.” A few of the students confirmed this to me in our interview. Dustin confessed,

> There was a time when we had that case study paper due and I was like freaking out, so I sent him one on email and I just copied and pasted it to Facebook cuz I didn’t know which one he really checked first.

Another student spoke more broadly about the ambiguous nature of the various areas on the Facebook course page. Rachel said, “I’ve never had Facebook for a class before so I was just kind of…I felt like I was confused…I think there was kind of a lot of iffy places that we weren’t sure about when we used it.” For students and the instructor alike, Facebook presented a steep learning curve that they struggled to understand.

Dr. Tides attributed most of the students’ uncertainty to the novelty of Facebook in the classroom. “I just think that because it was something new, they really weren’t sure how to respond to it. I wouldn’t say that they were scared, but just a little unsure,” he told me. This uncertainty was the part that Dr. Tides believed students least liked about using Facebook in his classroom. In our final interview, he admitted,

> For students, I think the worst part would probably be that at times [Facebook] was very unorganized. Not knowing where to send messages, not knowing which channels or sections to put them in. Again, the newness of it all. A virtual debate, I would guess not many of them have done that sort of thing before.

When it came to using Facebook for educational purposes, students had to learn along the way. Trying something new can be exciting, but it can also produce a lot of confusion, which can lead to uncertainty, as was displayed in this particular case.
Concern. In talking about the students’ uncertainty, Dr. Tides mentioned that he did not think they were scared about using Facebook in his course. Scared may be too strong of a word, but the data suggests that the students did occasionally have concerns using Facebook for educational purposes.

One notable issue addressed in the interviews that related to this concern was the students’ privacy on Facebook. Most of the students said they did not feel their security was an issue. As one student put it, “the same risk that someone’s going to be hacking into on Facebook exists in email also.” They believed that the risk associated with using Facebook was no greater than any other online tool used in education. Great lengths were taken prior to the start of this study to ensure that the use of Facebook in the course would in no way violate the students’ privacy. The opinions expressed by the students confirm that those efforts were successful. While students did not specifically verbalize any concern with the privacy issue, one thought that some others might not feel as comfortable about using Facebook in the classroom. She stated,

I don’t think very many students are going to be open-minded to it. I guess a lot of people probably have things like on their Facebook that they don’t want their teachers to see, like drinking and stuff. People are saying that Facebook is so incriminating these days, like you don’t want more authority figures seeing you drinking. I don’t know. I just feel like a lot of people have become paranoid about Facebook.

She thought that the general concern some have regarding the security of their information on Facebook may prevent them from being open to the idea of using Facebook in the classroom.
Though these students did not seem to be overly concerned about their privacy, they did converse about the lack of anonymity when adding content on Facebook. As was seen in the results of the Facebook Papers study, these students became more aware of their public personas when using social networking in this capacity. Most seemed to understand that their name would be permanently attached to whatever they typed and that all of their added content could be read by every other student at any time. This was especially true when it came to the ‘Facebook Day’ debates. Students were concerned about what they wrote for various reasons. One student was careful in what she wrote, so as not to repeat anyone else’s ideas. “I want to be able to debate with someone, but if I read hers and I haven’t even researched it myself, I’m afraid my answer will be too similar to hers; like I didn’t do my own research,” she said. Others were afraid that they would offend the opposing side in the debate. One student said, “I think it’s weird to [debate other students]. I don’t want to call one person out, someone who I don’t even know that well and be like, ‘you’re wrong.’” For most students, however, the biggest concern was not embarrassing themselves by what they posted. As Dustin bluntly put it, “because if I’m talking [on Facebook] about it, I don’t want to look like an idiot.” Responding to that, Bonnie added,

But another thing he just said about people feeling stupid, like, sometimes I’ll write a sentence and I’ll read it back and I’ll feel like people that know me know that I talk like this, but these are people I don’t know, so I’ll erase it and kind of reword it. In order to avoid this embarrassment, some students took extra precautions. “You want to make sure your grammar and punctuation and everything looks ok [on Facebook]. I have my
stuff to post for today’s class, but I’m gonna put it on Microsoft Word (first) to make sure,” a student confessed.

A similar concern was expressed when the discussion turned to the problematic Facebook study guide Dr. Tides tried to initiate. The students told me how they were not comfortable with putting their own questions up in this thread. Marie said, “and you don’t want to say something that might stump somebody else because when I posted mine, I was like ‘oh crud, why did I post that?’ I just really didn’t know…it was kind of awkward.” Dr. Tides also sensed that students had apprehensions about posting questions in the study guide thread. When we talked about it, he told me, “it puts people into the position to where they don’t want to, because it’s like ‘hey I’m going to ask this question that’s really easy’ and it’s going to make them look stupid or something.” He also talked about how students’ concern about appearing stupid related to the competitive nature that the classroom breeds. He went on to say,

I think another part of it, and something that is one thing that probably needs to be talked about with having class in this environment is that when you post questions and things like that it does open you up to everyone knowing you don’t have those notes. Granted we’re not in the competitive type environment of a law school or something like that, but not everybody in the class gets along, I’m sure. I don’t know anyone that hates somebody else or has problems with, but someone sees that person X doesn’t have the notes and they don’t get along particularly well, they may not respond.
Because everything is so public on Facebook, some students became very guarded. They wanted to make a good impression and appear to be intelligent in the eyes of the other students and the instructor.

Upon hearing about these concerns of embarrassment during the interviews, some of the others students tried to alleviate their fears. Many of them admitted that they would not think any less of another student if they made an error in their post. “I don’t really judge people on that thing,” one student said. Another student added,

If someone wrote the wrong thing, I wouldn’t think they were stupid. I would think they just messed up, so I would not expect anyone to think I was an idiot because I forgot a period or something like that. I would just think they write because they had to.

Contrarily, one particular student confessed that he had not even considered the possibility that other were judging his responses. He said to me, “I don’t read other people’s (posts) so I assume they aren’t going to take the time to read mine, but I don’t know if that’s true or not.” These comments were not expressed until the final interview at the end of the semester. For those students who were concerned about what they wrote, their work throughout the semester was affected by this fear.

Interactions on Facebook

Expedient. Now that Facebook was being used in their course, students had an expeditious way of contacting Dr. Tides and each other. Students found this to be a positive aspect of using Facebook in education and expressed this to me on a number of occasions.
One student said, “Facebook is convenient and it’s another way I can contact Dr. Tides.” Another student specifically mentioned how they liked that Dr. Tides not only had Facebook in his course, but also had an account on it. Darlene said, “I think it’s better that he is in [Facebook] because we can ask him questions and send him messages.” Facebook provided them with a quick way of getting in touch with Dr. Tides whenever they needed help.

The quick and convenient manner in which students could communicate on Facebook with Dr. Tides was seen as particularly positive, given the problems that some mentioned having with instructors in other courses. One student said, “I wish all of the other teachers would [respond to students quickly] too, because it’s really annoying when you have a question and you don’t know the answer.” They explained that most of their teachers had limited availability, while Dr. Tides assisted them all the time. “I think that these older teachers are used to the day being done, whereas Dr. Tides, to get him, it would take five minutes to talk to him on Facebook, whereas an older professor, it would probably take an hour,” explained another student.

Dr. Tides’ availability on Facebook was a determining factor for many students in how they chose to communicate with him. As one student put it, “it seems to be a quicker response than emailing professors because I guess he might use it as often as we do.” Dustin told me a specific story of how helpful Dr. Tides was when he contacted him through Facebook. He explained,
Today, as a matter of fact, I sent him a Facebook message saying…‘is the thing going to be due today?’ I thought today was the Facebook Day cuz it hadn’t been posted yet. By 12, he was like, ‘yeah.’ He got back to me pretty quickly. He was just like, ‘Yeah, I was a little bit delayed, it’s gonna be due by like 5 tomorrow.’ And I was like, ‘oh thanks.’

Likewise, most students in the class appreciated that Dr. Tides was frequently available on Facebook and that he responded quickly when they sent him a question on there. One student revealed,

He got back to both of those [messages] really quickly, so I mean I would probably just do it through Facebook now cuz I feel like he can tell when he gets on that and see the status of people…I felt like he set up the Facebook account for a reason, so I mean that’s how I contact him.

This sentiment was shared by most of the students who used one of the various communication options that Facebook provided (email, chat, post, etc.) to reach Dr. Tides in a hurry throughout the semester.

Students also used Facebook to quickly reach each other during the semester. They could easily communicate with their classmates on Facebook because they were all networked through the shared course page. Since everyone was required to visit the course page at least once a week to complete the discussion assignments, the students knew that they could contact someone else in the class and receive a response in a relatively short amount of time. One student mentioned that the expedience of Facebook would come in handy as she prepared to work on her group project. She said, “I think Facebook would be the best way
(to contact group members). I think email takes forever to get back and I don’t see anyone use AIM (AOL Instant Messenger) anymore because everyone puts up away messages all the time.” Most of these students were already using Facebook as a means to communicate with friends, so it was only natural that they would use it to quickly speak with their fellow classmates as well.

Dr. Tides was also thankful for the expedience Facebook provided when he needed to communicate with his students. In his previous teaching experiences, Dr. Tides occasionally dealt with difficulties in achieving timely communications with his students. During these course environments, he would often solicit suggestions from his students on best practices for accelerating shared communication. As Dr. Tides explained,

In talking with them after the class had been completed…getting their opinions as to if I’ve got information that I need to send you, especially you know, if classes are cancelled, you know if I have to cancel class, or if I have a guest speaker who’s coming all of a sudden…I wanted to find out what I could do to really help get that word out quickly. Because I had people tell me, ‘we don’t check email, don’t bother sending it to me.’

At that time, his students suggested he try Facebook. By integrating it into this course, Dr. Tides was able to establish a constant connection with his students. In the interview he said, “one of the things I get on my evaluations is that I am one of the quickest professors to respond to them and I mean that’s because either on my phone or on my computer, I’ve always got Facebook open.” This ubiquitous availability allowed students to request files, get feedback on assignments, or ask him questions whenever they wanted. Dr. Tides
indicated that it was never a problem allowing students to remain in touch with him at all times. He was happy to help students no matter when they contacted him.

Facebook’s various communication features provided participants with several options to expediently communicate with each other. For Dr. Tides, Facebook provided a quick way for him to send out a message to the entire class. From a student perspective, if they had a question that was time sensitive, they knew they could immediately contact Dr. Tides through the Facebook chat service. Dr. Tides was also quick to respond to asynchronous messages. If his chat availability status on Facebook showed ‘offline,’ students knew they could just as easily send him an email on Facebook and also receive a relatively quick response. The students appreciated how fast Dr. Tides responded to their problems in comparison to other instructors. Facebook provide that central location that everyone could use in order to communicate in a timely manner. With everyone networked on Facebook, the interactions between Dr. Tides and the students were much more productive.

**Apathetic.** Based on both the quantity and quality of their work displayed on the course page, some students appeared to be somewhat disinterested in using Facebook to its fullest capacity for this course. As stated in the previous chapter, one of the primary motivations for students using Facebook in this course was to obtain a grade. Dr. Tides created several assignments involving the social networking site that totaled 25% of the students’ overall grade in the course. Students did not exhibit much interest in doing anything on the Facebook course page outside of those graded assignments. This was evidenced by the limited amount of outside content that students added to the course page.
There was not a lot of additional activity or effort exhibited by the students outside of a few article links posted by Marie.

Students were very open and honest with me during their interviews about their lack of additional effort on the site. “Get in, get out” was the mantra one student had about using Facebook for this course. He did not want to spend any more time on the site than necessary for course-related reasons. Even if students saw an opportunity to post additional content on the site, they opted not to. Dustin told me,

I mean, I saw something on TV the other day and I was like, ‘Well if this was easy for me to do, I would put this on [Facebook]’ cuz it was something about PR and it was like a cartoon. It was funny…too much effort though.

He believed that the time it would take to add it was not worth the benefit it might provide the other students in the course. Another student admitted, “I mean, I guess I’m not one of those students who goes above and beyond, like will post little items…like, ‘look at this guys,’ cuz it’s just, I don’t do that.” None of the students I spoke with expressed any interest in providing additional material for the Facebook course page.

This apathy was especially seen in the Facebook study guide that Dr. Tides created for his students. Dr. Tides set up a thread on the course page where students could discuss the important concepts that they would be tested on and ask each other questions in preparation for the exam. Since it was not a requirement, very few students opted to contribute to the thread. Rachel explained,
I remember for the first test, [Dr. Tides] put a post up that was like ‘Put questions and I’ll answer it’ or ‘Put questions you might think…’ and I think one person wrote one question. I think that showed him that [students] don’t want to be on here unless they have to.

Students who studied together did so in person, while the rest were content with studying on their own. None of the students indicated a need to add anything to the study guide thread.

For his part, Dr. Tides tried to encourage the students to provide more additional content to the course page. Despite Dr. Tides’ heavily suggesting to the students that they contribute to the course page, very few participated. “I tried early on and encouraged it, but saw that it wasn’t going to happen,” he said, explaining his efforts to motivate the students.

The fact that students were not more involved on the site surprised Dr. Tides because it went against the research he has read on students in this generation. He explained,

I haven’t seen students pitch in as much as some of the literature on this generation would say they would. I mean, I just did a study on millennials, and everything you read says they’re more cooperative, more interested in group work, and everybody succeeding rather than the competitive, individualistic nature. But I just don’t see…this (pointing to the Facebook course page on his computer screen) doesn’t show it to me. I don’t see everybody working together to advance that greater good.

Dr. Tides eventually grew frustrated with their lack of voluntary involvement. He said, “it felt like I was having to push a lot more and it got a little tiring at times.” The students sensed that Dr. Tides grew more apathetic towards using Facebook after seeing them make no effort to do additional work on it. Rachel said, “I think if we had been a little bit more
excited about it or wrote tons of questions on there, he might have done more stuff like that.” With everyone growing apathetic as the semester went on, the amount of content being added, outside of the required assignments, dwindled.

Some students also had an apathetic opinion of the graded assignments. Not only did they not care to do extra work, but they also exhibited a disinterest for working hard on the assignments Dr. Tides required them to do. For example, many students took advantage of the loose time restrictions placed on the Facebook assignments. Students did not have to turn in a hard copy of their work, so as long as they had access to a computer, they could complete the assignment whenever they wanted, right up until the time of class.

The discussion board on Facebook is designed to time-stamp all posted messages. Because I had access to the course page, I was able to see exactly when students were submitting their work. In some cases, the time-stamp was not necessary for me to know when students were working on the assignments. I would come into the computer lab classroom for observation and see students doing their Facebook assignments minutes before they were due. If they were not finished by the time class began, some students continued working on the assignments while Dr. Tides began his lecture. When it came to the weekly discussion assignments on Facebook, it was typical for only nine or ten of the twelve students to post before class began, with one or two of those written within a half hour of the beginning of class. While there were always posts made at the last minute, it was not always the same students who were unhurried in responding.

The ‘Facebook Day’ debates were no exception when it came to the students procrastinating on their assignments. Students were given a full day to debate the posted
topic and most opted to wait until the very end of the day before submitting their first response. One student said, “There would usually be like three responses until like maybe six o’clock at night and then they would just start piling in.” Another student added, “There’s such a broad timeline to do it…everybody waits until the end of the night.” The time-stamps on the debate assignments confirm that the majority of them were not completed until the evening hours.

For the debate assignments, some students were not just apathetic about completing them, they also did not care about doing them properly. Dr. Tides intended for students to do two posts for each debate. The first post was their initial argument for or against the posted topic. The second post was meant to be a rebuttal to an initial post made by a student from the opposing side. While students typically completed the initial post correctly, many of them did not bother to do a rebuttal in their second post. Instead of commenting on another student’s argument, they would just add onto their own or provide some additional outside sources related to the topic. Pam admitted to being guilty of this practice. She said,

It’s always like twelve o’clock midnight and I’m like ‘oh no, I didn’t do my second response,’ so I just end up going back and kind of rewording what I originally wrote.

I don’t know. I guess that’s me too, not being responsible.

Dr. Tides was disappointed that students failed to properly put in the effort to complete these assignments in the manner he wanted. Explaining students’ attitude toward this assignment, he said,
by the time it gets close to deadline, it’s ‘oh, I got to go respond to something, let me throw down something really quickly because at that point I’ve already forgotten a good bit of what I researched’ and probably not going through and reading everything, just scanning it.

When it came to writing their second post, several students said that they were apathetic toward what everyone else had written. “This may be bad, but I don’t really care that much because I don’t really read other people’s stuff, so I don’t think that they read mine,” one student said. They believed that as long as they did two posts, regardless of the content, that would be sufficient for completing the assignment.

In talking with both the students and the instructor, I heard several interpretations as to why working on Facebook was met with such apathy. Marie, the one student who did include some additional links on the Facebook course page, commented on why she believed some were apathetic. Her explanation was, “It might just be a personality thing. (Directed toward the other students in the room) I mean there’s some of you who just don’t seem to care, but some of us do…I don’t know…it just might be a personality issue on that.” Recall that Marie was the only student who had never used Facebook at all before this course. Her approach to schoolwork was noticeably different than that of the students.

Dr. Tides also acknowledged this student apathy when it came to contributing on Facebook. He suggested some of it had to do with the virtual nature of the technology. When they had assignments that they could do from home, they “don’t have someone sitting there watching over them.” Within this virtual environment, the accountability is not as great on the students. Dr. Tides also realized that regardless of the physical environment of the
classroom setting, there would always be different levels of work ethic demonstrated by students. He surmised,

But then again, some people were fine with B’s and C’s. Not everyone said, ‘Oh I’ve got to get an A+ in this class.’ And as a professor that’s something you know going into it. You would love to think everyone’s going to be there, read everything, and do everything, but…I didn’t do it as a student.

It is his belief that there is always be a population of students who are apathetic toward doing the required coursework.

There was some indication by the students that having the assignments done on Facebook contributed to this apathy. Students remarked how they took a different approach to working on the ‘Facebook Day’ debates because they were conducted online. Bonnie said, I also think it’s kind of hard to take it seriously as an assignment, because I know that it’s an assignment, but if you told me we were going to have the debate the next day in class and asked to think about what you’re going to say, then I would spend much more time on it. It just doesn’t seem real.

Hearing this, Dustin responded, “I see what you’re saying. Like if we had to turn something in to him or like she was saying if we were to have the debate, I would prepare myself more than just posting something.” The lack of any face-to-face scrutiny of their work during a formal class session contributed to the apathy and resulted in less effort put into the online assignments. When it came to the required assignments, students procrastinated on completing them and often did not follow all of Dr. Tides’ instructions. While not true of
every student, there was a general sense of apathy exhibited by many of them when it came to doing homework on Facebook.

**Unidirectional.** There have been several instances mentioned where students have admitted that they did not read their fellow students’ comments in the Facebook discussions. This attitude ended up having an effect on the work they did in their own posts. Despite the Dr. Tides’ efforts to encourage collaborative learning by having them debate each other on various PR topics, there was very little interaction exhibited in their posts. The students’ comments did not create a dialogue. Instead, they were directed solely toward the instructor for evaluation purposes.

Some students freely admitted that they did not engage in a dialogue with other students during the ‘Facebook Day’ debates. A few of the comments I heard from students included, “I know that I would post my initial response and then I would be the next one after that to put my next follow up response,” “After you put your two posts up…I didn’t really read anyone else’s. I just said what I wanted to say,” “I didn’t like having to wait and then respond later. I just like doing it once,” and “I treat it like it would just be something I would turn into a teacher. I don’t write it as if my peers are going to be reading it.” Students were supposed to write an initial response to the debate topic and then wait until everyone else responded before writing a second rebuttal post. Instead, many students wrote both posts at the same time. Their primary concern was getting two posts done for Dr. Tides to grade, rather than trying to engage in a debate with the opposing side.

This lack of interaction frustrated some of the students. They indicated that these ‘Facebook Day’ assignments could not even be considered debates, due to the lack of back
and forth communication. One student said, “the debates were kind of pointless. There were too many people debating and we weren’t even reading what the other people were saying.” “[Dr. Tides] expects it to be a debate, but I don’t really see people that are like ‘oh I completely disagree with what so and so said because I think this,’” added another student. As I spoke with a group of the students, one of them questioned the purpose of these debate assignments. She questioned,

I’ll see this one girl and she’ll write a post and then her next post will be ‘oh and I found this website’ and that’s her second post and that’s it. Like I can just put all of that into one. I don’t see how [Dr. Tides] is going to say, ‘you need to make sure you put two’ when it’s like she put her answer in one and a website in the other.

In response to that statement, another student said, “well the point of it is so you write something and someone responds to you and you respond back.” The first student then replied, “yeah, but if you look at the group, you’ll see a girl and two posts, a guy and two posts.” Facebook is intended to be an avenue for social interaction, but not a lot of that was seen in these assignments. Their posts indicated that they did not care to debate these topics. Rather, the focus was on showing Dr. Tides what they knew and finishing the assignments quickly.

Dr. Tides also expressed frustration over the fact that students were not directing their comments toward each other. “On Facebook, I never really saw a student call another student by name or vice versa. It was very much, ‘here I am, here’s my post, let me move on,’” he told me. He also noticed that students were doing both posts at the same time instead of waiting to provide a rebuttal for the opposite side’s argument. He said,
What I would say they really failed badly at was trying to get that debate going. So they would do their research for their initial post, come up with something pretty solid and have some nice supporting evidence for it, but they didn’t then try to respond to others, even though one of the requirements was to have a post back, responding directly to someone or someone’s argument.

While acknowledging that this was a problem, Dr. Tides did not believe that this was an inherent problem with doing the assignment on Facebook. He explained,

> It was just their ability to respond that failed and I don’t know how that would have gone over in the classroom because there were quite a few in that class who stayed dead quiet the entire time. And so it may have just been that they didn’t have the debate personality because you could see several students having rather lengthy initial posts and then response posts that were three or four lines.

Dr. Tides informed me that when the students took that personality quiz, the results showed that many of them had introverted personalities. He speculated that because so many of them were introverted, debate assignments were destined to not be effective for them, regardless of which medium was used. Rachel, who admitted in the group interview that she did not feel right telling someone (during the debate) that they were wrong, supported this.

The students’ preference to communicate only with Dr. Tides was also indicated when students spoke with me about the Facebook study guide thread. Discussing the lack of activity in the study guide thread, one student indicated,
I just felt that there were certain people who were kind of like ‘well it’s our first test, we’ll just look at the PowerPoints and see where it goes.’ I mean, I’m not the type of person where I’m gonna post a question for like twelve other people to see and get back to me. Like I could go straight ask the teacher or if I’m studying with someone, maybe ask their opinion, but I’m just not the type of person where I need to ask twelve people and hope that they respond, especially because it’s like why would you put so much effort into it if you saw there wasn’t much activity, like maybe someone wasn’t even going to answer your question.

While this may not have been true for every student, some of them chose not to interact with the other students because they did not feel comfortable doing so. If they wanted their question answered, they communicated with Dr. Tides, not their fellow students.

Given the lack of engagement seen in the debates, the students were pleased to see Dr. Tides change the format of the final ‘Facebook Day.’ Instead of a debate, this assignment involved students simply responding to a topic provided by Dr. Tides. Students told me that they preferred this method over the debates. “I liked it a little better because I liked that you could do them both at once rather than going back later that night,” she said. Another student added, “I think it would probably be better to do it [this way], because the other way was, I thought, an influx of information and no one really cared what the other person said and so it wasn’t really a debate.” For this assignment, the students only had to worry about communicating their ideas to Dr. Tides, which they liked. Now they could continue communicating unidirectionally with Dr. Tides without worrying about being penalized for not responding to another student.
Power Dynamic Between Students and the Instructor

This section covers the power dynamic between Dr. Tides and his students throughout the semester (RQ2b). The introduction of Facebook into this course allowed me to observe several different displays of power. During the semester, I witnessed Dr. Tides and the students dealing with establishing their identities, as Facebook was being integrated into the course. RQ2 asks “What is the power dynamic between students and their teacher when Facebook is used in the course as an LMS?” From my data analysis, I have categorized three power dynamics exhibited by the participants: role maintenance, role defiance, and role negotiation. Role maintenance provides evidence of Dr. Tides playing the part of authoritarian within the classroom. Role defiance describes the ways in which Dr. Tides relinquished his authority. Finally, role negotiation reviews the examples of students negotiating their roles within the culture as Dr. Tides exhibited these varying levels of power.

Role Maintenance

At various times, Dr. Tides maintained the authority figure role within the classroom. Evidence of this was seen in the first class session he had with the students. As he introduced to his students the idea of Facebook being used in the course, he stated that he would not become ‘friends’ with any of them on Facebook during the semester. He did not believe it was appropriate to establish that kind of connection with them while they were his students. The students understood that they needed to keep things professional while they were in his class.
On that first day, Dr. Tides also exerted his authority by laying out some specific rules for how students should behave when they are in his class. One of the rules stated that students were not allowed to talk on their cell phones during class. If one of their phones rang while they were in class, Dr. Tides said he would stop his lecture and administer a pop quiz to the entire class. He told them that this was an important rule because when they have jobs in the real world, having their cell phones ring during meetings is a major faux pas. With this rule, Dr. Tides was trying to help the students prepare for the real world, but also remind students that he was in charge.

Dr. Tides’ authoritative role was also seen on the Facebook course page. Despite his desire to have the course page be a group collaborative effort, the assignments Dr. Tides designed for the website helped maintain a hierarchical teacher-student relationship. Dr. Tides remained the authority figure in charge of creating the assignments and the students were responsible for following his instructions. For example, with the weekly discussion threads, students waited for Dr. Tides to enter the topic and then they would respond to it in their posts. As Dr. Tides explained to me,

whereas this [course], even though I’m posting things and wanting them to play off one another, it’s very hierarchical in nature. I’m here saying ‘do this’ and then they do this. So it’s almost like a traditional homework type of an assignment, just done online.

By dictating how these assignments should be done, Dr. Tides maintained his authoritative status.
When Dr. Tides created the course page, his intention was to establish a community of equals. However, Dr. Tides sometimes had difficulty breaking free of his role as the instructor. If a student posed a question on the course page, Dr. Tides told me that he could not help but answer the student. Dr. Tides intended for everyone to help each other out on the course page, yet he found himself always being the one who stepped in to answer the questions. In our interview, he said that the teacher-student hierarchy was more present on Facebook this time than in his previous uses of Facebook for educational reasons. “[This course] still has that teacher-student structure, whereas the other one really did allow for, I would say more natural communication flow, not necessarily the hierarchy that’s in place (here).” In those previous uses of Facebook, Dr. Tides did not have a strong presence on the site. He primarily let the students use it however they saw fit. For this course application, however, he not only participated more, but he also maintained his authority during his interactions.

During my interviews with the students, some of them acknowledged that Dr. Tides remained the authority figure while on Facebook. They recognized how he took the responsibility of setting up the assignments that they needed to complete. As Rachel described it,

I feel like he kind of gives you the opportunity to, you know, answer an assignment and then he kind of leaves it at that. Or like the debates that we have, he posts one question and gives who the pros and cons are and then you go from there. So I feel like that’s just what we need; someone to get it started and then that’s fine.
Dr. Tides told me, “students, from what I’ve seen now, want very, very specific instructions.” Understanding the students’ desire for that hierarchical relationship, Dr. Tides remained in charge of them, both in the classroom and on the Facebook course page. He established that he was in charge and that he gave out directions for the students to follow. Through these actions, he maintained his role as an authority figure for the students.

**Role Defiance**

Despite the examples just listed, Dr. Tides did not always want to exert such authority in the classroom. There were several instances where he relinquished power and attempted to be more of a friend to his students. The students recognized this immediately when they learned that Dr. Tides was going to use Facebook for this course. In our first interview, many of the students commented that they did not view Dr. Tides as much of an authority figure. I heard remarks like, “I don’t feel like he’s the dominant figure, but I mean, he’s a good teacher” and “Like he’s not the department head. You’re not scared of him.” To these students, Dr. Tides defied that role of authoritarian.

On the first day of class, Dr. Tides made an effort to set himself, and this course, apart from other classes. To begin with, he informed the students that they could call him by his first name. Dr. Tides told me,

I’ve always told students, ‘don’t call me Dr. Tides, call me John (a pseudonym).’ I definitely want to be more on a personal/social level with them, because that’s how it is in the public relations workforce. I want to get them as used to that as possible.

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In addition, he frequently told the students that things were going to be “a little bit different” and “fun” when describing the course and the assignments. He really tried to convey a laidback attitude to them. Dr. Tides told me he never considered himself to be, as he phrased it, a “hoity-toity professor.” His approach was to be more easygoing and approachable to the students.

It was this mentality that led him to be open to the idea of using Facebook in his courses in the first place. As he discussed the Facebook course page with this class, he explained that it was “your Facebook group just as much as mine.” Dr. Tides intended for the Facebook course page to be a place where there were no power imbalances. Everyone could equally share their thoughts and ideas and be free of the traditional roles placed on them within the classroom.

Throughout the semester, Dr. Tides made additional attempts to be more of a participative leader rather than the overbearing authority figure. During one class session, he was reviewing the course schedule with the students and noted that there was one upcoming date with nothing pre-scheduled. For this date, he asked the students for their input on what they would like to do. Dr. Tides offered the students suggestions such as an in-class activity to reinforce course concepts or a free study day. He then let them decide what they wanted to do.

Dr. Tides also relinquished some of his power by being accommodating to the students when they had complaints about the ‘Facebook Day’ debates. Students expressed to him early on in the semester how difficult it was to debate a side that they did not personally believe in. Dr. Tides told the students that he would work hard to make sure everyone had a
“fair share of both sides” on the debate topics so that no one would constantly get stuck with the difficult side. Students were also encouraged to speak with him if they were having other problems with the debate stance they were given. Dr. Tides always welcomed their input in order to improve the assignments, as well as the overall course.

Trying to defy that authoritative role, Dr. Tides also shared details about his personal life with the students. His personal Facebook page had a public setting, so anyone who had a Facebook account could access it, even if they were not ‘friends’ with him. When I talked to the students about this, all of them admitted that they had visited Dr. Tides’ personal page at some time during the semester. Dr. Tides would also occasionally display the page to students in class. For example, during one class period Dr. Tides showed the students his new Facebook profile picture, which featured him wearing a fake mustache. The photo was created to support Movember, a charity organization which the class had recently been studying. Dr. Tides made the photo to support the group and wanted to share it with the students, in case they were interested in doing the same. Dr. Tides told me that making his Facebook profile page public and occasionally displaying the content to his students was his attempt to “de-professorize” himself. He said, “I certainly did not do anything to sort of raise myself above them. If anything, I tried to lower it as much as possible.” Acts like this or his insistence that students call him by his first name were deliberate efforts on his part to make him seem more like an equal to his students.
Role Negotiation

Dr. Tides’ varying displays of power and use of Facebook in an educational setting for the first time gave students an entirely new educational experience. On Facebook, students completed formal assignments yet communicated informally with their instructor. For some, it took a while to deal with this conflict in formality. They could not always rely on playing the role they were familiar with in his course. Dr. Tides explained why seeing Facebook in education could be a confusing experience for the students. He said,

It’s just one of those that it was a very interesting thing to go through. You know, to have it as an experience. I definitely think the ideas are there and can be fostered into something, if that’s something that students want. When you work in the work force, it’s something that you run into all of the time; that you want clear boundaries. This is work and this is personal/social stuff. And I don’t know if Facebook falls into one of those things that…is it something that should be used to straddle those two or does that blur everything even more so that now we’re all just working and educating nonstop?

Throughout the semester, the students had to continually adjust their roles and identify those boundaries in order to deal with the changes.

Even without the inclusion of Facebook in the course, Dr. Tides made students renegotiate their roles in the class. His attempts to “de-professorize” himself left students unsure of how to address him. Standard protocol dictates that students refer to their instructor as ‘Doctor.’ However, Dr. Tides told his students that they could call him by his first name. Some students were initially uncomfortable with this. One said to me, “It’s kind
of awkward for me because he said don’t call him ‘doctor’…so I just leave the title off. I
don’t want to say ‘Mr. Tides,’ so it’s kind of awkward.” Another student had difficulty with
this as well. “I feel bad because I feel like I’m being rude,” she said. Dr. Tides relayed a
story to me of Marie’s struggle with how to address him. He told me,

Even one of the Facebook messages that Marie sent me near the end (of the
semester)... you know, the subject line was ‘Dr. Tides.’ In her message, she said, ‘I
had to call you that at least once.’ And I was like, ‘ok, haha, I get it’ but I wonder
how much that really was a sentiment expressed by a lot of people; that [Facebook] is
interesting, a different way to have class, but they’re still looking for that structure.

Dr. Tides’ request for them to address him by his first name went against their tendency to
refer to their professors as ‘doctor.’ Each student had to make a personal decision on how
they would address him.

Students also had to adjust to the idea of having their professor on Facebook. The
notion that an educator was using Facebook was shocking to some of the students. “It’s just
weird to see your professor on there,” one student said. Sally also commented on this,
saying, “I was surprised that his profile... you know how you can make it private... I was
surprised that he has it open for everyone to see.” Finally, Bonnie was surprised that Dr.
Tides was using Facebook, because as she claimed, “I think a lot of our teachers probably
don’t know what Facebook is.”

Once the initial shock wore off, students were divided on their opinions of Dr. Tides’
presence on Facebook. These differing opinions had an effect on how students perceived Dr.
Tides as an instructor and the roles they played with him. For instance, Pam did not care for
Dr. Tides being on Facebook. She told me, “I don’t know if I really liked it. I think I would rather him not be on it because…he’s in the classroom and that’s his whole life to me as far as I’m concerned.” However, other students appreciated his effort to try something new. Rachel said,

I think it shows how creative he is and I think that’s why he’s so good at the job he did and why he’s such a good teacher because he wouldn’t do things necessarily like all of the other teachers would. I think it just shows he’s open-minded and cool.

Dr. Tides’ presence of Facebook made him seem less authoritarian to other students. Describing Dr. Tides, Bonnie told me, “I thought [using Facebook] made him seem more approachable, if you’ve never had him before. I like him a lot because he’s younger. He’s just a lot more approachable to me than a lot of my other teachers.” Building off that comment, Dustin said, “I feel the same way that she does and I just feel like he’s real personable and easy to approach, so I definitely enjoy having him as my teacher.” Finally, one student added,

I feel like it’s easier in class to kind of raise my hand or ask him a question, I mean, I guess because I know that he has Facebook and I guess he’s younger and easier to talk to more on that kind of level. I feel like some of the other professors I have I know don’t have a Facebook…I couldn’t talk to them in the same way that I talk to him in class.

I also heard students use the word ‘fun’ several times to describe him and the course, just as Dr. Tides had, at the beginning of the semester. One student said, “I think he’s fun. I think…he make me want to go to class. I think it’s effective the way he teaches.” Because
they viewed him as fun and less authoritarian, these students were not as worried about how they were perceived by him. For example, Rachel said that she was not worried if Dr. Tides saw her personal Facebook photos. She explained, “I would not have really cared if he saw them. He wouldn’t have been like (in a scolding tone), ‘You’re drinking!’” Depending on how students perceived Dr. Tides’ presence on Facebook, students negotiated the roles they played with him accordingly.

Reflecting back, Dr. Tides saw how difficult it was for some students to adjust their role. “So I think there was some sort of hesitancy about whether or not [Facebook in the classroom] was comfortable. You know this is sort of an invasion of my (referring to the students’) space almost, because it’s clearly a social application,” Dr. Tides told me. Throughout the semester, Dr. Tides tried to make this process as easy as possible for the students. However, he believed Facebook made it difficult for students to fully understand their role. He stated,

one of the things I was really hesitant about it, going into it at first, was that, you know, people see Facebook, MySpace, as a social thing more than an educational realm. And I’m wondering what…if there are ideas or thoughts in students’ heads that this is sort of invading their space. Like this is supposed to be fun, not school. So that’s in the back of my mind.

Students who were used to teacher-student hierarchical relationships struggled with having Facebook being used in the classroom because it blurred the definition of teacher and student. Determining when they were supposed to be the students and when they were supposed to be friends was something the participants in this course never fully solved.
Even after the semester had concluded, this negotiation process continued. Some of the students officially became friends with Dr. Tides on Facebook after the course was finished. However, according to Dr. Tides, this action did not signal that these students were willing to become friends with him on a social level. As he explains,

I’ve had students who I’ve worked with ‘friend’ me, but (only) after class, and it’s been more of a social-professional, ‘let’s stay in touch’ type of thing. And to me that helps further this idea that students are a little uncomfortable with the education invading their social space.

Students were willing to become friends with Dr. Tides, but in name only. From what Dr. Tides indicated, these students intend to keep the relationship on a more professional level. By becoming friends with Dr. Tides on Facebook, these students were trying to create a new relationship with him that hovered somewhere between teacher and friend. They were neither looking for an authority figure nor a best friend. They chose to stay in contact with him because he would be a good contact for them if they needed help in school or in trying to obtain a job in public relations. Having this post-class Facebook friendship meant students continued to negotiate their roles with Dr. Tides in order to remain connected with him, albeit at a distance.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the results from the second set of research questions in two sections. These questions focused on the social interactions that occurred in this course. The first section consisted of two sub-headings that examined various social interactions
exhibited by the participants. Uncertainty and concern described the participants’ interactions about Facebook. The interactions I observed occurring on Facebook were identified as expedient, apathetic, and unidirectional. This section looked at how these interactions were expressed or exhibited and the role Facebook played on their presence.

The second section of this chapter examined the power dynamic that was displayed between the instructor and his students. I began by reviewing how, at different times, Dr. Tides maintained his role as an authority figure and also defied it. The students exhibited role negotiation throughout the semester as they tried to deal with Dr. Tides’ varying levels of power. My review of these results shows how the power dynamic was in a constant state of flux throughout the semester.

In the next chapter, I build on the results covered in these past two chapters to produce the important themes for this study. The discussion will focus on the role Facebook had in creating the fluctuating power dynamic observed in this culture. I will cover the implications of Dr. Tides’ varying displays of power and the effect it had on how everyone utilized Facebook in the course. Through this examination, I will construct some important ideas, which can be used to direct further research into educational applications for Facebook.
CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Overview

In this chapter, I discuss the key contributions of this study from multiple perspectives. By examining the results of this study further and discussing the implications, I will show how there was a disconnect between the pre-study expectations for Facebook’s potential and the actual results. First, I will review the process of how Facebook was adopted as an educational tool for this study. This portion of the chapter will focus particularly on the attitudes of Dr. Tides and his students toward the idea of adopting new media within an entirely different context and how they intended to use it. As was noted in Chapter II, the introduction of new technology is a critical component of the adoption process. I will then review the actual uses and interactions that occurred, first identified in Chapters IV and V, and discuss how potential value of the technology was not fully realized. I will make the argument that the participants of this study ineffectively used Facebook as an educational tool as a result of rules and roles within the network not being clearly established during the initial weeks of the course. In the future, further research will be needed to determine how Facebook could more effectively be introduced as an LMS. To assist future researchers interested in this topic, I will offer up the limitations faced during this study. Reviewing these limitations will help explain the results of the study and provide guidance for those who wish to investigate this topic further. I will then conclude the chapter with some additional
questions that could be addressed as researchers continue to examine the use of social networking in higher education.

**The Intended Use of Facebook**

One of the unique aspects of this study is that it is not an examination of the adoption of new technology, but rather the examination of the adoption of technology in a new context. Almost everyone involved in this study was a current Facebook user; however, none of the participants had ever taken a course where the instructor used the application for educational purposes. This section reviews how Facebook was initially intended to be used in the classroom from both the perspectives of Dr. Tides and his students. Discussing their perspectives here is relevant as it reveals how the participants recognized some of the same aspects of Facebook’s potential value that were identified in Chapter II.

**Instructor Perspective**

The literature reviewed for this study revealed several factors which can indicate the likelihood of new innovation being adopted. One of the factors, the technology’s adaptability, involves identifying how well the device can fit into the context of an instructor’s course. Facebook’s perceived adaptability was a primary reason why Dr. Tides considered it for his classroom in the first place.

As discussed in Chapter III, Dr. Tides had previously experienced difficulties with the university-run learning management system, WebCT Vista. WebCT Vista allows an instructor to have a personal webpage for their course that they can customize with various
tools such as discussion boards, chat rooms, and a grade book. Dr. Tides attempted to use it as a means to help manage his course, but had several problems with it right from the beginning. “[WebCT], for whatever reason, had a very steep learning curve to get started,” he told me in our first interview. He found it difficult to input information into the website in the way he wanted. There were also times when it would crash, causing data loss. He said, “I used WebCT once…and had just a disastrous personal experience with it, where there was some glitch and lost all of the grades that had been inputted in it.” He added, “I remember…having it crash and having to go back and really do all those data entry to get everything back into place, and it was just a nightmare.” Dr. Tides quickly grew tired of these recurring difficulties with WebCT Vista and wanted an alternative learning management system that would be easier to use. His attitude is consistent with the findings from the pedagogical technology section in Chapter II. If every encounter with technology results in problems, an instructor will lose that youthful inner spirit that Lengel and Lengel (2006) indicate is needed for a successful adoption.

Dr. Tides believed the problems with WebCT also dissuaded some students from using the technology to its full potential. From his perspective, he saw students primarily use WebCT Vista to check on their progress in the course. “[WebCT] was mostly used as a source where they could go see their grades,” he shared. Dr. Tides considered Facebook to be an alternative, thinking it could address a lot of the problems he and other users had experienced using WebCT Vista. With several years’ personal experience with Facebook, Dr. Tides had not dealt with any problems using it. This was important, because in order for a new technology to be successfully implemented, the instructor must have some prior
familiarity with the technology (Ferdig, 2006). With his familiarity with Facebook, he was not concerned about needing additional training on how to operate it for his class. Dr. Tides said, “[my difficulty with WebCT] was one of the reasons I liked [Facebook] because it was something very different and I was interested to see how it would work.” He also knew that, given Facebook’s growing popularity with college students, most of them would be able to easily adapt to using it in the classroom. Eldred (2008) identified ease of use as one of the qualities for ideal pedagogical technologies. More time can be spent using the technology to learn rather than learning how to use the technology.

From Dr. Tides’ perspective, Facebook also had potential value by providing him with a new way to communicate with his students. In recent courses, Dr. Tides had been dealing with a problem of students not reading the messages he sent them via email. Many of his students had admitted to him that they did not check their email on a frequent basis. Initially, he could not believe that email was being phased out by students. “It was very weird for me having grown up in the age of email to start to see my students really not use email at all,” Dr. Tides said in our interview. Still, he needed to send messages to his students, so he sought their input on an alternative communication medium that they would more likely use to receive his messages. The most common response he received was Facebook. “For whatever reason, they’ve switched, and [Facebook] is their preferred method of communication,” Dr. Tides explained. Despite his proclivity for email, Dr. Tides was willing to consider their suggestion. He elaborated,
When it comes to teaching, I hate saying it this way, but [students] are our customers and to some extent, it’s up to [educators] to give them information in the routes and the methods that they prefer. So if Facebook is where they are going, then it makes sense to offer that information to them over Facebook or MySpace or any of the other social networking sites.

Using what the students preferred was not simply a case of Dr. Tides catering to their every wish and desire. This was an example of Dr. Tides attempting to form a stronger working relationship with his students. His efforts to adapt to students’ needs resembles Biggs’ (1999) third level of thinking about teaching. Biggs would contend that Dr. Tides was trying to understand “what students do.” In this case, Dr. Tides understood that students were increasingly using Facebook as a means to communicate with others and wanted to incorporate that practice into his classroom.

With Facebook, Dr. Tides was not just choosing a technology that was popular with college students; he was selecting a technology that provided him with multiple methods of communication. Facebook offers both synchronous and asynchronous means of communication. Dr. Tides could talk with his students by sending a message through Facebook’s email client, posting a notice on the group page, or speaking to them individually using Facebook’s chat service. With all of these options available, Facebook could be adapted by users to satisfy any of their preferred means of communication.

Dr. Tides also appreciated that Facebook afforded him the opportunity to introduce a distance learning aspect to his course. He did not want to conduct his course exclusively online, but found it helpful to occasionally conduct class in a virtual environment whenever
he was not able to meet with students in person. Dr. Tides saw Facebook as an excellent tool to accomplish this. He could meet in person with the students on most scheduled days and then set up assignments to be completed on Facebook whenever he had a scheduling conflict. By mixing in-person and virtual class sessions, he believed that Facebook offered everyone a little bit more freedom in their educational experience.

Lastly, Facebook appealed to Dr. Tides because it provided the opportunity to enhance the pedagogical objectives for his course. Since he taught a public relations course, he believed that Facebook had the potential to offer students an early look at the applicability of social networking in the business world. Dr. Tides explained that there is not enough focus on social media in education, despite the fact that more companies are using social networks as a form of communication with the public. “There’s a real lack of educational institutions that have courses on social media in public relations and students have tons of experience using social media personally, but it’s very different when you’re communicating from that organization perspective,” he said. He wanted to integrate Facebook with his course so that students could begin to use social media in the same way it was being used in the industry. Students would not only see how companies communicate using the technology, they would also personally get to use some of the applications found on the website that are used by public relations practitioners.

From Dr. Tides’ perspective, Facebook’s potential value made it likely that it could be successfully adopted in his classroom. In his mind it held a distinct comparative advantage over the other course management tools he had previously used. For the reasons identified above, Dr. Tides went into the semester very excited to use Facebook. However,
that attitude began to fade when he did not see the technology’s potential value being fully realized.

**Student Perspective**

It was apparent in my various discussions with Dr. Tides’ students that, prior to this course, they not only enjoyed using Facebook, but were also well aware of its popularity with most people their age. Brandi told me, “I think [Facebook’s] a growing phenomenon. I guess cuz you could say it started out really small and now it’s huge.” Most of the students in this study were using Facebook on a regular basis and appreciated the way it enabled them to keep in touch and communicate with all of their friends. None of them had used Facebook in a different context prior to this study and thus felt the sole purpose of Facebook was for socialization.

At the beginning of the semester when Dr. Tides informed the students of his intention to use Facebook as a part of the class, several students expressed uncertainty and anxiety with regard to his decision. Trying to explain her confusion over why someone would attempt to integrate Facebook in the classroom Pam shared,

Well, I mean, technically, besides submitting little things…you can do that on email.

It’s not like there’s something special for a class I don’t think. I mean, I don’t think there’s anything that you can do with Facebook that would be that beneficial to a class.

Another student, Jim, immediately agreed with this. “Yeah, what she said,” he added. Other students were more concerned with the fact that if Dr. Tides was able to develop educational
uses for Facebook, then their school work would be conducted in a space they previously used exclusively for social communication. Dr. Tides referred to it as crossing “that educational-social boundary.” By blurring these lines, students recognized that this meant there would be some aspects of their personal lives that would now be made public to their classmates and the instructor. For instance, everyone in the course could now see each other’s profile photo. One student tried explaining how communicating on Facebook would be more revealing by comparing it to America Online’s instant messenger service (AIM). She felt that if she communicated with her instructor or classmate on AIM, she maintained a certain level of anonymity. All they knew was that they were chatting with her. She felt that more of her identity was revealed with others on Facebook. She was not alone in struggling with the fact that one’s identity was more on display for everyone to see with the inclusion of Facebook in the classroom. The heightened awareness of one’s public persona was an issue identified by those who conducted research for The Facebook Papers (2011).

The issues with using Facebook effectively as an educational tool in this study began with these concerns. For students to successfully transition between that ‘educational-social boundary’ that Dr. Tides referred to, it required effort and skill on their behalf (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991). If that transition occurs, then social networking can create a learning community where those involved engage in intellectual dialog and shared ideas. However, there was nothing in the comments I received from the students before the study began that suggested they knew how to make the transition needed to establish a learning community on Facebook. As the next section will reveal, Dr. Tides could have done more to assist students in this transition.
Facebook Usage

In Chapter IV, I reviewed the various uses of Facebook by Dr. Tides and his students during the course. For the sake of review, those uses have been divided into three key categories – engagement in discourse, resource sharing, and non-pedagogical uses. Discussing those uses here, I will show how Dr. Tides’ initial intentions for the technology were not reflected in how the students actually used Facebook in his class. Early efforts by Dr. Tides to promote the use of Facebook were met with a mixture of uncertainty and apathy from the students. These attitudes were the result of a failure on Dr. Tides’ part to have the authoritative voice students sought to direct their use of Facebook, as well as some unexpected limitations discovered with the technology. A review of the participants’ uses of Facebook reveals what led to most people abandoning the technology, at least from an educational perspective, by the end of the semester.

Engagement in Discourse

One reason in which Dr. Tides chose to use Facebook was to improve the overall communication taking place in the classroom. As reported in Chapter IV, Facebook was used to open up lines of discussion between students in order for them to learn collectively. Dr. Tides had adapted some of his previous assignments so they could be completed on Facebook in order for students to take advantage of the technology’s social networking capabilities. Instead of simply turning in written assignments, the ‘Facebook Day’ assignments would allow students to discuss the course concepts in an open forum on Facebook. This effort to foster communication was met with an underwhelming response.
from the students. Despite Facebook’s affordances to help them collectively learn, few students actually engaged in a conversation when doing their work. Their primary interest was to simply obtain a grade (Chapter IV). They responded to the discussion questions posed by Dr. Tides, but did not bother acknowledging any of the other students in their answers. In essence, the students treated these assignments the same as ones being turned in on paper and read only by the instructor. Having the assignments on Facebook did not appear to change the students’ approach to completing the work.

A contributing factor to the lack of discourse was Dr. Tides’ approach to these assignments. I did not observe Dr. Tides exerting sufficient authority with Facebook in order to get students to complete these assignments as he intended. One student wished that Dr. Tides had given them an example of how the ‘Facebook Day’ assignments should have been conducted prior to making the class complete them. Dustin said, “It’s not a Facebook issue, it’s [Dr. Tides’] question issue…it would have been nice if we could have seen an example of somebody else’s debate or something so we could get some kind of idea [what to do].” Like many of the students, he wanted some additional guidance before engaging in the discussions with this new medium. Tolmie and Boyle (2000) point out that one of the factors associated with successful computer-mediated communication in education is the clarity of tasks. Without explicit instructions for them to engage in a discourse on the assignment topics, the students answered the questions directly without acknowledging anyone else’s response.

A similar problem was seen when Dr. Tides attempted to have the students complete a personality quiz on Facebook (Chapter IV). Outside of his brief explanation in class,
students had no specific instructions given to them, showing them where to find the quiz. Some of the students grew frustrated trying to find it and never completed the assignment, while others never knew it had been assigned to them in the first place. Because there was nothing posted on Facebook about the quiz, if a student was not in class the day Dr. Tides mentioned the assignment, they had no knowledge of it.

The students commented to me at the end of the term that he also did not reference the work that they were doing on Facebook enough in class. During our interview, one of the students brought up the fact that Dr. Tides did not talk about the Facebook debates in class much. Dustin added, “Yeah, I kind of think it’s weird that he doesn’t, to be honest.” Bonnie followed up on this by saying,

Yeah, like [Dr. Tides] will give us a [Facebook] assignment that I’ll have never heard about and then that’ll be the end of it. And then we’ll have a question about it on the test and I’m like ‘Dude, you didn’t even go over this.’

In a separate interview, another student specifically suggested that Dr. Tides reinforce the assignments more in order to improve students’ efforts on them. Rachel, told me,

Maybe it would help if he left five or ten minutes at the end of class to specifically go over what we have to do in Facebook and what he’s asking with the questions because he can be kind of vague about what he wants us to write about.

Without that reinforcement, many of the students either forgot to do the assignments or remembered at the last minute and did less than satisfactory work on them.

Dr. Tides’ efforts to use Facebook in his classroom were well-intentioned, but flawed. The potential value that he perceived Facebook to have was not properly communicated to
his students. There appeared to be an assumption on his end that students would automatically share his perception of Facebook’s pedagogical potential. Based on that, his contributions to the Facebook course page primarily consisted of constructing the space for students to use. He then left students to their own accord to use the space to enhance their educational experience.

Finlay, Desmet, and Evans (2004) concluded that the most successful uses of pedagogical technology came from when instructors “deliberately modified their teaching styles to take advantage of the technology” (p. 178). In this study, I did not observe Dr. Tides making those necessary modifications. The Facebook debates are an illustration of that. With the debates, he merely made a lateral move in transitioning the assignment from paper to online. Instead of students individually turning their responses into him on paper, they were now individually responding to him on the group page. Changing the medium the assignment was conducted in did not suddenly motivate the students to engage in more of a discourse. Dr. Tides tried to correct this by referencing some of the students’ responses in class the day after the assignment was due. This was an attempt to get students talking about each other’s ideas on these discussion topics. When he did, the students did converse in class and respond to what their peers had said in the Facebook assignments; however it never went further than that. The students never interpreted this as a suggestion that they should be talking more with each other on Facebook. Their failure to understand this was one reason why Dr. Tides’ efforts to have them engage in an online discourse decreased over time.

Compounding the problem was Dr. Tides’ approach to evaluating the students’ efforts. For their Facebook assignments, students never received any individual feedback
and/or critique on their work from Dr. Tides. Occasionally Dr. Tides would make general comments during class about how the class was performing collectively on the assignments. For example, after the first Facebook debate, he had told the students that he was impressed with the outside resources they had found to support their arguments. However, Dr. Tides never gave the students individual grades with comments on their work. When I asked Dr. Tides why he chose to do this, he explained to me that he was more concerned with the students’ participation on Facebook rather than the actual content they posted on the site. “I was hoping to originally use this assignment as one that is grounded in participation to help boost grades,” he told me. In retrospect, he realized that this may not have been the best approach. “I didn’t use a rubric and that is totally my fault,” he said. He then added, “I’ve seen that participation for participation’s sake doesn’t work. Grades drive performance.” Ertmer (2005) discussed the importance of the alignment between pedagogical technology and an instructor’s teaching philosophy. The fact that no rubric was used to evaluate the students’ work on Facebook indicates that not enough consideration had been given to how the technology should be used to reinforce Dr. Tides’ teaching philosophy. Objectives for how technology should be used not only need to be clearly established, but they also need to be more effectively communicated to those who are responsible for achieving those objectives.

Another example of Dr. Tides creating a space on Facebook for students to use was when he set up a study guide forum on the Facebook group page. The forum was designed to have students work together and communicate with each other on the possible topics that might be covered on an upcoming exam. While Dr. Tides created this space and encouraged
students to take advantage of it, he did not personally get involved in the discussion. Without Dr. Tides’ further involvement, most of the students did not bother posting anything in this forum. The few posts that were included in this area occurred during the last few days before the exam and were from students who were seeking notes or other lecture material from days when they were absent. Dr. Tides referred to this effort as ‘a last minute act of desperation.’ In this case, not only were the objectives for using this space unclear, but so were the incentives.

From the students’ perspective, they did not appreciate the fact that he simply created the forum and then left it for them to decide how the space should be used. Just like with the ‘Facebook Day’ debates, they wanted him to provide more information in order to help them use the space effectively. When I asked the students how Dr. Tides could improve the Facebook study guide, Bonnie told me, “I’m not trying to tell him how to do his job, but I think it would be helpful if he gave us questions to think about and answer ourselves and we could write responses [on Facebook] if we want.” Dustin immediately commented on that opinion by adding,

Or like require it for each person in the class to ask a question and he answers them. Because it’s like if one of my peers answers it, I would be more likely to think, ‘ok, he’s in the same class as me, same amount of time, he might be on Facebook all the time just like I am.’ If our teacher answered it, I would feel more comfortable that it’s the correct answer.

Had they been given some sort of initiation for discussion, the students believed they would have been more comfortable engaging in a discourse that would have helped everyone
properly prepare for the exam. Based on the research by Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) and how little discussion occurred when Dr. Tides gave them questions to answer on the ‘Facebook Day’ debates, it is arguable whether or not the students would have actually conversed more with each other in this forum had Dr. Tides provided more prompting.

In addition to the problems Dr. Tides had in trying to use Facebook to improve the communication between students, he also had difficulty using the technology to improve his own communication with the students. Dr. Tides initially felt that Facebook could replace email as his primary means of communicating with students. He believed it would work, since Facebook offered most of the same basic tools as other email clients. He also felt that it was more likely to be frequented by his students than the university’s email system, based on the feedback he had received from past students. However, as he began to use Facebook to communicate with his students, he ran into an unexpected problem. While he could send standard email messages through Facebook, he was limited in how much content he could attach in the emails. Facebook only affords users the opportunity to send photo or video files through their email service. For his courses, Dr. Tides frequently liked to email his students a PowerPoint file, which contained the slides for an upcoming class lecture. This was not possible through the Facebook email client. Since Dr. Tides was not able to send the PowerPoint files through Facebook, he had to send the students this information in an email to their university accounts. Dr. Tides then became conflicted regarding what to do with messages that did not include attached files. Given that they were already receiving certain emails through their university accounts, he worried that it would become too confusing if he sent other messages to their Facebook accounts. As the semester proceeded, Dr. Tides
decided that he would only send the students messages on Facebook if he knew they were already going to be checking the site in the near future, for instance to complete an assignment for the course. While the instructional communication research in Chapter II suggested that some students appreciated the ability to communicate with their instructor electronically, those studies examined communication from a singular method, like email. The problems here arose from the fact that there were too many methods being used for communication. Students were confused as to where to expect messages from Dr. Tides.

Likewise, when students needed to communicate electronically with Dr. Tides, they were forced to decide from several options. Some students embraced Facebook and used it exclusively to communicate with him, while others relied on their past habits and opted to use traditional email as their means of communication. This hesitancy exhibited by some students is representative of the larger problem that they had with Facebook being used for educational purposes. They had become so accustomed to emailing their professors whenever they had a question that they did not want to change their methods for just this one course, so they opted to email Dr. Tides in the same manner as the rest of their instructors. The fact that Dr. Tides was still using the university’s email client to communicate with them did not help in changing their perception of Facebook. Expectations for how Facebook was to be used needed to be more clearly established.

Those students who did become open to the idea of using Facebook as a means of communication with Dr. Tides eventually embraced the idea. As one student told me, “at first it was emails, but now that I’ve [communicated] with him on Facebook, I would probably just do it through Facebook now.” A few students even opted to contact Dr. Tides
using Facebook’s synchronous chat feature. Though some instructors may be reluctant to grant such ubiquitous access, Dr. Tides admitted to me that he had no problem communicating with students in this manner. The actions by these students suggest they gained a level of comfort during the semester using Facebook to talk with Dr. Tides. A longitudinal study may find that with more time and exposure to Facebook as an educational tool, growing numbers of students may eventually lose their preconceived notions of it being strictly a space for communicating with friends and see it as a forum where they can openly dialogue with an instructor regarding course-related matters.

**Resource Sharing**

Another objective of this study was to determine if Facebook afforded active over passive learning strategies, as advocated by many education researchers (e.g., Wolf, Bixby, Glenn III, & Gardner, 1991; Tolmie & Boyle, 2000). As Ferdig (2006) points out, opportunities for active participation, collaboration, and social interaction strongly influence a technology’s perceived pedagogical worth. Dr. Tides hoped that Facebook would afford active learning through the discussion assignments by encouraging students to discuss their viewpoints and develop a richer understanding of the material than if they had simply listened to a lecture. This did not happen – students merely responded to the discussion questions and did not engage with comments made by their fellow students.

Dr. Tides attempted to help students learn by occasionally adding outside content onto the course’s group page. Throughout the semester Dr. Tides posted material on the Facebook group page that he would use in conjunction with his lectures (Chapter IV). This
content included images and videos related to public relations issues. This outside material was typically posted on the Wall section of the Facebook group page, which was intended to be a space for community announcements. If he found information regarding PRSSA or recent public relations campaigns receiving media coverage, he would post the news on the Wall. This is one of the few examples I witnessed where Dr. Tides actually used the technology to reinforce his teaching philosophy. By sharing this material, Dr. Tides attempted to help students see public relations strategies in action as he explained it to them.

His contributions, however, were another point of contention with the students. Expecting him to take a more active role, they told me they wanted Dr. Tides to post more content on the group page. As the semester progressed, students noticed Dr. Tides contributing less in all areas of the Facebook group page. By the final month of the term, he stopped posting material altogether. In their remarks to me, the students commented on the importance of the instructor playing an active role in contributing content to the group page. Some of the comments included, “a teacher probably has to be interested in upkeeping the group page and know how to post websites,” and “[he needs to] be responsible for keeping it up and coming up with different activities to do on it.” In their study on instructor involvement in online discussions, Mazzolini and Maddison (2003) also found that students were more appreciative when their instructor took an active role in the discussion. However, the authors were not sure as to whether this appreciation was a result of the students learning more from the instructor’s contributions or whether they simply liked their instructor saving them from having to do the work themselves. Attempting to determine the nature of that
appreciation requires further examination of the teacher/student discourse. In this study, no such discourse ever really took place to examine.

From his perspective, Dr. Tides did not want to be responsible for adding all of the content on the group page. He wanted the students to exhibit their applied learning skills and post more of their own outside material on the Facebook group page. Early on in the term, he made an effort to remind student to find material online, whether it was pictures, videos, or news stories that connected with the course concepts, and post them on Facebook for everyone to view (Chapter IV). His words of encouragements were largely ignored. The majority of the students made no effort to add outside material onto the course’s group page. The few who did, added content as part of their required assignments. Only one student, Marie – the one who had never used Facebook before - took the initiative to share material on Facebook. She did so not because it would improve her grade on an assignment, but simply because she thought the rest of the class would benefit from reading the material. When the class was not participating as much as he expected, Dr. Tides admitted that he grew lax in his own involvement in posting content. “I think seeing [students not posting additional material on Facebook] sort of pushed me into not actively searching for pictures and things to post,” he told me. The lack of effort from both sides connects back to the motivating factors identified by Lengel and Lengel (2006). When students failed to add material, Dr. Tides lost that encouragement needed to effectively utilize the technology. As his efforts dwindled, any motivation left for the students to contribute also disappeared.

As for the consumption of the material that was posted, I only observed a few students occasionally looking at this content. The few students who did take advantage of
these opportunities, though, were the ones who typically exhibited greater effort in all aspects of the course. Regardless of whether Facebook had been adopted for this course, the observed effort made by these students suggests they put the time needed into their studies in an attempt to score higher grades. These are also the students that do not need a lot of guidance from their instructor in order to succeed. For these students, the presence of Facebook was inconsequential, as they would have found a way to learn the material regardless of whether the technology was used or not. The more important finding is for the students who could have benefitted from the inclusion of Facebook in the classroom. With a stronger presence from the instructor, and additional guidance on how to appropriately utilize the technology, it is more likely that these students would have seen the educational value of Facebook and used it to assist in learning course concepts.

Non-Pedagogical Uses

Though most of the students did not make full use of Facebook from an educational perspective, they certainly did not ignore the technology. This discussion would be incomplete without mentioning how students frequently used the technology for non-pedagogical purposes during class sessions. Dr. Tides’ course was conducted in a computer lab classroom, so each student had access to a computer during the class sessions. As I quietly monitored the students, I observed many of them surfing through various areas of Facebook other than the course’s group page (Chapter IV). Typically these students were reading the latest status updates from their friends or looking through newly-posted pictures.
Some students would also use the Facebook chat service to chat online with other users, including people who were not enrolled in the course.

Most of the students’ non-pedagogical usage of Facebook occurred while Dr. Tides was giving his lecture. However, there were also instances when students opted to use Facebook for social intents during time they were given in class to work on assignments. In both situations, the students sought out Facebook as a diversion from focusing on their course work.

I mention these non-pedagogical uses for two critical reasons. The first illustrates some distinct differences between the students in Dr. Tides’ course. A few students had their computers running only when Dr. Tides requested them to do so. However, most of them were using the computers throughout each class period, frequently for these non-pedagogical purposes. When I asked the students about the lab computers, many of them admitted that having Facebook play a role in their course did not affect how much they used the computers during class time. They felt they would have visited Facebook and other websites just as much had Facebook not been a part of their course. Some of them did say they felt less guilty about visiting the social networking site during class. If Dr. Tides ever questioned them about it, they could justify being on the site by saying they were on it for course purposes. Dr. Tides admitted to me that he assumed students would take this stance, which is why he never made an issue of it during class even though he was well aware that some students were on other parts of Facebook besides the course’s group page.

Dr. Tides’ silence on this matter is another example of why his students never realized Facebook’s value as a pedagogical tool. Whenever a course is held in one of these
classrooms, students are likely to be tempted to use the computers for diversionary means. Those impulses, however, can be curtailed with an effective authoritative voice who establishes rules for how the computers are to be used. By failing to encourage students to change their perceptions about Facebook, he was implicitly reinforcing their use of the application as a tool for diversion and entertainment. The Facebook page for this course did not include adequate aesthetic differences to visually separate it from the typical socially-driven Facebook pages they were accustom to. If a change in perception was going to occur, Dr. Tides needed to be the driving force behind it.

The one exception to this observation was Marie. Her first experience with social networking technology was in this course. Without any preconceived notions about Facebook’s intended purpose, Marie was able to simply follow instructions and use Facebook to complete her work for the course. She was using the technology as Dr. Tides intended. Not only did she complete the required assignments, she also found outside material that she posted on the group page for her classmates to view (Chapter V). At no time during class did I observe her Facebook pages other than the course site. With no prior experience with Facebook, Marie used it strictly as an educational tool. Marie’s efforts suggest that perception plays an integral role in the success of Facebook being accepted as an educational tool. If an individual can perceive Facebook as a place for learning, then the website’s pedagogical potential has a greater chance of being realized. Most of the students began this study with the perception of Facebook being a social media website primarily for entertainment and networking purposes. Marie, however, was a virtual blank slate with
regard to Facebook, thus her perceptions were formed purely from Dr. Tides’ instructions, limited as they were.

The Classroom Power Dynamic

In Chapter II, the role technology plays on the power dynamic between students and their instructor was reviewed. Hawisher and Selfe (1991) noted that when an instructor engages their students electronically, it can significantly change the way students interact. For this reason, I carefully observed the power dynamic that was created between Dr. Tides and his students. By more closely analyzing that relationship, I will further establish why Facebook’s potential as an educational tool was never fully realized in this course.

Relationship With Students

Dr. Tides’ students learned fairly quickly that his approach to teaching was different than most instructors. Instead of being a strict disciplinarian, Dr. Tides was more open and friendly toward his students. Many of the students appreciated the fact that Dr. Tides did not conduct himself like many of their other instructors (Chapter V). They considered him to be fun, outgoing, and found that he was willing to share some of his personal life with them. For many of them, his demeanor made attending class a friendly, enjoyable experience.

This demeanor was reinforced by his use of Facebook and personal presence on the site. By making Facebook a part of his course, he was perceived by students as being trendy and in touch with their interests. When he set up the group on Facebook for students to join, they became equal members of a social network. Although he did have administrator status
that gave him greater control over how the group page was handled, there were few visual
signifiers that would allow anyone looking at the group page to identify Dr. Tides as the
instructor or an authority figure. For example, Dr. Tides’ name and photo was listed along
with all of the students at the top of the page. Furthermore, Dr. Tides’ personal Facebook
page was public, so students were able to see aspects of his personal life outside of the
classroom. For all of these reasons, Dr. Tides was often perceived as more of a friend than a
teacher to the students.

As enjoyable as that relationship seemed to be, there were times when the students
desired Dr. Tides to be more of an instructor and provide them with structure and guidance.
Earlier, it was noted that the quality of the students’ work on homework assignments
conducted on Facebook suffered as a result of Dr. Tides’ lack of instruction and critique.
Prior to the assignments, some students felt a sense of uncertainty as to what they should
have included in their work. Afterwards, when Dr. Tides did not offer them any individual
feedback, the students assumed they were completing the assignments correctly. Without
that authoritative voice, students were doing their work on Facebook for the sake of doing it
on Facebook and not for any sort of pedagogical gain as it related to the course material.

An inability to assert authority in the classroom can be problematic for instructors and
is the biggest issue that educators who are considering adopting Facebook into their
classroom will face. Research suggests an instructor needs to provide guidance and
encouragement when introducing new technology into the classroom. Finlay, Desmet, and
Evans (2004) reported that there was more satisfaction and participation from students when
instructors made it clear how to successfully use the technology offered in their courses. It is
difficult to integrate new technological tools if they are not properly implemented by those with authority. There were several instances documented in this study where Dr. Tides was unable to exert sufficient authority when expressing to the students how they should be using Facebook for their assignments. Without any guidance, students were on their own in utilizing the space on the Facebook course page. As a result, most students never took the initiative to communicate with each other or use the space for sharing ideas and information.

While Dr. Tides could have taken a different approach to instructing students on how to use the technology, the students also shared the responsibility for having the technology’s pedagogical potential realized. One issue in this study was the students’ motivation in using Facebook for educational purposes. They seemed extrinsically motivated and viewed involvement on Facebook for this course as being more of an intrinsic reward. There was evidence of this attitude by the students, beginning with their responses to the motivation questionnaire they took before the course began. In Chapter III, I noted that the students’ responses suggested they were motivated when they viewed their work as being important or useful. I also reported how data indicated that when given the option, these students preferred not to study. Their responses on the questionnaire coupled with their observable actions during class, suggested that many of them only completed coursework on graded assignments thereby enabling them to earn a higher overall grade for the course.

The other disappointing issue was that the students did not fully grasp the value of networking that the added technology afforded them. While they may have appreciated more frequent contributions from Dr. Tides, there was nothing stopping them from additional communication with each other on the course’s group page. Despite that, very little
interaction occurred between students on the Facebook course page, as was identified in the section on unidirectional communication from Chapter V. In our interviews, the students never expressed a desire to communicate more with each other in order to create a stronger, collaborative learning community. Instead, they simply wanted to interact with the instructor more and obtain only the information that would help them achieve a good grade in the course. If students do not see the value of collaboration, then social networking’s potential as an educational tool may never be fully realized.

The attitudes and efforts exhibited by both Dr. Tides and his students prevented them from experiencing Facebook’s full potential. As the semester progressed, everyone became reactive, waiting for someone else to take the initiative in using the technology productively. While Dr. Tides would have been the likely participant to get the rest involved, his efforts began to mirror that of his students. Their apathetic attitude towards using Facebook for educational purposes spread to him. Lacking an effective leader, the Facebook group page was nearly abandoned by the end of the semester.

Implications

In reviewing the results of this study it became clear that Dr. Tides and his students were unable to utilize the value of Facebook as an educational tool that was identified prior to the beginning of the semester. Dr. Tides volunteered to have his course tested for the purpose of this study because he believed Facebook could be used as a learning management system. His previous interactions with colleagues and students, combined with his familiarity with the technology, led to his honest belief that Facebook had pedagogical
potential. The literature reviewed for this study would support that thinking. Researchers have identified some pedagogical benefits to using social networking in the classroom.

The findings of this study suggest that the success of adopting new technology in the classroom has little to do with the device itself. The effectiveness is at the mercy of the people who will be actively using the technology. Facebook was not intentionally designed for educational purposes, so for it to be effective as a pedagogical tool, it requires a concentrated effort by those seeking to make it work for their purposes. There were several components, outlined at the end of Chapter II, required for an instructor to successfully implement a new technology into the classroom. In this particular study, the results reveal that some of these components were never established or abandoned as the semester progressed.

Dr. Tides needed to take a more active role in sufficiently explaining how Facebook should be used by the students. Simply creating the space for students was insufficient. Students were left aimless, unsure of how to use this familiar technology in an unfamiliar context. This, in turn, resulted in the lack of understood rules. Without clear rules, students fell back to old habits and continued to use Facebook as they always had, which was discussed in the section on non-pedagogical uses (Chapter IV).

Everyone involved seemed to recognize the need for more instruction, yet no one seemed willing to take the initiative to establish it. The skimpy guidelines that Dr. Tides did offer for how Facebook should be used were followed. The students, however, did nothing beyond that. When students gave bare minimum effort, Dr. Tides’ interest in finding ways to capitalize on the technology’s potential waned. It was as if both sides were engaged in a
game of ‘educational chicken,’ waiting for the other side to show them how to effectively use Facebook within this new context. Neither side budging, everyone resorted to the rules and roles associated with using Facebook for non-pedagogical purposes.

Again, the one exception to this was Marie, the student who did not have a Facebook account prior to the course. Using Facebook for the first time, she had no pre-established perception of the technology. She was willing and eager to use it specifically for educational purposes. As was established in Chapter V, of all the students who were a part of this study, she was the one who contributed the most to the group page and made an effort to engage in conversation with the other students to discuss matters related to the course. It is important to note that her effort also dwindled as the semester progressed in part because of the lack of response from her classmates.

Marie’s efforts on Facebook suggest that there may be some benefit to not having prior experience with technology when it is being implemented in a new context. Unlike the other members, she did not have to worry about eschewing any preconceived notions about using the technology. However, that is a limited benefit. As was observed in this study, if there are undefined objectives, then everyone will remain at a loss for exactly how to proceed in using the technology. While these implications can in no way be made into generalizable results, they do provide some possible answers as to how the limitations associated with using Facebook in higher education can be overcome.
Limitations

While the results of the study suggest that the students failed to properly utilize Facebook’s potential, there were some associated limitations that may have affected the way the participants used Facebook and in the way I analyzed the data collected for this study. Consideration of these factors should be made before any future research is conducted.

One limitation was in the original design of Facebook itself. The creators of Facebook state on their website that their mission is “to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected” and it is used “to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet” (Facebook, 2009). Nowhere in this mission statement do they mention Facebook being used for educational purposes, which became evident at times throughout the study as the participants attempted to use it. For example, the group page that Dr. Tides created for his course was not an exclusive educational space. While the page was created solely for his course and could only be accessed by him and his students, the page still contained elements from other areas of Facebook. Any student who was on the course’s group page would still be able to see which of their friends were currently logged onto Facebook chat. They would also see notifications when a friend posted an update or message on their personal Wall. For the participants who were already members of Facebook, neither the aesthetics nor the functions of the course’s group page differed dramatically from any other page on Facebook. By having these non-educational features fixed on the course’s group page, it may have been difficult for the students to accept the group page as a separate educational space.
Another issue with the design of Facebook was the way the discussion forum was structured. Starting with the initial post, every comment made for a particular thread was organized in a single column. Posts were displayed in chronological order as they were added to the thread. This prevented anyone from being able to directly comment on another student’s post. If a student wanted to respond to something said in a different post, they would have to specifically reference it in their post because the layout of the discussion forum lacked tools to indicate threaded discussion. This was particularly problematic given that the discussion forums were primarily used for the Facebook debates, which required students to respond to a comment made from the opposing side of the argument. Considering the way that the posts were organized, students had to read the posts from top to bottom, occasionally making it difficult to follow along with the conversation. I asked Dr. Tides if he felt the layout of the discussion forums was problematic for what he was trying to accomplish with the debate assignments. He admitted that it was more difficult for the students to engage in an actual conversation on the various topics presented in these debates.

Because Facebook was not designed for educational purposes, it also lacked certain features that were desired by either Dr. Tides or his students, which would have made it a more suitable course management system. As documented earlier, the email service offered by Facebook is not very dynamic. Users are limited in the type and number of files they can send in a message on Facebook. Neither document files nor PowerPoint slides could be sent through email on Facebook. This posed a significant limitation in the way Dr. Tides could communicate and share resources with his students. Facebook also does not offer any sort of electronic grade book. While the previous course management system Dr. Tides used had a
grade book which allowed students to keep track of their progress in the course, Facebook offered no such service. Dr. Tides also learned that Facebook did not have very many applications which could be used on his group page, intended for scholarly purposes. Without more relevant applications, it became difficult for Dr. Tides to find ways to integrate additional features into his course. He told me,

    and so it became frustrating from a teacher perspective because I saw that there was so much that could be done [on Facebook], if you had the design… I don’t know what’s involved in the application creation, but there was a lot there that is just waiting to be done if you’ve got the know how to do it and, who knows, it very well may come to that point. But at the current stage, it’s a little difficult given what you can do.

The lack of features again not only limited what the participants could do on Facebook, it also limited the likelihood that it would be perceived as an educational space. This goes back to the point Eldred (2008) makes about adaptability. If future instructors are going to consider using Facebook as a pedagogical tool they must be aware of these limitations created by the website’s design and still find ways to adapt the technology to their particular course.

    Beyond the design of Facebook, there were also some limitations I faced as I tried to conduct this study and collect data. First of all, this study lacks generalizable results given that it was a case study. The isolated nature of this study makes it difficult to apply the findings elsewhere given the multiple variables that are involved.
The multiple variables involved in a classroom setting provided additional limitations for me. Factors such as the structure of daily class sessions, the layout of the classroom, and student attendance were beyond my control. Using a case study limited my observations to whatever occurred in each class session. While I could observe students using the technology in the classroom, they were also given assignments that required them to use Facebook on their own time. Not having the ability to observe students outside of the classroom, limited me to analyzing only certain variables of the students’ efforts based on what was provided on the website. Facebook displayed the time and content of what students posted. However, factors such as the duration of time spent working on a given assignment or reading what other people wrote on the Facebook page could not be observed.

Finally, a problem arose a few months after the case study was completed when Dr. Tides deleted the Facebook group page that contained his students’ work. This was inadvertent on his part. He did not realize that when he removed himself as administrator from the group that the entire page would be deleted. While I made attempts to photographically capture the Facebook activity of his students throughout the semester, deleting the page now limits the ability to do any comparative studies in the future. Without the class page intact, future studies examining the use of Facebook in a classroom setting will likely only be able to reference this study instead of using it for comparison. Given that this was a case study, using the results for reference rather than comparison is most likely sufficient. Based on both the results of this study, as well as the limitations outlined above, there is hopefully a clear understanding of where research on this topic should be headed in the future.
Future Directions for Research

My analysis, coupled with the feedback received from the participants of this study, has led to several questions that need to be addressed as research on the educational usage of Facebook continues. The areas of research covered in the literature review found in Chapter II will be used to organize these questions. Those researching social networking, the adoption of pedagogical technology, or instructional communication would benefit by addressing these questions.

Before those in higher education can seriously consider adopting Facebook as an educational tool, more research is needed to identify a proper implementation strategy. For this study, great lengths were taken to ensure the use of Facebook in the classroom met all FERPA regulations. However, successfully adopting this technology will require more than addressing the legalities of the process. The interviews with the students participating in this study revealed that despite efforts to assure them that their information would remain confidential, they still had some lingering concerns with regard to privacy throughout the semester. Identifying what it will take to completely assuage students that this is a safe form of communication will be important in future research.

While appropriate implementation will be critical, the more important variable to examine is student motivation. In this study, many students exhibited apathy towards using the social networking service for educational purposes, other than the times when it was mandatory for course outcomes. The question results as to whether the extrinsic motivation exhibited by these students is the norm. Will there be certain courses or specific populations of students in higher education who will have intrinsic motivation and want to use social
networking to create a learning community? Future research in this area should more deeply probe student motivation levels prior to the course inception in order to determine what role it plays in the success of social networking being adopted into the classroom. If it is determined that extrinsic motivation is the norm of students in higher education, consideration must be given to the idea of introducing social networking earlier in a student’s educational experience. If students are introduced to social networking in grade school, they may begin to learn the value of intrinsic motivation. By instilling this value at a young age, social networking may eventually be better utilized in higher education because students will seek out knowledge from their peers instead of only being motivated toward a final grade.

With regard to the technology itself, many questions remain about the actual potential of social networking as an educational tool. To answer these questions more research is needed on identifying the comparative advantage of social networking to other educational tools. There were instances seen in this study where Facebook was used for assignments in ways that failed to utilize the technology’s unique characteristics. Students would complete these assignments in the exact same way as if they were doing them on paper and turning them into the instructor in person. For social networking to have value in the classroom, instructors and students need to focus on the features that separate it from other forms of technology they may be using.

The other important aspect of the technology that requires further research is determining if Facebook is the best form of social networking that could be used in education. In Chapter III, I discussed the reasons why Facebook was chosen and made the argument that it could be very beneficial in the classroom, especially for a public relations
course. However, as the study went on, there were factors which were not considered prior to the beginning of the study that again indicated some limitations with Facebook. These limitations have been discussed at length in this chapter. There is a possibility that had a different form of social networking been utilized, specifically, one that students were not already familiar with or currently using, that their approach to the technology and how it was used in the classroom would be different. A comparative study where Facebook and a less familiar form of social networking were both examined would be beneficial to achieve a better sense of the actual potential of social networking as an educational tool.

Finally, more research is needed to explore the value of social networking from the perspective of the instructor. Earlier in this chapter I discussed the fluctuating power dynamic I observed between Dr. Tides and his students during this study. At times, Dr. Tides’ usage of Facebook flattened the hierarchy in his classroom. Based on my observations, there seemed to be a connection between the level of power Dr. Tides possessed and the students’ efforts to communicate on Facebook. If an instructor does not join the network with the students, will the students ever be self-motivated to use the technology? Or will they only use it when required by the instructor? Yet, if the instructor becomes an equal member of the network along with the students, how can the instructor remain in control of other facets of the classroom dynamic? Will students continue to respect and value the input of the instructor if they view the instructor as more of an equal that a superior? It will be critical in future research to determine how an instructor can find the balance between being an authority figure and a ‘friend’ while still having students use social networking to its fullest potential.
Summary

Through this discussion chapter, I attempted to expand on my results from the previous two chapters. This chapter was organized in a way to show the significance that Dr. Tides’ instruction through the use of Facebook had on the participants’ ability to tap into the educational potential of social networking.

In the first section of this chapter, I discussed the potential value Facebook was perceived to have by Dr. Tides prior to the study. I also reviewed the students’ perceptions of the technology to show how they were not aligned with Dr. Tides’. By contrasting the two perspectives, I sought to illustrate how the results of this study did not sync with Dr. Tides’ well-intentioned rationale for wanting to use Facebook in his classroom.

The discussion then turned towards examining the specific pedagogical uses of Facebook observed in this study. I specifically looked at the way Dr. Tides attempted to use the social networking website to engage in a discourse with his students and share resources with them. Dr. Tides’ effort to use the technology to improve communication with the students, as well as enhance their communication with each was not realized. By not providing more instruction or feedback, his efforts to have students engage in a discussion on Facebook were simply met with apathy or resistance. I rarely observed the students communicating with each other on Facebook. As for communicating with Dr. Tides, there were some observed instances of this, but in most cases, it was done as a substitute for another means of communication with him rather than as an additional means of communication.
The same basic theme was true when I reviewed the ways the technology was used to share resources. Early on in the semester, Dr. Tides made attempts to use the technology in an effort to help the students learn the course material. These efforts were mostly ignored by the students. I rarely observed the students using any of the outside material that had been posted on the group page. Outside material was not being added to Facebook by the students, either. Unless it meant directly helping them achieve a better grade on an assignment, the students were not interested in using Facebook for this course.

Finally, I reviewed any observed non-pedagogical uses. I discussed how frequently I saw students in the classroom using Facebook for reasons that were unrelated to the course. By reviewing these non-pedagogical uses, I showed how students not only had difficulty breaking the habit of using Facebook exclusively for entertainment purposes, but also reinforced their lack of desire for using it for educational purposes.

In the next part of the chapter, I made the argument that the power dynamic I observed between Dr. Tides and his students was directly related to how they had used Facebook in this study. Dr. Tides’ communication created a fluctuating power dynamic. At times (primarily early in the semester), he exhibited characteristics consistent of an authority figure. However, his presence on Facebook made him more of an equal or friend with the students. Regardless of which role he was playing, more was needed from him in that role for Facebook to have been used more effectively. As an authority figure, he could have better instructed his students in ways they should be using Facebook as an educational tool. If he was going to take on the role of a friend, he should have networked more with the students in order to create more of a dialogue on the course page.
The social network that was created on Facebook by these participants did not work because no one was able to establish clear roles. Without a stronger presence from Dr. Tides on Facebook, students were unclear whether they should treat him as a friend or as an instructor. Since most of them were current Facebook users, they typically maintained their status as ‘friend’ and thus were not motivated to use the website for educational purposes. For Dr. Tides or any other instructor considering the application of social networking in the classroom, more consideration needs to be given to the level of presence they should have on the site in order to maximize the technology’s potential.

Finally, the chapter ends with a review of the limitations I faced while conducting this study, as well as the questions which remain unanswered at the close of my research. I will finish this study in the next chapter, which will provide a sufficient conclusion and the important concepts that can be gained from it.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this study, college students were introduced to the idea of using social networking for educational purposes. Certainly this was a new experience for everyone involved. As Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon, & Byers (2002) put it, trying to implement a new technology into a familiar environment can be a “messy process.” It is not surprising that the implementation of Facebook did not go perfectly in this first attempt. While everyone was at least willing to give it a try, the individuals who participated in this study were unable to fully embrace this effort.

The research reviewed in Chapter II shows that increased communication among all members of a network can improve learning. This study attempted to see if that could be done specifically with Facebook. The fact that none of the students in the study had used Facebook in an educational context before led to some difficulty with the implementation of the social networking site in the classroom. Throughout my observation, I saw students reluctant to fully embrace Facebook in this new context. The same obsession that many of the students exhibited in looking at their friends’ pictures or reading their status updates on Facebook was not replicated when it came to communicating with their fellow classmates about course material. For many of the students, the implementation of Facebook in their course did not translate into their perception of it as an educational tool, but rather as a justification to continue using it for entertainment purposes during class time.
For Facebook to have any chance of being used effectively as an educational tool, students’ perceptions of this application need to be reshaped. This begins with how the technology is introduced to users. As this study has shown, Facebook has a lot of potential value, but turning that potential into actual value takes effort. In this instance, the instructor did not sufficiently establish how the technology should be used and as a result, most students did not take advantage of using Facebook within this new context. Without a change in perception, the students’ use of Facebook during the study remained consistent with the manner in which they used the technology prior to the study.

The best evidence of the relationship between perception and use came from Marie, the student in this study who did not previously have a Facebook account. With no established perceptions of the site, she, more than any of the other students, embraced the technology as a medium to exchange thoughts and ideas related to the course. Her actions and attitudes toward Facebook suggest that there is a chance that the application could be embraced and used as an effective educational tool. However, given the number of college students who currently have Facebook accounts, it may be unlikely that this current generation of learners will readily accept the technology in the classroom. Instead, it may be necessary for educators at the K-12 level to consider potential uses for Facebook and begin to find ways to implement the technology at an earlier level. By introducing this technology to younger learners, there may be a better chance of achieving acceptance for the product as a learning tool before they have the opportunity to perceive it in any other way.

Even if Facebook is never fully embraced as an educational tool, educators should still remain active in finding ways to help students network through technological means. As
Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) argue, the trend of non-adoption that remains in higher education needs to end. Instructors and administrators alike need to become more open-minded and discover ways to effectively integrate technology into the classroom just as students so readily embrace in their personal lives. If this can be accomplished, new opportunities for students to actively engage with course material and become part of an educational network that will continue to foster learning for years to come will be created.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PRE-COURSE SURVEY

This appendix contains the full survey that was administered to the students who participated in the study. Students completed the survey on the first day of the course. A summary of the survey’s contents and results were discussed in Chapter III.

Facebook as a Learning Management System in Higher Education Survey
PART 1: Student Motivation Scale

Instructions: Please circle the number toward either word which best represents your feelings about your college education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Motivated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Interested</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Involved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Not stimulated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Don’t want to study</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Inspired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Unchallenged</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Uninvigorated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Unenthused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Excited</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Aroused</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Not fascinated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Dreading it                            1 2 3 4 5 6 7       Looking forward to it
14. Important                            1 2 3 4 5 6 7       Unimportant
15. Useful                               1 2 3 4 5 6 7       Useless
16. Helpful                              1 2 3 4 5 6 7       Harmful

PART 2. Unwillingness-to-Communicate Scale

Instructions: Below are a series of statements about communication. There are no right or wrong answers. Indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by writing a number in the line next to each statement. A 1 means you strongly disagree, a 2 means you disagree, a 3 means you disagree somewhat, a 4 means you are neutral or unsure, a 5 means you agree somewhat, a 6 means you agree, and a 7 means you strongly agree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Neutral/Unsure</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I am afraid to speak up in conversations. _____
2. I talk less because I’m shy. _____
3. I like to get involved in group discussions. _____
4. I talk a lot because I am not shy. _____
5. My friends and family don’t listen to my ideas and suggestions. _____
6. I think my friends are truthful with me. _____
7. I don’t ask for advice from family or friends when I have to make decisions. _____
8. I believe my friends and family understand my feelings. _____
9. I have no fears about expressing myself in a group. _____
10. My family doesn’t enjoy discussing my interests and activities with me. _____
11. I avoid group discussions. _____
12. My friends seek my opinions and advice. _____
13. I am afraid to express myself in a group. _____
14. During a conversation, I prefer to talk rather than listen. _____
15. Other people are friendly only because they want something out of me. _____
16. I find it easy to make conversation with strangers. _____
17. My friends and family listen to my ideas and suggestions. _____
18. Talking to other people is just a waste of time. _____
19. I feel nervous when I have to speak to others. _____
20. I don’t think my friends are honest in their communication with me. _____


PART 3. Use of Technology

1. Circle below how often you check your primary email account.
   Once a week   Every other day   Once a day   Multiple times a day
2. Do you have your own blog? Yes No
3. Have you ever created a podcast? Yes No
4. Have you ever listened to a podcast? Yes No
5. Circle how often you use online chat programs (e.g. AIM, Yahoo Messenger, etc.)
   Never   Once a month   Once a week   Every few days   Daily
6. Do you have an account with a social networking site (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, etc.)? Yes No
   6a. If yes, which site do you have an account with? _______________________
   6b. If yes, how often do you visit that site? _______________________

201
7. Which of the following technological services have you used in a college course? (Circle all that apply)

Email  Blog  Message Board  Facebook  Chat program  YouTube
Vista  Podcast  MySpace  Twitter  Wiki  Google  Other: ____________________

PART 4. Background Information

1. What is your major? ________________________________

2. Circle the range that reflects your grade point average within your major:

4.0-3.75  3.74-3.5  3.49-3.25  3.24-3.0  2.99-2.75  2.74-2.5  2.49-2.25  2.24-2.0  below 2.0

3. Circle your current year in school:

freshman  sophomore  junior  senior

1st year master’s  2nd year master’s  other: ____________________

4. Circle your gender: male  female
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This appendix contains the questions that were asked of the participants during the formal interviews that were held over the course of the semester. Students and their instructor were each interviewed twice; once midway through the course and a second time at the end of the semester. Responses to these interview questions were reported in Chapters IV and V.

Interview questions for students (midway point)

1. What was your initial reaction upon hearing that Facebook would play a primary role in this course?

2. Did any of you previously have a course that used Facebook?

3. How many of you have had courses that used other learning management systems (i.e. Web CT, Vista, Blackboard)
   a. How does Facebook compare to those?

4. Do you feel Dr. Tides did a good job of introducing Facebook and explaining his expectations for it to you?
   a. Does he do a good job of reminding you to visit Facebook?
   b. How would you describe his presence on the site? Too much? Not enough?
   c. Have you noticed a change in the way you interact with him on the site?

5. On average, how often would you say you visit the course page?

6. What are your thoughts on having this class in a computer lab?
   a. Is it a good learning environment or do you find yourself being more distracted?
   b. Would you visit Facebook during class even if it wasn’t part of the course?

7. What, if any, benefits have you gained from using Facebook in this course?
8. Was anybody ‘friends’ with each other before the class began?
   a. How many of you have become ‘friends’ since the class began?
   b. What were the reasons for those friendships? Social? Class-related?

9. Have any of you done something on Facebook that you would consider ‘class-related’ that wouldn’t be seen on the course page?

10. Why was there not more participation in the study guide thread on the course page?

   Interview questions for instructor (midway point)

1. What led you to use Facebook for educational purposes originally?
   a. Had you used other learning management systems (i.e. Blackboard) before?

2. Can you briefly describe your previous uses of Facebook in the classroom?

3. What changes, if any, did you make when preparing to use Facebook for this class?

4. At the beginning of the semester, what goals or expectations did you have for your usage of Facebook?

5. What was your take on how students initially responded to you telling them that Facebook would be used in this course?

6. Tell me a little bit about having a computer lab classroom. Do you see a change in either the way you act or the way students perform in this setting?
   a. Probe on students being on Facebook a lot during lectures if you can.

7. Let’s turn to Facebook now; How often do you feel students should be visiting the course page and how often do you feel students are visiting the page?

8. How do you feel the Facebook Day debates are going? Are students meeting your expectations or could they be doing more?

9. What was your response to how students used Facebook in terms of a study guide for their first exam?

10. You recently had students do a personality quiz, but it appeared some students either didn’t do it or had difficulty doing it. What do you attribute the problem to?

11. How do you decide when you’re going to communicate with the class through Facebook versus sending out an email through the campus server?
12. Do you anticipate making any changes in the way you use Facebook for this class before the semester ends?

13. Finally, has there been anything about the way you or the students have used Facebook this semester that has surprised you?

Final interview questions for students

1. You recently had your final Facebook discussion day and the format was slightly different. It was more of a discussion than a debate. Correct? Did you enjoy this format better? How could it still be improved?
   a. Why do you think Dr. Tides made this change?

2. You also finished up your group projects recently. How do you feel they went?
   a. Did any of you end up using Facebook at all to help you in the preparation of your projects?

3. For the final exam, Dr. Tides has made it take home. Have you received it yet?
   a. Do any of you plan on talking with each other in order to help each other on the test?
   b. What methods do you plan on using to communicate with each other?
   c. If you communicate with Dr. Tides, looking for help, how do you plan on contacting him?

4. I know we talked about Dr. Tides as an instructor last time, but tell me again what you think of his as an instructor?
   a. Do you think only a certain type of teacher would be willing to use Facebook in their course?
   b. Do you think who he is played a role in how you used Facebook?

5. One thing we didn’t talk about last time was the external links that Dr. Tides and some of you posted (i.e. the Taco Bell and Chic-Fil-A giveaways). Did you check out these sites after seeing them posted on the group page?
   a. Did you like it when someone would post one of these?
   b. Why didn’t more of you post links?

6. Dr. Tides had also posted information on the group Wall about workshops related to Facebook or public relations. Did any of you attend these?
   a. Did you like that Dr. Tides posted these?
   b. Is this a good use of the Facebook group page?
7. How many of you were friends before this class began? How many became ‘friends’ since the class has begun?  
   a. Do you think you will keep in touch once the class is over?  
   b. Will you use Facebook to communicate with each other?  

8. Do you feel more instructors will begin to use Facebook in their courses?  
   a. Do you feel Facebook will be used more in corporate America?  
   b. Do you think Facebook should just remain as a social tool?  

9. How would you rate Facebook as a learning management system?  
   a. Do you think Dr. Tides used it to its fullest potential?  
   b. How does it compare to other learning management systems like Blackboard, WebCT, etc?  

10. What would you say was the best thing about having Facebook being used as a part of this course?  
   a. What was the worst part?  

11. We’ve talked a lot about the pros and cons of these various learning management systems, so in your opinion what should the ideal learning management system accomplish?  

12. Do you have any other thoughts or opinions about Facebook in education that you haven’t gotten a chance to say yet?  

Final interview questions for instructor  

1. Let’s begin with the various facets of the Facebook group page. First, the discussion board; how successful do you feel these assignments were?  
   a. What was your primary reason in changing the format of the final Facebook discussion day?  

2. Moving on to the Wall – do you feel this function of Facebook page was use to its fullest?  
   a. Who should be primarily responsible for putting messages on the Wall?  

3. Similarly with the photos and posted items parts of the Facebook group page, do you feel these were used effectively in this course?  
   a. Do you feel students took advantage of this added material?  
   b. Did you expect students to add things items to these parts of the page?
4. I want to change focus slightly and talk about Facebook in terms of some of the final assignments for your class. Did you get a sense that students used Facebook at all in preparing for their group projects?
   a. What about for their final take home exam?

5. Without going into specifics, did students use Facebook to communicate with you when they had individual problems or questions?
   a. What would you say was the ratio between students communicating with you on individual problems or questions through email vs. Facebook?
   b. Which method would you prefer they use?
   c. In general, did you notice any difference in the way these students interacted with you in comparison to students you had before you used Facebook in your course?
   d. I know you’re not too far removed from last semester, but have you had any students stay in contact with you?

6. We talked last time about the pros and cons of teaching in a computer lab, did you see any change at all over the course of the semester in how students used the computers in that classroom?
   a. I know this is only speculation on your part, but did you see any relationship between how students spent their time in the classroom and their performance in your class?

7. You talked last time about how you felt that traditional teacher-student hierarchical dynamic still existed in your class. Do you still feel that way?
   a. Why do you think Facebook was not able to change that?

8. You’ve talked in the past about your experience with other learning management systems, like Vista. Would you say that you consider Facebook to be an LMS and if so, how does it compare to other more traditional LMS?
   a. What would the ideal learning management system look like?

9. What was the best and worst part about using Facebook in your course?

10. What, if any, feedback have you gotten from students about Facebook in this course?

11. So what changes have you made this semester in using Facebook for the same course?

12. Is there anything else related to the usage of Facebook in this course that I haven’t asked you that you think would be important for me to know?