Communication competence on Facebook: Knowing what to say, knowing how to communicate

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ABSTRACT

Social media has become part of many people's way of life. One of them most popular social media sites is Facebook which allows them to establish and maintain connectivity worldwide. One aspect of Facebook users that has not yet been explored much as a subject of investigation is communication competence. This descriptive-comparative study was conducted to determine the perceived communication competence on Facebook of the select students of University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines (USTP). Stratified random sampling was used to determine a sample size of 80 students. Validated survey questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The data were analyzed using mean, percentage and standard deviation to describe the variables investigated in the study such as frequency and level of the students' exposure on Facebook, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine the significant difference of communication competence sub-skills among the students. The findings show that most of the respondents were highly competent communicators in certain sub-skills while the rest were relatively competent in other sub-skills. Overall, the respondents need to acquire—or rather, holistically develop—their communication competence which combines the sub-skills on "knowing what to say" and "knowing how to communicate".

Keywords: communication competence, descriptive design, Facebook, online social networking sites (OSNS)

I.   INTRODUCTION

Communication can happen by using different media. The newest medium of communication used by students these days is online social networking sites (OSNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, CyWorld, and MySpace. Providing a new forum for communication with others, these sites have become among people across the globe, particularly to millennials (also known as Generation Y). These media platforms have quickly succeeded in and outside the campus allowing students to communicate with anyone else and upload messages and posts of their choice.

Despite the liberty to engage in any communication on social media, many tend to overlook the basic competence required in mediated communication. Spiltzberg and Cupach (1989) defined competence as something that depicts the value of the quality of communication. It is about managing a person's capacities to exhibit communication skills, either intrinsic or created, to achieve communicative objectives.

Facebook is one of the most favored social media sites. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) labelled it

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the "college student population" where the greatest chunk of the entire population is composed of students. Generally, they utilize it securely and habitually to stay in contact with friends, peers, family, and others (Buga, Capeneata, Chirasnel, & Popa, 2013). Here, they make a profile page that displays their online "friends" and where they can share information about themselves. Based on the user's publicity settings, any individual who can access the site is able to view the user's profile. The latter may include personal information such as individual leisure activities, conjoint class schedules, standing, common groups, snaps, notes, and other posts on one's "wall" or "timeline".

One of the most popular features of Facebook is its capability to allow a person to share pictures uploaded from a mobile phone, camera, or hard drive. Also, one can post messages which often come in short or temporal notes. To keep certain information private, users may allow only friends to view and even download their posts (usually photographs).

Another feature of Facebook is Instant Messaging (IM). According to Hu, Wood, Smith, and Westbrook (2004) IM is unique because it allows others to identify who is linked to the space shared between or among friends. It allows people to have text conversations in real time. Facebook can give people the power to share and interact with others electronically; thus, it makes the world more open and connected.

There is so much information to consume in Facebook that people rarely spend any time exploring any of it in a great depth. Erlin and Susandri (2015) stated that there have been several research studies on the use of Facebook including those that have looked into impression formation (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Lau, 2017; Kim & Lee, 2011; Ridout, 2016; Roblyer, Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010). In addition, D'Urso (2009) reported that a huge number of scholars have published books and articles on Computer-mediated Communication (CMC), but very few have explored studies on communication competence on Facebook among college students. Hence, this study chose to address that particular research gap.

The primary objective of this research was to determine students' perceived communication competence on Facebook. Particularly, the study explored their ability to communicate through Facebook posts which include photos and texts. This topic is relevant because many use this network to communicate with others as a primary preference over other means of mediated communication. As a public

utility, Facebook should be considered an avenue for communication in which users should possess communication competence.

The main variable explored in the study was communication competence of the students. It consists of communication competence sub-skills such as: (a) *Selectivity*, referred to as the quality of carefully choosing someone or something as the best or most suitable; (b) *Attentiveness*, which means showing concern for the person one is communicating with; (c) *Appropriateness*, which is taken as employing communication behaviors that both one and others judge to be appropriate to the situation; (d) *Clarity*, which means the quality of being clear, or the ability to be easily understood; and (e) *Composure,* which is understood as balancing one's goals with others as the key to appropriate communication.

II.   FRAMEWORK

Communication competence means different things to different scholars (McCroskey, Richmond, McCroskey, n.d). Hymes (2009) in the study of Limpornugdee, et al. (2009) posited that "communication competence is a combination of the knowledge of communication and the ability to communicate" (p.3). One can achieve communication competence by becoming a conscious communicator (University of Minnesota, 2016). A mindful communicator knows what to communicate and knows how to adapt to any communication contexts (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Along this line, Hymes incorporated social rules and norms into the communicative competence framework, as competent communicators need to learn to adapt his/her communications to the rules and norms in the society to which they belong in order to communicate effectively and appropriately(p.3).

Backlund and Morreale (2015) also reviewed numerous studies on communication competence. To clarify Hyme's formulation, they suggested that communication competence should be a combination of "knowing what to say" and "knowing how to communicate" – the definition that this study adopted. Backlund and Morreale further explain that communication competence is the ability for someone who is communicating with another to reach their goals through shared and appropriate interaction. It is the capacity to attain communication objectives in a way that upholds the relationship on terms worthy to those associated with it.

The present study centered around the inquiry on communication competence on Facebook among

select college students of USTP. Primarily, the phenomenon was described considering the participants' profile which included age, sex, year level, and level of exposure on Facebook. In this study, exposure was measured in terms of duration (number of hours the students spent for each Facebook usage) and frequency (number of occasions in a day that they spent on Facebook). The main variable measured in the study was the students' perceived communication competence on Facebook in terms of the identified communication competence sub-skills: selectivity, attentiveness, appropriateness, clarity, and composure. Also, the study determined the significant difference in the communication competence of the students on Facebook when grouped according to their profile.

The study was anchored on two communication theories: Social Media as a Public Utility and Computer-mediated Communication (CMC). Social Media as a Public Utility explains that SNSs are public necessities. Social media is portrayed as a web instrument that permits individuals to associate and communicate with each other. The term itself has become a standard catchphrase for web and cultural communication and it is currently one of the prevailing ways for a person to engage on the information superhighway. By utilizing social media, people end up being more closely and emphatically associated to one another. The theory furthermore emphasizes that Facebook today is not just about privacy and publicity but about informed consent and choice.

Thierer (2012) stated that SNS like Facebook, Twitter, Skype, Messenger, Google, among others are social media that can be used as a public utility. He added that the advocates of this theory believed that social media websites already act like public utilities.

Lamberti and Richards (2017) furthermore defined CMC as a "process of human communication through computers, involving people, situated in particular contexts, and engaging in processes to shape media for a variety of purposes" (p. 31). This type of communication allows individuals to interact over computer networks (Kelsey & St. Amant, 2008).

Naughton and Redfern (2002) stated that understanding CMC includes all communication interactions that take place through technology such as computers. Understanding CMC is important in understanding the communication competence of Facebook users, which in this particular study refer to selected students taking up Bachelor of Science in Technology Communication Management (BSTCM).

The main distinction between CMC is the sifting of one exceptionally vital communication channel – the

nonverbal channel. The necessity of being able to see a person's development, hand signals, eye contact, and posture limits the data one can take in through CMC, whether it be through chat rooms or instant messaging, and hinders the ability of two individuals to create genuine web connections. In this sense, CMC can never coordinate face-to-face communication in terms of relationship building.

The study determined the communication competence on Facebook among select BSTCM students of USTP. Specifically, it determined: (1) the students' profile which includes age, sex, year level, level of exposure on Facebook in terms of duration and frequency; (2) their perceived communication competence on Facebook in terms of the following communication competence sub-skills: selectivity, attentiveness, appropriateness, clarity, and composure; and (3) the significant difference in the communication competence of the students on Facebook when grouped according to their profile.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive-comparative research design. This particular sub-type of non-experimental research design requires collection and tabulation of data, followed by describing the data.

The study was conducted at USTP – a government higher education institution (HEI) situated in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. USTP was known as Mindanao Polytechnic State College until January 7, 2009 when it has achieved its university status. It was then named Mindanao University of Science and Technology and renamed University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines on December 2, 2018 when it was amalgamated with Misamis Oriental State College of Agriculture and Technology (MOSCAT) – a state college located in Claveria, Misamis Oriental. The university offers science and technology programs in graduate and undergraduate levels: over 40 bachelor's degree programs, 16 master's degree programs and three doctorate degree programs.

The study utilized stratified random sampling technique. Eighty out of 689 students were identified through random sampling, of which the sampling frame was the entire list of students officially enrolled in BSTCM during the school year 2013-2014. The official list was obtained from the Registry and Student Information Services (RSIS) of the University.

The desired sample size pegged by the researchers at 80% was determined by using a sample size calculation considering proportionate stratification. To achieve this, the relative frequency of each year level

was divided by the total population. This was then multiplied by the desired sample size to determine the number of respondents from each stratum. Hence, the target respondents representing all levels are: 6 males and 22 females from 1st year; 11 males and 11 females from 2nd year; 8 males and 8 females from 3rd year; and 7 males and 7 females from 4th year.

The study utilized a validated survey questionnaire as a tool for data gathering. It was categorized in two parts: 1) Part 1 – profile of the respondents which includes sex, age, and year level; and Part 2 – categorized statements that measure the communication competence sub-skills of the respondents such as selectivity, attentiveness, appropriateness, clarity and composure.

The research procedure was carried out through the following steps: First, the survey instrument taken from Hales (2011) was adapted to address the objectives of the study. This was then sent to three experts in the field for face and content validation. Before the formal survey started, the validated questionnaire was tried to four target respondents (one representing each year level), who were potential respondents of the study. This was done to ascertain understandability and validity of the instrument among the respondents, so the study could generate the expected data.

Statistical tools used were the mean, percentage, frequency, ANOVA (analysis of variance) and Scheffe's test for post hoc analysis. Given that more than two groups were compared, post hoc analysis was carried out after using ANOVA to see specifically where the differences lie.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1
Respondents' level of exposure on Facebook according to duration of usage

Duration	f	%
Less than an hour	10	12
1 to 2 hours	34	43
3 to 4 hours	29	36
More than 4 hours	7	9
∑	80	100

As shown in Table 1, most of the respondents answered 1 to 2 hours of Facebook usage each day which falls under the category of "light users" (43%). "Medium users" or those who utilized Facebook for 3 to 4 hours, totalled 29 students (36%). "Heavy users", defined as those who used Facebook for more than 4 hours, comprised only seven students (9%).

Table 2 shows the distribution of the frequency of Facebook usage each day; 36 (45%) students answered "always", comprising the majority of the total respondents. Only four students answered "rarely".

The frequency and duration of FB usage is shown in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2
Respondents' level of exposure according to frequency of usage

Frequency of Usage	f	%
Rarely	4	5
Sometimes	21	26
Often	19	24
Always	36	45
∑	80	100

Table 3
Cross-tabulation result of frequency and duration of Facebook usage and duration by hour (daily)

Duration	f				
	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	∑
Less than an hour	3	4	2	1	10
1 to 2 hours	1	12	6	15	34
3 to 4 hours	0	5	9	15	29
More than 4 hours	0	0	2	5	7
∑	4	21	19	36	80

Table 3 shows that of the 36 students who answered "always", 15 of them revealed that they used Facebook for 1 to 2 hrs each day and equally 15 of them self-reported that they used Facebook for 3 to 4 hrs each day. From this finding, it may be deduced that only few (five respondents who answered "always,") may be considered obsessed with the social media site.
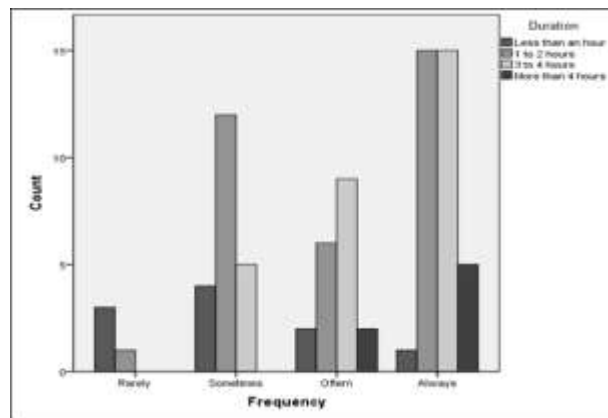

Figure 1. Bar Graph showing the distribution of FB usage duration and frequency

Table 4 shows that of the five sub-skills measured in the study, appropriateness scored the highest mean (4.24) while clarity scored the lowest (M=3.45). This implies that most of the respondents are highly competent in terms of employing communication behaviors that they and others judge to be appropriate to the situation. These behaviors include doing away with posting and/or sharing comments, photographs, and others on Facebook that might offend someone.

The other four communication competence sub-skills: selectivity, attentiveness, clarity and composure received means of 3.46, 3.73, 3.45, and 3.60,

respectively. This suggests that most of the respondents are quite competent in these sub-skills. The data clearly show that no one of the respondents was incompetent nor somewhat competent in communicating with others on Facebook.

Table 4
Communication competence of the respondents by sub-skills

	x̄	Description	Std. Deviation
Selectivity	3.46	Quite competent	.70023
Attentiveness	3.73	Quite competent	.75076
Appropriateness	4.24	Highly Competent	.75601
Clarity	3.45	Quite competent	.58027
Composure	3.60	Quite competent	.71808
Valid N (list wise)			

Note. To interpret the responses, the scale below was used:

Scale   Description
1 – 2 –   Incompetent
2.1 – 3 –   Somewhat competent
3.1 – 4 –   Quite competent
4.1 – 5 –   Highly competent

Table 5
ANOVA of the communication competence of the respondents when grouped according to age

		SS	df	x̄²	f	p-value
Selectivity	Between Groups	3.277	2	1.639	3.558	*.033
	Within Groups	35.458	77	.460		
	∑	38.735	79			
Attentiveness	Between Groups	1.650	2	.825	1.482	.234
	Within Groups	42.878	77	.557		
	∑	44.528	79			
Appropriateness	Between Groups	.003	2	.002	.003	.997
	Within Groups	45.149	77	.586		
	∑	45.152	79			
Clarity	Between Groups	.301	2	.151	.441	.645
	Within Groups	26.299	77	.342		
	∑	26.600	79			
Composure	Between Groups	.664	2	.332	.638	.531
	Within Groups	40.072	77	.520		
	∑	40.736	79			

Note. * Significant

ANOVA was conducted to compare the communication competence sub-skills of the students. The data that can be gleaned in Table 5 reveal that there is a significant difference in the "selectivity" sub-skill of the respondents when they were grouped according to their age: [F(3.277) = 3.558, p = 0.033] for the three age groupings. This means that there were students who belonged to certain age brackets that did not possess the quality of carefully choosing someone or something as the best or most suitable entity to engage with in a mediated communication using Facebook.

Table 6 shows the three mean scores of "selectivity" for the three age groupings

Table 6
Mean scores of "selectivity"

Age	Selectivity	n	Std. Deviation
15 to 17 years old	3.2437	31	.74559
18 to 20 years old	3.5417	40	.64944
21 years old above	3.8765	9	.53990
∑	3.4639	80	.70023

Taken together, the results suggest that older students are more careful in choosing someone or something as the best or suitable one compared with the much younger ones. However, many of them admitted during the focus group discussions that they tend to quickly click on the "Like" button, or share messages or photographs without realizing their actions' the accrued effects on other Facebook users.

Table 7
ANOVA of the communication competence of the respondents grouped according to sex

		SS	df	x̄²	f	p-value
Selectivity	Between Groups	1.325	1	1.325	2.763	.100
	Within Groups	37.410	78	.480		
	∑	38.735	79			
Attentiveness	Between Groups	1.008	1	1.008	1.807	.183
	Within Groups	43.519	78	.558		
	∑	44.528	79			
Appropriateness	Between Groups	2.324	1	2.324	4.233	.043
	Within Groups	42.828	78	.549		
	∑	45.152	79			
Clarity	Between Groups	1.408	1	1.408	4.361	.040
	Within Groups	25.192	78	.323		
	∑	26.600	79			
Composure	Between Groups	.614	1	.614	1.194	.278
	Within Groups	40.122	78	.514		
	∑	40.736	79			

In a similar vein, ANOVA was conducted to compare each of the communication competence sub-skills of the student-respondents when grouped according to sex. From the table above, there appears to be a significant difference in the respondents' communication competence in terms of "appropriateness": [$F_{(1, 78)}$= 4.233, p = 0.043], and "clarity" [$F_{(1, 78)}$=4.361, p = 0.040].

The results suggest that the mean score for appropriateness (M = 4.0313, SD = 0.78553) among the males was significantly different than that of the females (M = 4.3792, SD = 0.71010). Similarly, the mean score for clarity (M = 3.6125, SD = 0.64845) among the males was significantly different than that of the females (M = 3.3417, SD = 0.50858).

Table 8
Mean scores of "appropriateness" and "clarity" sub-skills

Sex	Appropriateness	Clarity	n
Male	4.0313	3.6125	32
Female	4.3792	3.3417	28
∑		3.4639	80	80

Table 8 shows the mean scores of appropriateness and clarity for the two sex groupings. The results imply that the respondents' sex matters on such sub-skills. Specifically, females employed appropriate communication behaviors more than males did. This is supported by Hales (2011) who reported that females were significantly likelier to exhibit more socially appropriate behavior than males.

In terms of the ability to be easily understood, the male students had more of this ability than the female students. This negates the findings of Hales (2011) that females were significantly clearer in communicating certain message than males.

Table 9
Communication competence of the respondents according to year level

		SS	df	$\bar{x}^2$	f	*p*-value
Selectivity	Between Groups	1.466	3	.489	.997	.399
	Within Groups	37.269	76	.490		
	∑	38.735	79			
Attentiveness	Between Groups	1.930	3	.643	1.148	.335
	Within Groups	42.598	76	.560		
	∑	44.528	79			
Appropriateness	Between Groups	1.629	3	.543	.948	.422
	Within Groups	43.523	76	.573		
	∑	45.152	79			
Clarity	Between Groups	2.797	3	.932	2.977	.037
	Within Groups	23.803	76	.313		
	∑	26.600	79			
Composure	Between Groups	1.252	3	.417	.803	.496
	Within Groups	39.484	76	.520		
	∑	40.736	79			

ANOVA was also conducted to compare each of the communication competence of the respondents who were grouped according to year level. There was a significant difference of the communication competence sub-skills, particularly "clarity", [$F_{(3, 76)}$=2.977, p=0.037] for the four year levels. However, there was no significant difference in the other communication competence sub-skills (selectivity, attentiveness, appropriateness and composure) of the respondents.

The results imply that the mean score for clarity (M = 3.2071, SD = 0.52063) among the first year students was significantly different than that of the fourth years

(M = 3.6714, SD = 0.62564).

Table 10 shows the mean scores of clarity for the four academic year levels.

Table 10
Mean scores of clarity

Sex	$\bar{x}$	Std Deviation
First Year	3.2071	.52063
Second Year	3.5909	.55025
Third Year	3.4875	.57951
Fourth Year	3.6714	.62564
∑	3.4500	.58027

The results reveal that the fourth year students tend to be easily understood than the first year students. This suggests that the seniors are more able to encode a message or upload a post that is easily understood by others who are engaged in a mediated interaction.

V. CONCLUSION

Considering Facebook as a public utility, almost everyone uses it for various purposes where communication competence should be applied. It is evident from the study that the students are all competent in all communication competence sub-skills though they vary in certain degrees. Students, in particular, should enhance their communication competence sub-skills regardless of their profile, to give justice to their academic degree on technology communication management. In a similar vein, they should increase their knowledge of communication and the ability to communicate. In this way, they would become improved competent communicators who know what message to communicate and how to say it. This could be a panacea that would address certain communication problems among students on SNS. It is further recommended that a similar study should be conducted considering a wider scope and bigger sample size. Future studies may also consider expanding the sample size to students of different degree majors.

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