

# CHAPTER ONE

## FACEBOOK, TWITTER OR TUENTI? A FIRST LOOK AT THE ACADEMIC USE OF WEB 2.0 SOCIAL NETWORKS IN TRANSLATOR TRAINING

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### **Abstract**

Web 2.0 social networks—Facebook, Twitter, or the Spanish site Tuenti—are everywhere and we cannot underestimate the impact they have on our students (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). They *could* offer university teachers and researchers new perspectives that would inform learning and teaching and enrich the quality of our students' learning experience (Ullrich, Borau, Luo, Tan, & Shen, 2008). However, like any other methodological trend, their use will only produce qualitatively significant results if approached adequately (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009) so, as with any innovation (Vickers, 1998), we should begin with the protagonists: our students. Before incorporating the academic use of social networks into our established social constructivist approach to translator training (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2007), we conducted a pilot study based on a review of recent research in the field. We designed and successfully trialed an online questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha 0.906) to gather student data describing current social network use so as to determine students' attitudes towards their application in the academic context. Data suggest culture-specific attitudes to social networks may influence motivation and use and that their face validity would need to be justified prior to adopting social network use in the Spanish university system.

### **Introduction**

The widespread application of e-learning in traditional learning contexts can only be justified if it produces results that are as good or better than those previously achieved. The only major meta-analysis we are aware of (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2009) indicates this *is* the case on blended learning courses such as ours at the University of Granada, Spain (UGR). The mix of online (70%) and face-to-face interaction (30%) enhances the teaching-learning

experience and participant outcomes tend to show an improvement over traditional methods. Furthermore, evidence suggests the use of written online communication motivates participants and improves the quality of learning products (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008).

Social networks (SNs) have been defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Research into the academic use of SNs has focused on a range of fields including privacy and image (Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008), learner motivation, and sense of community (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Hewitt & Forte, 2006; Jin, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2009; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). We hypothesize that enhanced motivation achieved through academic use of SNs would enhance learning quality (Ullrich, Borau, Luo, Tan, & Shen, 2008) and foster improved learning outcomes.

Our established social constructivist approach to translator training (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2007) seeks to adapt the e-learning environment to the professional realities of the translation market-place (Olvera-Lobo et al., 2005) but we are aware that SNs may offer both advantages and disadvantages: e.g. the service they provide is external to the university and therefore we are not dependent on our own level of IT expertise but, the same SN services have an underlying commercial purpose that might lead to unexpected changes at inopportune moments (Al-khalifa, 2008).

The present study stems from our view that change and innovation should begin with the main actors—the students—and therefore begin with a survey of the target population (Vickers, 1998).

## **Objectives and outcomes**

This pilot study is based on a review of recent research in the field. Our objective is to gather data describing current Web 2.0 use so as to determine student attitudes towards the academic use of SNs that would inform our decision-making on their use in course modules.

## **Method**

A pilot survey was conducted by a single teacher with two parallel groups following a final year optional course in Scientific and Technical Translation from Spanish into English. The course is taught as a blended e-learning module and the survey and its objectives were presented during class sessions. Students were asked

to voluntarily contribute and given access to the questionnaire via a hyperlink. They were given a time schedule during which they could respond and sent two e-mail reminders. Although the language of instruction of the course is English, we decided to write the survey in Spanish, the mother tongue of all but 2 students, to guarantee adequate comprehension and encourage fluent written responses. In the present paper, we have translated everything into English.

### Population

Fifty-four students (90%; 41 women, 13 men) responded to the survey out of a total of 60 registered in two course groups for the first semester of academic year 2009-10. Just over half (30, 56%) were aged 18-21; 4 participants were exchange students: 2 from Spanish universities and 2 from European universities. Forty-six (90.7%) were in their final year of the UGR's 4-year first degree program in Translation and Interpreting (Table 1-1).

**Table 1-1. Demographic data**

<b>Item topic</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>Gender</i>		
Men	13	24%
Women	41	76%
<i>Age range</i>		
≤18 years	0	0%
18-21 years	30	56%
22-25 years	17	31%
≥26 years	7	13%
<i>University of origin</i>		
University of Granada (UGR)	50	92.6%
Spanish university other than UGR	2	3.7%
Other European university	2	3.7%
<i>Degree program</i>		
Translation and Interpreting	51	94%
Spanish Language and Literature	1	2%
Other Modern Language and Literature	2	4%
Other	1	2%
<i>Year of studies</i>		
1st	0	0%
2nd	0	0%
3rd	2	3.7%
4th	46	85%
5th (i.e. students have probably spent a year abroad and are now completing their studies)	3	5.5%

Postgraduate	0	0%
No response	3	5.5%

### Instrument

We designed and trialed an online questionnaire (available at <http://www.encuestafacil.com/RespWeb/Qn.aspx?EID=652201>).

In order to complete the survey, participants were first asked to give informed consent to the anonymous use of data. There then followed four sections: general items on SN membership, participant purpose, and habits of use; attitudes towards the academic use of SNs and participant opinions about teacher presence; issues of image and privacy on Web 2.0 sites; and demographic information. The first and last sections used obligatory response items; all other items were optional. Most responses involved choosing from  $\geq 2$  options and included open response boxes for comments.

### Results

Our first application of the study was successful, giving a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.906. Details of SN membership (Table 1-2) revealed widespread use of a relatively narrow range of web sites and the substantial importance of the English-language site Facebook and the Spanish site Tuenti. Only 5 participants (9.3%) stated they were not members of any such site and none offered any explanation.

**Table 1-2. Social network membership**

Item topic	n	%
<i>Are you a member of any Web 2.0 social networks?</i>		
Yes	49	90.7
No	5	9.3
<i>How many are you signed up to?</i>		
1	13	24
2-5	38	70
6-10	0	0
10	0	0
Other/No response	3	6
<i>Which networks do you use?</i>		%*
Bebo	1	1
Cyworld	0	0
Facebook	42	42

Item topic	n	%
Hi5	1	1
GoingGo	0	0
LinkedIn	2	2
MySpace	9	9
Ning	0	0
Orkut	0	0
Tuenti	40	40
Twitter	4	4
Other	2	2

\* percentages reflect total responses to item

Table 1-3 presents data on participant motivation for communicating via SNs. Some 93% of responses indicated that “friends” are the most important attraction, 3% reported using SNs to meet “new people”, and 21% associate with “family”. With regard to predicted areas of interest, we found a fairly even spread of common ground—studies 38%, language 23% and leisure 33%—with only 1 response each for the reported niche interests: politics and religion (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

**Table 1-3. Purpose for using social networks**

	n	%*
<i>What attracts you to the social networks?</i>		
My friends use them	14	22
I want to keep in touch with my friends	46	71
I want to meet new people	2	3
Other	3	5
<i>Who do you associate with via the social networks?</i>		
My family	30	21
My friends from high school	44	31
My friends at university	48	33
New people	14	10
Other groups	8	6
<i>What do you and the people you associate with have in common?</i>		
Studies	45	38
Language	27	23
Leisure interests and activities	39	33
Politics	1	1
Religion	1	1
Other	7	6

\* percentages reflect total responses to item

Responses to items concerning habits of use (Table 1-4) suggest regular access is common: 43% access SNs between several times a day and once every 2-3 days; 12% report less frequent access. Time spent on SNs is limited: 94% spend <10-30 minutes online whenever they connect. Participants report connecting from home (52%), although 32% access SNs from the university.

**Table 1-4. Social network access habits**

	<b>n</b>	<b>%*</b>
<i>How often do you access one or other of the social networks?</i>		
Whenever I access Internet	11	22
Whenever I use my own PC	11	22
Several times a day	16	33
Once a day	2	4
Once every 2 or 3 days	3	6
Once a week	2	4
Less than once a week	3	6
Once a month	1	2
Other	0	0
<i>When you access a social network, how much time do you spend on it?</i>		
<10 minutes	18	36
10-30 minutes	29	58
30-60 minutes	3	6
>60 minutes	0	0
<i>Where are you when you access the social networks?</i>		
At home	51	52
At the Faculty	26	26
Elsewhere in the university	6	6
Cybercafés	4	4
Public libraries	12	12
Other		

\* percentages reflect total responses to item

Items investigating student attitudes to academic use of SNs use two techniques: discrete response (Table 1-5) and open answer (Table 1-6). Only one third of participants consider SNs might affect their attitude to a course. Nearly half (48%) stated they had looked for their teachers on Internet and their most frequent motives were curiosity (38%) and in order to make contact in relation to a course they were studying at the time (35%).



<i>How do you imagine the academic use of a social network would affect your attitude to different aspects of a course?</i>								
Your classmates?	37	82.2	5	11.2	2	4.4	1	2.2
The tutor?	35	81.4	6	14	2	4.65	0	0
The time you would spend on the subject out of class hours?	25	55.5	14	31.1	3	6.7	3	6.7
The quality of your learning?	13	28.9	22	48.9	7	15.5	3	6.7
The quality of the teaching?	11	26.8	14	34.1	12	29.3	4	9.8
Your final grade for the course?	7	16.6	31	73.8	2	4.8	2	4.8
Your motivation towards the course?	16	37.2	24	55.8	3	7.0	0	0
Other?	0	0	0	0	6	100	0	0
<i>What aspects of your learning could be affected by the use of social networks?</i>								
Communication with the tutor and my classmates would improve my understanding	24	64.9	8	21.6	4	10.8	1	2.7
Online learning is more professional	14	33.3	2	4.8	23	54.8	3	7.1
It would solve problems of physical distance	45	97.8	0	0	1	2.2	0	0
I would be able to work more creatively	12	29.3	2	4.9	24	58.5	3	7.3
We would participate more actively	30	68.3	2	4.5	10	22.7	2	4.5
Teamwork would be more efficient	26	60.5	4	9.3	10	23.3	3	6.9
Other	0	0	0	0	3	100	0	0

n indicates number of responses; \* percentages reflect total responses to item



Personal image and privacy are issues participants take seriously (Table 1-7) and respondents are active in their use of SN functions that enable them to protect themselves.

	n	%
<i>Have you ever uploaded a photograph of yourself to fill out your profile on a social network?</i>		
Yes	49	91
No	5	9
<i>Where you particularly careful about the photo you chose?</i>		
Yes	36	67
No	18	33
I don't remember	0	0
<i>Did you apply any privacy restrictions to your photo?</i>		
Yes	36	67%
No	18	33%
I don't know what "privacy restrictions" means		
<i>Are you concerned about the image others perceive of you via social networks?</i>		
Yes	32	60
No	18	34
Don't know	3	6
<i>Have you ever modified your image to impress your social networks contacts?</i>		
Yes	7	13
No	43	83
Don't know	2	4
<i>Does it worry you that you have private information on the Internet that others—people you don't know—can access?</i>		
Yes	27	51
No	20	38
I've never thought about it	2	4
Comment	4	8
<i>Have you read the privacy information that the social networks you use publish?</i>		
Yes	31	58
No	16	30
I don't remember	4	8
Comments	2	4
<i>If you could, what level of privacy would you apply?</i>		
None	1	2
Low	2	4

Mid	18	35
Maximum	31	60
<i>Have you ever felt you were being pressured by a social network contact?</i>		
Yes	5	9
No	48	91
<i>Have you ever blocked someone's access to your profile</i>		
Yes	34	65
No	18	35
<i>What type of messages do you usually use?</i>		
Private	19	37
Public	2	4
Equal numbers of private and public messages	26	51
Comments	4	8

## Discussion

Our literature review suggests this is the first study of its kind in the Spanish university system. Research has focused on the US (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008) and China (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009; Jin, Cheung, Lee, & Chen, 2009), although countries such as Romania (Grosseck & Holotescu, 2008) and Saudi Arabia (Al-khalifa, 2008) has also been reported. Our data suggest the identification of culture-specific use may provide further insights and that identifying participants' country of birth and language of habitual use would help. Among our Spanish respondents, reported "niche" social groups (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) are almost irrelevant but culture-specific alternatives may exist. The initial association of individuals through shared interests in their "studies" clearly leads to an extension of networks. The addition of "new people" (10%) suggests participant relations grow as a consequence of SN use.

Online access is largely from home but anecdotal evidence suggests many translation students take advantage of classes in computer rooms to deal with their SN contacts while in class. This may clearly prove frustrating for teachers but could perhaps be of benefit if adequately guided. Further items should elicit more information.

Although only half of all respondents indicated they had looked for tutors online (n=26, 48% of responses), participants indicated a substantial level of curiosity about their tutors (n=13, 38%). "Computer-mediated self-disclosure" is reported to have a positive motivating function on students (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007) but open-response comments suggest our Spanish learners are

more skeptical about this with a few firm comments on the inappropriateness of mixing leisure and learning.

Learners value positively aspects of improved communication and appear to associate these with changes in performance but only 7 (16.6% of responses) consider this would improve their overall grade, perhaps because they are unaware of the benefits of the social construction of learning.

Attitudes towards privacy and image reflect a substantial level of concern and the knowledge and willingness to take preventative action of one kind or another: 67% apply privacy restrictions and 65% have actually blocked access to their profile. Furthermore, data on private and public messages suggest participants make discriminatory decisions over their choice of message type.

## Conclusions

Management of change is only successful when decision-making is informed by the target participants (Vickers, 1998). Prior to initiating significant changes in our approach to learning-teaching, we conducted a pilot survey of students to gather data on social network use and their adoption in the academic context. Data suggest our Spanish students have much in common with respondents to surveys in other countries but that there may exist culturally-specific barriers that advise against or condition the manner in which SNs are employed in the academic context.

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