Using Mobile Facebook As An LMS: Exploring Impeding Factors

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ABSTRACT

The present article describes exploratory research conducted in two French language courses to identify the impeding factors of using a social networking site (SNS) on smartphones. Following the replacement of the faculty's learning management system (LMS) by a unified platform, there were difficulties in conducting the same class activities that the researchers and students had grown accustomed to. Students were no longer able to initiate discussions in the target language in online forums nor were they able to use their mobile devices to access and share resources directly from the classroom. Current literature emphasises (1) the benefits of learning on SNS and (2) the advantages of mobile learning, which suggests these technologies as possible solutions to the issue discussed in the present study. The opportunities afforded by these technologies were first explored with a survey and deeper knowledge was gained with group interviews. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the survey data while computer aided qualitative analysis software was used to categorise the themes which emerged from the interviews. Smartphone ownership and SNS membership were not identified as impeding factors to adopt these tools for learning. However, several impeding factors were identified with each technology. Inhibiting issues with SNS were: the lack of privacy, the dichotomy in the notion of friendship, and paradoxically the lack of stimulus to communicate. The constraints from the mobile phones stemmed from their intrusive nature and their inability to perform the same tasks as laptops. These findings are assessed and discussed in light of other research before an SNS and smartphone system is implemented to supersede or replace the LMS.

Keywords: mLearning; SNS; obstacles; CALL; LMS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 18 years of teaching French, two radical changes have been observed. First, for the past five years, students have been entering the classroom with Internet enabled smartphones. With these devices, students now have the capacity to access directly from the

classroom information which was not available to earlier learners of a foreign language. The second change which was witnessed during the same period stems from the development of social networking sites (SNS). With these sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, students are now able to rapidly share and exchange rich information within a network of like-minded individuals. Although several studies have been conducted on tapping into mobile technologies to teach a foreign language (Chen, Chang & Yen, 2012; Oberg & Daniels, 2013; Wong & Looi, 2010) or on SNS for teaching in general (Junco, Elavsky, & Heiberger, 2013; Rambe, 2012; Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, & Liu, 2011), rare are research endeavours which explore the simultaneous use of both tools. The present article discusses the use of Facebook on mobile phones to teach French as a foreign language, and particularly to replace the university's learning management system (LMS) which did not stimulate student engagement, enable classroom interactions, nor facilitate the sharing of learner-created content.

This study was conducted in a Malaysian public university where French is taught as a major at the undergraduate level. In this programme, successful students graduate after three years with a Bachelor degree in foreign languages with a specialisation in French. When the researchers joined the university in 2006, the faculty which conducted language courses used the Dokeos LMS. Similarly to what has been reported by other researchers (Pramela, Marlyna Maros & Siti Hamin Stapa, 2012), the use of this learning platform offered several standard features which enhanced both the online teaching and learning experience. Using Dokeos, the lecturers were granted administrator's privileges which enabled them to post documents, to manage private forums, to create computer-corrected assessment items, to record synchronous discussions and to view statistics on the students' usage without requesting the assistance of the ICT help desk. The LMS allowed the students to practice their French outside of class and thus enabled them to improve in the language. The requirements of online learning of French in Malaysia are to some extent similar to what has been observed with the learning of English as a second language in Malaysia. Indeed, Noriah, Supyan and Saadiyah (2012) noted that "online programs provided to ESL tertiary students must be made flexible and allow the students some kind of social support or scaffolding such as through online discussion forums in order to improve and increase their Zone of Proximal Development" (p. 1099). For these same reasons, the online tools available to the French language students proved invaluable opportunities to their learning endeavour.

In 2008, the university created its own LMS so that lecturers could post documents, manage several courses, and view the learners' progress. However, due to its central nature, the university's LMS did not provide the educators with administrator's rights, and therefore did not enable the lecturers to create multiple forums for group activities within the same class. Furthermore, students had fewer privileges and were not granted the right to post multimedia documents in the forums. To some extent, this situation was not exceptional as a single LMS could hardly fulfil the multiple requirements of diverse courses. In 2011, when Dokeos was eventually phased out, the researchers actively pursued a quest to find an alternative platform which would enable posting of multimedia content, enable student-student and student-lecturer communications, and at the same time provide the lecturers with some administrative features.

Investigating the literature (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007; Selwyn, 2007), several authors advocated the use of SNS in education. They offered features which were not too dissimilar from the standard LMS, and furthermore appealed to the learners. In fact, the sectors of Malaysian society predominant in universities are particularly well connected to SNS (Zakaria, Watson, & Edwards, 2010). Siti Hamin Stapa and Azianura Hani Shaari (2012) noted that: "a proper use of social networking tools such as Facebook can always be as a great platform for students to experience a real language learning environment that is

proven to be meaningful and more effective" (p. 819). As such, the introduction of an SNS in our foreign language classroom would provide the students with additional access to the online course. Furthermore, this is an opportunity to stimulate the learners to use the target language on a familiar platform.

Learning with mobile devices, or more commonly referred to as mLearning has attracted wide interest in the past ten years with the publication of numerous research findings on specific pedagogical applications (Lu, 2008), on attitudinal studies (Oberg & Daniels, 2013), on the potential of the devices, (Kukulska-Hulme, 2007) as well as on literature reviews pertaining to the domain (Traxler, 2011). Having already successfully trialled mLearning practices with similar classes (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2010, 2010b), it is predicted that merging the use of a popular SNS with mobile technology could provide the students with ubiquitous learning possibilities. Yet, there is also anticipation that several aspects related to SNS or mobile devices could negatively impact the learning process. With this in mind, therefore, the aim of this exploratory study was to discover these two factors which could potentially prevent students from using an SNS with mobile devices to learn French as a foreign language. In line with this aim, the present study sought to answer the following three questions. (1) What are the impeding factors to learning French with social networking sites? (2) What are the impeding factors to learning French with mobile phones? (3) What are the impeding factors to learning French with social networking sites on mobile phones?

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted over a period of seven weeks. In the first week, a survey was administered to evaluate mobile phone ownership and SNS membership. From the third to the seventh week, an action plan to incorporate the two technologies in teaching was implemented. Finally, in the seventh week, a qualitative approach of data collection and analysis was employed to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of the students. Interviews which focussed on the students' general use of the technologies and their assessment of learning French with them were conducted. This study was conducted in a single site with a single cohort.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study were all registered in an undergraduate program of French as a foreign language at a Malaysian public university. During the six semesters of the programme, students attend an average of 14 weekly hours dedicated to the general learning of the language and to the learning of French for specific purposes. In an opportunistic sampling method, a cohort of second year students was selected. At this level, students demonstrate a level of proficiency where autonomy and peer learning become more prominent. Two courses were selected for this study: French for Tourism and Hospitality, and Introduction to French Culture. The courses were each conducted over three hours per week. The 17 participants (15 females, two males) in this study constituted the entire second year cohort. All students were Malaysians whose ages ranged from $20 - 21$ years old (*Mean* $= 21.3$, *SD* $= 0.31$). Pseudonyms have been used throughout this study to protect the students' identities.

SURVEY

At the outset of this research, we needed to evaluate the students' ownership of mobile phones and their degree of participation on social networking sites. A previous survey

conducted by Gabarre and Gabarre (2010b) was adapted to assess these two factors which were crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the students' involvements with these tools (see Appendix I). To prevent issues of comprehension with the target language, English was used as the medium to deliver the survey. The original survey dealt with the tools available to each student on their mobile phones, and with their usage of the devices to communicate through SMS and MMS. For the purpose of this research, the questionnaire was simplified and reduced to three parts. The first part dealt with the respondents' particulars. The second part elicited information about mobile phone ownership and access to mobile Internet, and the third part dealt with membership and access to SNS. A current list of SNS ranked by membership was obtained from an online encyclopaedia, and presented in decreasing order of popularity. Although only twelve SNS were selected, students were given the possibility to freely add other SNS. In this particular section of the questionnaire, students were required to state whether they made use of each SNS at least once per day, per week or per month. We considered that a social networking site that was accessed with a frequency lower than once per month could not fulfil the requirement of popularity.

ACTION PLAN

Adhering to Krashen's (2009) theory of second language acquisition and the work conducted by Elis (2000) on task-based learning, efforts was made to maximise the students' exposition to the target language in a non-threatening environment. During the implementation phase of this research, students were invited to access the two Facebook pages which had been specifically created for their courses. Being used in lieu of the LMS, Facebook offered the lecturers the possibility to communicate with the students outside of class through the broadcast of status updates. These appeared in real time on the students' phone by way of the Facebook application. Additionally, the Facebook pages were employed as a platform to host the mobile course notes which could be accessed ubiquitously. As part of their assessment, students were required to collaborate in the production of videos in French with their mobile phones. This task-based approach enabled the students to put in practice the communicative skills which they were learning during the course. Following a social constructivist approach, the students then uploaded their production to the Facebook page where their peers were invited to provide a written feedback using the comment feature of the SNS. The discussions have to be conducted in French in order to ensure that the target language is put in practice and acts as centre of the activity. Learning from the comments, the students then revised their productions which were subsequently shared with the group on the social platform. From the onset of the implementation, it was made clear that the Facebook pages could be used by the students as they deemed fit, and that they had the freedom to post, share and comment on anything they wished.

FOCUS GROUPS INTERVIEWS

Since one of the focus of this research was social networking sites, understanding of group dynamics through the use of group interviews as advocated by Frey and Fontana (1991) was employed. Instead of interviewing groups of dissimilar individuals to stimulate exchanges, students were interviewed in groups of individual who are their friends in order to reveal the workings of micro-social networks. Furthermore, it is believed that students would be more open and willing to share their experience in a group of friends where they would be more comfortable. Since the Malaysian culture is an Asian culture which tends to value harmony over conflicts (James & Callister, 1999), we anticipated that dissimilar interviewees would not produce the same outcome as such groups would in a Western culture were diverging

opinions are generally more openly discussed. For these reasons, natural field interviews (Frey & Fontana, 1999), i.e. to probe "groups as they spontaneously form in natural location" (p. 183) approach were employed.

Although Tang and Davis (1995) did not provide precise numbers, they recommended that in exploratory research, the size of the group should be kept small in order to allow for more groups. They opined that small groups enabled their members to express more ideas especially when the interviews were conducted in a less structured manner. For Creswell (2005), focus group interviews should be conducted with four to six informants. Consequently, the decision was to have four to five students in each group.

After receiving an informative note on the research, the students were asked whether they wished to participate in this study. All of the 17 students agreed to be interviewed in groups and signed a consent form. The selection of the groups' composition for the interviews was based on their seating arrangements in the classroom. This arrangement suited the decision to have four students in each group, as the rows in the classroom allowed for three to four students to sit together.

An interview protocol (see Appendix II) was drafted to include general questions on the themes of social networking sites, mobile phones and language learning, as these were at the crux of the research questions. These themes dealt more precisely with the students' feelings about SNS, mobile phones, their experience accessing the SNS with their phones, and their views on learning a foreign language with technology. Themes which arose naturally during the interview of the first groups were recycled with subsequent groups.

As it was impossible to abstract the lecturer-student relationship in the group interviews, this limitation was taken into account during the interpretation of the data. Nevertheless, several steps were taken to reduce the influence of this relationship. The interviews were conducted in English, a language which is seldom spoken in the classroom as the vast majority of interactions take place in French. The choice of this language added an extra advantage because all students would have sufficient command of the language upon entering the university. This would not have been the case if the target language had been used. For practical reasons of privacy, the interviews were conducted in the lecturer's office. During the interviews, the respondents and the interviewer were seated around a table. This was a radical change from the classroom setting where the lecturer is always standing and moving between tables. Before the interviews started, an ice-breaking discussion was conducted in order to minimise the anxiety which the students might have felt.

A digital recorder was used to record the conversations. The students were informed that the content of these recordings would not be shared with anyone else and that their anonymity would be preserved. They were encouraged to speak freely and to provide as much information as they could. In order not to influence the respondents, the questions were not only seeking factors which impeded learning, but also sought facilitating aspects of the technology. The students were encouraged to discuss things they enjoyed and issues they disliked. The interviewer regularly probed the students to obtain more information. As anticipated, new topics which emerged in the first interviews were reintroduced and expanded upon during the interviews of the subsequent groups.

A verbatim transcript of the recording was produced and verified for accuracy by another researcher familiar with the informants. This was conducted to ensure that the transcript faithfully reproduced the interview After the transcripts were amended for accuracy, they were distributed to the respective groups and checked by the respondents who confirmed that it was a faithful transcription of what they had said. Triangulation between the responses in the survey and the interviews further ensured a check on the validity of the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

The results from the survey showed that although all 17 students owned a mobile phone, only 12 of them had smartphones. We used Bradley and Holley's (2011) definition of a smartphone as a phone which enables "web browsing and email" (p. 42).   This ratio represents a 71% level of equipment in Internet enabled phones in the group. This value is slightly lower than the results obtained from a previous survey with a group in the same foreign language program (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2010b). The result prompted the researchers to purchase five smartphones (two Nokia E5, two Samsung Galaxy Mini and one Samsung Galaxy Ace) for the students who owned feature phones, so that they could participate in this study.

The second part of the survey dealing with access to mobile Internet showed that only 59% of the students accessed the Internet on their phones. Wi-Fi hotspots were used by only 29% of the class, while 18% had subscribed to a data plan with their carrier. After carrying out a general market survey of the data plans offered by the four main mobile Internet providers in Malaysia, the survey revealed that equivalent of 5 USD would be sufficient to cover the cost of unlimited access for seven days. It was thus decided to provide each student with a weekly subsidy of 5 USD for the duration of the semester, with the understanding that they would bear any additional cost.

The third part of the survey which dealt with SNS membership, revealed that all but one student was a member of Facebook. Furthermore, 82% of the group accessed this particular SNS on a daily basis, while the rest accessed it at least once per week. The level of membership of other SNS such as Twitter (35%) and Friendster (24%) revealed that they were less popular with our cohort. The selection of the SNS was crucial as it had to be familiar to the students in order to reduce the learning curve. Furthermore, it had to be frequently accessed to provide a quasi-constant connection with the students. Due to its predominance in the group, Facebook was selected for the purpose of this research. It was discovered that this SNS was predominantly used after class as a means to keep in touch and share information with friends and family.

RESULTS FROM THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

The transcribed interviews were anonymized and adapted to be processed by Computer Aided Qualitative AnalysiS (CAQDAS) software. CAQDAS are systematic tools which aid the research without minimising the role of the researcher. The CAQDAS software we selected was ATLAS.ti. This choice was based on ATLAS.ti's non-hierarchical organization which could assist us in analysing the data without rigid constraints.

At the onstart of the analysis, an open coding method was applied to the interviews The transcripts yielded 368 relevant quotes which were attached to 65 different codes. Subsequently, these codes were reorganized into two broad themes: (a) SNS and (b) mobile phones.

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

The social networking sites theme is well grounded in the data with 140 different quotes. As expected from the national context (Zakaria, Watson, & Edwards, 2010) and the results of our initial survey, SNS were extremely popular among our students. Facebook, the world's leading SNS, was also the one which was the most talked about by the respondents. Several

themes related to SNS which could potentially impact the learning process emerged from the data.

SNS AND NON-DISCLOSURE

It is assumed that students used SNS to freely share their feelings and happenings in their lives. However, the theme of SNS and non-disclosure was relatively frequent. The desire to keep aspects of one's life private was recurrent. For some students, this was due to shyness while others saw non-disclosure as a way to physically protect themselves from strangers. Some students explained that they would not share personal information such as their current location, their address or phone number. Facebook allowed members of its site the possibility of identifying friends on photos. This feature was seen as interfering with their desire of non-disclosure and was perceived as a loss of control over the way their information was disseminated. Students who had known Facebook without this feature readily criticized the SNS's privacy policy. The following unedited excerpts highlight this finding:

> *For example, [laugh] Yannick, he tagged us into some places, and then he, hmm, he also tagged us into some groups. We're automatically in that group, without our… permission. […] If he adds others also in, then other people also can see our profile without… although they are not our friends. (Nolwenn)*

> *Now Facebook is a little bit scary […] cause everyone knows what you are doing. (Zazie)*

> *It's very not a privacy [sic] anymore. (Chantal)*

> *They have not really got privacy on Facebook. (Valérie)*

Moreover, it was discovered that the theme of non-disclosure also applied to the sharing of negative feelings. As such, students did not view Facebook as a diary or a confidant. They did not perceive this media as a suitable channel to express one's anger. This is partly due to the view that Facebook is an environment which has a strong potential to stimulate and fuel disagreements. To illustrate this, a student related an incident where an offline disagreement between herself and another female student was blown out of proportion once it was shared online on the SNS. The deterioration of the situation occurred after the online friends of one of the students started commenting on the dispute and naturally sided with their friend. The public nature of Facebook was perceived as the main reason for the problem as demonstrated in the following quotes from the interviews.

> *I prefer, I prefer just, just [to] keep in my heart or just tell with my close friends. […] I just don't want the public [to] know what I feel… (Yolande)*

> *Because anybody will read about the post, about their status and then comment and then… and that comment and that post will start to… to emphasize. (Annaelle)*

SNS FRIENDS AND REAL FRIENDS

In order to circumvent the lack of confidentiality, students resorted to making the most of the privacy features that were available on the SNS. Some strived to keep a true network of friends as opposed to Facebook friends. When asked about the differences between online and offline friendships, students explained that there was an enormous gap between the two which was perceived as a broad problem. One student explained that because of the aversion

she felt for her uncle, she was unable to keep him in her list of friends. Consequently, she felt that neither could she keep her cousin in her friend list as this would prevent her from freely criticizing her uncle. Another student narrated a story about her friend who ultimately had to remove her mother from her circle of friends on Facebook. This student explained that the friend in question was addicted to the SNS and thus constantly uploaded pictures and updated her status with her latest doings. As she wanted to keep this information private from her mother, she resorted to dropping her from her list of friends. In another instance, a student felt a certain degree of discomfort at having her former teacher in her friends' list. It appeared that although this teacher wanted to connect with her former student, she did not reply to her student's greetings. The lack of feedback and communication lead to the student to feel hurt and prompted her to remove the teacher from her list of friends. The following passages from the interviews demonstrate the separation made by the students between SNS friends and real friends.

> *So, nobody can add me. I will add them. (Annaelle)*

> *I try to lock everything. Just like from the setting there, […] I try to private [sic] all my things, ha, ha, only for, for my friends to view. (Valérie)*

> *Yesterday, I reset back, I reset back my Facebook, and I delete all the, all the…unnecessary friend… some… a little bit weird because I also delete my teacher. (Annaelle)*

These findings are coherent with the current literature (Tokunaga, 2011) which describes varying levels of friendships on SNS. Along a continuum, these range from best friends, through good friends, all the way to mere acquaintances. Problems arise when the definition of friendship differs from one individual to another.

SNS DOES NOT STIMULATE CONNECTION

Different interpretation of the term 'friendship' also manifests itself in the evaluation of the time required for a response. Some active SNS users did not realise that other members do not log into the network with the same frequency, and consequently expected prompt and quick replies. The same is true when it comes to SNS used for education. When used in the foreign language classroom, one student voiced her disappointment over the way her lecturer did not respond to her posts, which made her wonder whether her lecturer had indeed seen her work. She explained that she expected a reply within 24 hours after she had published her work online. Frustration was also noted when friends did not reply in a timeframe deemed adequate or when exchanges were not sufficiently dynamic. This notion is illustrated in the following two excerpts:

> *It's good when you want to connect with friends, but it kind of gets boring. When it's too long, […] you stare at it for a long time, and there is [sic] no notifications. (Ariane)*

> *Be very careful, because sometimes I think Facebook is not how we keep in touch completely, because sometimes my friend, friend of friend can add me, then when I approve there's nothing. There is nothing happen [sic]. (Annaelle)*

This theme is analogous to what has been described by Tu (2001) in the description of online interactions on an LMS. Immediacy is furthermore perceived in the underlying

understanding that newly made friends should somehow acknowledge their new status with some form of communication.

MOBILE PHONES

As revealed in our initial survey, mobile phones were widespread in the group that we surveyed. Although initially, not all students owned a smartphone which could access Internet, the level of ownership of all types of phones was still over 100% as some owned and used more than one device. As confirmed in the interviews, phones were always carried wherever one went. Students highlighted this view and explained that they could live without Facebook, but that they could not live without a mobile phone. It is precisely the ubiquitous nature of this device, which prompted the present study's aim; to investigate if mLearning and SNS could be merged together in a foreign language course. As mobile phones were more widespread and chronologically preceded the SNS, fewer factors which could potentially prevent its acceptance in the language classroom were expected. Although such was the case, several themes somewhat emerged as described in the next section.

MOBILE PHONES ARE TOO INTRUSIVE

For some, the phone was seen as intrusive as it enabled one to be contacted anywhere and anytime. This could be defined as the negative aspect of ubiquity. One student who was nominated to a post of responsibility in her residential hall expressed her distress over the frequent calls she received. She went on to explain that she was suffering from the constant ringing and the related responsibilities, and wished she did not have to answer it. Two students explained that it was not possible to multitask with a mobile phone while attending a class, and advised against it. In a far more reaching stance, one student explained that she was bothered by other students' use of mobile phones during lectures. Even though the phones might be in vibrating mode, the frequent vibrations disturbed her during the lesson. Furthermore she complained about the act of answering short text messages (SMS) while in class. The other students' use of mobile devices inadvertently distracted her from the lecture. The following excerpts depict this notion:

> *People need me [...] I'm too busy at school so people, teachers, friends always call me to know where I am. So they can get me. (Nadège).*

> *We're busy, we stress, I don't want to answer any call, any message. (Henri)*

PREFERENCE FOR LAPTOPS

As others have found (Kukulska-Hulme, 2007), one main criticism related to learning with mobile phones was inherent to the devices' diminutive size. Frequent criticisms were related to screen size. Even though portability could be the main advantage which renders the mobile phone ubiquitous, it could also become its main flaw. This theme was well grounded in the data for 20 students expressed their preference for accessing course related information on their laptop rather than on their mobile phones. Although the laptop is by definition a mobile device, it did not have the same portability as mobile phones. Students tended to keep their laptops in their dormitory rooms and only brought them to class on rare occasions. For this reason, the laptop was the students' first choice to access online course notes. Since most students explained that they mainly studied in their rooms, it is understandable that they would use what they deemed as the best tool at their disposal. Others complained about the lack or the inadequacy of language learning applications available on mobile phones. This was apparently not the case for computers. On the other hand, complaints about

dissimilarities between the phone's organisation of information and the more familiar computer were highlighted. It was repeatedly mentioned that what was displayed on the phone screen did not always match what was seen on the computer's display. For all these reasons, the mobile phone remained a second choice after the laptop. This trend could however evolve with the advent of tablet computers like the iPad, which could offer near mobile phone portability without the intrinsic limitations of the screen size. Difficulties related to mLearning and factors which impeded learning with mobile phones are revealed in the following excerpts:

> *I think the display is too small on the handset. I prefer on the laptop. (Henri)*

> *I never bring my laptop going [any]where. My laptop is just in my room there. (Annaelle)*

> *For example when we study in the bus [...] we cannot focus. (Yolande)*

SPECIFIC PROBLEMS INHERENT TO MOBILE DEVICES

Other problems specific to the mobile phone were mentioned during the interviews. Lydie narrated a prior event, where her phone was stolen when she was on a camping trip, hence, mobile phones are easily exposed to theft. The same reason was used by Yannick to justify why she does not use her mobile phone to access notes in the university bus. Although his friends in the interview group did not agree with him, he explained that he feared his phone might get stolen if he took it out. Another problem inherent to the mobile phones was in relation to connectivity to the cellular network. Several students complained about poor connectivity and the inability to access a consistent 3G signal on the campus. This was also the case with poor Wi-Fi signals, although such a criticism would also apply to laptops, as these devices use the same channel to access Internet. In general, students who reported that they did not use their mobile devices blamed it on connection problems and slow networks. This problem was also experienced by the researchers.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study has identified several factors which could potentially impede learning a foreign language with SNS on a mobile device. The factors related to the SNS were the reluctance to disclose information about oneself to the network, the diverging notions of online and offline friendships, and the lack of stimulation to connect with others. Problems were also detected with mobile phones as they were seen as being too intrusive, less practical than laptops, higher risk of being stolen and connectivity problem.

Students expressed the desire to protect themselves on the SNS. This is consistent with Baker and White's (2011) findings on concerns over cyber safety as the main reason for not using SNS. Furthermore, students revealed that occurrences such as offline arguments being narrated online and the removal of friends from their list could strain relationships. Tokunaga (2011) established that these two actions ranked among the top ten negative events which occurred over SNS. Although the theme of non-disclosure was quite recurrent as mentioned, it was not exhibited in the same manner within the group. Indeed students explained that they did not mind having their videos or pictures displayed to their classmates as they considered them to be friends. It could have been expected that shyness would also prevent introverted learners from feeling comfortable with their peers, yet this was not the case. A comfortable circle was created among members of the language class which was somehow disturbed when Yannick tagged pictures of his classmates. As a result, these

pictures were automatically shared with other groups without their prior consent. This led to 'loss of control' feeling, which is clarified by Tokunaga's (2011) statement that: "users of SNSs are unappreciative of others who willingly breach their privacy by publicizing information from their private profiles"(p. 425).

The root of the problem of non-disclosure is probably more related to the nature of the friendship. Hsu and Wang (2011) in their study on the nature of relationships on SNS discovered that "respondents wrote more on their average and close friends' walls than on the walls of their new friends and acquaintances" (p. 475). This could explain why the theme of non-disclosure might not be an inhibiting factor in the present study. Students explained that their network of friends outside of the language class had access to the posts they wrote in French. This raised enquiries from their other friends who were not fluent with the language. The students explained that this was not a problem for them as they could explain what they were doing in university. They strongly brushed aside the idea of having separate memberships on the SNS to segment their lives as this would defeat the purpose of belonging to a network.

The lack of stimulation to connect is related to the definition of friends. As Tokunaga (2011) explains, the notion of friends is not always the same for everyone. Some will see mere contacts as friends, while others will only consider under this label very close offline friends (Tokunaga, 2011, p. 430). Consequently, online relationships or more precisely the expectations associated with friendship will often be asymmetrical, with one party anticipating more than the other is willing to commit.

Although the mobile phone's ubiquity is probably its main advantage for mLearning ventures, it also poses some challenges. Students explained that they were under stress when people called or texted them frequently. Thomée, Eklöf, Gustafsson, Nilsson, and Hagberg (2007) reported similar findings with young adults. Furthermore, their study revealed evidence of a direct relationship between intensive mobile use and the advent of "symptoms of depression" as well as "sleep disturbances" (Thomée, et al., 2007, p. 1307). Yet as revealed in the interviews data, it was not only one's own mobile phone which was seen as a disturbance. Others' use of the mobile device for texting messages or even receiving SMS was perceived as a distraction, particularly when this took place in the classroom. This phenomenon has been well documented in the literature by Walsh, White and Young (2008). Nevertheless, we believe that our use of social networking sites to communicate and share information with the students should be less intrusive than the SMS, as not all mobile phones are capable of receiving SNS notification updates.

As far as practicality of use the mobile phones were in most cases less favoured than computer laptops. Their main criticism lay in the size of the screen being too small. Kukulska-Hulme (2007) in her review of various studies highlighted a consistency in this reproach and added other problems which the respondents in this study did not report; mainly the absence of a full size keyboard and the poor autonomy of the batteries.

Specific problems inherent to the mobile devices which were reported are not exclusive to this study. In some instances, acts of mobile phone thefts were recorded in institutions of education, thus placing additional challenges on these establishments (Campbell, 2005). In addition, the issue related to poor network access (Wi-Fi and cellular) were also brought forward by Kukulska-Hulme (2007).

The focus of this research was to explore the impeding factors which could prevent the long-term implementation of an SNS on a mobile device as replacement for an LMS. The findings show that the most recurrent theme which occurred in the interviews was the notion of enjoyment. Students repeatedly reported enjoying using Facebook in learning French. They appreciated posting their videos on the social network and they were equally fond of viewing their peers' productions. Daily observations of the online posts on Facebook

showed that students were generally committed to using this platform in a novel fashion. They felt that the environment was more enjoyable than the university's LMS, and thus were more motivated to view the content. This reported increase in motivation hints towards validating the theoretical framework employed in the present study. Strengthening this point, it is noteworthy that symptoms of anxiety were not observed during the implementation phase. This lack of observation and report does not necessarily signify that language anxiety completely disappeared from the classroom. However, it suggests that this affective filter was not predominant. Krashen (2009) notes that a reduction in the affective filters, mainly anxiety, and an increase in motivation and self-confidence are keys to nurturing a positive environment which could encourage foreign language acquisition.

On a more personal note, it is extremely rewarding to use a combination of Facebook and mobile devices to teach French. A sense of immediacy is felt, in situations whereby students responded within a short period of time after the researchers posted documents or comments. Notification about students' responses could be related to the novelty of a different learning platform. However the success of this action plan has directed prompted the researchers to continue the implementation over a longer timeframe. The present study has drastically altered the way the French courses are conducted. Accordingly, a similar setup is now being used in all of the courses. Positive data was obtained from analogous implementations point, to similar findings with different cohorts. Lessons learned from the present study have enabled the researchers to address the impeding factors and thus improve on the original implementation. New courses are now being conducted in a Facebook group rather than on Facebook page. The group offers additional privacy which was not available on the page. As such, students feel more secure and are consequently more disposed to express themselves in French. The lack of stimulation to connect was addressed by creating more micro-tasks which could be completed in a shorter time. As such, students interacted more frequently on the platform thus limiting the risk of boredom which had been reported. To address the preference of laptops over mobile phones to learn, course notes were altered to become more mobile-friendly by presenting less information per page. Consequently, the text could be displayed using a larger typeface more suited to small screens. Although poor connectivity remains the bane of mLearning, students are now more inclined to invest in an always-on data connection in spite of the absence of subsidy as was the case for the present study.

On a concluding note, solving problems associated with several obstacles which could have potentially disrupted the long-term attempt to merge mLearning with SNS, has led to the improvement of the social environment provided by the previous LMS. By combining the two technologies, challenges encountered from both mobile phones and SNS were reduced. It appears that the potential offered by combining a social networking site with mobile devices surpasses the sum of both of these taken individually. Future research should investigate the potential offered by various alternative SNS such as Twitter in foreign language learning.

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APPENDIX A

Please complete this questionnaire alone. *There are no right or wrong answers.* *Please ask if there are questions which you do not understand.* *Your input is greatly appreciated.*	

1. Please tell us about yourself

1.1	Name:
1.2	Date of birth:

2. Please tell us about your mobile phone

2.1	Which mobile phone(s) are you currently using?
2.2	What other mobile devices do you use?

2.3	Do you access mobile internet?	No (answer question 2.4)	2.4		If you answered *No* to question 2.3 please explain why you do not access mobile internet:		
		Yes (answer question 2.5 to 2.10)	by using Wi-Fi	2.5	On your phone	2.6	On your other mobile device
			by using a monthly data plan	2.7	On your phone	2.8	On your other mobile device
			pay per use plan	2.9	On your phone	2.10	On your other mobile device

3. Please tell us about your social networking sites

	Which social networking sites are you a member of	✓	Do you access this site at least once per…		…day? (✓)	…week? (✓)	…month? (✓)
3.1	Facebook			3.2			
3.3	Qzone			3.4			
3.5	Habbo			3.6			
3.7	Twitter			3.8			
3.9	Renren			3.10			
3.11	Windows			3.12			
3.13	Live Spaces			3.14			
3.15	LinkedIn			3.16			
3.17	Bebo			3.18			
3.19	Tagged			3.20			
3.21	Orkut			3.22			
3.23	Myspace			3.24			
3.25	Friendster			3.26			
3.27	Other please specify_____			3.28			

3.29	With whom?
3.30	When do you normally access these sites?
3.31	What do you use these sites for?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

APPENDIX B

Interview Protocol for Group Interviews

What do you think of Facebook in general?
Could you tell me, why this is so?
How do your friends feel about it?

What do you think of using mobile phones?
Could you tell me what this means to you?
Are you the only one feeling this or is this a general feeling?

Tell me about your experience in using your mobile phone to access Facebook?
Why is this so?
Could you tell me why you feel this way?

Do you feel learning French using your mobile phone is different from learning French in the classroom without using technology?
Why do you feel this way?
Are you the only one feeling this?

Tell me about the things you like or don't like about using your mobile phone to learn French?
Could you explain why you enjoyed or didn't enjoy these things?

How does seeing comments posted by others on Facebook affect the way you post your comments?
Does this have any influence on how you learn French?
Why do you think so?

Could you explain to me the way you access the lecture notes on Facebook?
Where and when do you normally do this?
Does having this information available on your phone change anything for you?
Why? / Why not?

How do you feel about posting the videos you recorded on Facebook?
Could you tell me if you found it difficult or easy?
Why do you think this is the case?
Does using Facebook change anything?

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