Reporting US2012: Using Facebook to Communicate

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Abstract

In November 2012, 300 students came together in The Media School at Bournemouth University in the UK to report the US Presidential Election, Over the course of 10 days, students published 176 articles on a rolling news website, garnering more than 20,000 hits. On election night itself, students produced 10 hours of live coverage on both TV and Radio, airing 30 pre-recorded video packages and 35 pre-recorded radio packages. This extra-curricular, experiential learning project, demanded constant contact and communication. Facebook was chosen as the main method of communication throughout the six-week project. This paper explores the successes and failures of using a social network site to manage such a large project.

Introduction: Opening New Channels, Moving Towards a Network

Traditionally, communication between lecturers and students has happened in the classroom in front of a white board, or during a one-on-one tutorial. But with technological advances and the creation of social media, communication is no longer constrained by space and time; now communication can occur in a digital sphere where the boundaries are skewed and time is endless (Papacharissi, 2002).

With this, however, comes both a positive and negative impact. As will be seen here, by using social media, or more specifically, the social networking site (SNS), Facebook, learning can be

enhanced outside the classroom, communication can be opened between students and lecturers, and students can peer support and learn from each other in an environment where they are already living much of their lives (Madge et al, 2009). On the negative side, when lecturers foray into the world of Facebook and use it as an instructional tool, some students perceive this to be a blurring of roles and also a mixing of the educational and social, while others still, enjoy the access they get to their lecturers (which can be an expectation of 24/7), and the ease with which material can be shared and thus used in the learning process (Mazer et al, 2007).

Facebook came onto the educational scene in early 2004 at Harvard University when then-student Mark Zuckerberg created the online tool to allow students with a university e-mail address 'to look at each other's photos, flirt, network and interact' (Boyd & Ellison, 2008: 218). Soon after, Facebook was open to all university students across the United States. By late 2005, however, Facebook went global. With more than a billion monthly active users as of December 2014 and 82% of them outside the United States and Canada, Facebook is a diverse community that engages at all levels of education and all areas of society (http://newsroom.fb.com/Key-Facts, retrieved, April 8th, 2015).

In the UK, a recent study by Mori (2007) suggests that more than 95% of British undergraduate students are regularly using SNS. Hargittai (2007) agreed, pointing out that Facebook is a popular online destination for young people, as it acts as 'both an important social domain and a powerful communication tool' (Madge et al, 2009: 142). Thus Facebook was chosen as the key communication tool for US2012, a special project in The Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University, where students came together to report the US Presidential Election, live, on Radio, Television and Online on November 6th, 2012. Having a digital tool where lecturers and students could communicate in a generally fast and easy manner became of utmost importance during this project. Having a place to hold documents, plan meetings, post text and video links and explain the political process as the project progressed was crucial. Thus, Facebook became a vital tool in communicating without crossing professional boundary lines. It is hoped that the case study, shared here, will allow media educators to review and share further experiences of using experiential learning in journalism education.

Navigating the Network: From Personal to Professional

Historically, like many Humanities subjects, journalism has been taught via lectures, seminars and workshops (Meadows, 1997). Over the last decade, however, lecturers in The Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University have taken that model and consistently challenged it. Multi-media journalism, which consists of teaching newspaper and magazine journalism (print), TV and Radio journalism (broadcast) and Online journalism (print and broadcast together) was introduced to the school in 1992. Groundbreaking at the time, the degree sought to set itself apart from universities that were not adapting to the changing needs of British and international newsrooms. It became apparent in the mid-late 2000s, however, with the creation of MySpace, Facebook, and Twitter, that the field of journalism, and would-be-journalists would be impacted yet again—there were new reporting skills to learn, and platforms for sharing information were changing. The Faculty decided to introduce converged news days in 2008. On a converged news day, students report for multiple platforms, including TV, Radio and Online. Students take on leadership roles, as would be expected in a newsroom, and they work to their news bulletin deadlines. This gives students some experience of what it is like in a functioning newsroom, but due to time and staff constraints, these news days do not happen as frequently as staff would like: 'The challenge for journalism faculties is to consistently engage students in new ways of learning and to offer them opportunities to become highly skilled journalists who are ready to enter the converged media workplace' (Lamb et al, 2010: 93).

There is a need in the journalism curriculum at Bournemouth University for more hands-on experiential learning. While lecturers can teach the basics of writing structure, editing and design, it

is not until students experience journalism for themselves that they understand the high-pressured, high-stakes environment in which they will be working. Kolb (1984) explains that in experiential learning theory, 'ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience. Learning is described as a process whereby concepts are derived from and continuously modified by experience' (1984: 26). Brandon (2002) explains that in journalism education, experiential learning is a process during which 'a person experiences an event, acquires competencies and then compares the knowledge gained with knowledge gained in similar situations' (2002: 62). To further the journalism curriculum at Bournemouth University, staff recognized a need for a real-world, intensive project in which skills in print, broadcast and online would be tested. It was also recognized that a project such as this could potentially enhance communication skills amongst students, build up confidence and self-esteem, while also exposing students to a live, unfolding media event that was being reported around the world. Thus, US2012 was born.

The project recruited 300 students, representing 1.7% of BU's total student population and 11% of media students. These students, all of whom volunteered to work on the project, came from 13 different degree programmes, five of which were postgraduate degrees. There were no grades attached to the project and no extra academic credit was given. Students studying on the BA in Multi-Media Journalism were allowed, however, to submit their work on US2012 for their National Council for the Training of Journalists portfolio, which is evidence of three years work at the end of their degree.

Throughout the duration of US2012, two staff members took responsibility for the project, with 24 staff providing support in the lead up to election night and on the night itself. There were 10 days of online rolling news coverage that started October 29th 2012 and ended November 7th. In that time, students published 176 articles, about 17 a day. Throughout the 10 days, there were 20,761 hits on the website, with 9,094 (44%) of these coming on election night alone.

On election night itself, students produced 10 hours of live coverage on both TV and Radio, airing 30 pre-recorded video packages and 35 pre-recorded radio packages. Students interviewed 50 guests live in the studios on the night as well. Online, production continued as the previous 10 days, but the students also created a live blogging team for the duration of the coverage. Following the conclusion of the project, students created a 20-page US2012 Election Magazine special, with highlights from the project. Following the conclusion of US2012, the project was awarded Best Live Programme and was runner-up for Best Factual Programming and Best Male Presenter at the British National Student Television Awards in 2013.

While teaching students about the history of US politics, providing extra workshops on TV and Radio editing, and teaching them how live reporting events work was important, what was indicated early on in the summer months, before the students were even approached, (how were they approached and selected?) was the lack of infrastructure within the university in which to communicate with the students who needed those extra tutorials. The university had mailing lists for various academic cohorts, but there was no way, short of creating a project database, to communicate with specific students who were completing specific tasks related to the project. With some earlier success of communicating with students via Facebook regarding changes to class timetables and promoting various events occurring in the department, it was decided to try this social networking tool as a way of managing the project.

Navigating the Network: Tags, Likes and Updates

The US2012 project was organized to make the experience as real as possible. Therefore, how the leadership hierarchy was created mimicked that of a professional converged newsroom, such as the BBC. The two lecturers that oversaw the project were established as 'Executive Producers'. For pedagogical and legal reasons, staff had to maintain control and responsibility of the project,

but under lecturers were student leaders1: Editor-in-Chief, Deputy Editor, Hub Editor, Online Editor, TV Editor, Radio Editor and Social Media Editor. (How were these chosen?)Once students were aware of the hierarchical structure, the EIC took responsibility for creating the open online Facebook group, to which all 300 students were encouraged to join. Unfortunately, at any given time, there only seemed to be about 200-275 students who were in the group, thus this proved to be an issue in terms of communication, which at times thwarted the project. What needs to be remembered in terms of this project is that all students volunteered to work on it from start to finish. Students were recruited during induction week when they returned for the academic year in September, and were also encouraged to attend larger informational meetings held across the Faculty. Students and staff alike volunteered their time, with no compensation, monetarily or on timetables, so requiring anyone to do anything at any given time was always based on goodwill and engagement and commitment to the project.

The project had a loose structure which articulated how lecturers thought it could or should work, but ultimately, this is an example of a project that grew organically, with both students and lecturers alike, learning from each other and about each other as the project progressed. The functionality and usage of the US2012 Facebook Group, ultimately fell into four categories: usage by lecturers and their changing roles; administration/management of the project and how students communicated with each other; how students learned about the US political system and engaged in the political process and lastly, post US2012, what happened next?

Lecturers and their changing roles

For young people, Facebook has its own codes, and is governed by certain values, 'such as establishing and negotiating identity, building relationships, staying connected, brevity, conciseness and immediacy' (Reid, 2011: 59). These values make students feel comfortable in this digital environment, as they see it as their domain. With such a captive audience, it stands to reason then that educators might venture into this unknown world and use it as a tool for enhancing learning outside the classroom. Mason (2006) suggests that Facebook is a good tool to encourage reflection, give peer feedback and encourage collaborative learning. Selwyn (2007) added that its informality encourages interaction between students. The little research that is available on whether students want their lecturers to move into the digital sphere is patchy at best. Madge et al (2009) explain:

> In our research, a clear picture emerged whereby first year undergraduate students, generally thought the use of Facebook was most importantly for social purposes, secondarily for informal learning processes (ie. For student-to-student interactions about academic work-related matters), but definitely not for formal teaching purposes (ie. Between staff and student and involving formal assessment) (Madge et al, 2009: 148)

Mazer et al (2007) had similar findings: 'It appears there are a range of opinions regarding tutors using Facebook, but generally students were not overly keen on the idea' (2007:13). Yet these pieces of research differ to more recent studies, which are more positive (list them). As is the nature of technological change, perhaps ideas about what is acceptable on Facebook in terms of student-lecturer interaction is also changing.

At the beginning of the US2012 project, the two lecturers who oversaw the project provided significant guidance and input into the project, which ranged from choosing editors, booking rooms for meetings, and outlining how the project would work, arguably all appropriate tasks for educators who are trying to engage students in an experiential learning project. However, as the project progressed, lecturers became facilitators and guides, steering students in the direction

1 The editor-in-chief had ultimate responsibility for the coverage, and managing students so they could meet the expectations set for the project; the deputy editor assisted the EIC. There were five main groups into which the journalism was divided, with each section headed by an editor that would report back to the EIC and DE as and when needed. The Hub editor was responsible for several sub teams on the night, which included Results and Newswire, Picture Desk, Interviews, Live Text and Ticker, Graphics, US Bureau and On Air Reporters. On election night, all information flowed from the Hub to the other groups. The Online Editor was responsible for the US2012 Website and its daily operation. The TV editor oversaw the creation of the 30 video packages, and organized the TV teams on the night. The Radio editor oversaw the creation of the 35 radio packages and organized the Radio teams on the night. The Social Media Editor was responsible for maintaining the project's social media feeds, as well as monitoring social media on election night.

Figure 1:

Figure 2:

that they needed to go, but allowing the students to make their own decisions, fail and succeed, and steer the project. Lecturers also facilitated learning by providing extra lectures on US Politics two evenings a week, and by bringing in journalists as guest lecturers so students could hear from professionals who were covering the election at the time. Additionally, on Facebook, lecturers started discussions based on links posted on the page (See Figures 1 & 2), and continuously asked students to think about the journalistic decisions they were making and why they were making those decisions. Reid (2011) determined that students respond well to the power shift that happens on Facebook when tutors make themselves available, communicate with them and engage in 'solidarity-building interaction' (2011: 64). It also indicates a desire on the lecturer's part to learn and engage with a world they might not otherwise inhabit (Roblyer et al, 2010; Arnold and Paulus, 2010). Yang et al (2011) concur, stating that student satisfaction with student-faculty communication outside the classroom increased when virtual office hours were available via Facebook.

The US2012 project was an intense six-week experiential project, and thus lecturers were always available for support when students felt overwhelmed or panicked over the immensity of the project. In a sense, through daily communication on the Facebook page (sometimes multiple times a day), lecturers became peers. This is quite similar to what is seen in a professional newsroom, when editors throw off their titles and 'get stuck in' when breaking news is happening. While the professional peer role allowed for much more joviality amongst the US2012 participants, and a sense of camaraderie between staff and students, there was still a boundary of professional distance where students respected and responded to lecturers when demands were made. Yet, despite these more recent positive studies, not many educators are embracing Facebook as a pedagogical tool. Researchers argue this is because lecturers are not open to the idea of using Facebook as a teaching tool and fear the perception that Facebook is merely a tool for socializing and not learning (Daniels and Billingsley, 2014).

Administration/Management of the Project and Communication amongst Students

Ultimately, US2012 was a student-led project, with supportive guidance from lecturers. The Facebook page proved a crucial tool in the administration and management of this project. First and foremost, students were able to motivate, encourage and scold each other in ways that their lecturers could not. In Roblyer et al's (2010) research, they found that students are 'much more open to the idea of using Facebook instructionally' than their lecturers (138). Burnett and Merchant (2011) reinforced this idea:

> Clearly, the potential for social media to support new or extended forms of participation and collaboration that could promote learning is attractive to those who embrace student-centered ideologies, and those who believe that traditional structures of knowledge and power are loosening (2011: 41).

Students motivated each other with pictures of sad-looking animals when they felt disappointed in each other, and funny videos when they needed pick-me-ups. The students held each other accountable (see Figure 3), using Facebook as the tool to do this. As classroom space was limited for this extracurricular project, students cautioned each other about being disruptive in classrooms where other classes were taking place; they also warned each other not to 'skip' or 'miss' classes when some of them started doing this, and the lecturers overseeing the project got in trouble. This is evidence of the peer relationship established between lecturers and students working on the project.

Overwhelmingly, however, it was how Facebook was used to manage their professional duties as journalists that was encouraging. They made use of the file-sharing tool on Facebook to create lists (see Figure 4), update practices and make announcements to the entire cohort working on the project. They created sub-groups on Facebook to break into smaller teams to manage their plans for working on election night (see Figure 5). They used the main group's wall to announce meetings and important updates as and when they were happening. They also used the wall to shout for help when students forgot their shifts, or forgot to submit stories for the website (see Figure

Figure 3
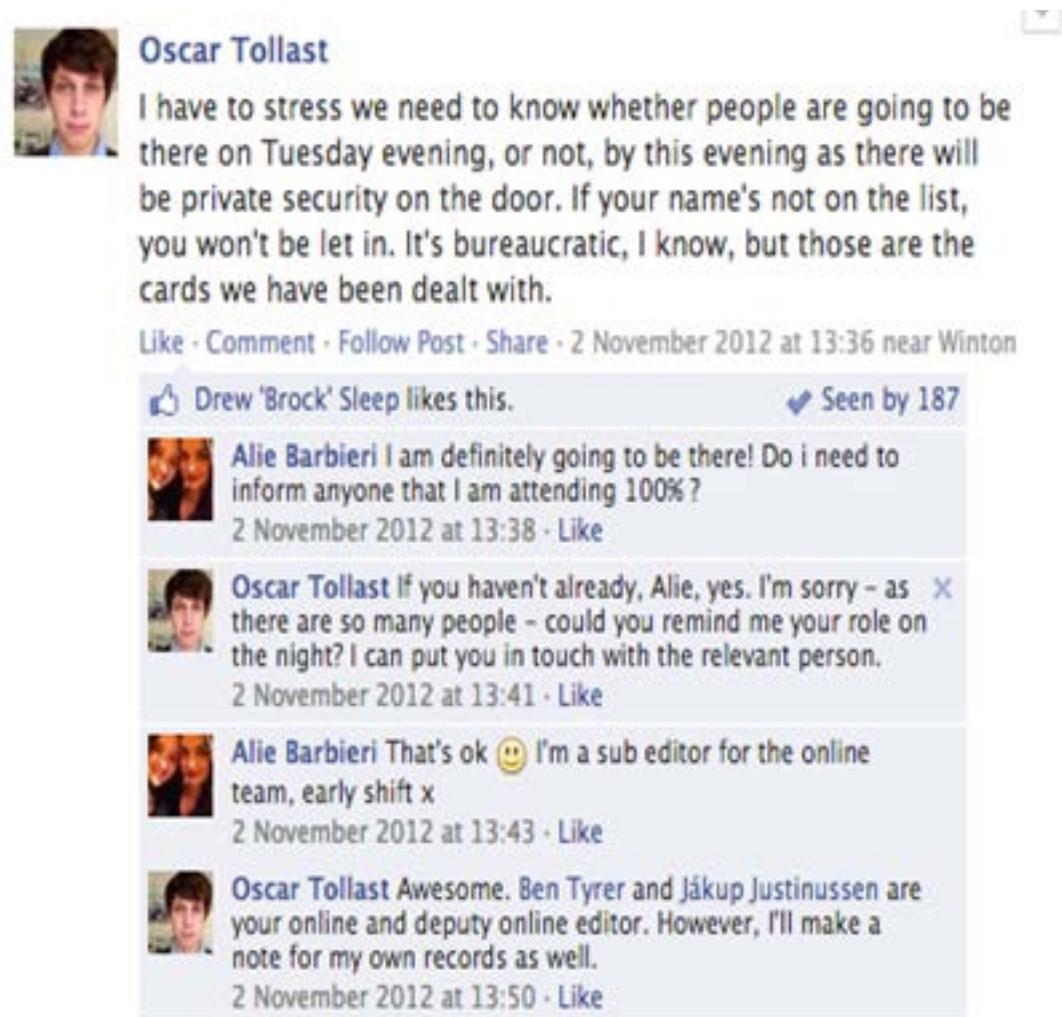
6). The Facebook group was used as a public relations platform from which they publicized their own coverage. They discussed their PR plans (see Figure 7), they suggested what they should be publicizing and the best way to attract an audience for their night of coverage. Without Facebook, it appeared communication amongst students and staff would have been sorely lacking.

Learning about the US Political System and Engaging with Politics

David Buckingham, a media academic who writes about new technology and the impact and influence it has on young people, has explored the notion that new technology, such as Facebook, helps to support new kinds of participation, whether it be learning or in the form of civic engagement (2003). Min (2007) suggests that online deliberation can increase a person's issue knowledge, political efficacy and willingness to participate in politics. While these discussions are helpful at a macro level, when it comes to working with students on a social networking site, it is best to engage on a micro scale.

It became clear early on in the US2012 process that few students had knowledge of the US political system. Consequently, staff members—those who worked as journalists in the United States, and those who researched the US political system—became quite important in providing a supplementary lecture programme two evenings a week that students were required to attend. Surprisingly, students engaged fully in these lectures, and carried their discussions over to the US2012 Facebook group. Students began reading newspapers and magazines from around the world, and

Figure 4

engaging with TV and Radio journalism in ways that their lecturers had not seen before. Students appeared to become inspired; they discussed articles they had read with each other (See Figure 8), supporting each other and helping each other when there were questions (See Figure 9); they also queried whether they should be covering similar topics themselves (See Figure 10). What should also be noted here is that lecturers were able to engage with students who otherwise rarely contribute in classes. Reid (2011) discovered that a closed Facebook group in her teaching was immensely helpful for engagement: 'People who don't normally say anything in class often came online to say something. Many students who are more reticent in the face-to-face context of the tutorial class participate actively on the closed-group Facebook wall' (Reid, 2011: 67). Lecturers engaged in some of these online discussions started by students, (see Figure 11), challenging them to think about the topics in more analytical ways Thus, here was another way that lecturers were able to teach, encourage and inspire students to learn.

Post US2012: What Happened Next?

As mentioned earlier, covering US2012 was an exercise in taking the student-lecturer relationship beyond the typical hierarchical structure of the lecturer in charge, and the student as submissive. Light et al (2009), discuss how 'teaching is not simply regarded as aiding students' accumulation of knowledge presented to them, but rather the process of facilitating students' construction of

Figure 5

Figure 6

Figure 7

knowledge for herself. The teacher will help the student develop and change his own conceptions of the subject and in many ways himself as a person' (2009: 30). This project showed how the relationship with students, based on using Facebook as the method for predominant communication, morphed the student-lecturer relationship into more of a professional peer relationship, but students themselves grew as journalists and individuals. Women's and Gender Studies pedagogists have argued that through the process of experiential learning, 'students gain new perspectives on themselves and their potential, which can lead to greater confidence in their ability to participate fully in the world of work and other spheres' (Malkin and Stake, 2004; Hoffman and Stake, 1998; Stake and Hoffman, 2001).

This learning carried over post-US2012 and back into the classroom. Post-US2012, a bond was created between lecturers and students, where after spending so much time together in the six weeks leading up to the project, it was difficult at first to disentangle. Educational theorists (Bullough 1994; Chickering and Reisser, 1993 and Klein, 1991) argue that changes in a student's engagement 'take place more effectively in an atmosphere of mutual trust and collaboration between teacher and student' (Malkin and Stake, 2004: 456). This was clearly seen Post-US2012, where Facebook proved to be a crucial tool in continuing new and previously established relationships (See Figures 12-14). Banter continued on the Facebook page amongst students and staff alike until about mid-December, 2012. Even now, despite finishing nearly 2.5 years ago, students still go onto the Facebook page to discuss projects they are working on and to discuss world events and how they would cover them, and those who have graduated report back about the 'real world' of journalism and how the project has helped them.

Figure 8

Network Support: Control Alt Delete

The purpose of this paper has been to outline the arguments for using Facebook as a pedagogical tool, using the experiential project of US2012 as a case study. The project, as shown through the various snapshots from the US2012 Facebook group, was exciting, nerve wracking, stressful and fun all at the same time. However, the project was not without its problems and Facebook was not the most perfect of tools to use in terms of communication, but it continues to be a resource that staff in The Faculty of Media and Communication use quite frequently to communicate with students regarding extracurricular projects (since US2012, we have worked on India2014, and are currently planning UK2015). Students who participated in US2012 were asked for anecdotal feedback, as well as asked to complete a questionnaire with 26-open-ended questions. The feedback received will be presented here, but will also inform guidelines for lecturers who might undertake similar projects in the future.

Feedback

Students and staff were asked to feed back their thoughts on the project in general. Overwhelmingly, feedback on the project itself was positive. One male student commented:

> "It was by far the best thing I've done since being here and the biggest project the media school has ever seen! I am very grateful to you both that I got the chance to present and also for your advice along the way. It has been invaluable and I have never been more proud to say I was involved in a project"

Another male student talked about the impact the project had on his life:

> "I just wanted to say thanks for the opportunity to present the graphics for the live US2012 coverage. It was stressful, yet fun and more exhilarating than I could have imagined. Essentially, the coverage has not only helped by giving me a taste of real election coverage, but gave me a greater inkling for the future of XXXX, so thank you."

While a female student discussed the confidence the project instilled in her:

> "Thank you for believing in me and trusting me with presenting seven hours of the live coverage. It was an honour and undoubtedly the highlight of my three years at Bournemouth University. I will remember and cherish this experience far beyond my years at Bournemouth. I really en-

Figure 9

Figure 10

Joshua Saunders

This may be a ye olde already pre-scribbled idea but the features/TV team may wanna look at the influence and involvement of Presidential wives throughout the elections perhaps? Maybe compare the involvement through the decades? You guys probably have this thought already though so hopefully it doesn't sound patronising!

Like · Comment · Follow Post · Share · 4 October 2012 at 15:20

Oscar Tollast and Alice Simons-Denville like this.　　　Seen by 194

Oscar Tollast Cheers, Josh. It's one of the ideas on our list that we'll hand out to relevant editors tomorrow.
4 October 2012 at 15:31 · Like · 1

Helen Winter I read an article the other day about Obama's wife bringing in the 'black votes' rather than Obama himself in the Economist...
4 October 2012 at 16:03 · Like

Figure 11

Gareth Hill

Here's a left view of the elections with Cary Younge of the Guardian. The climate is particularly interesting with Occupy Wall Street emerging outside of electoral politics. That movement and the recent and current strikes in Wisconsin and Chicago could be a base for a look at the politics outside of the two parties which could influence the election. Will people who feel let down by Obama bother voting ? etc That sort of thing.

Interview with Gary Younge on US presidential elections | 29Sep12
www.socialistworker.co.uk
Author and journalist Gary Younge spoke to Willemijn Wilgenhof about Obama's record and the mood among the US working class

Like · Comment · Unfollow Post · Share · 1 October 2012 at 17:11

Oscar Tollast likes this.　　　Seen by 195

Ann Luce Media-Bu Good stuff Gareth. Don't forget the Tea Party angle, too! Former Dems and Reps who might now have switched parties... what role does that play?!
1 October 2012 at 17:12 · Like

Figure 12

Mat Charles BU

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Last night, and the project overall, was a massive success. I am so proud of all of you. The coverage compared well with my professional experiences of covering American elections, and I hope you enjoyed it as much as me. I can't believe we called it for Obama before CNN! All the hard work really paid off, and I hope you now appreciate all my nagging! You know where to come for a reference! Here's to the wrap party! :)

Unlike · Comment · Follow Post · Share · 7 November 2012 at 23:04 via Mobile

You, Oscar Tollast, Anushka Naidoo, Vikki Hutton and 35 others like this.　　　Seen by 184

Figure 13

Vikki Hutton

You were all brilliant, I can't say this enough. We were so proud to see this project come together. Watch this space for details of the wrap party – Friday 16th Nov. x

Like · Comment · Follow Post · Share · 7 November 2012 at 21:34

Oscar Tollast, Anushka Naidoo, Beth Graham and 11 others like this.　　　Seen by 184

Write a comment...

Chika Anene

Everyone did a super job, both yesterday and today. You should all be proud of yourselves :). It was actually a really fun experience (those times I wasn't dozing off :/). :)

Like · Comment · Follow Post · Share · 7 November 2012 at 18:54

Oscar Tollast, Charlotte Foot and Alys Penfold like this.　　　Seen by 184

Skyler Shah Ha dozing or in a coma?
7 November 2012 at 18:55 · Like · 1

Chika Anene Lool
7 November 2012 at 19:02 · Like

joyed working with both of you and hope I'll have the opportunity to work with you again before I leave next year"

It was not only students who gushed about the project. Staff, too, were impacted by the immensity of engagement:

"I've never seen the Media School operating at anywhere near this level of energy and commitment. It was really inspiring and wouldn't have happened without your incredibly hard work. Thanks for a great night and congratulations for a phenomenal success"

"Overall, I feel US2012 was a brilliant project combining both hands-on pedagogy and good fun. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it's been one of the highlights of my last 11 years at BU. The sheer amount of people and roles involved was staggering. Presenters were well briefed and very calm under extreme pressure. For me, the best thing was how students and staff from different parts of the Media School worked together on a collaborative project which showed how much we can achieve when we harness the talent, expertise and facilities that are available to us"

Yet, the project was not without its problems. One colleague noted that while the project captured the imagination of staff and students, the 'cross department collaboration was only partially successful—the silos were connected, but they were still silos… only a limited number of staff became involved—Why?' This was a critical point that was noted by the organizers of the project, also. The main hypothesis however, is that many staff members were cautious of the experiential nature of the teaching that was taking place, and that if it went wrong, there could have been a negative impact on other areas of teaching within the Faculty. Thankfully, however, this was not the case. While these issues are important to note to help inform future guidelines for running projects of this magnitude, it is Facebook that really needs to be discussed.

Students were honest in their evaluation of the usage of Facebook during US2012. The feedback suggested that Facebook was a "great forum to communicate with everyone and for people to share interesting articles and websites with each other" and that it was "… extremely useful as a tool to cut bullshit. Everyone checks Facebook and Facebook knows what you've checked. People who might otherwise have slacked off stuff because 'they didn't know' suddenly were without an excuse". Students also described Facebook as 'a lifeline' and that it was "… an invaluable tool for interaction between the students and the team of lecturers working on the project; it allowed us to share ideas and information more efficiently than via email." Using the social networking site as a management tool was also praised: "The group was really helpful. I could locate all the files I needed because I knew they were all in one place. I used it all the time to get updates easily. The Facebook group definitely was a key aspect of communication."

On the other hand, students were also quite honest about the failures of Facebook. The Editor-in-Chief of the project who predominantly managed the group was thoughtful in his reflection:

"[The use of Facebook during the project was] challenging. It has pluses and minuses. I'm not sure it's the best way to coordinate more than 200 people. Sub groups worked to some extent, but I think we assumed because we put the information on Facebook that everyone would read it. That wasn't the case, and that's why confusion occurred.

"I think we relied too heavily on Facebook. I think we chose Facebook because we felt we'd get a quicker reaction from other students, but I can remember one final year BAMMJ pointing out that it was easy to miss notifications."

Other students noted that the communication on Facebook always seemed quite 'frantic' and thus, "the page got very used and it was hard to read every post and many people who you needed to see your post didn't." Still others were frustrated by how the group was used during the project:

"I felt that people ended up abusing the page to post funny videos they found on the Internet, rather than putting up the latest news that might have helped the news team." The constant notifications didn't go down well, either: "[I was] always bombarded by posts from the group, so didn't check it much as was repetitive."

However, despite the critical comments, students collectively agreed that Facebook was crucial to the running of the project: "not only THE place for communication, but THE place to promote our work" and " I think given the scale of the operation, communicating via social networks on a continual basis was efficient."

Guidelines for Staff: 5 Steps to Using Facebook in Special Projects

Despite some of the negative comments, it is clear that Facebook was a success in terms of the US2012 project. If this mode of communication was to be used again, however, there are some guidelines that need to be followed:

Lecturers should create a 'work' Facebook identity: Staff should create a 'work' identity for themselves, which is clearly labeled as a staff account, eg: Joe Bloggs, Josephine Bloggs. This indicates to students that there is a level of professionalism that needs to be followed, and that students will not get to engage with their lecturers in a typical 'friend' format. Lecturers need to decide what pictures to show of themselves, and how they will communicate with students on Facebook—is the tone formal, or informal? How much access will you give the students? In a project like US2012, access was given from about 6am until well past midnight most days, but the sheer magnitude of the project required this. Lecturers need to make this decision before they engage in their project.

Make sure ALL students on the project are 'enrolled' on Facebook: For communication to succeed, all students working on your project, must have their own Facebook page, but also MUST be enrolled in the Facebook group you are using. If this is not done, there will be miscommunication, students who feel left out, and students who do not engage when you need them to. This should be made mandatory as part of participation in the project.

Set ground rules and know what your Facebook group is for: Based on feedback from students, this is an important element of working with Facebook. Students have to understand the boundaries of the Facebook group. Can unrelated video be posted? Can students talk randomly about various different issues? Looking back at US2012, these boundaries and ground rules were missing. Students needed to be instructed that they were to use the group ONLY for US2012-related discussions. Miscellaneous conversations and videos should not have been allowed in the group. Additionally, it is here that students should also know how they can interact with their lecturers. Is it OK to joke with them and make fun of something their lecturer has done/said? In the case of US2012, this was allowed and encouraged to build camaraderie, however, lecturers carrying out future projects need to consider the boundaries and rules they wish to put in place to communicate with their students and vice-versa.

Encourage other staff members to engage in your Facebook group: One of the things that was lacking in US2012 was the lack of other lecturer voices. For the most part, staff left the group to the two main lecturers in charge of the project. While this was fine, it would have been better from a pedagogical perspective to have students engage in analytical and critical discussions with other colleagues throughout the project. It would have strengthened the learning process, and it would have also removed some pressure from the lecturers overseeing the project.

Carry classroom discussions onto Facebook: The beauty of Facebook is that the learning can continue 24/7, if you choose. Throughout the US2012 project, students engaged with their lecturers on a daily basis producing stories, and planning for election night itself. Some of the best learning occurred when conversations that had happened in the classroom continued on Facebook, with students posting references to information learned earlier in the day and/or week. Students also had the opportunity to ponder information that they learned and then ask questions about different election processes on Facebook, which again enhanced the learning experience.

Conclusion: Network Maintenance

US2012 was the first project of its kind to be ever carried out in The Faculty of Media and Communication at Bournemouth University. Overwhelmingly, the project was a success, and part of that success had to do with how communication was handled with the aid of Facebook. While there are positives and negatives to using Facebook as a communication tool, it is clear from the reflective evidence received from both students and staff in the Faculty, that overwhelmingly, Facebook was a tool that enhanced educational practice during this rather unique project. It is clear then that while communication between lecturers and students has traditionally happened in the classroom or during one-to-one tutorials, this does not need to be the case anymore. In fact, technological advances have enhanced how students and lecturers can communicate, which can only enhance the student learning experience. This case study about US2012 has shown that communication and experiential learning around journalism can happen in a digital sphere. It has been presented here as a roadmap for journalism educators to review and mould for their own projects, so that we can collectively enhance and share best practice in journalism education.

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