EXPLORING AND EXAMINING THE USE OF THE FACEBOOK IN THE CLASSROOM
AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT SUCCESS

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Under the Supervision of Dr. Alexa Dare
Under the Mentorship of Kristina Morehouse
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By
Olajumoke “Jummy” Olabanji

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We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

Thesis or Project Director

Faculty Mentor

Faculty Reader

Gonzaga University
MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies
ABSTRACT

American engineer, author and inventor, Richard Buckminster “Bucky” Fuller once said that, “Humanity is acquiring all the right technology for all the wrong reasons.” The apparent human obsession with technology permeates all facets of every day life including households, work places and especially in schools. Some argue that too much technology is just another distraction that takes away from the fundamentals of education and learning. Others would say that technology has enhanced the learning and development of America’s youth. This study used Marshall McLuhan’s *media ecology theory* to research the popular social networking website Facebook and its impact on the classroom, specifically how students themselves believe Facebook can be used to enhance their educations. Several university students were surveyed and asked to respond to how Facebook in the classroom changed their perception, experience and behavior in the classroom. A self-administered survey best captured the “actions and reactions of people” (Rubin et al, 2010, p. 218). The findings of this study showed that students themselves saw much benefit with incorporating Facebook into the classroom. The majority of respondents concluded that Facebook can help them better understand their work by enhancing the classroom experience, but there is also the negative aspect of the site serving as a classroom distraction. Using this data, a teacher, instructor, professor or educator can find ways to implement Facebook into the classroom culture to best serve their students.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social media knows no boundary. Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 …which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan, 2010). Some examples of social media include blogs, videos, instant messaging, and podcasts. Social media has become branded into our culture through popular social media technologies such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter.

Social media has swept through American society, creating new dynamics in communication and relationships. The efficiency, scale and scope of this relatively new communication phenomenon have made connecting with others a casual and nearly effortless task. With the use of computers and other technologies, it is easier than ever to connect virtually with others. Educational settings help provide adequate grooming and preparation in social skills, and social media assists in establishing these skills. Social media influences everything from students’ classroom experience to writing and social skills. By examining the positive and negative effects of social media’s infiltration into the classroom, we garner more insight and knowledge on how to foster a better learning environment for students and teachers.

This study examined the impacts that social media has in today’s classrooms. The website Facebook was used as a basis for the research. Marshall McLuhan’s media ecology theory provided a theoretical basis in which to look at both the literature and the data. McLuhan’s theory suggested that “changes in technology alter the symbolic environment – the socially constructed, sensory world of meanings that in turn shapes our perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior” (Griffin, 2009, p. 312). Using this theory, the author of this study looked
at student success in the classroom based on their perceptions, experiences and behaviors. To assist with this qualitative research, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to and answered by several college students. The results of this study provide insight on how educators can use social media to enhance the classroom experience for students without allowing it to be too much of a distraction.

**Definition of Terms Used**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were used:

*Media ecology* - changes in technology alter the symbolic environment – the socially constructed, sensory world of meanings that in turn shapes our perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior” (Griffin, 2009, p. 312)

*Faustian bargain* – the price culture pays for technology (Griffin, 2009)

*Phenomenological tradition* - communication as the experience of self and others through dialogue” (Griffin, 2009, p.49)

**Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 1 introduced the issue at hand; the impact of social media in the classroom. Chapter 2 is an introduction to the philosophical and theoretical theories used to convey the research. In chapter 2 several pieces of literature, including past studies, were used to gain a better knowledge of the background of this study. Finally, chapter two poses a research question to be answered by the study. Before moving forward with any research it’s important to identify several things such as scope and methodology. Data can start to be collected once a method is selection and an instrument has been created. All of this information can be found in chapter 3. The actual study itself including data analysis and the results of the study are assembled in
chapter 4, which also includes direct quotations from the questionnaire respondents and questions for further discussion. Finally, in chapter 5 the author discusses the limitations of the study, further study recommendations and the conclusion of the study.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Humans thrive off communication. Communication is the source for wellness; communication is life. Communication is also engaging, whether in conversation or in reading a book it should be engaging at all times. Em Griffin describes this type of communication under the phenomenological tradition: “communication as the experience of self and others through dialogue” (Griffin, 2009, p.49). Furthermore phenomenology is defined as “intentional analysis of everyday experience from the standpoint of the person who is living it; explores the possibility of understanding the experience of self and others” (p. 49). In this tradition there is a great emphasis on people’s perceptions and experiences.

This study assumes that dialogue, via social media, is vital to the well being of students’ classroom experiences, perceptions and attitudes. The research below aims to offer insight into how social media offers students the chance to break out from the traditional education norms and create a classroom culture that is beneficial to both learning and growing. Ultimately, this study works to identify and improve student engagement through the ever-evolving face of technology. The following sections will detail how previous research has backed up the aforementioned theories. The literature will look at how social media impacts media ecology -

THEORETICAL BASIS

Communication theorists, educators, politicians, scholars, and others are becoming increasingly interested in the ability of technology and social media to influence student achievement, success and culture both inside and outside the classroom.
One theory that can be used to explain the power of technology and social media comes from University of Toronto English professor Marshall McLuhan, a leading media theorist, who suggested that media should be looked at ecologically.

**Media Ecology**

Marshall McLuhan’s theory suggested that “changes in technology alter the symbolic environment – the socially constructed, sensory world of meanings that in turn shapes our perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior” (Griffin, 2009, p. 312). While other noted theorists wrote warnings against technological advances McLuhan believed that we are “safe” from our technologies as long as they are not “chasing us” (p. 313). According to McLuhan, it would be almost impossible to ignore the ever-changing face of technology. He believed that instead of focusing on what is changing people, researchers should focus on how our everyday experience of technology is changing (p. 313). Griffin takes a closer look at this theory writing, “a medium shapes us because we partake of it over and over until it becomes an extension of ourselves” (Griffin, 2009, p.313). McLuhan said that the “message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (McLuhan, 1964, p.130).

In his keynote address, delivered at the Inaugural Media Ecology Association Convention, famed media theorist Neil Postman suggested that media ecology means that humans are “not simply interested in media, but in the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings give a culture its character and, one might say, help a culture to maintain symbolic balance” (Postman, 2000, p. 11).
Both praise and concern have followed social media with its current cultural saturation. Researchers like McLuhan encouraged others to also look at whether or not media enhanced or destroyed those immersed in them. Renowned media theorist Neil Postman believed that media ecology’s primary task was “to make moral judgments” (Griffin, 2009, p. 319). In fact, Postman (1998) postulated that culture always pays a price for technology, and slick social media technology from web sites like Facebook has certainly created a new culture of language and expression that is adversely affecting writing and social skills within our classrooms. Postman called this *Faustian Bargain*, or “a deal with the devil; selling your soul for temporary gain” (Griffin, 2009, p. 319) Postman believed that technology could sometimes destroy more than it creates, and vice versa (Griffin, 2009). Something Postman looked at is whether or not technology is really needed. While Postman mostly used television as the medium he chose to study, his research can be used as a basis for looking at other mediums, like the Internet, as well.

The research in this paper will look at how new technology has changed or altered the perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior of students. When looking at media from an ecological, or humanistic, point of reference it is important to remember that everyone has a different view on what they consider “good” or “bad” for them. Quoting similar theories by psychologist C. G. Jung, McLuhan said that, “our human sense, of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 138). The following research studied how the relationship between Facebook and students identifies changes in perception, experiences and behaviors. Postman reminded us of this. In his previous mentioned address, Postman discussed the television and its impact on the average childhood. While many would argue that the television has made the institution of childhood “obsolete,” there are some, like electronic
salespeople, who see nothing wrong with it (Postman, 2000, p.12). The same could be said for social media and new technology, such as the website Facebook.

Facebook is currently ranked in the top five most visited websites around the world (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2009, pg. 176). With Facebook, students and teachers can easily communicate with each other simply because Facebook is an interactive website. Messages and chats can be shared almost instantaneously. The growing popularity of Facebook has undoubtedly changed the way people communicate. The following study will look at the way Facebook alerts our symbolic environment.

As Sabine Weinert wrote, for humans, “Much of our learning in an everyday context happens without conscious awareness” (Weinert, 2009, p. 244). Even though much can be learned outside of the classroom, educators have the important task of taking charge of what skills and behaviors are learned inside the classroom. Results from a 2009 study on content-based instruction, by Stella Kong, suggested that a focus on content provides a strong foundation for student success. The results from the study suggest “a lack of content focus provides an inadequate foundation for content and language learning” (Kong, 2009, p 257). Teachers should be aware of this pedagogy and recognize that education “must not be confused with training” (Ashton, 2010, p. 48). Education should be seen as a way to enhance the entire well-being of a student. The above information gives a pathway to introduce social media into classroom curriculum. Curriculum is the course of study for all students in a specific classroom that incorporates meaning participation, daily routines and activities. (Horn & Banjaree, 2009, p. 409). Research has shown that the use of social media in curriculum can be beneficial to many students.
The Literature

Themes

In his media ecology theory, McLuhan discusses several themes including perception, experience and attitudes and behaviors. He talks about how technology can alter our environment and therefore alter our communication. The following research takes a look at each of these three themes specifically in the classroom and how they affect students.

Perception

Several university researchers in the United Kingdom have studied whether there is any role for social networking tools to be used by university support services and academic departments to “enhance the social and academic integration of students, from the student perspective” (Madge et al, 2009, p. 141). As noted earlier, perception was listed as one of the key senses McLuhan identified in his media ecology theory. Roger Mason (2006), for example, suggests Facebook’s utility lies in its reflective qualities, its mechanisms for peer feedback and its collaborative models of learning. Many students use Facebook informally to schedule group meetings and ask questions about class. Most of the students surveyed used Facebook weekly to get in contact with students in their classes (Madge et al, p. 149). Some students Madge and his researchers interviewed stated that they would rather not use Facebook to communicate with teachers.

However, more than half of the students who responded to their survey did offer suggestions on how teachers could utilize Facebook in the classroom. Some of those ideas include academic support, peer revisions, and class announcements. Many of the suggestions were administrative in nature and not necessarily about a deeper connection with the instructor. Their findings reveled that more students would rather contact their instructor via Facebook than
have their instructor contact them via Facebook (p. 150). The above research shows that the majority of students embraced Facebook as a technology that enhanced classroom engagement. By using this advanced form of communication the students viewed their education as more meaningful and beneficial.

Oftentimes educators find themselves embracing technology to better understand how their students perceive the learning experience. The following two instances can be seen as examples of Postman’s Faustian bargain theory. Researchers at Ohio University studied the effects of teacher disclosure via Facebook on teacher credibility. Research suggested, “teachers who personalize their teaching through the use of humor, stories, enthusiasm, and self-disclosure are perceived by their students to be effective in explaining course content” (Mazer, Murphy & Simonds, 2009, pg. 175). In 2008 the Chronicle of Higher Education ran an article written by a college professor in which the professor wrote about her personal struggle to incorporate the use of Facebook into her classroom. She argues that Facebook friendships promote “closeness” between professors and students that isn’t necessarily needed. “Maybe we are not meant to be pals,” she writes (Chronicle, 2007, p. 3). Jonathan Wynn, a professor at Smith College, wrote about his experience “Facebooking” with students in the academic journal Sociological Forum. Wynn says that when he joined Facebook he initially accepted a few students as friends (Wynn, p. 455). He went on to say that as he was able to see the more candid, online side of his students, he was less inclined to add any more into his network. “…began to be the recipient of every broadcast of their ‘status updates’ and picture uploads…” he wrote (Wynn, 2009, p. 455). Wynn said he imposed a “no current students” as Facebook friends rule when he saw a picture of a student’s newest tattoo.

Experience
To research the effect that teachers believe Facebook has on the classroom experience, it is important to also research how students use Facebook to enhance their studies. The Institute of Education at the University of London studied just that in 2009. The university wanted to look into the claims of many in the education field who believe Facebook distracts students and takes away from “traditional” educational practices. Their study analyzed the Facebook “wall” activities of more than 900 undergraduate students at a university. The researchers looked at the students’ wall postings and looked at which ones could be considered education-based (Selwyn, 2009). The findings were split up based on these criteria:

1. The post-hoc critiquing of learning experiences and events

2. The exchange of logistical or factual information about teaching and assessment requirements

3. Instances of supplication and moral support with regards to assessment or learning

4. The promotion of oneself as academically incompetent and/or disengaged.

Their study revealed that Facebook doesn’t necessarily “enhance or erode” students’ engagement with traditional education. In fact, they believe Facebook usage must be viewed as “being situated within the ‘identity politics’ of being a student” (Selwyn, 2009, p. 1). They go on to say that Facebook provides an outlet for students to express their experience in relationships with both schoolwork and teachers and also gives them a place where expectations can be worked through in a “back stage” area. This type of feeling and experience could be viewed as the type of ecology that McLuhan spoke about.
Other examples of ways that the students in this study used Facebook were in the exchange of information and support from other students. For instance, Student A would have a question or need help on an assignment he or she was working on. Instead of emailing the professor, the student would post a call for help of his or her Facebook wall (Selwyn, 2009). When thinking of Facebook in those terms, it’s easy to see how this type of use would help enhance the student’s experience. The hope is that another student who is a Facebook friend would respond to the wall post and offer some help or insight. This creates a sense of community between the students. The previous sentiments are also shared in the article, Facebook: The New Classroom Commons. Harriett Schwartz looked into whether the site is a new way to keep classrooms connected or another example of technology trumping substance. Schwartz seemed to agree, “perhaps for students, Facebook truly is an extension of the classroom in which all kinds of connections take place, some routine and some substantial” (Schwartz, 2010, p. 41). Schwartz saw Facebook as a way to keep her metaphorical office door open, which in turn increases face-to-face conversations with her students that are “rich with connection” (Schwartz, p. 41).

Another researcher wrote that Facebook has ‘the capacity to radically change the educational system… to better motivate students as engaged learners rather than learners who are primarily passive observers of the educational process’ (Ziegler, 2007, p. 69). The Ziegler study looked at Facebook wall dialogue between two students. According to the study this is referred to as educational “banter.” These postings and exchanges are often humorous or sarcastic in nature. The study also looked at ways students use Facebook to “exchange practical information” and “reflect on school-related experiences” (Ziegler, p. 5).
To re-cap, the results of this study found five overall themes of students’ education-related use of Facebook (Selwyn, 2009, p. 5):

1. Recounting and reflecting on experiences.

2. Exchange of practical information

3. Exchange of academic information

4. Displays of supplication and/or disengagement

5. Banter

Ranjit Shraman described several challenges in his paper “The Challenges and Opportunities in the Existence of Internet as Rapid Mass Media and for Education.” Some of the challenges he listed are equality of technology, academic dishonesty, and Internet addiction (Shraman, 2010, p. 9-10). Concluding, Shraman wrote that becoming too entrenched in technology may “lead to uncertainty” in a student’s life or future (p. 11). Many of these challenges are similar to challenges listed by Postman. He also writes that technology is never distributed “evenly among the population” (Postman, 1998, p. 3). If this type of technology is not available to every student, some may not be able to build the same social skill set as their counterparts.

Like Shraman, Postman also discusses an addiction to technology although he labels it as becoming mythic (p. 8). Internet or tech addictions can make individuals reclusive and antisocial as they cling to these devices to fulfill their needs and wants instead of turning to people in order to avoid the risks and complexities. Postman may believe that too much technology in the classroom further allows it to control more of our likes “than is good for us” (p. 10).
Postman would also remind us of the ecological nature of technology, which he said “changes everything not a few things” (1998, p. 7). In this case, social media technology has entered the classroom and changed its landscape. For example, teachers are e-mailing parents weekly updates on their children’s progress. Students are texting or updating their Facebook statuses instead of completing class assignments. Laptops are replacing pens and paper. Social media in the classroom has enhanced teachers’ abilities to connect and engage with students.

**Attitudes and Behavior**

Those with a profile on the social networking site can see that Facebook shares many of the qualities of good education such as permitting peer feedback and peer interaction. In a recent study, Mazer, Murphy, and Simonds (2007) found that students who were exposed to a “high self-disclosing” teacher on Facebook reported higher levels of motivation and affective learning. These students evaluated the climate of the teacher’s classroom more positively than students who viewed a teacher’s Facebook page with “limited self-disclosures” (2009, pg. 177). With this information at hand, one could argue that teachers should feel free to be candid in their Facebook interactions with students as long as it doesn’t cross any sort of ethical line.

Some researchers have found that using social media like Facebook can have a negative affect on a student psychologically, which in turn can affect how well they perform in the classroom. Ana-Maria Petrescu looked into these claims in her paper titled, “The Influence of Media on Education - a Socio-Psycho-Pedagogical Approach” (2010). In her work, Petrescu looked at how over-using social media can lead to health problems such as headaches and blurred vision, psychological problems like addiction and irritability, and social problems such as withdrawal and introversion (Petrescu, 2010, pg. 46). Keeping these findings in mind, it’s
important for educators to remember that students will be using a computer frequently outside of class. This information should account for how the computer is used in class.

**Rationale**

This study is important because it helps us further understand how technology impacts communication and the environment. Based on the above information, it appears that while many would say the acceptance of social media into the classroom could be beneficial some would say takes away from the true value of communication. This study proposes to research how both students and educators perceive social media and technology, specifically how social media and technology shape our perceptions, experiences, attitudes and behavior.

**Research Questions/Hypothesis**

In the beginning of this study, we discussed communication and dialogue as a form of wellness. From information gathered from the likes of Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, one has to wonder when this form of social media dialogue begins to hurt or inhibit overall wellness. The study sought to answer the question:

RQ1. In what ways do students believe teachers can utilize Facebook in the classroom to strengthen learning rather than take away from it.
CHAPTER 3: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

SCOPE

In 2006 about 88 percent of Americans age 12 through 29 were online and that number has only continued to grow (Sheldon, 2008). The number of communication media available to young people is rich, diverse and will likely continue to increase in the future. This study examined the ways in which social media, specifically, impact the learning environment and process. The study looked at how the use of the website Facebook can enhance or detract from student achievement.

Facebook was chosen because of its growing presence in the everyday lives of the current generation. According to its website, Facebook has 800 million active users. College students were picked as the research sample because they use Facebook frequently. Coley (2006) wrote, “about 80 percent of colleges have Facebook, and 85 percent of students at those colleges have accounts.” Facebook has since gone public, allowing any one over the age of 13, students included, to sign up for an account. Coley also wrote that 60 percent of students log on to Facebook daily, and a high majority log on around six times a day.

Previous studies surrounding this issue have focused on motives for Facebook usage. This research aims to look at how Facebook can improve student engagement and overall academic wellness.

Student respondents were selected from Howard University, George Washington University and George Mason University in the Washington, D.C. area. Professors from the universities assisted in soliciting respondents for the survey by asking their classes to participate. At least three teachers offered some sort of extra credit to students for participating. Once the participants were identified, an initial phone conversation was set up to go over the information
for the research. Students were made aware that only their grade levels, majors and first names would identify them. Any student who did not want their true name to be used was given the option of opting out. No students suggested that they had problems with using their first name as long as a last name was not used.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study asked students if they see any benefit to using Facebook as part of educational practice and study, specifically how this form of social media affects the ecology of the classroom. While future research may look at specific forms of social media or new technology, for the purpose of this study only the use of the website Facebook will be surveyed. The reason that this type of people-oriented research was chosen was because it focuses on “actions and reactions of people” (Rubin et al, 2010, p. 218). The purpose of this research has been to learn how the students feel about social media. By using survey research, the author sought to explain the student’s “current attitudes, opinions, thoughts” and perhaps behavior (p. 218). To answer the questions posed in this research, the respondents needed to explain their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. According to the book *Communication Research: Strategies and Sources*, survey research is “the most widely used method of communication research” (Rubin et al, 2010, p.218). This method is also an effective way of gathering data from a large amount of people (p.219). The survey (Appendix A) also looked at the communication value of this type of media and how it affected the way students’ feel, understand, and perceive education. The survey questionnaire consisted of a combination of open-ended questions and some close-ended questions. The close-ended questions, such as “Do you have a Facebook account?” were used for background knowledge but not used in the analysis of the data as it pertains to this research.
The close-ended questions were answered in the beginning of the survey to allow the respondent to gain a better understanding of the research and be comfortable with the questionnaire.

The words and images that the students provided in their answers were examined to understand the messages. This communication research, according to Rubin, includes “self-reports of attitudes and behaviors via survey questionnaires” among other things (p.218). The primary data collection method used was self-administered surveys. These surveys were conducted without help of an interviewer or facilitator. The breadth for this study would be considered narrow. The reason a small group was chosen was mainly for timing issues. Other than timing, a smaller group was used to obtain a better quality answer.

The questions for the survey were selected to help gain improved knowledge of student use of Facebook based on Marshall McLuhan’s media ecology theory. Questions were selected with several themes in mind including perception, experience and behavior. Other questions were also asked to determine the student’s particular Facebook usage. Open-ended questions were written to allow respondents to explain their answers and reactions to the question with a sentence or a paragraph. The use of open-ended questions also cut down on response errors. According to researchers at the University of Colorado writing center, using open-ended questions in an online survey respondents are less likely to forget answers, and they do not allow the respondents to disregard questions. Other strength of open-ended questions, they pointed out, include higher response rate, more candid answers, and quick response time. Some potential weaknesses were seen as same demographic limitations and technical problems.

The survey was administered over a two-week period in the fall of 2011. The surveys were administered online via email. Each student was sent a link to his or her school email
account. They were then given a total of five days to complete their response to the survey. A phone number, with direct access to the researcher, was provided to each student. Any respondent who ran into any problems while answering the survey was told to call the number.

Once the data was collected, the author conducted theme-based analysis of the results. Richard E. Boyatzis described thematic analysis as “a process for encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 4). A theme is a pattern found in the information gathered that describes and organizes observations (p.5). As previously mentioned, the themes in this research have been identified as perception, experience and behavior. Boyatzis also said that thematic analysis “expands the possible audience for the communication and dissemination of ideas and results” (p. 5).

Making sure that the study is ethical, reliable and valid is important to this research. Rubin et al tell us that research ethics “concerns what is right and wrong in the conduct of research” (Rubin et al, 2010, p. 204). When conducting research it is important to not harm the respondents/participants; being as transparent as possible can aid this. For this study it was also important to be accurate, honest and precise (p. 204). All pertinent information was shared with respondents before, during and after the research was conducted. The author also made sure to receive every respondent’s consent before moving forward. Research should also be reliable and valid. Validity means “measuring what we intend to measure” and reliability refers to “how dependable, stable, consistent and repeatable measures are in a study” (Rubin et al, 2010, p. 203). For this study validity and reliability were checked as all research was being conducted. Any discrepancies, such as a respondent skipping a question, were identified and remedied before any analysis was done.
CHAPTER 4: THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The study examined student perception of the use of Facebook as a tool in their education. The study is an attempt to look at how social media affects students, learning and the ecology of the classroom. By looking at how students use Facebook, the research was able to ascertain any benefits or determents to the use of social media in the classroom. The research was conducted in an attempt to see how many students actually use the social networking site in their studies and how using the site impacts the way they feel, think and communicate.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data was collected over a two-week period in the months of October and November. All students surveyed attended Washington, D.C. metro area universities including: Howard University, George Washington University and George Mason University. The sample of students was picked at random with the help of several university professors who reached out for participants from their classrooms. A target goal of fifteen students for each grade level (freshman-senior) was desired, however due to timing and scheduling conflicts only ten students for each grade level was reached. Surveys were completed by 10 freshmen, 11 sophomores, 14 juniors, and 11 seniors.

Each student was sent the same exact survey question. First they were asked whether or not they have a personal Facebook page and how often they log on to use it. The students were then asked if they used that page for school or education. Following the answer of that question, the students were asked a series of questions related to this research. If a student revealed that they did not have a Facebook page, they were asked to answer why they did not have one and then they were asked to answer the research questions hypothetically. After selecting the sample
and collecting the data, the next step is to analyze the data received in order to find an answer to the research questions.

**RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

Once all data was collected, the author conducted a theme-based analysis. The themes looked at were perception, experience, attitude and behavior. These themes focused on what was important based on Marshall McLuhan’s media ecology theory. Of the forty students that were surveyed an overwhelming majority, 95%, said they had a Facebook page set up. Of those respondents, 100% said they log on to Facebook at least once a day. Based on the results it was evident that the majority of respondents felt that Facebook had a positive impact in the classroom.

**Understanding**

Students were asked to explain how, if at all, their perceptions of class work changed with the use of Facebook. In terms of percentages, the majority of students responded that Facebook does change their perception of class work. Out of the 38 respondents, 30 said that dialogue via Facebook does change their perception of class work.

Most of the answers centered on understanding their schoolwork. Sarah J, a sophomore, said that class work “seemed easier” when she was able to use Facebook to instant message chat with fellow classmates. Sarah J said, “When studying for a recent statistics exam, there were a few questions that I (had?) while studying. (After) I mentioned a friend on Facebook messenger and was able get the information I needed.” A senior by the name of Haden M. also said that he used Facebook to enhance his positive perception of class work. He pointed out an example in a business class where the instructor required students to set up a Facebook event page for an assignment. Haden M. said, “Having the event page really allowed me to spread my message
around campus. Not only did I get the word out about the guest speaker for business students, but I was also able to interact with fellow students in my major. I made great contacts on campus that I otherwise would not have been exposed to.”

Kai, a senior, wrote that she became aware of Facebook in high school but really saw no benefit in the site until she got to college. Kai wrote, “As technology advances, everything else needs to advance with it. My favorite teacher at GW has been the professor who embraced social media just as much as his students do. He owns an iPhone. If I ask him a question on Twitter, he eventually tweets back. Every night he will change his Facebook status and asks if any of his students need help. I couldn’t ask for a more down-to-earth teacher. He makes me want to learn.”

There were a total of eight students who responded that Facebook did not change their perception of schoolwork. Most did not give a reason as to why it did not. One student, Mai Ly K., did give a thorough answer. The sophomore English major said that while she does use Facebook to communicate with her classmates, the online dialogue did not change how she views her class work. She said, “Work is work. I don’t really like to discuss it on Facebook. I find it better to go right to my teacher or a graduate assistant if I have a question. I’ve always been the type of student who would rather talk to someone face-to-face. While I find it beneficial to study with a group in the library, I’ve never gotten help on Facebook.”

Learning

According to the majority of respondents, Facebook usage does enhance the overall classroom experience. All students were asked whether or not they believe the classroom experience would be enhanced if a teacher uses Facebook; 37 answered yes.
Donte S., a junior, explained that his government and English professors both set up Facebook groups for the class. In his government class specifically, Donte said using Facebook made the class more interactive and enjoyable. “During election night a few weeks ago, our class assignment was to log into Facebook and discuss the election results as they came in,” said Donte, “It was fun to predict the race outcomes as the polls were closing. I felt like a CNN political analyst. Move over Wolf Blitzer!”

Another student, Johann C., also pointed out positive experiences with Facebook. Johann, an art major, explained how Facebook was used in a photography class to share student pictures and projects. All students enrolled in the class were given iPhones and asked to download photography applications (apps) such as Instagram and Photoshop Express. Several of Johann’s class assignments involved taking pictures on the mobile device, manipulating the pictures with an app, and then posting them on the class Facebook page. “Being able to post the pictures on Facebook made them easier to share with the class. It was cool to get a Facebook notification and see how other students were coming along with their projects. Sometimes we would have competitions to see who could get the most ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ on their pictures,” said Johann.

Two participants both touched on how Facebook enhanced the ability to communicate with classmates, therefore enhancing the school experience. Freshman Mia F. said, “Now that Facebook messages can be sent to cell phones like text messages, I often used Facebook to get in touch with other students. Sometimes it’s easier to do that <rather> than sending an email.” Another freshman, Robby C., agreed with Mia. “When I first got to GW I used Facebook to make friends. Now I use it to keep in constant contact with them,” said Robby. “The first thing someone will say to me when they meet me is ‘Are you on Facebook?’”
When asked how their teachers could use Facebook to better, or in some cases continue to better, the classroom experience, Robby C answered, “Use it more.” He was not the only respondent to state a similar answer. Robby wrote, “I wish more of my professors knew about some of the cool Facebook features like the chat room and discussion board. I can’t access blackboard on my cell phone, but I can access Facebook.”

Postman would also remind us the ecological nature of technology, which changes everything -- not a few things (Postman, p. 7). In this case, social media technology has entered the classroom and changed its landscape. Laptops are replacing pens and paper. Social media in the classroom has enhanced teachers’ ability to connect and engage with students. Social media can also break down classroom barriers. Many students, who may be too shy to speak up in class, may be willing to participate in on-line discussions thus helping boost their overall experience.

Focus

The students were asked to answer how, if at all, using Facebook impacted their ability to stay focused and pay attention in the classroom. With many students having access to smartphones and laptops, they can be logged online at any time or place. If a student is spending too much time online, they may have less time to pay attention to the messages being discussed by their instructor or other students. Some of the negative behaviors that changed according to the participants were cooperation, responsibility and self-control. One of the positive behavior changes that most students mentioned was participation. “I’m much more willing to pay attention if we are discussing a topic I’m interested in. Social media just happens to be something I enjoy. It’s 2011. I think it would be absurd for a teacher to not even consider using Facebook. Might as well meet us where we already are,” said Marti.
A majority of respondents said that Facebook can be a distraction in class. Ericka M. said that “when I log-in to Facebook, I’m automatically tempted to do other things like read friend’s status updates and look at pictures.” Another student, Brianne B., said “It’s way too easy to become distracted in class. Once Facebook is open, you can bet I’ve also got another website open.” When asked how this could be avoided, Brianne suggested, “When one of my instructors uses Facebook in class he pulls it up on the overhead. That way we are all looking at the page and not on our individual computers.”

The fact that so many students admit to being attached to social media can actually be used to help teachers. Felder and Brent (2005) assert that the key to successful social media integration is to “mix things up” (Felder & Brent, 2005, p. 29). For example, instructors can break up long lectures with activities of varying lengths, such as role-playing exercises, PowerPoint presentations, and short video clips. Fazid, a junior business major, stated that he is able to focus much better because his teacher puts Facebook (and other web pages) up on the classroom projector rather than have students pull them up on their personal computers. He wrote, “I am more engaged in what is going on in the classroom and less likely to be off in space or checking my email.” Brent also wrote, “At the end of the day, any use of social media in the classroom has to be teacher-led, otherwise you run the risk of your students forgetting why it’s being used in the first place.”

Even with the lack of focus that some of the respondents said Facebook can present, no student believed that Facebook made them a worse student. “If anything, it’s just given me a way to connect with my professors and fellow students on a different level,” wrote Callie.
DISCUSSIONS

With social media penetrating our classrooms, we experience why Neil Postman (1998) would call this a trade-off of technology, a “Faustian bargain,” (p. 2), whereby “culture always pays a price for technology,” (p. 3). The above research shows that the trade-off doesn’t always have to be negative. Students are the innovators in the field of social media, and it is important to prepare them for future that includes this medium and traditional structured communication as well. Social development is a critical transition for students as they begin the process of discovering their identities and others, and their exposure to social media can help or harm them. McLuhan was quoted as saying “we shape our tools” and in turn “they shape us.” Based on the above research, what McLuhan was saying is that technology does have the ability to change what and how we perceive, experience and feel. The difference is that we can control that change. Using McLuhan’s media ecology theory, it could be said that Facebook is the message and is also an extension of ourselves (McLuhan, 1964). From the above research, we can conclude that students feel Facebook can help them understand their work by enhancing the classroom experience, but there is also the negative aspect of the site serving as a classroom distraction. Using this data, a teacher, instructor, professor or educator can find ways to implement Facebook into the classroom culture.
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitation of the Study

The study analyzed student perception of the use of social media in the classroom. What the study did not take into account was teacher perception. While it is important to gain background and research on student perception and experience, it is also important to understand the issue from the viewpoint of the educator who is helping to create and foster the classroom culture.

Undergraduate students were the only students invited to take the questionnaire distributed in this study. The study did not take into account the experiences of graduate students and secondary students, such as middle or high school students. It could be argued that there would have been a benefit for studying a larger age demographic of students, especially since so many younger students are familiar with Facebook and social media. Technology expert Renee Ramig (2009) noted that most elementary-aged children have also heard of Facebook, so it would be important to incorporate them into a study as well.

Another limitation was the number of respondents. Ideally the researcher would have had at least 100 students, but the limits of time prevented such an undertaking. At least one hundred students but because of timing it was not possible. Having more respondents would give the ability to have a wider scope of answers and also could have allowed for more use of quantitative data as well. The small size was relatively small and did not give a true representation of all college undergraduates.

Further Study or Recommendations

As with any study the author believes there is future research to be conducted. The research in this study mainly looked at qualitative measures and responses. It would be
interesting, though, to look at overall numbers and data in a quantitative study. As previously mentioned, a moving forward it would be beneficial to see how Facebook usage in the classroom impacts all students from elementary-age to graduate level. In the article “Social Media in the Classroom,” technology expert Renee Ramig wrote, “There are even social networking sites that attract kids as young as 5 years old. This is the reality of the world we live in, and schools should reflect this reality” (Ramig, 2009, p. 8).

Future research into other social media websites such as Twitter would also be beneficial. The number of universities and school systems signing up for Twitter accounts continues to rise, but as of the time of this study accounts were mainly being used to disseminate important information. Research could also more closely look at each individual way that Facebook, or social media, is used. For example how it can be used for extending classroom discussions and communication between students and teachers. Other areas for future research are potential challenges that could arise such as using Facebook for academic dishonesty and Internet addiction.

**Conclusion**

“Kids, tweens, and teens are using social networks regularly. All predictions indicate use will continue to increase, so it's also increasingly important that we find ways to incorporate them into schools” (Ramig, 2009, p.10). Based on the results of this study, most students would agree with Ramig. The ecology or environment of the classroom is important for student success. Whether it’s Facebook or something similar, this research shows the importance of enhancing the classroom experience.
The key seems to be balance, adding variety to lesson plans without letting it become a distraction. For example using Facebook could be beneficial if the teacher is providing guidance and feedback on the students’ school-related work. Some students may be more receptive to feedback given online as opposed to feedback given in the classroom. In the same way, students who are shy about raising their hands in class or asking a question out loud could use a tool such as Facebook to feel more comfortable.

In 2000, while delivering a keynote address about the humanism of media ecology, Neil Postman spoke about his past conversations with Marshall McLuhan. He stated that McLuhan would often remind him of the lines in Stephen Vincent Benét’s long poem *John Brown’s Body*. At the end of the poem, Benét makes reference to the Industrial Revolution and finishes with the lines: “Say neither, it is blessed nor cursed. Say only “It is here.” (Great quote) (Postman, 2000, 11). Based on this research, the same could be said for Facebook; it is here. It is now up to society, and teachers especially, to decide how to use it to the benefit of their students.
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APPENDIX A

1. For the purposes of this research please give us your first name, grade level (freshman, sophomore, etc) and your major.

2. Do you have a Facebook account? If so, how often do you log on?

3. Have you ever used your Facebook account for school-related purposes (examples: joining a class group, posting a status for homework help, sending friend requests to classmates)

4. How often do you see other students post school-related content on Facebook?

5. Do any of your current (or previous) classes have a Facebook account associated with them?

6. If you answered yes to the above question please explain how Facebook is used in the classroom and how often it’s used in the classroom.

7. Do you believe the classroom experience is enhanced when a professor uses Facebook? Why or why not?

8. How does your perception of class work change with the ability to use Facebook. Do you think it becomes easier, or is there no change at all?

9. Has using Facebook in your education altered your behavior at all? For instance has it caused any affect on your grades or ability to pay attention in class? Please explain.

10. How would you suggest educators use Facebook affectively in the classroom?

11. How do you believe you are you a better, or worse, student because of your use of Facebook?

12. Feel free to leave any final thoughts or feelings here.