Understanding Mediated Intercultural Communication: An Ethnomethodological Study of Social Media Engagement Practices of Asian Expatriates

Reynaldo Gacho Segumpan[1], Jean A. Saludadez[2]

[1]Ministry of Higher Education, Rustaq COE, Oman, [2]University of the Philippines Open University, Laguna, Philippines

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper is part of a larger research that attempted in providing an explanation to Bennett's (1998) question: "How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?". This study explored what are the Asian expatriates' practices when they engage in mediated intercultural communication. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) When do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication? (2) Why do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication?; and (3) What social media platforms do they use and for what purposes?.

Literature Review/Research Gap: While many scholars have examined expatriate adjustment and integration, it is evident that not many studies have explicitly explored the use of online social media during the adjustment and integration process. No known study has specifically investigated the use of online social media by Asian expatriates (Theemling, 2013). Social media are becoming so integrated into our lives (Meek, 2011). More than personal interest, social media usage is a phenomenon that has received little research focus (Kim, LaRose & Peng, 2009).

Research Method: The study used ethnomethodology as its analytical frame in order to locate meanings in the social media engagement practices of 20 Asian expatriates. Data were collected from the asynchronous online forum between November and December 2015 that were analysed with the help of NVivo 10.

Findings: Three themes emerged from the data: (a) Social Media Engagement as Everyday Practice consisting of eight sub-themes: The Practice of Ground Rules; The Practice of "Greetings"; The Practice of Thoughtful Thinking; The Practice of Saying "Thank You"; Keeping Conversational Partner; Renewing Relationships; Source of Information; and Source of Entertainment, (b) Social Media Engagement as a Practice of Building Professional Communities consisting of two sub-themes: Developing Expatriation Work and Intensifying Information, and (c) Social Media Engagement as a Search for Virtual Space consisting of two sub-themes: Trading Tools and Rendering Rich Media.

Theoretical and Practitioner Implications: Our findings highlighted the usefulness of ethnomethodology in understanding meanings which are in the practices of Asian expatriates' social media engagement.

Keywords: Intercultural Communication, Asian Expatriates, Social Media Engagement, Ethnomethodology

1. INTRODUCTION

The focal interest in this study was intercultural communication in mediated settings. Following Bennett's question (1998) "How do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?" (p. 1), it problematized how people with different cultural backgrounds interact with each other in mediated communication contexts. Our research attempted at exploring the meanings that were in the practices of Asian expatriates as they engaged in mediated communication and intercultural communication while on an expatriation assignment. The research gap, however, pointed out to the observations that the "voices" from the literature do not adequately reverberate as regards the structure and types of perceived realities of Asian expatriates of their social media engagement from mediated intercultural communication perspective. Citing Putnam, Phillips and Chapman (1996), Putnam (2001) said that "voice is a stance or a position from which to speak. It embodies who can speak, when, and in what ways" (pp. 41-42). Mumby (2000, in Putnam, 2001) succinctly said that "the construct of voice reframes the notions of paradigm, theories, and perspectives rooted in ocular metaphors and reified boundaries" (p. 42). Combining the insights gleaned from Mumby (2000) and Putnam (2001), our research explored the "voice" of the Asian expatriates, who were social media users. This "voice" was akin to what Saludadez (2004) calls as "stories" in her research

work. She construed a story as "a text, an interpretation of conversation" (Saludadez, 2004, p. 3). We construed "voice" as the narrative expression of these expatriates' practices in using various platforms of social media, including social networking, content sharing and everything else that revolved around the use of social media.

Social media as a concept has been viewed in various shades. According to the definition by Tufts University (2014), social media refers to "the means of interactions among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks." It is the "collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration" (TechTarget, 2014). Powell, Gray and Reese (2013) observed that individuals are being affected by social network site (SNS) usage in significant ways. In their qualitative study, they found the following themes for SNS engagement: Connecting with others, feelings (emotive responses) resulting from social networking site usage, compulsive use of social networking sites, preferring to have offline relationships, and communication using social networking sites being easier than offline communication. Certainly, individuals use SNS to maintain deeper relationships as well, but often the real draw is the ability to maintain large numbers of relationships, for instance, many users have hundreds or even thousands of "friends" (Ebrat, 2014).

Social media, argues Meek (2011), "are becoming so integrated into our lives" (p. 4). Social media usage is a phenomenon that has received little research focus (Kim, LaRose & Peng, 2009), thus, the research was very timely and relevant to contemporary intercultural communication research and the evolving landscape of mediated communication. Expatriates are also deemed as virtual communicators when they get engaged with the internet and its applications. Without a doubt, expatriates experience adjustment and integration issues in an international assignment, many of which relate to the fact that previous social networks that were once available in the home country are no longer available in the host country (Black & Gregersen, 1991). However, there was a dearth of researches that document the practices of these people as regards mediated communication using social media platforms from an intercultural communication perspective.

While many scholars have examined expatriate adjustment and integration, it is evident that not many studies have explicitly explored the use of online social media during the adjustment and integration process. In addition, no known study has specifically investigated the use of online social media by Asian expatriates (Theemling, 2013). Expatriates are non-citizens of a country where they are working (Daniels, Radebaugh & Sullivan, 2004). As contextualised in this study, "expatriates" were foreign staff or personnel, in particular, Asians, working gainfully and productively in various work environments through a legally binding contract between the employer and the employees, and who were engaged in various forms and platforms of social media (i.e. mediated communication).

The literature on mediated intercultural communication among Asian expatriates seemed to be meager. Understanding and describing the practices of expatriates in using social media was of immense importance and relevance in contemporary work environments, especially in the theory and praxis of mediated communication and intercultural communication. One of the reasons for this was explained in a nutshell by Pascal, Johnson, Dore and Trainor (2010), who said that it is through accessing practice that researchers may gain understanding of the meanings and perceptions of another person's world.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE AND QUESTIONS

This study aimed at understanding what were the Asian expatriates' practices when they engaged in mediated intercultural communication. Specifically, this study sought answers to the following research questions:
1. When do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication?
2. Why do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication?
3. What social media platforms do they use and for what purposes?

We situated this inquiry in the context of Don Ihde's Embodiment Relations (in Brey, 2000), which understands the human-technology relations. According to Brey (2000), embodiment relations are relevant to the philosophy of action, because many human actions are nowadays mediated by technology. A proper analysis of actions that are mediated by technology requires an understanding of how technical artifacts that participate in embodiment relations constrain and facilitate action. Ihde (1990, in Brey, 2000) distinguishes different types of human-technology relations. According to him, embodiment relations constitute one important type of human-technology relation, in which artifacts are experienced as means through which one's environment is encountered. Moreover, embodiment relations suggests the use of technologies in which the technology mediates one's experience of one's environment or world, by being a medium positioned in between individual and world through which the individual perceives his world.

While Ihde sees technology (such as social media as contextualised in this study) as a means through individuals may make sense of their world and construed artifacts as "means through which one's environment is encountered" (Ihde, 1990, in Brey, 2000), the theoretical question remained perplexing and unanswered: "how do people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience?" (Bennett, 1998, p. 1). When Ihde discusses embodiment relations, he discusses them in the context of an account of ways in which human beings experience technology (Brey, 2000). Bennett (1998), on the other hand, questions how people of different cultural backgrounds would be able to understand each other in a socio-cultural context. In our research, the wisdom of Ihde (in Brey, 2000) and Bennett (1998) provided a sound theoretical blend of "experience" and "practice". Citing Collier and Thomas (1988) and Martin and Nakayama (2007), Alkharusi (2013) explained that intercultural communication occurs when individuals share cultural systems and when they view themselves and others as representing two separate cultural systems. As a person cannot communicate alone, he/she has to be involved actively in communicating with others; this suggests that there is a dynamic process in the negotiation of meaning between individuals.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Ethnomethodology as Analytical Frame

The different traditions of qualitative research have the same intention: understanding meaning; however, each of them has a different assumption of where meaning is located; for ethnomethodology, it is in the practice…what people do, rather than what life is (Saludadez, 2016).

The preceding words describe the essence of ethnomethodology, which originated from the work of Harold Garfinkel in the 1950's and 1960's (Marcon & Gopal, 2008). Citing Rawls (2002), Marcon and Gopal (2008) extended the views of Saludadez (2016) as follow:

"Ethno" refers to members of a social or cultural group (or in Garfinkel's term, members of a local social scene) and "method" refers to the things members routinely do to create and recreate the various recognisable social actions or social practices. "Ology" as in the word "sociology" implies the study of, or the logic of, these methods. Thus Ethnomethodology means the study of members' methods for producing recognisable social orders' (p. 166).

Ethnomethodology is, thus, about practice. "Through empirical observation, we can discern the logic or rationality of sense-making in everyday interactions" (Marcon & Gopal, 2008, p. 166). It enquires into just how people manage to make sense of the world, to know what is happening around them and what it is that they are doing (Heritage, 1984).

We situated the study in the ethnomethodological tradition because social media engagement involved "practice" or "what people do" as seen from an intercultural communication lens and took form through, and meaning from, an online data forum.

3.2. The Participants

The participants in this research were chosen based on the following conditions: (a) active social media user, or someone engaged daily (regardless of frequency and amount of time spent) in some form of social media activity, such as sharing photos in Instagram, "liking" or sharing a post in Facebook, and making a tweet or a blog, to name a few; (b) Asian expatriate, or someone who worked outside of his country of origin with certain professional or technical expertise; and, (c) willing to participate in the research.

A total of 20 Asian expatriates signified their willingness to take part in the study. These included the following: Filipinos (6 of them), Indians (3), Malaysians (4), Pakistanis (4), and Thais (3). At the time of this research, they were working in various locations, namely, Australia, Cambodia Canada, Indonesia, Japan, Oman, Singapore, United Arab Emirates and United States of America.

3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected from the online data forum created using Facebook as a platform. This online group was known as Social Media at Work, the primary purpose of which was to share the members' experiences on social media engagement. Members of this online forum consisted of a mix of 45 active expatriates and non-expatriates, or people who were all working in various organisations across the globe. It was a multi-racial online group consisting of one of the authors' Facebook networks and as such, we used English as our medium of conversation to express our daily engagements with social media.

In our online data forum, the topics and issues were free-wheeling, thus, anybody could post anything which has a personal interest and social relevance and was shared to the members of the said group. There was no structure as regards the topics to be discussed or format to be followed, except that everyone was requested to communicate in English and to avoid "honorific titles" such as Dr., Engr., Atty., Prof., Sir, Ma'am, and the like, in order to avoid any hesitation in forum participation or communicative interactions whatsoever. Subsequently, it made the conversations flow naturally because there was no reference to the members' social or professional status.

For over a year now, there have been thick discussions in the online forum that echoed the members' practices on a wide spectrum of topics and issues. For the purpose of this research, only the data related to the practices of Asian expatriates of their social media engagement were extracted in January 2016. Meticulous and careful analyses of the responses were done in order to cull out the information provided by the Asian expatriates only; other responses were deemed not relevant to the objectives of the research. A total of 20 Asian expatriates was identified from the data extracted that spanned between November-December 2015. Three primary questions were focused on and reported in-depth in this research: (a) Why do you use social media?; (b) What is the role of social media in your work as an expatriate?; and, (c) What social media platforms do you use and for what purposes?

3.4. Data Analysis

The NVivo software (version 10) was used in analysing the data. It is a powerful tool for text-based data (QSR International, 2015). Thematic analysis was done in order to identify themes that emerged from the practices of the Asian expatriates. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes…data set in (rich) detail" (p. 79).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Social Media Engagement as Everyday Practice

The first research question was: When do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication? The themes that surfaced were as follow:

4.1.1. Keeping conversational partner

Social media engagement was construed by the Asian expatriates as a site for conversations; thus, the theme, Keeping Conversational Partner. As shown in Figure 1, the meanings that surfaced from the analysis echoed the rationale of conversations among the participants. Through social media engagement, the Asian expatriates may have felt that they could sustain their conversations – hearing from each other, knowing issues that interest them and events that have personal appeal to them.

Social contact and conversations aid in sense-making through the opportunity to retell the story and make social comparisons; they can also lead to the provision of support and solidarity. Taken as a whole, this process can decrease expatriates' stress and anxiety associated with negative emotions while enhancing positive affect through reliving positive emotional experiences in conversation (Bazarova, Choi, Sosik, & Cosley, 2015).

> In my experience, social media can be addictive and thus I tend to get carried away or I cannot stop talking to a person because I enjoy the conversations so much (in online conversations etc.).
>
> (Expatriate in the Sultanate of Oman)
>
> Nice conversations. Let me pitch in. For me, connecting to people anywhere is so easy now with the use of social media as long as there is wi-fi it is free no charge at all... I can call using facebook which is very expensive if you buy phone cards. On the other hand, maybe due to privacy, people can take our picture without knowing it and post in facebook.
>
> (Expatriate in Los Angeles, California)

Figure 1: The rationale of Keeping Conversational Partner among Asian expatriates

Australian Academy of Business Leadership

4.1.2. Renewing relationships

Renewing Relationships emerged as another theme from the analyses. Social media engagement (i.e. mediated communication) was viewed by the Asian expatriates as akin to developing relationships among family members, friends and colleagues at work (e.g. supervisors and co-employees). As shown in Figure 2, the tone of the message was on establishing personal and social ties among those related to the Asian expatriates.

4.1.3. Source of information

Further analyses of the data surfaced Source of Information as another theme of this research. The meaning suggests that Asian expatriates may have found social media engagement as means to easy access of data and information. True enough, at the 'click of a button' people are instantly connected and easily able to communicate and collaborate with others (Yost & Fan, 2008, p. 40). Figure 3 shows samples of this rationale.

4.1.4. Source of entertainment

Asian expatriates in this study, just like other global staff who were away from home, were exposed to loneliness, boredom, work-related anxiety and job stress. As such, they would need to find an outlet to escape from such challenges in order to avoid maladjustment from their overseas work. The following viewpoints in Figure 4 reflect how social media mean to Asian expatriates related to this theme:

4.2. Social Media Engagement as a Practice of Building Professional Communities

The second research question was: Why do Asian expatriates engage in mediated intercultural communication? The themes that surfaced are discussed as follow:

> Very important in terms of "connectivity" with my family and friends. Connectivity to me is simply "accessibility" in communicating with my family. Social media enable me to know where and what my family members are doing on certain time and I can readily talk, pm, or text them. Connectivity is extremely important as we are a close-knit family. We often communicate with each other even for trivial or non sense things. If we missed to communicate even in a day, there seems to be a big gap already. So social media has undoubtedly gives us the opportunity to be "connected" at all times, even if I am far from my family and friends.
>
> (Lecturer in the United Arab Emirates)

Figure 2: The rationale of Renewing Relationships among Asian expatriates

> For fb...I use it as a databank for my teaching materials and online communication channel with my students (besides class time for sure...) seems they are really put fb as their preferred habit. why not I utilize it to make them 'closer' to me? when I posted notes, articles.etc... I could for see whos open it. (and there is no room for them saying "I dont receive it"."I dont know that" -referred from fb notification)... hihihi.
>
> (Expatriate in Singapore)

Figure 3: The rationale of Source of Information among Asian expatriates

> It gives me entertainment especially when I'm alone. I read magazines and watch shows on social media. I also consider chatting with friends a form of entertainment.
>
> (Private school staff, Indonesia)
>
> Social media make me get to know what is happening in my home country…Online gaming – playing games with others.
>
> (School Administrator, Kingdom of Bahrain)

Figure 4: The rationale of Source of Entertainment among Asian expatriates

4.2.1. Developing expatriation work

The participants seemed to be engrossed with issues that tackle one of the core functions of their expatriation assignment: to engage themselves in the regular routine of an overseas work, business and the operational efficiency of such routine in order to achieve organisational objectives as contextualised in expatriation. This theme described job-related plans, activities and programs that Asian expatriates communicated through social media engagement. Figure 5 shows samples of this rationale.

The meanings that surfaced echoed the communicative importance of social media engagement among the said expatriates in order to learn from each other as regards the best practices they put into action in their own work as expatriates. To the Asian expatriates, there may be a construction of "business" as related to the official tasks communicated to, and communicated by, the expatriates while on an expatriation. On the other hand, it could mean the literal process of setting up business enterprises through social media. This theme is also analogous to creating space where the Asian expatriates could have communication on issues related to expatriation, repatriation and related human resource issues. Social media engagement could be a means by which the said expatriates could exchange views on their work practices and experiences.

4.2.2. Intensifying information

This theme involved an interaction and reinforcement of communicative behaviour among participants who were in communication. In other words, the participants of this study may have viewed social media engagement as an opportunity for them to gather and exchange information on a wide array of topics and issues that interest them. Figure 6 presents samples of this rationale.

The meaning surfaced that the Asian expatriates construed their engagement in social media as an avenue for information sharing, information dissemination and information utilization. The next sub-section presents the sub-themes that emerged from this theme.

4.2.2.1. Ensuring speedy information

Further analyses of the conversations surfaced a sub-theme known in this study as "Ensuring Speedy Information." A manager of a private company in the Sultanate of Oman said it succinctly: "In my situation, I use social media to get speed information…"

With the demand in the workplace and from external stakeholders, Asian expatriates may have construed that social media engagement would let them find ways or devise mechanisms on how to obtain information at a fast pace. Engaging in social

---

Social media, is not for work. It can be distracting, people can forget there should be a line drawn between personal and work. To me as an expatriate, however, social media is relevant, regardless of my status as an expat.

(Expatriate in Cambodia)

We practice what we preach, so to speak. We make sure in our company that what we post in our website goes down to the level of our clients. In many ways, social media guide our marketing, customer services and operational practices.

(Expatriate in the Sultanate of Oman)

Figure 5: The rationale of Developing Expatriation Wok among Asian expatriates

---

Social media for me is a venue for exchanging information and communication through the internet. Exchanging in a sense that when you post a status, a picture, a video or a link, you send information and when you read other people's status and posts you also receive information.

(Teacher expatriate in Jakarta, Indonesia)

I can get information (such as latest updates for any news, events and happenings, political issues, knowledge sharing in various fields, etc.) from any geographical location in the world almost in real time (as if it happens nearby).

(A supervisor based in Manama, Bahrain)

Figure 6: The rationale of Intensifying Information among Asian expatriates

media seems to be effective for such purpose as viewed by the participants themselves. A common sense reality is that at a click of a mouse, textual information, videos and photos, among others, could be sent to any location not only in Asia but also in the world. With the busy lifestyle of expatriates due to work demands and relevant professional commitments, the need for speedy information was thus, imperative.

4.2.2.2. Extracting enormous information

In addition to speedy information, the analyses also showed another sub-theme: Extracting Enormous Information. This sub-theme necessitated volumes of information that may be needed and required by Asian expatriates, especially those working for global companies operating in Asia. These expatriates may have realized the importance of large amounts of information in the performance of their duties and as they would interact online and offline with their fellow expatriates and co-workers.

"Social media provide me enormous data and information that are relevant to my job," wrote a supervisor of an oil company in the United Arab Emirates.

The analyses suggested large amounts of data that could be solicited from social media, in particular, from online conversations and discussions and also obtained from social networks (i.e., peers, supervisors and friends) that possessed relevant information. This hints that social media engagement was a highly useful mode for acquiring enormous information.

4.2.2.3. Educing current information

In addition to enormous information, another meaning surfaced from the analyses: Educing Current Information. As the name suggests, this sub-theme described the kind of information that Asian expatriates derive from social media engagement – recent data and up-to-date information. Such data and information were critical in expatriation, especially in sectors where data and information management was the crux of the business, such as, obviously, IT-related companies involved in IT-related services and operations.

It was surfaced from the study that by engaging in social media, Asian expatriates may have felt that their circles of networks could provide them the latest information related to current issues that interest them and have an appeal on their work, tasks and responsibilities.

Generally, social media provides the exchange of information easier and faster…especially to the millennials – people who grow up at the turn of the century and are tech savvy. It can be a vehicle for change as people can interact and make plans thru social media. (Expatriate in Indonesia)

The meanings that surfaced may portray an atmosphere of open communication exchange lines between the current work station and the home country organisation where expatriates could learn from each other as regards topics or issues that require information. Social media engagement may, thus, be seen also as a means to an end, rather than an end by itself, which was conceived in this research as an opportunity for Asian expatriates to engage in information search and information exchanges.

4.3. Social Media Engagement as a Search for Virtual Space

The last research question was: What social media platforms do they use and for what purposes? The succeeding discussions zoom in on the themes that surfaced from analyses.

4.3.1. The practice of trading tools

This theme describes users who engage in social media to look for, or even share tools that serve a certain purpose. "Tool" is akin to "platform," which is an online program or application used for certain functions or purposes. Figure 7 shows a sample script.

The meanings that surfaced show that social media engagement was construed as a space where social media could function as tools or platforms. The latter are where intercultural communication and communication discourses could take place. Three

> As to my personal observations, through their comments, I have learned about more serious and sensitive issues related to the the services we give. Thus, immediate attention and solution is offered. Social media are useful tools for my work. (Expatriate in the Kingdom of Bahrain)

Figure 7: The practice of Trading Tools among Asian expatriates

sub-themes emerged from this theme, namely: Searching for Cheap Marketing Tools, Searching for Innovative Tools and Searching for Useful Tools.

4.3.1.1 *Searching for cheap marketing tools*
Social media were considered cheap tools for Asian expatriates to engage in marketing activities that do not require financial obligations to pay, such as marketing communication, marketing research, promotion and advertising. By engaging in mediated intercultural communication, the participants could introduce products and services that could be of interest among their peers and social networks. Figure 8 presents samples reflecting social media as cheap marketing tools.

4.3.1.2 *Searching for innovative tools*
Another meaning that surfaced from the analyses is that social media engagement could be akin to engagement for innovative tools. The analyses seem to evoke a meaning from the perspective of utility where social media could be viewed not only as enablers of engagement but also as innovative tools necessary for such engagement. Figures 9 presents sample practices on the use of social media platforms among the Asian expatriates.

The Asian expatriates are clear about the tools they are using to engage in a communication space where they could download photos and videos in matters of minutes and share them to their social networks locally and overseas. Such quality of social media makes such form of technology-mediated communication as "innovative" as positioned in this research.

4.3.1.3 *Searching for useful tools*
The analyses of the study also surfaced another sub-theme, Searching for Useful Tools. This describes social media engagement as a useful tool in engaging co-workers, friends and the wider social networks of Asian expatriates. In the practice of mediated intercultural communication, the participants may have viewed social media as useful tools for them to interact and share experiences. Figure 10 shows a sample of the practices.

As regards the specific social media platforms or tools used by the participants in social media engagement, Table 1 presents the names of these platforms/tools and the number of sources.

As reflected in the table, Facebook surfaced as the most popular social media used by the Asian expatriates in their social media engagement. The narratives that follow were verbatim remarks of the practices of the Asian expatriates in this research:

The fact is that the company has accomplished all this without investing any single money in marketing. Unlike their smaller competitors, it hasn't spent anything on user acquisition. The company doesn't even employ a marketer or PR person. Yet like the world's greatest brands, it's created a strong emotional connection with consumers. (Marketing director, Singapore)

In marketing, sales, customer services, ABSOLUTELY, It will not only help employees to attract business but also it will help them to remain updated regarding new marketing or sales requirements. (Expatriate in the Sultanate of Oman)

Figure 8: The practice of Searching for Cheap Marketing Tools.

I use skype for voice/video communication for studies/business/close friends, I use it for meetings in business, talking with families back home and also using it for my PhD studies (Australia) where my supervisors discuss my research. I even used it for my PhD presentation as part of my milestone. facebook—to keep in touch with friends/family/business purposes—I love posting my pics and see pics of my family or distant family around the world. We posts announcements or even events in the family and what everyone is doing. Instagram –just for pictures and keeping in touch with my students here in UAE, I don't usually use this apps much because I don't know how to use it!. Whatsapp for family—yes I message my mom and sister. Talking about work and basically the recap of our day.

(Expatriate in Dubai, United Arab Emirates)

Figure 9: The practice of Searching for Innovative Tools

Social media are any tools which allow online communication for various social purposes. Personally, I am in social media 5 hours a day on the average -- In the same category with my food and coffee. (Expatriate in the Sultanate of Oman)

Figure 10: The practice of Searching for Useful Tools.

Table 1: Social media tools used by Asian expatriates	
Name*	**Sources**
Blackberry Messenger	2
Facebook	42
Google	4
Instagram	9
Skype	7
Twitter	13
Viber	3
WeChat	1
WhatsApp	13
Yahoo	5
YouTube	7

*in alphabetical order

I find social media the fastest and cheapest way of communication with my loved ones back home. I'm into Facebook and Whatsapp. Facebook allows me to update my family and friends on my daily activities and photos. Whatsapp is for chitchatting with my family and friends on daily basis.

Expatriate in United Arab Emirates

NOW A DAYS, CANT LIVE WITHOUT IT. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE, THESE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES HAVE CHANGED THE WAY WE INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER. SITES LIKE FACEBOOK, TWITTER, LINKEDIN AND MORE MAKE IT SIMPLE TO STAY CONNECTED IN PEOPLE'S LIVES. I CAN EASILY CATCH UP WITH FRIENDS WITH THEIR STATUSES, PHOTOS AND VIDEOS THEY POST.

Filipino expatriate in Canada

The results could be positioned that social interactions among the participants could be a function of the platforms. The platforms used by the Asian expatriates facilitated and mediated intercultural communication among themselves and other individuals who have social connections with them.

5 DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The meaning and mediational connection of mediated communication and intercultural communication could not be simply understood by looking at its value on knowledge production and dissemination but it also required closer examination on how it could be intertwined on the everyday life of the users (Asian expatriates, in this research). "Everyday life" is defined by Handel (1982, in Zagado, 2013, p. 134), as the "periodic orientation or pattern of commonsense events characterized by practical, fluid and loose actions which are not based on standards of traditional logic." It is in these loose, ordinary everyday activities or what Garfinkel (1964, in Zagado, 2013, p. 134) calls "indexical expressions" that we understand the natural rather than objective construction of reality – in this case, the role of social media engagement in the lives of Asian expatriates. Asian expatriates described their everyday life as dialogic of production, information and interaction. Among their main concerns are issues of what they do with social media (production), how to use social media (information) and with whom (interaction). The Asian expatriates' everyday life was accomplished through the interaction and dynamics of these circumstances. These expatriates view the role of technology (social media, in this case) as reconstructing the discourses of production, information and interaction.

Another area of interest in this discourse highlighted the embodiment relations of technology (in this case, social media) to intercultural communication. Social media engagement was viewed here as the mediator of intercultural communication among Asian expatriates as expressed in the discursive positions of the participants and their practices in everyday life as overseas workers. Computer-mediated technology (i.e., social media) has become an everyday practice embedded in the everyday production of social practices such as mediated intercultural communication. As positioned in our research, technology was construed as "an instrument to act on the world" (Brey, 2000, p. 3). Through social media engagement, the participants of our

study were able to negotiate and co-produce meanings in their online interactions. They were able to express social media practices that reflected their construction of their socio-cultural world.

The meanings that surfaced in the research allowed a clear stance to situate social media engagement in the context of mediated communication and intercultural communication due to the various constructions of meanings defined by cultural backgrounds of the participants (i.e. Asian expatriates) of their communication interactions using social media. In our study, culture was not treated as a normative practice that "drives" action, but was a performative enactment that constitutes practice (Gibson, 2009). Here, this "practice" was contextualised in terms of social media engagement among the participants of our research.

Mediated intercultural communication, with the use of social networking sites such as Facebook, offers several communication channels with different levels of network visibility and interaction directedness (Bazarova, et al., 2015). The collaborative capacity of social media tools makes them an attractive and useful tool for users who desire 'synchronous (real-time, or near real-time)' or asynchronous interactions (Cheung et al., 2008, p. 694). Such engagements will somehow allow individuals to "understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience" (Bennett, 1998, p. 1).

Social media were used by the said expatriates to share resources related to their own work or to the work of peers, which served to cultivate mediated intercultural communication. Engaging with other individuals or organisations via social media enables one to find and strengthen professional connections, crowdsource ideas and gauge one's impact (Lewis, 2014).

In our study, it surfaced from the analyses that the Asian expatriates engaged in mediated communication in intercultural communication discourse, expressing a variety of activities or practices that reflected their lifeworld as expatriates. Moreover, the findings echoed our theoretical position that social media offer the potential for intercultural engagement as well as bridge and reinforce cultural differences to encourage intercultural communication. New communication technologies, such as "social media can boost intercultural communication; however, we must be willing to reach out across the boundaries that separate us" (Guffey & Loewy, 2011, p. 95).

In addition, the Asian expatriates who participated in the asynchronous online forum may be seen as members of a community of practice. According to Wenger (1998):

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly…They have an identity defined by a shared domain of interest…They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems – in short, a shared practice (pp. 1-2).

In the words of Grosse (2002), understanding how to communicate effectively on virtual intercultural teams will help business managers achieve higher performance and avoid costly delays in projects and decision making. It will "enhance appreciation for cultural diversity and knowledge of technology's power to communicate across time and space while building strong human relationships" (p. 37). This is also a useful insight considering that some of our participants were also holding managerial/ leadership positions.

In a nutshell, through the ethnomethodological research tradition, the findings of our research were able to illuminate that:

The research field of intercultural communication cannot be defined as it constantly evolves and perpetuates. Intercultural communication is an almost endless field of theorizing and analyzing on how human interaction is shaped by culture and vice versa (Otten & Geppert, 2009, p. 21-22).

Mediated communication and intercultural communication among the Asian expatriates are replete with meanings and "knowledge is produced out of practices" (Ihde, 2009, p. 8).

The metaphor of Hannerz (1996) of social media as "habitats of meaning" explains the nature of intercultural communication among Asian expatriates as mediated communication. Through mediated communication, these expatriates were able to sustain their online interactions, thus, produce and reproduce meanings which are in their everyday life's practices.

The crux of the results is that by understanding why people (Asian expatriates in this context) engaged in mediated intercultural communication, our research has provided thick discussions and insights on our theoretical pursuit: "How people understand one another when they do not share a common cultural experience" (Bennett, 1998, p. 1).

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's result, the following recommendations for research are offered:

Exploration on how the other traditions (e.g., semiotic, cybernetic, critical) would situate and problematise mediated intercultural communication. The other traditions may provide unique lens of sense-making which is in the practices of what individuals do when engaged in communicating inter-culturally in online environments.

Experimentation of other qualitative research methods (e.g., ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenological) in understanding socio-cultural phenomena such as mediated communication and intercultural communication in broader contexts of business and management, higher education, public management and other social sciences.

7. REFERENCES

Alkharusi, M. J. (2013). *The Intercultural Communication Experiences of Arab Muslims Studying in New Zealand: Academic and Social Perspectives*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Bazarova, N., Choi, Y.H., Sosik, V.S., & Cosley, D. (2015). Social Sharing of Emotions on Facebook: Channel Differences, Satisfaction, and Replies, Paper presented during the *18th ACM Conference on Computer-Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing,* March 14-18, 2015, *Vancouver, Canada.*

Bennett, M.J. (1998). Intercultural communication: A current perspective. In Milton J. Bennett (Ed.). *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Selected Readings*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Black, S., & Gregersen, H. B. (1991). Antecedents to cross-cultural adjustment for expatriates in Pacific Rim assignments. Human Relations, Vol. 44, No. 5, pp. 497-515.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77-101.

Brey, P. (2000). Technology and embodiment in Ihde and Merleau-Ponty: Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Technology. In Mitcham, Carl (ed.). *Research in Philosophy and Technology.* London: Elsevier/JAI Press.

Cheung, K.H., Yip, K.Y., Townsend, J.P., & Scotch, M. (2008). HCLS 2.0/3.0: Health care and life sciences data mashup using Web 2.0/3.0. Journal of Biomedical Informatics, Vol. 41, p. 694. doi: 10.1016/j.jbi. 2008.04.001.

Daniels, J.D., Radebaugh, L.H., & Sullivan, D.P. (2004). *International Business: Environments and Operations*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education.

Ebrat, M. (2014). A phenomenological study of FaceBook users' discursive habits: Socializing and learning opportunities offered through exigency and images. Retrieved October 25, 2014 from http://www.academia. edu.

Gibson, W. (2009). Intercultural communication online: Conversation analysis and the investigation of asynchronous written discourse. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol. 10, No. 1, Art. 49, http://nbnresolving.de/ urn: nbn:de:0114-fqs0901493.

Grosse, C.U. (2002). Managing communication within virtual intercultural teams. Business Communication Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4, pp. 22-38.

Guffey, M.E., & Loewy, D. (2011). *Business Communication: Process and Product* (8th ed.). Stamford, Cincinnati: Cengage Learning.

Hannerz, U. (1996). *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge.

Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ihde, D. (2009). What is postphenomenology? *Postphenomenology and Technoscience.* Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 5-23.

Kim, J., LaRose, R., & Peng, W. (2009). Loneliness as the cause and the effect of problematic Internet use: The relationship between Internet use and psychological well-being. CyberPsychology and Behaviour, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 451-455.

Lewis, T. (2014). The use of social media in professional communication. Information Services & Use, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 89-90.

Marcon, T., & Gopal, A. (2008). Irony, critique and ethnomethodology in the study of computer work: irreconcilable tensions? Information Systems Journal, Vol. 18, Vol. 1, pp. 165-184.

Meek, D. (2011). YouTube and social movements: A phenomenological analysis of participation, events and cyberplace. *Antipode,* Vol. 44, No. 4, pp. 1-20.

Mumby, D.K. (2000). Common ground from the critical perspective: Overcoming binary oppositions. In Putnam, Linda L. (2001). Shifting Voices, Oppositional Discourse, and New Visions for Communication Studies, Presidential Address delivered at the 50th *Annual Conference of the International Communication Association*, June 3, 2000, Acapulco, Mexico.

Otten, M., & Geppert, J. (2009). Mapping the landscape of qualitative research on intercultural communication: A hitchhiker's guide to the methodological galaxy. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, Vol. 10, No. 1, Art. 34, http:// nbnresolving.de/urn: nbn:de:0114-fqs0901520.

Pascal, J., Johnson, N., Dore, C., & Trainor, R. (2010). The lived experience of doing phenomenology: Perspectives from beginning health science postgraduate researchers. Qualitative Social Work, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 172-189.

Putnam, L.L. (2001). Shifting voices, oppositional discourse, and new visions for communication studies. Presidential Address delivered at the 50th *Annual Conference of the International Communication Association*, June 3, 2000, Acapulco, Mexico.

Putnam, L.L., Phillips, N., & Chapman, P. (1996). Metaphors of communication and organisation. In Putnam, L.L. (2001). Shifting voices, oppositional discourse, and new visions for communication studies, Presidential Address delivered at the 50th *Annual Conference of the International Communication Association*, June 3, 2000, in Acapulco, Mexico.

QSR International (2015). Company profile. Retrieved October 24, 2015 from http://www.qsrinternational.com/About-Us/Company-Profile.

Saludadez, J.A. (2016). Coding output: Email conversations dated February 26, 2016.

Saludadez, J.A. (2004). *Research Collaboration Stories: Communication as Constitutive of Temporary Organisation.* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

Tech Target (2014). Social media. Retrieved November 20, 2014 from http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/social-media.

Theemling, R. (2013). *The Use of Online Social Media and Expatriate Adjustment and Integration in Netherlands.* Master's Thesis. Erasmus University, Rotterdam, Netherlands.

Tufts University (2014). Social media overview. Retrieved November 18, 2014 from http://webcomm.tufts.edu/social-media-overview13/.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yost, H., & Fan, S. (2008). Social media technologies for collaboration and communication: Perceptions of childcare professionals and families. Australasian Journal of Early Childhood, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 36-41.

Zagado, R.G. (2013). *Human Agency, Power, and Discourse: Accomplishing Farm Work Through Short Messaging Service (SMS) in the Philippines*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Adelaide, Australia.

Zingale, N. C. (2013). The phenomenology of sharing: social media networking, asserting, and telling. Journal of Public Affairs, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 288-297.