Young Adults' Identity Construction in Digital Literacy

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine young adults' identity construction in Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (ACMC) in Taiwan. Aligned with New Literacy Studies, this study views digital texts as a social practice and explores how linguistic features influence young adults' identity construction as one online community of practice. The analysis is based on a semi-structured interview, composed of five participants from southern Taiwan, aged 21-23, with the focus on participants' motives that influence their text-making practices in a digital environment. The findings reported show that these screen-based texts are multimodal with a mixture of visual images and a variety of modes of communication employed. Young adults make use of these affordances to foreground their friendship, rapport and cultural bond with peers, constituting a community of practice to share common knowledge and conventions.

Keywords: Digital literacy, identity construction, community of practice, text-making practices, asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC)

1. Introduction

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) has appeared to be one popular means of everyday communication in the world. With the growth of new computer programs carrying different affordances and capabilities, Internet users are able to create profiles with images, photos, personal information and a list of interests to share with approved 'friends' in such interactive online communication. As images, sounds and movements permeate screen-based texts, different modes and semiotic resources of representation and communication reshape the process of meaning making in an online environment.

The increasing number of Internet users, particularly young adults, participating in online communities leads to the generation and the development of a wide variety of linguistic features. The majority of young adults spend a considerable amount of time searching for information, sharing experiences or arranging to meet with peers via different mediums of CMC, which has become one important platform for them to maintain friendships and social networks in their everyday communication. CMC allows these young adults to participate in a virtual and dynamic community where feelings of friendship and rapport are foregrounded. It is of interest to researchers to explore young adults' online reading and writing habits, and in particular how

these everyday literacy practices facilitate their identity construction in an online environment. Amongst the CMC mediums currently popular, the researcher is interested in Bulletin Board System (BBS), one kind of asynchronous computer-mediated communication which constitutes a particular form of digital literacy practice in Taiwan and is the focus of this present study. At the beginning, the aim and rationale of this study will be explained.

2. Aim and Rationale of this Study

The aim of this study is to investigate young adults' identity construction while they engage in asynchronous CMC, as one aspect of social practice in Taiwan. Through investigating bulletin board system, the researcher aims to discover how young adults construct their identities in this online community and the unique characteristics of their literacy practices. The production and consumption of BBS content is seen as a new form of social practice which reconfigures relationships and engenders new ways of looking at screen-based literacy practice. With the emphasis on a social account of the BBS texts in use, the researcher draws on New Literacy Studies (NLS) as the theoretical framework for the study (Street, 1993; Barton and Hamilton, 1998, 2000).

The concept of NLS is particularly pertinent to the present study, where reading and writing are viewed as more than decoding words or letters, and are linked to the wider social structures in which these activities are embedded, and which these events in turn help to shape (Barton, 2007). In this study, the researcher argues that ACMC allows young adults to enrich their interpersonal communication, and enables them to reshape the nature of the traditional writing system by using an extended set of orthographic choices. BBS users can draw on these affordances to suit their interests and construct their identity. Therefore, the research question of this present study is as follows:

> *How do BBS participants develop text-making practices in asynchronous CMC in order to construct their identity and negotiate social relationships in one community of practice?*

In the next section, the notions of community, virtual community, community of practice (CofP), affinity space as well as text-making practice (TmPs) are introduced in order to explain how young adults construct their identity in ACMC in this study.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Community/ Virtual Community/Community of Practice/ Affinity Space

'Community' is a collective of kinship networks which share a common geographic territory, a common history and that may be rooted in a common religion (Weinreich, 1979). More recently, a new form of community, 'virtual community', has been coined due to the popularity of various

forms of CMC. Virtual communities are defined as computer-mediated spaces where there exists an integration of content and communication with an emphasis on member-generated content (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997). In virtual communities, a set of characteristics such as level of interactivity, various communicators, level of sustained membership and a virtual common-public-space are demonstrated.

Some researchers see CMC as a text-only medium where visual cues, which are the dominant factor in face-to-face interaction, are absent (Herring, 1996). This absence of social cues in fact motivates CMC users' self-disclosure and encourages rapid development of interpersonal relationships and communities (Turkle, 1995). The assumption that the Internet is a 'weak' emotional and psychological medium is therefore no longer appropriate.

The notion of 'Community of Practice' (CofP) provides the theoretical underpinning for this present study where digital literacy practices in online discussion boards create new types of authorship, participation and multimodality (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007). The researcher argues that online technologies have created conditions for a new kind of community in this society. "A community of practice (CofP) is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations, in short, practices emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor" (Eckert and McConnell, 1992: 464). Wenger (1998) further specifies CofP by providing three criteria: mutual engagement of the members, jointly negotiated enterprise and members' shared repertoire. In order to construct a community of practice, the mutual engagement of one group of people is required. "Given the right context, talking on the phone, exchanging electronic mail or being connected by radio can be part of what makes mutual engagement possible" (Wenger, 1998: 74). In relation to ACMC, a specific online CofP was constructed in which participants make mutual engagement possible. Secondly, Wenger states, "in CofP, members should share some jointly negotiated enterprise. Members get together for one purpose, and this purpose is defined through their pursuit of it in order to create relationships of mutual accountability amongst the participants" (Wenger, 1998: 77).

The researcher now turns to explain the notion of 'affinity spaces' which is another important social configuration where people engage and learn. According to Gee (2004), an affinity space is different from CofP in some aspects. In contrast to CofP, in an affinity space, people are gathered together because of common interests or goals, regardless of gender, age or social class. Everyone can share this common space no matter whether they are newcomers or masters. An affinity space encourages people to share knowledge with each other and this enables them to know more than they could on their own. Informal learning becomes an outcome when people engage in this space. An affinity space emphasises people's interaction, rather than membership in a community.

Although the notion of 'affinity spaces' is relevant to this present study, the researcher uses CofP as my theoretical underpinning since the ideas of CofP carry the connotation of 'belongingness' and people being 'members' which are more pertinent to this study. Undoubtedly, CofP is an important force in learning as applied to schools and workplaces. However, in this research, the notion of 'affinity spaces' can also be useful in pointing to participants' informal learning on ACMC.

With regard to the question of CofP and identity, Le Page and Tabourer-Keller (1985) define identity as to single out a person and to see a person as part of a group, a cause or a tradition. Group membership is an essential part of what shapes people's identities. Memberships of concrete groups such as school and local community, as well as virtual message boards, are precise examples of a close relationship between group membership and identity. As Le Page and Tabouret-Keller indicate:

> An individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behaviour so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished (1985: 181).

Although this present research concerns one 'online community of practice,' the representation of meaning-making is grounded at the level of the socio-cultural context.

3.2 Online Identity Construction

According to Butler (1990), identity is a performance of fantasy and desire and a pursuit of being the image of that desire. In a digital world, the performance of identity deviates from the physical cues of embodiment or context, and relies instead upon the digital texts that people create in virtual words. Although the physical body is absent in online communities, "it nevertheless provides a site for the production of a new type of body which is self-produced, and authored through words and images within the social and discursive practices of the members of the community" (Thomas, 2007: 6).

According to Thomas (2007), online identity is about the authorship and self-representation of a living-out of these states of being, belonging and behaving through a range of social and literacy practices that are connected with the body and shared with the public. As Taylor has stated:

> Users create digital presences, either via textual descriptions of graphical representations or all of these actions are done not by just an amorphous self in the space, but by a body imbued with certain characteristics and properties. The

bodies users create and use in virtual spaces become inextricably linked to their performance of self and engagement in the community…Avatars and textual bodies facilitate interaction, shape and solidify identity, as well as more generally mediate users' engagement with the world. (1999: 438)

Even without the 'visual image' of an avatar, identity is shaped by textual presentation. In this study, the online identity is self-produced via orthography. Even without simulated corporealisation or avatars, and confining to texts, the researcher will show that online identities are constructed in online textual interactions.

3.3 Text-making Practices (TmPs)

In relation to computer-mediated communication as a social practice, the researcher adopts Text-making Practices (TmPs) as one of the theoretical perspectives (Lee, 2007). Lee defined the concept of text-making practices (TmPs) as the ways in which people choose and transform resources for representing meanings in the form of texts for different purposes. TmPs explore people's beliefs and perceptions of other values.

The concept of TmPs involves both the production and consumption of online texts. In other words, TmPs are comparable to the concept of 'textual practices'. Leander and Prior (2004) suggest that textual practices are 'the process of reading and writing' in which ways of 'making texts', including the choice of words and linguistic features, are considered. Combining concepts of NLS and TmPs, new literacy practices are characterised by self-performance, with the visual effects and interrelation between readers and writers. As applied to this study, the approach of TmPs is useful and pertinent in understanding digital texts in Taiwan. Since 'text-making practices' in asynchronous CMC have not been widely used, the researcher adopts these relatively new TmPs as one approach to exploring young adults' text production or meaning-making representation in BBS texts for different purposes. Adopting the concept of TmPs in examining asynchronous BBS, different aspects of literacy practices, including manifestations of creativity and language playfulness, and participants' identity construction or self-representation by using a variety of languages or writing systems are examined.

To sum up, in this study, the researcher draws on the notion of text-making practices, coined by Lee (2007) rather the broader concept of 'literacy practices' since TmPs connect the ideas suggested by all the related terms discussed above. More importantly, TmPs as a refinement of NLS preserve the original essence of literacy practices in NLS. They are not only activities but are also associated with the values and beliefs of individuals and the contexts in which these are situated.

4. Methodology

This section discusses important methodological issues in the study of young adults' identity construction in ACMC. As discussed in the introduction, digital texts are understood as a social practice which involves a variety of human sense-making activities that are most appropriately examined through qualitative methods, and are especially influenced by the emphasis on taking an emic perspective as in ethnographic approaches. Thus, the researcher adopts a qualitative research design for the investigation in this study.

In this study, a group interview is the essential instrument employed to analyse participants' motives. The interview began with general and open-ended responses, and then narrowing the focus to specific questions. The reason for doing this was to encourage the participants' thinking in response to the research question. The researcher firstly explains the data selection including information relating to five participants' backgrounds in general. A detailed interpretation and discussion of the result of the group interview are provided in the following section.

4.1 Backgrounds of the Five Participants

Five female young adults majoring in English from the same university in southern Taiwan took part in this group interview voluntarily. The five participants ranged in age from twenty-one to twenty-three. They had known each other for three years before this interview. The researcher provided their demographic information: age, gender, their native language, length of studying English (years), and how long they had used BBS, as shown in Table 1: participants' background information.

Table 1 Participants' background information

Name	Age	Gender	Native Language	Period of studying English (years)	Period of using BBS (years)
Coldplay-hw	22	Female	Chinese	12	11
Annice	23	Female	Chinese	13	8
Jellyfish	22	Female	Chinese	12	4
Pei-ting	22	Female	Chinese	13	4
Huanyu	21	Female	Chinese	11	5

In the following table, i.e., 2, the information includes each interviewee's personality, competence in using BBS and spoken language ability.

Table 2: Participants' background information (continued)

Name	Personality (described by the interviewer)	BBS competence	Language ability (spoken)
Coldplay-hw	She talked a lot especially when she knew about the topic	Competent	Taiwanese English
Annice	She was talkative and extroverted	Competent	Taiwanese English Hakka French (a little)
Jellyfish	Neither overly quiet nor talkative	Competent	English Taiwanese German (a little)
Pei-ting	Generally quiet, but she talked when she knew about the topic	Not competent, but provided the answers she knew	English French (a little)
Huanyu	Neither quiet nor talkative	Competent	English Taiwanese (a little) Hakka French (a little)

In the next table, i.e., 3, information about the five interviewees' favourite types of BBS boards (besides their own class boards), average hours of browsing BBS per week and other CMC mediums favoured by them are given.

Table 3 Participants' background information (continued)

Name	Favorite Boards on West BBS	Average Hours of Browsing BBS per week	Other CMC Instruments
Coldplay-hw	Gossip Making friends	16	Live Messenger, blog, Facebook
Annice	Gossip	22	Live Messenger, Skype, Facebook
Jellyfish	Gossip Sports Online shopping	12	Live Messenger, Skype, Facebook
Pei-ting	Graduate schools	3	Live Messenger, Skype
Huanyu	Gossip Online shopping	15	Live Messenger, Facebook

4.2 Interview Questions

After explaining these five female students' background information in general, the researcher moves to explain the group interview data which mainly cover the following areas:

- **_Demographic factors_:** General information was collected, such as the participants' gender and educational background as well as their relationship with other participants at the beginning of the semi-structured group interview. After gaining a general understanding of the online identity of the five participants, the researcher focused on their level of participation on BBS, such as the number of hours of browsing or posting messages per day.
- **_Language choice_:** One major focus of the group interview was the online practice of the five participants, i.e. their use of language or writing systems on BBS as the researcher was interested in knowing which languages they preferred to use, such as: Mandarin Chinese, Taiwanese, English or other orthographic choices, symbols or codes. The researcher was also investigating orthographic choices, symbols or codes, and how codes or expressions were used innovatively.
- **_Self-identity construction_:** Information relevant to identity construction was gathered from the interview data. The researcher aimed to find out whether students avoided

being 'outsiders', and whether they browsed their own class board using a specific language. Relevant information obtained from the students' interview data was related to issue of identity construction. It is significant to find out whether student participants used any particular languages or expressions in order to deter outsiders from entering their shared communities or not.

5. Findings

The results of the group interview are discussed in this section. The researcher found that young adults negotiated their social relationship in terms of three important factors: language choice, online social network with peers and neologism.

5.1 Language Choice

The researcher noticed that all these five students preferred to use Mandarin Chinese mixing with different scripts or symbols rather than 'purely' Standard English to post messages on BBS. This is probably because using the most common and popular language to communicate with each other on BBS is important in order to become part of the in-group community. MC is the most common language on BBS followed by English expressed in scripts, then Standard English or Taiwanese expressed in scripts.

- *Annice* said assertively that she avoided using Standard English on BBS although she majored in English because she simply wanted to be a member of the online community when she communicated with her peers. With the capability to speak and write well in Standard English, *Annice* responded that she still preferred to post messages in Mandarin Chinese or to use mixed languages, mixed scripts, to express intended meanings. She regarded communication on BBS as informal exchanges between friends and peers. Accuracy and correctness became a secondary and minor issue of concern because few people paid attention to the formal language expression.

For the remaining four interviewees, Mandarin Chinese was the priority, when they posted messages, in some cases, mixing of different languages, scripts or symbols occur. However, *Pei-ting* usually browsed messages to search for the information she needed, instead of posting anything on the class board.

5.2 Online Social Network with Peers

The researcher then moved the focus to how these participants built a social rapport with their friends by asking several questions relating to social networks and identity construction.

- *Annice* continued that she tried to avoid being left out by members in this online community. In order to avoid being isolated from other members, she did not use Standard

English. Besides, she mentioned that she feared being bullied or teased, particularly by other members as a consequence of 'showing off' her English ability to others.

- *Coldplay-hw* further said that although five of them were from the Department of English with advanced English level, they used Standard English for the most part in academia rather than peer-to-peer communication in everyday lives, as on BBS. Rather, mutual understanding of BBS terms became an important bridge to connect with members in this community. In order to avoid being an outsider, Standard English was avoided. *Coldplay-hw* avoided Standard English, even though she was able to communicate fluently in English in online environments.

- *Coldplay-hw* also pointed out that she kept her messages understandable to members in this online community. Correctness of grammar was not a main concern. The application of emoticons or Martian language, on the other hand, brought closeness to other members. More importantly, she tried to express her intended meanings in an innovative and funny way in order to attract the attention of her classmates, other browsers', or so- called guests. Occasionally, she browsed other boards without leaving any messages. For *Coldplay-hw*, browsing BBS was one medium for her to understand the prevailing or stylish language expressions among adolescents and not to be left out of her generation's interactions. She added that she could get the latest information and responses about subjects of interest in the process.

- *Coldplay-hw* added that since the bulletin board in this study was a more academia-based class board, most posts pertained to class announcements or discussion about assignments or course materials. On the other hand, she also pointed out that PTT, the largest bulletin board system in Taiwan, had become popular with most young adults, for PTT covered diverse topics and discussions of social, recreational, and even political news. She further mentioned that regardless of whether the boards were academia-based or recreation-based, she preferred to post messages in Mandarin Chinese rather than in Standard English.

5.3 Neologism

After examining the factor of social network among the five participants, the researcher moved the focus to questions regarding new terms. What would the five participants do, if they had no clues about new terms? They all agreed that they would be interested in figuring out the intended meanings of neologisms. Whenever any unfamiliar neologism was shown on the board they were interested in it, and they were keen to find out the intended meaning of that new term, either by self-learning or by peer-learning. This self- or peer-learning was very effective, particularly for interesting subject headers. Learning from their peers served to promote involvement in this

online community.

- *Jellyfish* replied that she would ask her classmates face-to-face when she met them in class. Alternatively, she might search the term in order *not* to be left out of the community she belonged to.

- *Annice* replied that she learned how to use the new terms by observing other posters' posts. In the meantime, she mimicked the terms in her own posts. For her, learning neologisms involved a kind of self-learning and she learned to use this term next time in her own postings in order to communicate with the same members of the group.

- *Huanyu* replied that using emoticons was very common on BBS in general. She stated that if she did not understand some specific neologisms on the board, she would post message directly to ask the original poster about its intended meaning. When someone failed to capture the meaning of new terms, it was easy to get mocked by other members on the board. Therefore, she tried her best to read other similar postings with the same neologisms rather than asking posters directly. Alternatively, she might search the meaning. She learned the new terms by self-learning and by observing other postings.

The researcher further asked the five interviewees what other CMC was used for them to communicate with their peers. The purpose was to examine how interactivity made BBS a social network that developed a community of practice and how this network linked to other websites for online interactive and synchronous CMC (also called SCMC), such as Facebook or Skype. The researcher asked five interviewees whether there was any contradiction between ACMC and SCMC.

None of the five interviewees thought that BBS would be replaced by other SCMC. BBS was one way to access the latest information or the latest responses from people with similar interests on the same topics or subjects. They all agreed that BBS and Skype offered different affordances. The affordances of ACMC and SCMC did not collide with each other since BBS basically offered the latest information searching and information sharing, whereas Skype basically served for synchronous communication with friends added to their contact lists.

- *Huanya* told me that the main purpose of BBS was to exchange information or to communicate with peers. Even with the increasing popularity of synchronous CMC, the role of BBS was still irreplaceable. The affordances of the above two CMC mediums: SCMC and ACMC did not overlap. She had habitually used both media regularly and did not feel any contradiction.

- *Jellyfish* gave me an example of a social relation drawn from her own personal experience. One day she needed to search for information about an Italian restaurant near the area she lives in. On such occasions, she usually searched for information on BBS. First of all, she logged onto the board entitled 'restaurant' and then entered the name of her neighbourhood in the search box on this board. Within a few seconds, several restaurants recommended by other BBS users in her area appeared as a list. She could then browse the possible suggestions in terms of the lists on that board. She could even send a private email to a poster via BBS to ask for further detailed information regarding the restaurants s/he recommended and built a social relationship with this person with a shared interest in Italian cuisine. This person might come from a different department on campus or even from another city.

Unlike any search engine, the participant could obtain immediate responses if s/he had further questions regarding the menu of the restaurant or its signature dish. S/he first posted her questions. Within a few hours, several responses popped up from members on the thread-up posting on that board. Those members usually gave further suggestions based on the questions the participant asked similar to Facebook.

- *Pei-ting* mentioned that she recently started to search for information on BBS because she was going to take a postgraduate entrance exam the next month. She could get other BBS users' responses regarding the information she needed, which could cover campus information, tuition fees or skills for performing well in postgraduate entrance exams. She admitted that she was a novice of BBS, but she realised that it was of value when she needed to find specific information that she was unfamiliar with.

- *Annice* replied that "BBS 最迷人的地方，就在於這些不知名的創意 (The most appealing characteristic of BBS is its popularity and creativity with new terms popping up in this society without reason or explanation)".

Moreover, another interesting piece of feedback drawn from my interviewees was that young adults such as my participants can use some innovative expressions without particular reasons.

6. Discussion

The findings revealed that the role of English as the 'language of new technologies' for communication is changing. Although the global impact of English and the emergent discourse practices of new technologies are correlated (Gillen, 2010; Thurlow, 2001; Wetherell et al., 2001), the study showed that online communication in ACMC is mixed with different varieties.

In an ethnographic approach, researchers engage in the lives of a cultural-shared group through observation of and interactions with members of one particular group (Creswell, 1998). An ethnographic approach relating to people's perceptions has made researchers to examine how BBS activities are socially and culturally constructed. As applied to this present study, the findings of the in-depth interview and interaction with the five participants allowed the researcher to conclude that some degree of sharing and communicating feelings of closeness and solidarity was found in a diversity of BBS activities which indeed served multi-functional purposes. The choice of language or writing systems was decided upon by participants' sense of being relatively close to their peers on BBS. The five interviewees all agreed that posting messages in Mandarin Chinese was more applicable and was part of getting involved in the online community.

The dominant language that the five interviewees preferred to use on BBS was Chinese, followed by symbols or emoticons, and then mixture of Chinese, English or Taiwanese to indicate their intended meanings. This disposition was regardless of their language repertoire or level of participation. For the five participants, 'getting involved' and becoming an 'in-group' member of the majority became the major concern for them when selecting which language(s) they adopted on BBS.

Whereas the traditional view of BBS was that of a vehicle simply for message posting and discussion, for the participants in this study, BBS had multiple functions which made it significant and irreplaceable for young adults. Moving to the relation between ACMC such as BBS and SCMC, the researcher realised that each of them offered different affordances and did not overlap in their function and purposes.

Figure 1: Multi-functions of BBS in my analysis
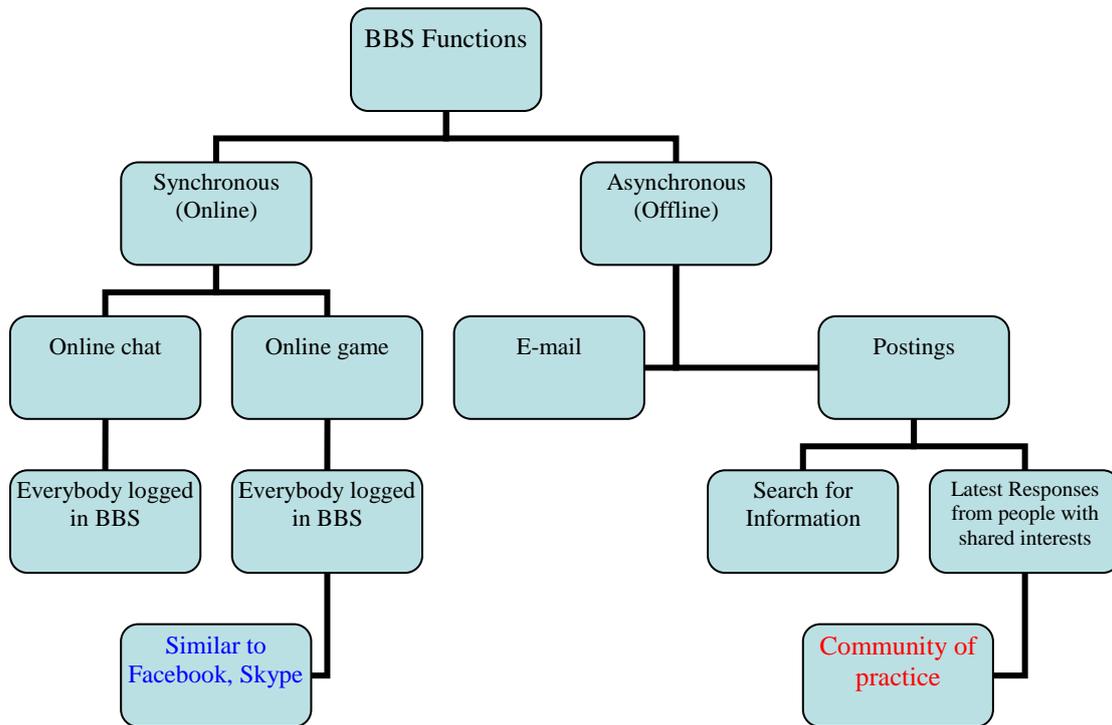
As seen in Figure 1, ACMC such as BBS in Taiwan serves not only as a forum to discuss or post messages on boards but also a synchronous CMC medium, such as for playing online games or having online chats. Apart from the traditional functions in public forums, BBS serves multifunctional purposes in Taiwan. However, the main function for BBS users is to search for the latest information and to share with members who have common interests. In this way, knowledge exchange is facilitated and an online community of practice is constructed (Su, 2009).

The findings indicated that educated people such as young adults still tend to use non-standard language expressions. To facilitate mutual communication between BBS users, this has a high priority for young adults. In terms of interpersonal membership, Su (2009) concludes that language practice on BBS has become highly 'stylized' which means the use of personal style and individuality, such as the use of 'stylized' Taiwanese. Such forms of playful language use convey a sense of friendliness, intimacy or closeness. Under such circumstances, users have to have a shared common knowledge to exchange ideas with symbolic capital (their own writing systems or languages), while new users must undergo some forms of socialisation in order to become part of the membership of this society or social network on BBS. Figure 2 explains this online social network.
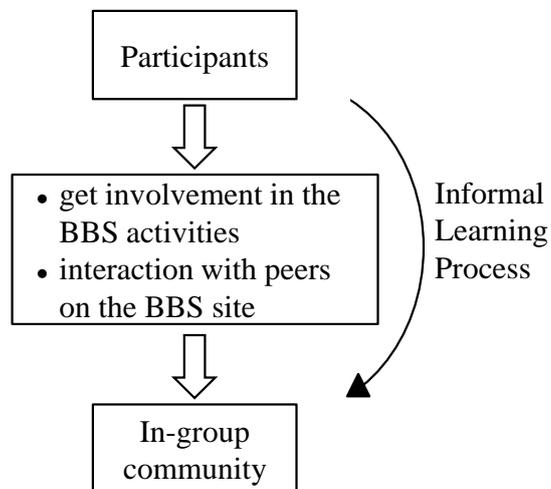
Figure 2: Online social networks with peers (slightly adapted from Greenhow and Robelia, 2009)
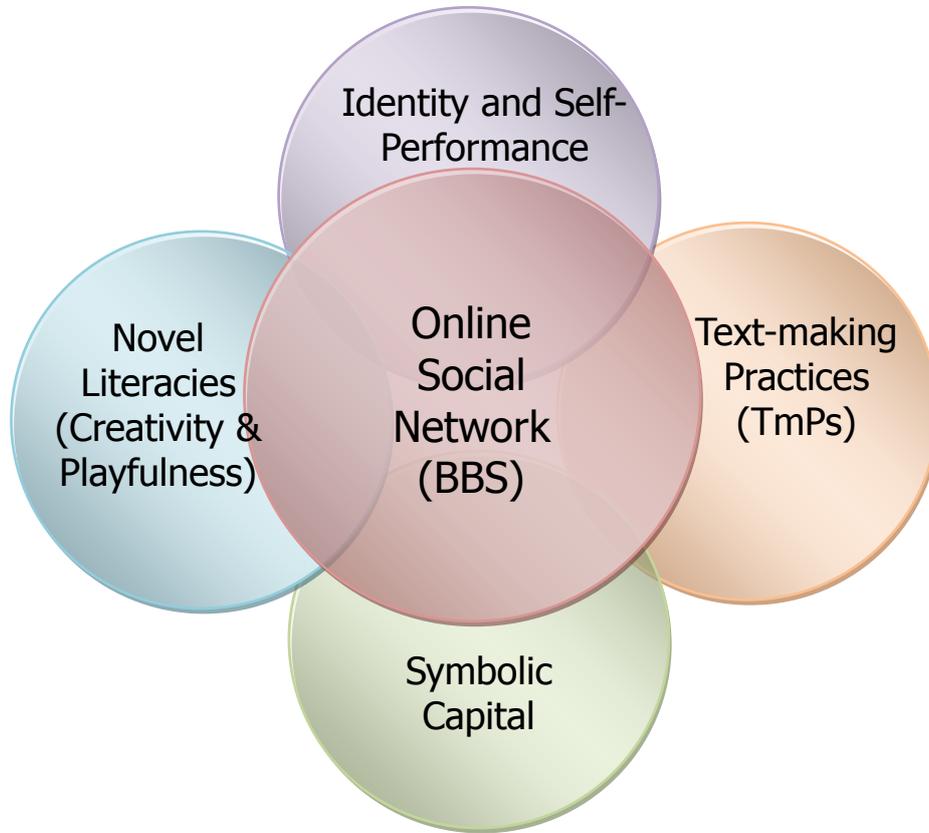
As seen in Figure 2, in this online social network, several concepts are revealed. Young adults construct their identity and negotiate social relationships, using TmPs with their symbolic capital (here symbolic capital means ability to write or read in digital literacy) and they further create or invent new terminology in this online environment. The researcher realised that a common characteristic of the digital practices is the way in which digital texts themselves mediate a social relationship between one or more persons. In the group interview, the researcher found that a participant would need to have access to a range of sources of information in order to make a thorough analysis of the postings. This may include shared knowledge of who the participants are, their previous knowledge of topics and of each other, the degree to which their backgrounds are shared and an understanding of their purposes for posting and commenting.

Figure 3: Factors that influence participants' text-making practices

Factors influence participants' text-making practices

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        ┌──────────────────┐
        │   Participants   │
        └──────────────────┘
                 │
                 ▼
   ┌──────────────────────────┐  ╲
   │ • get involvement in the │   ╲  Informal
   │   BBS activities         │    │ Learning
   │ • interaction with peers │    │ Process
   │   on the BBS site        │   ╱
   └──────────────────────────┘  ╱
                 │            ▼
                 ▼
        ┌──────────────────┐
        │     In-group     │
        │    community     │
        └──────────────────┘
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Factors that influence young adults' text-making practices are through *engagement* as shown in Figure 3. This engagement is interpreted as 'informal learning' (Willett and Sefton-Green, 2003). Through interactive activity like cross-posting or leaving messages by registering each individual account in ACMC, participants learn and become experienced users. 'Engaging' in BBS should be seen as a type of informal learning. In other words, the more college students are involved and interact with the BBS site, the more they learn and understand its functions. Similar to a situation of engagement in playing computer games, a person can gain a satisfying degree of success with very little experience. This kind of informal learning motivates young adults to get more involved in online activities.

That is to say, this kind of informal way of learning may be found in language use. As Merchant (2002) suggests, some critiques have claimed that electronic texts are destroying language because users do not follow the conventions of language use. On the other hand, young people use electronic texts as part of a creative process to meet their communication needs. In this study, the five participants learned how to get involved on the BBS site by a new form of learning, i.e. an informal method of learning via interactive activities with their peers. Through this interaction, they gradually enhance their ability in manipulating BBS and become experienced users.

The researcher also conceptualised that this creative online literacy practice has become one part of youth culture online. As Jørgensen (2003: 144) notes, through language choice, "young people realise that they have fun together and therefore they are attracted to the in-group members with whom they have already had all this fun." Language use is one means to strengthen in-group ties

and relations amongst young adults. As found in the analysis of this group interview, five participants responded that the most important motive and factor for them to engage actively in BBS were to become in-group members in this community.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher has analysed the dataset by implementing one instrument method: a semi-structured group interview, as the analytical approach and further discuss the findings in order to answer the research question. An ethnographic approach relating to people's perceptions and assumptions has allowed researchers to scrutinise how experiences of digital literacies are socially and culturally constructed. Through the ethnographic approach, issues relating to the interpretation and representation of individuals are raised (Agar, 1980). How participants give the value to their thoughts or experiences of digital literacies is revealed.

The participants in this study were found to be particularly sensitive to the importance of signalling their identity in a digital world. They used a number of strategies to introduce or 'identify' themselves in an online environment. With this sensitivity in mind, the objective of this study has been to investigate further how young adults construct their identity and develop their social relationships with their peers in ACMC.

To summarise, in this study, for most participants, being an 'in-group' member is an important issue and device to negotiate their social relationships and identity construction in one online community. They suppose that members of this community have shared knowledge to understand a variety of language uses, expressions or writing systems. Text-making practices and identity construction mutually reinforce each other. After conducting this research, the researcher concluded that in order to facilitate the mutual relationship, text-making practices such as language choice or specific expressions particularly on neologism have become symbolic capital for young adults to get involved in one online environment and further form a shared community of practice.

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