Pathways to Social Presence in Online Learning Communities

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Abstract: Online learning communities provide a wider learning space for learners to communicate, interact, collaborate and cognitively engage without the constraints of time and space. Social presence, as the link between the online learning community and the learner, is key to understanding online learning behaviour. Social presence is one of the learning outcomes sought by online teaching and learning, and it plays an important role in the formation and development of online learning communities and has an impact on individual perceptual learning and learning satisfaction, among other things. Therefore, in online learning, it is important to focus on enhancing social presence.

Keywords: Online Learning Communities; Social Presence; Online Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

Social presence, also known as social presence, social representation and social presentation, is an important concept from the field of communication. The theory first appeared in the 1976 book *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications* by Professor Short of the University of Maryland and was first defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" in the process of communicating using the media, and the degree of perceived connection with others. It was first defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" and connected to others during communication using media [1].

Social presence is an inherent characteristic of a medium, and people feel a difference in social presence depending on the medium they use. can feel cold and distant, ultimately preventing the individual using the medium from establishing good interpersonal relationships[1].

For online learning communities, whether and to what extent online learners have developed a sense of social presence is an important indicator of their maturity.The degree of social presence is one of the most important indicators of the maturity of an online learning community. Some scholars have shown[2] that a satisfactory online learning environment should have two characteristics: firstly, it is 'unmediated', i.e. learners are not aware of the difference between virtual reality and physical reality, and can feel each other's presence in a real way; secondly, it is a 'sense of community "The second is a sense of community, i.e. a sense of intimacy between people. In online learning communities, a sense of social presence can create certain teaching and learning situations in which learners can collaborate to engage in high-quality inquiry and interaction, thereby achieving meaningful learning goals[3]. At the same time, a good sense of social presence can motivate learners to actively engage in discussions and responses to questions, prolong the time spent interacting with each other, increase the level and depth of interaction, and improve learner satisfaction with online learning.

2. Results

In Anderson et al.'s 'community of inquiry' theoretical framework, three factors influence the quality of online teaching and learning: social presence, cognitive presence and pedagogical presence, with social presence being the basis for successful online learning. They argue that cognitive and pedagogical presence can only be developed once social presence has been developed to a certain extent. In other words, without the development of a sense of social presence in an online learning community, there is no way to talk about online learning.

Holmberg argues that some form of dialogue can be achieved through well-designed materials, but that learners who are isolated and unsupported, while learners who are isolated and unsupported, and at the same time ill-prepared, find it difficult

to complete their learning with little or no institutional support.It is clear that the separation of teaching and learning in online learning communities dictates that well-designed and developed course learning materials do not really guarantee that learning will occur and academic success will be achieved, and that dropouts will occur frequently if a network of support is not built for learners.

Some researchers have found that high levels of social presence in online learning environments are positively correlated with perceived learning outcomes, but that the impact of social presence on learning outcomes is indirect. Emotions, feelings and expressions of mood are the central determinants of social presence, so social presence in an online learning community only reinforces the positive impressions learners have of the course, it makes them more attractive to each other through the exchange of information between learners, it enhances the integration of social systems within the online learning community, it achieves the development of affective goals, and it achieves results that reinforce the ongoing power to accomplish course goals The result is a sustained force that reinforces the achievement of the cognitive goals, and is essentially a beneficial guiding force for the achievement of the cognitive goals. As Garrison et al [4] conclude, social presence supports the achievement of cognitive goals through its own motivating and sustaining effects, enhancing the development of learners' critical thinking skills.

3. Discussion

Social presence, as a connection between the online learning community and its members, reflects the physical and psychological perception of the reproduced social environment. The stronger the sense of social presence, the closer the online learning community is to the real community. Therefore, a successful online learning community needs to have both educational functions and social service attributes that promote members' cognitive behaviour, as well as developing and building on the way members perceive and receive themselves in a traditional learning community.

Unlike the nature of traditional learning communities, online learning communities are complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. Among these, emotion is a prerequisite for the 'experience of being' in an online learning community. Emotional response and presence are highly interrelated; presence is not a construct separate from emotional response, but is in fact an emotion. The social nature of interactive and cognitive behaviours is a necessary element in the construction of online learning communities. In online learning communities, interactive behaviours represent the learner's intention to socialise with others; cognitive behaviours construct and determine the degree of relationship and socialisation with others, presenting the social service attributes of social presence. Specifically, in online learning communities, learner interactions have a strong social dimension and there is a strong link between learners' social presence and the emotions they invest in their learning. The more engaged learners are in the virtual education community, especially those with positive affect, the higher their engagement, the higher their perception of the learning behaviour and the higher their identification with the community.

The community of learners in an online learning environment is a virtual learning community, and the process of constructing and developing a sense of social presence within it has a number of new trends and characteristics that are different from those exhibited by presence within the traditional classroom environment. In online learning communities, learners are isolated from each other in physical space, excluding the possibility of using non-verbal intuitive information such as body language, facial expressions and intonation between interlocutors, and learners use text as the main symbol for communication within online courses, with verbal intuition being a key factor in establishing a sense of social presence in online courses. The use of verbal symbols to convey information in online learning contexts and the substantial reduction in cues to convey the social context between interlocutors can have an impact on problematic discussions. Some researchers argue that the lack of non-verbal information will allow interlocutors to communicate easily with each other and be more able to coalesce to solve problems, a concise and practical information exchange activity; while others, particularly many in the field of education, disagree, arguing that this may be beneficial in some cases, but that using only textual symbols to convey information in a course makes the use of textual symbols between learners The ability to express socialised emotions is diminished, will lead to dull conversations that lack emotion, and it is doubtful whether it will support research-based activities and enhance the development of learners' critical thinking skills. Therefore, most learners still tend to use a variety

of methods to increase the social presence of the course, to convey mutual emotions, to enhance mutual understanding and to build bonds of support and trust.

4. Methods

Social presence plays an important role in the formation and development of online learning communities, and there is a positive relationship between the two. Without a certain degree of social presence, it is impossible to successfully build an online learning community.

Therefore, firstly, teachers need to strengthen the pedagogical design of distance learning activities and create normative online learning. From the real-life experience of current online distance learning practices, teachers can only implement the organisational activities of the course by strengthening the pedagogical design of learning activities, such as the setting of the course and the arrangement of learning activities, and by stipulating strict online learning protocols.

Secondly, learners need to improve their online learning skills and enhance their ability to construct a sense of social presence. Research findings show that not only does the learner's personality influence the effectiveness of the learner's perception of social presence, but also the learner's background factors significantly influence the learner's perception of social presence. This suggests that the Internet, while serving learners with diverse personalities in learning activities, influences the development of learners' online learning abilities to some extent. The findings of several researchers have expressed essentially the same view that "the Internet is a very powerful medium in which people can successfully adapt their personalities to new situations and demands" [5]. Therefore, strategies to improve learners' online learning skills are an important way to enhance learners' ability to construct a sense of social presence.

Furthermore, learners need to strengthen emotional support, build learning communities, and strengthen interpersonal connections and emotional interactions. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emotional and belonging needs are higher-level human needs. The more emotional interaction learners have in an online course, the more information they reveal about themselves, the more mutual understanding between individuals is strengthened, and the more likely it is that mutual trust between learners will be established and more seeking and support tasks can be provided.

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The authors declare no competing interests.