On Teaching

Using Blogs in Teaching Negotiation: A Technical and Intercultural Postscript

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This article reexamines an earlier experiment in the use of blogs in teaching negotiation when undertaken in a different cultural environment. I briefly examine two core factors — technical competence and cultural preferences in communication — as well as a student preference to reserve the use of social media for purely social and informal communications. Parallels are also drawn with the technical and cultural contexts of developments in online dispute resolution.

Key words: negotiation, mediation, negotiation pedagogy, social networks, blogs, online dispute resolution.

> We approach [others] on the assumption that they are similar enough to be intelligible and make a dialogue possible, and different enough to be puzzling and make a dialogue necessary.
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> —*Bhikhu Parekh (2006*: *124)*

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Introduction

In an earlier issue of *Negotiation Journal* (Macduff 2009), I described an informal experiment I conducted over a period of two years using blogs to help teach a course in negotiation and mediation. My aim in conducting that experiment was to take existing learning tools — especially student journals — and adapt the delivery of these to take account of the new social media. I also sought to make use of what I assumed was an increasing student familiarity with the range of online options, such as blogs and Facebook. At the time of the first experiment, Twitter had not appeared on the virtual horizon but might now need to be added to the equation.

My reason for writing this follow-up article is simply to examine how my experiment in using social media to teach negotiation worked and did not work in a different cultural context.

A related aim of the original exercise was to draw some parallels with the burgeoning world of online dispute resolution. At a purely technical level, the technologies of social media could be part of the more conventional world of dispute resolution, and students can actually use the media when — as happened — disagreements or misunderstandings arose in the course of the collective class blog. Thus, in this second mode, students would personally engage in online dispute resolution in dealing with whatever misunderstandings arose in their communications for class.

I had another, larger aspiration for this experiment, one that is consistent with the capacity-building role of teaching negotiation. I also sought to foster two kinds of conversation. First, to the extent that courses such as this typically have a "participation" component, my goal was to find an additional vehicle for that participation, to sit alongside active engagement in class-based activities, by creating another forum in which the substance and issues of the class, and of dispute resolution in general, could be discussed beyond class hours. As I indicated in the earlier article, this turned out to be more successful than anticipated, and the students surprised themselves with just how much additional time they willingly put into these conversations.

The second kind of conversation that I hoped to facilitate was less the social and informal conversation than the critical and analytical pursuit of core ideas. This, too, turned out to be reasonably successful in that students seemed willing to either respond to or to offer provocations on dispute resolution and its place in the world of law, politics, and commerce. (There may be a disjuncture between the familiar and comfortable uses of *social* media, and their application to *analytical* and intellectual ends. I will pick up this point later.)

I conducted the first experiment with classes in New Zealand. Subsequently, I moved to Singapore and, as I have been teaching the same kinds of courses in negotiation and mediation, I sought to transport a modified version of that application of social media to this new learning environment. In this article, I will comment on my impressions of my three-year experience using blogs with law and business students in Singapore, all in negotiation and mediation classes.

The Context

The university where I am now based is a "technology-enabled" campus: all classrooms and campus spaces are equipped for wireless Internet access; the library is regarded more as a "collaborative study space" for students to work together, largely relying on excellent access to online resources and journals; all classrooms have an array of video and interactive technology; and the university itself has a commitment to making use of this full array of technologies in teaching and learning, although the school is not actually a provider of online and distance teaching.

Students are equally well equipped: it is rare to see a student without a laptop, netbook, or tablet computer, and impossible to find one without a mobile phone. This, of course, can be a mixed blessing, and academics are not immune from those conversations about the distractions from learning and intelligent participation in class that are created by e-mail, text messaging, and web surfing. (Some of my colleagues, notably in the corporate communications and social media fields, actively incorporate tools such as Twitter into their classroom conversations, but this is a path we have yet to try in the negotiation classroom.)

Given that students have so much access to and familiarity with not only hardware but also with software and platforms, it seemed a natural transition — with cultural differences in mind — to apply and extend the experiment I had conducted previously in New Zealand. My present university also makes use of an Internet-based teaching platform akin to the one I relied on before, with all the opportunities for group discussions and sharing of information, web links, and external resources.

The details of how I applied blogging to this Singaporean context are unimportant as they were, in technical terms, substantially the same as described in the earlier article, with two exceptions. First, in the negotiation class for law students, the individual journal remained as previously described, but I made the collective blog optional rather than a core part of the assessment. And second, because this university makes group project work a core part of most courses, I decided to incorporate "wiki" technology as the platform for the preparation and initial presentation of each group's work.

The comments and tentative conclusions that follow are based on a small and unempirical sample. They reflect my observations rather than sustained laboratory analysis, and they reflect conversations with colleagues at my university who have employed comparable technologies with similar impact.[1]

The Wikis

"Wiki" is now the generic term used to refer to multiauthor, open-source platforms for the collaborative creation of documents, whether they be encyclopedias, such as Wikipedia, or, as in this case, platforms for the collective and shared creation of student projects. Briefly, the wiki platform relied, in one class, on the Apple Wiki engine, and in another, on Wikimedia, the engine that underlies Wikipedia — each is only slightly different from the other. The idea of using the wiki, as part of a campus-wide experiment, was to apply the students' undoubted experiences as Wikipedia users to the task of authoring wiki-based documents, and to do so for the class's group projects so that the emerging work could be seen as a work in progress.

The key points explained to students were as follows:

1. The wiki was to be a work in progress so that all phases of the drafting of the joint paper were to be put up on the wiki pages.
2. While group members retained the final authorship rights and responsibilities, any member of the class could offer suggestions and, in practice, make changes to the document, which changes would be visibly tracked by the wiki engine.
3. All members of the university community — that is, any person with log-in rights — could view the document (but only members of the class could write to the wiki pages).
4. Where Wikimedia was used, any person with access to the Internet and the wiki address could read the document (but not edit it).
5. The public nature of the wiki meant that students had particular obligations in terms of factors such as good writing, proper citation, and avoiding plagiarism.

In the remainder of this article, I will focus on two perspectives on the uses of social media in this kind of class setting: the technical (but not the technological) and the cultural.[2] In part, these observations are more strictly oriented toward elements of teaching practice, but to the extent that this experimental use of social media is also about increasing exposure to the technology and its applications in online dispute resolution, it has direct implications for learning about many varieties of negotiation. In addition, my students' experiences also illustrate some of the cultural differences and preferences in negotiation style that have been widely discussed in the literature.

I also draw on recent literature on comparative cognitive psychology to explore the possibilities of "priming" changes in some of the perceptions and inhibitions that my colleagues and I observed. The comments that I make here about the responses of my students in Singapore are in no way to be taken as conclusions about fixed characteristics of national culture; they are, instead, indicative of at least preferences and social norms that shape student responses to the expectations of using social media in assessable courses.

The Impact

We know well enough that there are risks in assuming that a standard template of negotiation practice can be exported to other countries. The burgeoning literature on international and intercultural negotiation is testament to this, not least a substantial recent study by practitioner-scholars Christopher Moore and Peter Woodrow (Moore and Woodrow 2010). Equally, scholars of negotiation pedagogy are extending this practical awareness to the delivery of negotiation training, capacity building, and program design (Honeyman, Coben, and De Palo 2009). One size clearly does not fit all, whether it is in terms of negotiation practice or of pedagogy.

At the same time, the commonality provided by Internet-based platforms, the fact that much of the instant communication is borderless, and the relative neutrality of the platforms themselves suggest the possibility of overlapping experiences in learning negotiation. At the very least, the viral spread of social networking tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, suggests some degree of common ground, at least in terms of global technological platforms. This assumption necessarily leaves out of the discussion the problem of the digital divide and unequal access to online resources. To the extent that this present discussion specifically focuses on the applied uses of information and communication technologies (ICT), it assumes a high level of access. It is, or will be, quite another matter to consider ways of harnessing the power of ICT for teaching purposes when access is more limited.[3]

My students in Singapore are certainly as well supplied with technology and gadgets as any university student might be in a developed economy. They also exhibit many of the characteristics of modern student research that have been discussed endlessly in higher education forums, such that "research" is largely reduced to asking Google to do a search on key words and taking the top three results as core sources for an assignment. So I began from the assumption that, first, there would be technological access, and second, that there would be a level of familiarity and comfort that meant that using blogs and wikis were not going to be seen as terrifying innovations. Indeed, informal inquiries at the start of various classes revealed that every student was a Facebook user and every student was a heavy user of mobile phone text messaging. In addition, the use of

Twitter has risen rapidly over these three years, primarily and simply for sending "status updates" to friends in different classrooms throughout the day.

This rise in student use of social media has paralleled the increasing implementation of teaching and feedback strategies relying on ICT, primarily in the use of Twitter as a means of gaining instant feedback in class participation, or as a way of garnering "participation" from those more reticent students who prefer not to speak up in class but could be encouraged to tweet responses to the instructor's class laptop. I have my doubts about this as a pedagogical tool, but that is another matter.

So, how did it work in practice? On the positive side, this class experiment, especially in the use of wiki platforms for group work, was seen and accepted by students as part of a university-wide commitment to the delivery of instruction via new technologies. And for students who had become almost unconscious users of Wikipedia as a "research" tool, it was a chance to see what lay behind the process of joint authoring as well as to become familiar with the relatively straightforward platforms for doing so. I also invited the class to read some of the contemporary literature on the problems of enclave thinking, unreliable information, and digital democracy (Keen 2007; Sunstein 2007) in hope that this experience would provide insight into the broader impact of digital learning and communication.

Again, on the positive side, most students picked up the individual blog with relative comfort, although only those who, by their own confession, had previously kept any kind of diary seemed to become potentially serious bloggers. In a class in "Ethics and Social Responsibility," which I also teach (a compulsory course for every degree at this university), the students — or many of them — were similarly comfortable with the collective discussion blog, although it was largely the same core of students who initiated and led the conversations.

Overall, however, the experiment did not work as well as anticipated. The use of the wiki was slow to catch on, especially the requirement that the work in progress be loaded to the wiki site from the outset. Even the usual inducements — or imperatives — that failure to do so would affect students' group grades seemed not to provide sufficient motivation. Students also strongly and surprisingly resisted learning to use the wiki platform: it became clear that the enthusiastic and daily use of Wikipedia as "consumers" did not translate into an ease with what were relatively accessible platforms.

Alongside this resistance, students expressed an overall reticence about writing in this way. Casual inquiries revealed that many of the students kept personal blogs, and most of them willingly revealed their lives on social networking sites, but this did not transfer easily to the learning environment.[4] Exposure on truly social sites appears to be perfectly familiar, but exposure in this other context was less comfortable. By the same token, some students took to this with considerable enthusiasm, so much so that one online journal writer produced around twenty-five thousand words of personal reflection on conflict and negotiation, when the norm was around three to four thousand words.

For the most part, however, the best that can be said was that students tentatively adopted the technologies for specific learning purposes. In particular, I found an almost complete absence of activity in one specific area of the wikis — in the invitation that a wiki platform allows to add editorial and substantive changes to another's contributions, and to add commentary on others' web pages, even though both of these activities were identified as actively contributing to each student's participation grade.

This apparent disjuncture between expectations of the uses, application, and adoption of online technologies in education has a parallel in the world of politics and democratic representation. Many governments in developed countries have adopted online strategies for citizen access to information, delivery of services, polling of opinion, and grassroots engagement. In part, this can be seen as an exercise in greater efficiency, especially in the provision of largely automated information, effectively outsourcing this aspect of government to technology. But these administrative developments have not necessarily produced a corresponding degree of active engagement in politics[5] nor reduced what some observers describe as a "democratic deficit" (Coleman and Blumler 2009). The parallel here, with the application of information technology to teaching negotiation, is that much of the experience students have of the technology is either as consumers (i.e., users of Google, Wikipedia, and so on), or as informal authors on accessible platforms (e-mail, SMS, Facebook). The experience is, thus, either unidirectional (information comes to the user on demand) or constrained by the user platform.[6]

Stephen Coleman and Jay Blumler (2009: 80) wrote

> Early cyber-democrats predicted that representative institutions would be radically transformed, or would even become obsolete, in the face of the public's capacity to state views and vote on any issue. These visions of the return to the Greek agora or the New England town meeting reflected a combination of overdeterministic reliance on the apparently democratizing features of digital technologies and a naïve belief in the dispensability of representation in a world where the total presence of those who will be affected by decisions is rarely, if ever, possible.

In the setting of the virtual negotiation classroom, at least three things seem to be going on — and again it is worth bearing in mind the spillover implications for the development of online dispute resolution and our assumptions as to its ready acceptability.

First, as indicated in my initial article, using these technologies creates a considerable degree of additional work for both students and instructors. My students, in both the initial and follow-up experiments, commented that they perceived a tangible benefit to the time spent in this out-of-class conversation, but what is not always clear — in a grade-driven environment — is whether the work is actually directly reflected in outcomes. For the instructor, the weekly and sometimes daily blog contributions required more regular attention to student contributions than is typical for normal and scheduled submissions. Equally, the wiki requires frequent observation and, if the learning is to be continuous, comment by the instructor.

Second, my students were confused about the level of formality required — journals are typically less formal than research papers because they are designed to elicit different learning outcomes. But students who also know that what they write counts toward assessment feel uncertain as to whether the instructor really means what he or she says about the more informal style.

At the same time, the wiki is intended as the formal output of the student group research project, and for that reason — and because it is a more public document — it needs to satisfy the normal requirements of style and coherence. Students are perfectly familiar with the informal and often cryptic style of writing involved in e-mail, text messages, and Tweeted communications, but the still informal and personal format of the online blog journal represents a considerable adjustment upward, as does the construction of a research paper online, in full view of others. The particular challenge lies, it seems, in *sustained* writing that is subject to potentially *critical* observation.

Third — and this underpins the two preceding points — a significant problem lies in the fact that social networking is precisely that: social. And for that reason, I encountered a resistance to using the medium in the more formal setting of the online classroom. Because networking is personal, informal, opportunistic, and typically conducted in a truncated form of language, there was not an easy shift to the more structured, reflective, and articulate requirements of the class. As Tony Judt wrote in a recent essay (Judt 2010), "[i]n a world of Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter (not to mention texting), pithy allusion substitutes for exposition. . . . the communicative shorthand of their hardware has begun to seep into communication itself." In particular, shifting from a user to an author of platforms such as wiki, and from the confessional to analytical style required of both online journals and wikis, present challenges. This is not to say that these transitions cannot be made — it is only to say that the transitions require extra attention to how they are implemented and supported.

Discussion

I suggest here two ways of thinking about this second iteration of the blogging experiment, each of which ideally helps indicate ways to more effectively utilize the power of online tools. These two frames are technical and cultural.

First, I consider the technical component. As indicated earlier, my students, like students elsewhere in the developed world, are highly wired and well equipped with the very latest of resources for accessing the Internet and networking sites. The university is also particularly well served by and committed to online technologies. But there remains this disjuncture between accessibility and engagement, between ownership and competence or comfort. On more than one occasion, students expressed surprise that someone as obviously ancient as their instructor should, first, even know about wikis and blogs, and second, insist on using the platforms as this seemed well beyond their practical experience.

One answer to this gap lies in the recent report of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) (2009), which offers several relevant and intriguing conclusions. First, if we consider availability of technology, Singapore ranks first in the more than one hundred fifty countries surveyed in terms of price, and hence availability.[7] Despite relative ease of access in terms of cost, however, Singapore ranks eleventh on access and infrastructure, which includes factors such as "fixed line penetration, mobile cellular penetration, international Internet bandwidth per Internet user, the proportion of households with computers, and the proportion of households with Internet access" (ITU 2009: 35–36). It also ranks fifteenth on the development index (2009: 22), reflecting relative growth in ICT use and infrastructure. But, for our purposes, the interesting figure is that, despite these high rankings in access and development, Singapore and Singaporeans rank only sixty-sixth in terms of skills (2009: 38).

How the ITU and we might read these results from the perspective of policy and infrastructure development goes beyond the scope of this article. But that bare result — the disjuncture between access and skills — seems to reinforce the impression that I and my colleagues have, that possession and consumer use of the tools of information technology do not readily or automatically translate into an intuitive comfort with a more creative or interactive use of the tools. There is no obvious translation of the ownership of and access to technology into a facility with its use, nor is there a ready transition from access as *user* (of, say, Wikipedia) to access as *author*.

If this were merely a question of technical competence, it might be readily overcome. But the second way of thinking about this mode of negotiation pedagogy, the cultural frame, may tell us more than just these bare facts about ITU ranking. Quite apart from — and perhaps more important than — technical competence is the cultural frame that shapes communication styles and preferences. The key issue to consider here, from the rich discussions of culture and communication, is the role of cultural norms — in this case Asian cultural norms — in shaping preferences for risk taking and exposure in communication, especially where there is a combination of cultural conventions on saving face and social norms of restraint in expressing opinions.

Here again I found an interesting duality of responses: on the one hand, my students belong to a lively blogging culture, and as elsewhere, they are fully engaged in the public world of online sites such as Facebook; on the other, they are cautious about self-exposure on class-related versions of similar platforms. This is not as simple as a public–private dichotomy, as the informal world of social networking is anything but private, and indeed commentators lament the loss of those norms of privacy. The challenge lies in the requirements of technical competence just mentioned, a contextual transition from social networking to intellectual inquiry, and a cultural dimension, invoking expectations of and constraints on communication styles. We have also seen a shift from the "push" mode of communication, with messages and updates fired out into networking spaces with no necessary expectation of response, to the "push and pull" implications of blogging and wiki authoring for assessment and critique purposes.

Let us briefly consider two aspects of culture and communication in an attempt to understand why the experiment did not work as well in an Asian setting, although it was not wholly unsuccessful. First, scholars of intercultural communication draw on the distinction between high-context and low-context cultures, and their respective communication styles (Hall 1976). In brief, as a descriptive and analytical tool, the distinction between high- and low-context cultures has the virtue of both simplicity and depth: the intensity and quality of our social relationships will have an impact on our styles of communication. In Donghoon Kim, Yigang Pan, and Heung Soo Park's (1998: 509) terms:

> In [Edward Hall's] view, a high-context (HC) culture is one in which people are deeply involved with each other. As a result of intimate relationships among people, a structure of social hierarchy exists, individual inner feelings are kept under strong self-control, and information is widely shared through simple messages with deep meaning. A low-context (LC) culture is one in which people are highly individualized, somewhat alienated, and fragmented, and there is relatively little involvement with others . . . As a consequence, social hierarchy, as well as society in general, imposes less on individuals' lives, and communication between people is more explicit and nonpersonal. Thus, it appears that the social structure or hierarchy of a culture over a long period of time has a significant impact on whether a culture

is high context or low context. In addition, the dynamics within and the uniqueness of each culture also have strong impacts on its current state.

If we examine this further, it will become apparent that the differences lie not only in terms of those things that can be left unsaid, or the nuances around agreement and disagreement, or of elliptical or direct communication styles. The differences between high- and low-context communications also relate to issues of "face," perceptions of and responses to conflict, responses to authority, the need for approval from others, the capacity of individuals to respond to new situations or to be flexible in familiar settings, the acceptance of responsibility, and the adherence to such values as cooperation, autonomy, compliance, or respect for hierarchy.[8]

Two elements of this communication orientation are relevant here: first, a preference for a more elliptical, indirect style of communication, and second, a preference for avoiding the appearance of confrontation and contradiction in communication.[9] The first aspect contributes to at least a caution in the expression of direct opinion (which is certainly less of an issue in such direct and low-context cultures as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States). The second underpins a student's reluctance to appear to contradict even his or her classmates or to appear argumentative in online group discussions. It can also be linked to the earlier observations that in a more high-context, high-power distance, and hierarchical society, students will tend to question whether they really are being invited to express views openly.

The question needs then to be asked as to whether blogs, as a form of teaching, are more suited to high- or low-context cultures and communication styles. Mediation scholar David Augsburger (1992: 28) wrote: "Individualistic (low-context) cultures prefer directness, specificity, frankness in stating demands, confrontation, and open self-disclosure. Collectivistic (high-context) cultures tend toward indirect, ambiguous, cautious, nonconfrontational, and subtle ways of working through communication and relational tangles." It should hardly be surprising that the same cultural factors that are likely to shape communication preferences in negotiation and mediation will also shape other forms of communication, such as the fairly public form of written submissions through blogs and wikis.

One consequence of having a high-context communication style is a preference for avoiding confrontation. This will have an impact equally on negotiation style and on the comfort levels students will have with requirements such as writing substantive or editorial comments on each other's wiki pages. Whereas the experiment in the New Zealand university setting produced the occasional robust exchanges and an equal willingness to deal with differences both on- and offline, this is clearly less the case in a culture in which there is a marked preference for avoidance of direct confrontation and commentary. This combination of factors means that in high-context cultures (such as China, Korea, Singapore), people appear "more socially oriented, less confrontational, and more complacent with existing ways of living" (Kim, Pan, and Park 1998: 520). By extension, the use of social media for personal — albeit often highly public — communication typically does not involve any direct confrontation and also operates in a world removed from the presence of one significant authority figure: the professor teaching the negotiation class. For that reason, the transition from personal to pedagogical and from informal to analytical seems to represent a larger gap in high-context societies than it would in low-context ones.

The second and related cultural factor that is likely to have an impact on both negotiation and this use of social media in teaching is "face." This subject has been comprehensively examined in literature on cross-cultural communication and needs no detailed discussion here, other than to note that the respect for and protection of face is both a self-regarding and other-regarding stance toward communication. While there can scarcely be a culture in which some form of face saving is not important, in those cultures in which it is more consciously pursued, we usually find a preference for indirect communication. And while course requirements relating to wikis and blogs are not, in themselves, an invitation to confrontation, one can understand that students may prefer to avoid being in a position in which either others can contradict or find error in their work, or they are expected to (appear to) disagree with or correct classmates' work.

In practice, this can also mean that errors are not corrected — other than by the instructor — as to do so would be to openly contradict. It also means that "face" and "facts" sometimes come into conflict, and that the communication tools used to preserve face — indirectness, vagueness — compete directly with the pursuit of facts, and the strategies used to elicit facts can directly confront face (Dozier, Husted, and McMahon 1998). Thus, high-context communication, with its emphasis on respecting face (self and others'), goes beyond being kind or considerate, but is a matter of conflict avoidance and preserving Confucian values of maintenance of harmony.

Conclusion

One practical conclusion of this relocated and repeated experiment is that, while the class and private blogs will be retained, the class wiki — with its apparent challenges of technical facility, public airing of differences, and authorial exposure — will be dropped.[10]

Analytically, my conclusions are the scarcely surprising observations that, in the same way that styles of negotiation do not always travel well, so too assumptions about negotiation pedagogy do not always translate into different cultural and communicative contexts. This does not suggest an insuperable obstacle to using the kinds of teaching tools that are increasingly familiar in a wired university environment; it is merely a recognition that the transition requires adaptation and — because this is a joint learning exercise — some capacity building and adaptation on the part of the students. It also requires, as the ITU report shows, a degree of technical capacity building.

That the responses are not immutable can be seen from work in cross-cultural and comparative cognitive psychology. While researchers such as Richard Nisbett (2003) have illustrated the foundations of differences in culturally shaped perceptions and communication, they have also pointed out that these responses and patterns are not written in stone. Simple experiments in "priming" experimental subjects — by a device as basic as showing the subject the flag of a nation that is known to operate on different communication norms — can invoke changes in the subject's own communication style (Nisbett and Miyamoto 2005).

Here, as in any commentary on ethnic, cultural, and national styles, it remains important to avoid any primordialist conclusions about the fixed nature of ethnicity and cultural imperatives. For that reason, the conclusions reached here can be read as a call to explore ways of redefining the task and teaching delivery rather than as a counsel of despair about the nonportability of teaching tools or about the impossibility of eliciting particular kinds of engagement from categories of students. The technology of social media is now embedded in the lives of our students and, increasingly, in our instructional design. But the apparently common and global platforms of such social media do not necessarily equate with common experience and expertise in their use, and the "social" nature of social media requires a feat of translation to incorporate its effective use into assessable and critical components of teaching.

What is clear, at least from the ongoing discussion board platforms in my current courses, is that students in both negotiation and ethics courses in Singapore have taken to the online interaction with a degree of enthusiasm that matches that of my students in New Zealand. One linguistic device that students use in Singapore — echoing its use in wider social communication — is to preface any comment that might appear contentious or critical with a form of words, such as "if I'm not wrong" or to close with "that's just my opinion." This at least preserves the face and integrity of both the student author and those to whom she or he might be responding. This, of course, is at the level of communication between social equals: it does not translate, by and large, into online interaction between student and instructor. Indeed, with some exceptions, my own interventions on the discussion board tended to be met by polite neglect, as a way of not taking up — or, worse, contesting — the issues that "Prof" has raised.

At first glance, students seemed reluctant to use the tools of social networking for work and assessment purposes. This is understandable to the extent that the appealing informality of social networking requires a considerable adjustment if the same platforms are turned to more intellectual and analytical ends. That this can be done, of course, is perfectly obvious from the range of excellent blogs providing intelligent political, analytical, and social commentary.[11] But it might be a step too far to expect that transition where technical acuity might be challenged, conventions of social networking favor informality, and cultural norms lean in the direction of communicative restraint, and where the communication is not only peer-to-peer but also has a vertical axis involving observation, critique, and evaluation.

NOTES

1. In noting this, I appreciate the helpful comments of the journal's reviewer who rightly pointed out that the sample is an insufficient one from which to draw too large a conclusion.

2. I am grateful to Professor Steven M. Maser of the Atkinson Graduate School of Management, Willamette University, for an ongoing e-mail conversation about his experience in using blogs in his negotiation courses. While some of my observations in this article will dwell on potential cultural barriers to the easy use of social media, Maser's experience also suggests that there are some aspects that cross those divides.

3. This work, in the field of peace and regional conflict, is well advanced. See, for example, the work of Sanjana Hattotuwa on citizen journalism (http://sanjanah.wordpress.com/), and of the Finnish NGO, ICT4Peace (http://www.ict4peace.org/).

4. Ironically, many of them sought to defend their frequent social use of Twitter on the basis that the street protesters in Iran had "saved lives" through tweeting examples of brutality, or that environmental protesters had used Twitter to overcome an injunction placed on news media investigating the "Trafigura" case of waste oil dumping (see, e.g., http://www.politics.co.uk/news/culture-media-and-sport/guardian-gagging-order-sparks-twitter-frenzy-$1333687.htm). So they are well aware of the political potential of social networking tools — but were hesitant to use these tools for course purposes.

5. I note here the exception of an emerging "citizen ethics" groundswell, with a growing online conversation about participation in matters of public concern, especially in the aftermath of the global banking crisis. See http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/series/citizen-ethics and *Citizen Ethics in a Time of Crisis* (the pdf version of the conversation in the previous web link).

6. See Zittrain (2008) on the emergence of "tethered appliances" — the new generation of Internet and computing devices that limit the user's opportunities for software authoring and "tether" the user to the embedded software in the device.

7. Any visitor to Singapore will be only too aware of the almost overwhelming array of technologies available at what appear to be very good prices.

8. While we can broadly say that Western societies fit the low-context model, and Eastern and Asian societies the high-context, this is necessarily subject to variations. For example, at least by way of comparison with North American culture, France can be said to be more of a high-context society: notwithstanding the "fit" with patterns of modern, liberal individualist societies, in terms of *negotiating* style, France is high-context in that there is a marked preference for avoiding the "straight-from-the-shoulder" style of bluntness that often comes with low-context relationships; there is a preference for the more elliptical locution and the careful choice of the "right moment" for an observation or interjection.

9. We may note also, as Hall does, that styles will vary within cultures and between cultures within the same region (e.g., "Asia"); that most families will, whatever their wider context, tend to behave and communicate in high-context ways; that a greater degree of familiarity between parties will similarly produce more high-context communication; and that there will be variations within and between cultures depending on the issues at stake.

10. Professor Maser indicates, for broadly comparable reasons, that he too will drop the wiki from his course at Willamette, although his concern is that there is more gap between private and public blogging than the avoidance of confrontation and preservation of face.

11. On the other hand, Gregory Kalscheur quotes Alan Jacobs's suggestion suggests that: "the architecture of the blog. . . . with its constant emphasis on novelty, militates against leisurely conversations. It is no insult to the recent, but already cherished, institution of the blogosphere to say that blogs cannot do everything well. Right now, and for the foreseeable future, the blogosphere is the friend of information but the enemy of thought." http://reasonableminds.wordpress.com/?s=is+thoughtful+conversation+possible.

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