



Facebook Literacies – an ethnographic study in Hong Kong

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Abstract: The core aim of this research is to explore how the everyday self-generated literacy practices and the interactions of adult volunteers at an aviation-centred uniformed youth group are shaped by new technologies, with a particular focus on a social networking site, Facebook, as the most popular social virtual world in Hong Kong. These adult volunteers are all Cantonese speakers who interact in English as L2 online. The study is grounded in the framework of literacy as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2012) and the community of practice (CoP) learning theory (Wenger, 1998). Taking a CoP perspective, this chapter also views the uniformed group as a community sharing common knowledge, ideas and practices. The research was conducted using a linguistic ethnographic approach. Based on the analysis of multimodal texts on Facebook, interviews and participant observation, this study contributes to the understanding of new practices in social media and other technologies, which will become more prevalent in volunteering environments. The significance of online literacy practices cannot be considered in isolation from their unique sociocultural context.

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Introduction

As Hyland (2007) asserts: "Writing is a social activity" (p. 152). Four adult volunteers who are all knowledgeable Facebook users from an aviation-oriented uniformed youth group, Hong Kong Air Cadet Corps (HKACC) participate in different literacy activities in different ways and on different platforms. On Facebook, the most popular social networking site (SNS) and cloud computing tool (Limbu, 2012) in Hong Kong, frequent interactions and connections between these writers and their viewers in English as their second language are a core component of learning and participation. Adult volunteering can be assumed to be full of self-generating activities, though this is not always the case. As a matter of fact, the HKACC shares many of the features of schools, having curricula, assessments and regulations, and is a small-scale community that has activities imposed based on uniform regulations. "The distance between chevrons and shoulders can be defined and enforced more precisely than the procedures of academic grading or teaching" (Joseph & Alex, 1972, p.724). At the same time, the HKACC, similar to a workplace, has volunteers with long-term commitments "mirroring traditional long-term working relationships between employer and employee in the mainstream remunerated economy" (Lockstone, Binney, Holmes, Smith & Baum, 2010, p.436). It is expected that both workplace-like and school-like literacy practices of the participants can be examined in this unique context. In my study, online culture has gradually become part of the volunteers' language, learning and literacy practices as well as social reality because of the emergence of new modes of textual practice on Facebook. Social media and their associated literacy practices are deeply embedded in these adult volunteers' lives. My two years of research aim to answer the following core research question: What are the Hong Kong adult volunteers' learning and literacy practices on Facebook?

Before examining the literacy practices of uniformed group volunteers in Hong Kong, it is vital to explore the language pattern of this "Two Written Codes, Three Spoken Languages" society. The current multilingual and multicultural characteristics of Hong Kong can be traced back to its complex background and history. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR), before Hong Kong's reunification with Mainland China in 1997, was a colony of the United Kingdom for 99 years. The colonial influence also shaped the language repertoire of Hong Kong after the post-colonial period. Since the "Biliterate and Trilingual Policy" (Tung, 1999, p. 24) first advocated by the SAR government, the common mission of Hong Kong educators has been to raise students' proficiency in two written codes, namely, written Chinese and written English, and three spoken languages, namely, Cantonese, Putonghua and English. This promotion of biliteracy and trilingualism still plays a role in contemporary society. Speaking in Cantonese while writing in English is a typical phenomenon in Hong Kong society.

This paper begins with Barton's (1994) fundamental proposition about literacy as a social practice. In echoing the work of Barton and Hamilton (2012), what I aim to do in this paper is to identify and establish my own theoretical framework for the literacies used in a Hong Kong voluntary uniformed group (UG) as vernacular literacies. Furthermore, building on the groundbreaking work of Lave and Wenger's (1991) articulation of communities of practice (CoP) and extending Barton and Tusting's (2005) understanding of going "beyond communities of practice," my research will draw attention to how the learning and literacy practices of four research participants are shaped by new technologies, with a major focus on Facebook. My argument is that the relatively informal communications on Facebook help to strengthen the solidarity among volunteers. The final step is to discuss the key patterns of how these research participants used Facebook to connect with their volunteer fellows and learn from each other by sharing knowledge, ideas and practices. These four Facebook users also did not have a completely separate cyber realm of new contacts and interests, so some of their social actions are similar between the digital and physical worlds.

Literature Review

New Literacy Studies

In developing the rationale and analytical tools for this research, I have drawn on several strands of research. I approach the phenomenon of volunteers' writing and reading from the perspective of "literacy as social practice" (Street, 1984; Barton, 2007). The study is informed by a broader definition of literacy as a social practice as found within the New Literacy Studies (NLS) (e.g. Barton & Hamilton, 2012). This theory of NLS turns a new page on the definition of "literacies" (Gee, 2004; Street, 2004; Barton, 2007): literacy is neither simply one type of neutral skill nor a progression of technical skills. Rather, literacy is always embedded in a particular cultural context or domain (Fishman, 1972). Language and literacy are not abstract systems but social and cultural practices which are shaped by the people involved and by their relationship to each other.

Barton (1991) argues that "literacy events are the particular activities in which literacy has a role" and "may be regular repeated activities" (p. 5). My findings include both written and spoken events involving texts originated by adult volunteers. All these events are repeated regularly, every month or year, which ultimately constructs the literacy practices of these volunteers. Literacy practices on digital platforms can be quite different from traditional literacy practices by being more "participatory" and less "published", more "collaborative" and less "individuated", and more "distributed" and less "author-centric" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006, p. 9).

Vernacular literacies are a type of writing that is "voluntary", "self-generated" and "everyday" (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). My research narrows the focus of "everyday" life to volunteering life, in which volunteers engage in Facebook

interactions as part of their volunteering life. Their volunteering practices can be analysed in six different categories by adopting the terminology of Barton and Hamilton's (2012) Lancaster study: (1) organizing life; (2) documenting life; (3) personal communication; (4) private leisure; (5) sense making and (6) social participation. This paper will echo this Lancaster study and further explain how these six main areas of vernacular literacies are in response to the voluntary nature of the SNS practices.

In contrast to the Gee's affinity space theory (Gee, 2004), which is about an affinity space referring to a virtual world, such as an online video game portal in which users do not know each other's identity in the physical world, communities of practice (CoP) are more applicable to my research site for two reasons: first, informal learning takes place at the workplace-like institution. Second, knowledge sharing, engagement, participation and practices are involved when a group of people comprising both novices and experts share a common interest. HKACC is full of adult volunteers who have strong and cohesive bonds and relationships in both the real and virtual worlds. Their practices in both worlds shape and complement each other.

Lave and Wenger (1991) propose three central concepts for CoP: "(1) situated learning (the umbrella concept of learning); (2) legitimate peripheral participation (the form that situated learning takes); and (3) communities of practice (the locus or site of learning)" (Hughes, 2007, p. 31). The units of analysis of my research project focus on individual participants' literacy practices and relevant communities of practice, where research participants and other volunteers "interact with each other, getting and giving meaning to signs within it" (Barton & Tusting, 2005, p. 11) and work collaboratively when they meet face-to-face. Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea for a new paradigm of learning is still influential as it helps to illustrate how CoP provide an extra model of learning over and above the formal education context (Hughes, Jewson & Unwin, 2007).

Moreover, drawing upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theoretical concept of situated learning and Wenger's (1998) later follow-up explanation, I argue that HKACC is not just a social network but a community with situated learning and also an online CoP. In this CoP, adult volunteers, regardless of demographic and geographic characteristics, come together, form social relations, and negotiate and sustain all activities. My paper paints a picture of a particular online platform on which there are frequent interactions between these volunteers. This learning community can be analysed in three dimensions:

"Mutual engagement" refers to involvement in a multiplicity of actions, the meanings of which are negotiated among members. "Joint enterprise" is characterized by involvement in a common endeavour, comprising collective processes of negotiated practical action, common accountability and mutual engagement. "Shared repertoire" comprises routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts. (Wenger, 1998, p. 83)

Three dimensions, namely, mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire, categorize my research setting as a community involving the hybrid nature of nonformal education, as well as online literacy practices. I will exemplify each of these criteria in the forthcoming sections. Mutual engagement involves frequent interactions among adult volunteers. Joint enterprise refers to the negotiation processes between them, whereas a shared repertoire includes both linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

Ethnographic Approach

The nature of my project involves “adopting an ethnographic perspective” and “using ethnographic tools” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) to work from participants’ own terms, as well as taking social, cultural, economic and physical factors of the context into consideration to illustrate literacy phenomena in a biliterate and trilingual environment.

My research is an example of “the conjuncture of ethnography and linguistics” (Rampton, Tusting, Maybin, Barwell, Creese & Lytra, 2004), as defined before. To date, the material texts which support participants’ interactions in the social world can be in both paper and digital formats (Tusting, 2013). Though linguistic analysis is not the major focus of my paper, my data illustration part will also concern this aspect.

My virtual ethnographic study adopts ethnographic insights which involve a range of data collection methods including observation (and some participant-observation), interviews and artefacts collection. I also observed the ethics of virtual ethnography by applying an ethnographic approach (Hine, 2008). For instance, I electronically sought informed consent from all four research participants who were Facebook contacts of mine prior to any data collection.

Research methodology

Sampling

To test the theoretical concepts, the essential criteria for the sampling selection were as follows:

1. Writers are aged 21 or over (i.e. adult volunteers) regardless of rank¹
2. Writers whose L1 is Cantonese and L2 is English
3. Writers who are active Facebook users and implicitly treat Facebook as an indispensable part in their repertoire of modes of connection with fellow volunteers

In addition, sampling diversity enabled me to obtain richer data and make meaningful comparisons regarding the participants’ literacy practices due to their different ages, abilities, and educational and occupational backgrounds. All four

¹ Rank is a representation of different levels of seniority in UGs.

research participants were generally classified into two types according to the duration of their service history. Old-timers refers to those members who used to be cadet members and are currently adult members, such as Sam and Chris who are an officer and a non-commissioned officer, respectively, whereas newcomers (or novices) such as Holiday, who underwent basic training, and Jayden who was directly appointed, are those who newly joined the organization as adult members. All of the names used are pseudonyms².

Data Collection, Data Organization and Data Analysis

In order to let instruments and approaches complement one another and combine to address my research question effectively, I aimed to triangulate my data by collecting them in a combination of forms ranging from participant observation, texts and visual data, especially photographs, to the self-reported feelings presented at the semi-structured interviews using audio recording, instead of relying solely on interviews.

Interviews

New data types emerge in the volunteers' online world. To understand how the writers interacted with technologies in the past, what their present practices on Facebook are and how they interact in this social network, I arranged a semi-structured interview with the list of questions shown on Figure 1.1. database for analysis constitutes two major types of data sources. In line with the linguistic ethnographic perspective (Tusting, 2013), the first type of data is linguistic data in the form of participant-generated texts, i.e. Facebook written texts. The other type is researcher-generated ethnographic data in the form of field notes from participant observation, unstructured interviews, and, most importantly, transcripts of semi-structured interviews.

To analyse Facebook data, transcripts, photographs and field notes, I first used the transcription software "Express Scribe." Changing from oral texts to written ones is a "recontextualisation" process of literacy practices. Ethnographic data with their "reminders, quotations and details" can enrich data descriptions and interpretations (Eisner, 1991). For all interviews conducted with adult volunteers in Cantonese and all Facebook posts written in Chinese, the method of naturalized transcription was first applied, and then the content was translated into English by me. Secondly, the software package Atlas.ti (Weitzman, 2003) was used to code and retrieve linguistic data about Facebook data as first-person narratives illustrating participants' literacy practices and experiences in the community service context as a social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2012). Thirdly, after the coding process, I conducted a thematic

² A consent form was used for both online and offline data collection. Pseudonyms for names and squadron number to guarantee the anonymity of all participants.

analysis (Joffe, 2012) to identify themes in order to examine how participants' literacy practices and their learning trajectories differ from each other.

Fig. 1.1 Interview Guide

Part 1 – Current practices

1. How often do you post or share images and/or videos related to our Corps on Facebook?
2. Do you enjoy posting Corps-related messages on Facebook? Why?
3. Do you like writing comments about your Corps-related photos?
4. How often do you comment on the messages of other volunteers on Facebook?
5. In general, do you enjoy making comments on Facebook? Why?
6. Which languages do you prefer to use on Facebook? Why?

Part 2 – Social network and interaction

1. How do you choose your 'friends' on Facebook in terms of i) accepting friend requests and ii) initiating friend requests?
2. What proportion of your Facebook 'friends' are Corps members (i.e. fellow volunteers)?
3. Do you get to know more about Corps members on Facebook in terms of both quantity and quality?
4. What do you think about the relationship between Facebook and mutual communication between Corps members?

Findings and Discussion

In the following sections, I will exemplify how the CoP's three interrelating claims applied to the HKACC context through the six notions of literacy practices of Barton and Hamilton (2012). First, HKACC adult volunteers have established norms and collaborative partnerships, which is mutual engagement. Secondly, they share goals and milestones as well as a shared understanding of regulations, which is a joint enterprise. Thirdly, the organization has a shared repertoire by having its own communal resources. Expressing one's viewpoint on Facebook cannot be "context-less" (Blommaert, 2006) nor a simple transfer of skills, but rather a social practice, shaped by adult leaders' own personal, cultural and social factors. Drawing on Barton and Hamilton (2012), I classify literacy practices, with a prime focus on the Facebook world, into six main types in terms of their literacy content. These adult volunteers take up "new opportunities on the Internet" (Barton, 2010) and participate in ESL writing practices associated with Facebook.

Organizing Life

Writing and technology are inseparable companions for writers (Hyland, 2007), including some of our adult volunteers who pursue a vocational education program in our organization. On the one hand, volunteers were similar to those Lancastrians who got used to preparing lists, writing diaries to keep their records, and having their own financial management mechanisms in their daily life, as mentioned by Barton and Hamilton (2012) with their paper-based literacies. On the other hand, the meaning of vernacular literacies had to be redefined because of the emergence of technology in their lives (Barton & Lee, 2012). In my research, that includes computers, the internet and Facebook. Our volunteers used literacy to deal with application and assignment submission activities, which were both digitally mediated. For instance, Chris first received a memo with appendices from the Officer Commanding Vocational Qualifications Unit (I have dual roles as a researcher and the officer in-charge) via the HKACC Headquarters' electronic mailing list. Then, he glanced through all the files online but decided to download an application form, print it out and complete it. He attempted to send his completed application form to his Major Unit Commander (Cdr) for endorsement by email, but in vain, so he decided to give the original to his commander at the next meeting. Since the CVQO only accepts electronic applications, Chris had to scan the completed form before sending it by email. During the assignment writing process, Chris also had to word-process a file and look for relevant email correspondence in his inbox. If he had any queries about the VQ program he was encouraged to contact me either offline (when I met him at any Corps event or social gatherings) or online (send me either emails or instant messages through Facebook's chat function if he wanted a faster response).

Facebook is intrinsic to the volunteers' everyday life. Vernacular practices become more valued socially on this platform, which is full of social interaction, in contrast to the traditional emphasis on dominant practices in education and other institutions (Barton & Lee, 2012). Routine message-posting activities on Facebook involve literacy. For example, Holiday types her posts about her squadron activities on a regular basis, as well as other parts of her HKACC life. All of these activities are related to the chores in her volunteering life, which are all generated by her volunteering practices. Her posts receive comments from fellow volunteers in other squadrons, as well as from other volunteers in other UGs or even from the UK. Thus, local posts can lead to international exchanges in the Facebook world.

Recording details of routine appointments and important events within the organization is a notable example of demonstrating how our participants organize their life with a particular focus on the volunteering aspect. Based on my participant observation, though all four participants are digitally literate volunteers, Sam, Holiday and Chris still rely on paper calendars, while Jayden, in spite of his extra years, is used to using the calendar function as well as other functions on his smartphone. For example, Figure 1.2 shows the paper appointment diaries used by Sam, Holiday and Chris to list major events and activities conducted in their unit or group during the periods 2011–2014, 2008–2009 and 2012–2014, respectively.

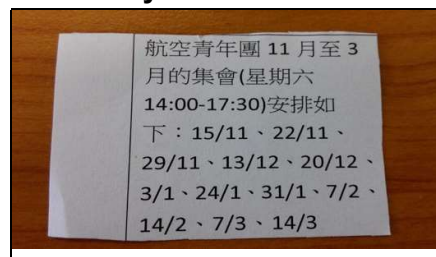
Fig. 1.2 Paper appointment diaries belonging to Sam (left), Holiday (middle) and Chris (right)



Holiday has been using pocket-sized appointment diaries for a long time, and she is able to carry one to her squadron and indicate clearly whether a particular routine meeting is a “closed meeting” (i.e. cancelled) or not. Coincidentally, the A5-sized appointment diaries of both Sam and Chris are provided by the Hong Kong Government to employees on a free-of-charge basis. Interestingly, Sam likes stapling his own HKACC name card onto the front cover of each calendar to make it more personalized and “professional” (Sam, *unstructured interview*, 2014). There is a common practice and a common goal to create a professional identity among all HKACC volunteers. When Sam was asked why he did not intend to shift from a paper to a digital calendar, such as the calendar function on his smartphone, his immediate response was “it [using paper appointment diaries] is my habit” (Sam, personal communication, 2014). Organizing life through print-based calendars is a typical common practice.

Holiday seems to be the only one among the writers who has more diversified strategies for organizing her volunteering life. As well as a paper format, Holiday is used to recording her Air Cadets-related activities in the calendar function of her smartphone (Figure 1.3). On top of this, to remind herself of key dates of routine meetings, she also prepares slips of paper and keeps one in her purse. An example is shown in Figure 1.4: all the dates shown are for routine meetings of her squadron from November 2013 to March 2014. Information about the timeslots of routine meetings is skipped on this paper reminder, since from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm every Saturday³ is a common practice for Holiday and her cadet members. Holiday likes to keep all three types of schedules in different locations: a paper reminder in her purse for quick reference, a paper appointment diary at home and a digital appointment diary which is portable. As such, print-based and digital practices overlap and do not directly duplicate each other.

³ In general, a great majority of the cadet squadrons hold their weekly routine meetings on Saturdays from 1 pm to 5 pm, or sometimes to 6pm, which tends to be a norm in the HKACC, whereas a few squadrons have weekly training on a Saturday or Sunday morning due to school availability or students’s needs.

Fig. 1.3 Holiday's Digital Appointment Diary**Fig. 1.4 Paper Reminder of Holiday**

Documenting Life

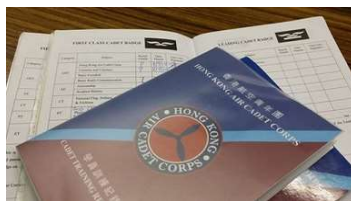
Facebook itself is a notable example of documenting volunteers' lives as written life histories in the digital domain. Facebook becomes a virtual community with a majority of HKACC members who post messages on their own timelines detailing their life in words, images and other types of files, though writing is still a core aspect. Facebook documents participants' lives from the past to the present. As Barton and Hamilton (2012) mentions, in addition to keeping texts, people in Lancaster kept images, some of the documents they kept could be long-lasting across generations, and some of the elderly also generated life histories.

While the volunteers documented life online through writing to each other, they also documented life offline with representing facets of offline, analog texts. Facebook itself is an online social media but the texts and images recorded by Facebook can be offline representation. For instance, in Data extract 1.1, Holiday successfully cultivated a sense of satisfaction through recording her cadet achievements in a Cadet Training Record Book (CTRB). A CTRB is like a handbook to record the details of individual cadets' results in all their continuous assessments, promotions and community service. All records have to be endorsed by their officers or projects-in-charge. According to the First Class Cadet Training Manual, "The Cadet Training Record Book is presented to a cadet at the time of his/her enrollment and it maintains a record of all the activities a cadet participated in, such as training, examinations passed and community services achieved" (Hong Kong Air Cadet Corps, 2015).

Data extract 1.1 Documenting Life with a CTRB12 October 2013

As a ma'am, the happiest moment is to sign my name in the CTRBs for endorsement after my cadets passed their exams. When their CTRBs are full of [our] signatures, I am really satisfied.

^O^



29 like this.

(Holiday, Facebook post, 2013)

The Facebook users in my research like keeping photos as a record of their lives. Participating in current activities can trigger one's memories of past activities. Memory retrieval is a common practice in Facebook timelines. For instance, as shown in Data extract 1.2, due to his current paid job's duties, Chris managed to revisit a place in which he took on the duty of a local escort in the IACE when he was in his cadet period.

Data extract 1.2 The retrieval of events or information from the past15 May 2014

When I was a local escort for IACE at the age of 17, I was swimming with the overseas cadets at this swimming pool at the Gordon Hard Camp. I am not sure if I still have any chance to revisit old places. Today I managed to revisit this old place because of work.



26 like this.

Chris: Were you, you and you there once upon a time?

Volunteer 1: Bo Lung?

Chris: The riverside opposite Bo Lung.

Volunteer 2: Sailing at the Gordon Hard Camp (Rigid Raider4)...

Chris: Going to the Bo Lung Hill by Wessex then walking down the hill.

⁴ The Rigid Raider is a fast patrol craft which is common in military forces.

Volunteer 3: Is it permitted to enter (now)?

Chris: (No. I am only permitted to enter the venue) simply because of work.

Volunteer 4: Chris Sir wanna “reswim” here?

Chris: I already “reswim” here, so there is no need to “reswim”.

(Chris, Facebook post, 2014)

Having artful or creative dialogues on Facebook is another common practice among the virtual CoP. In the above Data extract 1.2, Chris and another volunteer make a joke by using two ambiguous words in Cantonese. In Cantonese, the pronunciations of the words “swim” and “visit” are the same but their meanings are different, as they are homophones. This pun is a form of word play representing humour (Swann, 2006). The superficial meaning of the question is whether Chris wants to “reswim” in this swimming pool, but its underlying meaning is whether Chris wants to revisit this place. The online interaction strengthens the offline relationship between volunteers, which may enhance their engagement with the community as a whole.

Another example showing life history is Sam Tong’s case (see Data extract 1.3). Sam’s female volunteer friend (Volunteer 5) posted an old newspaper article with their images during the cadet training period entitled “Students can be pilots!” on her timeline. Among the HKACC community, there is always a rumour that members who come from 123 Squadron (Sqn) can gain weight very easily and Sam Tong is regarded as a “leader.” The Facebook post recalled their childhood memories and their longlasting friendship.

Data extract 1.3 Informality and humour through Facebook interactions

27 March 2014

Volunteer 1: U [You] still keep it!!!

Sam: We are still young...

Volunteer 2: What? Training Camp can [let members] lose weight?

Volunteer 3: You have to ask CHAN Tai Man (another volunteer friend) then.

Sam: 123 Club.

Volunteer 4: Sam ... Form 7...

Volunteer 5: Sam Tong ... he is a such a great leader [in gaining weight] ... hoho...
(Sam, Facebook post, 2014)

Among all the research participants, Holiday is the one who frequently posts multimodal messages and updates. For example, Holiday combined text with an emoticon and an image in the same post when she wanted to express her feeling of achievement with her teammates in the Annual Footdrill Competition, namely, the Albatross Award (shown in Data extract 1.4).

Data extract 1.4 Multimodal update on Facebook

6 December 2009

Yeah! We are the best 456 [Squadron]⁵!



456! Eventually we have a chance to win in the Albatross Award. Thank you for xxx everybody's effort ☺ How touching!

(Holiday, Facebook post, 2009)

My research participants' timelines become techno-biographies (Lee, 2014, p. 94) with their frequent inputs, they are like diaries with posts about their own feelings and photographs. Since 2013, Facebook has created a special slideshow to review users' highlights from the past year. In each slideshow, those photographs with the largest numbers of "likes" are included. Their Facebook timelines are technology-related life histories. "By life history we mean the lived through life; by life story we mean the narrated life as related in a conversation or written in an actual present-time" (Rosenthal, 1993, p.1). In short, their Facebook timelines are "a life story in relation to technologies" (Lee, 2014, p.94).

Personal Communication

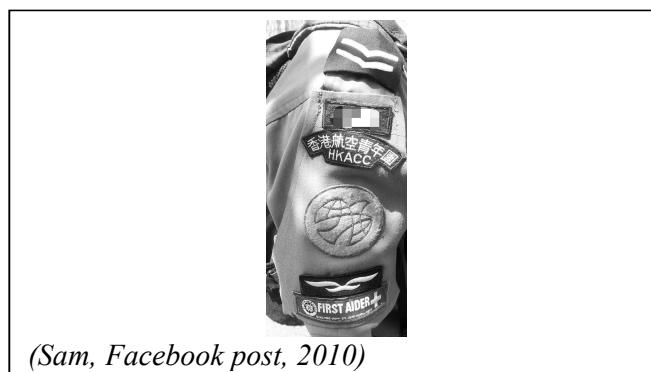
In the digital era, participating in Facebook is voluntary and forms part of the adult volunteers' volunteering life. Apart from face-to-face interaction and communication, Facebook becomes an alternative platform for personal communication within the HKACC community in which traditional types of texts such as letters have been

⁵ It is a common practice to mention the squadron number only, instead of the squadron number plus the word 'squadron', within the HKACC.

phased out (cf. Barton & Hamilton, 2012). On the one hand, virtual Facebook serves as an extension of their real volunteering life, supporting interactive dialogue and strengthening the already-established social network. On the other hand, generally, volunteers who have joined my research study also continued their interactions and discussions from the virtual world in the real world.

Based on my participant observation, my research participants have been frequently sharing useful information with fellow officers through other electronic means, like Facebook. The following example comes from one of the images on Sam's Facebook page, as shown in Data extract 1.5 (The whole image has been modified to maintain the anonymity of the cadet member; for example, the Sqn number is blurred, the rank slide is amended and a photograph is used to replace the original image, which is a painting). I took the image as intended to convey the sense of achievement of a cadet member who underwent training conducted by Sam before. This cadet expressed that he was proud of his acting appointment in a parade even though the duration was only 24 hours. The armlet in the middle of the image is the core part showing a cadet's classification, badges such as AYP and other achievements, e.g. First Aider Badge. Each small photo and each piece of writing involve a tag (he tagged his officers and other cadet members who went through tough training activities with him for years). Underneath this photo, Sam gave a "like" to show his support for the cadet.

Data extract 1.5 A cadet's Multimodal Image



Language Choices and Formal & Informal Literacy Practices

Facebook users can freely decide which language they want to use on Facebook. All they have to do is to click on the "language tab" on the "accounts page" and select their preferred language out of the 84 available from a drop-down menu. In Hong Kong, the dominant languages used by Facebook users are English and Chinese (including Cantonese and Putonghua).

My research participants from the aviation youth group had different preferences for the languages they prefer to use on the SNS. The participants were asked to

explain when they generally chose a particular language in the second semi-structured interviews. Chris said Chinese was his favourite simply because it is his “mother tongue.” Holiday preferred using two languages, depending on the situation: “Depending on which language they (cadets) use first. If they use English first, then I continue to use English. If they use Chinese first, then I use Chinese” (Holiday, personal communication, 2014). On the other hand, both Jayden and Sam felt that using English was their favourite, but their reasons for language choice were slightly different. Jayden explained that he felt more comfortable when he wrote in English than Chinese, because his Chinese vocabulary proficiency was not good enough: “Using English is more accurate than Chinese since there are some Cantonese slangs I don’t know how to write” (Jayden, personal communication, 2014). Sam opted for English when he was asked to decide his preferred language for writing due to a lack of competency in typing Chinese (see Data extract 1.6 below). Writing (typing) in the English alphabet is easier for him.

Data extract 1.6 Sam: English is “easier for input”

Winnie (the researcher): Which languages do you prefer to use on Facebook? Why?

Sam: English.

Winnie: Why?

Sam: Easier for input, because my Chinese character input skill is...

NOTE: Sam is smiling. I have observed his poor Chinese input method. He has to use the handwriting function of the computer.

Winnie: No other reasons?

NOTE: Sam is shaking his head.

(Sam, field note and semi-structured interview, 2014)

Facebook use also involves a combination of formal and informal literacies depending on participants’ preferences and situation. Chris has long been delineated as a “serious” trainer, but he can look very different in the Facebook world. For instance, when Chris talked about the Albatross Award that he was responsible for, he spoke in a more serious tone, the same as his normal image in the real world (in Data extract 1.7). However, on another occasion, when Chris interacted with another volunteer on a more casual topic: “Birthday”, his words became more relaxed and less formal.

Data extract 1.7 Chris’s Formal and Informal Literacies

(Example of Formal Literacies)

2 December 2012

Volunteer 1: Today thank you so much for your big help!

Chris: In fact, lots of errors due to my lack of preparation [There is still a lot of room for improvement]. [I hope that] we can cooperate happily.

Volunteer 1: In the past, I rarely organized this type of event. This time [errors] was due to my lack of preparation actually. Thank you for your reminders and paying close attention to details throughout the preparation journey!

Chris: Likewise.

Chris: Let us encourage each other in our endeavours.

(Chris, Facebook post, 2012)

(Example of Informal Literacies)

2 February 2013

Volunteer 1: Happy Birthday!

Chris: thnak [thank] you sir. Don't believe FB so much.

Volunteer 1: !!

Chris: Feb 2nd may not be the truth. Hahaha...

Volunteer 1: ooopppsss ... !!!!

(Chris, Facebook post, 2013)

Another example to illustrate informal literacy comes from Jayden's timeline. Jayden generally projected a good image as a friendly and approachable trainer. So it was no surprise to see an informal Facebook "conversation" between Jayden and a cadet member who was well acquainted with Jayden and who cracked a joke about Jayden's picture (see Data extract 1.8).

Data extract 1.8 Jayden's Informal Literacy with fellow members

7 June 2008

[an image of Jayden standing beside a helicopter]

Volunteer 1: WOW~How stylish ... the helicopter XP

Jayden: WOW~Yeah ... How stylish ... I thought you talked about the manbut the helicopter. The helicopter is more important than me!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Volunteer 1: HAHAAHAHA ^v^ Don't be angry la, I know Jayden Sir is not that stingy ... hehe~

Volunteer 2: ah sir is stylish!

Jayden: Ah, no wonder why you are my good colleague, good brother.

Volunteer 3: Wah Ha Ha Ha~~~both the man and the helicopter are stylish!!!!
(Jayden, Facebook post, 2008)

Private Leisure

Individual writers' Facebook pages, as portrayed in the previous sections, are like databases of private leisure activities. The same as Barton and Hamilton's (2012) findings, private leisure can appear in public spaces. Some of the volunteering literacy practices can be classified as either self-generated or imposed, or labelled as either Air Cadets-related or beyond the scope of the Air Cadets. To illustrate how volunteers write for themselves and for others as private leisure, one well-known example that prompts controversy among the HKACC community but was not initially generated by any of its members was the Ice Bucket Challenge in 2014. This was a popular charity activity involving dumping a bucket of ice water on someone's head with the aim to raise the awareness of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). As Vaidya (2014) said, "...a social media phenomenon known as the Ice Bucket Challenge had raised more than \$100 million toward solutions and increased awareness for this progressive and fatal neuromuscular disease that affects about 5 in every 100,000 people worldwide". Thanks to social media, people including our volunteers, like tagging their friends to participate in order to mobilize their friends to make a donation. Such fundraising activity was increasingly popular from June to August 2014. Jayden personally enjoyed commenting on fellow members' Facebook posts, especially those posts related to this campaign. He said, "[Commenting on] Facebook is ok. Nowadays there are videos apart from images, so we can watch Youtube videos too. Recently dumping ice ... that Ice Bucket Campaign is common, little Sussie [a junior officer who is the mutual friend of Jayden and me] has done so too. I have seen this on Facebook. I have commented on their posts" (Jayden, semi-structured interview, 2014).

Lurking on Facebook, as Jayden calls it, becomes his private leisure. The traditional meaning of lurking on Facebook refers to the great amount of time one can spend on reading, observing or browsing information on the SNS without any involvement (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert, 2009). However, Jayden has a greater level of involvement as he likes beautiful pictures and comments on posts created by people whom he contacts from time to time. This is a case of the distinction between a self-reported account (emic) and my analysis and interpretation (etic).

On the other hand, among the research participants, Jayden was the only one who drew a sharp distinction between his reactions to positive and negative

comments. During the interview, Jayden asked me if I knew some officers who were our mutual friends and became Cadet Pilots. I managed to see the updates on Jayden as well as on those future captains whom I knew through their online conversations on Jayden's posts, along with positive comments on those Cadet Pilots' achievements. The same as his face-to-face interactions with fellow Corps members, Jayden encouraged positive interactions online. He appreciated posting positive comments online but tried to avoid critical comments to minimize the possibility of irrational discussions, confrontations or the possibility of being attacked. He mentioned that "negative comments are only limited to issues such as Occupy Central and student strike though I don't want to talk about these issues [on Facebook] that often. Some [Facebook] people are very crazy. If you mention something which is not their cup of tea, they investigate your background, attack you and make troubles" (Jayden, personal communication, 2014). Jayden's viewpoint was largely affected by Occupy Central, which is a civil disobedience movement initiated by a group of Hong Kong scholars and students in September 2014. After all the controversial debates and arguments between both supportive and opposition parties, Jayden explained how some people who supported Occupy Central tended to go to extremes, which he perceived as wrong. So he perceived criticism as negative and tried to block any extreme friends online.

Similarly, Holiday also enjoyed providing encouraging feedback on her HKACC friends' Facebook posts. The only difference is that Holiday paid more attention to her cadets' Facebook pages. For Holiday, having a deeper understanding of her cadets' online practices and showing her support for her cadets' Facebook writing is her private activity. Holiday likes being involved in her cadets' social circles, contributing to their discussions and is willing to make donations in order to support her cadets' kindness shown to those who are in need in society, e.g., those who suffer from ALS in the campaign. Holiday notes that "I have to know what happens to them. They are the kind of people who even like posting dumping ice buckets. Haha! They tag Robert (a cadet) [for the challenge] then he has to donate money. I must support" (Holiday, personal communication, 2014).

Interestingly, Chris's self-reported account differed from his digital practice. Chris claimed he was less willing to comment on Facebook because of time constraints. Chris felt time was precious. He did not like the idea of commenting on Facebook because "it will spend a lot of time to write and respond" (Chris, personal communication, 2014). However, the Facebook screenshots I collected show that he was very active in commenting on others' posts.

Sense Making

Adult volunteers in my research are like local experts who carry out their own research in the community, the same as people who are experts in the Lancaster community (as identified by Barton & Hamilton, 2012). On the one hand, adult volunteers bring their professions into the volunteering world. Notable examples include Jayden from

aviation, Holiday from IT, and Chris and Sam from discipline training. They read booklets about particular areas like legal entitlement, health and religion. On the other hand, all these professionals never stop learning and pursue continuing education in the volunteering domain. For example, Holiday engaged in expedition training activities with reference to AYP guidelines, as examined previously, whereas Sam drew on and created new vernacular knowledge by referring to the General Guidelines for Conducting Training Activities issued by the Training Group, as seen in Data extract 1.9. He kept an eye on the temperatures reported by the Observatory regularly and monitored members' health whenever there were any outdoor activities such as hiking.

Data extract 1.9 Sam: "I have asked my training staff to observe the Guidelines strictly"

As we all know, the weather of Hong Kong is hot and humid. Also, Hong Kong is often affected by typhoon and rain storms during summer times. Thus, my squadron, which often arranges footdrill training in open area, needs to take upmost care of the arrangement of training activities under adverse weather for ensuring the safety of all squadron personnel.

The Training Group of the Corps has published the "General Guidelines for Conducting Training Activities" (please see Annex F), which stated the arrangement of training activities under adverse weather. I have asked my training staff to observe the Guidelines strictly. Also, special attention is paid to 'Heat Exhaustion'.

My staffs are asked, during any training session, to be aware of the likelihood of the participating cadets to suffer from heat exhaustion if the outside temperature is over 30°C. All outdoor activities should also be halted if the temperature is over 33°C.

All in all, my staffs are kept on reminding by me to consider the comfort of the cadets during any training. Periods of instruction should be short enough to avoid the instructor or cadets from becoming over tired (usually giving rest in every 30 to 45 minutes). The training staffs are also required to ensure the cadets can have adequate supply of water at the training venue.

(Sam, Reflective report, 2010)

Twenty years ago, there was a traditional culture of overreliance on textbooks as the main teaching and learning resources in the field of education in Hong Kong. The transformation from textbooks to diversified learning resources was a drastic change in the field of education and training (Rennie & Morrison, 2013). Volunteers nowadays, as members of the digital generation, have a strong need to acquire "the abilities to 'read' a range of printed, electronic and visual texts; master the new communication technologies via spoken and written language; locate, manage, evaluate and use information or knowledge; and engage critically with media and other

texts” (Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004, p. 32). More opportunities via communication technologies put more demands on volunteers’ literacies.

Using a search engine has become a common trend in the Web 2.0 world. For example, visiting the Hong Kong Observatory’s website to check the weather forecast (Data extract 2.0) and referring to “General Guidelines for Conducting Training Activities” issued by the Skills Development Wing of Training Group is a common practice of project officers, including Holiday.

Data extract 2.0 Holiday “[I] hope the Observatory’s weather forecast is accurate this time”

23 April 2012

The weather forecast shows it keeps raining throughout the week, which makes me feel worried indeed! The Squadron Camp is approaching soon!

2 May 2012

[I] hope this Saturday and Sunday can be sunny. [I] hope the Observatory’s weather forecast is accurate this time.



(Holiday, Facebook post, 2012)

Facebook is also like a communal database full of experts from different disciplines. As well as using search engines, Facebook users in my research can look for solutions to problems with the help of fellow volunteers within their social networks. Because of such networks for support, the nickname “Facebook God” emerged in recent years. Posting problems on volunteers’ own timelines can elicit responses within a short timeframe. For instance, in Data extract 2.1, Holiday expressed her concern over the difficulty in arranging a One Day Refresher Course (ODRC) organized by Hong Kong St. John Ambulance for valid First Aid Certificate holders on any Sunday. She intended to ask for a solution because of her unavailability on Saturdays. Other volunteers who were more familiar with First Aid Courses gave her some suggestions after reading her puzzled message.

Data extract 2.1 Holiday's call for solutions to her problem

30 November 2014

Just realized the First Aid card is expiring soon. No st john one-day refresher course on Sunday. What should I do!

Volunteer 1: Self-study, or making use of the chance to organize a EFA course for doing some practice XD

Volunteer 2: Red Cross refresh

Holiday: Thanks for everyone's concern: If there is no st john one-day refresher course, then self-study is useless.

Volunteer 1: Candidate holding an expired First Aid Certificate not more than 6 months can apply for the ODRC course

Volunteer 1: http://www.stjohn.org.hk/b5/fa_c_ODRC.shtml
(Holiday, Facebook post, 2014)

So, the sense making process involves one's assessing information and problem solving utilizing their own knowledge, expertise and external resources around them within the community.

Social Participation

Volunteering within HKACC is a form of social participation which involves diversified types of activities, as in Barton and Hamilton (2012). Many of the interviewees were active in political organizations, had a sense of group membership and made demands of the government. This kind of voluntary organization acts "as a bridge between informal networks and official organizations" (Barton & Hamilton, 2012, p.208). HKACC members' social participation on Facebook can be portrayed in terms of reading and writing themselves, and reading and writing with images and videos. This subsection explains the use of text and visual literacies in social participation in the virtual community.

Reading and Writing in Social Participation on Facebook

Attending meetings regularly and participating in unit activities are two major highlights of the social participation of Air Cadets' members. These volunteers also engaged in a certain amount of reading and writing related to the organization on the popular SNS in different ways. For example, Sam reported that 80% of his Facebook posts were related to HKACC. He treated Facebook as an alternative platform for broadcasting

messages to other members: "I like doing so since many people have the same platform as me, which means it is easier to spread my messages around" (Sam, personal communication, 2014).

Though the other three writers said they made relatively fewer relevant posts, they were still active in posting and replying to messages. Chris regarded posting messages on Facebook as a method of "chatting" (Chris, personal communication, 2014). Holiday reported that approximately one third or one quarter of her posts were relevant to her life and her cadets in HKACC. Holiday enjoyed interacting with her cadets on Facebook. For her, "I think 30–40% [of my posts] are related to ACC since my cadets have Facebook. I have added them. They said, "Ma'am, I have done this. I have gone out to do a service (community service). I have met this batch of friends ... or a new one (boyfriend or girlfriend)". Meeting a girlfriend is something I must know for sure. Haha" (Holiday, personal communication, 2014). Holiday is like a chaperone for the teenagers in her unit since she cares about her cadet's training activities, and also the cadets' psychological and social development.

The amount of time spent on reading and writing may vary. Chris's preference was to have more reading than writing: "on the average an hour a day" (Chris, personal communication, 2014). Jayden also preferred reading, which is the reason why he managed to spot his own images on many HKACC project banners. Jayden admitted he still commented on fellow members' posts depending on the type of activity, such as those activities organized by me as a researcher with the aim to give spiritual support to me. For example, Jayden mentioned that "I have seen [posts about] Commandant's Award and CVQO activities are those that I have read. I did comment on these activities" (Jayden, personal communication, 2014)!

Through Jayden's Facebook posts, his dedication to HKACC can be demonstrated since he has made use of his own personal platform to call for donations and helpers who are the general public. For example, Data extract 2.2 shows that he tried his best to recruit his friends as supporters or donors for the annual fundraising campaign on Facebook, despite his job demands at the airport at the same time. This fundraising campaign is called Flag Day and is approved by the Hong Kong government. On HKACC Flag Day, most HKACC members and other volunteers serve as volunteers, carrying bags and flags (Corps logo stickers) to collect money from passersby.

Data extract 2.2 Jayden: "Please support HKACC flag day, Thanks"

15 June 2012

Jayden: Please support HKACC flag day, Thanks
13 like this.

Volunteer 1: Will you attend? If yes, see you in Central.

Volunteer 2: Please come to Aberdeen to support us!

Friend 1: HK island?

Friend 2: when is it?

Volunteer 2: Tmr morning...

Friend 3: Wait for me. I am on the way.

Jayden: All HKACC Colleagues, bon courage. I am working hard at the airport.

Friend 4: well done, bon courage.

(Jayden, Facebook post, 2012)

4.6.2 Sharing Images about Social Participation on Facebook

All writers are experienced in sharing images to show their social participation on Facebook. With Facebook data for the period of 2007–2014, all four writers were quite active in terms of reading and writing and including images about the Corps. For instance, among all the images shared by Jayden on Facebook, the majority of them related to training activities or flying activities he organized regularly. For example, an aviation trainer made a paper glider with his partner at the end of a lesson and uploaded a photo onto his Facebook timeline, which attracted feedback from other aviation enthusiasts (see Data extract 2.3).

Data extract 2.3 Jayden shared an image of a paper glider

6 August 2012

Air surfing glider



13 like this.

Volunteer 1: brilliant~ when will the course commence?

Jayden: Very soon. Very soon. It will be around September to October this year!

There are also regular posts with images about both Corps-level and Sqn-level activities that show the writers' attention to and enthusiasm for Corps affairs. For example, Jayden left a comment on a group photo taken at the end of a large-scale outdoor competition at Corps-level, it was "the moment of happiness, cool ... and cold" (Jayden, Facebook post, 2010). That competition involved the coordination and effort of over a hundred members. A group photo successfully captured the team spirit in a strong wind and chilly weather. On the other hand, at the Sqn-level, Holiday always

does something extra on top of her “mandatory” volunteer duties as an OC Sqn, as can be seen from her frequent posting or sharing of images related to her feelings, attitudes, and unit activities on a weekly basis. According to Holiday, she is the one who holds the camera normally since cadets have to do footdrill practice: “Photos must be uploaded after each meeting based on cadets’ request. ‘Ma’am, when will you post them (photos) on Facebook?’. Once per week since I attend squadron meetings once per week. After each meeting, photos are uploaded [onto our Facebook]” (Holiday, personal communication, 2014).

Data extract 2.4 Examples of Holiday’s weekly posts with images

18 October 2014

Today I can see my Cadets – 😊 feeling excited.
13 like this.

18 October 2014

PT section (i.e. session)@20141018 – someone who was overconfident challenged Ah Fai



11 like this.

Among all the Corps-related photos on her Facebook timeline, Holiday had a literacy choice. Her willingness to add comments or captions to photos about HKACC depends on whether the owners of the photos are nodding or casual acquaintances and whether she feels the need to support a particular event. Holiday likes writing things about Corps-related photos for those members with whom she is more familiar. But sometimes, depending on whether those events need her support, for example, she must write for those events organized by me (Holiday, personal communication, 2014).

The above dialogue also indicates the rapport established between me as the researcher and those researched. I am always aware of my position in the organization. The dialogue between Holiday and me shows some essence of the rapport: friendship, honesty and trust (Springwood & King, 2001). Holiday had already offered support and assistance to me, both mentally and physically, even before she joined my research as a participant and collaborator. Her above claim about the willingness to write depends on the familiarity level of HKACC friends, as demonstrated in Data extract 2.5. After she posted a photograph about Donald, her former coursemate in the OCTC, she showed her concern for this fellow who lost his voice at the end of the Annual Parade.

Data extract 2.5 Holiday's practice to write about those friends whom she is more familiar with

26 November 2007

Holiday: Today Donald Sir had to give commands, so had lost his voice. Take care!

Volunteer 1: Take care ... He is sick whenever there is a parade ... get well soon!

Volunteer 2: It seems to be true.....Donald, next time please drink Chinese herbal tea before you go to PARADE GROUND!

(Holiday, Facebook post, 2007)

Another notable example to illustrate the influence of social participation on Facebook literacy practices is the HKACC Flag Selling Day, an annual fundraising campaign held on 26 October 2013. Thanks to the positive impact of a television series about pilots and other aviation professionals entitled “Triumph in the Skies II,” HKACC became a popular topic in the city in 2013. Hence, a television station sent a crew to interview four of our adult and cadet members as representatives. The Administrator of the HKACC Facebook page realised that fellow members might have missed the chance to watch a TV show entitled “The Green Room,” because it was broadcast in the afternoon on a weekday, which was within volunteers’ office hours, so he decided to take screenshots and upload Data extract 2.6 to his Facebook page for promotion and information sharing. Sam first clicked the “Like” button then shared the images to his own page to show his support for the organization virtually, in addition to his physical support on Flag Day. In addition, Sam enjoyed sharing images taken at “major events such as Annual Parade or functions of my own unit more often” (Sam, personal communication, 2014).

Data extract 2.6 Screenshots of Interviews in “The Green Room” on TV



Non-existence of the Chain of Command

On the other hand, the emergence of Facebook communication has significantly reshaped the communication methods of HKACC members. “Chain of Command” has long been the core spirit of our “Customs and Courtesies” training curriculum. All members, no matter whether they are cadet or adult members, have long been trained to report issues, problems or even complaints to their immediate supervisors, and nobody is supposed to break this rule. For example, when an issue or problem arises, a training officer in the squadron is supposed to report to his or her immediate supervisor, which is the Officer Commanding Squadron but not the Officer Commanding Wing. Data extract 2.7 briefly shows the meanings of “Chain of Command” and “Customs and Courtesies.”

Data extract 2.7 The Chain of Command should be observed and followed by all members of the Corps

Customs and Courtesies (C&C) play an important part in all Hong Kong Air Cadet Corps (HKACC) activities and they contribute to build up a sense of discipline and an 'Esprit de Corps' in every member. There is a fine line separating customs from courtesies but each is rooted from the same source – respect between two individuals for each other. Both customs and courtesies must be observed by all members of the HKACC. (Page 2)

Official channel of approach and communication is through CHAIN OF COMMAND. It should be observed and followed by all members of the Corps. (Page 3)

Do not criticize the Corps in front of non-members. If you feel an improvement can be made, forward a suggestion to your superior through the chain of command. (Page 4)

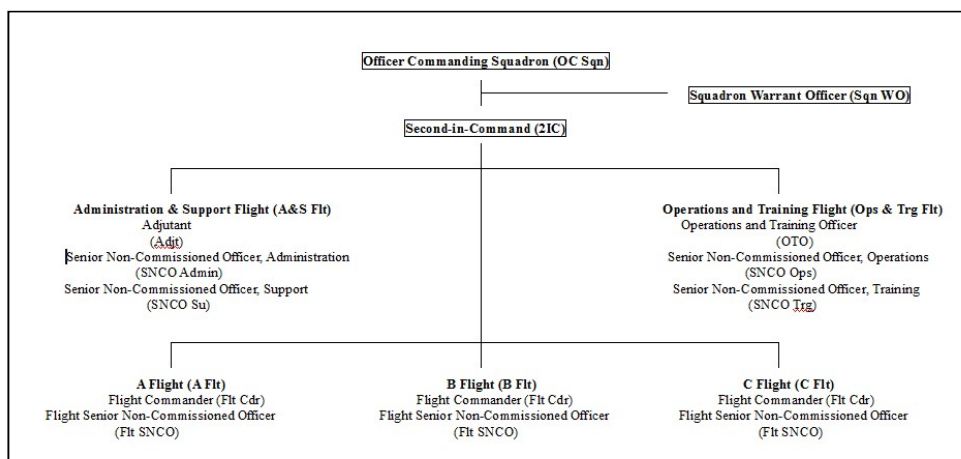
Do not bypass the chain of command. (Page 4)

(Student Resource Materials – GST02 Customs & Courtesies, 2009)

However, on Facebook, all members, regardless of rank or post, can communicate and share any issues or problems with each other freely. In this case, “one to one” becomes a “one to many” communication practice. I can illustrate how Facebook alters the message delivery mechanism within the organization. Traditionally, the communication practice is either top-down or bottom-up, as shown in Figure 5.5, which is a simplified version of the cadet squadron’s communication mechanism with reference to its table of unit organization and establishment. Top-down communication means the Officer Commanding Squadron (OC Sqn) passes a command or instruction to his Second-in-Command (2IC) who will then disseminate the information to his subordinates, who are the commanders of flights, including Administration & Support Flight (A&S Flt), Operations and Training Flight (Ops & Trg Flt), A Flight (A Flt), B Flight (B Flt) and C Flight (C Flt). All these Flight Commanders (Flt Cdr) will then deliver the message to their respective Flight Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (Flt SNCOs). On the other hand, if any Flt SNCO plans to

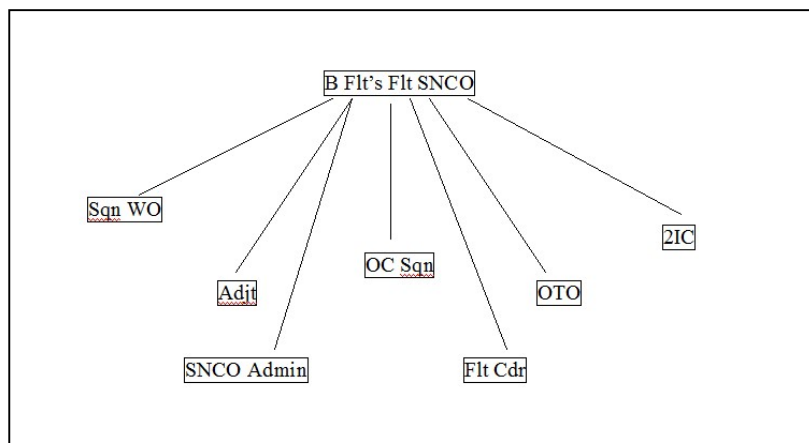
report an issue to OC Sqn, s/he is supposed to report it first to the Flt Cdr concerned, who will then pass the message to OC Sqn through 2IC, which is bottom-up communication. Based on what I have observed in the Corps, Figure 5.5 shows a new communication practice because of the emergence of Facebook. A Flt SNCO, e.g. B Flt's Flt SNCO, can bypass his immediate supervisor (i.e. B Flt's Flt Cdr) and pass a message to anyone on his Facebook friends' list: ranging from Sqn WO to OTO, or even OC Sqn.

Figure 5.5 Routine “One to One” Communication Practice



**Figure 5.6
New
“One
to
Many”**

Communication Practice



It has been brought to the attention of the Commandant (Comdt) of ACO, UK that the Chain of Command is at risk on Facebook since there have been increasing numbers of complaints delivered to her office directly after her active engagement in social media. Data extract 2.8 is a public message broadcast to nearly 10,000 Air Cadet members subscribed to the Comdt's Facebook fan page. It is advised that all problems or issues should be handled at respective levels, but not sent to the top layer

– the Comdt directly. In spite of being two different organizations, both Air Cadets Hong Kong and Air Cadets UK share the same principles for handling social media and the Chain of Command.

Data extract 2.8 Sending complaints direct to the Commandant “undermines the chain of command”, 13 March 2015

The downside is that this can create the impression that the Comdt is highly accessible and approachable for issues not associated with social media and there has been a noticeable increase in ACO personnel sending complaints direct to the Comdt, normally via my Blackberry or email address, often in writing to my office. This undermines the chain of command, as the lower levels of the Organization are denied an opportunity to address any problems or concerns before the details are exposed to me and other HQ staffs. We have a policy in the ACO of always trying to resolve an issue at the lowest level possible.

Therefore, if anyone has a complaint or concern they wish to raise, they should do so at the appropriate level, be that at Sqn, Wg or Reg level, or equivalents in the CCF and VGS communities. Only if you don't achieve a satisfactory response to your complaint at that level should you escalate to the HQ and to me.

I am, of course, always interested if you feel things are not quite right in the Organization and I will always investigate complaints that require my attention. But, before you send a complaint direct to me, cutting out the rest of the chain of command, ask yourself if someone lower down the chain might be able to address your concerns.

This will enable me to focus on the business of leading this great Organization and investigating the more serious complaints that merit my personal attention.
(Commandant Air Cadets's Facebook page, 2015)

In the Facebook community comprising HKACC members, on some occasions the Chain of Command can be bypassed “legally” to a certain extent, as long as all members who are online observe the implicit rule about following Customs and Courtesies (C&C). Preserving C&C in the online world is the common understanding of all these volunteers which establishes a social norm, it specifies the “shared repertoire” dimension of the CoP (Wenger, 1998), as can be seen in Data extracts 2.9 and 3.0. The social norm is that research participants like Chris and Holiday still address their fellow members in a more senior position as either “Sir” or “Ma'am” appropriately.

Data extract 2.9 Chris: “It is my pleasure to have a group photo with you, Sir”

29 December 2012

Chris: It is my pleasure to have a group [sic]⁶ photo with you ... Sir.

Volunteer 1: More than happy to be with a dedicated member like you ... Thank you for your contribution through these years.

(Chris, Facebook post, 2012)

Data extract 3.0 Holiday: “Raymond sir ... come back to see your sons and daughters”

4 November 2009

Holiday: 456 Sqn:⁷ good things come in pairs! We have a Cpl plus the “first in class” cadet at JN! Yeah!

Volunteer 1: YEAH YEAH YEAH! Then we can get the champion!!~

Volunteer 2: good good la

Volunteer 3 (Raymond): Feeling touched...

Holiday: Raymond sir ... come back to see your sons and daughters⁵ when you are freer

(Holiday, Facebook post, 2009)

Online Influence on Offline Communication

This subsection seeks to identify the kinds of social practices with digital texts that volunteers bring to the offline real world from their online and virtual encounters with communication technologies. A majority of the research participants gave positive feedback to the impact of Facebook on offline communication with fellow Corps members. The common ground of Jayden, Sam and Holiday was that Facebook served as a good channel to disclose both outer and inner images of a user. The SNS enabled these Facebook users to have an all-around understanding of their fellow members, which could contribute to generating more common topics in real conversational contexts, such as on squadron bases, as explained previously. Moreover, Jayden sounded a note of warning to a few misbehaving members. He values the importance of preserving a positive image on Facebook, particularly as a

⁶ This word should be ‘group’.

⁷ Son and daughters are the general nicknames of cadets.

professional trainer in front of cadet members in the organization: “since they [Facebook timelines] do not only have ACC activities, but also their personal activities. Then I can see if there is any contrast between their ACC and personal activities. Let’s say, if someone looks formal in ACC activities, but s/he smokes, drinks a lot of alcohol, karaoke and is addicted to drugs behind the scene, then I know s/he is a bad guy” (Jayden, personal communication, 2014).

Sharing the same viewpoint as Jayden, Sam said that Facebook revealed how volunteers behaved both in and out of uniform. The term “in uniform” refers to the volunteering context, whereas “out of uniform” means other contexts like daily life. Sam commented, “Whenever I see Corps’ members, they are in uniform (i.e. Corps events) or social events. On Facebook, I am able to see their feelings, aspects about their private life such as family members, friends or the subjects they take ... I am able to know more about them for sure” (Sam, personal communication, 2014).

Having more interaction and communication with other members online can facilitate one’s self-reflection regarding offline activities as well (Hernandez-Zamora & Zotzmann, 2014). For example, Holiday managed to review the room for improvement in her unit after a glimpse into the life of another Facebook volunteer, Pat. Holiday recognises that she “positively [gets to understand] more [about her peers] since I know their daily life. For instance, after I read Pat’s Facebook, I know how her squadron cadets are like and also her squadron activities. Then I reflect and wonder if it is the time for me to organize activities. So, [Facebook is] for my reference. This let me reflect on how I can improve things” (Holiday, personal communication, 2014).

Out of all the writers, Holiday and Sam were the ones most conscious about disclosing private things on a public platform. Holiday was more conscious about posting Corps-related messages on Facebook since her private Facebook page was open to the public. The content of her HKACC-related posts was restricted to general information, such as squadron meetings and activities. Holiday expressed that “regarding messages [on Facebook], we have to be more careful. Handling ACC-related messages on Facebook is an Art! Only more general messages such as attending squadron meetings can let my friends know easily. Messages among officers are rare. I normally only share messages about what happen to my cadets with my friends [on Facebook]” (Holiday, personal communication, 2014).

Similarly, Sam’s comment “ideas can be misunderstood easily” (Sam, personal communication, 2014) showed his slight reluctance to express his ideas on Facebook. Based on my observation, how Sam commented matched his practice on Facebook. He was less active in writing or posting messages on the public platform. In addition, his messages were generally shorter than those of other writers. However, he was willing to contribute to online “conversations” when events were significant and could create “noise.” Sam’s active engagement in the Facebook community is also shown by another aspect – clicking (on the Web) or pressing (using his mobile phone device) the “like” button to show his recognition of pieces of content written by friends, or images shared by friends, very frequently. Sam only wrote (commented) when the occasions could evoke resonance among readers. He mentioned that “it depends on

whether the events themselves can evoke resonance or not, or whether it is an occasion for feasting or celebration, for example, passing-out, the birth of babies” (Sam, personal communication, 2014).

5. Conclusion

To conclude, adult volunteers are engaged in a volunteering environment full of digital texts. The volunteering culture, with a key feature of “learn by doing,” has been shaped by social media. Facebook has become an indispensable social medium that promotes interaction between adult volunteers. This SNS serves as an alternative communication platform for these volunteers and their seniors, peers, and subordinates across the city or even in the UK. Their close bonding is revealed thanks to their well-established offline relationships. Spoken, written and multimodal discourses on Facebook facilitate mutual and mass communications among the volunteers. Any volunteers who do not have Facebook access might easily miss out on an update in the volunteering world. My research also enhances our understanding of the engagement of Facebook users from examining literacies as a cultural practice, which is a type of situated literacy (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanič, 2000). The contribution of the study is to explore the literacy practices of adult volunteers through Facebook vis-à-vis HKACC with its heterogeneous nonformal education, which can be generalized to other UGs or other countries.

It could be the case that the rise and popularity of Facebook will change the way the HKACC thinks about the dynamics that can lead to both challenges and opportunities. The dilemma of the findings is a potential source of reflection for those volunteers who take up management roles relating to a traditional core value within the organization: the Chain of Command. On the one hand, how adult volunteers communicate and interact on Facebook may pose a challenge to Management's authority. On the other hand, the instructions given by Senior Management can be disseminated to junior cadets in a moment as long as they are Facebook friends, which ultimately enhances efficiency to a certain extent. Solidarity can be easily created through social media engagement in this particular cultural context.

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