Live Journal—An Initiative to Enrich a Teacher-Educators’ Conference

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Case study research investigated the launching of an innovative *Live Journal*, as part of a professional social network, during international conference held in Israel on the subject of teacher training. Research literature notes various publications used to record research and academic materials, but talks less about tools accompanying academic conferences. As far as could be ascertained no online “live journal” has served the needs of a professional conference. To understand the process and contribution of the *Live Journal*, qualitative study was chosen, using categorical analysis to interpret materials uploaded by participants on the journal. Additionally, in-depth interviews exposed participants’ voices and interpretations. The research aimed to identify factors encouraging or hindering the initiative’s success, patterns of participation, participants’ characteristics, writing styles and incumbent difficulties and aimed to present a model for optimal operation of the *Live Journal*. Findings indicate essential components for the journal’s success include: participants, technology and marketing, noting the importance of each component and their correlation with other components. The journal’s potential to assist construction of a professional community, and act as an impetus for professional development and familiarity with other professionals in the field indicates the importance of the journal and constitutes the key for success.

Keywords: case study, Live Journal, professional development, virtual community

Introduction

The *International MOFET Conference on Teacher Education* was accompanied by an online interactive journal called *Live Journal*, intended for the use of the academic conference participants. The use of this tool became possible due to contemporary technology that enables conference participants to take an active part in communication through mobile devices such as tablets, Smartphones or laptops. The MOFET Institute is a national inter-collegial center for the research and development of teacher education and teaching programs in academic colleges. The Institute constitutes a unique framework both in Israel and worldwide for the support of teacher-educators’ professional development including the integration of technology in teaching. Therefore, it was important to integrate online environments into the traditional conference to further support their

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technological development. In addition, it was assumed that it would motivate participants to take a more active part in professional discussions (Shonfeld, 2005).

Technology is now making interaction both more inclusive and more extensive. This paper describes the use of an interactive social network in Hebrew called *Shluvim* for teacher-educators and the adaptation of this unique platform to serve as a live journal. *Shluvim* has been used as a professional network for professionals in all areas of education. Using the platform of the *Live Journal* participants were able to comment on the various sessions of the conference, discuss issues raised in the conference, summarize presentations and voice their point of view, send invitations to their sessions and advertise themselves.

This was a new initiative in teacher education in Israel and it was therefore essential to research the *Live Journal*, to understand the extent and quality of its contribution to the conference organizers and participants. The hope was that the research would allow the construction of an efficient model for the application of the *Live Journal* in other similar events. A case study was chosen to facilitate a professional in-depth examination of the studied phenomenon.

The Significance of the Research

The objectives of the research were to assess to what extent the *Live Journal* increased the participants' engagement and information sharing during a conference, including sessions where they were absent, and as a byproduct to examine whether participants were subsequently likely to use technology of this kind in their own teaching.

The study outlined here describes the function, structure, organization, roles, time sequence, contents, etc. of the *Live Journal* as it was used in a traditional academic conference. The paper concludes with recommendations for optimal organization of an initiative such as the *Live Journal*. The research related to an innovative initiative in the field of application of technology in areas of Israeli education in general and particularly in teacher training. The very operation of this initiative and its partial success constitutes an important contribution to educational research in Israel.

Literature Review

The following review examines both key research relating to online learning and work which is more closely linked to integrated learning, i.e., where learners have the experience of both face-to-face and online learning. In addition, it describes the history of journalism in order to explain the importance of a communication medium both before the digital age and in the digital environment.

Journalism and Initiatives

The first periodicals created at the height of the Roman Empire, contained official reports but also gossip. The first journals worthy of the name were manually printed by post office administrators (who were the first to hear news and current events) throughout Europe during the 17th century, and later to the New World of America. These papers often became the mouthpiece for the struggle for freedom of expression (Wahl, Lipkin, & Enosh, 1996).

Printing technology gave rise to a prolific journalism industry, which peaked at the end of the 20th century with the development of computerization. Improved accessibility of information changed the relationship between reader and journal. Readers become able to choose what interests them by browsing and were not bound by the editor's typesetting. They became somewhat like their own editors. They can now receive all and any information almost in real time (Limor & Mann, 1997; Dror, 2012).

A newspaper usually has a hierarchical organizational structure in which there are various roles. It has a chief editor responsible for editors, reporters, photographers, graphic designers and an entire setup of administration, advertisements, marketing and printing departments. It is the editor's responsibility to plan and set goals, to utilize their initiative intelligently, guide and/or organize, support and plan for all stages of the publication from planning to summary and feedbacks. As an organization, the newspaper has defined common goals; members of the organization work in a planned and coordinated manner while dividing the work between them, striving to achieve these common goals. Ranks of authority, communication systems, and coordination systems organize the relations between the different participants (Samuel, 1996).

In the modern era, a newspaper needs to establish and address a specific audience. The characteristics of this audience and its needs and interests should be identified so as to ensure maximum correspondence between the journal and its consumers and this will affect the character of the journal and its choice of topics. The journalist has the most crucial role in the communication between writer and reader, since the transfer of information from person to person is a complicated and complex process (Limor & Mann, 1997).

The transformation in methods of news consumption in recent years means that more and more people obtain the news from their cellular devices and mobile computers, which possess multimedia capabilities to enable instant on-location real-time video footage. The interactive nature of the media, open to consumer responses, has turned out to be an excellent means for acquiring an audience. Giving the right of response to media consumers is a highly important tool in preserving their loyalty to a newspaper site. Contemporary journalists need training that will equip them with skills for tri-media reporting: radio, TV and Internet (Komornik, 2010).

The *Live Journal* is defined as an initiative implementing an auxiliary tool for a face-to-face conference (Shonfeld, Bar-Tal, & Orad, 2015). An initiative is a special task that has never been done before (Dvir, Raz, & Shenhar, 2003), usually with an innovative character. It requires planning of objectives and goals, activities, time sequence, work process, and a budget. It has unique features that distinguish it from ongoing training processes. Such groundbreaking initiatives aim to enable utilization of innovative technologies, not used by most, in a given time frame as a spearhead model. Education professionals are constantly confronted with cutting edge technologies, and breakthroughs made by innovative initiatives and these can constitute isles of inventiveness (Solomon, 2000). The *Live Journal* was such an initiative, a unique tool that was used for the first time in a conference for teacher-educators in Israel. Hopefully, it can serve as a model for other places in Israel and worldwide. The uniqueness of the *Live Journal* is expressed in the use of online communication and text conversations.

Online communication in text messages. Online communication entails different forms of communication between people. In online text messages, the reader must rely solely on words in order to interpret the intent of the author, as there is no body language to guide the reader (Whipple, 2006). The cultural background of the reader and their social status influence their text interpretation.

It is evident that the combination of reading messages and writing feedback on messages, affects the interpretation of the original message (as opposed to passively reading a message). Responding to a message requires the writer to process the information read, and apply his own knowledge to the text, thus creating new contexts for the original message. Such processes stimulate learning and provoke change in attitudes (Nekmat, 2012).

Uploading messages on sensitive, interesting or challenging issues can increase involvement in the discussion, at work and when learning. Participants in discussions usually prefer to use written media rather

than audio, as it allows them to better process the information and reflect their thoughts in a more eloquent manner (Blau & Barak, 2012). Yet, people do not tend to share their thoughts and questions. Often, they read others' texts but do not make efforts to write back. Solutions need to be found to encourage and increase interactions between participants.

Increasing Interactivity in Conventional Conferences

An online channel promotes various aspects of the traditional conference format, since it increases participants' involvement, updates participants on content discussed in parallel sessions and workshops, and exposes conference content to an audience that is not physically present at the conference. It enables academics to be part of the conference community without traveling to interact with the community (Shonfeld, 2005). There is a variety of online channels that may be used during a conference such as the blog, microblog, instant messaging and social networks (Orad, 2010). Online tools can be used to promote social and educational involvement (Evans, 2014). They improve motivation and attitudes and promote reflection and meta-cognition (Vasb et al., 2014). For example, Twitter encourages multi-directional communication between participants in a unique way that does not normally takes place within the framework of a traditional format (Deshen, 2013). The use of blogs helps participants learn from each other, develops collective knowledge, and promotes their interpersonal communication (Orad, 2011).

There are many online channels that can be used to promote a conference: sending short messages concerning the conference (e.g., Twitter); instant publication of photographs (e.g., Instagram); publication of relevant information during the conference (through the conference site); addressing the participants for feedback; using designated applications to increase exposure by organizing meetings, writing blog posts about the conference beforehand and creating a dynamic and interactive list of participants (Ireland, 2014); and conducting online surveys to increase audience engagement (Beers, 2014).

Research conclusively indicates that social media such as Facebook, do engage consumers, allowing participants to interact with an event—particularly prior to the event. And while some social media, such as Twitter, are a bit too ephemeral to be an effective assessment tool, Facebook does provide enough archival information to be at least part of the evaluation of social and cultural impact. People can discuss the advent in advance and upload a picture after the event ends (Hanslip, 2013).

Involvement improves motivation and positions and promotes reflection and meta-cognition (Vasb et al., 2014). Uploading information about interesting or challenging topics can increase involvement in the discussion. Nevertheless, participants in discussions prefer to use written rather than vocal media, because it allows them to process the information better (Blau & Barak, 2012). Various channels are used in virtual communities in order to increase engagement through interactivity. Nowadays, such communities are commonplace in learning. Therefore it's important to understand how learning takes place in those communities.

Virtual community and learning. A community is defined as a group that is mainly characterized by rational interactions or social ties that draw people together (Heller, 1989). In order to create a community, the participants must know and trust each other so that the opinion of each member can be positively valued. Identification with shared goals and values, can give the group a sense of community (Ryman, Hardham, Richardson, & Ross, 2009). An online community should also have privacy and security mechanisms to ensure mutual trust on the network. A virtual community is based on a continuous supply of knowledge from members,

and therefore one of the challenges is how to encourage people to write especially because non-participants, usually referred to disparagingly as “lurkers”, often make up a large portion of an online community. It has been found that knowledge, self-efficacy and resource availability enhance perceived behavioral control of knowledge sharing, in such a way that knowledge and self-efficacy had the most effect on posters while resource availability affected lurkers the most (Hung, Lai, & Chou, 2015).

Prerequisites for a flourishing virtual community are: clarity of objectives, activities and site constraints; the site should be protected by a password; the participants should be familiar with all communication means used and with the site's means of operation; there should be a site manager or conference moderator to motivate participants to upload content and messages, and to stimulate discussions and empathy (Hodes, Pritz, Kelley, & Foster, 2011). A well-operating community shares ideas and reflects on what was said in the discussions, thus creating higher-order thinking (Ryman et al., 2009).

In the 21st century, information and communication technology is making learning accessible anywhere, anytime. Learning occurs online through interaction with colleagues, using WEB2 tools. Interaction in virtual communities has been examined in order to understand the processes of studying and learning that occur there (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2008). Virtual communities are compelled to overcome certain difficulties, resulting from the lack of physical interaction, for example eye contact, touch and social cues, all perceived as important for effective collaboration and learning (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Chiu & Hsiao, 2010).

Extensive interpersonal and social de-centralized communication take place in the online space to different extents with an immense and diverse audience and through different media. Each media has different discussion characteristics, different behaviors and rules of discussion (Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2006). Online interaction allows participants a choice between different levels of control over messages and the means of their transmission (Barak, 2007; Rafaeli & Ariel, 2007), control over the extent of privacy and exposure (Joinson & Paine, 2007; Mann & Lev-On, 2015), choice between true identification and use of diverse or anonymous identities (Suler, 2004a, 2004b; Turkle, 1995).

The freedom of expression available in online interaction can only be realized through a set of moral norms such as respect and acceptance (Spinello, 2002). The fact that it is possible to express oneself freely, in spontaneous here-and-now, often without due consideration or any boundaries and with a lack of consistency and the difficulty to supervise and define a responsible framework, are often exploited for the worst in network interaction (Amichai-Hamburger, 2007; Barak, 2000, 2006; Suler, 2004a, 2004b). This behavior may lead to infringement of rights, transgression of privacy, libel, gossip mongering, distortion of information, provocations, expressions of aggression, hatred and racism, trolling, shaming, dissemination of radical ideology, occupation with controversial matters and publication of undesirable content.

In recent years, social networks have often evolved into “knowledge communities” specializing in specific themes such as literature, medicine, hobbies etc. In higher education, there are social networks that relate to the practice of a particular discipline or research (Vidgen, Henneberg, & Naud, 2007). It is important to remember that the main characteristics of net social activity are sharing of feelings, evaluations, experiences and thoughts and also of materials, files etc. (John, 2012).

Teacher-educators are also involved in virtual communities such as “Shluvim”. Teacher-educators are required to have appropriate technological skills in order to act as models for their students (Goldstein et al., 2012). However, many teacher-educators lack a sufficient level of technological skills and therefore do not use virtual communities very much.

ICT in teacher education. In order to implement technology in teaching, teachers must know where, with whom, when and how to use Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in classroom activity (Hine, 2011). International organizations involved in education, such as UNESCO and the OECD, indicate that technological literacy affects the development of the learner, the society and the state. In recent years, the Israeli Ministry of Education has invested in ICT programs for schools, and also in a program for teacher-educators in colleges that do not employ WEB2 technology (Goldstein et al., 2012). To keep up with expected changes in different reforms, teacher-educators need to undergo continuous learning processes that will enable them to reshape their beliefs on the substance of knowledge, information and teaching. Such beliefs are characteristically covert so that often even those who hold them are unconscious of their existence (Fang, 1996; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987).

Research has indicated that while most pre-service teachers entering college have basic ICT skills they mostly use traditional methods, even during their ICT-integrated courses. Innovative ICT integration models were not found to be in wide use. Additional research is required to assess which tools will be most effective for the future generation, that uses online collaborative environments regularly, and how online communities can be used as a learning channel and a place for professional development. Focus should be given to outcomes such as higher-order thinking, profound understanding and knowledge creation (Resta & Laferrière, 2007).

When approaching an adult audience and especially teachers, it is important to remember that one of the most prevalent approaches to technology in education in the early 21st century saw present-day children as “digital natives” who acquire technological skills naturally like a mother-tongue in early childhood (Prensky, 2001). This approach was qualified after several years by the insight that technical mastery over digital technology, an area in which digital children excel, does not guarantee intelligent use of this technology (Prensky, 2009). Thus, the teacher training system needs to provide an appropriate response to the integration of pedagogy in a digital teaching environment. Consequently the *Horizon Report 2016* (Johnson et al., 2016) relating to higher education indicates that the teacher training system should play a significant role in training teaching staff to be able to face all the challenges involved in the new technological environments. The intercollegiate MOFET Institute has played an important role in the dissemination of innovations within teacher-education settings (Goldstein et al., 2012). The *Live Journal* project was initiated by the MOFET Institute to serve teacher-educators who participated in the conference, and enable lecturers to use an advanced environment during the lectures.

The research questions were how, in fact, did the participants use the online channel offered? Which role did they take? And what was the contribution of this channel for the conference community, the participants, speakers and organizers?

Methodology

This study examines the contribution a *Live Journal* to the structure, organization, roles, communication, socialization and contents of a traditional academic conference. It uses a qualitative approach to obtain a holistic picture of the phenomena that the researchers wish to understand. It is assumed that there is a link between the different elements of a phenomenon. This approach requires interpretative analysis and discussion of the various opinions voiced in the answers of the participants (Shkedi, 2003).

The study was defined as a case study, limited to a specific international academic professional conference that took place over three days in Israel. Conference participants were teacher-educators mostly from Israel but

also from abroad. The *Live Journal* operated on the Shiluvim network. Shiluvim is an innovative social network operating under the auspices of the MOFET Institute and directed by a pedagogic manager, with technical support and all the materials appear on the MOFET Institute server.

The case study aimed to understand the participants' meanings, and interpretations regarding the studied phenomenon in order to expose the essence of the case and to gain insights and knowledge concerning the processes involved (Yosifon, 2001).

The research population included 32 teacher-educators from 26 colleges of education from different areas and different sectors of Israeli population. These colleges train student-teachers to be teachers in K-12 schools. In addition, they serve as a place for professional development for in-service teachers and provide them with graduate programs within their specific fields. Teacher-educators from these colleges participated in the three-day *Sixth International Conference of Teacher-Educators* entitled "Changing Reality through Education 2013", which related to topics in the teacher-education field.

The conference participants (500) were mostly Israelis and Hebrew speakers. Therefore, the language which they used to communicate between themselves within the journal was almost always Hebrew, and only Hebrew speakers were involved in it. About 6% of the conference participants took part in the *Live Journal*. Ten of the Hebrew-speaking participants who were representative of the population in the conference (participants, lecturers, and academic leaders) were interviewed at the end of the conference, while three of the journal's leading figures discussed the journal in a focus group (all of them teacher-educators).

The research tools and resources included a semi-structured interview (with 10 participants), a focus group of journal leaders (3 participants), and journal posts. 213 posts were coded and categorized; distinctions and divisions were determined in the data continuum in order to discover the significance of the data (Tzabar Ben Yehoshua, 2001). All data from the three tools: interviews, focus group, and posts underwent content analysis with the help of Atlas software. The coded citations that were selected for the paper were translated from Hebrew to English.

The researchers analyzed the posts that appeared in the journal aiming to cross reference them with the interviews and focus group (triangulation), to learn what captured the interest of the participants, their modes of writing, their roles, and views on the future existence of the *Live Journal*. The conclusions and recommendations of the study were formulated in light of all the findings and the discussion.

Findings

This study examined the contribution of the innovative *Live Journal* to a community of teacher-educators who used it during the three days of a traditional face-to-face conference.

Content analysis of the posts reveals that 32 out of 500 conference participants wrote in the journal, meaning that only 6% took part as active members, a low participation rate. It was impossible to locate those who were reading the posts without writing, those who were lurkers. The reason for the relatively low number of conference participants using the *Live Journal* can be explained by a lack of broad publicity before the conference took place and perhaps by the participants' low level of technological skill, but the uniqueness of the project and the issue, led the researchers to undertake a profound case study.

Active participants wrote a total of 316 posts, however there were 3,405 reader views. This means that a large part of the journal readers were lurkers, who could not be identified. They only read items which had been written by others, but did not write, and therefore they could not be interviewed.

The following categories emerged from the analysis of the message data:

- Goals and objectives
- Journal content
- Choice of tool/environment

Dynamics of writing in the journal:

- Writing characteristics
- Roles within the Live Journal
- Difficulties and recommendations

Goals and Objectives

The data indicates that both participants and organizers questioned what was the target audience of the conference *Live Journal*. They wished to characterize it. G. considered the organizers to be the target population, but also the participants:

[this journal] may be significant at the level of the conference organizers ... who can learn in real time from various places what is going on there ... but as for myself, I want to hear and report things truly and earnestly... ” The Conference Chairman said: “as the Conference Chairman I can see what’s on people’s mind because it’s a bit like talkbacks ... what the atmosphere’s like ... another sensor to pick up the emotional and cognitive climate of the conference.

In contrast, M. considered the target population would be conference participants who were undecided and seeking guidance in choosing a session. “*I had several chats; I was trying to decide between ... I really enjoyed it when I was in one session and peeked into the other...*” J. had the impression that the journal was meant for a minority of participants, and pointed to a unique target population, those who had not arrived physically at the conference and yet could participate remotely through the journal.

The participants’ words indicated that the *Live Journal* allowed thoughts, feelings, and views to be shared during the conference. Participants in the various sessions could write in a common public space and thus share thoughts, feelings, etc., with other participants who were not sharing the same physical space with them. M.: “*I want to share and also hope others will share with me...*”. Sharing the various sessions taking place simultaneously expands reality – D.: “*Insights and experiences reach me even though I’m not physically at the session...*” Shk.: “*Using the Live Journal offers a wider perspective on the conference*”—Writing in the *Live Journal* enabled writers to feel they were part of a community, and thereby generated a sense of belonging. As Tz. said: “*It’s belonging, it’s involvement, it’s care*”. The participants saw the added value of real time communication as part of an authentic experience. Tz. noted: “*The word ‘live’ says it’s here, now, present... very authentic*”. They saw the advantage of receiving reports from sessions in which they were not present, and of discussions with remote participants. Sh.: “*I think that this immediacy is the part that characterized the experience*”.

Among the interviewees, there were those who considered that one of the goals of the journal was to act as a model, exceeding the proceedings at the conference, and thought that it could be used in teaching: “*... as a model to be included in lessons for the purpose of students’ involvement as well as reflection*”. M. believed that the online “*Live Journal*” had two main objectives, one was to document the content of the chats and the other was to briefly report on the sessions and what happened in them in terms of social climate.

In summary, according to both participants and conference organizers, the journal was a platform that served the conference participants and the journal organizers alike, and the primary purpose of the journal was real time sharing as events unfolded.

Participants raised questions about the purpose of the *Live Journal*, asking whether it should publish only feedbacks and professional criticism of the various sessions, or turn the journal into a social and communication center. Y. thought that the journal should not deal with "gossip", meaning social posts: *"It's really a bit more gossipy... I don't see myself writing to someone: 'run to stand 8, there's sushi there'"*. It seems that people wanted the journal to have an academic character. However there were participants who needed the social layer of the conference. G. thought that the posts added a sociable tone: *"It adds a kind of social layer"*.

Organization and the Choice of Tool/Environment

Participants expressed diverse opinionson concerning the platform for the *Live Journal*. It seems that those familiar with "Shluvim" were satisfied with the tool and its handling. However, others, who lacked any acquaintance with the tool, found it difficult to operate and thought that another, more open and familiar tool, such as *Twitter* should have been used instead. The Conference Chairman had his first experience of the environment, and uploaded a number of posts. He noted: *"I'm sure that it'll be an integral part of future conferences in a very friendly and simple format like WhatsApp"*. Y. says: *"At the end it worked beautifully. I didn't have any technical failures"*. In contrast, there were participants who criticized the tool and found it difficult to operate. G., one of the more active participants who belonged to one of two groups leading this initiative, claimed that lack of sufficient familiarity with the environment could affect participation: *"I think there's a problem ... I recommend a Twitter framework ... it should be fast"*. Responses were meant to be very short and to capture the eye without bothering to search for them, as happens on *Twitter* which is a familiar tool. Ma. added: *"I wanted something more Twitter-like both for the possibility of short and fast responses and because it is a familiar tool"*. Some believed that the visual design of the journal should be changed and made more user-friendly.

Dynamics of Writing in the Journal

One of the issues raised was the right time for writing. The views which emerged related to three periods: before the conference, during the conference and afterwards. Some said that it was important to report in real time from within the sessions; many of the participants described in a few words where they were, sometimes with reference to the topic being discussed in the session. G. reported: *"At the plenary session..."*. Y. believed that real time reporting served the conference leaders among others, who could keep track of events. However, receiving the information and the updates as they happened was also important for the conference participants. *"You desperately want to know during the conference about the stronger sessions, weaker sessions, here you get it online"*. The *Live Journal* was sometimes used during the conference as an alternative arena for the conference sessions. The importance of real time reporting was that it could affect participants' decisions on which sessions to join. *"So, on the one hand it can empty a room, but on the other hand, it can really attract people who are interested"*.

In contrast, covert criticism of the *Live Journals* operation in real time also emerged. A dilemma exists between writing during the events while continuing to listen to the lecture. *"I was writing things in the Live Journal at the same time, but as I was writing I also missed some of the things said"*. Y. noted a problem of how other participants in a session might perceive you as impolite when you were preoccupied in other activities such as writing in the journal during the lecture. There was fear that this would be considered rude and inconsiderate as well as emptying out sessions: *"So on the one hand it can empty a room, but on the other hand, it can really attract people who are interested"*.

Writing Characteristics

The posts were diverse and questions were raised about the form that they should take—should the writing be in the form of a report or documentary? Should it be interactive? Should the posts be short or long?

The findings imply different approaches concerning the character of the writing in the *Live Journal*. S. believed that the writing should be academic, although it was clear to her that it would be brief: “*Academic documentation. Precision, numbers, terms, concepts were very important to me*”. Tz. believed that the journal’s role was not to give a running commentary on the lectures: “*There’s no need for the documentation of the lecture...the lecture can be recorded*”. Sh. thought that responses should be instant and very brief: “*only short messages like on Twitter...*”.

Analysis of the posts reveals that although no instructions were given to the participants concerning the style of text to use and its length, the majority wrote short posts. Analysis of the length of the journal posts shown in Table 1 shows the distribution of text lengths.

Table 1

Distribution of Length of Posts in Words

Number of words	Number of posts
1-20	87
21-50	74
51 and more	52

40% of the messages were short, 14 words at most. These findings indicate that the frequency of long posts was lower than short posts. That is, most of the posts were short and only about a quarter were long (51 words and over). Ma. believed that the text should be focused and precise. Summaries could be found in the conference abstracts book. She said: “*what interested me was the matter of parallel sessions that I wanted to go to. I really wanted something in a more Twitter-like style*”.

The vision of the conference organizers was that the journal would be used, among other things, for pedagogic academic discussions of the contents raised in the conference. And indeed, one of the questions that arose during the functioning of the *Live Journal* was whether the journal should encourage social interaction within sessions or during breaks. Did the journal contribute, or interfere? Shk. says: “*In a large number of cases there’s no interaction among the writers on the wall*” O. responds to Shk’s claims regarding the lack of interaction between participants and lecturers: “*I personally saw more than a few cases (while writing myself) of participants who responded to each other*”. G., although agreeing it is difficult to maintain interaction and simultaneously listen to the lecturer, recommends responding, raising questions, and daring to be provocative: “*I ask reporters—go on reporting; tell us about what you’re listening to. But in addition, don’t hesitate to raise questions, puzzles. Dare to generate argument. So that the journal will be alive*”. In practice, there were very few attempts to respond to this request. The number of threads relating to the same topic were small. Because of the lack of time and the brief style of writing, no deep, professional discussions were developed on any topic. Most research respondents thought that the *Live Journal* should mainly focus on brief, concise, report style texts, short impressions, and less documentation and summaries.

Roles Within the “Live Journal”

Analysis of texts relating to the category of writing characteristics in the *Live Journal* reveals the nature of the roles assumed by its participants. The texts revealed that their writers assumed some of the classical roles

that exist in any journal, such as the journalist (reporting, documenting, commenting, informing) or the advertiser—who publicizes and distributes comments. However, unlike a typical (printed) journal, which is run by professionals, and in which each member has a single defined role, in the *Live Journal* each participant may fulfill all the functions, starting from editor, producer, journalist, advertiser, photographer, and so on. In terms of the roles, it was possible to identify among the writers those who criticized, discussed, reported, documented, advertised, marketed, shared feelings, shared information, and interviewed others.

One of the questions that arose in the *Live Journal* was: should there be a decision about who advertises, reports, and criticizes, or can anyone do whatever they would like to do. G. believed that he remained himself, reading, writing, discussing, criticizing, reporting, and he said: *“the role is to be yourself, and the goal is not only to express my opinion, but to stimulate consideration and sometimes to do that you need to be slightly provocative and a bit restrained”*.

M. believed that the difference between academic and journalistic reporting should be maintained: *“...we should distinguish academic reporting from the role of a journalist, and define it for people...because if someone thinks his role is only academic reporting, he may avoid writing”*. Ma. considered her role to be advertising and public relations: *“I did some public relations work for my presentation with a small text message”*.

The desire to maintain a dynamic journal was evident from the responses concerning the roles undertaken in the *Live Journal*. Anyone who felt they had something to report or advertise did so directly in the journal.

In the following section, we examine more closely some of the roles assumed by participants that emerged clearly from their texts in the *Live Journal*:

The advertisers sent posts that advertised events that occur at the conference. The posts arrived from two sources, first from the journal's organizers and leaders whose goals were to advertise ongoing information and encourage participation in the journal, and the other source came from the journal participants' spontaneous writing. The posts related to the opening of the day, information on sessions, an invitation to take part in the journal, and ongoing information on timetables. Posts were usually real time reports on events, such as: *“bon appetite to all participants! Recharge your batteries for the rest of the sessions”* [relating to restaurants]. or the remark of M.: *“Please turn to the lecturer sitting next to you... and get him interested in participating in the ‘Live Journal’”*.

The reporting and documenting journalist appeared in the *Live Journal* in various roles, starting from recounting emotional experiences, sharing academic sources of information, providing feedback, and reporting on lectures in real time. Some of those who participated in the lectures also supplied their colleagues with academic information on sources of knowledge, books and websites and presentations which the lecturers mentioned.

- An example of sharing emotional experiences is presented in Al.'s post: *“the last three days – full of feelings of calm, a reunion with colleagues, and new challenges”*. G. says: *“How wonderful! Time is up, and it's break-time, but—the discussion on the issue continues”*.

Translating journalist—participants translated lectures from English to Hebrew. As mentioned, this was an international conference and some of the lectures were presented in English. S., one of the journal's leaders, translated one of the lectures from English to Hebrew during the conference, and arranged it according to headlines in order to refer participants to the sources.

Interviewing journalist; another way to connect participants with academic knowledge was initiated by A.: *"I decided to interview conference participants—I was interested in what most impressed them most, what insights they gained..."*.

The organizers and participants played different and multiple roles in the journal, unlike a printed journal in which there are fixed defined roles. A large part of the texts were personal, emotional writing that involved sharing rather than factual reporting. Analysis of the texts identified three types of journalistic posts: informative, academic, and emotional. The journalist usually writes in real time, sometimes documenting, translating, and/or interviewing; these roles can be called spontaneous roles, and in the context of the contributors to the *Live Journal*, we can say that these are roles which do not require prior training or preparation.

Participants' Recommendations

The leaders' recommendations referred to the goals of the journal, choice of the right application, and the target population. Not all the recommendations related directly to the goals, but these can be inferred from the statements.

The organizers and the participants made it clear that a journal embedded into the conference site would be a better option than a separate journal. Some participants wished to add the possibility of comments in real time on each session at the conference site, which would contribute to the sense of a real time event, and in turn would assist participants to choose the session in which they were most interested out of the several sessions taking place simultaneously. Y. said: *"To enter and say ... what's happening here now, what do people say about what is happening here ... what's interesting ... what's your opinion..."*. She wanted the comments to be connected to the session's space on the conference site.

M. recommended that there should be documentation alongside shorter reports, and suggested a technical improvement to make it easier for participants: *"Alongside the documentation of the lecture, there should also be updates"*. This also refers to the idea of uploading the comments on the conference site.

Various tips were suggested in order to attract more participants to the journal. S. suggested publishing useful contents such as: *"At one o'clock there is a dairy cafeteria open on the first floor and a meat cafeteria on the second floor"*.

Another recommendation was to work with an editorial team that included interviewers, a photographer, and information update writers. Tz.: *"I believe that someone has to take responsibility ... codify the material ... I want to get it in brief ... with an option or a reference telling me where I can read the whole thing"*. In addition, S. recommended combining all information on a certain topic to make orientation easier: *"if I'm interested in early childhood, this is my professional field. So I'll collect all the information on early childhood"*. There was no classification function to organize the material in the journal.

One of the resources required for the success of such an initiative is the construction of an infrastructure of advertisement. It was difficult to promote the *Live Journal*, Tz. Says: *"at first it didn't have good enough publicity"*. Therefore it is recommended to include it as part of the conference organization and planning.

Discussion

The findings of this study identify the goals, structure, and organization of the *Live Journal* used in a traditional academic conference. The findings relate specifically to the roles played by active participants, the tools they use and their styles of writing and types of contents. Although thousands of logs to the *Live Journal*

were found, the level of active participants was low. It seems that a large proportion of the journal readers were lurkers, who could not be identified. Perhaps more appropriate preparation for the *Live Journal* would have increased participants' sense of digital self-efficacy and reduced the number of lurkers, and contributed a sense that there was a genuine online community of practice (Hung, Lai, & Chou, 2015). The participants should be helped to become familiar with all communication means and with the site's manner of operation. In addition, there was no site manager or conference moderator to motivate the participants to upload content and messages, and to stimulate discussions and empathy, which are necessary for active participation (Hodes et al., 2011). It is possible that the meager active participation stemmed from the environment of the *Living Journal* that required prior registration and a new entry for each use of the journal.

It was decided to choose the professional social network of teacher-educators, *Shluvim*, in which there are 2,500 members, some of them conference participants, as the platform for the *Live Journal*. Some participants commended this choice and claimed that the network was friendly, and thought it would become an integral part of future conferences. Other participants claimed they expected a friendlier and faster tool which permitted mainly "tweets" like Twitter. It seems that it is important to create a tool which includes the "tweet" function, allowing immediate publishing and giving feedback in order to increase interaction (Ireland, 2014).

The research findings indicate that the attempt to convert a traditional community to an online community constitutes a major challenge. To ensure the success of such a project it is necessary to understand the characteristics of the project and undertake appropriate preparations, including finding the optimal way to accompany the conference with the online journal.

It was initially essential to identify the target audience for the *Live Journal* and once this was defined it was necessary to determine the goals that the organizers aimed to achieve (Limor & Mann, 1997). Thus, the preliminary preparations needed to include planning of objectives and goals, activities, time sequence, work process, and budget, in line with the identified needs of the participants, their fields of interest and wishes.

The goals of the *Live Journal*, as they emerged from the findings, were diverse: most of the participants believed that one of the journal's goals was reporting and sharing in real time, because it allowed them to extend the circle of knowledge. Others noted the extended possibilities of informing choice, obtaining information and details on lectures without actively taking part in them, updating participants on the contents of parallel sessions and workshops, and exposing the conference contents to an audience physically absent from the session. The journal helped in developing collective knowledge, as is the case in blog communication (Orad, 2011). All these functions helped participants to learn from each other and to develop collective knowledge.

The research findings indicate that participants, contents, technology and (academic, publicity, social and organizational) marketing constitute the main components required to operate a live journal, which will accompany a conference. The findings show that at the start of the conference, some of the participants were not aware what the target audience for the *Live Journal* would be. Some of the teacher-educators thought that it was intended to serve the organizers because it could provide them with important online information in real time, which could help the conference organizers improve their organization, and update participants on what was happening through the various sessions, while receiving feedback.

The journal also provided participants with a wider range of perspectives during the conference. It provided directions for deeper consideration of skipped topics, and perhaps even dialog with the journal contents and with other participants. Transfer of information from person to person is a complex and complicated process. Reading an item in a journal, like any other text, is not a unilateral action, but rather a

type of dialogue between the journalistic text and the reader, while each written detail may generate a reader's response or question (Limor & Mann, 1997). Learning in the technological age mostly takes place through interaction with colleagues on the Internet (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2008).

In order to relate more profoundly to this issue it is pertinent to understand two basic concepts, the types and levels of interaction as a stage in the construction of a professional learners' community. In the space where the *Live Journal* operated not all the participants were members of one community and certainly did not know each other before the conference. There were however "clusters" of acquaintance among the participants, who knew each other. Additionally not all the conference participants were members of on-line communities and so they were not familiar with this environment, its characteristics, rules and manner of operation. These findings explain the difficulties involved in operating the *Live Journal*. One of the strengths of the present research findings was the identification of the flaws that restricted the success of the *Live Journal* and the relatively low level of participants in the journal in comparison to the number of conference participants.

Another goal reported by organizers and participants was the creation of a community atmosphere, providing a sense of belonging and involvement. Belonging and involvement are defined as "care" (Evans, 2014), an important issue in the community's activities. Online tools promote social and educational involvement. It seems that involvement in online activities creates a sense of belonging that is significant for everyday functioning, and facilitates the feeling of being a part of the community. To form a community, participants must know and trust each other, ensuring that the opinion of each member is positively valued. Identification with the group's goals and values can provide the group with a sense of community (Ryman et al., 2009). Some participants believe that motivation is also a product of involvement and belonging.

The findings also refer to didactic and pedagogical objectives. Teacher-educators, for whom the conference was designed, considered that the *Live Journal* could serve as a didactic resource which they could use as part of their teaching. Among the goals they mentioned that the journal could realize were: increasing reflection, developing thinking, organizing information, and acting as a source for teaching improvement. They believed that maintenance of the online *Live Journal* could serve as a model for their teaching. They saw the option of integrating the journal in their lessons, in order to generate involvement and reflection.

Findings from research conducted on online communication in forums and blogs supports this approach. Use of the online medium for reports and discussion has been shown to lead to a higher than average level of reflection (Sela, 2010). In addition, a higher level of motivation was found among students who used blogs (Peri, 2008). However, it seems that the improvements in thinking and learning appeared only where there was a combination of reading and writing (Nekmat, 2012). In other words, feedback on posts influences the thinking and learning of the original contributor. In the *Live Journal*, there were more posts but less responses, which may have caused less motivation, reflection, and learning. Most participants believed that the journal was mainly intended for reporting, documenting, marketing, and advertising, albeit in different proportions (Limor & Mann, 1997). Analysis of the texts indicated that participants held almost no interactions and discussions.

A journal requires essential resources and services to function properly. Organizers must adapt the journal to the target audience. The role of the organization (organizers) is to guide and/or organize support for the initiative at every stage from planning to summary and feedbacks. The organization is composed of a hierarchy of ranks of authority, and system for communication and coordination systems between the various participants (Samuel, 1996). However, the organization here was too brief and lacked essential resources and stages.

Another organizational aspect relates to the provision of instructions for those who wish to write in the journal. Some participants claimed there were no instructions concerning writing style. It was not clear whether they should provide short reports or documentation, whether to invite others to a discussion or just "tweet". Choosing a proper environment for a digital journal is not to be treated lightly, and setting criteria for such an environment is also important. Indeed, such a discussion did take place in the organizers' group concerning the environment (the tool) within which the online journal would operate, before it began its operations.

The various sections of a newspaper include a variety of formats, starting with news published mainly on the front pages, through articles and personal interviews in the inner pages, various opinion columns, and different styles of writing, as well as illustrations, graphics, photos, and more. Also, in most newspapers there is a chat section often dubbed the "social section" (Limor & Mann, 1997). The *Live Journal* contained only a small part of all the above mentioned formats due to its unique character. Therefore, there was confusion at the conference about the type of messages expected and their appearance.

The current study found that most *Live Journal* posts during the conference were spontaneous. On the first day, a number of writing styles appeared, starting with short notices by the organizers, about current conference events, lecture abstracts, translations of lectures into English, lecture outlines, one-liner reports on the lecture topics, in addition to notices about food, drinks, and extensive documentation of sessions. It seems that the participants were not clear what the journal contents should be, where they should be written, where they should contribute and in what style.

The findings identified two approaches concerning the conference content. The first claimed that the journal was meant for sharing on conference topics only, and therefore contents should be academic. The other opinion supported sharing on social matters. Those in favor of including social contents claimed that social posts would attract more people to the journal. Supporters of an academic character for the journal said, among other things, that reports should be well-formulated including precision in concepts and figures. Findings indicated that the greater the length of the post the smaller its frequency, so that most of the posts were short, and only about a quarter were longer than 51 words. Participants would have liked to be updated on other sessions but were uninterested in summaries, the likes of which can be found in the conference abstracts book.

Some participants recommended that the journal should be retained in an online *Live Journal* format even after the conference finished, because of the difficulty of responding at an academic level during the sessions. Discussion requires concentration, time, and consideration in depth. The reader needs to absorb a large amount of knowledge without being able to receive immediate answers, such as: What is the connection? Who is this? What is the source of this information? (Limor & Mann, 1997). However, most participants thought that writing in the *Live Journal* meant writing in real time, from the lecture room (in session). The advantage of reporting during a lecture or presentation is the possibility of influencing the considerations of conference participants on which session to join. The risk is that it can "empty a room" or alternatively "fill up a room". On the other hand, if the feedback comments are displayed on the lecture screen, they may also influence the way that the presenter deals with feedback and support the presentation.

However, it should be acknowledged that a dilemma is created by writing during the session, between reporting and simultaneously listening to a lecture when the writer is not a professional journalist. This is one of the changes we face in the digital society. The appearance of non-professional journalists has gained momentum due to the existence of the Internet, and even constitutes an alternative to professional journalism.

Such journalism does not have instructions laid down from above by the editor and there is no supervision of the writing (Dror, 2012).

One of the questions raised by this study is how should a *Live Journal* run. Should it have an organizational hierarchy and which roles should be involved? Should there be a predetermined definition of roles? A decision is needed on who advertises and who reports, and who takes photos, or does anyone do whatever they desire. Analysis of the texts in the *Live Journal* during its activity identified the roles assumed by the active journal participants. Some were roles that exist in every journal, such as journalist (reporting, documenting, interpreting, informing) and advertiser-publicity and more (Limor & Mann, 1997). However, in the *Live Journal*, each participant could fulfill all the functions: editor, producer, advertiser, photographer. The following roles were evident: criticism, discussion, reporting, documenting, advertising, marketing, sharing feelings, and sharing information. Unlike regular newspaper texts, a large part of the online texts were personal, emotional writing that involved sharing rather than factual reporting.

The journalist was one of the main roles in the *Live Journal*. It came into play at two different times, "real time", and "after the session". The journalist appears in the *Live Journal* in various functions, reporting on lectures, sharing emotional experiences, sharing academic sources of information, and providing feedbacks. In their real time reports from within sessions, most described in few words where they were, sometimes with a brief reference to the lecture topic. But here, too, an important element of the reports dealt with academic sources of information, some of the lecture participants supplied academic information to their colleagues on sources of information, books, sites, and presentations.

Recommendations

In order to ensure the success of an online journal during an academic conference, the journal should be planned in advance. It should be promoted by advertisement and explained. An online newspaper should be guided professionally by the conference's organizers and technical support should be accessible at any time. Participants in the conference should receive training so that they know how to use the site in advance, as well as clear instructions for writing. A survey of the needs of the target audience is desirable, including needs for different contents and styles, choice of an easy user-friendly and easily accessible platform, and a familiar environment.

The initiative to operate a *Live Journal* should come from the conference leaders, in order to be useful for them. This objective will justify the time and effort of setting the system up and motivate the investment of efforts required to organize the journal. The journal should constitute an integral part of the conference and be clearly perceived as important by the participants. Organizers can also arrange for the provision of end means to connect to the *Live Journal*, or ask the participants to arrive with an appropriate digital device. Conference organizers are the ones who should clearly define the goals of the *Live Journal* and adapt it to the type of conference, audience, and content that it serves. The journal should be part of the conference website, and should be fully integrated with the contents and lectures. Thus, for example, a lecture can be discussed with a link to it, and lectures can even be rated easily and immediately.

Regarding writing styles, long texts are not practical to be read by participants during the conference. Therefore, participants should be instructed to write briefly during the event. This recommendation would allow more writers to contribute and take part. Giving a team of conference organizers the explicit role of reporting and writing in the journal will encourage writing and form an important mode of communication between organizers and participants. Another possibility is to suggest that users should evaluate and grade

content they are exposed to during the various sessions (for example from 1 to 4). It is therefore recommended that journal organizers should determine appropriate writing styles for the journal.

An interesting issue arose concerning the appropriate time for writing in the *Live Journal*. Analysis of the responses indicated that the journal provided significant and immediate information during the conference, but there was no need for a summary of the sessions as this already existed in the abstracts book.

In conclusion, to implement an innovative initiative involving the integration of a *Live Journal* as part of an academic conference requires prior planning, allocation of resources and manpower, practice and assimilation of the techniques for its use, while maintaining professional and academic standards for the participants' contributions. This process is based on the understanding that there is a need for the initiative as an integral part of the conference and that it can provide an important contribution to both organizers and participants.

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