

APPLICATION OF MEDIA IN THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE STUDIES

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Abstract

The article reviews the concept of media, excluding social media, discusses their features, and presents the possibilities of their application in learning professional terminology. The research methods selected were analysis of scientific literature, analysis of documents, and a written questionnaire survey of the students of higher education institutions. The results of the study are based on the data of the analysis of the survey. The study revealed a favourable assessment of the use of virtual learning environments for professional language learning.

Keywords: media, innovative teaching methods, professional language teaching and learning

1. INTRODUCTION

In the age of information and rapidly evolving technology, more and more people are becoming part of the networked structure of the Internet. Most life processes and experiences, ranging from reading books to realising ideas, move into the virtual space. It is still not possible to say exactly whether the intensive development of social media is due to the need for modern technological solutions and people's self-realisation, or whether new networks and emerging communities themselves are capable of attracting new users, facilitating the communication process, and helping find new technological solutions. The medium that is used for communication alters the construction and formulations of human thoughts as well as the manner of the communication itself. A person may think that he or she controls a computer, creates software for it, and implements innovations, but does not even feel that the computer reprograms that very person, changes the peculiarities of communication, organises his or her free time, etc.

In the information society, new media provide communication and learning opportunities for anyone with internet access. In the age of information and rapidly evolving technology, more and more people are becoming interactive. When learning a professional language, students move many of their activities to a virtual space. By helping to communicate, the media change the wording of the students' thoughts and the way they communicate. The media (in Latin, *medium* means "publicity or commonality") are means of communication or a channel, i.e., an intermediary between the sender and the recipient of information, having its own information coding and dissemination system. The media are either of interpersonal (telephone) or mass (radio, press, and television; in total this is called mass media) character. A medium (pl. media), in a broad sense, is a means of communication that conveys information about current phenomena and events. Media are those means of communication that are of technological nature. Media include photography, cinema, video technology, and the Internet. Examples of new media include news sites, blogs, wikis, computer games, and social networks. New media broadcast their content through communication and conversation and allow learners to share, comment, and discuss a wide variety of topics.

Research problem and relevance. Virtual communication is a new social phenomenon. Several decades ago, virtual media united only a few hundred thousand users. Today, several billion people are using social networks in cyberspace. Social media have attracted researchers' attention since the beginning of this phenomenon. Sociologists, psychologists, linguists, computer scientists, and economists have tried to analyse this phenomenon by applying theories of their fields and conducting interdisciplinary research.

However, there is still no unified theory covering all segments. Lithuanian researchers mostly focus attention on individual, rather narrow aspects of virtual communication and application of social media:

peculiarities of electronic language (Ryklienė 2000), expressions of the virtual community (Drevel 2009), social networking (Rutkauskienė & Gudonienė 2010), identity creation (Savicka 2011), political communication in social networks (Šuminas 2009), and economic advantages (Urnėžiūtė 2014). The application of media in the process of teaching/learning a professional language is most often mentioned when researching innovative teaching methods, combining traditional and new methods, or analysing the application of computer technologies in language teaching (Žegunienė & al. 2014; Jankauskienė & al. 2013; Leonavičienė & Salienė 2013). However, as a separate object, social media in the learning process are not a common phenomenon in the writings of Lithuanian researchers.

The aim of the study was to analyse and empirically identify the expression of the application of new media for the improvement of professional language skills in the study process.

Methodology of the study. A quantitative survey of students' opinions was conducted. The following methods were used in the study: the analysis of scientific literature, documents, and the students' written survey as well as the generalisation, interpretation, and systematisation of the results of the survey. The study involved 181 biomedical students who were selected using convenience sampling.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CONCEPT, FEATURES AND POSSIBILITIES

Social media emerged in the 1990s. Even though this phenomenon is being actively analysed, there is disagreement over what constitutes social media, with new components being added to the classification of social media. However, there is a consensus on one of the most important features of these media: interactivity. Social media are created by all their users, i.e., the content of the information does not depend on the sole disseminator of information (as is the case in traditional media). The content created may have multiple formats, i.e., a single message provides an opportunity to present a combination of textual, visual, and audio elements as well as active links to the primary sources.

Social media include personal blogs, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and others. These media are often home to individual communities whose members share material of interest to them.

There are about 200 definitions of social media. Here are some examples:

“Social Media is the democratisation of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers” (Solis 2010).

“Social media is online information created by people using technologies that are easily accessible and easy to publish.” (Dailey 2009).

“Social media are online sources that individuals use to share content: video, photos, images, text, ideas, insights, humour, opinion, gossip, and news.” (Drury 2008, p. 275).

“Social media are a tool for people to share information in the digital space” (Garnytė & Perez 2009, p. 43).

Thus, it can be said that social media is understood as a certain platform for communication, collaboration, and the creation and dissemination of various information. As can be seen, the definitions of social media identify three main features of social media: users (readers-creators), information content (created by the readers here and now), and the use of technologies. Compared to traditional media, the main difference is that people can participate in the communication process not only as recipients of information, but also as creators and senders. An opportunity arises not only to listen, watch, or read, but also to comment, supplement the information, and disseminate one's knowledge, ideas, and experiences.

P. Dailey (2009) distinguished four main features of social media: a) authenticity (ability to communicate and publish authentic messages); (b) promptness (possibility not only to publish information but also to comment on it immediately after the event at any time of the day); (c) transparency (possibility to express a different opinion, to provide revised versions of the facts, and to refute lies with proven facts); (d) sociality (a reliable, attractive, and interactive environment for

disseminating information in a variety of formats and for monitoring and commenting on messages sent by others, as well as communication and social networking).

Similar features have been identified by A. Mayfield (2008): a) participation (social media encourages contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience.); b) openness (most social media services are open to feedback and participation. They encourage voting, comments, and the sharing of information. There are rarely any barriers to accessing and making use of content – password-protected content is frowned on); c) conversation (whereas traditional media is about “broadcast” (content transmitted or distributed to an audience), social media is better seen as a two-way conversation); (d) community (social media allows communities to form quickly and communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as a love of photography, a political issue, or a favourite TV show); e) connectedness (most kinds of social media thrive on their connectedness, making use of links to other sites, resources, and people).

As can be seen, both authors present similar features of social media: communication, open access, and active participation. Social media gives people opportunities not only to communicate with each other on certain topics, but also to share ideas and content and to form groups. In addition to the dissemination of textual information, it is also possible to share visual (i.e., photos and video), audio (music recordings), and entertainment (games) information. Various portals, forums, communities, groups, blogs, etc. are created for various activities. After evaluating the characteristics of social media, it is possible to determine the principles and possibilities of their use in the process of teaching a professional language. In the platform chosen in the virtual space, professional language learners could create and publish information, read, evaluate, and comment on and supplement their colleagues' reports. The chosen activity could take place not only during the lectures, but also at the time chosen by the learners. A student and/or a teacher would not be limited by the factor of a specific place (a classroom) either. Social media could become a platform where students not only share lecture material, but also gather independently collected multi-format information or references to sources on topics covered.

There are a number of foreign websites of publishing houses, teachers, or organisations where one can learn a professional language or find links to pages with similar content. There is often a "Forum" section where users can discuss teaching/learning tools and their use as well as the variety of tasks and can also gather in groups and learn professional languages together in virtual meetings. Higher education institutions have the Moodle system, yet it does not provide as many language teaching/learning opportunities as can be found on social media.

According to V. Leonavičienė and V. Salienė, language learning is an active process of skills development, which should be continuous. Realizing that it is not so much theories that are important for language teaching, but rather the language environment itself, teachers should try to provide their students with as many possibilities and links as possible to give them the opportunity to hear and learn not only the textbook truths but also the peculiarities of the language that is used by native speakers. Such opportunities are provided not only by audio or video clips accompanying the selected textbook, but also by social media, i.e., newspaper or magazine websites, online clubs, forums, movies and their excerpts, and so on.

In the process of teaching/learning a professional language, attention must be paid to the development of four skills, i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading. The peculiarities of social media (openness, efficiency, accessibility, community spirit, etc.) allow the teachers to choose the appropriate level of language teaching material, and the students to choose the topics and activities of interest to them without straying from the issues discussed in the lectures. This would make it easier for the teacher to apply individualised teaching in groups with a mixed level of student proficiency. Social media could become not only a source of material, but also a platform for organising evaluations. There is a possibility to create a virtual classroom, a group club, or a blog where one can publish material in various formats (written, audio, or visual) that can be seen and/or heard and evaluated not only by the teacher but also by the co-learners. Considering the properties of social media and the possibilities of their use, the question arises as to why few teachers use these tools in their classes.

Thus, in summary, students are active users of social media, i.e., they know the possibilities of social media and know how to work with them. They find activities in the virtual space attractive, and thus it could be assumed that it would be attractive for them to study, deepen their knowledge, and perform certain tasks using social media.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In the first part of the survey, respondents were asked what learning media they used to study speciality subjects. The students' answers showed that they mostly used printed texts, i.e., books, handouts, questionnaires, etc., as well as the Internet (see Figure 1).

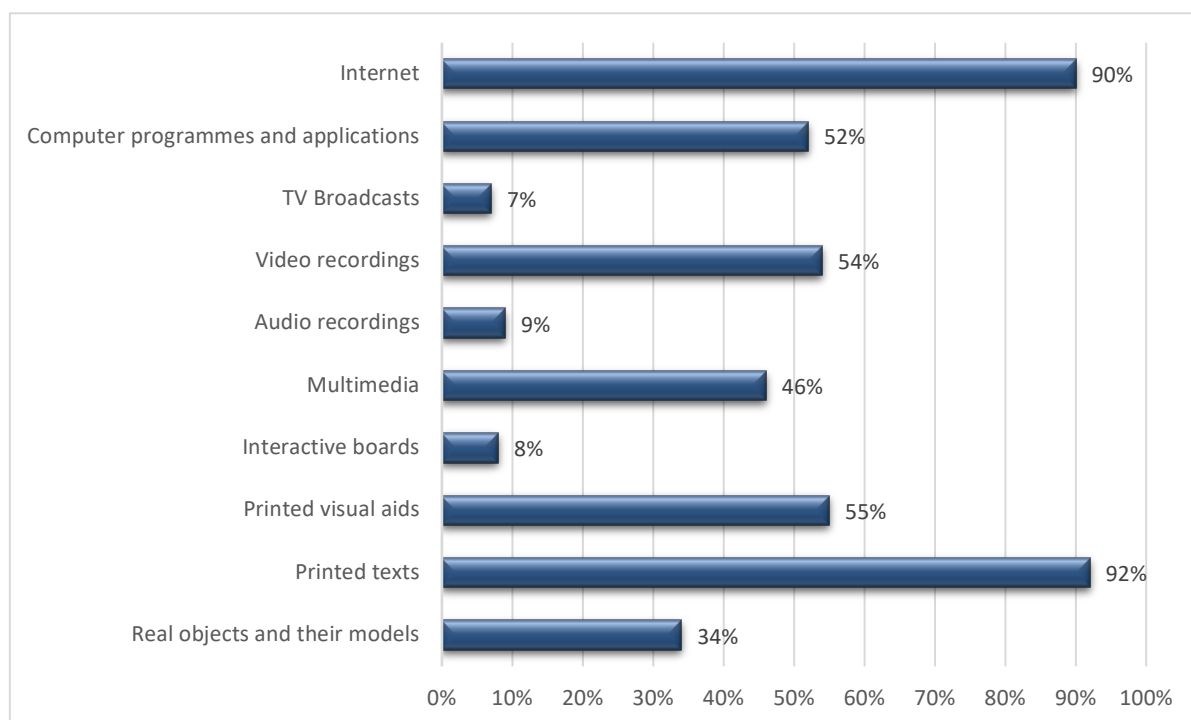


Fig. 1. Use of media in studies

When asked what social media they used to learn professional terminology, the respondents indicated that they mostly chose YouTube, less often Facebook and Wiki, and a fifth of the respondents indicated that they chose Instagram. Individual students mentioned using Kahoot, Snapchat, Quizlet, Babel, Duolingo, online translators, dictionaries, manuals, and/or encyclopaedias (see Figure 2).

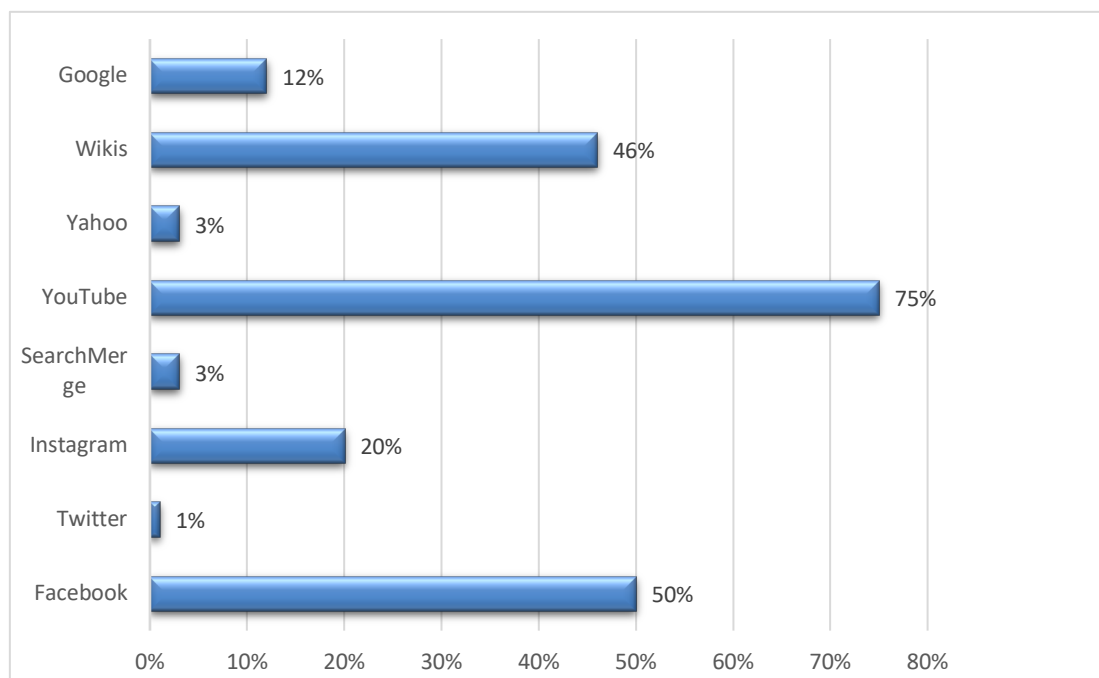


Fig. 2. Use of social media in studies

The students' answers revealed that in the study process, they usually integrated social media into the search for textual, visual, and audio information. Meanwhile, the use of the media for information sharing and professional communication was less frequent. Students were reluctant to post their information on social media (only a tenth of the respondents practiced this) (see Figure 3).

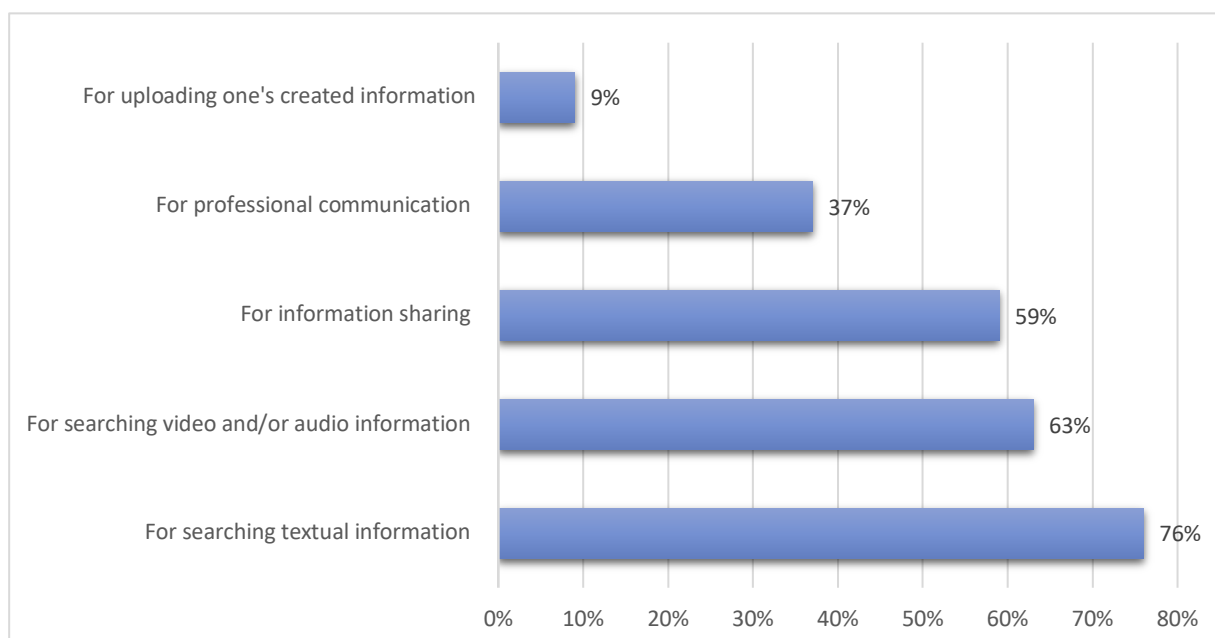


Fig. 3. Learning activities integrating social media

The respondents' experience of using new media for distance learning of professional terminology depends on the virtual learning environments used in educational institutions (as many as 86% of the

students indicated using Moodle, 30% of the respondents indicated having experience with the Oracle PeopleSoft study management system, and 24% of the respondents were using FirstClass). Only a small proportion of the respondents had experience in online courses and interactive lessons or seminars (see Figure 4).

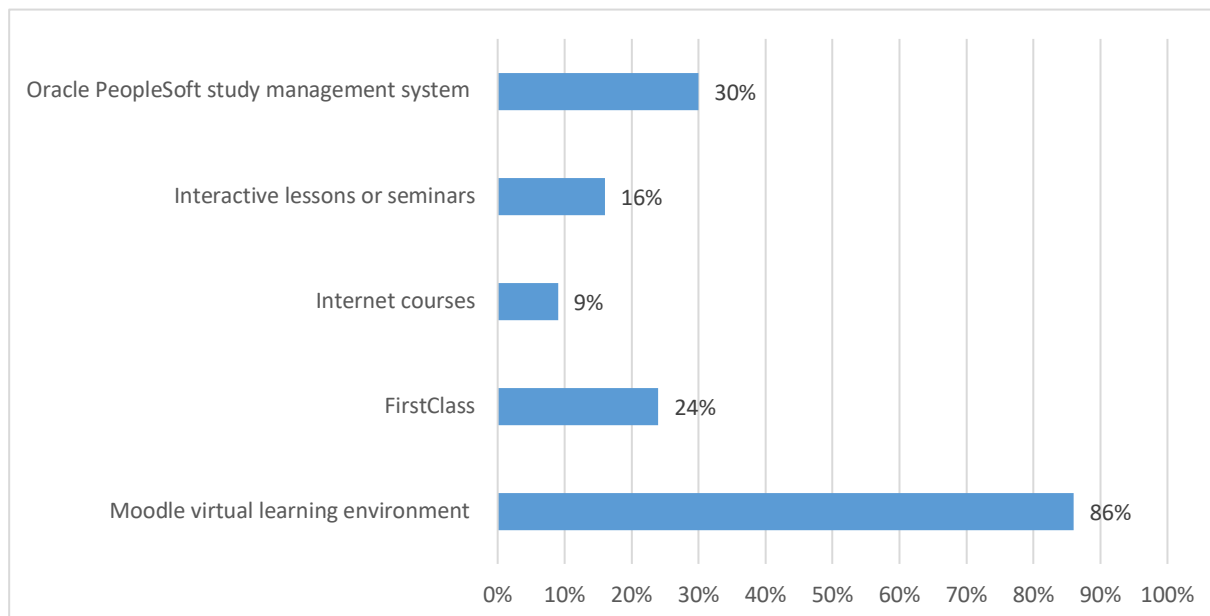


Fig. 4. Experience of media use for distance learning

According to the respondents, the inclusion of new media in the personal learning of professional language was mainly determined by the desire to expand the understanding of professional language, the improvement of listening comprehension, the improvement of pronunciation, and the consolidation of professional terminology. For a third of the respondents, the media helped them to orientate themselves in different contexts of professional language. One tenth of the students used media for the development of their socio-cultural competencies (see Figure 5).

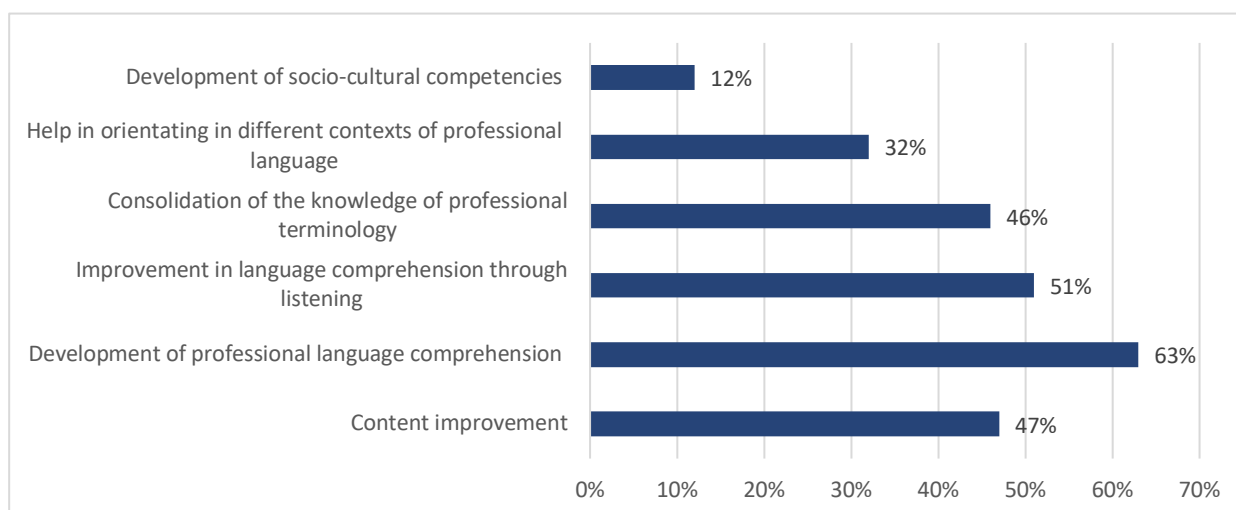


Fig. 5. Factors influencing the use of media for language learning

4. CONCLUSIONS

Anyone who has access to the Internet and who is willing and able to share information in a variety of content and formats, to communicate and collaborate, to find like-minded people, and to follow and comment on content posted by other members can become a media user. Factors that unite all members are common interests and goals in social networks and the content of information that is created here and now. The assessment of the opportunities offered by social media and the needs of students suggests that these tools can be used in professional language exercises to develop four key skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This could be achieved by creating blogs, forums, virtual communities, clubs, closed groups, etc. Social media also provide the opportunity to keep up to date with the latest information and using material in a variety of formats and volumes for the teaching of a professional language. Students, being active users of social media, tend to actively use these tools in the learning process as well. According to the students, many of the existing social media could be used not only as search engines, but also as a platform for organising evaluation testing.

The analysis of the scientific literature and the results of the study showed that students using new media preferred the interaction of mobile technologies with social networks and the opportunity to learn via collaboration.

Students are motivated to use media as they provide access to a variety of resources needed for professional language development and enable students to acquire a wider range of language skills not only through the use of information but also through its creation.

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