Social Media and E-Learning:

Linking usage habits of Social Media Tools and the effectiveness of E-Learning in China and Germany

E-Leader Berlin 2012

Hochschule für
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Berlin School of Economics and Law

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• Changes in digital communication influence ways of learning

• **Impact of social media on learning:** enhanced collaboration in learning communities

• "This net-centric generation values their ability to use the Web to create a self-paced, customized, on-demand learning path that includes multiple forms of interactive, social and self-publishing media tools." (Baird & Fisher, 2005)

• Problem: cultural background influences the way of using social media → different impact on e-learning

• Consequence: Adapt e-learning platforms to various social media usage habits

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• **Research question:** Is there a link between usage habits of social media and the effectiveness of e-learning?

• **Subquestions:**
  - success factors of e-learning platforms?
  - active social media users = active e-learners?
  - Do Chinese people use social media differently than German people?
  - Do Chinese people use e-learning differently than German people?
  → same e-learning platform in different countries?
  - How do we build up an e-learning platform in a culture we are not familiar with?
  - Should Chinese e-learning platforms follow the rules of Chinese social media platforms?

• **Initial problem:** How to build up an e-learning platform for the Carl Benz Academy - the Exectuive MBA-programme of Mercedes Benz China Limited

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- **Online social networks and e-learning in China:**
  - Growing importance of social media
  - Majority of social media users share content that already exists
  - Western countries: spread of own ideas + more collaborative
  - Reasons: different learning cultures

Practices of learning:

demonstration		participation
tracing		dialogue
repeated copying	⟷	discussion
active memorisation		Observation
(Jin & Cortazzi, 2006)		(Chatti, Jarke & Frosch-Wilke, 2007)

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• **The need for e-learning in China:**
  Reasons for adopting a blendes learning strategy:
  - growing demand for education
  - shortages of teaching staff
  - growing number of companies → increasing need of part-time study programmes
  - creation of new cities → jobs require further education
  - learning = way to overcome the bimodal distribution of wealth

• **Challenge** for companies: bridging the knowledge gap

• **Solution:** running own education programmes by using virtual learning environments (VLE)

• **Advantages** of VLEs: unlimited access to learning tools (e.g. document sharing systems, teacher assistance, discussion boards)

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- **Foundation of the Carl Benz Academy:**
  - MBA programme in collaboration with Peking University, Berlin University for Professional Studies and L.A.'s Woodbury University.
  - Benefit from e-learning experience of foreign educational systems
  - Blended learning approach
  - Collaborative online platform: foster exchange, innovation, shared purpose

- **Obstacles:** VLE unfamiliar for CBA students, implementation of online units accompanied by training sessions

- **Question:** reasons for these problems?

- **Assumption:** Besides cultural differences, communication problems and different experience with e-learning, usage habits of social media determine significantly the effectiveness of e-learning.

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- **Setting:**
  - students from different cultures using an identically constructed platform
  - unique opportunity to examine how the same e-learning platform is perceived by students with different cultural background
  - students stay in their own cultural learning communities (no interaction) → findings extremely relevant
  - Collaborative online platform: foster exchange, innovation, shared purpose

- **Survey:**
  - Among 30 Chinese and 30 German students
  - Aim: identify social media usage habits

- **Measure of the learning success:** comparison of the results of the first online units

- **Analysis:** Do different user habits have an impact on the success of e-learning platforms?

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First results:

Chinese respondents:

Social media:
- only 20% studied abroad
→ mostly influenced by Chinese educational system

- 80% have a social media account and use it every day or more than once a week

- most relevant purpose: share information (100%)

German respondents:

Social media:
- only 13% studied abroad
→ mostly influenced by German educational system

- 86% have a social media account and use it more than once a week or once a week

- most relevant purpose: stay in contact with friends (29%), share information (43%), create own web presence (29%)

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Chinese respondents:

E-Learning:
- 60% prefer to learn in groups but also 60% prefer lectures

-work mostly in teams

- think that they learn the most in workshops

- suggestions: more reading material (e.g copies of books)

German respondents:

E-Learning:
- 75% prefer to learn alone but no special preference regarding lectures and workshops

- 50% work mostly in changing environments (in teams and alone)

- think that they learn the most in online units

- suggestions: more interactivity

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• Collecting more **data** in order to get significant results.

• Pay attention to other important **factors** such as age, educational system etc.

• Working on the measurement of the **effectiveness** of e-learning platforms.

• Provide **recommendations** regarding the construction of VLEs in countries with different cultural background.

• Do we need a sixth **cultural dimension** (Hofstede) called "social media usage habits"?
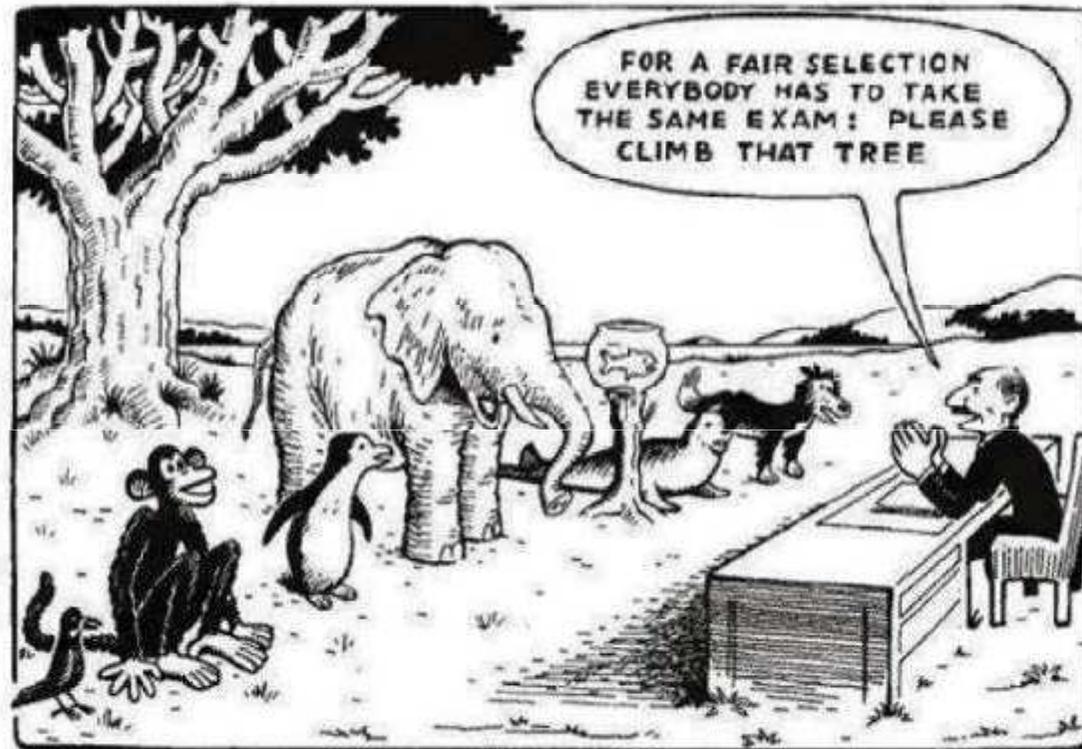
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