



Process of Setting and Recognizing Standards in Online IG Learning Communications

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Abstract

Online learning communications among multigenerational faculty and students in higher education flow more smoothly if participants adhere to standards which guide these communications. This study adopted the systematic grounded theory design to articulate how the standards for online IG learning communications were established and recognized by participants, and how they influenced behaviors toward the said process. Data were collected from 63 participants in higher education institutions in the Philippines' Central Luzon Region using three methods: semi-structured individual interviews, online communication analysis, and a qualitative survey. Through a three-phase analysis, a grounded theory was articulated to explain the process of how standard-setting is determined by teacher authority, and how standard-recognizing is influenced by generational distance. Findings also show that whether the standards are provided explicitly, implicitly, unconsciously, or assumed, students rely on pakikiramdam (sensing) in recognizing standards set by the faculty for communication. Findings promotes awareness of the faculty and students' roles in the process, in order to support a safe and IG-inclusive online communication environment.

Keywords: grounded theory, intergenerational diversity, online learning, classroom standards

Introduction

Communication is at the core of human operations. Language and media may vary, but the need to convey meaning for mutual understanding remains a constant struggle. As Flor (2020) stated, communication is essential to any social system. This is more so in education, where learning is exchanged and negotiated for the achievement of its qualification, socialization, and subjectification functions (Biesta, 2009). Open lines of communication have the potential to promote healthy relationships among faculty and students (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020). Learners are encouraged to engage when there is interaction and timely feedback (Bigatel 2016), and high-quality interactions could have a positive impact in the students' learning perceptions (Aydin, 2013). Aside from the fact that high-quality communication supports the development of solutions to issues on students' attainment of competencies as future specialists (Hreilikh & Vydolob, 2021), the interaction also makes the student feel that someone is supporting them in their journey (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020). Not only do these interactions help students get their diploma, but they also help them grow as people (Hreilikh & Vydolob, 2021).

This high value of communication in education remains true regardless of delivery mode. For instance, when education

was disrupted by the pandemic, the shift to blended and online learning had been abrupt across the globe (Sun, Tang, & Zuo 2020; Nambiar, 2020; Librero, 2021; Maleko, et al. 2021). At this time, one of the struggles of teachers had been to deliver the same core functions using new media. One of those core functions that teachers had to sustain in new ways was connecting with students (Bongco & de Guzman, 2022). Nambiar (2020) claimed that timely interaction among faculty and students is essential to the satisfaction of these parties in online learning. Further, while the typical assumption is that online learners are autonomous, reality suggests that it may not be so, which is why a responsive faculty could help reduce the attrition of an online class (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020). This is because the communication with the teacher and timely feedback gives the students the assurance that they are not alone in cyberspace (Mupinga, et al., 2006). As Gonzalez-Flor, (2020) indicated, an online platform is not simply a means to obtain a degree for the student. It is also a space for interaction.

Even when the world has gone back to "normal," the learning during the pandemic years will definitely affect the post-pandemic education at all levels. One of these important learning is the potential of digital technology to enhance and support teaching and learning. As such, online platforms are expected to serve as means for learning communications

between faculty and students even post-pandemic. Online learning communications however is not without challenge. One of these is the nature of online platforms that challenges the acceptability of a simple transfer of face-to-face communication techniques to online communications. Among the features of online communication that challenge this practice are the limited or different non-verbal cues for communication, (Loglia & Bowers, 2016; Edwards et al., 2017; Alawamleh et al., 2017) and delayed responses or asynchronous mode of communication (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020; Bongco et al., 2022). Another challenge is the intergenerational differences as multiple generations bring in their own styles and consider them as the golden standard while considering the styles of others as inferior (Polat & Kazak, 2015; White, et al. 2017; Devlin, 2018; Bongco, 2020).

These challenges, which could potentially lead to misunderstandings, drive participants to explore effective ways of communicating with each other by identifying the standards of communication. These standards include norms and expected behaviors (Evertson, Poole, & the IRIS Center 2003) in online communication. Conventional wisdom would lead to the assumption that these standards are set by the faculty. However, recent literature suggests that the postmodern era has seen the erosion of teacher authority. Hence, it is no longer clear who holds the authority and who submits to it (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020; Zamir, 2021; Lü & Hu, 2021). This could be due to a confluence of trends and events such as the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches that value power sharing and student autonomy (CHEd, 2014; Bremner, 2021) and the overemphasis on student perspectives over teacher perspectives (Nambiar, 2020).

Regardless of who the authority is, adherence to standards could facilitate smooth communication in online platforms. However, while reviewed literature has explored the importance of communication, as well as the teacher and student's expectations, it is not clear how such expectations or standards are communicated with each participant in the communication act. Hence, this study aimed to articulate how these standards are set and recognized by students and faculty as they engage in online learning communication. Understanding this process would assist faculty and students in making sense of their crucial role in the process whether intentionally or not. Such knowledge would help the players be more retrospective of their actions which are likely used as cues by the other participants in standard recognizing. The same understanding could also inform curricular policy development in online learning to ensure more open and IG-inclusive online communication among faculty and students.

Research Problems

This study intended to articulate the process of establishing and recognizing the standards for online learning communication among multigenerational faculty and students in higher education. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

RQ 1: How are standards established in online IG learning communications?

RQ2: How are the established standards in online IG learning communications recognized by the participants?

RQ 3: How does the process of setting and recognizing standards influence participants' behaviors toward online learning communications?

Methodology

This study intended to articulate a theory that is grounded in the data, in order to describe the process of setting and recognizing standards in online learning communications among multigenerational faculty and students in higher education. As such, a systematic grounded theory design was used. This design compelled the researchers to push beyond description, to a systematic generation of a theory from the gathered data. Simply put, this design allowed the researchers to generate a theory that explained the process based on the views of the participants in the concerned process (Creswell, 2007).

Additionally, the post-positivist method allowed researchers from the Millennial and more seasoned faculty generations to bracket their subjectivities and let the participant realities inform the theory. Hence, prior to the instrument development, researchers confronted their own biases by answering questions such as "Who should be setting the standards for online communications in class?" and "What do I consider to be common sense in the process of setting and recognizing these standards?"

Participants

The study is concerned with the multigenerational faculty and students of higher education institutions in the Central Luzon Region of the Philippines. Participants were selected through the following inclusion criteria: (1) teaches or studies in a public or private higher education institution in the Central Luzon Region; (2) participates in online learning communications; and (3) works with multigenerational faculty or students (in terms of cohort).

The study involved 63 participants. Recruitment started with 20 multigenerational faculty and students. However, for theoretical sampling and for better saturation, more participants were invited to participate. Invitations to participants were made through the social network to ensure anonymity and voluntary participation. Table 1 shows the summary of participants in terms of sex and generation.

Table 1: Summary of Participants in terms of Cohort and Sex

Participant	GENERATION (Cohort)			TOTAL
	Generation Z	Millennial	Political Generation	
Male Faculty	-	5	2	7

Female Faculty	-	5	2	7
Male Students	18	2	-	20
Female Students	28	1	-	29
TOTAL	46	13	4	63

While faculty participants' age ranges from 26 to 64, student participants range from 18 to 30 years. All the students were young adults. Among the faculty participants, 5 are young adults, 7 are middle-aged, and 2 are older adults. They were from the public and private higher educational institutions in Bataan, Bulacan, Pampanga, and Zambales.

Data Gathering

The theory was grounded in the data which were gathered from three different sources including semi-structured individual interviews, online communication analysis, and qualitative surveys. All tools were developed by the researchers and validated. The research design, however, demanded that the questions be evolving to satisfy the need for theoretical saturation. Hence, theoretical sampling was facilitated through the zigzag direction of data gathering and data analysis where the tools were recalibrated after preliminary analyses in order to highlight the concepts that needed further investigation.

Semi-structured Individual Interviews

The interview, as one of the basic data collection procedures for grounded theory, was the primary data source. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and was validated through expert validation and pilot testing to check for relevance to the research problems, clarity, difficulty, and facilitation requirements. The tool was revised based on the comments and suggestions of three experts before it was pilot tested with a male Generation Z student. This allowed the researchers to further improve the interview questions and their facilitation by encoding the participant's identified standards through a shared slide for a smoother interview process. Preliminary analysis was done after the first 10 interviews to facilitate theoretical sampling. Sample interview questions are provided below.

- In communicating with your professor/ student (specify sex and generation of faculty for students participants) how do you identify the standards that you have to apply? (Initial validated question- RQ 02)
- How do the teachers maintain the standards that they have established? (Included after preliminary analysis for saturation- RQ 01.)

All 20 interviews were conducted online using video conferencing apps. However, participants were not required to open their cameras. Interviews were conducted in English and Filipino which, was most convenient for the participants. The

main part of the interviews lasted an average of 45.7 minutes. Four faculty represent the Millennial (young adult) and Political generation (middle-age and older adult) cohorts from both sexes. Meanwhile, 16 students were interviewed, from Millennials and Generation Z (young adults).

Online Communication Analysis

With the use of an additional data source called online communication analysis, researchers were able to observe intergenerational instructors and students' online learning conversations in their natural environment without interfering with that environment. Researchers requested the participants for three or more screenshots of their online learning communications. It had been assured that these participants had the full consent to share. Analysis tool was also developed by the researchers and validated by three experts in terms of relevance to the research questions. There were 53 sets of screenshots that were shared and analyzed for the study. These include direct or group messages with multigenerational faculty and students.

Qualitative Survey

After a second analysis which laid the foundation for theory building, concepts emerged which needed further saturation. Hence, a qualitative survey was conducted. The questionnaire was developed based on the findings. Separate sets of questions were identified for faculty and students. Both questionnaires were pilot tested to check for clarity and difficulty. Pilot testing participants included a female young adult GenZ student and a male middle-aged Political generation faculty. The instruments were revised based on the participants and researcher's evaluation of the pilot test questions and responses. Sample questions are listed:

- For the students: How easy or difficult is it to sense the faculty's expectations in online communication which were not discussed expressly?
- For the faculty: In your opinion, what are the standards for online learning communication which do not have to be explained to the Gen Z students anymore because college students should already know them?

Five male faculty members and five female faculty members responded to the survey. They span three life cycle phases and are members of the Millennial and Political generation cohorts. Meanwhile, 21 female and 11 male students from Generation Z and young adults answered the survey. Social networking sites were also used to find all the participants.

Data Validation, Analysis, and Saturation

All data were transcribed and analyzed verbatim in English and Filipino. To ensure the credibility of the interview data, transcripts were returned to the participants for member checking prior to the analysis. Only one female student and one male faculty requested for an alteration.

A three-phase analysis was conducted to analyze the data that were gathered in this study to the desired level of saturation. Preliminary analysis was conducted after the first 10 transcripts for theoretical sampling or to inform further data

gathering. This analysis showed the need for emphasis on implicit standards, maintenance of set standards, and effects of the process, among others.

A second phase analysis was conducted after the completion of the interviews and online communication analysis. This involved the three coding cycles for grounded theory, which include open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Process, and descriptive codes such as feeling the moment, assuming, maintaining, and teacher authority emerged from open coding. Hence, categories include the process of setting standards, the process of recognizing standards, and effects on behaviors. Analytical memoing was done throughout the process to facilitate theory building. Finally, during selective coding, a preliminary theory to explain the process was articulated. From this, however, emerged concepts that required further data gathering to achieve the researcher's desired level of theoretical saturation. These concepts include the tendency to avoid communication due to uncertainty, and basis for determining the explicit and implicit standards. The survey data were similarly subjected to open and axial coding for the third phase of analysis to enrich theory building. Codes were used in multiple themes where they were applicable.

Finally, everything was analyzed through the lens of the Age-Period-Cohort model for intergenerational diversity. This means that the IG diversity of participants in this study is seen as the result of the overlapping and interacting effects of age or lifecycle, cohort, and period.

Results

The subsequent sections will present results and discussions relative to the research questions. Finally, the theory that was developed from the grounded data will be presented in both graphical and narrative forms.

Setting standards in Online IG Communications

The results show the authority of the faculty in setting the standards for online learning communication. Meanwhile, students' role in setting standards is limited to suggestions and negotiation if the faculty allows it.

Explicitly Set.

Faculty across the sexes and generations articulate standards for online communication with students. This process, which includes oral discussions, written posts, and messaging (Pa A, B, C, D) is important and valued by students. However, students observe that younger faculty make their explicit standards easier to understand for the GenZ students (Pa 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). Learners are also more confident in their understanding of the younger faculty's standards. As a female GenZ shared, "the older ones are complicated when they explain... the younger makes clearer explanations, we understand the terminology."

These explicit standards are typically set at the beginning of the course through class orientation meetings (Pa 1, 2, 6, 7, 8). These cover general netiquette (Pa I, 13, 14). However, there are also standards which the faculty do not set verbally at the onset but make explicit in reaction to a certain event or student's communication (Pa A, B, D). This is also shown in

how a faculty emphasized that students should not talk to her like they are friends. Female Millennial Participant B shared, "Sometimes I am not comfortable, they think it was okay so I established and I tell the students that our relationship during online class, there should always be respect." It could be observed that the setting of standard was made after she felt uncomfortable with the students' communication. Similarly, female GenZ Participant 2 shared that their Millennial faculty emphasize that they are not supposed to communicate with them like *tropa* (friends).

Similarly, Female, Old-aged Participant D articulated her expectations with students in reaction to a communication act. "When you say good morning, you will see them reply good morning... Then I wrote, we have a quiz later at 10 AM (laughs). Then, no one responded or reacted. Then, I said, 'Ay, no reaction, (There is) No thank you.' (laughs). Then they reacted with a laughing emoticon to my message..."

While faculty reported that they attempted negotiating and seeking students' agreement, it is clear that the decision over the setting of standards lies on the faculty (Pa 4, B, C). Students tend to make suggestions, intentionally or not (through unconscious transfer of standards from one class to another). For instance, female young adult Millennial Participant 14 shared "... It happened before. Our instructor was shocked when we raised our hands. We were used to our practice in another class where we raised our hands to indicate that we understood, without having to unmute. We did that (in another class) and the instructor asked why we were raising our hands, thinking we had a question. Then we explained that that was how we respond to an instructor in another class to show that we understand. The instructor adopted it in class, as well." However, the possibility of negotiation and the approval of students' suggestions still depend on the faculty. Hence, the teacher remains the sole authority for setting the standards for online IG communications.

Deliberately Implied.

The faculty recognize that standards should be clear to the students (Pa E, I). As a male-middle-aged Political Generation Participant E shared "I guess, (no standards should be assumed or implied) So that students will be aware of the ethics on how and when to send messages or call professors for their concerns." Nonetheless, it was observed that there are also unvoiced standards due to their controversial nature. This includes a differentiated style of communication with male and female students. For instance, a male young adult Millennial faculty Participant A shared that he was cautious when communicating with female students to avoid misunderstandings. This caution influenced how he interacted online with male and female students. From the teacher's perspective, the standard could not be voiced but needed to be implemented. Hence, he implies this through his actions and choice of words.

"I am more careful in communicating with the females because I do not want to offend them. In our case with six years of experience, they are sensitive. So if I need an example to make the

class jolly, I direct my jokes or statements to the loud male students, instead of the female.”

“... To avoid any issue... I am not very observant if he will be offended or not if it is a male. But if I would reply to a female and I would be joking, I would triple check my chat sometimes, (laughs).”

Similarly, the careful recognition of the presence of parents in synchronous class communications is an implied standard for the middle-aged Political Generation male faculty. Participant C recognized the parent’s presence in online classes which makes him more cautious of his communication with students. He said, “Of course, the parents are there, listening. One time, I saw a parent with my student, and they were also asking... Honestly, in face to face, sometimes we speak harsh words although we are very careful. Yet, we are just humans.... But in online class, the parents are there, we might be recorded so we are very very careful.” Knowing that most students are studying at their homes and discussions are most likely overheard by parents or guardians, he deliberately calls attention to the fact by calling them to discussion. For instance, the faculty deliberately requested a parent to explain a concept in class at one time. This implicitly called the attention of the whole class to the presence of parents in their online discussions, highlighting the fact that everything they say and do in class through video conferencing is witnessed by more than the enrolled members of the class.

Assumed.

There are some standards that the faculty do not intentionally communicate with the GenZ and Millennial students because the faculty believe that the students should already know them. These assumptions include values (e.g. polite communication) (Pa J, L) and expected necessary competencies (e.g. use of email) (Pa F). Some assumptions are also based on the faculty’s belief that GenZ and Millennial students who grew up in the age of technology are already digital literates and therefore should already know the expected standards without express discussion (Pa G, K, M, N). Participant K said it is already part of GenZ’s lifestyle and therefore no longer needs to be made explicit. Further, younger instructors make it explicit that students are not supposed to communicate with them like they are friends (Pa 2). Meanwhile, this is already assumed by the older generations. Other faculty’s opinions regarding assumed standards are:

“(It is more disturbing for me) when they do not follow the standard which I expect they should already know without saying because they have grown up with access to digital technology and have high influence on how they interact with the online learning environment. (Female, Older adult, Political, Participant N)

“Similar standards to that of F2F learning set-up. This is also a common topic in social media which is a typical source of info of Gen Z.” (Male, Middle-aged, Millennial Participant M)

Unconsciously Set.

Faculty and students are setting standards in online communication unconsciously. These are typically based on their personal or generational style and/or perceived style of another. For instance, a faculty may not be aware that students take note which platform makes it easier to obtain a reply from him/her. This observation sets a standard for online communication with the faculty (Pa 13). For instance, male GenZ Participant 6 shared “... I communicate using email with Millennial faculty but messenger with the Political generation faculty because it is easier to communicate with them through messenger.” Faculty’s use of reaction features (e.g. thumbs up, heart, etc) and emoticons are also setting the standards for communication (Pa A, C). While many students and participants mention formal communication, how that formal communication is actualized in their chatbox and emails is modeled by the teacher. For instance, a faculty may not be aware that using “haha” somehow sets a standard in their online learning communication. However, the teacher’s use of it sets its acceptability in one class, even though it may not be acceptable in another. For instance, in a screenshot of class group chat shared by young adult Millennial Participant A:

Faculty: I did not reg(ister) immediately. I sent it first to you haha (with 10 laughing reactions)

Student: (replied to you) sorry sir, UwU (with 3 laughing reactions)

This is in contrast to Participant 13’s experience with the male middle-aged Political generation Participant C, “He is really kind but he misinterpreted my classmate. Someone messaged in the group chat ‘haha.’ Political generation hates that ‘haha,’ sad reactions (laughs)... Haha was misinterpreted. ‘What’s with this student?’ I told him that it might have been pressed accidentally or maybe the student was happy chatting with him (laughs).”

Similarly, students are also setting standards for themselves on how to communicate online with Millennial and Political generational faculty. This student-initiated standard-setting is possible because these standards are made only for themselves, rather than for the larger group. Such standards are typically based on their perspectives and observations about the generations. For instance, students reported using more formal, concise, or detailed step-by-step explanations when communicating with older faculty. For instance, young adult male Participant 9 shared that he uses messenger to chat with the male middle-aged Political generation faculty because “... that age are not very adept in using technology so I just used the easiest way to communicate with them.” Female GenZ Participant 5 shared, “For the older faculty, we explain more, step by step. The younger faculty ‘get’ our meanings more easily.”

All types of standards discussed in this section are maintained by the faculty and sometimes, by the students through words or actions (Pa 2, A, B, C, D). Old-aged Political Generation Participant D said that it is important to be consistent. Even students help maintain this through reminders to their classmates.

Recognizing standards in Online IG Communications

Due to the recognition of the role of teachers in the classroom, students are mostly the ones who are expected to recognize the standards for online IG learning communications. They do this through listening and *pakikiramdam* (sensing).

Listening or Reading Explicit Instructions.

Students recognize the explicit standards for online communication through listening to the teacher's explanation through video calls or by reading messages. They typically obtain the information through class orientation, where the faculty explain the standards. They also find these standards posted in their LMS or shared in their group messaging platforms (Pa 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Students find that younger faculty make their standards for online communication more explicit and clearer (P 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22). Male GenZ Participant 3 shared, "Ahm, I based on the announcements. For example, when the professor announces." Participant 6 also said that the standards were explained well to them.

This process, however, entails interpretation, even though participants are usually unaware of it. For instance, Participant C shared that he advised his students to check the encoding of their messages. Students respond to this by sending messages following standard spelling conventions. However, Participant C's own chat messages show the contractions, although quite understandable, "*Gud am as per dean's advice wag daw po muna tau mag-deploy today kc ang Revised MOA ay s City of X p lng wl p ang Division of X. Wait for further announcement n lng po muna. Stand by lng po tau ne. Ingat po ang lahat.*" (Good am, as per dean's advice, we won't be deploying yet because Revised MOA is with the City of X. There is none for Division of X. Wait for further announcement for now. Let's just stand by. Take care, everyone.).

Vigilant Pakikiramdam.

Pakikiramdam (sensing) is a central strategy to effectively decipher the standards for online communication. This is vital for sensing the implied, assumed, and unconsciously set standards. Students observe and interpret the teacher's tone of communication (Pa A, D). They observe the acceptable reactions and emojis on messaging platforms (Pa A, C, D). They observe which time it is okay to communicate with the faculty, the platform where it is easiest to get response from him/her, among other reactions and responses (Pa 6). These send out the cue how they are expected by the faculty to communicate online. For instance, male GenZ Participant 8 said, "(Example) a specific professor does not set the rules of his/her likes or dislikes, then he/she does not respond.... We did or said something and he/she did not give a good response... we won't do it again even if he/she did not set rules..." Further, male GenZ Participant 15 shared, "We have to be direct to the point when we talk with Political Generation faculty because they are quick to be annoyed."

Pakikiramdam is also important for them to feel the mood of communication moment (Pa A), which is essential for successful interaction. For instance, in a screenshot of exchanges between Participants A and 2, even though the male young adult Millennial faculty maintains a comfortable

atmosphere of communication with students, the subject of discussion kept the student on her toes, feeling the faculty's mood.

Further, *pakikiramdam* is also important in explicitly set standards. *Pakikiramdam* tells students when they could take a chance to make suggestions or negotiate standards (P25). They also sense when they may take chances to deviate from the established standards. For instance, a young adult male, GenZ Participant 25 said, "If I know that the teacher is not well-aware of the platforms and methods available online, and does not have a teachable attitude, I won't persist to offer an alternative...."

Some students struggle in reading the non-verbal cues through *pakikiramdam*. As Participant 1 shared, "Oftentimes, we are groping. We try something. If the faculty gets angry, we won't do it again. It's like trial and error." *Pakikiramdam* using limited cues in the online platforms could also be challenging which is why misunderstandings could always be a possibility. However, participants believe that one's level of online or digital skills could make *pakikiramdam* easy or challenging for some. Male GenZ Participant 26 said, "It's hardly bearable for a person who has little online social skills." On the other hand, female GenZ Participant 43 believes that it is easier for her because "I have enough knowledge in online communication..."

Effects on Behaviors in Online IG Communications

Generally, a standard for online communication that is clearly communicated and recognized leaves the participants feeling confident and safe in the communication process. This confidence, however, does not mean that they are certain that there will be no miscommunication. Participants recognize that there is always such a risk. However, this recognition and lingering doubts keep the participants constantly cautious of their communication acts.

Cautious and Continuous Attempts to Online Communication.

Students make conscious attempts to adjust to the standards for online IG communications set by the faculty (Pa 2, 3, 4, 6). Nonetheless, participants recognize that miscommunication is always a possibility in online communications (Pa 2, 3). This, however, does not drive away most students (Pa 24, 31, 32, 33). They keep on trying to understand the expectations to ensure effective and continuous communication with the faculty because they recognize the importance of maintaining such connection. GenZ Participant 21 shared, "I won't avoid communicating with a professor, no matter how difficult it is to talk to him/her online because I won't be able to do something well without his/her guidance." Similarly, Participant 35 shared, "In my perspective, it will be better if I will still communicate or get in touch with my teacher. Even though I found it hard or difficult, I will still try to reach his/her standards. I think it's better than having no communication at all."

In fact, this constant possibility to be misunderstood developed consistent cautious communication among players

in communication acts (Pa 3, 4). As Participant 14 shared, “doubt is okay because it makes you more careful.” For instance, male GenZ Participant 8 said, “I will check my message before I send it if there is anything offensive or difficult to understand or if there are jokes or humor... then I always practice in mind what to say or what to do when communicating with my professors.”

However, students are more cautious in their communications with the older faculty, feeling that consequences could be riskier in communicating with them. Participant 6 said, “... we are more scared with the older faculty, but we feel calmer with the younger faculty...” Similarly, Participant 8 said, “We need to follow the policies of the political generation because we do not want any problems... considering that they are already having difficulty with flexible learning.” The student also shared that if the faculty sends messages late in spite of the policies of communication during work hours, responding to Millennial faculty after five is more comfortable for them. “For the Political Generation, we should not bother them anymore after five because there is a chance that they would be irritated.”

Taking Chances and Perception of Defiance.

Some faculty take students’ violations of explicitly set standards as an act of defiance (Pa I, M). As one male middle-aged Millennial faculty said, “If the violation is severe and frequent, it is more disturbing when students violate explicit standards because there is a tendency that they are challenging the faculty’s authority, in spite of having emphasized it in class.” As such, many of the faculty are disturbed by non-compliance with explicitly set standards.

However, data shows that students tend to deviate from the set standards, which are not maintained consistently. For instance, male middle-aged Political Generation Participant C shared that he had set the standards students should not communicate too late in the evening. However, he admitted that he sometimes replies to them in the evening when he can and if the matter is important. Furthermore, he himself sends messages in the evenings. The ambiguity of “too late in the evening” leads students to take chances on chatting with the faculty even beyond hours due to the irregularity of effects. Similarly, Millennial young adult male Participant A shared, “I strictly implement communication during office hours, but I still have consideration for students with real urgent concerns...” In such cases, the relative interpretation of urgency allows some students to justify their attempts.

Further, a male GenZ student shared that although the raising of the hand is set as an explicit standard, sometimes it is no longer followed. “They (standards) are sometimes no longer applied when the group is teasing. What we do is just raise questions in chorus. We just popped the question.” This shows that non-compliance to set standards, especially those which are not maintained, is not always an act of defiance. The inconsistency of their implementation and consequences leads students to wonder about the actual acceptability of the action.

Limiting and Avoiding Communication.

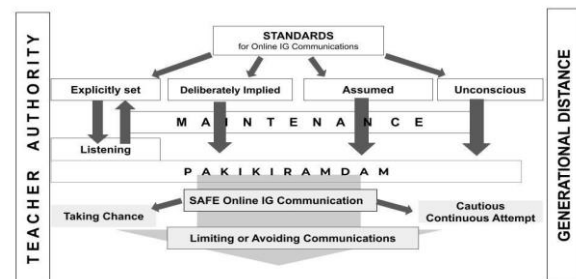
Students also have the tendency to limit or avoid communication with the faculty due to uncertainty of the standards to be followed that will ensure smooth communication (P25, 28, 29). Students who resort to this decision might be doing so because of the belief that they would be misunderstood anyway. Participant 25 believed that “Probably, yes (I will avoid or limit). After all, we could not draw favorable conclusions if I persisted in communicating online.” Similarly, Participant 28 responded, “Yes, I will avoid or limit because sometimes they misinterpret what I am saying. Sometimes, they take my good intentions negatively.”

However, not all students opt for this response because they are driven by frustration. Some students believe that limited communication or tentative distance will ensure better relationships with the teacher. For instance, GenZ Participant 45 shared, “I will limit the communication because when you avoid it will only get worse. There is always a limit to everything. If the situation is not good, do not push... because the misunderstanding will only intensify...”

Theory of Setting and Recognizing Standards in Online IG Learning Communications

From the grounded data, the Theory of Setting and Recognizing Standards in Online IG Learning Communications was built. The theory’s processes are summarized in graphical format in Figure 1. In the next few paragraphs, the grounded theory’s processes and theoretical propositions are discussed.

Figure 1: Theory on Establishing and Recognizing Standards in Online IG Learning Communications



Online communications are central to learning in the current era of digital development, whether a higher education institution operates in a face-to-face or flexible modality. However, in order to ensure effective communication among multigenerational faculty and students, these online communications are governed by standards that are not exactly policies enshrined in university handbooks and sanctioned accordingly. Still, they are set up and shared among the people who are communicating in different ways to make sure that connections run smoothly and continuously.

In the context of multigenerational higher education, standards for online communication among faculty and students are established mostly by the faculty whose authority is recognized by the students due to respect and/or systemic design of the educational system. Students could have minimal input through negotiations and suggestions, for as

long as it is recognized by the faculty. In the end, it's up to the teachers to decide if the student's ideas are accepted or not.

The faculty are setting the standards for online IG communications both explicitly and implicitly. They could also be assumed or unconsciously set. Expectations could be stated at the onset or could be given in reaction to a student's communication attempt. While faculty values explicit instruction to standards, some standards are set implicitly intentionally, which include those which are unvoiced due to the controversial nature of their assumptions, such as gender, and parental involvement in flexible learning set-up. There are also standards which were set unconsciously through modeling or interpretation of other generation's style of communication. Finally, some expectations are assumed to be already known by the students. In the case of implicit standards, faculty's reactions, actions, or even silences serve to communicate the standards to students. These standards are maintained through words and actions, both by the faculty and students.

Meanwhile, students are expected to recognize these standards set by the faculty, whether they are explicit, implicit, unconscious, or assumed. Students find it more critical to decipher the standards of older teachers due to generational distance. However, this is challenging because students find older faculty less explicit in their expectations compared to the younger faculty. Students mostly learn the explicit standards by listening to the faculty. However, the most critical process that is applied in recognizing standards is *pakikiramdam* or sensing, which is facilitated by digital literacy. Students observe non-verbal actions, reactions, and consequences to their, as well as other students' communication with the faculty, which may include tones of communication, consistency in standards, use of emoticons and reactions, and ignoring their communication attempt among others. This is true not only for standards that are implied but also for those that are expressly. Through *pakikiramdam*, students sense how to interpret the teacher's standards and consistency.

Finally, a clear understanding of set standards for online communication leads students and faculty to a feeling of satisfaction in a safe online communication environment. This does not mean that they have no uncertainties. They do have uncertainties as they recognize the possibility of miscommunication in online IG communications. Nonetheless, this does not deter most students who continuously keep trying to adjust to the standards for communication set, always adopting cautious communication. However, the challenge in deciphering implicit standards could also lead some students to limit or avoid online communication with the faculty. When standards aren't kept up consistently, on the other hand, students may take the chance to go against them.

This grounded theory have the following theoretical propositions: (1) Teachers take the central role in setting standards in online IG communication, which may be explicit, implicit, unconscious, or assumed; (2) Some standards are

deliberately unvoiced due to controversial basis; (3) Students find it more critical to decipher and follow the standards set by the older generation of faculty, even if these teachers' expectations are more implied compared to the younger faculty; (4) *Pakikiramdam* (sensing) is a critical strategy for recognizing standards; (5) Deviation to set standards may be the result of inconsistency or diverse interpretations; (6) The ever-present possibility of online IG miscommunication does not scare away the participants, who tend to take cautious communication attempts; and (7) Uncertainty could lead some students to limit or avoid online communication with faculty to maintain a safe connection.

Discussion

Even with education's return to face-to-face learning, online communication would remain a viable platform for communication among multigenerational faculty and students in higher education. Aside from its great potential for connecting faculty and students, it also appears to be a more convenient communication platform for some introverts, compared to the traditional classroom (van der Spoel et al., 2020). However, clear communication of expectations is critical (Songer, 2015).

Findings show that standards are set mostly by the faculty and recognized by the students. Such standards could be set explicitly and recognized through listening and reading. As Evertson, Poole, and the IRIS Center (2003) asserted, it is easier for students to meet these standards if they know exactly what is expected of them. Teachers could make their expectations explicit through direct teaching or through their consistent reactions to student behaviors, which may include appropriate consequences. Because written standards and posts in LMS are often unread, they are also discussed during orientations, consistent with the suggestion of Songer (2015) that written expectations must also be shared in alternative forms. Standards for schedule of communication are usually among those which are emphasized explicitly because communication response time is a typical source of tension (Bork & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2013). This contrasts with the findings of Aydin (2013) that flexibility of time and place in online learning leads to more balance in the lives of faculty and students. On the contrary, teachers feel that online learning could be disruptive to their work-life balance, especially in the pandemic set-up, consistent with findings by Bongco and de Guzman (2022). Other standards, however, were not communicated deliberately because faculty assumed that students should already know them. It is therefore the student's responsibility to discover what the faculty assumed they already knew. Many of the expectations are based on the "assumption of common sense" (Giroux, 2011), even if they may only be a personal or generational style. Nonetheless, they stood unquestioned and supported by the culture of mutism or silence (Cortez, 2013). Most of the sources of assumed standards are anchored on the belief that Generation Z as technologically skilled should be digitally literate. However, as Stjepi, Vuki, and Sua (2019) discovered, there is a statistically significant difference between Generation Z students' perceived level of digital literacy and their surveyed

level of digital literacy. This is although they were raised in a highly digital environment. Another assumption is that online operations are a simple migration of face-to-face operations to online platforms. This is not true, however (Songer, 2015). Online communication has different features such as delayed responses, different cues, the illusion of 24/7 access, expectations for learners to be more autonomous, and the necessity of role shifts. Further, students have limited opportunities to learn communication through these different features through the process of socialization (Bork & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2013). Faculty are also setting expectations implicitly which they may be conscious or unconscious of. At times, the faculty's generational or personal style becomes a familiar way of interacting. They may not be expressed but the students and faculty routinely expect and exhibit them, which makes it appear that a consensus has been reached between the two parties to adopt this norm of behavior (Evertson, Poole, & the IRIS Center, 2003). However, there are also standards that are deliberately communicated implicitly because of their political or sensitive nature. This could be due to the critical intervention of parents in education (Tobin, 2013 as quoted by Zamir, 2021) which was made possible by the synchronous classes via video conferences. Another possible reason for deliberately implying standards is the call-out culture in social media which has become a professional hazard for teachers (Matei 2019; Rom & Mitchell, 2021). All these standards are either reinforced or supported by the faculty and students for consistency. Otherwise, they could be altered or suspended (Evertson, Poole, & the IRIS Center, 2003).

Interpretation is important in communication, so even with the explicit standards, making meaning is still an active process. This is more so in implicit standards. As such, *pakikiramdam* (sensing) is important as students try to make sense of the unspoken standards. The good thing is that Filipinos' characteristic of being indirect in communication compelled them to be very sensitive to non-verbal cues through *pakikiramdam* or the underlying social perception (Pe-Pua & Protacio- Marcelino, 2000, Macapagal et al., 2013). The challenge, however, remains in that online interaction has changed the traditional cues in communication such as the tone of voice, gestures, and facial expression with alternatives such as use of caps lock, audio mute, and emoticons (Loglia & Bowers, 2016; Edwards, et al. 2017; Alawamleh, et al. 2017). As Librero (2020) indicated, online tools do not impede students' online engagement. However, they need to efficiently maximize what is already available.

While interpretation of explicit and implicit standards could lead to misunderstandings, students strive to discover the standards that they are expected to adhere to for effective communication, which could be anchored on their need to connect (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020; Hreilikh & Vydolob, 2021) or the willingness to give others the benefit of the doubt due to the nature of online IG communications (Bongco et al., 2022). However, some students also choose to limit or avoid communication in cases of uncertainty about the standards. This could be due to the shared identity of the Filipinos or the

relational self, which makes it of vital importance for them to maintain good relationships through *hiya* and avoidance of conflicts (Pe-Pua & Protacio- Marcelino, 2000; Macapagal et al., 2013; Librero, 2020). Librero (2020), referring to an earlier paper of his, said that students tend to give up rather than risk being embarrassed or disappointing their peers and teachers.

Furthermore, there are two factors that had a major influence in the process of setting and recognizing standards in online communication. These are the teacher's authority and generational distance. In spite of growing literature showing the decline in teacher authority (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020; Lü & Hu, 2021), present study showed that teachers remain as the authorities in establishing standards in online communication. Negotiations and student inputs only become legitimate with the teacher's approval. This order is recognized by students who desire a structured hierarchy of organization (Librero, 2020). Lü and Hu (2021) suggested that this is an acknowledgment of a shared allegiance to the moral order where the teacher has the right to command, and the student is duty-bound to obey. These diverse actions help them contribute to the realization of the moral order. These comprise norms, values, and principles which unite people together for the attainment of their shared goals. The moral order, which is more recognized and endorsed by mutual parties attains higher allegiance and stability. The moral order justifies hierarchical relationships. This relationship shows that power inequality is not only inevitable but also functional in social life due to differences in abilities, expertise, prestige, and norms (Hofstede, 2008 as quoted by Lü & Hu, 2021). It could be inferred then that shared power even in learner-centered classrooms does not equate to sameness. Their different roles dictate that such power will manifest itself in different ways.

Another major influence in the process of setting and recognizing standards is generational distance. All generations in terms of age, period, and cohort have diversities, but the amount of distance from one generation to another could influence how wide the chasms are, which could be actual or perceived. If such generational and ideological chasms become too wide, it could result in tensions resulting in system dysfunctions (Flor, 2020). While all teacher generations try to make some of their expectations clear, the kind of standards that they feel the need to emphasize are influenced by their generational distance with the students. For instance, where older faculty assume that communicating with them with respect and with formality should be expected, the younger faculty needed to make this explicit. The older faculty's assumption must be anchored to the Filipino value of respect towards the elderly (Macapagal, et al. 2013). This generational divide makes it difficult for students who are obligated to recognize the standards (explicit, implicit, and assumed) to satisfy their felt need for a better understanding of the older teacher's standards, to whom they feel more intimidated. This intimidation could be fueled by the wider interpersonal distance brought about by greater group differences (Ota, Giles, & Somera, 2007) or the pedagogical

and scientific achievements of teachers (Hreilikh & Vydolob, 2021) although generation may not directly translate to higher achievements.

Conclusion

The process of setting and recognizing standards for online communication is not a one-time activity at the onset of the course but a continuous process of discovery and maintenance. Due to the IG diverse styles, assumptions, and different features of online platforms, users employ underlying social perceptions of alternatives. However, the interpretations and acceptability of these alternative cues may vary greatly, making standard misreading a constant possibility. Further, style and the design of the platform could shape how “common sense” standards are interpreted (e.g., respectful and formal communications). This means that perceived deviations from standards are not always indicative of defiance to authority. It could simply be a phase of the participant’s attempts to understand the unspoken expectations.

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