SOCIAL MEDIA & DIALOGUE FACILITATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC JOURNEY
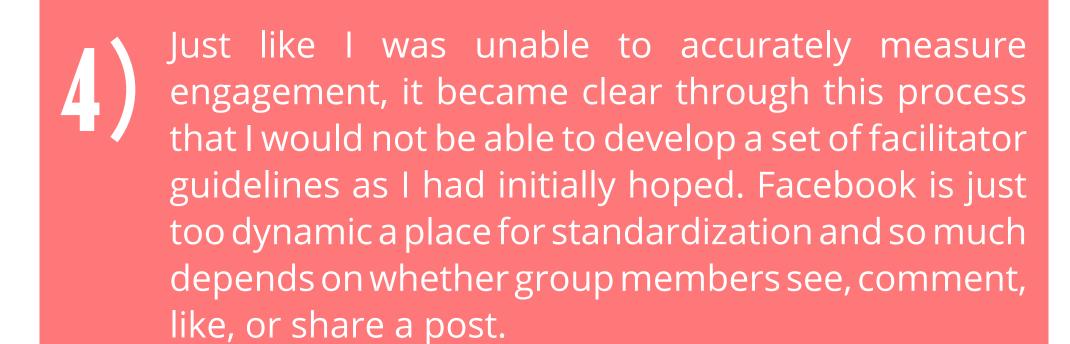
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1) My passion for storytelling, business experience, and education prepared me to frame a research idea that explores the use of dialogue facilitation on social media as a way to engage and promote conversation. By effectively using dialogue, I could create empathy across communities, and nudge participants to social action, and help participants widen the lens with which they see the world. So, I set out to use dialogue techniques in creating engagement on social media with a Facebook group and if I could create standard guidelines from the experience, all the better.

2) Next: testing. My sponsor allowed me to facilitate content and conversation on the Facebook page for the AIS Special Interest Group on Social Inclusion. The group is composed of professors, researchers, and students in the information systems field who are located in various spots across the globe. I posted content two times a week and planned to measure engagement based on the response to each post.

3) A snag: How can I possibly measure engagement on social media? Measuring engagement on social media is a challenge and rather than finding answers from this project, I am left with more questions. Does a one-sentence response to a dialogic question show less engagement than a paragraph response? What if no one responds at all? Maybe a member read the post, went home and discussed it with someone at length, but never engaged with the post.

5) Moreover, there was also no way to know if I nudged participants to social action or helped them widen their lens of the world.

6) Measured successes were tough to determine because of social media's unique and constantly changing environment, but I did discover a few informal learnings that might be useful to you.

4) Just like I was unable to accurately measure engagement, it became clear through this process that I would not be able to develop a set of facilitator guidelines as I had initially hoped. Facebook is just too dynamic a place for standardization and so much depends on whether group members see, comment, like, or share a post.

7) First, it was important to find a fine balance when writing content. Too little content or too much content and the group might not engage. I found two to three sentences to be the perfect amount. If you are linking to a news article, including a small quote from the article in the post is also helpful. This allows group members to get an idea of content and participate in the discussion without having to read the entire article. A simple "what do you think?" question is sometimes enough to get the conversation going and facilitating the comments from a post by asking follow-up questions helped keep the conversation going. Responding to the comments quickly showed that, even though I was facilitating, I too was engaged in the discussion, which I think was important.