

## **The Exploration of undergraduate Students' Facebook Activities for Collaborative Learning: A case study of International Islamic University Malaysia**

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### **ABSTRACT**

One of the major aims of IIUM is to bring about integration and collaboration among students of divers origin and cultures. Due to this, the institution creates avenues for students to work in groups to enhance their cooperative spirit. Therefore, the present research intends to explore how Facebook could create an avenue for students' group work and collaborative learning. Qualitative method is adopted for the present study based on the nature of the research, while semi-structured interview were conducted for 12 undergraduates IIUM students in a focus group. Based on this, the researcher fund that Facebook could be useful for student's collaborative learning, and at the same time it can be detrimental to their group learning it is all depends on the reason and how it is used and it cannot totally replace the conventional group discussions for academic purposes.

**Keywords:** Facebook, collaborative learning, group discussion, learners' centered

### **INTRODUCTION**

The most common social network among the students of this 21<sup>st</sup> century is the Facebook activities. Most students spent greater part of their time in Facebook, to the extent that it prevents most students from their major activities, including their academics. The influx usage of the Facebook among students does not exempt students from the International Islamic University Malaysia, which is accommodating students from more than one hundred countries in the world, who are predominantly Muslim and Arab countries. Face book creates avenues for students to interact with their closer friends who are nearby as well as those who are far from them. Facebook activity is very lively and interesting that most students could not do without it. However, it is taking large part of their time. As it is known that, time is very precious in life and very important in all life events, including business, academic, recreation, etc. Meanwhile, IIUM is an institution created for the serious-minded people, for this reason, the larger percentage of its assessment, which is 60%, is based on assignments and group project. This made it compulsory for all students to work together and spend greater part of their time together for group work. As a result, the major focus of the present study is to explore how the Facebook could create an avenue for student group work and collaborative learning.

Most students are strongly attached to Facebook that they spend most of their precious time on it. Therefore, lesser hours are given to other equally important activities. As a result, most students do not give the due to proportion of their time to their academics. Hence, Facebook engagement could affect students' academic performance. To justify this Haq & Chand, (2012), conducted an empirical study to investigate the impact of students' Facebook use on the students' academic engagement, and they found that Facebook activities negatively affect students' academic engagement.

Equally, it could be seen that IIUM gives student large amount of group works and projects to enhance their collaborative learning. However, the time given to these groups projects by the students is lesser as a result of their Facebook involvement, which affects the quality of their work at the end of the day. Invariably, the problem identified by the researcher is that most students spend larger part of their time with Facebook which is affecting the quality of their group work and at the end affect their final CGPA. This assumption could be justified by the research carried out by (Brubaker, 2013), to investigate the effect of Facebook activities on African-American students and their academic performance. At the end of the study the researcher discovered that, Facebook activities do not have statistical significant contribution to the students, CGPA. Equally, (Junco, 2012) found that Facebook has a negative impact on students' academic engagement, which could later lead to decrease in their total academic performance. Therefore, the present study wishes to explore the extent to which Facebook activities enhance collaborative learning among IIUM students.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory assists us to understand how people learn in the social contexts. How students learn from each other, which bring about collective and collaborative learning, and they construct their learning. Lev Vygotsky (1978) first explained that human being learned through their interaction with the social environment as well as communication with others. Vygotsky, proposes that our social environment influence our learning process. He suggested that students learn through interaction with their mates and peers. He mentioned that some factors need to be put in place for effective learning to take place.

1. Developing learning communities
2. Community of learners classroom
3. Collaborative learning and group work
4. Discussion based learning.

It is discovered that students are mostly pre-occupied with Facebook even more than academic work. Therefore, the concern for the present study is to create an avenue to use a Facebook as learning community where students discuss their classroom courses through Facebook activities as well as discussing their collective project and group assignment through the Facebook engagement in order to make a Facebook as one of the tools to enhance their learning and boost their academic achievement. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how the Facebook could create an avenue for students' group work and collaborative learning and by providing answers for the following: How could Facebook activities provide avenues for group work and collaborative learning.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There are numerous studies on social media and collaborative learning; this is because students of the present century are greatly engrossed with the social network. Some people believe that since the present trend in education is geared towards students' interest; that is students' centered, Facebook and other social network should be utilized to bring about meaningful learning in students Danneels (2004). Conversely, some posit that Facebook could disrupt students' learning (Ramble, 2012). Based on this an empirical study was conducted to examine the impact of Facebook on the pedagogical delivery and meaning learning. The finding shows that Facebook complement learning, foster academic networking, student democratic expression and enable students to construct their own knowledge(Ramble, 2012). Equally, Facebook of some high-school students was explored

through qualitative interviews, the result of the reveals that Facebook interaction help students to maintain their academic relationship provide an avenue for self-expression as well as enhance emotional support Greenhow and Robelia (2009).

In addition, a study was conducted to examine student's perception on using Facebook as a collaborative learning mode in higher institution, the finding from this study suggest that Facebook has the potential of promoting cooperative and collaborative learning (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, 2012). Equally, Naidu (2005) suggests that Facebook usage could motivate collaborative learning. However, some studies found the negative aspects of Facebook to collaborative learning. Some believe that Facebook could great influence on academic performance, which can be negative or positive among group (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010), even it is also a form of distraction (Wise et al, 2011). The issue of privacy cyber bullying, stalking and virtual integrity are also some of the threats that Facebook pose to the collaborative learning (Williems and Bateman, 2011; McCarthy, 2012; Cluett, 2010). Equally, an empirical study discovered that the level of student' frequenting of Facebook does not predict collaborative learning (Lampe, 2011) among higher institution students. More so, a study was carried out in Saarland University to explore the adverse effect of student's presentation on Facebook collaborative learning and discovered that student's prior preparation for Facebook does not predict effective learning outcomes (Judele, Dimitra, Puhl, & Weinberger, 2014). Meanwhile, another study was conducted in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) to examine Facebook as the potential method for collaborative learning, this study shows that there are great potentials in Facebook for collaborative learning (Ataie, 2013). However, the few literatures that examined face usage of Facebook in relation to collaborative learning in IIUM, just discovered that there are some likely potentials that Facebook could provide for collaborative learning but fail to highlight these potentials. In order to fill this gap, the present study intends to highlight how Facebook usage could enhance collaborative learning of IIUM student.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative method, under which case study design is adopted. This is due to the fact case study focus on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and boundaries between phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident Yin (1994). The rationale behind using this design lies in the premise that the present study wishes explore student use of face in a real life situation as it affects their group activities, it equally Suitable for studying complex social phenomena, Yin (1994). However, in order to have an in-depth understanding and come up with a profound outcome, the researchers employed a qualitative approach by using an interview as the instrument for data collection to this study.

### **Participants**

The present exploratory study was conducted to explore how Facebook usage could enhance collaborative learning of students in International Islamic University Malaysia. There were 12 student participants precisely undergraduates. The respondents were chosen because their frequency of using Facebook, and comprises of two groups second year students who are given group assignment. They include six females and four males. One group is from Kulliyah of ICT and the other group is from the department of educational technology in Institute of education.

### **Establishment of Credibility and Trustworthiness of the Instrument**

The establishment of credibility and trustworthiness were carried out through the interview questions designed. The necessary research modifications were made by a Professor in the

Institute of education of the International Islamic University Malaysia. In addition, the checking of interview protocol was done by an expert at the Institute of Education, International Islamic University Malaysia before the actual research was conducted. The pilot interview was carried out to test the validity of the interview questions; hence necessary modifications were subsequently made on each item that the participants were expected to respond to.

### Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the aim of gaining insight into and unraveling answers from the questions which the research raised. Data was collected through an interview, whereby some regular Facebook users were interviewed. The conversation from the interviews was recorded with the permission of the participant being interviewed using a MP3 recorder that was later listened to repeatedly, transcribed and read as well, to obtain an overall understanding of the respondents' view.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Rice-Lively, 2004). Therefore, all the interview transcripts were read by the researchers and coded in the style of a grounded theory approach where analysis is done base on inductive stance, and the investigator strives to derive meaning from the data (Merriam, 2009). Four category headings were generated from the data and under these all of the data were accounted for. Two independent researchers were asked to verify the accuracy of the category system and after a discussion with them; minor modifications were made.

## DISCUSSION

This section is going to deal with the discussion of the themes that generated from the analysis. It also makes comparison between the present research and the similar past studies as well as ascertaining whether the themes from the present study are in line with the past studies. Equally, the researcher also makes necessary arguments in order to make up with findings for the studies. Meanwhile, the themes generated from the analysis are as follows:

1. Uses of Facebook for Cooperative Learning
2. Benefits in Using Facebook for cooperative learning
3. Barriers in using Facebook for cooperative learning
4. Place of Facebook in cooperative learning

**Table 1. Sub-Themes and Themes Derived from the Analysis**

<i>Sub-Themes</i>	<i>Themes</i>
1. Sharing academic resources and information 2. Group discussion and chatting 3. Group Organization	Uses of Facebook for Cooperative Learning
1. Lack of clarity written expression 2. Response Related Barrier 3. Contact Barrier 4. Academic Related Barrier	Barriers in using Facebook for cooperative learning
1. Cooperative Advantages	Benefits in Using Facebook for cooperative learning
1. Facebook as second Option	Place of Facebook in cooperative learning

## Uses of Facebook for Cooperative Learning

This section reveals how IIUM undergraduates' students use Facebook for their collaborative learning. They identified various ways in which Facebook can be used in their group work. Most of the respondents claimed that they use Facebook for the following: to Share academic resources and information, *we discuss something academic purposes and the I think that if you have online discussion you can use Facebook messenger, and I think that it is very useful(DU18)*, Group discussion and chatting as well as Group Organization, *we have online discussion we share opinion through messenger and upload a file (DU 24)*, Course material such as articles, course folder, videos and others are shared between students in order to aid their academic improvement. They do this whenever they are distributed to groups in during their classes. Students do not only send or share materials through Facebook but also organize themselves for the group task through Facebook interaction. *We gather all the group members through Facebook (DU 22)*, after which they made necessary discussion through Facebook chatting.

Therefore, it shows that students' involvement in Facebook activities for academic purposes could really assist their group work. Meanwhile, past studies also found that social network sites are avenues that facilitate students' academic interaction, information sharing as well as collaboration, of which Facebook is the most popular Ataie, (2013). Equally, a study also discovers Facebook use to help students in their networking, collaboration, sharing of resources as well as other educational purposes Arjan, & Harshrne (2008). Even, Facebook activity is seen as an avenue for students to discover and construct their learning through collaborative effort Ataie, (2013). Based on the themes and evidences from past studies one can say Facebook is a good avenue to enhance student learning through collaborative means. Despite this finding, can we totally replace Facebook activities with real life discussion? This question shall lead us to the next theme generated from the interview which is about the place of Facebook in collaborative learning.

## Place of Facebook in Cooperative Learning

This aspect is explaining about the position of Facebook in collaborative learning, do students prefer Facebook discussion over the real-life discussion? Most students registered their opinion concerning the place of Facebook in group discussion one of the respondents said it is second option: *we don't use Facebook straight away Facebook is a second option (DU68P)* Another said if they have the opportunity, they prefer real-life discussion, *Facebook is the last result (DU60P)*, students unanimously agree that: *if we don't have the time to sit together, then we can use Facebook (DU58P)*.

From this discussion among IIUM students, it shows that Facebook cannot totally replace the real-life discussion it is just seen as second option, which could be an auxiliary to the real-life discussion. This finding is substantiated by (Irwin, Ball, Desbrow, & Leveritt, 2012) that Facebook usage can only enhance and support the conventional group discussion but cannot replace it. Equally, it was argued that the primary purpose for using Facebook is for socializing and communication Lampe, Vitak Gray and Ellison (2012), whereas people use it for academic purposes if it could totally replace the academic group discussions it can defeat the primary purpose for creating it, and adequate modification has to be done in order to meet up with the task. More so, it was argued that Facebook has its limitation, which could make it unsuitable to replace the real-life discussions totally. This brings about the next theme emerge from the interview.

### Barriers in Using Facebook for Cooperative Learning

This aspect deals with the problems that confront students while using Facebook for group assignment or project. On this, most of the respondents recount their experiences while using Facebook for group discussion. Most of the respondents recounted their negative experiences on the issue of response, one participant said: *sometimes people not reply because they have no credit (DU54P)* this action disrupts the discussion. While some claim that: *Facebook message might not be clear and misunderstood because you don't see their emotion Facial expression, body language (DU62P)*. This aspect is understood because the importance of body language, facial and emotional expression in communication is very profound, most especially if it is an issue that very difficult and requires practical demonstration. Their ordinary written expression might not be rich enough to convey the message they are trying to pass across.

Equally, from the interview, the participants also mentioned the issue of distraction, that is some students who are engrossed with Facebook activities are easily distracted by it from group discussion. One of the respondents recounted her experience during a group discussion that: *they keep using their phone to chat while we are discussing (DU92)*, the phone they were using does not related to their discussion and this action is drawing them back. In addition to this, it was also mentioned that the materials such as articles, text, magazine might not be reliable it is better to visit the right archive for these sources. On this point, one of the participants claimed that: *I don't get the sources from Facebook because of the problem of reliability (DU28P)*. These are the identified problem that is associated with the using of Facebook for collaborative learning.

Meanwhile, past studies confirm the problem that Facebook could pose to student academic and collaborative achievement. For example, some studies found that, Facebook is a form of distraction for students' learning (Pierce and Vaca, 2008; Watters, 2011; Wise et al. 2011; Warman 2011). While some found that it greatly affects students' academic achievement (Kirshner and Kerpinski 2010), and some discovered that Facebook limit student's attention span Presky (2005). However, there are some benefits of using Facebook mentioned by the participants; this shall be discussed in the next paragraph.

### Benefits in Using Facebook for Cooperative Learning

However, most of the respondents equally claimed that using Facebook is useful and beneficial to them. They recounted that using Facebook is very convenient for them, because it poses no location barrier. One participant said: *if we are at different places, we use Facebook (DU36P)*, it is also good for shy student who is very nervous to discuss in the class they said: *we are free to discuss with our friends (DU6P)*. Equally, according to the respondent they made discussion in a very relax mood not too serious like in the classroom. On this, they pointed that: *we discuss together in relax mood (DU34P)*. Based on these past studies are also coherent with the above finding, for example, Rambe (2012), discovered that Facebook benefited students by promoting visibility of common problems through collaboration. It is also found that Facebook enhances provision of resources to students Naidu (2005). It facilitates communication in the classroom (Lampe, Wohn, Vitak, Ellison, & Wash, 2011), It enables participation and supports collaborative learning (Judele, Dimitra, Puhl, & Weinberger, 2014). It equally enhances students satisfaction thereby increases activeness and participation (Irwin et al., 2012).

One can see that there is contrasting evidence from themes one argues on the merits of using Facebook for collaborating learning among students while the other stand on the draw backs it posed to the student achievement. Based on this one could conclude that Facebook in collaborative learning is like a double headed or face sword that could serve as a good servant

or a bad master. Therefore, Facebook could be useful for student's collaborative learning, and at the same time it can be detrimental to their group learning it is all depends on the reason and how it is used. Therefore, based on the above discussion and the themes that emerge from the interview the following findings were deduced.

### **FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY**

Based on the analysis and discussion of the emerging themes the following findings were derived.

1. Facebook is a good avenue to enhance student learning through collaborative means
2. That face book cannot totally replace the real-life discussion it is just seen as second option, which could be an auxiliary to the real-life discussion.
3. Facebook could be useful for student's collaborative learning, and at the same time it can be detrimental to their group learning it is all depends on the reason and how it is used.
4. It is discovered from the study that other social network avenues are competing with Facebook.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is discovered from the study that Facebook is important for collaborative learning, which could either improve or decrease student's achievement. Therefore, IIUM students should enlighten and orientated not only on how to use face but also use it for their academic advantages. Equally Facebook could also be an avenue to unite and integrate students from different cultures. More so, the present study wishes to recommend that, lecturers should be part of the student's group in order to intelligently guide student but not infringing on their privacy so that students excess through Facebook can be minimized. It could also be recommended whatever information should post on Facebook wall in most especially concerning student's academic must be assessed, and reliability must be ensured in order not to misguide and mislead the students which may have detrimental effect to their academic and life.

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