

The Relationship Between the Personal Use of Facebook and Hospitality Students' Group Engagement in Malaysia

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Abstract. This research aims to explore whether a relationship exists between the personal use of Facebook and hospitality students' group engagement, thus shedding light to what retains connectedness and engagement for hospitality students working in groups in the more prominent educational area of Malaysia. The results indicated that Facebook is dominantly perceived by students as a social network that is solely utilized for personal reasons albeit the fact students were found to utilize Facebook as a tool for collaborative group work purposes.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Malaysian universities (particularly those of which are located in Klang Valley) which offer the up-and-coming course of hospitality and tourism have made student engagement a prime focus as a differentiator in the quality of graduates produced. Aiedah and Lee provided a stance to the fact that there are limited in-depth studies pertaining to student engagement in Malaysia, particularly in project-based learning for some subjects^[1]. Furthermore, on an international scale, there has been an urge to move academics to become more sustainable and innovative to address student engagement with more clarity and substance where concepts of blended learning are concerned^[2].

In addition to the lack of course-specific research on student engagement, researchers focusing on Malaysian educational facilities have not yet bridged the gap of how today's largest social network platform, Facebook, relates to student engagement although the general use and issues of privacy, social information sharing, and accessibility amongst Malaysian users have been covered^[3].

This research aims to explore whether a relationship exists between the personal use of Facebook and hospitality students' group engagement in Malaysia, thus shedding light to what retains connectedness and engagement for hospitality students working in groups in the more prominent educational area of Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

Many researchers have introduced the topic of student engagement as one that is pushing the traditional boundaries of areas of interest in conducted research having to do with the education line. Quaye and Harper's collated novel of findings from a number of respectable researchers found that student engagement varies for the broad categories of high school students and adolescent students attending college^[4].

McCormick and McClenney highlighted the relevance of the current research in student engagement is arguable not sufficiently valid when put to practice^[5], thus instigating frustration for many researchers who have strived to generalize the concept of student engagement only to reach conclusions lacking in validity. Lee and Chao pointed out that relatively little has been explored in the area of hospitality students' group engagement, let alone the significance of today's social networking giant^[6], Facebook, that plays an important role in encouraging group engagement amongst those undertaking courses in hospitality

Facebook is increasingly being used as a communicative tool for interpersonal relationships with colleagues, parents, and lecturers for students attending university [7]. Yan and Cheung's focus on student engagement and quality of educators concluded that experiential learning methods, which are typical of delivery of education in relation to the hospitality industry, impacted student engagement in accordance to students' perceptions of how well or how poorly classes were conducted [8].

Where student engagement is concerned, teaching and learning methods are essential elements. Hospitality educators have continued to push conventional teacher-directed approaches to make teaching and learning methods used more student-oriented [9]. Hospitality students' engagement was further explored and research found that practical-oriented students were more engaged when blended learning and active, participatory learning exercises were used [10]. Berrett's study drawn similar conclusions and findings – blended learning does indeed improve hospitality students' engagement [11].

3. Research Objectives

Based on the area of interest established and literature review above, the research objectives that this study seeks to answer and hypothesis are generated as follows:

- 1) To establish whether a relationship exists between the personal use of Facebook and Malaysia hospitality students' group engagement
- 2) To establish whether a relationship exists between the frequency of Facebook Messenger use and Malaysia hospitality students' group engagement
- 3) To measure the highest and lowest frequencies associated with personal Facebook use and Malaysia hospitality students' group engagement

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and data collection

This study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was collected through survey distribution whilst secondary data is as detailed in the literature review. As this is a causal study with the primary objective to establish the existence of a relationship between the personal use of Facebook and hospitality students' group engagement in universities in Malaysia, correlation tests and frequency computation was run to determine the existence of a relationship between the variables and to answer prior introduced research questions. Tests associated to reliability and normality were also run to ensure satisfactory accuracy and distribution of the data collection process. Questionnaires were distributed to students who currently undertaking either Diploma in Hotel Management or Bachelor Degree in Hospitality Management In Klang Valley area in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

4.2 Results

The relationship between the personal use of Facebook and hospitality students' group engagement was established by running a correlation test between the two variables. An acceptable Pearson correlation value of 0.433 reflected that there is a relationship of fair strength between the two variables. Therefore, this objective was met.

The relationship between the frequency of Facebook Messenger use and hospitality students' group engagement was established by running a correlation test between the two variables. An acceptable Pearson correlation value of 0.584 reflected that there is a relationship of moderate strength between the two variables. Therefore, this objective was met.

The third research objective was to measure the highest and lowest frequencies associated with personal Facebook use and Malaysia hospitality students' group engagement. The frequencies for items representative of independent and dependent variables were computed in order to meet this research objective. Descriptive analysis revealed that the highest frequencies associated to personal use and group use of Facebook were for the occasional uses (i.e. 'Sometimes') to view others' statuses and to inquire about details of project assignments respectively, with frequency values of 46.3% and 38.0%.

5. Discussion

Based on responses received for the purpose of this study, it can be concluded that hospitality students somewhat perceive Facebook as a tool that can be utilized for educational purposes and collaborative group work. However, the ultimate revelation lies in the fact that 84% of students responded that they primarily use Facebook for personal use, which indicates that although Facebook is not necessarily dismissed as a tool to gauge group engagement, the use of the social network for this purpose has not significantly been put into practice.

For the education industry, engagement strategies and effective integration of the use of Facebook could be emphasized on, particularly for activities with high frequencies to gauge student engagement on personal and group levels. For instance, methods to integrate activities of status updates and project assignment inquiries for personal and group engagement respectively is to be highlighted for academic advancements in teaching and learning due to the reflected high frequencies of 46.3% and 38.0%. In addition, as the act of looking at photos for personal use showed the lowest frequency of responses for students who had 'Never' used Facebook for this purpose (i.e. 0.3%), the education industry should be reassured that visual presentation of learning materials remain relevant to student engagement.

As for low frequency items that indicate poor student receptiveness such as sharing of knowledge/technical computer tips and coming to group consensus using Facebook (both with computed frequencies values of 8.7% in respondents who agreed that they use Facebook for these purposes 'Very Frequently'), the education industry could vest less interest in these activities or look into methods to encourage increased group activity in these areas.

The use of Facebook is one that is not a dead end street for educators as interestingly, albeit the lack of frequent use of Facebook for group engagement in terms of frequencies analysed, respondents did not disagree to the statements that Facebook is a unique tool for education and that personal use of Facebook enabled them to learn how to use the social network for group work purposes as computed frequencies reflected that 37.67% and 41% of respondents 'Somewhat Agree' with these statements.

As for further research, a more diverse approach in obtaining respondents by means of electronical survey distribution should be employed. As this study employed only physical questionnaire distribution, more advanced systems and processes could be used to extend survey reach to appropriate respondents. Should collaboration with universities be possible, future research for this study will prosper as making the questionnaire available online with the support of various universities will most likely increase the likelihood of respondent participation.

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