Benefits of Using the Facebook
from the Malaysian Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper is to study the benefits of using the Facebook from the Malaysian perspectives. In finding the answers to this study, the questions posted were related to the hours spend, language used, types of knowledge sharing, and the interaction pattern. The respondents' feedback responses were analyzed through the content analysis. Findings showed Facebook culture is related to knowledge sharing as a way of life. It can be a platform for future research on the capabilities and benefits of online social networking. This research gives an insight on how Malaysians shared knowledge and benefits that they obtained through Facebook.

Keywords: Social interaction; culture; way of life

1.0 Introduction

Knowledge sharing is an important activity that enhanced an individual capability to retrieve new data and resources for the purpose of learning, problem solving, and self- improvement. The development of information communication technology (ICT) plays an essential role in the creation of knowledge sharing activity as it provides a platform for people to do activities such as posting questions and answers, discussions, messaging, story-telling as well as sharing experiences. It allows rapid communication and interaction among people as the distance barriers have been minimized. The internet technology of the 'World Wide Web" makes it possible to give a new dimension on how people communicate with one another. Web-based communication slowly replace the traditional face-to-face communication even more since the invention of telephone many decades ago as people tend to meet virtually. One such online software application is the online social networking focusing on Facebook. This contemporary social ICT tool has rendered virtual social phenomenon and become the craze of people around the world. Generally speaking, this could mean that knowledge sharing escalation is even more. In this context, there are many statements that say 'knowledge is power'. Facebook application may be a mechanism to stimulate and support the activity of knowledge sharing. This is an important activity for organizational development. There is a lot of studies on the area of knowledge is power. These studies have drawn out interest from researchers, political scientists, philosophers, bureaucrats, and academician (Hass, 1990). With regard to this, socialization of knowledge culture existed in the era before then. In the case of the new technology such as the Facebook, it gives impacts to knowledge sharing through online interaction. It draws many advantages from its usage which explains the huge access to its application globally. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how culture plays an important role in knowledge sharing in the social learning context using the Facebook. In addition, the paper will explore the type of knowledge Malaysian shared and the type of benefits that they obtained through this activity. There is evidence that Facebook already has a significant impact on communication and interaction on people. The methodology of this study is qualitative, where the responses of the respondents will be analyzed in depth. The respondents for this study are Malaysian Facebook users.

2.0 Literature Review

Facebook has many benefits that the usage has generated the huge access to the application globally. The future of the internet use indicates that the social benefits will far outweigh the negatives over the next decade (Anderson and Rainie, 2010).

In this paper, culture is defined by Bezweek and Egbu (2010) as the shared patterns of behaviors and interaction, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. The concept of online social networking like Facebook is a cultural paradigm shift. Morse (2003) says that human beings are naturally born to be social creatures. They love to socialized, they love to develop and maintain complex social network of friends, family and acquaintances through various means of communication and technologies.

Goodfellow and Lamy (2009) outline four major areas of inquiry associated with cultural contacts which include (1) education beyond culture and borders (2) computer-mediated

interaction by marginalized people or group (3) the evolution of new types of knowledge production, and (4) the development of social networking events and their usage for teaching and learning.

Dahlia (2008) noted that the culture values of Malaysian among them were honesty, knowledgeable and trustworthiness. This refers to the fact that information and knowledge sharing were based on values that are crucial to knowledge development. On the other hand, culture which surrounds us is deep seated and pervasive that it is accepted as our way of life. On that note, Facebook has affected the daily life of today's society. Adamic, Buyukkokten, and Adar's (2003) findings showed that online social networking like Facebook users usually create an online network and connections with users with a similar profile, characteristics and interests. Therefore, the evidence showed that friends of friends that belong to the social network will likely create new online relationship and friendship.

Facebook which came into existence since 2004 is the second most accepted and generally most visited in the world (Alexa, 2012). Twelve million users were from Malaysia (Tawie, 2011). This has positioned Facebook as the number one social media website (Tawie, 2012, Alexa, 2012) in Malaysia. With regard to that, Facebook application is chosen for this study as it is a popular communication platform to share digital content and socialize. Research done on Facebook users with the facilities of online social networking showed that it provides the users an avenue for them to interact between them more easily daily as it provides an option to connect with people at anytime and anywhere. Its impact and benefit is persistent with many social, economic and education activities. Thus, the online social network has increasingly become an online social culture event (Pookulangara and Koesler, 2011). This posits that Facebook with its beneficial features provide social utility such as social interaction activities suited with the definition of culture mentioned earlier as shared pattern behavior.

In detail, the study aims to answer these research questions, which are:
Does culture play an important role in knowledge sharing?
What are the benefits of online social networking among the Malaysian Facebook users?

Statement of Problem
The Star Online (2010) stated that most Malaysian Facebook users spend 9 hours per day. This is very alarming situation, and research must be done to find out as to what extent this is true and explore reasons Malaysian's use the Facebook. In addition, literature shows that there is a limited research on the issue of culture and knowledge sharing in Malaysia (Shaari, 2004) and very few studies were conducted on the behaviours of Malaysian Facebook users. This will be the initial study before embarking to a quantitative methodology

3.0 Methodology
This study adopted the qualitative methodology. Data was derived through posting of questions in the Facebook. Responses from the Facebook users were analyzed. The questions were tagged to Facebook users, chosen randomly. Since this study is applying

qualitative approach the questions are worded in a way to include more stem (Junco, 2012) to get inferences of Facebook usage. Questions that were posted include:

How many hours spend on the face book (per day, per hour)

What are the benefits that you gain from the face book interaction?

How do you share knowledge on the FB?

What type of knowledge that you share?

What type of language used in the face book?

The profile of the respondent are describe as an active Facebook users and linked to the researchers'

Facebook platform. They are Malaysian, having similar culture in terms of traditional social norms and values, they speak the same native language, and reside in Malaysia. Most of the respondents are females and more than three quarter of them are working adults.

4.0 Findings and Analysis

4.1 Benefits of online social networking.

From the 52 users that were tagged with the questions, only 25 responses were obtained. These are some of the responses.

Respondent SH says:" *I have a few benefits that I want to share including finding long lost friend, updating information…"*

NMN says that "meeting *old friends again, sharing religious information, sharing travel information and to fill time".*

YR says "...through the fb I am able to interact with students and friends and sharing information from fb friends".

NKA says that " we can receive joy, motivation, and pleasure from meeting new and exciting people , developing real lasting relationships, sharing news, sharing information and sharing knowledge on important events like health talks and conferences, learning more about each other, about behaviors – the list goes on and on."

HW also gave her opinion which is .." the main benefits include the interaction with friends, sharing information, sharing ideas and the best benefit is to get connected with long lost friends".

ZN shared his opinion which is "...to interact with family members, another benefit is for business purposes such as selling items in the fb, and getting in touch with the community as well as leaders in the society.".

From the interaction analysis can be derived that the benefits of Facebook were:

1. finding long lost friends
2. knowledge sharing
3. interaction with friends and family
4. meeting new people

Finding long lost friends is the benefit that seems to be agreed by most respondents in the Facebook. Some users were able to contact friends that they have not met for more than 20 years. Some respondents agreed that they are able to get connected to long lost friends overseas and this experience brought a lot of joy and motivation to many of the users.

Knowledge sharing is the second benefit where all respondents agreed that knowledge sharing is done spontaneously. At any time a question on an issue can be typed into the face book and many will response to the question. The respondents also stated that these knowledge sharing is only limited to general knowledge and not issues that are sensitive to the public. The respondents stated that they are at ease to share knowledge on health, food, travel, latest book issues, geography, history or sciences. The cultures among Malaysians are always to take care of the feelings of others. The responses of the users showed that this is indeed so even in the online social networking platform.

Interaction with friends, family members and meeting new people are also the benefits that the respondents get went they do social networking. Communication and interaction between family members, and long lost cousins and uncles is definitely a plus point. This benefit closes the gap of communication between family members and information among them easily be updated from time to time.

Business purposes are another benefit that was stated by the respondents. Announcements can be made, items and collectibles can be auctioned and also items such as clothes, cloths, food, books, teas, coffees and etcetera can be sold in the face book.

It is felt that through the online social networking, businesses can expand and develop faster than the conventional way of selling.

4.2 Hours spend on the face book.
The 23 responses from the face book, says that they spend less than 1 hour per day, and 4 hours per week.

Therefore, Malaysian face book users don't spend much time on online social networking. This showed us one interesting pattern which relate to the characteristic of the respondents who were mostly females of working adults. The time spend is low because they able to gauge between time of their working time, family time and time for face book which is considered as their free time activity. This probably adds another level of insight among face book users.

4.3 Knowledge sharing and culture
There were only 20 responses from this question. Most of the responses stated that there are some knowledge can be shared and some knowledge cannot be shared. Some of the respondents feel that knowledge sharing virtually among the virtual community is a good habit. Knowledge sharing culture is viewed by most respondents as a variable that have to be seriously taken in consideration when people are interacting in the face book.

According to respondent "H", cultural difference is a barrier especially when you have users of different background. Therefore, the responses in this research stated that it is important to not raise "sensitive issues" or make statements that can cause discontent to others.

"..I am extra careful with what I say or post on the fb,.. because I feel that many people can read my statements..At times I tend to forget that I am not interacting with one or two people.. "

According to respondent "S", there are certain values in the Malaysian culture such as honesty, knowledgeable and trustworthiness becomes a barrier when sharing knowledge on the face book. Issues of concern include:

"Can I trust the knowledge that I receive through the fb... is this statement true? questions like that always keep coming into my mind"..

This in line with the findings of Goman (2002) that people are reluctant to share knowledge for several reasons. Among the reasons a fraction of the community that believe that when you have knowledge , you are more powerful than the person next to you. Therefore knowledge is not being shared because of that belief.   Shahrinaz (2010) stated that people are reluctant to share knowledge with reasons they are unable to trust the people in their social network circles. It is difficult to predict the reaction, attitude and perceptions of the fb users. In addition there are reported problems and cases on the ethics of the users

According to respondent SH, *"It depends on knowledge that I want to share...I am at ease to share knowledge on things related to general well being such as sharing recipes or herbal remedies… I feel that I am quite reserved in sharing my opinions on politics and I would not want to make sensitive comments or negative statements on others. I guess in our Malaysian culture we try to take care of the other persons feelings, we are not so open..."*

The respondent YR says that *..." it depends on what kind of knowledge and experience. I believe that not everything can be shared in the fb..."*

Respondent Sue also says that ..." I am ok in sharing knowledge, but a bit reserved in sharing experiences especially personal ones".

Respondent K says...

"What worries me is our society knowledgeable enough to filter the knowledge that is received?"

4.4 Language

Language is another salient issue that can motivate people to interact with one another. It can be associated with the lingua franca. In general, people having the same lingua franca have a strong tie between them and people with having the shared language seemed to interact more frequently and are at ease. A study on an international organization environment,   staff with the same language can create a harmonious working environment, it reduces communication breakdown (Harzing, 2008). From the feedback received it showed that most of the respondents feel comfortable to interact in both languages. This is because most Malaysians are bilingual. This may due to Malaysian educational system which placed English language as a second language.

Among the feedback that shows acceptance of both languages include:
Respondent SH said.. "Does not matter, communicating in both language is okay."
Respondent HJ said... "I use both languages, depending on the person I interact with..."
    While;
ZN and SA said "...both language".

AY said "Malaysian language, I am patriotic"
TA said "you get more response with your own language".

5.0 Conclusion

The findings of this study relied on the responses given by the Facebook users through the Facebook platform belonging to the researcher. Therefore, the researchers acknowledge the fact that the findings of this study may not be generalized in other settings. However, the findings and discussion managed to shed some light on how culture play an important role in knowledge sharing and what are the benefits of the Malaysian Facebook users. In answering the first research question, the dominant cultural values that surface in this research are the issue of trust, the importance of knowledge sharing and avoiding sensitive issues shaped the respondents views on culture and knowledge. Malaysians are known to be cared about one's feeling. From the analysis it is shown that they tend to share anything that is common or having compatible interest but however still very reserved on issues that touch on personal or sensitive issues.

Most importantly, this study showed evidence of the benefits among the Malaysians online social networking of Facebook such as finding the long lost friends, knowledge sharing, interaction with friends and family, meeting new people and for business purposes.
The findings from this study is useful for researchers and academics to evaluate the benefits of online social networking like Facebook. Thus, further study of the Malaysian Facebook users' views and perceptions on culture and knowledge sharing can be conducted for more discussions. Besides providing a better understanding, the findings could serve as the basis for further study in depth in using the Facebook as a virtual tool for knowledge

Acknowledgement

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