The use of Facebook in a multi-course collaborative project within a cross-cultural context

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Background. Facebook is the most popular social network site worldwide with over one billion active users every month (Facebook, 2012) and most university students are already using it. Therefore, implementing it into the classroom provides a familiar environment for students. The benefits of Facebook use, such as interaction, communication, social relationship, and participation, have been found to affect student motivation in learning (Lam, 2012). However, the role of Facebook use in student attitude and intention toward the project has not been examined in a multi-course, multi-cultural context. This study developed and tested a model that delineates external and motivational factors influencing attitude toward and intention to take a future collaborative learning project which uses Facebook as a communication venue across courses in different cultures.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses. The motivation theory and Fishbein model (Ajzen & Fishebin, 1980) were used as theoretical frameworks. Deci (1975) suggests two types of motivations to perform an activity: extrinsic and intrinsic. Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1992) proposed perceived usefulness as an extrinsic motivation and enjoyment as an intrinsic motivation. Researchers also found that external factors directly influence an individual's extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, in turn affecting intention to use Facebook (e.g., Lin & Lu, 2010). This study examines (1) the effect of an external factor, cultural difference (the U.S. vs. S. Korea), on perceived usefulness and enjoyment of the project Facebook (H1a, b), attitude toward the international collaborative project, and intent to register for a future international collaborative project (H1c, d); (2) the influence of perceived usefulness and enjoyment on attitude (H2a, b) and intent (H3a, b); and (3) the influence of attitude on intent (H4).

Implementation. We developed a multi-course, multi-cultural collaborative project to provide students an opportunity to acquire firsthand knowledge about unique retail environments in different cultures and to develop networks with future professionals in the global industry. The project involved two retailing courses and two merchandising courses in the U.S. and S. Korea. Students worked on a hypothetical scenario in which they needed to develop business plans and merchandising strategies to expand their business into a foreign country (the U.S. or S. Korea). Each course had four groups working for a company with a different retail format in the home country and conducted in-depth market research for the assigned company (Part 1). Using the project Facebook, students in each culture exchanged the information acquired from Part 1 and used this information to conduct an in-depth analysis of different cultural environments and potential competitors in the country to enter (Part 2). Each group created an audio-recorded PowerPoint presentation, converted it into a video, and uploaded it to the project Facebook. Students communicated with each other by posting their questions, feedback, or comments.

Method. The data were collected using a convenience sample of students participating in the project: Visual Merchandising (22) and Global Retailing (11) in a Southeast university in the U.S., and Fashion Buying and Merchandising (37) and Fashion Retailing (26) in universities in S. Korea. Four bilingual faculty members developed and reviewed English and Korean versions of the questionnaire, which were distributed in class after the final project presentation. Each question had two versions for Korean students.

Results. About 73% of the respondents were female and 82% were juniors or seniors. The average age was 22 years old. About 94% had used Facebook before participating in the project and 62% agreed or strongly agreed that they had actively participated in the project Facebook. Factor analysis confirmed uni-dimensionality for each construct used in our model. Cronbach's *alphas* of the measures ranged from .89 to .96. To test H1a~d, multivariate analysis of covariance was used. Perceived importance of technology use in learning was used as a covariate. The covariate had a marginally significant effect on the dependent variables (*Wilks's* λ = .90, $F(4, 91) = 2.472$, $p = .050$); but it just significantly affected perceived usefulness ($F = 8.797$, $p = .004$) and enjoyment ($F = 9.054$, $p = .003$) of using the project Facebook. There was a significant main effect of cultural difference on dependent variables (*Wilks's* λ = .79, $F(4, 91) = 6.133$, $p = .000$). The results of univariate analysis revealed that cultural difference had a significant effect on attitude toward the project ($F = 5.377$, $p = .023$) and intent to register for future international collaborative projects ($F = 8.357$, $p = .005$) (H1c/d supported); attitude and intent were higher among Korean students. Stepwise multiple regression was used to test H2~4. Perceived enjoyment of the project Facebook positively affected attitude ($\beta^* = .463$) and intent ($\beta^* = .509$) (H2b/H3b supported), whereas perceived usefulness affected neither attitude nor intent (H2a/H3a rejected). Attitude positively affected intent ($\beta^* = .660$) (H4 supported).

Discussions and Future Plan. Our findings emphasize the intrinsic component (enjoyment) of student motivation to engage in a multi-course, multi-cultural collaborative project. This study is the first to examine the role of Facebook use in an international collaborative project in fashion and merchandising disciplines and provides educators in the related disciplines insights about how to incorporate social network sites into course curriculum to motivate student learning. This project will be continued in difference courses and countries.

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