



# Trust as a learning facilitator that affects students' learning performance in the Facebook community: An investigation in a business planning writing course

Wen-Long Chang<sup>a,1</sup>, Chun-Yi Lee<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Shih Chien University, No. 70, Dazhi St., Zhongshan Dist., Taipei City 104, Taiwan, ROC

<sup>b</sup>National Taipei University, No. 151, University Rd., San-Shia, New Taipei City 23741, Taiwan, ROC

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 22 September 2012

Received in revised form

5 November 2012

Accepted 12 November 2012

### Keywords:

Improving classroom teaching

Learning communities

Learning strategies

## ABSTRACT

Several studies have found that participants are willing to share personal information on Facebook, due mainly to trust in fellow group members; however, this trust is often influenced by the discussion environment, methods and participants. A learning facilitator is often employed in entrepreneurial courses but few previous studies have examined how they actually influence the effectiveness of teaching. This paper discusses how the trust in such facilitators in the Facebook community influences the development of students in the writing of business plans in order to model learning behavior. We employed pre- and post-test data from a sample of 188 undergraduate students in a mid-sized Taiwanese university and observed the influence of learning facilitators on learning performance. This study also explored the interaction between partner trust and discussion mode with regard to business plan writing. Our results show that having an entrepreneurial consultant participate in the discussion results provide significantly stronger improvements in business plan writing than that afforded by other modes of discussion. A significant interaction between the mode of discussion and partner trust with regard to business plan writing was identified. Our findings make a concrete contribution by increasing our understanding of partner trust and cooperative learning, in a business plan writing course in the Facebook community. The study also provides an alternative course design based on various approaches to the instruction of business plan preparation.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

A well-devised business plan is crucial to anyone wishing to start a business. Entrepreneurs must contemplate and clearly state the functions of their proposed business and explore any inadequacies through the process of writing. Thus, a business plan is a form of self-examination as well as a proposal to introduce the business to would-be investors. Governments and universities in Taiwan have established numerous courses in entrepreneurship to encourage students to start their own businesses, and business planning makes up the core of these efforts. For example, many government-financed venture loans, such as “Youth Entrepreneurship Loans” provided by the Small and Medium Enterprise Administration, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, “Entrepreneurial Phoenix Loans” provided by the Council of Labor Affairs, Taiwan, stipulate that prospective entrepreneurs must first complete a business plan course, in order to obtain loans.

Without a well-thought-out business plan, attracting investors can be difficult; therefore, ensuring the content and quality of the business plan is a crucial issue and business management courses that teach business plan writing could be beneficial to those wishing to start their own business. Since the 1970's, studies related to entrepreneurial education have treated the development of business plans as a core element in business training (Finkle, Kuratko, & Goldsby, 2006; Hills, 1998). Klinger and Schündeln (2011) showed that developing a business plan is a key factor in entrepreneurial training and described how many well-known American universities encourage students to participate in business plan contests and take pride in those who win.

Cooperative learning is one of the most important aspects of any course related to business planning. Today, Facebook has become a popular social network in Taiwan, due to its friendly tone. Knowledge is shared through the process of discussion, storytelling and

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +886 2 26748189ext.66914; fax: +886 2 86714205.

E-mail addresses: [wenlong@mail.usc.edu.tw](mailto:wenlong@mail.usc.edu.tw) (W.-L. Chang), [chunyi.lii@gmail.com](mailto:chunyi.lii@gmail.com) (C.-Y. Lee).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +886 2 25381111ext.8924; fax: +886 2 25336293.

collaborative editing. University students consider Facebook activity as a means to support existing relationships; thus, Facebook is commonly used to augment instruction in an increasing number of business courses offered by Taiwanese universities (Lin & Chen, 2012).

Although such social networking sites provide users with the opportunity to share information and develop social networks online, there are risks and concerns with sharing information with large numbers of people (McCarty, Prawitz, Derscheid, & Montgomer, 2011; Stamoulis & Farley, 2010; Walrave, Vanwesenbeeck, & Heirman, 2012). Participants remain willing to share on Facebook mainly because of their trust in their online friends (Al Omoush, Yaseen, & Alma'aitah, 2012; Fogel & Nehmad, 2009; Park, Jin, & Jin, 2011; Tosun, 2012). Studies have found that trust may reduce interpersonal tension and conflict and promote intra-community collaboration, cohesiveness, and identification (Mistzal, 1996), as well as enhance interpersonal harmony and cooperation (Coleman, 2000; Fukuyama, 1995; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009). However, trust can vary according to the situation, the method of discussion (Dwyer, Hiltz, & Katia, 2007), and even the participant's gender (Forbes, Jobe, White, Bloesch, & Adams-Curtis, 2005). Dwyer et al. (2007) compared perceptions of trust, in their survey of two popular social networking sites, Facebook and MySpace. In that study, Facebook members expressed greater trust in Facebook and its members, and were more willing to share personal information while MySpace members were more inclined to use the site to meet new people.

External partners, such as entrepreneurs, industry mentors and consultants may often be involved in business plan courses. The facilitator's role in this type of course is very important for the potential success and the desired knowledge transfer. Classic authors like Gibb (1993) have given considerable attention to the issue. Gibb (1993) argued that the facilitator's role is that of a guiding partner in the process, and must focus on recognizing different ways in which people learn, understanding the learning process and facilitating it. The facilitator should move away from the traditional teaching methods, while moving toward a learning process that is not tightly controlled or processed. The emphasis should be on the delivery of knowledge and the examination of understanding. According to Pretorius, Nieman, and Van Vuuren (2005), the role of the facilitator is highly influential on the potential success of a training course. The facilitator must follow the participants' progress throughout the entire process, seeking opportunities to explain theory and clarifying theoretical concepts and principles.

McAllister (1995) emphasized that trust in this type of partnership includes both emotional trust and professional trust. Owners of new start-up businesses must disclose to their consultants all of the problems and difficulties they encounter, including technical and financial issues. Even issues that are difficult to discuss must be dealt with to ensure that all problems are addressed and effective strategies devised. When a partnership is more dynamic or conducted over a limited period of time, there is an even greater need for trust between parties (Chang, 2012; Seabright, Leventhal, & Fichman, 1992; Sprenger, 2004). New entrepreneurs must be willing to tell partners about the difficulties they encounter, which means dealing with a degree of risk. Trust in one's partners implies a willingness to bear the risk of being criticized (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

This study evaluates the learning effectiveness of different learning facilitators as they join in a Facebook discussion. Participants were divided into three groups: peer groups (where only student peers join the discussion), entrepreneur groups (where entrepreneurs join the students' discussion), and entrepreneurship consultant groups (where consultants also join the discussion). We also explored the interaction between the three discussion modes and partner trust with regard to the writing of business plans. This study examined the following questions in greater detail:

1. Which discussion modes (peer, entrepreneur, or entrepreneurship consultant) have a better learning effect on business plan writing in a Facebook environment?
2. Does partner trust alter the way that the three discussion modes influence the performance of students in business planning?

The study is structured as follows: In Section 2, a review of the literature is presented and related theories are discussed. Our methodology is outlined in Section 3, and the results and discussion are presented in Section 4. Finally, the conclusions are offered in Section 5, along with implications for both instructors and for the scientific community. A discussion of the study's limitations and suggestions for future research can be found in Section 5.2.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The role of learning facilitators

Entrepreneurs often need the assistance of external experts in the entrepreneurial development process. Therefore, these experts will often be invited as a learning facilitator in a business plan course. The facilitator's role is very important for the potential success of the course and the desired knowledge transfer. Nieman and Niemann (2004) note that facilitators play the role of learning coordinator for a wide range of learning opportunities that allow students to develop their knowledge, attitude, skills, aspirations, and behaviors. A facilitator may train a student in new learning strategies, facilitate whole study groups, lead critical friends groups, facilitate action research teams, or organize professional learning teams. Because the types of learning experiences the coach facilitates vary, this role is diverse. Facilitators recognize the importance of using a variety of learning processes, honoring the uniqueness of adult learners, and aligning the learning process with the content and the learning preferences of students.

The facilitator's role is also very important for the potential success and knowledge transfer in simulation games. Gibb (1993) gave considerable attention to this issue, believing that the facilitator's role is that of a guiding partner in the process, and must focus on recognizing different ways in which people learn, understand the learning process and facilitate it. The facilitator should move away from the traditional teaching methods, while moving toward a learning process that is not tightly controlled or processed. The emphasis should be on the delivery of knowledge and the examination of understanding. According to Gibb, "In certain respects, the tutor is more important if learning is to be assured" (Gibb, 1993: 22).

According to Killion and Harrison (2006), the role of a facilitator should be:

- Facilitating dialog and team work
- Assessing the needs of teachers

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6835630>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6835630>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)