CMC on Group Collaboration: The Process and Barriers Between Two Cultures

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Abstract - In an increasingly online world, the ability to use Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and communicate effectively with people from other cultures are key to success. The purpose of this study is to examine how young generation with different cultural background are doing the communication process (specifically in creating messages, choosing the communication device and choosing the time mode) using CMC medium, and how they are dealing with the possible barriers that could hinder the collaboration effectiveness. We refer the cultural differences on cultural dimensions by Hofstede. This research uses qualitative with a case-study method and analyzed multiple sources of evidence such as recorded correspondence, logbook, focus group discussions, direct observation and experts’ interview for data collection. Participants are 30 Journalism students from Pelita Harapan University (UPH) Indonesia and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Australia who join a collaboration project from October – November 2018. This study shows that Individualism, Masculinity and Power Distance cultural dimensions really affect how they communicate to each other. The students use mostly asynchronous communication such as chat text, email and google doc for their communication tools because the available technologies especially internet connections did not yet support this group collaboration using CMC optimally. This project cannot be finalized without CMC however some barriers needed to be overcome to increase the effectiveness of future collaboration.

Keywords: Group Collaboration, Digital Communication, Intercultural Communication, Psychology of Communication Technology, Computer-Mediated Communication

Introduction

Just as the saying, “Every coin has two sides”, globalization has brought us both opportunities and challenges to the humankind. To be successful in this globalization era, it is mandatory for one to have the ability to communicate across different cultures and to use modern communication technology effectively (Chen, 2012) One needs to understand the different cultural point of view and also use and taking advantage of these modern communication technology that is rapidly changing in order to be able to deliver his/her message effectively and achieve its communication objective.

This study is primarily focus on CMC as a process of human communication via computers and other digital devices such as laptop, tablet or smartphone (Thurlow & Lengel, 2004). Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become a common norm for modern students who live in an increasingly online world. In professional life, International collaborations are on the rise, with scientists in smaller nations more likely to collaborate with foreign authors than those in larger ones. Between 2000 and 2013, collaboration has been increasing, with higher shares of scientific publications with institutional and
international co-authorships rose from 13.2% to 19.2% (National Science Foundation, 2016).

This research would like to see how college students from two distinct cultures and separated by geographical distance communicate within their group members using mainly computer-mediated communication (CMC) medium in order to be able to complete their assigned project and collaborate effectively. The examination covers from what type of messages used (text, audio, video or image), by what kind of devices (smartphone, tablet, laptop, or PC), the time mode chosen (synchronous or asynchronous), to what kind of barriers that hinder the communication process. According to Indonesia Internet Service Provider Association (APJII) survey report, in year 2017, the total number of internet users has reached 143,26 million users or more than 50% from the total population in Indonesia. Just 10 years ago in 2007, there are only 20 million internet users in Indonesia. From the 143,26 million users, 72,41% users live in urban area and 49,52% users are within 19-34 age range (young adult) with a relatively balance (51% boys and 49% girls) composition of users’ gender (APJII, 2017).

In five years, young generation will become the dominant generation and future leaders of Indonesia. So, the need to research and analyze, particularly empirical research on how college students collaborate effectively especially with people from other cultures using digital communication medium are areas that needs high level of attention.

Theoretical Frameworks

Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is an umbrella term which refers to human communication via computers. It started in the early 1960s when the first exchange of prototype emails is recorded. Temporally, a distinction can be made between synchronous CMC, where interaction takes place in real time, includes: various types of text-based online chat, computer, audio, and video conferencing, and asynchronous CMC, where participants are not necessarily online simultaneously, encompasses: email, discussion forums, and mailing lists. CMC can take place over local area networks (LANs) or over the Internet (Simpson, 2002).

Modern students have changed radically. Today’s students are no longer the people of our educational system was designed to teach. They have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cameras, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age. They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to “serious” work (Prensky, 2001).

According to Prensky (2010), today’s teachers are “digital immigrants.” Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language. Prensky suggests that educators must change the way they teach to meet the needs of the digital generation.

More educators are opting to create high quality on-line learning environments that embrace interaction, collaboration, and a supportive learning community. Collaboration can be effectively used to improve the quality and quantity of education in online learning environment. The collaborative learning methodology is more likely to evolve and make significant benefits to education, and probably to post educational business (Clark, 2000).

Communication and collaboration may be complicated by the failure of participants from different backgrounds to recognize the potential for misunderstanding. Cultural background can significantly affect the way audience understands the message (Brantley & Miller, 2008). (Yang, 2011) found that people present different preferences and
styles when using CMC tools in their organizational communications, which can reflect their inherent cultural characteristics.

In social anthropology, 'culture' is a catchword for all those patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Not only those activities supposed to refine the mind but also the ordinary and menial things in life, such as: greeting, eating, wearing clothes, showing or not showing feelings, touching various parts of your body, making love, or maintaining body hygiene.

Geert Hofstede, assisted by other scholars, came up with five basic dimensions of culture: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-term Orientation (Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind, 2010).

Methodology

For this research we use qualitative with a case-study method. We prefer a case study research method, compared to the other methods because: (1) the main research questions of our study are “how” questions; (2) we have little or no control over behavioral events; and (3) the focus of this study is a contemporary Computer-Mediated Communication (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

Data Collection

This study uses multiple sources of evidence for data collection: (1). Document analysis: we gather information from recorded email/chat correspondence and daily log book provided by the respondents during the collaboration project; (2). Archival Records: we take advantage of “free public use files” and other statistical data made available by governments or institutions; (3). Interview: One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview. We conduct Focus Group Discussions with Respondents & In-depth interview with Experts; (4). Direct Observation: We will use multiple observers to do the observations and may even consider taking photographs whenever possible; (5). Participant-observation: One of our research team members is actually participate in the collaboration project being studied.

All sources of evidence were reviewed and analyzed together, so that the case study’s finding was based on the convergence of information from different sources, not quantitative or qualitative data alone.

Unit of Analysis

Participants in this study were college students comprise of 15 Journalism students from Pelita Harapan University (UPH) in Indonesia and 15 Journalism students from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Australia who joined a collaboration project from October–November 2018. The collaboration project uses blended learning method, combining online and face to face meeting. Students communicated via computer medium (CMC) for one month before they met face to face (in Indonesia) for one week. They must collaborate to create a story package containing a news feature article complete with info-graphic and multimedia material (in English language), with the goal that their work is accepted and published by a respected news media online in Indonesia.

Pelita Harapan University (UPH) is a private Christian university located in an elite residential Lippo Village in Tangerang, Indonesia. This institution has branch campuses in the following location(s): Surabaya, Medan, Jakarta. Officially accredited and recognized by the Kementerian Riset, Teknologi, dan Pendidikan Tinggi (Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia), UPH is considered a large (uniRank enrollment range: 10.000-14.999 students) coeducational higher education institution formally affiliated with the Christian-Evangelical religion.

UPH offers courses and programs leading to officially recognized higher
education degrees such as bachelor degrees and master degrees in several areas of study. This 24-year old higher-education institution has a selective admission policy based on entrance examinations (UniRank, 4icu.org, 2019). The yearly tuition range of IDR 30,000,000-40,000,000 or USD 1000-3000 per year (UPH, 2018) has put UPH as one of the exclusive private universities in Indonesia with most of its students come from A or B socio-economic class.

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is a non-profit public higher education institution located in the urban setting of the large city of Brisbane (population range of 1.000.000-5.000.000 inhabitants), Queensland. Officially accredited and recognized by the Department of Education and Training, Australia, QUT is considered a very large (uniRank enrollment range: over 45.000 students) coeducational higher education institution. QUT offers courses and programs leading to officially recognized higher education degrees in several areas of study (UniRank, 4icu.org, 2019). Yearly tuition range is unidentified however based on its type as a public university so we can assume that most of its students are the middle class of Australians.

Results and Discussion

The discussion began with the question: ‘Which daypart (timing) do you prefer to communicate with your group mates? Why?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>QUT (N=15)</th>
<th>UPH (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
<td>1 (6,7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>7 (47%)</td>
<td>6 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening</td>
<td>2 (13%)</td>
<td>8 (53,3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After Midnight</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The student answers were varied. From the responses, it seems that diverse personal schedule and time zone are the main factors that influence the timing chosen for communication. However, after we dig deeper, we found interesting cultural influence in here.

W (Indo): Although the foreigner seems very welcoming and nice, they seem really passive and unmotivated, probably because it is still the first time, so still a bit awkward.

R (Indo): She's not an active WhatsApp user. She informed (me) that she will have her exam, so currently her focus is not in this project.

A (Aussie): I had an exam that day worth 60% and as such, that day I had to prioritize studying and working on preparing for that rather than working on this project, however, the group chat was still very active.

M (Aussie): I think one of the big differences actually is the students here (Indonesia) seems to spend a lot of time at university than we do. Because I talked to my partner (Indo student) and she spends the same amount of classes in one day I would have in a one week, so that’s ‘kinda’ surprise me how much students here (Indonesia) spend time in the university than students back there in Australia.

Australian lives in Individualist society. The purpose of education is to enable children to stand on their own feet. Children are expected to leave their parents’ home and live on their own when they start pursuing higher education. In individualist cultures, parents will be proud if children at an early age take small jobs in order to earn pocket money of their own, which they alone can decide how to spend.

In this case study, indeed, we found that most of the Australian (Aussie)
students, besides study, also work part time or full time (as an accounting, lawyer assistant, medical receptionist, etc) and most of them live in an apartment independently from their parents. They are paying for their own car petrol, handphone and even their own apartment cost.

As Collectivist society, Indonesians’ children have not been encouraged to earn their own money (especially from the wealthy family like most of UPH students). Rather, parents are expected to provide the financial resources which will allow children to focus their attention and energy on doing school assignments, preparing exams and entering the competitive workforce, expecting that when this child in the future gets a well-paid job, the income will also be shared to help younger siblings or to take care of parents in their old age.

Only in cases of poverty are children demanded to both work and attend college — to help immediately lighten the parents’ burden. In this case study, we found that all UPH students were focus to study only and still living with their parents and most of their expenses are provided by their parents. Even if they are earning side money, all the basic expenses are still covered by the parents. Besides cultural influence, Indonesian students admitted that is not easy to find proper part-time work in Indonesia.

Unfortunately, during this forming group, aside from their part/full time job, the Aussie students were also had lots of assignments and exams from school. This really created the dynamic that it seemed most Indonesian students were more eager to start the communication process than their Aussie mates (at least in the beginning of the project). When their Aussie mates didn’t give immediate responds, the Indonesian students felt ignored.

\[G\ (Indo): \text{They (Aussie students) took more than a day to text me back.}\]

\[V\ (Indo): \text{I don’t know about the other groups but my Aussie mates were not responsive at all. Sometimes they took 5 hours to reply to my chat.}\]

(Hughes & Wickersham, 2002) stated one of the aspects of effective collaboration are students feel comfort and trust among fellow collaborators. Collaboration groups also take longer to get oriented in the initial stages of a project (Hughes & Wickersham, 2002). In this project, the lecturer just let the students initiate everything from introduction and forming the group. The students admitted there were awkwardness during the first two weeks and there was almost no significant progress except saying ‘Hi” to their fellow member.

In addition to this situation, in the next question we will see that there were also different perceptions regarding instant feedback between Aussie and Indonesian students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2 The Response-Time Chosen (Synchronous or Asynchronous)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous (Real-time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asynchronous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second question was: ‘Did you receive instant feedback from your mates? How long do you consider still within instant feedback?’ Indonesian students defined instant feedback as giving reply within minutes or at least less than an hour.

\[M\ (Indo): \text{Em.. minutes...}\]

\[B\ (Indo): \text{less than half hour}\]

\[E\ (Indo): \text{I always reply fast. I don’t want to be perceived as rude if I already read the message but don’t reply.}\]
Whereas their Aussie mates perceived responses within 12 hours are still instant feedback.

A (Aussie): I consider like within 12 hours, but like if it was longer we didn’t really mind cause we were like all busy, we’ll answer when we got a chance to. No one feels like being ignored or anything, yeah, I’ll take within 12 hours is instant feedback but if it takes a few days I’m okay too.

T (Aussie): I would say within 24 hours given the time difference between Indonesia and Australia. Yeah most of the time I would consider this instant feedback if it is still within that time frame.

Australian lives in a sequential time culture, time is very important. People like projects to be completed in stages. Time is money, and so it is important that each stage is finished on time. The QUT students realized that they give delayed response to their Indonesians mates. In the introduction phase of the project, they were in the middle of final exams and prioritized their exam first. After their exam weeks were finished then they start giving their attention to the collaboration project. Indonesians lives in a synchronous time culture, people see the past, present, and future as interwoven. Because of this people do several things at once, as time is interchangeable. This results in plans and deadlines being flexible (Trompenaars, 1993).

In addition to that, Indonesians also come from Collectivism society, where personal relationship prevails over task and should be established first. That was why Indonesian students were eager to start the communication with their Aussie mates to build relationship before they can start working on the task.

In the next question we will see the type of message the students preferred and how culture influenced their preferences.

### Table 3 Type of Messages Used (Text, Audio, Video or Image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>QUT (N=15)</th>
<th>UPH (N=15)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>2 (13.3%)</td>
<td>2 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Image</td>
<td>2 (13.3%)</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All students chose text as their main type of messages and only very rarely use video or image. They reasoned that text was very time efficient and also helping them in dealing with the technical issues or the language barrier.

H (Aussie): I don’t have time for calls. So, text was easier, and they could reply later in the day and after that I could reply again so yeah... a bit more efficient

J (Indo): I chose text because of language differences. I have more difficulties in following the video or audio call conversation, however in chat conversation I can read the chat over and over again before I answer. I can also use google translate to help me write my answer.

If there were no language and technical barrier, actually, Indonesian students preferred to do the communication by video chat where they can see their Aussie mates face expressions and body language.

R (Indo): I prefer to do video chat to get to know my team member better, but my Aussie mate prefers text because it is more efficient. She doesn’t like to have synchronous (real time) conversation or to discuss together. She prefers to do her part and I do my part separately and then we give feedback to each other work by text. If I can choose, I prefer to meet face to face or at least have synchronous conversation.

A (Indo): I prefer video call because you feel better when you already talk
In person. I would like to see their face and their gesture.

In Collectivism society, personal relationship prevails over task and should be established first. This explained why the Indonesian students were eager to start the relationship by initiating video call. High-context communication prevail. You need to see the gesture and face expression of your communication partner. According to (Thurlow & Lengel, 2004), social cues are either static (e.g. clothing and hairstyles) or dynamic (e.g. facial expressions and gestures) and communicate a sense of status, power and leadership.

Building trust is important for effective collaboration (Hughes & Wickersham, 2002). Indonesian students from social groups, needed cues to help them learn to build trust by observing voice intonations, body gestures, and facial expressions of their QUT mates. However, in Individualism society, task is supposed to prevail over any personal relationship. So, text type communication in this situation was very efficient for Aussie students even though it was not always the most effective.

Communication medium vary in the capacity to process rich information (Lengel and Daft, 1984). The reason for richness differences include the medium’s capacity for immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization and language variety. According to Media Richness theory, text type communication is the lowest type of communication because it doesn’t provide immediate feedback and doesn’t provide cues so that interpretation can be checked. Medium of low richness are also less appropriate for dynamic communication process such as resolving issues or decision making. The students also experienced the downside of using text type communication.

M (Indo): Respond comes in hours’ time, ineffective discussion. I prefer to have group decision, so not only us (Indonesians) who decide, that’s why we need face to face communication.

G (Aussie): I have difficulty in understanding the meaning of the task in written format

In an extreme case, by only using text communication, one of QUT student perceived their UPH mates as rude, not listening or have no real firm opinions. However, after she met them in person her perceptions changed and she can feel that her UPH mates are kind, generous and helpful.

A (Aussie): over messaging, it seemed that D (Indo student)) was rude and not listening to anyone's opinions but his own or if he were listening, not acting consistently with them. It also seemed that E (Indo student) was just willing to go with the flow with no real firm opinions of her own. Through talking with them in person from Monday onwards, they have shown this not to be the case. Both E and D are very kind, generous and helpful.

To balance between building effective collaboration and efficiency, it would be better especially in the introduction phase or in situations where resolving issues or decision making are needed, students must intentionally try to use high richness media such as video calling or at least audio calling. Whereas in lower level of communication processing such as sharing information, exchanging research data, sending reports, uploading data in google doc, giving confirmation, sending summary, etc. can be done by low richness media such as email or text chat.

For the next questions we will see that even though for this collaboration project both Indonesian and Australian students agreed to use WhatsApp as their main communication app, actually, they have different preferences for applications used.
Table 4  Technology / Apps Used (email, skype, WhatsApp, FB messenger, etc)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>QUT (N=15)</th>
<th>UPH (N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
<td>2 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB Messenger</td>
<td>2 (13.30%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 (26.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Docs</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students chose WhatsApp chat, followed by emails and Google docs as their main communication app with different reasons and purposes.

M (Aussie): So, A (QUT lecturer) suggested we all get WhatsApp because that’s what popular in here (Indonesia), so now we will have WhatsApp.

G (Aussie): Yeah, we had the conversation with other students at the beginning on WhatsApp. I used it before to talk to family overseas. But early I didn’t like it. I feel like a little bit ‘crap’ compare to Facebook messenger. But yeah, we talked and G (QUT student) and I, we both prefer Facebook but I think they (Indo students) found it a little bit hard cause they never checked Facebook so we’ve just had to compromise and we use WhatsApp. We discussed what would be the better communication app. The (Indonesian) students preferred WhatsApp which was an adjustment because I never use it and it was an adjustment. But now that I’m here (In Indonesia), I find it really easy cause even ...it’s funny. academic stuff that we have been calling around on WhatsApp and like I would be so lost without WhatsApp now. UPH students actually tracking us on WhatsApp when we got lost and telling us where to go so that’s pretty good.

Data from (APJII, 2017) tells us that Facebook is still the most popular social networking site in Indonesia. Infographic survey from APJII in 2016 showed that 54% internet users in Indonesia is using Facebook, followed second place by Instagram and third place by YouTube. However, we found out from our focus group discussion, the UPH students were no longer using Facebook application as their main social media, in fact they considered that the app is outdated. All the UPH students preferred LINE as their main communication app with their friends.

V (Indo): I never use FB again because my friends don’t use FB so when I open my FB home it’s empty, so I don’t feel motivated to use FB again.

R (Indo): We see FB as an ‘oldies’ application. We used to play with FB until we get bored and we need something new.

(Goenawan, 2019) stated that there are around 80% or 72 million LINE monthly active users in Indonesia. They spend around 40 minutes per day using LINE. 41% from the total users are young people with age range around 18 – 22 years old. In Indonesia the pattern of users for chat app is divided into two segments. LINE is used mainly for teenagers and young people and WhatsApp for older generation and professionals. This data aligned with our observation in this study. All Indonesian students using LINE actively.

M (Indo): It seems we do ‘clustering’ when we chat. For family we use WhatsApp, friends (we use) Line and Instagram. It would be very strange if a family member suddenly direct message me via Instagram.

J (Indo): Instagram for sharing photos, and Line for chatting. I tend to chat with close friends using Line and for strangers I tend to use WhatsApp.
For work or professional matters I always use WhatsApp

Meanwhile, (Cowling, 2019) stated that Social Media users in Australia are some of the most active in the world, with a total of around 60% of the country’s population an active user on Facebook, and 50% of the country or 15,000,000 monthly active Australian users logging onto Facebook at least once a day. This is again aligned with what we observed in the collaboration project. All the QUT students prefer using FB messengers because they said it is such a comprehensive app, it is just what everyone use in Australia and if you don’t have Facebook it’s really odd.

C (Aussie): WhatsApp but yeah, If I had to choose, I would choose Facebook messenger. Because that’s what we use.

A (Aussie): I really dislike WhatsApp as a communication tool and much prefer to use Facebook messenger as I feel it has a better, easier to use interface.

Based on the data gathered, we conclude that cultural dimensions do not affect the choice of apps. Despite the fact that Facebook is popular app in both Australia and Indonesia, this project does not use Facebook as their main communication app. The students agreed to use WhatsApp for this group main communication because it is the app that the lecturer has recommended, and it is the most common app used that can reach both young and older generation in Indonesia. After WhatsApp chat, the students also use emails and Google docs for their main communication process.

For the next question we will find out the main communication device used by the students and their reasons.

Table 5  Type of Devices (smartphone, tablet, laptop, or PC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>QUT(N=15)</th>
<th>UPH(N=15)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Smartphone</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
<td>15 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop</td>
<td>3 (20%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablet</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
<td>1 (6.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question was: “What type of device do you mainly use in communication (smartphone/ tablet/ laptop/ PC)? Why?” Based on the FGD, students chose smartphone as their main communication device because it is easier, practical and they carry the device almost every time and everywhere they go. They admitted that they can do almost everything with their smartphone.

A (Aussie): Eeee... Google docs (I use) computer, WhatsApp (I use) phone, but sometimes I could do my Google docs on my phone...

B (Indo): Smartphone. Because it’s easier, practical, mobile and with us all the time

This study shows that culture did not affect the student’s choice of device type, rather, it is in line with the theory about media convergence. Various analog media forms — books, newspapers, radio, television, cinema, etc. now can be accessed by one device such as smartphone (Gasher, 2011). Media convergence affirms that everything we do with our computer; it is now available in our smartphones.

(APJII, 2017) stated more than 50% of Indonesia’s population (over 130 million) owns smartphone/tablet while only 25,72% owns computer/laptop. This is an opportunity for marketer that targeting younger generation, to develop a more precise strategy using smartphone to engage and attract more customer.

Collaboration Barriers

Even though group collaboration provides many opportunities for the participants, it is not always desirable for many students. One of the downsides is because one capacity to carry out activities and build toward their assignment become
limited by their group member’s schedule and quality of work (Fischer, 2000). There are also many barriers that could hinder the collaboration effectiveness. The purpose of this study is also to examine how the students are dealing with the possible barriers that arise in this collaboration project.

H (Aussie): Well I hate group assignment, so, I’m just ‘gonna’ say that. I think it was a waste of time but for this situation it was great ’cause we can’t speak Bahasa Indonesia, so it was needed. I think I only did one English interview out of the six we have done so it was definitely helpful. The communication was difficult before we got to Jakarta, because we didn’t understand them, we thought they were confused. But then once we saw them in person it all makes sense and it was just language barrier, but now, we just talked easily. It was good communication.

Barriers can result in miscommunication with the potentially serious consequences of hurt feelings, wasted time, or missed opportunities (Brantley & Miller, 2008). A review of the literature to date, we found several common barriers or noise relevant in CMC context that could hinder the collaboration process:

(1). Language Barrier

In this collaboration project, each group consisted of two Journalism students from Pelita Harapan University (UPH) Indonesia and two International Journalism students from Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Australia. However, some of the Indonesian students from the Online Journalism class came from regular program (not International program) in UPH so their English level are mostly basic which is not sufficient enough for English journalism standard. To deal with the language barrier, we found out that Indonesian member with stronger English fluency automatically became the communication bridge (translator) for the Indonesian students with weaker English fluency.

J (Indo): I admit that my English is not really good, and I have difficulties in following the conversation especially when the group starts talking about the project because usually, they speak very fast and using difficult phrases. Glad I have one Indonesian mate that can translate for me. The language barrier is really a challenge for me.

G (Aussie): I think the biggest issue is for example, K (Indo student) is very good at understanding what we need, whereas B (Indo student) doesn’t always understand first, so it’s more to the proficiency of the language

Some groups unfortunately have both Indonesian members with weak English fluency. Therefore, for the next collaboration project, it might be better to form group members not by their topic interest but by their English fluency. It is important to have at least one Indonesian member with strong English fluency in each group to ensure a smoother communication in the collaboration.

(2). Cultural Barrier

Communication may be further complicated by the failure of participants from different backgrounds to recognize the potential for misunderstanding. Cultural background can significantly affect the way audience understands the message (Brantley & Miller, 2008).

In this collaboration project, culture significantly influence how the students were thinking, feeling, and acting, such as: in making decisions, sharing opinion, resolving conflict, showing self-drive and competitiveness. For example, during FGD sessions we learned that the Indo students perceived their Aussie friends as dominant and seemed to under-estimate them while QUT students perceived their Indo friends...
as very friendly but did not seem to fully understand journalism.

A (Indo): One thing that concerns me is that I feel my Aussie mates seemed to under-estimate us. I can feel it. Why? Because whenever they make decision, they didn’t ask for our input. They just go ahead.

D (Indo): Yaa, they (Aussie mates) are more dominant.. they feel that they are smarter (than us).

A (Aussie): They (Indo students) are really friendly, we (Aussie students) were a lot of formal but since we got here it was just really friendly, really fun and chilled out, so yeah..

H (Aussie): I thought they’ll be hardworking, good at their degree at journalism. I thought they have a full understanding of it. My perception was fifty-fifty. My team is very hardworking, very good. But I don’t know if they fully understand journalism.

Geert Hofstede, assisted by other scholars, came up with five basic dimensions of culture: Individualism, Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-term Orientation. Australia and Indonesia are significantly different in almost all cultural dimensions (Hofstede, Compare Countries, 2019). We analyzed the cultural influence based on the cultural dimensions by Hofstede.

**Individualism VS Collectivism**

In most collectivist cultures, direct confrontation of another person is considered rude and undesirable. The word no is seldom used, because saying “no” is a confrontation. High-context communication prevail. In the collectivist classroom, the virtues of harmony and maintaining face reign supreme. Confrontations and conflicts should be avoided or at least should be formulated so as not to hurt anyone.

K (Indo): In my group, they (Aussie students) speak more bluntly. If they don’t like something, they don’t hesitate to confront. Here (in Indonesia) we speak more politely.

In individualist cultures, on the other hand, speaking one’s mind is a virtue. Telling the truth about how one feels is characteristic of a sincere and honest person. Confrontation can be salutary; a clash of opinions is believed to lead to a higher truth. Low-context communication prevails. The right to privacy is also a central theme in many individualist societies.

K (Indo): We were in the hotel room working on our assignment. It was very quiet, so I turned-on music in my Handphone. They (Aussie students) immediately said, “Could you please hear it by yourself?”

**Masculinity VS Femininity**

Feminine culture values modest behavior (under-selling self) and cooperation oriented. Excellence is something one keeps to oneself; it easily leads to jealousy. Competitive behavior and attempts at excelling are easily ridiculed. They appreciate social adaptation and Internet is mostly used for rapport building.

M (Indo): Once the Aussie students arrived here (Indonesia), they immediately took control of the assignment. They make decision if they want to be the writer or also the video editor. Suddenly the assignment is complete without telling us. We (Indonesian students) became confuse. We admit that the article is well written, so we didn’t feel necessary to give any additional inputs.

Masculine culture values Competitive behavior (over-selling self)
and performance oriented. Students try to make themselves visible in class and compete openly with each other. They appreciate academic performance and Internet is mostly used for fact gathering.

_G (Aussie student):_ We know that all of us are doing a similar degree, we all wanted to have a job when we finished. So, we know that we need to work hard to be the best we can be because there are just so many of us that are competing for the same job, so you want to be better than the person next to you. Because you want the job and there aren’t so many job.

**Power Distance**

Is defined as the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Subordinates are unlikely to approach and contradict their bosses directly.

In more egalitarian societies (low power distance), where problems cannot be resolved by someone’s show of power, students stressed the importance of being flexible in order to get somewhere. Children learn to say “no” very early. Students make initiative and are expected to find their own intellectual paths. Students make uninvited interventions in class and they are supposed to ask questions when they do not understand something.

In this collaboration project, one of Aussie student (from low power distance country) didn’t hesitate to express her disagreement to the lecturer’s decision regarding bylining system (a line in a newspaper naming the writer of an article). She sent protest email to the lecturer with wording that Indonesian students would very unlikely to use.

From this analysis we can see that Individualism, Masculinity and Power Distance cultural dimensions really affect how the students communicate. There are still two cultural dimensions from Hofstede, which are: Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term Orientation, however we could not yet see and analyzed them due to the short duration of this collaboration.

(3). **Technical Barriers**

The collaborative learning assignments were not always a successful endeavor. Technical difficulties could greatly hamper the communication, interaction and collaboration with distant partners (Ragoonaden & Bordeleau, 2000). In this study, the technological problems that occurred during the collaboration project are greatly affected students and discouraged the groups in using synchronous communication such as video or audio call even though there are times when high rich communication medium is needed such as in resolving issues or in decision-making situation.

_G (Aussie):_ We did a group call to discuss exactly what our topic was about, but the sound was difficult to understand.

_B (Indo):_ Our group planned to do a skype video call. But somehow our video screen is blank so we could not do the video call.

_M (Indo):_ The quality of WhatssApp video or audio call is really bad, especially if you are not using wifi connection.

Available technologies especially internet connections did not yet support CMC properly. One potential alternative for online communication is video interchanges. However, there are a number of issues yet to be resolved with video-mediated communication before it is considered a viable option in enhancing collaboration. Slow internet connection influences the quality of sounds and image.

**What Worked and Lessons Learned from The Collaboration Project**

This collaboration project has showed synergy where each member in the
group contributed differently according to their strength and working together toward a common goal. The Australian students mostly wrote the article because they are native English speaker and Indonesian students mostly contributed in interview translation, photography, infographics or logistic since the project is held in Indonesia. This project also applied equal reward system for group performance with individual accountability. Even though there were protest from one member regarding the bylining system, at the end, this student abided with the agreement made by the lecturers in the beginning of the project regarding the bylining system.

The Lecturer’s role shifted from simply preparing lectures and delivering information to designing the learning environment and interacting closely with students to facilitate learning and evaluate progress. Meanwhile, students made discoveries of his or her own regarding online journalism, CMC, cross-cultural communication etc., and gained knowledge through active engagement, conflict management, problem solving and authentic experience while also had fun.

Five out of eight articles have been accepted and published by one distinguish online news media in Indonesia and all students agreed that they receive benefits from this collaboration project.

What Did Not Work
The available technologies especially internet connections did not yet support this group collaboration using CMC optimally. The students use mostly asynchronous communication (the low richness medium) such as chat text, email and google doc for their communication tools as it was very time efficient and also helping them in coping with the technical issues (slow internet connection) or the language barrier. Technical problems such as slow internet connection influence the quality of communication and discouraged almost all groups to conduct synchronous communication (high richness medium) such as video or audio call even though there are times when synchronous communication is needed such as in resolving issues or in decision-making situation.

Suggestions for the Next Collaboration Project
To make the introduction phase more smoothly for the students, it would be better if the lecturers help the students especially in the introduction phase (during the first two weeks) by coordinating and assisting in making first official video call meeting and establish a few rules among students, such as: when is the exact start of the communication process, the agreed regular discussion time, the role and responsibilities of each member and some intercultural tips in communication. Then, it would be good to put the agreed rules in written format, including bylining agreement not only between lecturers but also among students to avoid misunderstanding among students.

Conclusion
During the FGD, we found out that none of the students conducted pre-research about their cross-Nation mates. The Aussie students were busy with their exams and had no time to do research whereas the Indo students were too excited and immediately contacted their Aussie mates to start the relationship. All of them assumed that their cross-country mates are similar with them. In the beginning of the project, it would be good to conduct workshop about cross-cultural communication to prepare them for the challenges ahead.

Finally, Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become a common norm for modern students who live in an increasingly online world but it will be the ability to understand and appreciate the differences in cultures and to learn to collaborate effectively that enable us to address today and tomorrow’s challenges.
References


