WORKING WITH WHATSAPP: A CASE STUDY OF ITS USE IN CROSSCULTURAL EDUCATION FOCUSING ON TOURISM AND LEADERSHIP

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ОБУЧЕНИЕ ЧЕРЕЗ WHATSAPP: МЕЖКУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ОБМЕН ЗНАНИЯМИ В СФЕРЕ ТУРИЗМА И ЛИДЕРСТВА

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ТУРИЗМ ТАРМАГЫНДА ЛИДЕРДИК БОЮНЧА БИЛИМ ЖАНА ТАЖРЫЙБА АЛМАШУУ: WHATSAPP МИСАЛЫНДА

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Abstract

This case study explores the use of technology, specifically the WhatsApp tool, to enhance student learning about leadership in different cultures through observations and the analysis of student products and reflections. Students in a class in the United States worked with students in a class in Kyrgyzstan to compare and contrast tourism and leadership in their respective countries, using video and chat technology. Student projects and reflections on the project and process involved were examined via content analysis to reveal findings regarding learning and the use of the app tool and other technology.

Keywords: WhatsApp, learning, teaching, tourism, leadership/

Аннотация

В этом тематическом исследовании рассматривается использование технологий, в частности приложения WhatsApp, в обучении студентов разных стран по направлению «Туризм и лидерство». Студенты университетов Соединенных Штатов Америки и Кыргызстана пользовались видео и чатом для онлайн-передачи опыта, а также анализа развития сектора туризма и лидерства в своих странах. Студенческие проекты, мнения о проекте и всего учебного процесса были рассмотрены с помощью контент-анализа, где были выявлены результаты обучения посредством приложений и других технологий.

Ключевые слова: WhatsApp, изучение, обучение, туризм, лидерство.

Аннотация

Бул илимий изилдөөдө билим берүү тармагында технологиялардын колдонулуусу, тактап айтканда WhatsApp аркылуу эл аралык деңгээлде тажрыйба алмашуу каралат. Америка Кошмо Штаттарынын жана Кыргызстандын туризм тармагында билим алган ЖОЖ

студенттери өз өлкөлөрүнүн туризм жана лидердиги тууралуу тажрыйбаларын видео жана чат аркылуу онлайн чөйрөдө бөлүшүп, анализ өктөрүүсүнө мүмкүнчүлүк түзүлдү. Студенттердин долбоор, колдонулган технологиялар жана тажрыйба алмашуу процесси тууралу ой-пикирлери контент анализ аркылуу каралып, жыйынтыктар чыгарылды.

Негизги сөздөр: WhatsApp, окуу, билим берүү, туризм, лидердик.

Introduction

This Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) case study focuses on student learning about tourism and leadership using "WhatsApp" and other technology. The case study describes the application of innovative teaching technique that involved students in semester-long intercultural learning opportunities concerning tourism without leaving their own universities. The main goal of this teaching innovation was to help understand the global tourism, where sustainable tourism and intercultural competence take significant share [1, c.14]. Historically, people traveled abroad to work in international teams, but currently people also work in virtual teams using a variety of technological tools [2, c.70]. It is essential for students to be able to use technology to communicate and learn about a variety of topics [3, c.10], including those related to their chosen discipline. Therefore, understanding more about how and what students learn about behaviors and practices in other cultures and how to use a variety of technological tools to communicate and collaborate is increasingly important. Mobile applications are becoming more and more popular as personal and professional technological tools, including as helpful communication tools in the hospitality and tourism industry. Therefore, it is worthwhile to understand more about how to use them in educational settings where instructors work with students to prepare them or careers in hospitality and tourism.

Lierature Review

All kinds of technology have influenced the hospitality and tourism industry over the past decade and technology is likely to continue to influence the industry in the future. For example, in hotels, the use of electronic locks and property management systems has become ubiquitous [4, c.89], and in the food and beverage industry, technological tools such as computerized point-of-sales (POS) systems, electronic paging systems and computer-based foodservice training are commonplace [5, c.37]. As some scholars note, those in the tourism industry have found that mobile technology and mobile applications are very useful [6, c.165]. They also observe that mobile applications cannot only be helpful to the industry, but also to tourists to enhance their experience at a destination [6, c.170; 7, c. 98]. Some scholars have indicated that mobile applications can be used in three distinct areas: content applications, participatory applications, and leisure applications [8, c.255]. Content applications are typically developed by a destination area, may be written in several languages, and do not contain user-generated content, such as that created by tourists. On the other hand, participatory content may be developed by those promoting the destination, but encourage user-generated content and leisure applications may ask the user to play games about the destinations that are related to tourism promotion [8, c.253].

Additionally, according to some, "Apps are taking over the world" [9], with Apps such as Yelp continuing to increase in use. Technology is essential across the varied segments of the hospitality and tourism industry as well and is used in all kinds of educational settings, too.

In today's fast-paced global society, it is essential for students to be able to work with people of other cultures and understand the perceptions of leadership held by those of other cultures [10]. Thus, understanding students' use of new technology is important for communication purposes and managerial operations. In this study an app called WhatsApp was used by hospitality management students and studied how they viewed the app as a possible tool for educational purposes and as a communication tool.

Purpose

Therefore, through this case study the instructors in a cross-cultural learning virtual experience

in a tourism class sought to learn more about how and what students learn with regard to tourism, hospitality, and leadership using the WhatsApp technology tool. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What did you learn about tourism and leadership in your own country and another country using "WhatsApp" technology in the tourism class?

2. What are the pluses and minuses/advantages and disadvantages of using the WhatsApp tool in a classroom setting for a class-related activity?

3. What are the pluses and minuses/advantages and disadvantages of video links or other tools in class as learning tools?

4. What do students learn about tourism and leadership in their own country and another country through a cross-cultural, collaborative project, focused on leadership, and using video connections and "WhatsApp" technology?

Methodology

This was a SoTL case study and therefore, the instructors gathered data via observations of class activities and the written reflections of 31 university students, 15 enrolled in a tourism class in a university in the United States (U.S.) and 16 enrolled in a tourism class at a university in Kyrgyzstan. The case study took place during the spring of 2017 and during that semester the students in Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. met on a weekly basis for 16 weeks via video call using one of the mobile applications called WhatsApp to discuss various topics related to tourism, including leadership. As part of the class, the students also completed collaborative projects comparing and contrasting tourism and leadership in their respective countries.

An example class session looked like the following:

1. Greeting from Kyrgyzstan and U.S. – 5-10 minutes.

2. Students from Kyrgyzstan show a brief slide show about tourism organizations in Kyrgyzstan – 15-20 minutes.

3. U.S. students show a brief slide show about tourism organizations in the U.S. – 15-20 minutes.

4. All students on mobile app – WhatsApp to discuss for 20 minutes.

5. Wrap-up and questions for next time – 5 minutes.

An example collaborative project included the following:

Directions for a collaborative project on leadership in tourism: You will work with your partner(s) to create a collaborative project. You will use WhatsApp as a communication tool. The end product for this collaboration may be a paper or a PowerPoint presentation (You and your partner(s) may decide which one you want to create). You will present your project to the class during one of our last two links with the partner school.

1. Compare and contrast leadership in tourism in Kyrgyzstan with leadership in the U.S. Consider leaders' characteristics such as gender in your research and paper or presentation on leadership.

2. Write a short paper (2-3 pages double-spaced in 12 point Times-Roman font) or make a brief PowerPoint presentation (about 10 slides) that compares and contrasts leadership in the two countries.

3. You should research the basic components of leadership in the two countries. These include:

- Definitions of leadership in the two countries;

- Similarities and differences regarding leadership in the two countries—pay attention to these as they relate to gender and culture;

- Examples of leadership in hospitality and tourism in Kyrgyzstan and the U.S.A.

4. Leadership training and education in Kyrgyzstan and the U.S.A. – for example does your university offer particular courses in leadership? You might need to do some research about classes at your own university to find out – and what kinds of leadership training opportunities such as workshops are offered in the US and Kyrgyzstan? Are the opportunities similar or different and how?

5. The future of leadership in tourism in the two countries.

6. Note: Please also use references in your project and list them at the end of your paper or on your last slide.

7. Present your findings in class during one of our last two links as directed.

Results and Discussion

As one can see from Figure 1, students believed that they learned important things through the use of the WhatsApp tool. It appeared to allow students to readily learn about each other's' cultures and countries, including the topics of tourism and leadership. Students believed that they could communicate effectively using the WhatsApp tool, as shown in Figure 2, and the advantages were much more readily discussed than were any disadvantages. Furthermore, as one can see from Table 1, students' perceptions of the use of WhatsApp were primarily positive although most mentioned that they would have preferred to use video technology over the app tool. One thoughtful comment noted how the app tool allowed the students (and the instructor) to readily look back over the conversations. She commented that, "It was easier to reflect using WhatsApp because our conversations were available to look back on. Although I enjoyed using the video stream, it was hard to remember sometimes what we specifically talked about. It also allowed us to discuss various topics and answer questions we all had about each other's countries." In addition, one student noted that, "Just by using the app we were able to share pictures and not only learn but see what events, foods, etc. look like." Additionally, as one student noted, "We were also allowed to communicate with each other when the video technology failed."

When asked what they learned, students' answers also varied. In terms of content, students wrote about various topics. For example, one student shared the following refection, "I learned that there is so much out there to this world that we may not know about. Upon taking this class, I had no clue Kyrgyzstan even existed. Through this course, I was able to learn interesting things about the food they ate such as goats, and traditions that they have carried in their country throughout the years. "Overall, students' written reflections of the use of the WhatsApp tool were positive and the students believed that the app enhanced their learning experiences and in many instances helped them to continue to interact when other means of communication failed.

Conclusions and Recommendations
Implications

This SoTL study has implications for future classes and the students' careers in the hospitality and tourism industry. In this class setting the two instructors had the students experiment with the WhatsApp tool to augment the use of video technology in a virtual classroom. In the future, the instructors could build the use of the WhatsApp tool into the course in a more structured, intentional manner. For example, students could be paired up so that students have WhatsApp "pen pals" and the tool could be used as students work on group projects as well. Not only does WhatsApp have potential, but there is potential for the use of other technological tools, too. The use of apps is becoming common in the hospitality and tourism industry and implementing their use in educational environments, including those involving cross-cultural communication has much potential for enhancing learning and enabling effective communication to occur internationally.

Limitations and Further Research

This was a small case study and the application of this tool could be studied more widely with a broader, more diverse sample. In addition, other types of technology could be tested to see what their application is like in the college classroom to help connect students from different countries around the world.

Table 1 – Examples of students' answers to the question, "What did you learn about tourism, culture and leadership in your own country and another country through a cross-cultural links using "WhatsApp" technology in the tourism class?

I learned first-hand about the everyday lifestyles of students my age in Kyrgyzstan and how they differ from my day to day activities. Also, through "WhatsApp" I was able to learn about the various tourism councils in Kyrgyzstan, unlike what we have in America.
There were not many new things that I learned about, pertaining to our country, but there were many new things that I learned about Kyrgyzstan. One of the things I learned about tourism, within their country, is that they are very big on limiting pollution and steering away from things that can harm their environment. A while back ago, they had a huge gaming event that brought in a whole lot of people. The other students mentioned that while this event may have brought in a lot of visitors and money, it damaged the environment of their country.
The use of pictures provided images for us to see what the other class was talking about.
I learned that there is so much out there to this world that we may not know about. Upon taking this class, I had no clue Kyrgyzstan even existed. Through this course, I was able to learn interesting things about the food they ate such as goats, and traditions that they have carried in their country throughout the years. It was easier to reflect using WhatsApp because our conversations were available to look back on. Although I enjoyed using the video stream, it was hard to remember sometimes what we specifically talked about. It also allowed us to discuss various topics and answer questions we all had about each other's countries.
By using WhatsApp in the class I think it made it easy to get answers and clear ones at that because it was not always that easy to understand what they were saying. Just by using the app we were able to share pictures and not only learn but see what events, foods, etc. look like. I think by linking with this class I really learned how different we are from other countries, but this is why we are given the opportunity to learn and travel to other places.
It was interesting to find out that we use similar apps in different countries to communicate and share ideas.
I learned how awesome it is that other countries want to learn our language and about what we do here. It was easier and quicker to get in contact with them when we did use the app.
I learned a lot about tourism, culture, and leadership. These daily links helped me explore not only the United States, but North Carolina as well. For example, through one of my topics on the slides, I learned that North Carolina is the 6th most visited state in the US. These links also helped me learn about a country I had never heard of before.
I learned more about things they do for fun there or places they like to go or have traveled.

Table 2 – Example Student Perceptions of Advantages and Disadvantages of Using WhatsApp

Advantages	Disadvantages
We are able to directly communicate with the other students. There is less of an opportunity for technology issues to occur as well.	Not as personable. We are not able to speak to the other students face to face. All the things that want to be said, may be misunderstood and words may get lost in translation.
It's quick and easy	We can't speak with them face to face
able to send pictures, and you can receive responses just as quick as a text message when we were not in class and you did not have to answer at that moment either as the message would still be there.	I do not think there were many disadvantages to using this app other than we were all buried in our phones most of the time messaging back then actually communicating.

| It kept conversations going easily and sometimes it helped with the language barrier, it allowed the conversation to be like it is between friends texting. | The language barrier caused minor problems because there were times when the students would send questions/answers through WhatsApp and it was hard to decipher what they were trying to say. |

Table 3 – Students' Views of Working with WhatsApp

Question	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total
I prefer using WhatsApp over use of the video in class.	0.00%	0	20.00%	2	60.00%	6	20.00%	2	0.00%	0	10
I prefer using the video over WhatsApp in the class.	0.00%	0	8.33%	1	25.00%	3	66.67%	8	0.00%	0	12
WhatsApp is a useful tool.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	75.00%	9	25.00%	3	12
Using WhatsApp will improve my class work.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	33.33%	4	58.33%	7	8.33%	1	12
Using WhatsApp will enhance my effectiveness.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	16.67%	2	75.00%	9	8.33%	1	12
Using WhatsApp will increase my productivity.	0.00%	0	8.33%	1	25.00%	3	50.00%	6	16.67%	2	12
My interaction with WhatsApp is clear and understandable.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	16.67%	2	66.67%	8	16.67%	2	12
I find it easy to get WhatsApp to do what I want it to do.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	8.33%	1	75.00%	9	16.67%	2	12
I find WhatsApp easy to use.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	8.33%	1	75.00%	9	16.67%	2	12
WhatsApp makes class work more interesting.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	18.18%	2	54.55%	6	27.27%	3	11
Working with WhatsApp is fun.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	33.33%	4	50.00%	6	16.67%	2	12
Using WhatsApp involves too much time.	25.00%	3	50.00%	6	16.67%	2	8.33%	1	0.00%	0	12
I will use WhatsApp in future.	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	41.67%	5	50.00%	6	8.33%	1	12

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