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## Youth's Usage of New Media: Exploring Learning and Identity Formation

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## Youth's Usage of New Media: Exploring Learning and Identity Formation

### Abstract

This study investigated youth's usage of new media technologies in and out of school as well as how it relates to learning and identity formation. Even though youth's usage of new media in school is inferior compared to out of school, it does not mean that both contexts are disconnected. In fact, there is a possible relationship established between both contexts and such connection can prove to be significant for youth's learning and identity formation. Communities of Practice (COPs) was adopted as the theoretical foundation of the study. The research method employed was case study. Data collection involved six 13 years old students from two secondary schools in Malaysia. They were interviewed, directly observed during classes and tasked to complete a media diary out of school. The findings of the study indicate that, despite the differences in youth's new media practices in and out of school, relationship exists between both contexts through the multi-membership dimensions of COPs. It was also found that, the experience of participating in different practices in and out of school is significant for youth's formation of identity. Learning is embedded within youth's participation in everyday new media practices. Hence, it is important for schools to understand youth's new media experience and to relate it with classroom learning.

### Keywords

Youth, New Media, Learning, Identity, Communities of Practice

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## Youth's Usage of New Media: Exploring Learning and Identity Formation

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### Introduction

The explosion of new media has transformed our lives in the manner that we have never imagined before (Albirini, 2007; Konrad & Wittowsky, 2018; Raza & Murad, 2008). It changes the way we think, communicate, work, and learn (Collins & Halverson, 2009; Flew, 2008; Sakil, 2017). While the term new media might be argued as being vaguely defined (Socha & Eber-Schmid, 2013), scholars in general agree that, it refers to digital technologies which are interactive in nature, hyper-textual, virtual, networked and simulated (Creeber & Martin, 2009; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009; McMullan, 2020). New media should be characterised through the combination of three Cs, which are computing and information technology; communication network and digitalised media and information content (Flew, 2008). This characterisation originates from the media convergence process, where different kinds of media are simultaneously used and linked together digitally (Flew, 2008).

The increase in ownership and usage of digital technologies among youth signifies the importance of new media in the lives of young people (Ismail, 2014; Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013; Rodriguez-Gomez, Castro, & Meneses, 2018; Yin, Agostinho, Harper, & Chicaro, 2014). Ownership in this regard, refers to the digital access and permission to use the new media technology (Kusper, 2014). Youth use new media in different contexts in and out of school, to serve several different purposes, including for work, socialisation and relationship building, with the main intention of making their lives easier (Green & Hannon, 2007; Kinnula, Livari, & Ijas, 2015).

Due to the limited technological access and support, inadequate funding and rigid curriculum, youth's usage of new media in school is often described as being inferior (Agasisti, Gil-Izquierdo, & Han, 2020; Broekhuizen, 2016; Collins & Halverson, 2010; Elgali & Kalman, 2010; McGarr & Kearney, 2009). On the contrary, youth's usage of new media is richer out of school as many of them have better technological access that enable them to engage in a variety of digital practices at an extended period of time (Agasisti et al., 2020; Fraillon, Ainley, Schulz, Friedman, & Gebhardt, 2014; Johnson, 2009b; Rudd & Walker, 2010).

In Malaysia and many other parts in the world, youth's access of digital technologies out of school is higher compared to during school (Ismail, 2014; Nugent, Shannon, McNamee & Molyneaux, 2015). They also have better opportunity to engage in various practices such as gaming, watching videos and listening to music out of school (Ismail, 2014).

In comparison to out of school, youth's usage of digital technologies is limited due to different factors including inadequate access to technology and the rigidity of school practices (Ismail, 2014). Although the nature of youth's usage of new media in and out of school is relatively different, scholars believe that both practices are not disconnected (Bulfin, 2009; Fraillon et al., 2014; Ismail, 2014; Vekiri, 2010). According to Yelland (2007), a relationship between both contexts is established when youth bring with them their new media experiences into and out of school.

The encounters that youth experience through their participation in various new media practices in and out of school would result in the formation of identity. Identity formation here refers to something that is temporal and continuously negotiated as youth gain new experience from their usage of new media in and out of school (Buckingham, 2008). This is elaborated by Wenger (1998) who indicated that, it is through our everyday experience that we negotiate who we are and what is or not important to us (Wenger, 1998).

However, due to the lack of research, knowledge on youth's formation of identity resulting from their participation in different new media practices in and out of school is limited. The complexity of youth's new media practices (Bulfin, 2009; Rodriguez-Gomez et al., 2018), also contributes to the difficulty in understanding their identity. Therefore, a thorough understanding of the kind of practices that youth participate in and how participation in these practices influences them is necessary to entangle their formation of identities. Hence, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What are the new media practices that youth participate in and out of school?
2. How does participation in new media practices influence learning and youth's formation of identity?

### **Theoretical Standpoint: Communities of Practice**

This study utilised communities of practice (COPs) as the theoretical framework to unravel youth's identity with regard to their participation in new media practices in and out of school (Davies, 2006; Beatty & Geiger, 2009). The basic premise of COPs is the dimensions of practice which comprise of mutual engagement, a joint enterprise and a shared repertoire (see Figure 1). The dimensions of practice provide a basis to understand COPs members' participation in shared practices of their communities, negotiation of meanings, formation of identities and learning (Wenger, 1998).

Mutual engagement between members is the prerequisite for COPs. In communities of practice, diversity is acknowledged, as members from different backgrounds work together in the shared practices of their communities (Kisiel, 2010). Participation in COPs encompasses of involvement in a series of continuous negotiations with other members of the communities, which results in the creation of a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). It is through their

participation in COPs that members develop and produce a shared repertoire or artefacts such as symbols, language, routines, methods, rules and guidelines (Wenger, 1998).

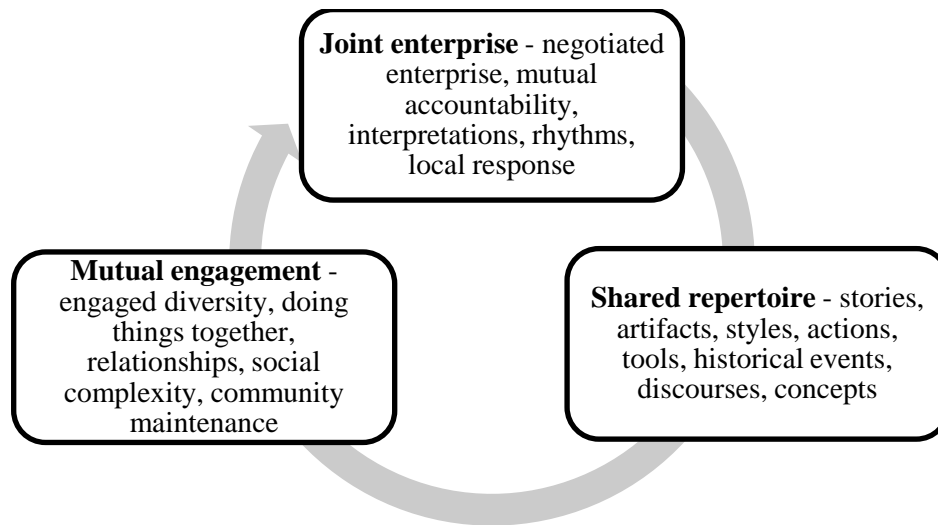


Figure 1. Dimensions of practice as the property of a community (Wenger, 1998, p. 73)

At work, in our neighbourhood and at the sporting field, we belong to different communities. But it does not mean that these communities are disconnected. As members of multiple COPs, we often bring with us our own experience from one community to another and influence practices. In COPs, this is referred to as the multi-membership dimensions that allow us to connect the practices of one community to another through the use of (a) boundary objects – similar artefacts such as tools, documents and concepts that are used by different COPs; (b) brokers – highly regarded members of COPs who are capable of influencing and connecting practices of different communities that they belong to; (c) complementary connections – the complementarity of participation and reification experience that can help to connect different COPs and; (d) boundary encounters and the negotiation of meaning – encounters such as conversations and meetings that provide opportunity for members from different COPs to come together and share experience (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Wenger, 1998).

Participation in shared practices of COPs also comprises of learning and formation of identity (Kapucu, 2012; Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2017). It is through active participation in their own communities that COPs members learn from one another ways to accomplish certain tasks (Aguilar & Krasny, 2011). Membership in COPs also entails the formation of identity which comprises of individual as well as collective experience of living in the world (Pyrko et al., 2017; Wenger, 1998). Based on history, experience and competence of participating in the shared practices of the communities, members of COPs develop their sense of identity (Battey & Franke, 2008; Burns, Howard, & Kimmel, 2016).

While the scope of identity in this study is only limited to COPs, it is significant to evaluate how the conception can be applied and extended within the context of youth's new media practices in and out of school. In a way, this contributes to the development of COPs as a relatively new theory of social learning.

### The Researcher Context

In the Malaysian context where this study was conducted, new media is very important in every facet of life. As of 2019, the Internet penetration in the country was over 80%, and

Malaysia also recorded the highest social media penetration rate in the Southeast Asian region and the fourth highest in the world (NST, 2019).

As an academic in the area of communication and media studies, the researcher was keen to look into how youth can benefit from their everyday usage of new media in and out of school. Such knowledge can provide better understanding of youth's new media practices, and more importantly, to inform policy makers and educators on ways to effectively utilise new media technologies for educational purposes.

The standpoint or positioning that the researcher held in regard to this research was based on the social constructivist perspectives. Such a worldview provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore how learning and formation identity took place among youth through their everyday new media practices. The basic premise of social constructivism is that, knowledge is social, and it is constructed within our own experience of participating in different practices with other members of the society (Crotty, 1998).

This research project was initially carried out as part of the researcher's PhD research and extended to a new research study under the Short Term Research Grant, awarded by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM).

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research approach was employed in this study. Its ability to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Berg, 1998; Creswell, 2008), enabled thorough understanding of youth's new media practices to be provided.

### **Case Study Method**

Specifically, this study employed case study as the method to explore youth's new media practices in and out of school. Case study allowed the researcher to holistically explore the research phenomenon (Yin, 2003). A case study, if it is carefully conducted, has the potential of providing in-depth knowledge and important discoveries related to the research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000; Yin, 2003).

In this study, single case (embedded) design was employed. According to Yin (2003), single case (embedded) design allows theoretical preposition to be tested involving multiple units of analysis within the context that is being studied. In relation to this study, six secondary school students were examined as the subunits of analysis. They were located within the larger case which was youth in the Malaysian context.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

This study employed three methods of data collection which were semi-structured interviews, direct observations and media diaries. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents to gather information pertaining to youth's usage of new media in and out of school. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, at school during school time and each session lasted for a maximum duration of 40 minutes. Second, direct observations were held in school where the respondents were schooling. Specifically, the respondents were observed twice over a two-week period during the ICT Literacy (ICTL) class session. Observations were mainly focused on respondents' actual use of new media in school. Each observation lasted for an hour. Third, media diary was employed to gather information pertaining to youth's usage of new media out of school. Respondents were requested to report their everyday usage of new media using either Facebook or through email over a one-week period.

The main rationale for choosing the three different methods of data collection was due to the need of in-depth data to enrich understanding of youth's new media practices in and out of school. This is also consistent with Yin's (2003) suggestion that, multiple methods of data collection are necessary to enable triangulation of data, enhance validity and deepen understanding of the research.

### **Selection of Respondents**

The researcher adopted a purposive sampling method to suit certain important criteria of the study (Silverman, 2010). Specifically, in this study, youth aged 13 who are frequent users of new media were selected as respondents. According to McQuillan and d'Haenens (2009), the number of youth using new media increases with age and it reaches ceiling when they are at 10-11 years old. In a related study conducted in the United States, it was also revealed that, youth aged 8-12 use digital media on the average of six hours every day (Wallace, 2015). The same study also found that some youth aged 13 are obsessed with social media to the extent where they check their social media account up to 100 times a day (Wallace, 2015). Hence, based on the findings of earlier studies, it can be noted that, youth are exposed to digital technologies at an early age and by the age of 13, they are expected to have a certain level of competency and experience with new media.

The respondents of this study consisted of six 13 years old students from two different schools in Malaysia. The two school locations were suggested by the State Education Department. Students from the two schools were made known about the study through advertisement. Upon pertaining approval from the school principals, the researcher distributed promotional posters to be put up at both schools, inviting students to participate in the research. In addition, the school principals also made announcement to promote the research to students during the weekly assembly. The researcher selected the first six respondents who expressed their interest to participate, with condition that they fulfilled the criteria of this study which is to be users of new media technologies in and out of school. Ideally, the researcher was keen to recruit more students' participants to take part in the research. However, the number of interested students were relatively small, and only the six participants chosen fulfilled the criteria of the study.

While Yin (2003) did not specifically state the acceptable number of respondents required for a case study, the selection of the six students was justified based on a single case (embedded) design employed in this study. In addition to the six student respondents highlighted in this study, the main research project also involved six close associates of the students and six teachers. In comparison to the main research project that explored multiple perspectives related to the topic, this study solely focused on the youth's perspectives with regard to their use of new media in and out of school. Data collected from the additional respondents was also reported as part of the main research project but not within the scope of this article. Hence, it was not presented in this article.

During the time this research project was undertaken, approval by the university institutional review board was not a requirement. However, the researcher took into consideration every aspect pertaining to research ethics, to ensure that respondents' safety, privacy and confidentiality were addressed. As the respondents were below the age of 18, parental consent was sought before they were enrolled in the study. Parents were informed of their children's right to quit at any time during the data collection process. They were also provided with the explanatory statement to explain about the possible benefits of the research, duration of participation, possible inconvenience/discomfort, privacy and confidentiality.

## **Data Analysis**

Upon completing the data collection process, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The coding sheet and notes from the observations as well as the information provided by the respondents in media diary were compiled accordingly.

Based on Yin's (2003) relying on theoretical propositions strategy for analysing case study data, the researcher collected and analysed the data based on the COPs' dimensions of practice. The research objectives, theoretical propositions and data collection instruments of the study were derived from COPs.

The step by step process of data analysis began with the researcher carefully analysing each case individually. This was followed by the examination of cross-case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). The researcher then, compared the data with findings of earlier studies to look into patterns, similarities and differences (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Research data gathered from multiple sources of inquiry was carefully divided into different themes as follows:

1. New media practices in and out of school
2. New media based COPs in and out of school
3. Learning and identity

The research data was coded, categorised and analysed using the NVivo software package.

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Theme 1: Youth's New Media Practices In and Out of School**

Similar to the findings of earlier studies (Courtney & Anderson, 2010; Johnson, 2009a, 2009b), the researcher found that, in comparison to school, the respondents of this study had better opportunity to use new media out of school (Agasisti et al., 2020). This was partly due to inferior new media access in school. When asked about their usage of new media during school, the respondents in School A informed that their usage of digital technologies such as computers and the internet was mainly limited to during the ICTL class lesson only, whereas, the respondents in School B had the opportunity to use new media during the ICTL class lesson and also after school hours at the computer lab. There was not much difference between School A and B in term of new media access for students to use. Both schools had two computer labs that can be used for teaching and learning purposes. However, the digital facilities in School B were better managed and maintained compared to those in School A.

Based on the observations conducted during the ICTL class lesson, it was found that students were taught basic knowledge about computer hardware and applications such as word processor, media players and desktop publishing. When asked further about the ICTL class, R1, one of the respondents critically responded:

Hahaha...it is quite boring actually. In school, it is like learning it all over again. They (the school) are doing it for others (students) who do not have computers at home.

According to R2, another respondent, he felt that the ICTL lesson was not useful. R2 claimed that students were "forced" to go to the ICTL class and if he had the choice, he would prefer not to attend the lesson. In comparison to R1 and R2, the other four respondents, R3, R4, R5 and R6 informed that they did not mind attending the ICTL lesson, even though they



acknowledged that most of the curriculum taught in the class was a repetition of something that they already knew. Other than during the ICTL lesson, students in School A and B did not have much opportunity to use new media at other times during school.

One of the issues that this study found was the mixed proficiency among the respondents with regard to their knowledge and experience of new media. During interviews and observation, some respondents showed higher level of new media proficiency compared to the others. This affected some students in term of their perceptions and interests towards the ICTL class.

Out of school, the respondents engaged in a variety of new media practices at an extended period of time. R2 was very excited when asked about his use of new media out of school:

Woohoo (high voice)! I use laptop, then my iPhone, iPad. PSP, iPod Shuffle, hmm (pausing)...PS3...camera, I use it all the time. Similarly, the other respondents also reported that they use different kinds of new media technologies at a longer period of time out of school. In the media diary, the respondents shared various out of school digital practices that they participated in including using social media and downloading music.

This finding echoes with Pini, Musanti, and Pargman (2015), Courtney and Anderson (2010) and Ilomaki and Kankaanranta (2009) who deliberated that richer new media selection and the opportunity to use digital technologies at a longer period of time without having to comply with rigid rules and regulations are greatly appreciated by youth. Participation in out of school digital practices helps to ignite youth's interest, motivation and proficiency of new media (Courtney & Anderson, 2010).

Besides the availability of technological access in school, there are other factors that influence students' opportunity to use new media technologies like computers and the internet during school. These include the maintenance of the technological infrastructure to ensure that the computers, the internet, printers and other equipment are in good condition. As this study found, School B benefited from better facilities maintenance compared to School A. As a result, School B has the capability to allow its students to use the computer labs after the school hours. Other factors such as the rigidity of the existing curriculum, over emphasis on examinations, school leadership decision as well as teachers' own attitude and knowledge also influence the usage new media technologies in teaching and learning during school.

Besides differences in technological access that they have out of school, where some have more access than others, youth's usage of new media technologies is also influenced by parental control and mediation. The findings of this study indicate there are a variety of parental control and mediation practices. Some parents allow their children unlimited usage of new media, while the rest exert certain forms of control such as limiting the amount of usage time and the purpose of usage. According to R1, R2 and R5, they experienced low parental mediation with regard to their new media usage, as compared to R3, R4 and R6. As a result, R1, R2 and R5 engaged in more frequent usage of new media compared to R3, R4 and R6. According to R3, R4 and R6, they were only allowed by their parents to use new media for learning purposes during the week days and more leisure practices such as playing online games and watching YouTube videos only on weekends.

Although the respondents' usage of new media in school was mainly limited to during the ICTL class only, it does not mean that they did not share their digital knowledge and experience with one another at other times during school. When asked about this matter, R5 replied:

We talk about new technologies like the DSLR camera. We share experiences with one another and we compare which camera is better... We also talk about mobile phones, the mobile phones that we have and all. Also about music.

R6 and the other respondents also agreed that they shared their new media experiences with friends during school. This usually happened in conversations between friends due to similar interest in gaming, film, music and new technologies. Such finding shows that youth bring their out of school knowledge and experiences of new media to school and share it with friends during school (Yelland, 2007). It also confirms that, even though school and out of school new media practices are relatively different, both contexts are not disconnected (Bulfin, 2009).

As respondents of this study brought their out of school new media experiences to school and shared it with their friends, it opened the possibility for learning. This kind of learning is social, where it is embedded in youth's everyday experience participating in different new media practices in and out of school. This occurs as part of their belonging to different COPs in and out of school.

## **Theme 2: New Media Based Communities of Practice In and Out of School**

Based on the COPs' premises, youth participate in different practices in and out of school. In regard to this study, youth's shared interest in new media might indicate their belonging to COPs. As Wenger (1998) pointed out, the basic premise of COPs is that, it comprises of individuals who share similar practices, goals or interests. However, it would be rash to assume that youth belong to COPs by solely taking into account their shared interest in new media as precedence. For this reason, the researcher utilised the Wenger's (1998) dimensions of practice to further explore if youth's shared interest in new media and their digital practices in and out of school leads to participation in COPs:

1. Mutual engagement – The mutuality that the respondents had with their friends with regard to new media practices at school took place not only during the ICTL class, but also at other times during school. The social nature of schooling allowed the respondents and the other students to share their new media interest, knowledge and experience with one another at different times in school such as between classes and during recess. Similarly, out of school, the respondents were found to be participating in various new media practices such as using social media and playing computer games with their friends. Participating in the same new media practices in and out of school is an important indicator of being mutually engaged with one another in the COPs.
2. A joint enterprise – It basically refers to the shared activities that members of COPs are performing. In relation to this study, joint enterprise was evidenced during the ICTL lesson, where it was observed that the respondents and the other students were working together to accomplish tasks assigned to them by their teachers. The respondents also reported that at other times during school, they frequently chat with friends about different new media practices such as the online games that they played at home and the most recent YouTube videos that they have watched.
3. A shared repertoire – Among the repertoires that were shared by students during the ICTL lesson were similar seating arrangements and the usage of identical styles in the performance of individual assignments. The discussions that students had with one another during class time influenced the way they

performed the assignments. Out of school, the repertoires that were shared by the respondents and their friends included the use internet slang words such as “noob” and “geek” and the usage of similar gaming strategies.

Through Wenger’s (1998) dimension of practice, it is evidenced that new media based COPs existed in different contexts, in and out of school. As this study found, the respondents participated in multiple communities of interests. It was through their shared new media interest and practices that they created the sense of belonging with one another.

The findings of this study indicate that COPs occurred both online and offline. For instance, at school, when new media usage was limited, most of the practices took place offline. Out of school, as the respondents spent a longer period of time using different kinds of digital technologies, many of the practices took place online. This shows how COPs are influenced by certain condition, demand and resources which require members to adapt to their situations (Vincent, Steynor, Waagsaether, & Cull, 2018; Wenger, 1998).

Shared interest in new media and participation in a variety of digital practices in and out of school indicates the respondents’ belonging to multiple COPs. The multi-membership dimensions of COPs allow a relationship to be established between school and out school with regard to youth’s use of new media. One of the ways how the relationship is established is through youth’s sharing of out of school new media experience during school. This finding indicates the role of new media as a “boundary object” that is utilised by multiple COPs in and out of school. As a “boundary object,” new media opens the possibility for relationship to be established between in and out of school communities.

COPs multi-membership dimensions also allow relationship between in and out of school to be established through the use of brokers, complementary connections and boundary encounters and the negotiation of meaning. For instance, there were respondents who became brokers and influenced new media practices in and out of school. The role of brokers in influencing practice was inherent in the way R5 influenced her friends’ usage of peer-to-peer file sharing software as follows:

Yeah, yeah...like the kind of software that we use. Like R2, he uses 4shared, I use FrostWire. For me, 4shared is a little bit slower because if you use FrostWire, you can just click and the song will appear, you can just download it. But 4shared, you need to choose a song and then you need to see the information and things like that.

Even though R5’s justification for favouring FrostWire over 4shared may not be accurate as it is possibly be due to her own liking instead of performance, her ability to influence others shows how brokering occurs. This finding in particular echoes with Wenger (1998) who reminded that, not everyone is capable of becoming brokers and influencing practices. Brokers need to have the ability to translate, coordinate and align practices accordingly (Ishiyama, 2016; Wenger, 1998). They are usually made of those who are respected by the other members of COPs (Ishiyama, 2016).

The researcher found that in school alone, the respondents belonged to multiple new media-based COPs including class communities, gaming buddies and digital technology enthusiasts. Out of school, they participated in several other communities as they engaged in practices such as blogs, social networking and online gaming. Some of the COPs that the respondents participated in during school were sustained and continued out of school. But the way in which the practices of these communities were performed were relatively different in and out of school. For example, during school, the communication is mainly face to face. Out of school, the practice continues online. According to David and the other respondents, they

have their own class Facebook groups, where students utilised the platform to discuss, share information and socialise with one another.

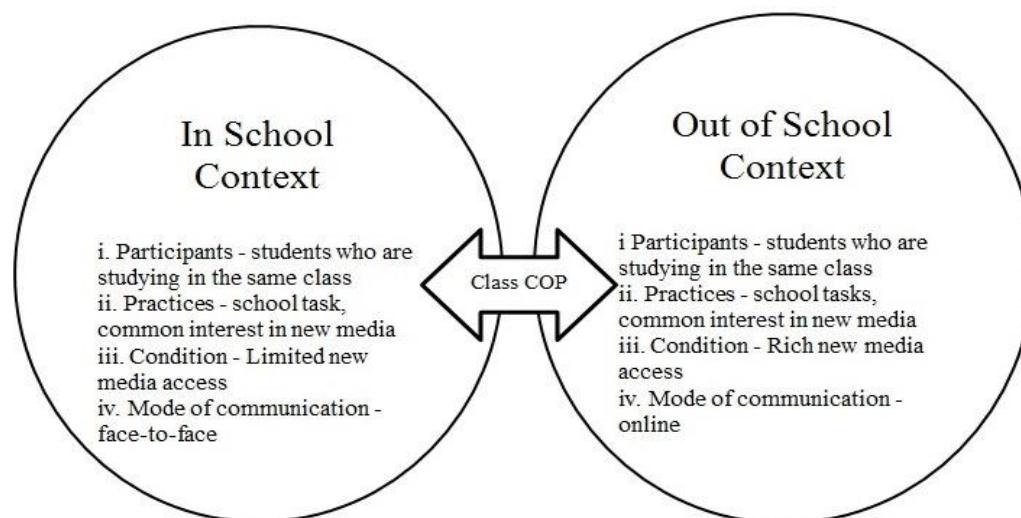


Figure 4. Class community of practice that was sustained and continued across the in and out of school contexts

As the findings of this study revealed, the conditions in which the practices took place in and out of school were relatively different due to several factors including digital access and the nature in which new media was used. These differences however did not deter the respondents and their peers from participating in shared new media practices across the in and out of school contexts. They adjusted themselves according to the conditions in and out of school by negotiating their enterprises based on the available resources and restrains that they had. Under the circumstances, school and out of school become social spaces or backgrounds in which COPs operate. Figure 4 depicts the class COP that was sustained and continued across in and out of school contexts.

### Theme 3: Learning and Identity

According to Buckingham (2008), identity as a term is often loosely defined and as a result, it may be subjected to different interpretations. Hence, in order to avoid confusion, it is important to note that, in this study, identity was analysed solely based on the perspectives of COPs. The basic premise is, participation in shared practices results in identity formation which, according to Wenger (1998) is negotiated throughout our lives. Identity formation according to the COPs take into consideration our negotiated experience, community membership, learning trajectory, nexus of multi-membership and the relation between local and global (Wenger, 1998).

This study found that participation in various digital practices has a huge influence on youth's identity, especially in the way they regard the significance of new media in their everyday lives. The respondents reported that new media is frequently used to serve several crucial functions including for communication, socialisation, overcoming loneliness, building and maintaining relationship, learning and entertainment. This finding echoes with Pattaro (2015) and Boyd (2014) who reported that new media has a major influence on youth's identity, particularly in the way young people navigate their complex lives online and offline and how they develop themselves both socially and emotionally.

As COPs members, identity formation that occurs through community membership takes into consideration three crucial dimensions which are mutuality of engagement, accountability to an enterprise and the negotiability of a repertoire (Wenger, 1998). This study found that mutuality of engagement occurred when the respondents engaged in shared practices and socialised with other COPs members. It was through active engagement in shared practices such as attending the ICTL class and playing online games together that they developed better understanding of each other.

Accountability to an enterprise refers to a particular perspective and interpretation that COPs members believe in as they participate in the shared practices of their communities (Wenger, 1998). For instance, even though R1 knew that it is not appropriate to offend others with profanity, but when playing games online, this is the norm that he had to tolerate.

Based on the findings presented above, it is inherent that the formation of youth's identity is shaped by their participation in shared new media practices in and out of school. These findings in particular reaffirm Vittadini, Siibak, Reifova, and Bilandzic's (2013) argument that frequent usage of new media has a major influence on youth's generational identities.

It is also important to note that the respondents reconciled their participating experience in new media based COPs in and out of school into an identity. This shows how participation in multiple communities allows COPs members to incorporate and reconcile their experience and to turn it into an identity. It is suggested that, the borders that define in and out of school as well as online and offline are blurry as youth participate in various practices in different contexts, and bring along with them their knowledge, experience and expertise from one practice to another.

Besides the actual participation or engagement, identity is also shaped by imagination and alignment. According to Wenger (1998), engagement has limitation, but this can be overcome through the use of imagination which has the capability to expand and connect practices beyond the actual participation. Despite being an avid user of new media, there were still many technological practices that R3 did not have the opportunity to perform, and one of it was online payment. Even though R3 did not have the experience purchasing things over the internet, based on the observation of his mother and his own imagination, he knew that it is possible to pay bills and shop online. However, it is important to note that imagination also has its limits. The misuse of imagination can lead to false assumptions and derail COPs members from reality (Wenger, 1998).

This study also found that learning took place as part of the identity formation process that the respondents went through. It is embedded within youth's participation in various new media practices in and out of school. As Lim, Thanq, and Liang (2013) pointed out, learning occurs not only in school, but it also takes place informally out of school. However, unlike Lim et al. (2013), the researcher found that, some of the respondents of this study had difficulty to relate their digital practices with learning. This is probably due to teachers and parents' failure to recognise the potential of new media for learning (Delen, Kaya, Ritter, & Sahin, 2015; Ismail, 2014).

### **Theoretical and Practical Contribution**

As a theory of social learning, COPs provide a useful theoretical lens to understand youth's participation in various new media based communities in and out school, the kind of learning that they experience and their formation of identity. It is important to note that the work of identity is ongoing, which indicates that youth continue to negotiate their identity based on participation in new media based communities in and out of school. As the findings of this study revealed, students' participation in new media based COPs in and out of school have a

profound impact on their identities. For instance, based on their participating experience in COPs, some participants consider themselves as “geeks” and “experts” of new media.

As a relatively new theory, COPs are subjected to ongoing debate and criticisms. The notion “community” is challenged for being loosely defined and it is claimed that learning only occurs from within the community (Jewson, 2007; Wubbels, 2007). In response to the critics, this study found that, community according to COPs exist everywhere, in and out of school as youth participate in different new media practices. While community membership might be difficult to identify due to the informal nature of COPs, it is important to consider the joint enterprise and shared repertoire that can be used as evidence of the existence of a community. As for learning, it takes place not only within the community as claimed, but it also occurs through brokering, connection between practices and encounters involving members of different practices.

In order to aid the development of COPs, it is important that future studies address crucial issues related to the politics of participation, power, influence and culture and their relations to participation in shared practices of the community, negotiation of meaning, learning and the formation of identity.

In term of the practical application with regard to youth’s usage of new media in and out of school, the findings of this study indicate the need for Malaysian schools to embed new media more in teaching and learning. Beyond the ICTL class, new media should be employed in the teaching and learning of other subjects. This however is not easy to materialise due to the heavy emphasis on examinations (Nurul-Awanis, Hazlina, Yoke-May, & Zariyawati, 2011).

It is proposed that schools should thoroughly understand students’ everyday usage of new media and to build upon their expectations and experiences for learning purposes in school. This is in line with Yelland (2007) and Johnson (2009b) suggestions that, teachers need to be able to create meaning of students’ rich digital experiences and to relate them with the classroom learning.

### **Generalisation and Limitations of the Study**

Generalisability of a case study is often debated, especially in its ability to be replicated or applied to other studies (Yin, 2003; Henderson, 2007). In explaining this, Henderson (2007) argued that each case study is unique should not be narrowly evaluated based on its ability to be replicated to different contexts. Instead, the generalisability of a case study should focus on its contribution to the process of theory-building (Burns, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 2004; Henderson, 2007).

In regard to this study, youth’s usage of new media in and out of school was investigated through the theoretical lens of the COPs. Guided by Eisenhardt (1989) and Yin (2003), this study began with the construction of research questions, followed by selection of cases, methods of data collection, process of collecting data, analysis and making comparison with the earlier literature.

This study has its own limitations. As this was a case study involving only six respondents from two secondary schools, the sampling size was small. The findings of this study also were subjected to certain biases due to the researcher’s own subjective interpretations.

During data collection, the researcher took a long time to complete the interviews. The interviews had to be conducted in two rounds. The difficulty experienced in conducting interviews with the respondents was mainly due to the issue of rapport building. In the Malaysian setting where high-context culture is in practice, trust needs to be earned.

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