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ENGAGING GENERATION Z: A STUDY ON FACEBOOK GROUP IMPLEMENTATION  
IN LANGUAGE COURSES AND IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

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For the degree of Doctor of Education

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May, 2018

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# ENGAGING GENERATION Z: A STUDY ON FACEBOOK GROUP IMPLEMENTATION IN LANGUAGE COURSES AND IN MULTIPLE CONTEXTS

## Abstract

This dissertation uses a mixed-methods approach with both an analysis of Facebook group data from a 2016 faculty-led trip and a meta-analysis of Facebook group studies from the past five years to examine popular theoretical frameworks, publication bias, themes, and how a Facebook group can be used with Generation Z learners to facilitate engagement with language instruction. The research was supported by a literature review that includes second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory. The study revealed that a Facebook group can facilitate engagement for Generation Z language learners at the university level by creating an environment that is personal, social, and engaging through four types of posts while providing analytical tools to help ensure that each student is viewing the material. The meta-analysis revealed that there is very little overlap in the theoretical framework of current studies on Facebook group utilization with university students, and the studies centered on three major themes: (1) Facebook groups are comfortable for Generation Z, (2) Facebook groups facilitate student engagement, and (3) Facebook groups can help improve student course performance. This research also gives examples of posts and suggestions for educators to consider before utilizing a Facebook group with students.

University of New England

Doctor of Education  
Educational Leadership

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Opinions are divided among university language professors in the United States regarding the use of technology for instruction (Clark & Zagarelle, 2012). While there does exist some middle ground, professors often either allow or prohibit student use of personal technology in a course. There is a specific argument by many language professors that technology is more of a distraction than a beneficial pedagogical tool. Language professors who prohibit technology in a course commonly deal with behavior management problems because of students' refusal to adhere to the policy and language professors who do allow the technology struggle with appropriate use. On the other hand, Seemiller and Grace (2016) encouraged the use of technology, and social media in particular, as it can be a "...learning tool and avenue for accomplishment" (p. 222).

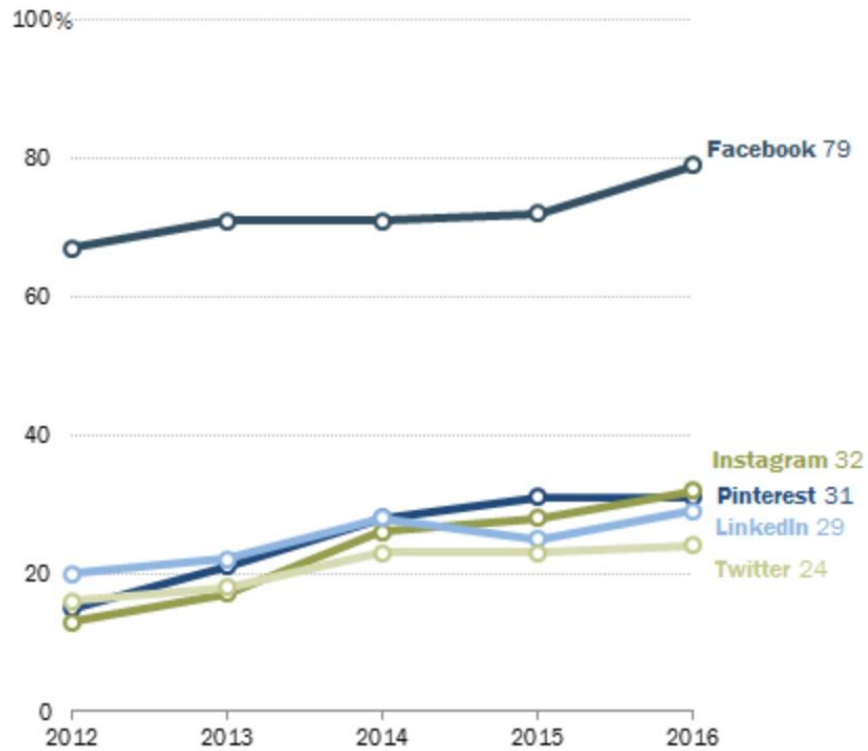
Clark and Zagarelle (2012) described instructor perceptions on technology implementation as a "technological divide" and added, "Transformational leadership is needed to create the right atmosphere for technology application" (par. 4). Clark and Zagarelle (2012) considered the views of both proponents and skeptics of technology in the classroom, but recognized a national increase in the use of technology for multiple purposes, such as entertainment and socialization. The use of technology is problematic in classrooms at many levels, and many researchers have addressed both sides of the argument of implementation. Few studies address instruction of current university students, as most of them belong to a new generation: Generation Z.

Generation Z students, born 1996-2010, use technology to socialize and have never experienced life without the Internet. This generational shift introduces the topic of the

utilization of technology in course-based instruction. Since the topic of technology is very broad, this dissertation will focus on the use of a Facebook group within a university language course to facilitate learning. There are many social networking sites, yet Facebook has persevered over the years. According to Brenner and Smith (2013), from interviews with 1,895 American adult Internet users, 89% of the 18-29 age group use Facebook. A more recent study by Greenwood, Perrin, and Duggan (2016) found that 88% of Americans ages 18-29 use Facebook and Facebook continues to be the most popular social media platform, as 68% of all US adults use Facebook. Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, and Twitter are all social media platforms that are used in today's world for a variety of reasons, yet figure 1 below demonstrates the popularity of Facebook in 2016 (79%) from a national survey of 1,520 adults (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016).

## Facebook remains the most popular social media platform

% of online adults who use ...



Note: 86% of Americans are currently internet users

Source: Survey conducted March 7-April 4, 2016.

"Social Media Update 2016"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

*Figure 1.* Facebook remains the most popular social media platform, by Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016, Social Media Update 2016, *Pew Research Center*, p. 1.

Since the most current students represent Generation Z, it can be concluded that the majority of university language students use Facebook, prompting the investigation on the utilization of a Facebook group as a supplementary pedagogical tool to support a university language course. The Facebook group option allows information collaboration and communication without requiring group members to be “friends” on Facebook. This is beneficial for pedagogical purposes because all personal information on individual profiles outside of the group may not be accessed unless the group member allows access.

### **Statement of the problem**

Generation Z tends to communicate in a different way than past generations. Students check their phones constantly in class to view notifications, post updates, and communicate digitally. Koulopoulos and Keldsen (2014) explained that many “Gen Zers” think that it is a right to have Internet access. With this mentality, current generations may consider the prohibition of technology in the classroom to be almost unconstitutional. Additionally, some language professors are interested in implementing social media, but do not understand how it could be useful or engaging for students and because technology changes so quickly, it is difficult to analyze specific social media platforms. As previously discussed, educators are divided on whether to use technology for pedagogical purposes, just as they are divided on the use of social media for pedagogical purposes. For example, connections have been made between the use of social media and narcissism, empathy, and self-esteem (Errasti, Amigo, & Villadangos, 2017). There are researchers who have promoted the use of social media for educational purposes and there are also those who have demonstrated its negative impacts.

Furthermore, poor communication between faculty and students contributes to educational outcomes like the dropout rate (Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018). Generation Z students

communicate via social media platforms like Facebook. Knowing that students who represent the latest generation value the Internet, university language professors in the US may opt to reevaluate and consider the way they educate students or deal with a burden of behavior management with the technology. Students check their phones frequently during courses and 86% of those aged 13-17 explain that they would be upset if they were forced to give up their cell phone (Gen Z: Digital in their DNA, 2012). To begin a language course with prohibitions that upset students may affect their willingness to participate or put forth the effort to learn a language. To understand this reaction, consider a person who enjoys taking notes and keeping reminders by using sticky notes. Such a person may have years of experience with this practice and found it useful for their learning style. To take away the sticky notes and force them to learn in a new way from the beginning could potentially build a wall between the educator and the student. Current generations may feel the same way about their cellphone in class, as the devices are used constantly for various and sundry mundane and educational purposes such as searching for a definition for a word, looking up a concept mentioned by an educator in a lecture, or interacting with others socially in or out of the target language. Andrea, Gabriella, and Tímea (2016) explained Generation Z's constant connection:

They are always online on any technical device virtually, with no stop. It can be seen through their actions, as well which are in connection with their technical environment and which can appear as a tool or as a milieu in their life. Other forms of socialization are very difficult for them. (p. 93)

The desire to use a cellphone in class demonstrates Generation Z's preference to be constantly connected to the Internet. The average cellphone has the capacity to access multiple applications to assist with personal needs. Companies have facilitated the ability to quickly search, switch



applications, and connect the applications to educate, entertain, and provide opportunities for socialization with text messages, video chats, and social media.

Because technology changes so quickly, it is difficult for researchers to analyze specific tools for language instruction purposes. This study addresses the utilization of a Facebook group for use with current university students in the US who are studying a language. With the boom of social media, language educators, and educators in general, want to learn more about ways to use it in courses because they see their students using it before, during, and after class.

Generation Z students are engaged with social media, but few researchers have explored using a Facebook group as a supplementary pedagogical tool for language learning, especially for faculty-led trips. Even fewer have compared the findings of Facebook implementation, so the meta-analysis in this research will help to identify overlapping results to help educators understand the positives and negatives of using a Facebook group for educational purposes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study served a purpose to provide insights into social media implementation analysis for university language courses to encourage conversations that will lead to increased interest and engagement with students, fostering a more productive learning environment. Another purpose of this research was to examine the utilization of a Facebook group as a supplementary tool for a university language course while abroad to analyze the engagement with Generation Z, serving a purpose for university educators may understand how to use a Facebook group for faculty-led trips or university courses in general. An additional purpose was to examine previously published studies on Facebook groups through a meta-analysis to list findings to identify common themes, examine overlapping theoretical framework, and consider publication bias. Innovators and effective leaders question why things happen and how situations can be

altered to provoke a positive change (Dyer, Gregersen, & Christensen, 2011). A study by Usher (2012) found that when technology is used as it is in the “real world” in conjunction with academic subjects, student motivation increases. It is understood that educators desire to provoke high levels of motivation, so analyzing a social tool that is used by current generations in their “real world” is important.

Finally, this study aimed to make connections between theoretical information on generations and language learning with social media. Students are now using multiple social media applications through personal electronic devices (PEDs) for many reasons, but this study focuses on the use of a Facebook group.

### **Research Question**

The research question below represents a starting point to further understand social media use for university courses in multiple contexts, with a focus on second language acquisition.

How can the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners facilitate engagement in language instruction?

### **Significance**

Previous researchers have found that students often become more engaged when teachers incorporate social media to classes (Al-Bahrani & Patel, 2015; Alon & Herath, 2014; Barczyk & Duncan, 2012; Buzzetto-More, 2014; Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Evans, 2014; Ferrara-Love, 2013; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Kivunja, 2015; Kuh, 2009; Rankin, 2009; Ricoy & Feliz, 2016). This study adds to the studies on social media for educational purposes, yet specifically focuses on the use of a Facebook group for language learning.

Professors frequently converse about the advantages and disadvantages of students utilizing technology for class during, before, and after lectures, indicating an interest in the topic

of technology implementation. Johnson (2010) explained, “There is a growing movement to unblock the YouTubes, Facebooks, and game sites in the libraries, labs, and districts where educators and students have learned the positive value of these resources” (p. 21). Social media can be relatively cheap, or free, as many students now have a PED such as a laptop, smartphone, or tablet. This may indicate that the technology implementation problem has shifted from cost to utilization strategy. Additionally, many universities require students to purchase a computer and wireless Internet is available on most campuses, and social media can be accessed from virtually any device that can access the Internet.

While computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is ubiquitous in current research, much is left to be understood about PEDs and social media for educational purposes. Mango (2015) completed a study on 35 students learning Arabic in 2013 while utilizing iPads once a week for 30-40 minutes for 10 weeks. The study indicated that students enjoyed using the devices and the students believed that the iPads helped them learn. While Mango’s (2015) study suggested the productivity of PEDs, it does not focus on the use of social media. While research is still being conducted because of the constant change in social media platforms, recent studies on Facebook implementation for pedagogical purposes will be examined in the next chapter.

### **Definition of terms**

**CALL:** computer-assisted language learning

**Digital Natives:** people belonging to Generation Z, according to Prensky (2001). This generation has never experienced a time without technology or the Internet.

**Facebook:** A social media tool that allows users to create a personal page and communicate with other users

**Facebook group:** An online community through Facebook that can be designated as private or

public

Generation Z: people born 1996-2010. The actual dates are debated by scholars, but this provides a general range.

Instagram: A social media platform that focuses on the use of photos

LinkedIn: A social media platform that is primarily used for business and professional purposes.

LMS: Learning management system

PED: Personal electronic device

Twitter: A social media platform that limits posts to a specific number of characters. That number has changed over time.

WhatsApp: An application for a personal electronic device that enables users to text, call, and send photos through the use of wireless Internet

### **Conclusion**

While this study was specifically aimed at the use of Facebook for second language acquisition courses and language departments at the university level, the findings could inform understanding of how social media might be used in a general setting as well. There are many other factors to consider in lower educational levels, as the Generation Z students utilize technology on a daily basis for learning, shopping, socializing, entertainment, directions and even personal reflection. Technology is an integral part of the identity of Generation Z, as these students do not remember a time without social media (Williams, 2015). According to Adler (2012), "...the concept of cultural identity includes typologies of cultural behavior, such behaviors being the appropriate and inappropriate ways of meeting basic needs and solving life's essential dilemmas" (p. 9). The Internet has become an omnipresent cultural tool that helps form the identity of the digital native. It is imperative to understand Generation Z students and the

communication tools that they use before making the decision to implement or prohibit social media use in university courses.

The next chapter will examine the relevant literature and studies that have been completed on similar topics. Since social media is still a relatively new subject, there are a limited number of studies to consider. This dissertation will examine previous Facebook group studies and how Facebook was used in a language course at Western Carolina University to shine light on the productivity of a Facebook group when used as a pedagogical tool for second language acquisition.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Facebook continues to be the most popular media platform in the US (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). While many other social media platforms may be used by Generation Z, the focus of this study will be primarily on the implementation of a Facebook group in a language course at the university level because Generation Z students use Facebook more than other mass communication methods (Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). The literature in this review provides an overview of Generation Z and an explanation of how the findings of seven studies (Ahern, Feller, & Nagle, 2016; Clements, 2015; Guo Shen, & Li, 2018; Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, & Chew, 2010; Momcilovic & Petrovic, 2016; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu, 2012), as seen in table 2, were synthesized to form the research question. Studies mentioned were found based on the references of studies like Clements (2015) and other literature with Generation Z and Facebook as subjects.

The conceptual framework will be explored following the review of the literature which explains the theoretical background on which this study is based. It is essential to understand the connections among second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory before considering a study to analyze the use of Facebook with university students. Second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory all serve as theoretical lenses by which the use of a Facebook group for second language acquisition can be examined.

#### **Social Media and Generation Z**

While considering a method for teaching a language course, it is crucial to understand the student group. What generations are currently present in university classrooms? How do those

students prefer to interact? How do they interact outside of a classroom? The following review will discuss Generation Z and previous studies on the implementation of Facebook for courses.

### **Students Representing Generation Z**

While multiple generations can be seen in a university classroom, “Between 2000 and 2015, the 18- to 24-year-old population rose from approximately 27.3 million to some 31.2 million” (National Center for Education, 2017, par. 14). The growth in this age group means that there are now more Generation Z students in university courses. Prensky (2001) called the latest generation “digital natives” because of their technology obsession, as they can be seen constantly checking their phones for notifications and searching for information and/or entertainment.

**Table 1**

#### ***Generational Dates***

“Baby Boomers”	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
1946-1964  (Graham & McDonald, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Tulgan, Baumann, Graham and McDonald, 2016)	1965-1977  (Graham & McDonald, 2016)	1978-1995  (Seemiller & Grace, 2016)	1995 or 1996-2010  (Hendler, 2016; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Weller, 2017; Williams, 2015)

To understand a general timeline of years, it must be understood that scholars don’t fully agree on the dates for these generations (Williams, 2015). According to Tulgan, Baumann, Graham and McDonald (2016) current generations in classrooms include the Baby Boomers,

born 1946-1964, Generation X, born 1965-1977, Generation Y, born 1978-1989, and Generation Z, born 1990-1999. According to Howe and Strauss (1991), the generations occur in a cyclical manner with each turning lasting 20-22 years. Those born between 1964-1984 represent Generation X and those born 1985-2008 represent Generation Y (Howe & Strauss, 1991). Generation Z is also known to represent the years 1995 to the present day (Hendler, 2016). While Generation Z is the main focus of this research, table 1 above is meant to provide the reader with a general understanding of the current generations.

Generation Z students enjoy having consistent and frequent feedback like they experience with social media (Tulgan et al., 2016). This may indicate a need to reconsider language learning feedback if the educator previously used summative assessments for feedback, as formative assessments allow for consistent and frequent feedback. Tulgan et al. (2016) also explained that Generation Z students may prefer a teaching leadership style to help them learn. Taking this into account, an educator may choose reciprocal teaching as a method to reach the generation, but may also consider doing so through technology. Generation Z students are familiar with technology such as YouTube tutorials, that can then be posted on Facebook. Generation Z has grown up in an age where there is a phone application to fit nearly every need, so the educator may choose to explore those options as well. It cannot be ignored that Facebook and social media are present in the lives of almost all Generation Z members. Educators can choose to shun technology from the classroom and deal with behavior management issues or embrace it to foster a win-win situation in which students may become more fully engaged in learning. A change in methods is necessary to reach the “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001).

A 2017 study by Barnes and Noble College revealed that Generation Z students thrive when challenged and actively engaged in their education and 80% prefer to study with friends,



with video chatting being one method of facilitating the act of studying for courses (Zimmer, 2017). Online videos were also found to be helpful to 80% of participants in the study (Zimmer, 2017). This data may suggest that online resources, such as social media, can be helpful in facilitating learning for Generation Z students. Facebook now offers a variety of functions including video, chat, and connections to other social media and tools. While choosing a specific technology to use with current generations, it is important to ensure that it is capable of offering experiences that are similar to the lives of the students outside of the classroom (Usher, 2012). The use of social media networking sites in education allowed students to challenge and express themselves, collaborate with like-minded learners, and build communication and technology skills (Ahern, Feller, & Nagle 2016; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009). Generation Z students prefer interpersonal learning and social learning in groups (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They are accustomed to communicating through social media, so the use of Facebook could be a valuable tool for university courses.

Generation Z students are *different*. They are less interested in driving, less concerned about trying alcohol, they date less, don't seek independence from their parents, aren't as sexually active as previous generations, wait longer to apply for their first job, and spend a great deal of time on their phones (Weller, 2017). If educators accept that this new generation is different than previous generations, it may be valuable to analyze the educational approaches with these students to understand and promote engagement.

### **Previous Studies on Facebook**

To gain a general understanding on how Facebook has been studied in the academic realm over the past eight years, the following studies were found, beginning in 2010 (Ahern, Feller, & Nagle, 2016; Clements, 2015; Guo Shen, & Li, 2018; Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, &

Chew, 2010; Momcilovik & Petrovic, 2016; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu, 2012). The seven studies, as seen in table 2, were synthesized to form the research question. The studies were found based on the references of studies like Clements (2015) and other literature with “Generation Z” and “Facebook” as search terms and keywords. This was a general search for studies to identify areas of interest to assist with the search criteria for the meta-analysis.

**How has Facebook been used in education?** Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, and Chew (2010) conducted a study of 76 participants from anonymous universities to analyze the experience of social software usage and found that while students may have registered accounts with social software, "...more than 70% of the respondents rarely or never use social software for learning according to the responses..." (p. 778). The results may suggest that social software is not being used widely for pedagogical purposes, prompting a need to explore and analyze the usefulness of Facebook and other social media in education. Ahern, Feller, and Nagle (2016) explored 260 undergraduate students' use of Facebook groups and revealed that students are using the groups to seek information and learn from others.

Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang and Liu (2012) analyzed the use of a Facebook group as learning management system (LMS). The study included 16 participants from two elective courses at a teacher education institute in Singapore. While there were limitations such as student insecurities, Wang et al. (2012) reported positive pedagogical, social, and technological affordances and explained:

The finding of this study confirms that the Facebook group has the potential to be used as an LMS. It allows making announcements, sharing resources, taking part in online discussions and participating in weekly activities, which are the basic functions of an

LMS. Also, using the Facebook group as an LMS gives teachers more control than using commercial LMSs and overcomes certain limitations of commercial LMSs. (p. 435)

Clements (2015) conducted a study "...to assess the efficacy of online communication tools for enhancing independent student engagement in a first-year undergraduate class" (p. 131) and found that Facebook "...can be used to enhance extracurricular engagement in a higher education setting" (p. 144). This study explores a science topic instead of language learning, yet it is significant it is similar to this study and provides a methodology and a useful approach to analysis of data.

Miron and Ravid (2015) conducted a study on the implementation of Facebook groups with university students, and from the 77 participants who answered their questionnaire, 49 were ages 26-30, 21 were younger, and 7 were older than 30. The particularly interesting aspect to the study by Miron and Ravid (2015) was that creating a Facebook profile and being a group member was mandatory for multiple courses observed in the study. Students who were concerned about privacy or those who had work restrictions had the option of creating an anonymous account, as long as the alias profile name was given to the educator for grading purposes (Miron & Ravid, 2015).

Momcilovik and Petrovic (2016) conducted a study of 110 university students to determine students' attitudes toward learning the German language through Facebook and found that Facebook can be a significant support to learning a language, but "...the capacities of this social network have not been sufficiently used" (p. 148). This study may suggest that many students may have a desire to use Facebook for language learning, but have not been given sufficient opportunities to explore the new-age possibilities of learning languages.

Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) analyzed three university sections and utilized a treatment group with Facebook as an additional tool for communication to compare with another group in which Facebook was not used. Their research findings show that the use of Facebook as a supplemental communication method can help an instructor better reach out to students, reduce a course's failure rate, and improve student course performance (Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018).

Table 2 below shows a synthesis of the findings from the previous seven studies on Facebook to explain the thought processes for which the main research question was created. Previous researchers have found that students often become more engaged when teachers incorporate social media within their classes (Al-Bahrani & Patel, 2015; Alon & Herath, 2014; Barczyk & Duncan, 2012; Buzzetto-More, 2014; Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Evans, 2014; Ferrara-Love, 2013; Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Kivunja, 2015; Kuh, 2009; Rankin, 2009; Ricoy & Feliz, 2016). In figure 1 in the first chapter, data demonstrated that Facebook is the most widely used platform by this target population, so Facebook was chosen. Because there are many aspects of Facebook data to analyze, the seven studies in table 2 helped to inform and encourage this research to form a research question that was both relevant to current university educators and helpful to researchers who study Facebook utilization for academic purposes.

**Table 2*****Synthesis to Form Research Question and Guide Research***

<b>Study</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>How the finding informed and encouraged this research</b>
Ahern, Feller, and Nagle (2016)	Students do use social media for learning	Would students be interested in joining a Facebook group for learning a language?
Clements (2015)	Facebook groups can enhance the student experience	Are there other studies available?
Guo, Shen, and Li (2018)	Facebook can improve course performance	How can Facebook supplement course material?
Jones, Blackey, Fitzgibbon, and Chew (2010)	Students use social media to be social, not learning	Could social media be used for learning in a variety of contexts?
Miron and Ravid (2015)	Educators can force students to join Facebook	Should students be required to join Facebook?
Momcilovik and Petrovic (2016)	More research on Facebook is needed	How many current studies are there on university Facebook groups for language learning purposes?
Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang and Liu (2012)	Facebook has potential	What part of Facebook has the most potential?

The studies in table 2 indicate that there is potential for using Facebook in educational courses and students are interested in such use, but few educators are using it as a pedagogical tool. Learning Management Systems like Moodle and Blackboard are widely used at universities in the US because of their strictly academic nature. Facebook is meant for communication and not specifically for educational purposes, so educators may be concerned with the business and marketing aspects that may interfere with educational goals. Also, with the constant change through social media fads, it is difficult to thoroughly research, use, measure, and report data on technology use, yet this study primarily analyzed the use of Facebook because it has persevered over the years and now serves as a social, marketing, and educational tool that deserves significant analysis. This study adds to the previous research with an example of how a Facebook group can be implemented in a language course. Could social media be used for learning in a variety of contexts? A search for current studies on the use of Facebook groups in education might help to answer this question, thus this research includes a meta-analysis of studies that explored the use of a Facebook group for university courses.

**Potential with Facebook.** Facebook groups have been mentioned by studies like Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu (2012), that highlighted the potential for Facebook groups. While there are many features and activities within Facebook, it was decided to only examine the use of Facebook groups in order to identify overlapping theories and findings. Facebook utilization for educational use is still a new field and technology changes rapidly, so it is difficult to analyze multiple parts of Facebook without current studies that examine multiple parts. How many current studies are there on university Facebook groups for language learning purposes? The question was posed previously in this research about finding current Facebook group studies with university students, but it is also important to find studies that focused on the use of a

Facebook group for language learning because the researcher teaches Spanish in a university setting. Both Momcilovic and Petrovic (2016) and Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) explained that more research is needed on Facebook, so a study on Facebook group use could help add to the number of current studies.

The seven studies cited here are an excellent starting point, but it would be helpful to understand other ways in which Facebook groups have been used for pedagogical purposes. For this reason, a search for additional studies in the meta-analysis was an integral part of this research.

**Students and Facebook.** Should students be required to join Facebook? Interestingly, Miron and Ravid (2015) explained that students were required to join Facebook in their study. “We experienced concerns and objections, similar to those that have been described by Wang et al. (2012). Some students, especially master’s students, are not digital natives, and do not behave as such, especially with regard to privacy” (Miron & Ravid, 2015, p. 377). Since students use Facebook outside of education for socialization and upload personal information, forcing students to join a group could be considered invasive, as Miron and Ravid (2015) reported that half of the students in their study identified privacy concerns.

Would students be interested in joining a Facebook group for learning a language? This research examined how a Facebook group was used for a faculty-led trip. Students were not forced to join, creating an area of comparison with the study by Miron and Ravid (2015). Ahern, Feller, and Nagle (2016) found specific motivators for students to use Facebook groups: (1) access and content control, (2) accessibility from multiple devices, (3) communication mode, (4) group management, yet all of the studies considered in the study were student-led groups. Students use Facebook groups already and lead them, so it would be helpful examine if they

would voluntarily join a Facebook group to supplement course material while learning a language. Momcilovic & Petrovic (2016) also aimed to understand student attitudes toward using Facebook, but for learning German. Since the findings were positive, it would be helpful to identify other studies for comparison. Guo, Shen, & Li (2018) also found that "...students preferred email and other electronic communication media over traditional channels, such as telephone calls or office hour visits, for faculty-student interaction" (p. 40). This finding also supports student interest in using social media for communication, but does not touch on learning a language.

**How can Facebook supplement course material?** The instructor in the study by Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) posted a total of 20 times in order to simply push out course information to the students and the student survey results found that even though 58% of the students were neutral about the Facebook use, 22.58% found it to be quite helpful and 12.90% found it to be very helpful. Additionally, by analyzing student grades, Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) found that "...students who are offered Facebook as an additional communication method outperform those who do not have such an option" (p. 39). This finding on the use of Facebook is significant, as it is tied to course performance, but it was used for reminders, instead of providing connections and explanations of course material. It would be helpful to find other studies that highlight specific types of posts that supplement the course content.

In order to take all of the previous questions into account through the synthesis of the findings of the previous studies on Facebook, the research question in this study focuses on how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners facilitate engagement in language instruction.



## **Framework**

According to Anfara and Mertz (2015), “A useful theory is one that tells an enlightening story about some phenomenon. It is a story that gives you new insights and broadens your understanding of a phenomenon” (p. 5). This research is supported by a theoretical framework around second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory. Second language acquisition theory helps educators understand how people acquire a second language and sociocultural theory considers behaviors and mental processes involved while learning. Both of these avenues of theory relate to this study, as sociocultural theory must be considered to fully understand second language acquisition. Generational theory is discussed in this research as well in order to answer the previous investigative questions on how to effectively educate language students in 2017, as this research questions the possibility of adding generational theory to second language acquisition theory and sociocultural theory for a more inclusive understanding of language pedagogy. It is important to note that additional theories may complement this research, yet the focus here will be on these to provide a deep understanding on the three mentioned and how they relate to the study.

### **Prominent Authors and Theories**

James Lantolf, a professor of language acquisition at Pennsylvania State University, completed extensive research on second language acquisition and sociocultural theory. According to Lantolf (2000), “The most fundamental concept of sociocultural theory is that the human mind is *mediated*...As with physical tools, humans use symbolic artifacts to establish an indirect, or *mediated*, relationship between ourselves and the world” (p. 1). It is through sociocultural theory that phenomena are addressed in regard to second language acquisition and while some scholars may argue that general learning is different from second language

acquisition, it could be argued that there are some similarities, as many publications have made connections to offer suggestions on maximizing productivity. Sociocultural theory provides a basis for research involving language acquisition for current students with technology, as it considers behaviors and mental processes involved while learning. To be specific, this research will show how the use of a Facebook group connects with certain areas within sociocultural theory such as: Vygotsky's (1978) notion of imitation and zone of proximal development, the input hypotheses of Krashen (1982), and scaffolding. All three topics are essential to understand in second language pedagogy, and understanding the connections bridges the old with the new, exploring new possibilities with language courses to maintain engagement with current students. All of the theoretical support centers around social interaction and learning with the help of others. Before the Internet, educators only interacted with students in person, but we now have many options to engage and foster student success virtually through social media platforms such as Facebook.

VanPatten and Williams (2007) explained, "Vygotsky proposed that the key to internalization resides in the uniquely human capacity to imitate the intentional activity of other humans" (p. 207). Imitation is a key concept in sociocultural theory, and can be observed of any being learning from another. Child language researchers such as Speidel and Nelson (1989) discussed how imitation takes on an important role with language acquisition, involving motor and neurological processing (VanPatten & Williams, 2007). This imitation is not simply acting as a parrot and repeating a word or phrase verbatim, rather taking the information learned and putting it into new contexts. For example, a child who learns a "bad" word at school from a friend may repeat that word later at home in a new context and surprise a parent. It is obvious that the child has learned a new word, yet may not understand the contextual usage of certain

words. Social media and other technology can serve as educational reference tools to learn new information, model it through imitation and practice, and learn through revision. Technology provides opportunities to see and hear modeled behavior and conversation through audio-visual modes such as YouTube, Facebook, and other social media.

VanPatten and Williams (2007) made reference to Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development as it relates to sociocultural theory. Vygotsky (1978) explained the zone of proximal development as "...the distance between the actual developmental level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). While Vygotsky's (1978) work is widely-known and referenced in many textbooks, his work was similar to earlier publications by cognitive psychologist, Jerome Bruner, who discussed tutoring. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) wrote:

More often than not, it involves a kind of 'scaffolding' process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts. This scaffolding consists essentially of the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence. (p. 90)

The idea of scaffolding relates to Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis because a specific type of scaffolding may help the learner tackle new and/or increasingly complicated material. Nightly reading with a child is a prime example of how the learner can make progress with help from a literate adult. This can be done with a learner who is practicing a second language, or also a learner who is increasing knowledge of a first language. Two subcategories can be found within scaffolding: reciprocal and technical. Holton and Thomas (2001) explained that reciprocal

scaffolding takes place in a group of two or more, while technical scaffolding was explained by Yelland and Masters (2007) as utilizing technology to get that extra help. Reciprocal scaffolding can be observed with group work in which two or more learners are benefiting mutually and technical scaffolding is commonly seen in online learning communities, such as Facebook groups. Both approaches may be suitable for the latest generations because of their desire to be constantly connected to technology.

Strauss and Howe (1991) explained generational theory to include not only the generations before 1991, but also made an attempt at understanding future generations until 2069. They classify generations by periods of around 20 year increments and discuss general personalities for each generation. What is significant here is that Strauss and Howe (1991) explained the cyclical nature of generational typology to include generations who are: idealists, reactive, civic, and adaptive. This theory has the potential to predict future generation types. This cyclical nature could also mean that certain language acquisition methods could be cyclical as well, yet further research would be necessary to analyze that possibility. Strauss and Howe (1991), as well as other researchers, agree that each generation is unique, therefore creating a need for analysis of strategies to educate the most current generation, which is the main focus of this research about language learning. The notions of Strauss and Howe (1991) were not an end to the generational theory. They published two more significant books on generational theory since 1991, *The Fourth Turning* and *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, both of which have been cited by thousands of scholars.

### **Strengths**

The theories and hypotheses above provide a solid theoretical framework for this research, as it is essential to understand how a second language is acquired and the sociocultural

aspects that affect comprehensibility in regard to second language acquisition. Vygotsky (1978) built a firm foundation for this current research because of the implications of using scaffolding through the zone of proximal development in a comfortable environment. While many are still trying to analyze millennials as the newer generation to be formed, Strauss and Howe (1991) pointed out that each generation is different, which provides support for examining new methods of teaching and reaching Generation Z.

### **Weaknesses**

The theorists mentioned previously provide research about how a second language is acquired and how certain activities that deal with human interaction can support or hinder learning. These studies, however, do not address generational differences or how to utilize a specific technology tool, such as social media, in response to characteristics of the current generation. While this gap could be seen as an oversight, this research creates a new avenue for researchers to explore. Also, each theorist has been criticized in some manner, as most theorists are, yet the theories are referenced by many. Strauss and Howe (1991) analyzed the generations based on the information and technology that was available in 1991, yet the present world is dominated by technology that was not available in 1991. For example, Facebook was not launched until 2004 and it now affects the way people communicate on a daily basis from simple conversations to political campaigns and corporate advertisement. Updated information is essential, yet, theories that have shown success, like the ones previously mentioned, provide a foundation upon which new theories may be developed.

### **Conclusion**

The current research seeks to understand how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction, and the literature review

and theoretical framework demonstrate connections and a need for further research. Knowledge of generational theory can be helpful for all educators to understand students and people in general. Since technology implementation has increased drastically over the past two decades, early publications on second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory did not take technology into account, yet this research will later discuss how to utilize social media while remaining cognizant of the theories to maximize productivity in courses.

The following chapter will address the methodology for this study.

### CHAPTER 3

#### METHODOLOGY

This study incorporates a mixed-methods approach, as it includes both quantitative and qualitative data. The study aimed to answer the following research question:

How can the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners facilitate engagement in language instruction?

Other similar studies mentioned previously in this research, such as Clements (2015), utilized “likes” on Facebook to measure student engagement, so this study will take a similar approach with “likes”, yet Facebook now allows the group administrator to see how many group members have viewed specific content. This tool will also be utilized to analyze the number of views within the group.

Educators and researchers across the globe are discussing the use of social media in educational institutions (Miron & Ravid, 2015). Even the parents of students use social media for a variety of reasons that could relate to business, pleasure, or keeping an eye on their child. Brenner and Smith (2013) explained that, according to their study of 1,895 American participants, 72% of online adults use social networking sites. Facebook engages about 80 to 90 percent of college students (Educause, 2007). It is obvious that students are using Facebook, but many educators face the challenge of deciding whether or not to permit them to use it in class or for course-related purposes. Heiberger and Harper (2008) conducted a study with 377 undergraduates at a Midwestern institution and found positive correlations between Facebook use and student engagement. This overall increased interest in using Facebook for academic purposes encouraged the creation of this study and the methodology from the studies directed the methods of data collection and analysis.

The study in this research is compared with other Facebook group studies from the past five years through a meta-analysis that identifies popular theoretical framework, publication bias, and common themes. It was the goal of the researcher to more fully understand how a Facebook group engaged students that represent the newest generation.

### **Setting**

The data for the Facebook group in this research came from a Facebook group that was active during a 4-week university faculty-led intermediate Spanish course in Costa Rica. This setting is appropriate and unique for this study because it demonstrates that Facebook can be used from almost all locations where Internet is available. While Internet access can be limited while traveling abroad, all participants in the study had access to computers and smartphones to access Facebook while abroad. Not all students have smartphones, yet Facebook reports that in 2016, 1.57 billion users accessed their accounts via a mobile device (Company info, 2016).

As with most studies that utilize social media for pedagogical purposes, student privacy was a concern. The Facebook group was made private, meaning that only the group administrator could approve new members and all personal information on the study participants was kept confidential. Students signed a consent form to be included and also consented to using trip photos for academic purposes.

Facebook was not the only method of communication throughout the course of the trip. Other methods of communication were used such as: text messaging, phone calls, emails, WhatsApp, and verbal communication. The study by Wang et al. (2013) mentioned that it "...did not compare the effects of using Facebook as an LMS with other commercial systems like Blackboard" (p. 436). This research builds on the idea of a Facebook group as an LMS, but places an emphasis on second language acquisition and the Facebook group as a supplemental



learning tool (SLT), as it was not the only LMS used for the course and abroad trip. Although it is not the main focus of this study, WhatsApp was a communication tool that was also widely used by the population in Costa Rica, so it was used by students as well. Baytiyeh (2018) found WhatsApp to be particularly helpful for communication purposes with students, associating it with “simplicity for discussion and coordination, cost-effectiveness, immediacy, and sense of belonging” (p. 73).

### **Participants**

There were 9 participants in this 2016 Facebook group, all of whom were university students on a faculty-led trip in Costa Rica for four weeks. The identities of these students and their personal information are not shared in this research, but all students voluntarily signed an agreement for the data within the Facebook group to be used for analysis in this research. The use of the Facebook group was completely voluntary and it was not a required part of the intermediate Spanish course, yet 100% of the students on the trip agreed to join the Facebook group. Since the course selected for the trip was intermediate Spanish, it is understood that all participants had a basic knowledge of Spanish that was equivalent to two semesters of Spanish at the university level, which normally focus on the present and past tenses and vocabulary sets such as colors, numbers, greetings, family members, clothing, classroom objects, and house items. The mastery of these topics was a requirement to travel with the group to Costa Rica.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

According to Astin (1999), student involvement can be measured by using both quantitative and qualitative data. Studies on Facebook generally include both types of data, primarily for the qualitative data to exemplify the quantitative data. Numbers have the power to measure engagement, yet qualitative data describe the types of interactions on this social medium

and provided insight through personal and descriptive dialogue. The data set in this research is small, as there are nine participants in this study. Qualitative and quantitative data within the dates of the 4-week course in Costa Rica are used in this analysis, as Facebook utilizes quantitative data to measure the number of “likes” and views on content. This was a measure of engagement and enjoyment of learning specific content within the Facebook group. Data on posts were also used to analyze the use of the target language.

The meta-analysis in this research examined studies on Facebook group studies with university students that were published within the past five years to explore the variance in the participants, subject matter, data measurements, findings, and location to identify successes, failures, and/or engagement strategies for Facebook groups. The meta-analysis also attempted to identify reoccurring theories, publication bias, and overlapping themes in the recent studies for comparison with the 2016 Facebook group mentioned in this research. The overview in the meta-analysis was used to compare with the researcher’s 2016 Facebook group. The online EBSCOhost database will be used through the Western Carolina University library. A preliminary search was done by entering “Facebook groups” and “Spanish” within the search bars, while limiting the search to 2013-present, in order to limit studies to the past five years, adults 19-44 years, to only focus on higher education, and only peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Finally, Google Scholar was consulted for additional studies, using "Facebook groups for Spanish language" with a limitation of 2013 to 2018. Google Scholar was used because the site allows researchers to view more studies with a wider international lens to render more results.

### **Participant Rights**

Participants in this study signed a consent form that can be found in Appendix A. Data from social media is a sensitive issue for many institutions, as the rights of individuals must be

protected. For example, Parry (2011) explained how researchers from Harvard University violated student privacy by using information from over 1,700 student profiles without permission.

This dissertation study does not include an analysis of the personal information of the participants, but rather their interactions within the private Facebook group. The Facebook group was designated as “private” and was not made public, so only the group members had access to the content within the group during the trip. Participants signed a consent form for the data from the group to be used without identifiable data and also agreed to be photographed for promotional and academic purposes. The content within the Facebook group acts as the data for this study to analyze the group engagement. The participants in this study voluntarily joined the Facebook group once it was created, and it was not a required aspect of the course while abroad in Costa Rica.

### **Analysis**

Facebook data will be organized into a chart to identify the number of posts by the instructor, number of posts by students, number of “likes” on posts, number of “seen by everyone” posts, number of student posts that were completely in Spanish, and the number of students on the trip who joined the Facebook group. Since Facebook currently provides numbers easily within a group to show the number of views and likes, this facilitated the data analysis process. Clements (2015) took a similar approach through the use of Facebook metrics for analysis, so the data from that study will be used to compare the quantitative results from the 2016 Facebook group data. Since Facebook cannot provide the data on the number of students who posted in Spanish or the number of students who joined the group compared to the total number of students on the trip, that data had to be counted manually.

The meta-analysis of the eleven studies and the current study followed the steps outlined above to organize the commonalities and variations. The fourth chapter of this dissertation will explain in detail the procedure for identifying the studies used in the meta-analysis. A discussion will follow the organization of the data.

### **Limitations**

One major limitation in this study worth mentioning is limited access to Facebook while abroad. While WIFI is now commonly available in major cities, cellular data is still not easily accessible. The cost for cellular service is a limitation while abroad, as exorbitant prices prevent many from accessing cellular data. This means that students who do not have cellular data must connect to the Internet at a location where WIFI is available. Cellphones with Internet accessibility (smartphones) or computers are also required to access Facebook or other social media sites. Many Facebook users now rely on a mobile device, such as a smartphone to access the Internet. Facebook reported that in 2016, 1.57 billion users accessed their accounts via a mobile device (Company report, 2016).

A final major limitation for this research is that the meta-analysis is limited to the few number of studies on Facebook groups and the subject matter for the groups varies. While it would be helpful to compare the study completed in this research to only other Facebook groups that were completed while on a faculty-led trip in Costa Rica, the researcher was limited to the number of available peer-reviewed Facebook group studies in general that were published in the past five years. This supports the claim that this research is significant, as it adds to the area of Facebook group research for academic purposes, especially in the field of second language and using a Facebook group for faculty-led trips for university courses.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to analyze a way in which Facebook can be used with current university language students in the US to facilitate engagement and participation. Studies that were previously mentioned in this chapter such as Heiberger and Harper (2008) and Wang et al. (2013), found that Facebook can be helpful when used as a pedagogical tool, so this research analyzed the data from the researcher's 2016 Facebook group while on a 4-week faculty-led trip in Costa Rica with university students. The study was also similar to the study completed by Guo, Shen, and Li (2018), as Facebook was used as an additional communication tool, yet Spanish was the subject and it was used while abroad. The following chapter analyzes the results from this study and includes a meta-analysis of studies, in addition to the previously mentioned studies on student engagement through Facebook groups to identify variance and commonalities.

Since this research is both quantitative and qualitative in nature, the search for relevant and recent studies on Facebook groups for educational purposes with university students takes on a unique approach to conduct a meta-analysis by running a search for articles, reading through abstracts to select relevant publications, determining the quality of the studies selected by considering the publication bias, considering the heterogeneity in the theoretical framework, and determining themes that are present in multiple studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter focuses on the results of both a Facebook group that was used for a faculty-led trip in Costa Rica, as well as the findings of previous studies done on the use of Facebook groups for pedagogical purposes in university settings.

#### **Brief Review of Methodology**

In order to examine how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction, this study includes a meta-analysis on Facebook group studies to compare with the researcher's 2016 Facebook group. "Likes" and the number of views were analyzed quantitatively and the findings were compared qualitatively with the studies listed in the meta-analysis. It is important to understand the process by which the studies were found in order to understand the limited number of studies available at this time on Facebook groups used for language courses. While there are many studies available on the topic of Facebook, Facebook groups for course instruction are still a relatively new area of research.

To begin, the online EBSCOhost database was used through the Western Carolina University library. A preliminary search was done by entering "Facebook groups" and "Spanish" within the search bars, while limiting the search to 2013-present, in order to limit studies to the past five years, adults 19-44 years, in order to focus only on higher education, and only peer-reviewed scholarly journals. Only one study was found that focused on Spaniards instead of the Spanish language. With the same search approach, but using "Spanish language", four studies were found, yet none focused on using Spanish as the target language for a Facebook group. Removing the "Spanish language" and adding "language" yielded 348 studies. The researcher reviewed the studies to find those that were related to language and university students. In

addition to the studies found by this database, other articles in this research also referenced studies such as Clements (2015), Miron and Ravid (2015), and Guo, Shen, and Li (2018). While these three studies are not necessarily focused on using a Facebook group as a tool to learn a language, they do serve a purpose in this research to demonstrate that a Facebook group can be used for multiple subjects outside of a language department.

Additionally, a search was completed on Google Scholar for "Facebook groups for Spanish language" with a limitation of 2013 to 2018. While the search rendered 18,100 results, none focused on the Spanish language use in a Facebook group for pedagogical purposes, but Back (2013) was one interesting study that focused on the use of Portuguese on Facebook while on an abroad trip. The study used content from personal Facebook profiles instead of a Facebook group, so the data is not included in the meta-analysis, but the study supports this research, as Back (2013) found an increase in posts in the target language of two-thirds of the participants.

### Meta-Analysis

**Table 3**

*Overview of 2013-2018 Studies on Facebook Groups for University Courses*

Study	Partici -pants	Engagement Measurement Tool	Findings	Subject	Success? (Based on findings)
Clements (2015)	59	Questionnaire and Facebook analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...90% of all students engaged with material to some extent" (p. 131).</li> <li>• "The majority of students engaged through Facebook and felt most comfortable with this platform" (p. 131).</li> <li>• "Facebook can be used to enhance independent student engagement" (p. 131).</li> </ul>	Biology	Yes

EKOÇ (2014)	22	Observation notes, diary entries, and memos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “By gaining more and more familiarity with the practices, some more learners became active participants in a new, emergent paradigm” (p. 23).</li> <li>• “...in some cases, the expectations of linguistic behavior and of established power relations between students and their teacher did not align with some students’ established understanding of teacher/learner relations” (p. 23).</li> </ul>	English as a foreign language	Yes
Guo, Shen, and Li (2018)	N/A	Survey and academic performance data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...the use of Facebook as a supplemental communication method can help an instructor better reach out to students, reduce a course's failure rate, and improve student course performance” (p. 1).</li> </ul>	Information and Technology (IT)	Yes
Leier (2016)	12	Questionnaire, Facebook analytics, interviews, diaries, memos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Some students did not like the set topics and did not want to participate and share information” (p. 146).</li> <li>• “...the use of informal language did not happen as the students felt anxious about performing writing tasks in the target language” (p. 147).</li> <li>• “When Facebook is integrated into a language classroom with students using it comfortably and actively, it is a powerful and unique window to the world and can facilitate the creation of a classroom by bringing in authentic elements of the target language, which never was possible before” (p. 166).</li> </ul>	German	Yes



Lin, Kang, Liu, and Lin (2016)	23	Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Themes were presented to explain both the positive and negative experiences for the teacher and students. Positive= functionality, affect, complement to face-to-face teaching and learning, course management, teacher beliefs, and group effect. Negative= student preference of face-to-face learning, lack of relational building, assignment submissions, one-way communication, and difficulties with syllabus incorporation (Lin, Kang, Liu, &amp; Lin, 2016).</li> <li>• "...FB served as a complement to FtF and traditional e-learning with positive experiences outweighing the negative experiences for the teacher and students" (p. 107).</li> </ul>	English as a foreign language	Yes and No
Mc Dermott (2013)	23	Questionnaire and Facebook analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...students were receptive to the use of social media for language learning" (par. 49).</li> </ul>	French	Yes
Miron and Ravid (2015)	77	Questionnaire and Facebook analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Overall, the majority of responses were positive or even very positive, for example: 'I felt much more comfortable on Facebook than with other LMS, one push of a button is enough to have everything appear and open to everyone'" (p. 378).</li> <li>• "...3 students (4%) published on average more than one post per week, 23 (30%) published on average 1 post per week and 51 (66%) were just passive participants" (p. 378).</li> </ul>	Knowledge Management	Yes

Momcilovik and Petrovic (2016)	100	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“...students who study psychology find and acquire materials which they need to study through Facebook much easier and faster (MV=3.63), while students of Communication studies, compared to other departments’ students, are much more competent in finding material that contains a greater number of examples (MV=4.50)” (p. 147).</li> <li>“...the data acquired in the research shows that students use Facebook communication to clarify unclear parts in the materials they learn in the courses of the German language...” (p. 148).</li> </ul>	German (Philosophy and Law students)	Yes
Montoneri (2017)	32	Questionnaires and Facebook analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“With the exception of post 1 on week 2, all the other posts from week 3 to week 14 were mostly viewed within a day after posting...” (p. 154).</li> <li>“Facebook can be a useful complementary educational tool for teachers who wish to improve the presentation and organization of their courses” (p. 158).</li> <li>“This way of teaching is obviously more demanding and time-consuming, but it is worth it, as students can see their level in French progress faster while using online technology and social networking” (p. 158).</li> </ul>	French	Yes
Thomé-Williams (2016)	20	Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Students reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to meet and share openly with Brazilian students of their age. They believed this</li> </ul>	Portuguese	Yes

			<p>helped improve their Portuguese by revealing areas in which their language skills requiring more attention” (p. 228).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Most students felt that the use of Facebook encouraged more participation” (p. 228).</li> </ul>		
Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang and Liu (2013)	134	Questionnaire and Facebook analytics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Students use Facebook in ways that are both positively and negatively related to their grades and engagement” (p. 316).</li> <li>• “...the use of the popular Web 2.0 artifact sustained learning engagement both inside and outside of the classroom” (p. 318).</li> </ul>	English as a foreign language	Yes

Eleven peer-reviewed studies were found on the use of a Facebook group for university courses published within the past five years. The average participant sample size was 50 (not including one study that did not provide the sample size) and the studies chose from the use of questionnaires, surveys, Facebook analytics, academic performance data analysis, observation notes, diary entries, memos, and interviews to measure the student engagement. All studies found that a Facebook group was helpful to facilitate student engagement and Lin et al. (2016) included both the positive and negative aspects of using the Facebook group, as mentioned in Table 3. Lin et al. (2016) explained both the positive and negative aspects of the Facebook group utilization in a language course. Not only does this study take into account the student experience, but it considers the teacher experiences as well since the students are not the only ones who are affected by this new implementation of technology. The negative experiences of the teacher regarding the generational gap, mentioned by Leier (2016) were not taken into account in this graphic, but could be helpful to further analyze the age or technological savviness

of the instructor in a future study because instructors who do not use social media on a daily basis could struggle with the components and tools within a Facebook group more so than an instructor who uses Facebook frequently. Since it is understood that Generation Z is constantly connected, the generational gap between student and instructor may cause some of the negative experiences. For example, “lack of relational building” can contribute to a negative student experience (Lin et al., 2016). If the instructor represents a generation in which verbal communication is valued more than written communication through technology, the student experience may be negatively impacted.

Another negative experience was found, as Leier (2016) explained, as “Some students did not like the set topics and did not want to participate and share information” (p. 146). This is an concern that may be observed in a traditional classroom, as not all topics will interest students and sharing personal information may be uncomfortable for the student. Language educators understand this issue well, as basic language education begins with numbers and exchange of personal information. It is important to emphasize that the information does not have to be true, since the purpose of the exercise is to simply practice the language.

Thomé-Williams (2016) even found that the group was successfully able to connect two groups of students even though they were physically located in different countries. Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) analyzed the success of a Facebook group by considering the academic performance data and found that the group can help reduce a course’s failure rate while increasing students’ academic performance.

### **Popular Theories and Heterogeneity**

As seen in table 4 below, the framework from the eleven studies on Facebook groups for pedagogical purposes were analyzed to identify potential common theories. Some of the studies

proceeded directly to the method instead of providing a strong theoretical framework, while others used Social Learning Theory (SLT), Computer mediated communication, communicative language teaching, input hypothesis, input-interaction theory, output theory, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), mentions of Vygotsky and Leont'ev, Engeström (Activity Theory), Community of social Inquiry (CoI), Bloom's Taxonomy, Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL), Communicative Competence, and the 7 principles of good practices of improving engagement in undergraduate education (Chickering & Gamson, 1987) as a theoretical lens to analyze the study. It was the intention of the researcher to identify potential overlaps in the theoretical framework, yet each study took a different approach. This could be because the subject content of each study varied, pointing the researcher to multiple theoretical fields. This demonstrates that the use of a Facebook group is flexible and can be applied to various, if not all, content areas.

This research uses second language acquisition theory, sociocultural theory, and generational theory as a foundation to explore the research question. The approach by Leier (2016) in an exploration of the use of a Facebook group for German education with undergraduate students most closely resembles the approach in this research because of the connections to second language acquisition through theories on input and output, yet Leier (2016) did not make a strong connection to generational theory, even though she experienced "...a generation conflict and cultural divide" (p. 83) during the research period.

The abundance and variety of theories observed in table 4 may also be explained by the academic's desire for the research to be unique or the sources perused could have mentioned specific theories that stood out to the researcher. Since only eleven similar studies were found for this research, the other researchers could have experienced a similar issue, especially considering

that Mc Dermott (2013) and Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang and Liu (2013) were conducted before the other studies.

**Table 4**

*Lack of Theoretical Overlap from Facebook Group Studies in Meta-analysis*

<b>Study</b>	<b>Framework</b>
Clements (2015)	Social Learning Theory (SLT)
EKOÇ (2014)	Computer mediated communication
Guo, Shen, and Li (2018)	N/A
Leier (2016)	Communicative language teaching (input hypothesis, input-interaction theory, output theory) Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and Engeström (Activity Theory)
Lin, Kang, Liu, and Lin (2016)	Community of social Inquiry (CoI)
Mc Dermott (2013)	Bloom's Taxonomy
Miron and Ravid (2015)	Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)
Momcilovik and Petrovic (2016)	N/A
Montoneri (2017)	N/A
Thomé-Williams (2016)	Communicative Competence
Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang, and Liu (2013)	7 principles of good practices of improving engagement in undergraduate education (Chickering and Gamson, 1987)

**Publication Bias**

It is important to analyze the publishers of studies in a meta-analysis, as certain publishers have specific aims and interests. As seen in table 5, from the eleven studies found on the use of Facebook groups for pedagogical purposes, ten publishers were identified. All were peer-reviewed and five specifically focus on the promotion of technology for pedagogical purposes. This finding is significant because the journals could potentially select articles for publication that promote technology instead of publishing articles that highlight mostly negative aspects of using technology in education. Conversely, since the journals represent a varied number of nations and some are international, it may suggest that the publication bias factor could be decreased because of the international reviewers.

**Table 5*****Characteristics of Publishers of Facebook Group Studies in Meta-Analysis***

	<b>Publisher</b>	<b>Rigor</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Scope</b>
Clements (2015)	<i>Higher Education Studies</i>	Double-blind peer-reviewed	Canadian	Instructional theory, pedagogy, education policy and case studies
EKOÇ (2014)	<i>Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE</i>	Peer-reviewed	Turkish	New ways of approaching distance education
Guo, Shen, and Li (2018)	<i>International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education</i>	Peer-reviewed	International	Promotes advancement of teaching with technology
Leier (2016)	University of Canterbury Research Repository	Peer-reviewed	Dissertation	N/A
Lin, Kang, Liu, and Lin (2016)	<i>Asia-Pacific Edu Res</i>	Peer-reviewed	International	Empirical and theoretical studies in education with an emphasis on the Asia-Pacific Region
Mc Dermott (2013)	<i>Recherche et pratiques pédagogiques en langues de spécialité</i>	Double-blind Peer-reviewed	French	Theoretical and applied research with a pedagogical dimension
Miron and Ravid (2015)	<i>Journal of Educational Technology &amp; Society</i>	Double-blind Peer-reviewed	Canadian	Educational issues
Momcilovik and Petrovic (2016)	<i>eLearning &amp; Software for Education</i>	Peer-reviewed	Romanian	Promote technology in learning environments
Montoneri (2017)	<i>IAFOR Journal of Education</i>	Peer-reviewed	International	Promote international exchange through research



Thomé-Williams (2016)	<i>Intercultural Communication Studies</i>	Double-blind Peer-reviewed	International	New research in the field of intercultural communication
Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu (2013)	<i>Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE</i>	Peer-reviewed	Turkish	New ways of approaching distance education

## Themes

The overall research question in this study was to examine how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction. Three major themes can be seen from the analysis of the findings of the eleven previous studies to further understand the impact that Facebook groups can have on language learning for Generation Z.

**1. FB groups are comfortable for Generation Z.** Being “comfortable” with a specific social media tool seems subjective, yet according to Clements (2015), “The majority of students engaged through Facebook and felt most comfortable with this platform” (p. 131). Clements (2015) supported this claim with the questionnaire results (53%) from asking students which of four platforms were the most comfortable. It is not completely surprising that this generation is comfortable using Facebook, as we know that they spend a significant amount of time on social media outside of the educational realm. Both Thomé-Williams (2016) and Mc Dermott (2013) reported this positive reception by students and both Montoneri (2017) and Momcilovik & Petrovic (2016) mentioned that students can see their progress with the language through this type of communication. The written aspect of the language within the group can allow the students to visually see the language and the tools on the internet can provide the emotional support with time to formulate responses, whereas real-time conversations are intimidating and stressful for beginning language learners.

This research utilized sociocultural theory as a theoretical lens to examine Facebook group use for educational purposes. As discussed previously, imitation is key in sociocultural theory. The Facebook group provides a virtual space in which the learners can visually see the optimal use of the target language so that they might reuse it in a different context.

**2. FB groups facilitate student engagement.** The intention of this dissertation is to understand *how* student engagement is facilitated by Facebook groups in regard to language learning, but the previous studies help to understand that the groups can facilitate that engagement, in one way or another. For example, five of the eleven studies used the analysis tools within Facebook to provide the engagement data (Clements, 2015; Mc Dermott, 2013; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Montoneri, 2017; Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang & Liu, 2013). For the instructor, this is a valuable feature that is easy to use, because it makes the engagement, views, likes, and comments, clear through quantifiable data. For the students, they are able to keep track of conversations and review the material before progressing, which facilitates both learning and engagement. According to Thomé-Williams (2016), “Most students felt that the use of Facebook encouraged more participation” (p. 228).

**3. FB groups can help improve student course performance.** When students are engaged and they are able to see their progress, it can be a success motivator. Guo, Shen, & Li (2018) found that “...the use of Facebook as a supplemental communication method can help an instructor better reach out to students, reduce a course's failure rate, and improve student course performance” (p. 1). By analyzing student grades, Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) added that “...students who are offered Facebook as an additional communication method outperform those who do not have such an option” (p. 39). As previously mentioned, students are able to see their progress with course material within the Facebook group (Momcilovik & Petrovic, 2016;

Montoneri, 2017; Thomé-Williams, 2016) so they are able to identify areas of improvement, which is crucial for improving course performance. In a traditional setting, students may receive feedback from an instructor on written grammatical errors, but this online setting is based upon mutual understanding within communication by using a second language. Mutual understanding and improvement from feedback builds on scaffolding, as discussed in the theoretical framework of this research. Reciprocal scaffolding, as explained by Holton and Thomas (2001), takes place in a group of two or more, while technical scaffolding was explained by Yelland and Masters (2007) as utilizing technology to get that extra help.

The overall success is quite possibly the most compelling aspect of this meta-analysis, as it was demonstrated through all eleven studies that Facebook could be beneficial for university courses, as the studies covered seven different subjects (Clements, 2015; EKOÇ, 2014; Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018; Lin et al., 2016; Mc Dermott, 2013; Leier, 2016; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Momcilovik & Petrovic, 2016; Montoneri, 2017; Thomé-Williams, 2016; Wang et al., 2013). Some of the negative aspects of using a Facebook group for pedagogical purposes identified by researchers include student preference of face-to-face learning, lack of relational building, assignment submissions, one-way communication, and difficulties with syllabus incorporation were found to be the downsides to the implementation of a Facebook group for academic purposes (Lin, Kang, Liu, & Lin, 2016). Also, EKOÇ (2014) noted that "...in some cases, the expectations of linguistic behavior and of established power relations between students and their teacher did not align with some students' established understanding of teacher/learner relations" (p. 23). The Facebook environment tends to place everyone on a similar level of power that encourages "friends", so educators who find comfort in establishing the instructor as the one in control may find this type of environment uncomfortable unless rules of communication are

clearly defined. That being said, clearly defining communication procedures can also benefit educators in traditional settings. For example, for those who teach Spanish, the decision must be made as to whether the instructor feels comfortable with the students addressing him/her with “tú” or “vos”, which both can indicate an informal “you”, instead of “usted”, which can indicate a formal, or respectful “you”. Essentially, it is up to the language instructor to make this decision, but this can be a language lesson worth mentioning to the learner.

### **Strengths of the Studies**

**1. Examples of posts from studies.** To understand how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction, it is important to highlight the types of posts that can encourage second language acquisition. Montoneri (2017) explained multiple types of posts that were used in French:

1. Quotation of texts
2. PowerPoint
3. Photos. This type of post was also used by Leier (2016).
4. Movie and music information
5. External links. Clements (2015) also used this type of post to engage students, even though it was related to biology, instead of second language acquisition. Leier (2016) posted videos related to in-class discussion in German.

**2. Diversity of data collection and analysis.** Each study included in the meta-analysis is unique, in that multiple engagement tools were used, varied sample sizes were analyzed, and multiple course subjects were considered. While heterogeneity could be seen as a limitation because it makes the studies difficult to compare with others, it could also be seen as positive because the researchers are exploring multiple ways in which Facebook groups can be utilized

with current university students. This shows that educators are interested in testing the waters with social media in order to engage Generation Z.

### **Weaknesses of the Studies**

**1. Feedback.** From the eleven studies on the use of a Facebook group with university students, only Leier (2016) discussed corrective feedback with students in the Facebook group. Giving feedback is essential in second language acquisition and a crucial part of scaffolding. Many language educators struggle with how to approach correcting students without intimidating them. Feedback must be approached delicately in order to encourage constant language production, so this aspect is worth considering in the virtual space through writing. Although this was found to be a gap in the majority of the studies, the finding by Leier (2016) regarding feedback assisted greatly in understanding how to approach this issue. Surprisingly, students “...always reacted to the corrective feedback with either a short comment saying ‘danke’ (thank you) or with the ‘like’ function” (Leier, 2016, p. 116).

**2. Inconsistent quantitative data type.** It was the intention of this researcher to compare the quantitative data in the 2016 Facebook group with the data from the eleven studies in the meta-analysis, but the ways in which the researchers chose to present the data varied greatly, making it difficult to analyze. For example, the 2016 Facebook group data were already provided by Facebook analytics to include: the number of posts by the instructor, number of posts by the students, number of “likes” within the group, number of “seen by everyone” posts, number of student posts that were completely in the target language, and number of students who joined the group in comparison with the total number of students in the class. With the exception of Clements (2015), the studies did not consistently provide these explicit categories. The potential causes of these variations is that the *analytics function* within the Facebook group is a new

update, meaning that the studies that were conducted before that update had to calculate all of the data manually. The example of the 2016 Facebook group in this research will therefore act as a starting point for other future studies to utilize the data for analysis.

**3. Facebook groups were not used for faculty-led trips.** A major gap in the studies was identified as none of the studies in the meta-analysis utilized a Facebook group for a faculty-led trip. This creates room for future studies, and the 2016 Facebook group mentioned in this research will serve as a beginning to analyze the groups for this purpose. Faculty-led trips allow students to gain first-hand experience with course content with the help of a university professor. In second language acquisition, abroad experiences are arguably the best ways for students to experience complete immersion with a target language. Faculty-led trips allow professors access to more language-learning resources to teach the students, yet when students are away from friends and families for an extended period of time, there has to be some line of communication open to ensure safety, learning, and enjoyment during a trip. Facebook serves that purpose, as it can be accessed from any location where there is access to the Internet. While on these trips, the dynamics of the student-professor relationships change, as students travel and spend time with the professor more than ten hours per day. Students are generally comfortable with using Facebook, so using a Facebook group while on a faculty-led trip creates a sense of community for the students, and professor, who are traveling together.

### **Facebook as a Supplementary Tool for Language Instruction**

**Context.** Through the use of a Facebook group for a faculty-led trip to Costa Rica for four weeks in 2016 with a group of 9 university students, quantitative data was collected through the use of Facebook analytics to understand the group engagement. The group was used as a supplementary tool for the trip, so no grade was attached to the utilization. The Facebook group



Figure 3. Facebook post example 2.1

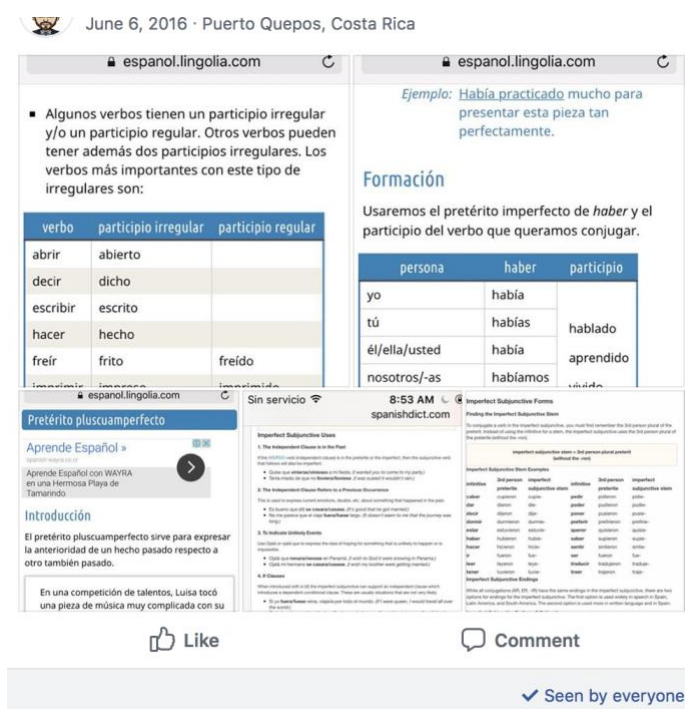


Figure 4. Facebook post example 2.2

### 3. Local news articles in the target language





*Figure 5. Facebook post example 3*

#### 4. Instructions for daily plans



*Figure 6. Facebook post example 4*

As seen in figures 2-6, the target language was utilized, yet students were not obligated to respond to the posts. This simulates what happens in other places on Facebook and in Facebook groups outside of the academic realm. The posts also utilized comprehensible input to ensure that the students were understanding the majority of what was being communicated. For example, the posts correlated with the topics covered in the course, so in order for the student to comprehend the messages posted in the Facebook group, the current material had to have been mastered or the student would have resorted to looking up words on the Internet to make sense of the messages.

**Results.** Table 6 shows that the majority of the posts were by the instructor, yet students posted 39 times within a 4-week period. With the use of a Facebook group, one must understand that “likes” are a measurement of engagement and academic interest. There were 53 “likes” on the content posted by the instructor or other students. These “likes” are significant because they demonstrate that students enjoyed the majority of the posts within the group. Facebook also facilitates the analysis of views within the group and it is labeled as “seen by everyone” if 100% of members have seen a particular post. This is important, as instructors commonly wonder if students are viewing course material. In this study, there were 78 “seen by everyone” posts, which accounts for 98% of all posts in the group.

Language educators may be interested to know that 21 posts (53%) were completely in Spanish. Language instruction was the primary goal of this faculty-led trip, so it is important to analyze the use of Spanish for gains in language acquisition. A real struggle during a trip with students for language learning is making sure that they are actually speaking Spanish, even when the instructor is not present. Language educators face this challenge in classrooms as well with large classes in which the instructor cannot observe every student during a class period. This study demonstrated that the majority of language students in the Facebook were using the target language on their own to interact, which supplemented what the students were learning in class and from the host families while on the trip.

Are students interested in using a Facebook group for language learning? According to this study, 100% of the students voluntarily joined the group even though it was not for a grade, so the data suggests that university students are indeed interested in using a Facebook group for language learning. Although the sample size was smaller than the studies mentioned in the meta-analysis, the findings parallel those previously mentioned, although there is not a single method of measuring engagement. The use of quantitative data within Facebook, such as number of views, likes, and comments, is a new function that facilitates data collection, but some Facebook group studies utilize qualitative data through the use of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or memos. Of all the quantitative and qualitative data available at this time, the use of a Facebook group in university courses tends to produce more positive outcomes than negative outcomes and also facilitate engagement.

### **Research Question and Results**

This research sought to answer how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction. The eleven studies in the meta-

analysis utilized quotations of texts, PowerPoint, photos, movie and music information, instructions, reminders, and external links to engage students within the group. The 2016 Facebook group utilized cultural YouTube videos in the target language, grammar explanations with examples, local news articles in the target language, and instructions for daily plans to encourage second language acquisition. Multiple studies, as well as the 2016 Facebook group study, utilized the analytics within Facebook to analyze engagement within the Facebook group, and this is a valuable function, as an instructor can easily see total views, likes, and comments at any given moment during a course to determine engagement.

### **Comparing the results**

One way of analyzing if the content is pleasing to students is considering the “likes” within the group. Clements (2015) took this approach and reported that during a traditional academic semester during January to April, 26 instructor posts and 49 student posts were made with a total of 71 “likes” within the group. Because the time frame of Clements (2015) was four months and the course in the 2016 Facebook group lasted only one month, the available data was reduced 25% to aid in comparison. With this change, it is understood that significant more posting was done in the 2016 Facebook group on average and more “likes” were observed than the average activity reported by Clements (2015). Furthermore, the study by Clements (2016) had 59 participants, whereas the 2016 Facebook group had only 9 participants. Interestingly enough, the students posted more than the instructor in the study by Clements (2015), which did not parallel the results in 2016 Facebook group.

**Table 6*****2016 Facebook Group Engagement***

<b>Category</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b># Clements (2015)</b>	<b>25% of # Clements (2015)</b>
Number of posts by instructor	56	59%	26	6.5
Number of posts by students	39	41%	49	12.25
Number of "likes" on posts within group	53	--	71	17.75
Number of "Seen by everyone" (100% viewed) posts on main page	78	98%	N/A	N/A
Number of student posts that were completely in Spanish	21	53%	N/A	N/A
Number of students on trip who joined the Facebook group	9	100%	N/A	N/A

There were three major themes identified in the eleven studies through the meta-analysis. The 2016 data from the Facebook group supports two of the three theme findings. The students' willingness (100%) to join the Facebook group suggests that they were "comfortable" with using it for the course trip. The instructor was able to see that the students were engaged in learning by seeing the views within the group. While this could be seen as passive engagement, it is still important because the students were using the group to gain information through reading. The third theme finding was not supported in the data from the Facebook group because student grades were not a part of the analysis.

### **Summary of the Findings**

In conclusion, the meta-analysis and the 2016 Facebook group data revealed that a Facebook can facilitate engagement with university students, as the findings of eleven empirical studies from the past five years mentioned in this research support its use through both qualitative and quantitative data (Clements, 2015; EKOÇ, 2014; Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018; Lin et

al., 2016; Mc Dermott, 2013; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Momcilovik & Petrovic, 2016; Montoneri, 2017; Thomé-Williams, 2016; Wang et al., 2013). No studies from the past five years were found on the use of Spanish in Facebook group while abroad, but the meta-analysis found that Facebook groups are being used for multiple subjects, including second language acquisition. While the number of “likes” or views can help to evaluate success, the findings from the surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and memos help to strengthen the case for using a Facebook group for pedagogical purposes with Generation Z. The 2016 Facebook group in this research adds to the number of current studies and shows how a Facebook group can be successfully implemented with a faculty-led trip abroad with university students.

The meta-analysis considered the strengths of the current studies that included examples of posts and diversity of data collection and analysis. Weaknesses were also found in the studies, which included lack of feedback, inconsistent quantitative data type, and the context of the studies did not include a faculty-led trip.

The 2016 Facebook group data gave examples of posts that were used during the four-week trip in Costa Rica that included YouTube videos on culture, grammar explanations, local news articles, and instructions. When the quantitative results were compared with Clements (2015) after modifying the data to find monthly averages, it was discovered that the monthly average rate of posting was higher than that of the data reported by Clements (2015).

Finally, the three major themes identified through the meta-analysis help support the premise for using a Facebook group with Generation Z language learners at the university level. The groups are comfortable, facilitate student engagement, and can help improve student course performance. The negative aspects of the Facebook implementation were also mentioned in

studies such as Leier (2016) and Lin, Kang, Liu, and Lin (2016), but these studies also confirm that the positive aspects outweigh the negative.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter will summarize the overall findings of the 2016 Facebook group and the meta-analysis while demonstrating the connections with the literature review before delving into recommending future action and suggesting further areas of study in relation to this topic.

#### **Review of Research Question and Summary of Analysis**

The research question for this study examines how the use of a Facebook group with Generation Z learners can facilitate engagement in language instruction. The meta-analysis revealed eleven Facebook group studies with an overall success trend of 100% through the use of student and/or instructor posts, even though the researchers reported both the positive and negative aspects for the students and instructor during the research periods. While many of the studies used some sort of participant survey to analyze the data, many took advantage of the analytics within Facebook to help with data analysis to determine engagement. Just as the 2016 Facebook group in this research demonstrated, the engagement data is valuable to educators, as the educator can see that the student has viewed specific content and the “likes” facilitate the analysis of pleasure while learning.

The purpose of this research was to:

1. Examine the data of a Facebook group for a university language course while abroad to analyze the engagement with Generation Z.

The data suggested that students are interested in using a Facebook group for a university course, as 100% of the students volunteered to join the group. This data also revealed that 59% of the posts in the group were done by the instructor, accounting for the majority of the content. This is similar to a teacher-centered traditional classroom, in which the educator does the

majority of the talking while the students are watching and listening. It is evident that the students were engaged in reading and observing posts within the group, as there were 78 “seen by everyone” posts, accounting for 98% of the total posts in the group, yet the group did not encourage the students to contribute more content than the instructor.

2. Examine previously published studies on Facebook groups through a meta-analysis to list findings to identify common themes, examine overlapping theoretical framework, and consider publication bias.

Three major themes were identified in the findings of the eleven empirical studies on Facebook groups for pedagogical purposes with university students: (1) Facebook groups are comfortable for Generation Z, (2) Facebook groups facilitate student engagement, and (3) Facebook groups can help improve student course performance. There was a lack of overlapping theoretical framework in the eleven studies, which may suggest that the researchers had difficulties finding similar studies, as McDermott (2013) and Wang, Woo, Quek, Yang and Liu (2013) were conducted before the other studies, or the researcher could have wanted the study to be unique. Publication bias was found, as five publishers specifically focused on the promotion of technology for pedagogical purposes. Publishers have the power to select which articles they desire to endorse, so it is in the best interest of these publishers to publish articles that support the technology promotion agenda.

3. Consider a Facebook group as a supplementary tool for pedagogical purposes.

The Facebook group in this study effectively served as a virtual learning tool that was supplementary to the Spanish language content that was covered in the intermediate course. Students were able to visually see conversations, which modeled conversations that they saw in other places while on the trip, such as text messages from locals in the target language. Lin,



Kang, Liu, and Lin (2016) and Montoneri (2017) also found the Facebook group to be an educational tool to complement what was learned in the classroom.

4. Make connections between theoretical information on generations and language learning with social media.

As previously discussed, Howe and Strauss (1991) made the point that each generation is unique and other authors have explained that Generation Z is like no other generation (Hendler, 2016; Prensky, 2001; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Williams, 2015; Weller, 2017; Zimmer, 2017). This specific generation is constantly connected to the internet more than any other generation in the past (Andrea, Gabriella, & Tímea, 2016). A Facebook group may not be the single answer to facilitating engagement with Generation Z, but it is a virtual place where these students feel comfortable, as found in theme 1.1 of this research. Such a comfortable environment affords the educator opportunities to engage in virtual instruction in a way. For example, Leier (2016) included the Facebook group in a German course as an activity that was graded based on participation through posting five times with at least three complete sentences on each post. With this sort of assignment, the educator is able to use a tool (the Facebook group), other students, and the knowledge of the instructor to mediate the communication observed in the posts, which connects to Lantolf's (2000) notion of sociocultural theory and scaffolding. Further explanation is provided in the following section.

### **Interpretation and Alignment of Findings with Literature**

What motivates students to use technology? Guo, Li, & Stevens (2012) discussed the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) perspective (Katz et al., 1973) to explain the motivations for media usage: the needs to be educated, identify with others, be entertained, improve social

interaction, get away from everyday stresses. Generation Z uses social media, and the Facebook groups help to educate these students by responding to their communication style.

The willingness of all participants in the study demonstrated an interest in using Facebook as a learning and communication tool. This aligns with the findings of Eren (2012), who found that students have a positive attitude towards using Facebook as a supplementary activity in addition to the traditional classroom after surveying 48 undergraduate students in a one-year English class.

Lantolf's (2000) explanation of sociocultural theory and the notion of humans using symbolic artifacts to establish relationships between ourselves and the world connects with the findings of the Facebook group studies in this research as Facebook has become a symbolic artifact of human interaction for Generation Z students. Not only are the students engaging in the technological conversations, they are leaving behind academic footprints of learned knowledge.

Vygotsky (1978) explained the zone of proximal development as "...the distance between the actual developmental level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). This study builds on the explanations of the zone of proximal development by Vygotsky (1978) because the adult guidance (the instructor) or the more capable peers are able to answer questions within the Facebook group and even the Internet itself serves as that Most Knowledgeable Other (MKO) because of the scaffolded support system afforded through online dictionaries. This scaffolding, as also discussed by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as taking the student to the next level of proficiency. Additionally, the meta-analysis also noted that Leier (2016) found Vygotsky's (1978) work, such as scaffolding, to connect to the use of a Facebook group for language instructions. In second language acquisition, language educators of the past had to rely on thick

print versions of dictionaries for students to find adequate translations, but Generation Z now has access to machine translation such as Google Translate and other sites for support with definitions and conjugations such as WordReference. Some of this technology may be used in conjunction with a Facebook Group at the discretion of the instructor, although some language educators may be apprehensive about the idea. Nevertheless, Facebook began to integrate translation capabilities and now offers translations in a number of languages. That being said, both students and teachers must realize that machine translation is not perfect, as it cannot handle the textual pragmatics yet. Humans are needed to make decisions on context. Ironically, this creates a great example of the seemingly symbiotic relationship that technology has formed with Generation Z and anyone who uses the Internet or social media on a regular basis. As educators and students use the Internet more and more, the technology companies benefit and the programming improves while this constant stage of improvement allows us to be more efficient with the time that it takes to communicate, research, and learn, but symbiotic relationships are not always without harm.

While researchers and educators have considered using Facebook for courses and as a supplemental tool for courses, the impact of doing so is worth mentioning as well. Errasti, Amigo, and Villadangos (2017) found a relationship between empathy, narcissism, and self-esteem and the use of Facebook and Twitter. Facebook encourages narcissism and the use of social media is associated with low self-esteem (Errasti, Amigo, & Villadangos, 2017). This isn't too hard to believe, as Generation Z social media users are accustomed to taking "selfies" frequently and adding filters that minimize wrinkles and add makeup.

The researcher compares the findings in this dissertation to a prescribed medication, as it may be beneficial and help many, yet it is not without side effects. In the end, it is up to the

educator to make the decision on the use of a Facebook group for a language course with Generation Z, but the majority of the findings in this research have been positive.

Howe and Strauss (1991) found that although there seems to be a cyclical pattern, each generation is unique. Generation Z is like no other generation (Hendler, 2016; Prensky, 2001; Seemiller & Grace, 2016; Williams, 2015; Weller, 2017; Zimmer, 2017). “Remember, Gen Z has grown up with cellphones, iPads, iPods, laptops and smart TVs. They use them interchangeably and in new ways that surpass even Millennials” (Hendler, 2016, par. 3). This research took into account the most popular social media platform that has persevered over the years and used by Generation Z to analyze how engagement with university language students can be facilitated.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Action**

The research suggests that a Facebook group can be an effective tool for engaging Generation Z (Clements, 2015; EKOÇ, 2014; Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018; Lin et al., 2016; McDermott, 2013; Leier, 2016; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Momcilovic & Petrovic, 2016; Montoneri, 2017; Thomé-Williams, 2016; Wang et al., 2013). While a Facebook group could be used as an LMS, just like Moodle or Blackboard, it could also be a comfortable space for learning and communication without a grade attached to it. In the 2016 Facebook group study conducted in this research, no grade was attached to the participation in the Facebook group, yet the students and the instructor used it to share media, information on trip details and encourage second language acquisition. “Facebook can be a useful complementary educational tool for teachers who wish to improve the presentation and organization of their courses” (Montoneri, 2017, p. 158). Just as any culinary expert will explain, presentation is everything. If educators, present the information to students in a way that is conducive to their communication style, such instruction may increase their success, just like the findings of Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) who found that the

Facebook group can help reduce a course's failure rate while increasing students' academic performance.

### **Guide to Facebook Group Utilization to Enhance Language Instruction**

Table 4 in the fourth chapter included the 7 principles of good practices of improving engagement in undergraduate education by Chickering and Gamson (1987) that were mentioned in the study by Wang et al. (2013). These seven principles can be utilized effectively in Facebook groups with undergraduate students, as they connect with the virtual environment that is created with Generation Z. Chickering and Gamson (1987) mentioned that good practice in undergraduate education includes: (1) encouraging student and faculty contact, (2) developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, (3) encouraging active learning, (4) giving prompt feedback, (5) emphasizing time on task, (6) communicating high expectations, and (7) respecting diverse talents and learning styles. Interestingly enough, the use of a Facebook group for educational purposes aligns perfectly with the seven principles and caters to the communication preference of Generation Z since it is understood that these particular students are constantly connected and use Facebook frequently.

For university language educators who are interested in utilizing a Facebook group for use with students, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Decide whether the students should have specific objectives when using the Facebook group or if the group simply serves as a supplementary communication tool to use the target language and/or space for photos and video.

The use of Facebook as a supplemental communication method can help an instructor better reach out to students, reduce a course's failure rate, and improve student course performance (Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018). Eren (2012) found that students have a positive attitude towards using

Facebook as a supplementary activity in addition to the traditional classroom and Usher (2012) found that student motivation increases when technology is used in conjunction with academic subjects.

2. Determine if group membership is a requirement or if it is voluntary.

Miron and Ravid (2015) required students to join, and there were some concerns about privacy. Requiring students to join a group and setting objectives may make the group feel too much like a classroom, decreasing interest or motivation to do anything extra outside of the requirements and certain topics may not be of interest, as pointed out by Leier (2016). The 2016 Facebook group mentioned in this research did not require students to join, yet 100% chose to be a part of it. This helped ensure that everyone was seeing posts, but some students may feel left out or unaware of post information if some students do not choose to join the group.

3. Become familiar with training resources on building a Facebook group.

Many universities now have social media coordinators or managers who oversee all of the social media interactions dealing with the university. These professionals can be very helpful by providing insights, tricks, explanations of potential hurdles, and resources to create a Facebook group. YouTube also has many tutorials on how to create a general Facebook group.

4. Explore the functions of a Facebook group before using it with students.

This has proven to be somewhat problematic because of frequent updates, yet a general understanding of the functions of all the buttons is helpful. For example, one update deals with the scheduling of posts. Group administrators are now able to plan and schedule posts weeks in advance for use with a target audience. This is helpful because it saves the administrator from having to be constantly connected, although that is the preference of Generation Z. Montoneri (2016) made a suggestion on finding a balance to avoid Facebook group administrator burnout

by posting “...one or two times per week and to choose the posts ‘wisely’, in relation with what was actually taught during the class” (p. 159), as posting too frequently could be counterproductive. Leier (2016) posted in German three times per week, while the instructor in the study by Guo, Shen, and Li (2018) posted twenty times during the semester. The instructor in the 2016 Facebook group posted 56 times in Spanish. A trend was observed that higher engagement occurs when there are more frequent posts. This would need to be explored further in another study, but since group members get notifications when someone posts within the group, it makes sense that members will view the post. This could relate to what Seemiller and Grace (2016) call Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), in relation to the observations of Generation Z activity.

This research has already clarified that Facebook is the most widely used social media platform that has persevered over the years, but there are other social media platforms that can be integrated into a Facebook group and all of it can be controlled in one place via a social media managing software. For educators who would like to use multiple social media platforms, the social media managing software may be a great option, but it does come with a cost.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The meta-analysis in this research revealed that there are a limited number of studies on Facebook groups for language learning, so this could be an area for further investigation. The methods to measure engagement within the Facebook group varied greatly among the eleven studies, so additional studies with the same measurement tool would be useful. Interestingly enough, all of the studies found the Facebook group to be an overall success with students, so three conclusions could be made: (1) failed attempts are not being reported, (2) researchers are estimating that Facebook is just a fad and there will be new technology that will replace it before

the time that it takes to publish a study or (3) educators do not know how to use a Facebook group for language education or lack the interest in using it. The use of video integration could also be an area for further study with Facebook groups, as Facebook now offers the option of “going live” within groups and the number of live viewers is shown to indicate engagement. Almost all language educators explore the ways in which they can offer students a complete immersion experience without going abroad. Video integration in Facebook groups could fit that need.

None of the eleven studies in the meta-analysis utilized students as the administrators, even though Ahern, Feller, and Nagle (2016) pointed out that students are using Facebook groups outside of academia. Social media managers commonly put students in leadership roles through social media managing software, so this type of interaction could be tested to accomplish course objectives. Generation Z students may be more comfortable communicating with other students from the same generation because that is how they communicate outside of courses. Given the resources of some universities, such as funds for graduate assistants, a young Facebook group administrator could affect the outcomes, especially if that person has time to devote to entertaining the group with interesting and engaging content.

Finally, this dissertation analyzed the use of a Facebook group with university students taking an intermediate Spanish course while on a faculty-led trip in Costa Rica for four weeks. Since this is a new avenue for the utilization of a Facebook group while on a short trip abroad instead of a traditional fall or spring semester without traveling, additional similar studies could be done to compare and analyze the quantitative data.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, this research suggests that a Facebook group can facilitate engagement for Generation Z language learners at the university level by creating an environment that is personal, social, and engaging while providing analytical tools to help ensure that each student is viewing the material. This parallels the findings of the studies in the meta-analysis and adds to the number of available recent studies on this topic (Clements, 2015; EKOÇ, 2014; Guo, Shen, & Li, 2018; Lin et al., 2016; Mc Dermott, 2013; Miron & Ravid, 2015; Momcilovic & Petrovic, 2016; Montoneri, 2017; Thomé-Williams, 2016; Wang et al., 2013). The “likes” function on Facebook allows the educator to analyze the perception of the academic content. While very few negative aspects were found in this research, it is recommended that educators weigh the positives and negatives before implementing a Facebook group, yet the connections made to Lantolf’s (2000) explanation of sociocultural theory, the notions of the zone of proximal development and the MKO by Vygotsky (1978), and the agreement on the uniqueness of the newest generation of students by Hendler (2016), Howe and Strauss (1991), Prensky (2001), Seemiller and Grace (2016), Williams (2015), Weller (2017), and Zimmer (2017) cannot be ignored. Generation Z is a generation like no other, so language educators have the opportunity to facilitate engagement with these students through the use of a Facebook group.

As the meta-analysis revealed through the eleven studies on the use of Facebook groups with university students from the past five years, Facebook groups are comfortable, they facilitate student engagement, and they can help improve student course performance. While there are many options for an LMS, Facebook has persevered over the years as a social media platform that engages Generation Z (Brenner & Smith, 2013; Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Seemiller & Grace), shifting the conversation in education from the technology divide, as

mentioned by Clark and Zagarelle (2012), to a social media divide, yet the majority of the findings from the studies on Facebook group implementation within the past five years demonstrated that there are many positive outcomes for both the teacher and the student.

The meta-analysis analyzed the strengths of the current studies that included examples of posts and diversity of data collection and analysis. Weaknesses in the studies were also found, which included feedback, inconsistent quantitative data type, and the context of the studies did not include a faculty-led trip.

Examples of posts from the four-week trip in Costa Rica included YouTube videos on culture, grammar explanations, local news articles, and instructions. The quantitative results were compared with Clements (2015), after modifying the data to find monthly averages, and the monthly average rate of posting was higher than that of the data reported by Clements (2015). The use of a Facebook group as a supplementary educational tool for language learning was effective and interesting to the university students, just as the eleven studies from the meta-analysis found, so these findings should inform university professors in the future who may consider the use of a Facebook group for courses in order to facilitate engagement with Generation Z.

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## APPENDIX A

## INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Garrett Fisher. I am an Instructor of Spanish at Western Carolina University. I am conducting research to better understand how Facebook can be used with second language acquisition courses at WCU. Facebook is used by many students at WCU and around the world. I am specifically interested in analyzing and demonstrating how a Facebook group can be used in Spanish courses while on abroad trips. This study will highlight the benefits and negative aspects of using a Facebook group through quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Both faculty and students will benefit from this information in our region and abroad.

You agree to participate the Facebook group for the faculty-led trip in Costa Rica. This is not a requirement for the course and you were not evaluated on any of your postings, however it served as a great tool for communication and learning while abroad. I would like to analyze the data on our Facebook group. There are no more than minimal social risks for this study, as the Facebook privacy policy explains how data is used and users agree to this by having an account. You understand that the research investigator for this study is not responsible for the actions of other participants in the study. There are no foreseeable legal, psychological, economic, or physical risks in this study. Your name will not be mentioned in the study and your participation is this is voluntary. I will not use any of your personal information from your profile or data from other parts of Facebook. I will **only** use the information within the Facebook group entitled “Costa Rica Crew 2016”.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and there are no negative consequences for not participating. Your participation or choice to not participate will not affect your academic grades. Please be informed that you may quit the study at any time without negative consequences.

If you have any questions, please discuss them with me at this time. However, if you would like to discuss this research at another time, you should contact me at gdfisher@wcu.edu. You may have a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment as a participant in this study, you can reach the Chair of the Western Carolina University Institutional Review Board through WCU’s Office of Research Administration at 828-227-7212.

Please complete the portion of the consent form below:

I do ☐ or do not ☐

give my permission to the investigator to use the data from my activity within the Facebook group “Costa Rica Crew 2016” in his research.

**Participant:**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*print*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*signature*

**Primary Investigator**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*print*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*signature*

APPENDIX B  
LETTER OF EXEMPTION FROM IRB



UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW ENGLAND

Institutional Review Board  
Olgun Guvench, Chair

**Biddeford Campus**

11 Hills Beach Road  
Biddeford, ME 04005  
(207)602-2244 T  
(207)602-5905 F

**Portland Campus**

716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, ME 04103

To: Garrett Fisher  
Cc: William Boozang  
From: Olgun Guvench  
Date: February 8, 2018  
Project # & Title: 012418-010, Language Courses with Generation Z (Initial)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the above captioned project, and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Olgun Guvench at (207) 221-4171 or [oguvench@une.edu](mailto:oguvench@une.edu) with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Olgun Guvench".

Olgun Guvench, M.D., Ph.D.  
IRB Chair

IRB#: 012418-010  
Submission Date: 1/16/18  
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4)  
**Status Date: 2/8/18**