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## Does a Social Network Media Group Follow a Fixed Sequence of Group Development Process?

### A Study of Group Development Process of a Social Network Media Group

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#### **Abstract:**

*The use of social media for forming social groups and networking is increasing day by day. The most popular websites of social media are LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. As human being is a social animal, with the today's busy lifestyle, people wish to get connected and share the interests and information in the fastest way which is location free. Also like to keep in touch with their loved ones or for the professional contacts. The social media groups are formed, connect together for some common interests and objectives or just for fun!*

*So the researcher was curious to study the process of group development of social network media groups and its behavior and significance.*

*The objectives of the study: 1. Does the social network media group follow a fixed sequence of group development stages? 2. Is there any variation in these stages? 3. If there is any variation, is it initial or contextual condition?*

*To study these objectives, researcher felt that it would be challenging to study a social media network group as it has a unique feature of an informal group using social media to network. The group selected was an informal group, on a social media, LinkedIn, formed a year ago, by a HR Professional, has 4238 members from all over the world. The profiles of the group members are from various professional areas. Being a member of this group, the researcher was involved in all the developmental stages of the group, had an opportunity to actually be a part and study it with context of the research.*

*The researcher classified this group as an informal group using social network media as a platform for the interaction. So the features or the characteristics of this group were discovered as the combination of the features of a social media, social network and an informal group. A set of the combination of the definitions of these three terms were applied to understand the features of this group. Almost all the group development theories talk about the stages of development and group processes and interactions of the formal groups or groups in the organizational settings. As the group studied by the researcher is an informal group so it was difficult to apply a particular stage development theory and study the group. The equilibrium model of group development, created by Robert Bales was taken as the base for analyzing the group development stages of this group, as this theory was proposed as a study of the manifestation and incidence of task-oriented and socio-emotional behaviors within groups.*

*To study developmental process and each stage of this group, the researcher focused the research on 1. Collecting the data about the features /Characteristics of the group 2. Collecting the data about the profiles and the shares/ posts by the group member's a periodic analysis 3. Collecting the data about the member's profiles 4. A structured interview of a subset of the group which has emerged as a subgroup eventually in the course of time*

*The key findings revealed that the group followed the stage development sequence proposed by Bales up to the evaluation stage. The group is still very much inactive in terms of task oriented behaviors as well as not showing socio emotional behavior significantly. But there is an emergence of a subgroup which was initiated by a member other than owner of the group, invited members of a particular location and formed the group, (n=27). The researcher studied this group through a structured interview of the group members, which revealed that the need was felt to meet personally to activate and progress of the motto and objective of this group. Which shows that some initial conditions like the percentage response for professional / recruitment shares, lack of regular communication, involvement or of only few members, nothing new shared as an interest for which the group has formed. The response to the initiative of a Bangalore location member initialized the emergence of a subgroup which is not as per the Equilibrium model.*

*So this study indicates and concludes that the social network media groups may not follow the fixed sequence of stages of group development. There is a variation in the sequence of stages which likely to emerge as a result of the initial conditions of the group as well as the contextual conditions.*

*The findings of this study are limited to one group, studied for a period of one year. A comparative study of such more groups on different social network media, with different context and objectives will provide more insight to the group development study and theories. There is a further scope to study such groups with different contexts, perspectives and objectives, which in turn can be used for making these groups effective and significant.*

**Keywords:** Social network media groups, Group development process

## 1. Introduction

Almost all the group development theories talk about the stages of development and group processes and interactions of the formal groups or groups in the organizational settings. McGrath and Tschan (2004) (Temporal matters in social psychology: Examining the role of time in the lives of groups and individuals) mentioned that the study of group development is still having lot of challenges. One of the challenge mentioned by McGrath and Tschan is "If a given group does not follow a fixed sequence of stages, is variation in the sequence indicative of malfunction in the group's development or maturation, or does it merely express normal variation arising from initial or contextual conditions? (p.102),

If the groups are informal and formed to achieve business objectives, usually invites are sent to unknown members with common interests and profiles. But these groups work on a different norms and environment as these are virtual groups. These groups do not follow the usual group norms as their characteristics seem to be different than the usual groups. So it seems quite difficult for these groups to live their motto and achieve their objective than the usual groups.

As the social network media groups are on rise a lot for various purposes the researcher was curious to understand its development process and thought it would be worthwhile to test the challenge stated by McGrath and Tschan in the context of a social network media group. For which the objectives of the study were: 1. Does the social network media group follow a fixed sequence of group development stages? 2. Is there any variation in these stages? 3. If there is any variation, is it initial or contextual condition?

## 2. Methodology: Objective Wise Methodology of Research Applied Was as Follows

a. To understand the sequence of the stages and the variations of group development the secondary data about the group, members and other information in context of the type of the group was collected from the group information from LinkedIn. Also the various posts and shares of the group members were tracked for last one year after the group was formed in the year Dec.2015, were noted, classified. A simple frequency distribution method was used to analyze the data.

b. To understand the emergence of the subgroup and the reasons of the variation in the evaluation stage, a personal interview was conducted with a structured questionnaire of 27 members from Bangalore location.

### 2.1. Respondents

There are 4361 members. All members were invited by the owner of the group and have joined the group voluntarily by invitation. All member's personal profile was studied with the profession and designation. Professions classified under broad categories as HR, Recruitment, Business, Coach and consultant, IT industry professionals. The designations were GM/AGMs, Owners/directors/presidents, Managers /leads, Entrepreneurs/consultants.

### 2.2. Design of the Study

- The group profile, members profile and the owners profile, the formation and initialization of group as well the motto/objective of the group was understood and studied by collecting the information from Linked in about the group as a group member.
- The individual profile study was conducted on two parameters as mentioned above i.e. professional and designation information collected and classified, specifically to understand the professional status of the member, find out the commonality for joining the group.
- The posts and shares of the group were studied by no of posts, these posts and shares were classified under broad categories to understand the type of communication and track the stage of development of the group. all the e posts also classified under a period of one month each to track the stage of development and the issues and subjects shared on the posts.
- The interviews of the subgroup members were through a structured questionnaire covered the motive, involvement, contribution, expectations of the group member from the group, connectivity with the primary group and the reason of feeling the need of forming a subgroup from the primary group.

### 2.3. Statistical Analysis

A normal frequency distribution was used for the analysis of the posts and shares under classified categories broadly found in the data. The analysis of questionnaires is based on the responses received from the 27 members.

### 3. Tables and Figures

#### 3.1. Analysis of the Posts /Shares by the Group Members - Subject Wise

Category of the posts	No of posts	Response of the member
Hiring/Job posts	8	2
Coaching /training articles	23	2
Consultancy information / offers	5	nil
Job inquiries	3	nil
Request to join a social cause	4	2
Information about start up, new business	4	nil
Women empowerment	1	nil
Sharing some articles	1	3
Personal shares	7	nil
Surveys posted	2	nil
Invitation acceptance	68	Likes only
Events invite	2	nil
General issues	4	nil
Meeting requests for a location	7	nil
Face to face meetings	1	nil

Table 1

#### 3.2. Analysis of the Posts /Shares Month Wise

Month	Posts
1	Hiring, Sales promotions, product promotions
2	Recruitment job posts, Sales promotions, product promotions
3	Invitation acceptance, Articles, Personal shares
4	Articles of interest personal shares
5	Business information, social cause requests, Coaching and training
6	Invitation acceptance, Entrepreneurship posts
7	Invitation acceptance, Coaching and training, surveys
8	Invitation acceptance, Coaching and training, Employee meeting requests
9	Coaching and training, Employee meeting requests
10	Coaching and training
11	Coaching and training
12	Job posts, Coaching and training

Table 2

#### 3.3. Interview Data

Sr no	Questions	Response
1	How you got connected to the group?	
2	Your involvement with the group: Daily/weekly/not at all:	Weekly-2 Not at all -25
3	Your Intention to join the group (what you were expecting):	Jobs-20, Business/Entrepreneurship-17
4	How far you think it has been successful in achieving this motto?	Not till now, will start working now (after meeting)
5	How are you connected with the group: Posts/Shares/job opportunity/personal shares/information share:	Posts-3, not at all-24
6	What interests you most of the shares with the group	Cannot say as not connected
7	Is there any value addition from the group till you joined: (in terms of job, or other achievement)	No -20, Yes -27
8	Have you used /tried to use this group for any professional /personal needs /requirements?	Yes -10, No-17
9	Reason you thought to form a subgroup	No value addition, no specific plan for leveraging the group connections, no direction for any particular activity, need to have a structured plan, no initiative from any member

Table 3

#### 4. Conclusion

The key findings of the study of the group development process of the social media network group, based on the secondary data about the group information and the analysis of the group member's profiles, the posts and the shares shared by the group members and the interviews of the subgroup members are as follows:

1. This group is defined by the researcher as an informal social media network group as it exhibits and possess the combination of the features of social network, social media and an informal group. This group is created by the invitations to the members of a social media by an HR professional, with a motto of "Opportunities to improve the quality of their lives through self-development and Career". The membership is voluntary and the purpose or the motto is not very well defined. The communication pattern is natural, spontaneous and haphazard. This is a leaderless group with the owner /invitee as administrator of the group. There are no boundaries, operates in different dimensions, the nature of group reflects freedom and spontaneity personal warmth. The relationship of the members is social.
2. The analysis of the member's profile, the posts and shares of the group members within a period of one year after forming the group shows that the group was in the orientation stage for almost 5 months where the communication post and shares were maximum on invitation acceptance, Product /sales promotions, Some articles, and social cause posts. Which exhibits that this was the orientation phase where the members exchanged the business information, shared articles, more task oriented. A lot of new members invited and joined the group within a span of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> month where most of the posts were invitation acceptance and task oriented exchanges were very few. The analysis shows there is an overlap of the Orientation stage and Evaluation stage as there was a sudden exchange of opinions and ideas about expressing needs to meet personally by locations. But instead entering in to control stage and performing, it was fragmented and a part of the group has emerged as a subgroup out of the preliminary group.
3. The need expressed about forming a subgroup location wise, and plan a meet. There was an emergence of a subgroup in the 7<sup>th</sup> month by the group members from Bangalore. Had a personal meet. This clearly shows that the group has not followed the sequence of the equilibrium model but has emerged with a subgroup. The variation in the group development process and the reasons were revealed in the interview of this subgroup members.
4. The interviews revealed the group members are not in connection with the primary group, frequency of involvement and post update /response is negligible, Weekly, or even monthly. There are not leads for recruitment, entrepreneurship development opportunities expressed / shared in the group. As well the group members of other locations are seeming to be disconnected or far to explore the business / job opportunities. There is no any structured plan directed, developed by which the group member will get benefitted.
5. The lack of remaining connected and involvement of maximum members, no proper response and exploration of this social platform to achieve the motto and no directed efforts or encouragement and actions from the group members are the internal factors which has generated the variation in the group development process and emerged in the form of a subgroup. The contextual factors are the group is an informal social media network group, has no boundaries, no well-defined objective and only the way to remain connected is through posts /shares which has played a role in variation in the process of group development.
6. The findings of this study are limited to one group, studied for a period of one year. A comparative study of such more groups on different social network media, with different context and objectives will provide more insight to the group development study and theories. There is a further scope to study such groups in different contexts, perspectives and objectives, which in turn can be used for making these groups effective and significant.

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