# INTERACTION OF VISUAL ARTS LEARNING IN A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

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## Abstract

*In cyberlearning, interaction becomes one of the features that determine learning success. This study underlines the interaction of visual arts learning in the virtual community. Virtual community facilitates informal art learning in cyberspace as they have comprehensive capacity related to the strategy of organizing cyber-based learning. This study involved 24 informants consisting of founders, members, and learning instructors of a virtual community in Indonesia. Using virtual ethnography as a research method, this study found three patterns of learning interactions in the virtual community, that are the interaction of learning participants with learning content; learning participant interaction with the instructor; and interaction between learning participants. Through these three interaction patterns, cyber-based art learning can be formulated in a virtual community.*

**Keywords**

Visual Arts, Virtual Community, Cyberlearning, Arts, Education

## 1. Introduction

In cyberlearning, interaction becomes one of the features that determine learning success (Swan et al., 2000). In line with what was stated by Harasim (1990) that asynchronous discussion in cyberlearning allows participants to appreciate the contribution of other learning participants while encouraging participants to make their contributions. Participants learn to think more thoroughly about comments, suggestions, or questions before they publish them in an online discussion forum. Cyberlearning experts stated that these conditions create a culture of reflection in learning (Poole, 2000).

In visual arts research, the phase of improving skills is inextricably linked to the requirements of the market. In particular, millennials are raised as agile, responsive, and autonomous learners. They seek an environment that can satisfy their goals in gaining information that supports their skills and do not often position themselves in a traditional education program to learn things (Nugrahani, et al, 2018).

The need to increase the visual arts knowledge and skills of millennials through informal learning initiated by the virtual community has increased significantly. In Indonesia, various virtual communities with specific positioning offer a new learning environment that takes place in a virtual space. Virtual learning spaces certainly provide a learning experience that is different from conventional learning. This study focuses on the pattern of learning interactions that take place in a virtual community in Indonesia that specifically produce visual artworks. The discovery of learning interaction patterns in the virtual community is expected to provide insight into how informal learning activities in virtual space can be run effectively.

## 2. Virtual Community

The emergence of a networking site enabled by digital technologies that generate virtual interaction creates what is labeled as a virtual community (Piliang, 2017). Porter made a point of saying that there is no single type of virtual community that can then be heavily accepted. This assertion is consistent with much of what Komito (1998) has said that the word community means quite different things for different people, and it may not be simple to locate a description of the community that can be universally understood. The virtual community is characterized as a set of people or business associates who engage in a certain mutual interest, and whose activities are largely facilitated and managed by technologies and are driven by several conventions or norms (Porter, 2006).

The era of digital technologies is deemed sufficient to accommodate positive education viewpoints that suggest that individuals can fulfill their complete capacity further if they are deeply invested in the discovery, discovery, and exchange of knowledge collected by those in the group. (Ackermann, 2001). Such thought is one of the reasons that make learners appear quite secure in a virtual environment in the millennials period.

The virtual community uses network technology, especially the internet, to establish partnerships throughout regional limits and periods (Johnson, 2001). In a simulated world, everybody will play an important part of the training process, as well as providing the ability to become students and teachers. The presence of virtual communities is immediately linked to social platforms, that facilitate the nature of engagement and collaboration among team participants. Now many virtual communities are created and deployed from individual social media platforms. The virtual world also links designers, curators, and spectators. They exchange ideas, and they will receive immediate feedback.

## 3. Methods

This study is qualitative research designed using a cultural approach. Operationally, this research focuses on regularity. As stated by Rohidi (2012), research aimed at finding or finding regularity includes identification, categorization of elements, and observing patterns. This study involved 24 informants consisting of founders, members, and learning instructors of the Hijabographic community, a pioneer virtual community in Indonesia, using virtual ethnography as a research method. This virtual community was founded in 2013 and has been a productive virtual community in producing visual art through learning activities, and collaborative artworks carried out by its members. Data collection was carried out in three ways, that are 1) observation of learning activities that took place in the virtual community, 2) in-depth interviews involving 24 informants, and 3) tracking of learning documents used in the virtual community.

## 4. Learning Interactions in Virtual Community

Based on the results of observations and in-depth interviews conducted during the research process, it can be seen that the Hijabographic Community creates a dynamic learning environment by utilizing all the features provided by Instagram so that the learning activities organized encourage experimentation, collaborative work, and active participation of members to share ideas and thought.

In the Hjabographic community, social presence and solidarity between members are one of the essential foundations in creating a virtual learning space. Social presence includes the

participation of members and followers of the Hijabographic community in various activities held online and offline. Their participation is not only seen in activities related to learning in the form of workshops or discussions, but also in social activities such as charity initiated by the Hijabographic community. This is in line with what was revealed by Rourke et al. (2001) in his research that the social presence and strong interaction between members need to be developed and continuously pursued comprehensively to create a solid online learning community.

The form of intimate relationships in the Hijabographic online learning community cannot indeed be demonstrated through social communication measured from the expression of emotions, feelings, and moods as explained in the theory of social presence described by Garrison (2017). Computer-mediated communication expressions in the Hijabographic community are carried out in several ways, including the use of emoticons, giving likes, and also expressing appreciation in the comments column. The use of symbolic representation that takes place in online communication, as stated by Kuehn (1993) facilitates expressions that can also build intimacy between members even though communication takes place in a virtual space. As part of the network society, members and followers of the Hijabographic community are aware that one form of appreciation and participation in the community is to leave a digital footprint on every post published by Hijabographic on Instagram.

Learning interactions in the Hijabographic community are summarized in three types of interactions. Adapting from the type of learning interaction proposed by Zacharis (2009) which consists of the interaction of learning participants with content; learning participant interaction with the instructor; and interaction between learning participants.

## 4.1 Interaction of Learning Participants with the Learning Content

The interaction of learning participants with learning content in the Hijabographic community is closely related to the availability of alternative technology-based learning media such as electronic modules, video tutorials, and podcasts. Various learning media are available and published through Instagram Hijabographic accounts and learning tutors' accounts. To make learning content useful as a learning media, participants should have the skills to extract information provided by tutors from the Hijabographic community and conduct more exploration through art creation activities independently. Extracting information, in this case, is the ability to be able to understand the techniques and media used by the instructor and then follow the steps that have been taught by the instructor or try to find their way of producing works with the same techniques and media.

Instagram allows users to share content that is not only visual-based but also audio visual-based. This appliance makes it easy for the Hijabographic community to be able to provide multimedia-based learning media that can be accessed by members and followers on Instagram. In

addition to simple visual static-based tutorials, the Hijabographic community collaborates with tutors to provide multimedia-based learning media that is realized in the form of video timelapse process of making illustration works.

## 4.2 Interaction between Learning Participants and Instructors / Tutors

In the Hijabographic community, the interaction between learning participants and instructors is facilitated through the use of social media, such as online chat either through the comments column on Instagram, Direct Message (DM), and the "Ask Me Questions" feature. Some learning participants who have more intense interaction with instructors can continue discussions through instant messaging services such as WhatsApp.

In the learning process, the interaction between learning participants and instructors is generated through two types of activities; online and offline activities. In online activities, instructors usually initiate to open online discussion forums with community members or followers on Instagram regarding certain techniques and media used in producing visual art.
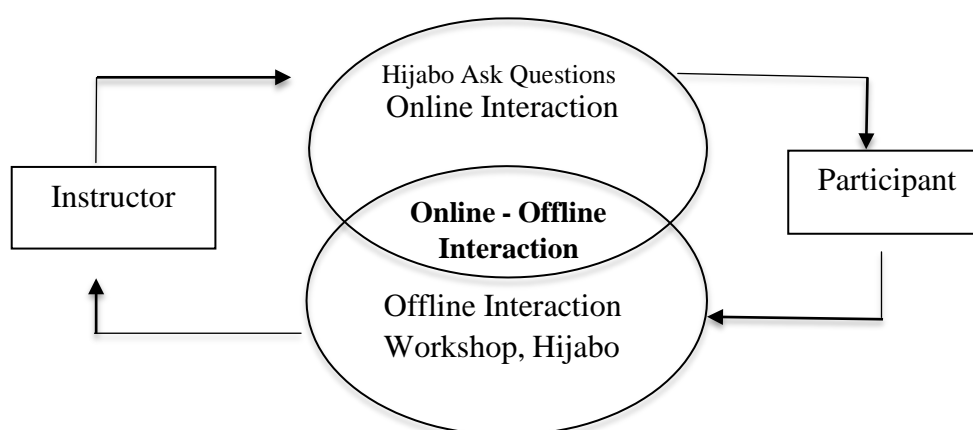


**Figure 1**: *Interaction between Learning Participants and Learning Instructors in Hijabographic Community*

Besides online activities, it can be observed that most learning interactions between participants and instructors are the result of workshops held offline. When members or followers of the Hijabographic community attend workshops with certain themes or content, they will automatically connect with instructors and other learning participants via Instagram. This interaction will usually continue even though the workshop activities have ended.

The familiar and informal style of communication becomes one of the factors that close the gap between the learning participants and the instructor. Although instructors are professionals in the visual arts industry who are quite famous in social media, as instructors, they show a very humble character, not hesitate to appreciate the artworks of participants.

## 4.3 Interaction of Learning Participants

As is the interaction between learning participants and instructors, the interaction between learning participants in the Hijabographic community is initiated through online or offline activities. The friendship that is established through offline learning activities such as the *Hijabo* Class is one of the tools that can build continuity of interaction between participants, which continues with Instagram mediation. Informal chat among participants which is a means for conducting discussions and brainstorming is a form of instructional component that is widely used by the Hijabographic community to increase the participation of members and followers on Instagram.

Interaction between learning participants also has a big impact on building solidarity and loyalty to the Hijabographic community. Based on the results of online interviews conducted by researchers with ten members of the Hijabographic community who are actively involved in various activities held online and offline, it is known that one aspect that strengthens the interaction between learning participants in the Hijabographic community is the existence of emotional bonds that are established through friendship. As stated by Wegener & Leimeister (2012) and Porter (2006) that the sustainability and success of virtual communities in carrying out learning activities are highly dependent on the strength of participants' motivation to achieve common goals that can help build social bonds between learning participants.

Interaction via social media conducted by learning participants in the Hijabographic community increases their ability to be more expressive and at the same time also increases their ability in terms of appreciation. Learning participants seemed more motivated to appreciate the results of visual arts among learning participants, giving input, or sharing new techniques in work. Interaction between participants who are bound by the same goals and interests has led the Hijabographic community to become one of the most productive virtual communities in creating various collaborative visual arts.

## 5. Conclusion

Virtual space is a new learning place, easily accessible and open, not constrained by time and geographical constraints. Through this research, it is known that the use of technology with a digital platform becomes a means of supporting the continuity of visual art learning in the virtual community, which offers a pattern of learning interaction and socio-cultural values that are completely different from conventional learning patterns. Instagram, as a media has provided opportunities for learning participants to find a virtual learning space that is comfortable and under their psychological and behavioristic aspects as part of a networked society. The way they upgrade their skills and improve their knowledge in terms of visual arts is very flexible and adaptive. The

Instagram account owned by the Hijabographic community provides two resources needed for online learning, there are creators and artworks, which can help learning participants synthesize the information they need to improve their knowledge and skills in creating visual arts through discussion that occurs during interaction in a virtual environment.

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