

# **Research on the Effect of Social Network Services upon Team-Members Communication**

## **Case study: International Culture Exchange Association (ICEA)**

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#### **Abstract**

The increasing modernization of organization work processes implies the methods of communication within it to shift in the aim to cope with environment changes and organization members' new habits. This modernization, however, raises the question of which communications path is most effective. Therefore, this article aims to demonstrate the role of smart phones social network services mobile applications in enhancing team members' communication through a questionnaire survey forward to the International Cultural Exchange Association ICEA members who are facing plenty problems that mainly stem from communication problems. The study outcomes revealed that the use of smart phones social network services mobile applications do not improve neither ICEA members' participation nor decreasing cross-cultural misunderstanding issue. By contrast, it would be very useful on one hand, decreasing absenteeism rate. On the other hand, increasing motivation and commitment, updates dissemination, and feedback.

**Keywords** ICEA, Social Network Services "SNS", Team Members' Communication, Smart Phones

## I. Introduction

The indispensable ingredient for high team performance lies on the effective communication between team members, especially in the current volatile environment with high time pressure (P.P. Rasker2002).As organization situation changes, the organization communication process changes instantly to cope with it, for instance(Naimisha& Balakrishnan2013) argued that the onset of crisis in the organization could be deducted by the change in email communication patterns. Moreover, communication process within organization changes when information and communication technology evolves. The 21<sup>st</sup> century hardware breakthrough is matched by software development, nowadays people do not use their mobile phones just for calling or texting, but they use them for playing games, navigating, and social networking due to the large usage of Smart phones, (Gartner, 2012) found that in 2011 smart phones sales represented 31% of the yearly global mobile phone sales, and it reached 472 million units which represents an increase of 58% comparing to 2010. The widely use of smart phones has changed customers' communication habits, (Mohammad&Negahban,2013)found in their study that the addiction to mobile can be assessed by the use of social networking services (SNS) mobile applications. This growing market of social networking services encourages software companies to create new social network applications like: WeChat, WhatsApp, Viber, ect... but the most popular SNS in the world still be Facebook with 955 million active users whom more than the half of them prefer mobile devices to connect on Facebook(SocialBakers, 2012).

SNS is very important topic, plenty research have been done about it, but it doesn't have a common definition, for instance(Shiu-Yun K, Debra, Mary, Wenbiao, 2007) defined social networks as the subjective feeling of belonging, or being accepted,loved,wanted, esteemed, valued, and needed for oneself'. Therefore this feeling is paramount for any individual to be successful in all life aspects because SNS are becoming an important element of collaborative learning environments (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, &Turoff, 1995; Haythornthwaite, 2002). Nowadays, SNS do not just affect the private life, but affect the professional life. The environment has changed, technology has evolved, employees has got new habits and ways of communication, but organizations still prefer the old and formal means of communication like emails. Therefore, this article aims to show the effect of SNS upon team members' communication, and how SNS features can help to solve organization problems that couldn't be solved through the old communications means. For that, we analyzed data collected via questionnaire survey forwarded to the International Culture Exchange Association (ICEA), it is a team of small number of students of Wuhan University of Technology with complementary interests. Foreigners and Chinese students who are interested in cultural exchange between students from different countries and organizing cultural, sportive events to entertain and enhance understanding between students. ICEA was incepted on the third of April 2009. The aim of this organization is not only to build up a communication platform between international students and Chinese students, but also bridging the gap between the foreign students and the international office.

Recently, there are around 60active members "32 foreign students and 28 Chinese students"and 400 fans. The ICEA is divided into four departments; Communication department, Sport and Culture department, Study department and Secretary department. ICEA is facing a permanent challenge as high absenteeism rate, lack of commitment and participation from both; foreign as well as Chinese students, dissemination on information and updates. Therefore ICEA issues stem from the traditional ways of communication and persuading methods.

This article tries to find adequate solution to tackle ICEA challenges by analyzing the current communication channels, andproposing the use of modern communication tools, such as SNS, because it diver features can help to decrease the absenteeism rate, make sure to convey the messages towards all students, make updates easily available and improve the commitment and persuade the students to participate in events by sharing pictures and videos of the previous experiences.

## II. Methodology

### 2.1 Sample

The target group was the members of the ICEA, a total of 32 students. The questionnaire survey was forward to the team members throughout the current channel of communication, which is email. Unfortunately the response rate was very low, just 5out of 32 emailed back their answers; it shows the inefficacy of the current mean of communication. Therefore we had to meet the other members face-to-face. The total number of responses reached 23, and it decreased to 22 after scrutinizing all the answers, we found one member didn't answer all the questions.

### 2.2 Instrumentation

The study used a questionnaire survey that included an introductory note explaining the purpose of the study. The survey was divided in three sections; the first section used closed questions to get basic information about the participants, like gender, age group, county, language skills as well as working experiences. The second section used closed questions as well, to assess how frequent communication misunderstanding occurs between tem members, which social network applications are widely used. We also used five point Likert scale questions "very important, important, moderately important, of little importance, unimportant" to assess smart phone social network application features. We

assessed also the time spent a day on social network application, we used five point Likert scale questions “never, once a week, 0-3 hours per day, 4-7 hours per day, 8-24 hours per day”.

The last focused on the different challenges and how useful the different features of social networks could solve them. The study used descriptive analysis using frequencies and tabulations of data were completed to summarize the variables and calculate the standardized values.

### III. Findings

The participant gender distribution was 63,6% male and 36,37% female.

The participant age was grouped as follow, 22,73% of team members fall in the age range between 18 years to 25years. And 59,09% of them fall in the age range between 25 to 30, and just 18, 18% are more than 30 years.

As you may know ICEA is constituted by foreign students from different countries, 27, 27% of team members are from Africa, 36, 36% are from Asia, 9, 09% are from Europe & North America & Australia, 18, 18% are from Middle East & North Africa, and 9, 09% are from South America.

According to participants’ response, just 9,09% of them are native English speakers, and roughly 59% them are assessed as excellent in English language skills, but we have almost 32% of them are assessed as good.

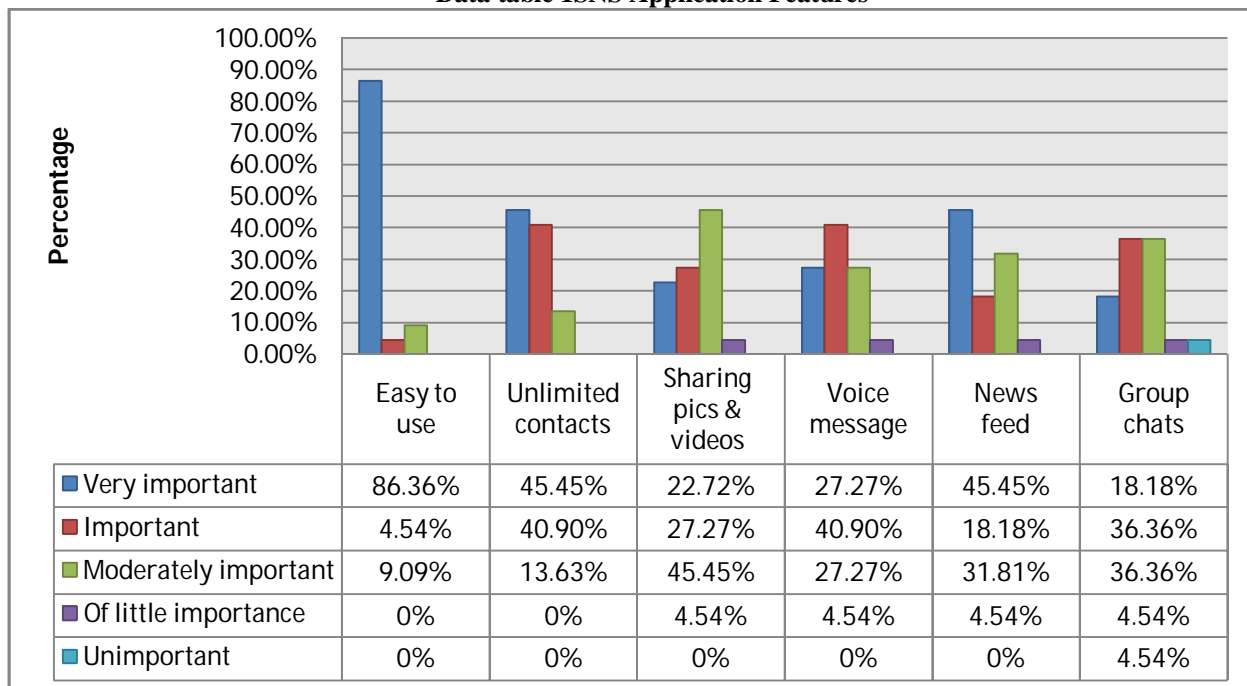
The participant worked in projects before join ICEA was 4.54% from 3- 5 years, roughly 73% of the team members have worked before joining the association at least 6months and no more than 3years, and just 4,54% have worked in project more than 3 years. And 22,72% of the team members do not have any work experience before joining ICEA.

We do have almost no misunderstanding between team members, because according to participants’ response: roughly 55% rarely have some difficulties to communicate with other team members, and 40% rarely have problem. But there are 5% of respondents who have always difficulties to communicate with others.

From the previous analysis, we can deduct that ICEA members are mature and experienced people “roughly 80% are more than 25 years old and more than a half have work experience more than one year before joining the ICEA”. Moreover, all team member are fluent in English language and do not have any difficulties to interact with each other. Therefore, these recipients should give us high performance team with no communication issues, but unfortunately ICEA is suffering from communication issues that lead to very low projects performance. Thus, communication challenges are neither from the lack of team member communication skills, nor from the experience, but it stems from the current communication channel.

The subsequent analysis will demonstrate how the use of social network applications in smart phone can be used to tackle ICEA communication issues.

Data table 1SNS Application Features



Source Field Study

According to participants’ response, roughly 95% percent of them use smart phones, and everyone has account in the

different social networks applications offered by different smart phone companies.

Therefore, the data table 1 depicts the degree of attractiveness of social networks application features for the team members.

1. The frequency analysis of the social network applications feature “Easy to use” revealed that:

- a) 86, 36% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 9, 09% of the team members think of it as moderately important

2. The frequency analysis of the social network application feature “Unlimited contacts” revealed that:

- a) 45, 45% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 40, 90% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 13, 63% of the team members think of it as moderately important

3. The frequency analysis of the social network application feature “Sharing pictures & videos” revealed that:

- a) 22, 72% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 27, 27% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 45, 45% of the team members think of it as moderately important
- d) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as of a little important

4. The frequency analysis of the social network application feature “Voice message” revealed that:

- a) 27, 27% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 40, 90% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 27, 27% of the team members think of it as moderately important
- d) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as of a little important

5. The frequency analysis of the social network application feature “News feed” revealed that:

- a) 45, 45% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 18, 18% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 31, 81% of the team members think of it as moderately important
- d) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as of a little important

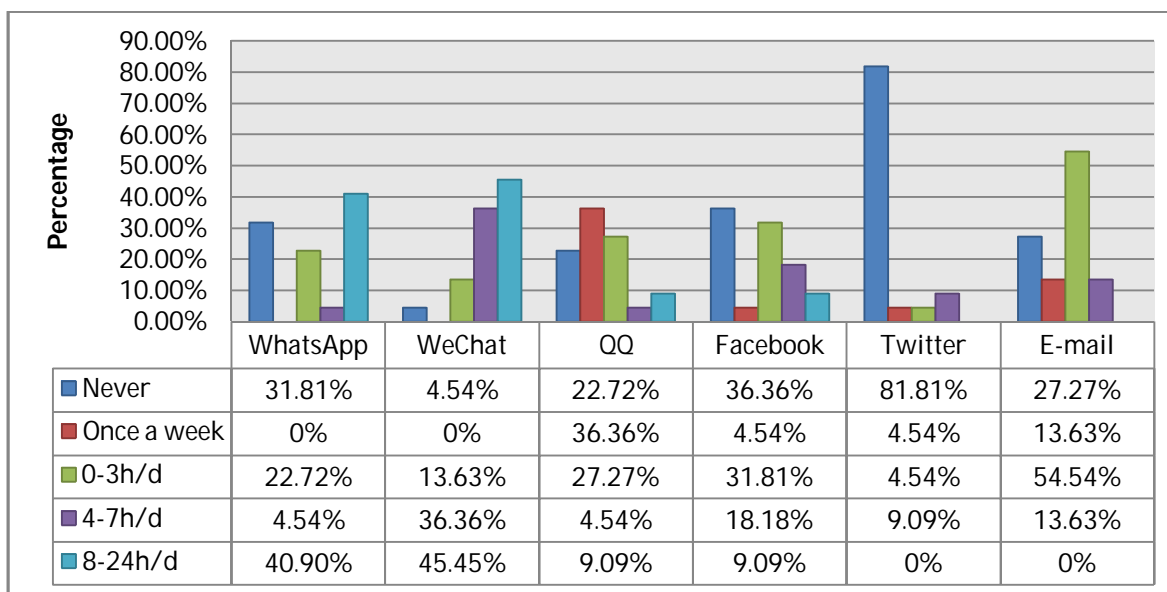
6. The frequency analysis of the social network application feature “Group chat” revealed that:

- a) 18, 18% of the team members think of it as very important
- b) 36, 36% of the team members think of it as important
- c) 36, 36% of the team members think of it as moderately important
- d) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as of a little important
- e) 4, 54% of the team members think of it as unimportant

In a nutshell, we can deduct that the most attractive features of social network applications for the team member are as follow: first of all, it should be easy to use, has an unlimited of contacts number, and has news feedback.

The other features “voice message, allowing the creation of chat group, and sharing pictures and videos” are considered as moderately important.

**Data Table 2** Frequencies Usage of SNS in Smart Phones



Source Field Study

Smart phone companies as well as the different operating systems offer a slew of interesting social network applications. We listed down 5 social network applications “whatsapp, wechat, qq, facebook, and twitter” in the aim to assess the time spent on each social network application by the different team members, and we compared it with the current communication channel which is Email.

Data table 2 depicts the time spent by team members in different social network applications + Email box. The field research results were as follow:

1. The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application WhatsApp on smart phones revealed that:

- a) 31, 81% of the team members don’t use it at all
- b) 22, 72% use it between 0-3 h/d
- c) 4, 54% use it between 4-7h/d
- d) 40, 90% use it more than 8 h/d

2. The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application WeChat on smart phones revealed that:

- a) 4, 45% of the team members don’t use it at all
- b) 13, 63% use it between 0-3h/d
- c) 36, 36% use it between 4-7h/d
- d) 45, 45% use it more than 8h/d

3. The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application QQ on Smart phones revealed that:

- a) 22,72% of the team members don’t use it at all
- b) 36,36% use it once a week
- c) 27,27% use it between 0-3h/d
- d) 4,54% use it between 4-7h/d
- e) 9,09% use it more than 8h/d

4. The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application Facebook on smart phones revealed that:

- a) 36,36% of the team members don’t use it at all
- b) 4,54% use it once a week
- c) 18,18% use it between 0-3h/d
- d) 4,54% use it between 4-7h/d
- e) 9,09% use it more than 8h/d

5. The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application Twitter on smart phones revealed that:

- a) 81,81% of the team members don’t use it at all
- b) 4,54% use it once a week

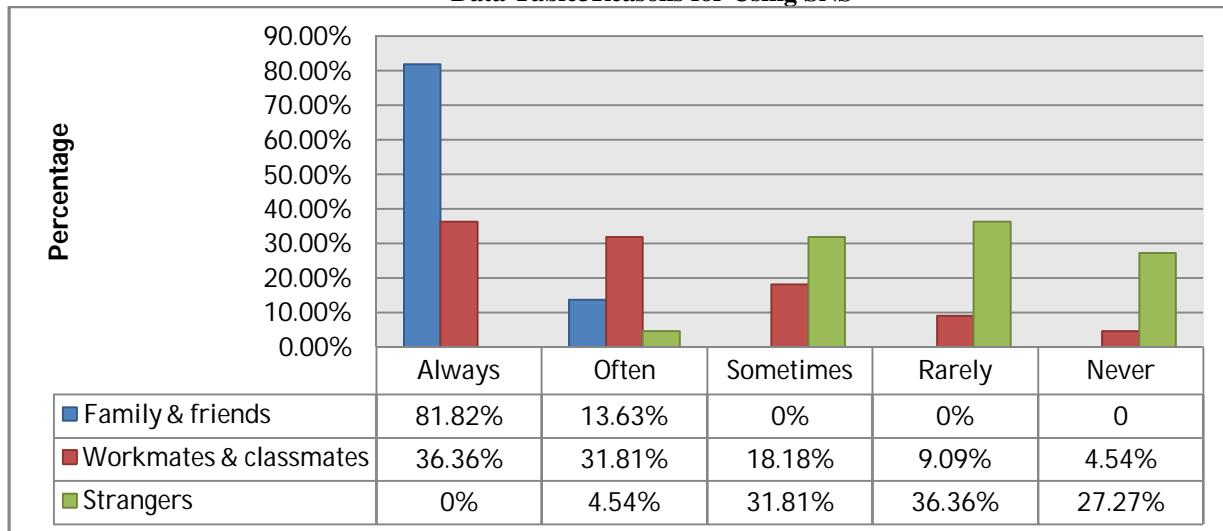
- c) 4,54% use it between 0-3h/d
- d) 9,09% use it between 4-7h/d

6.The frequency analysis of the use of the social network application E-mail on smart phones revealed that:

- a) 27,27% of the team members don't use it at all
- b) 13,63% use it once a week
- c) 54,54% use it between 0-3h/d
- d) 13,63% use it between 4-7h/d

From the previous analysis of the usage of social network application on smart phones data, we deduct that WeChat and WhatsApp are widely use by team members, they are using these two social network applications more than 8 hours/day in a rate of 45,45% and 40,90% respectively. By contrast QQ, Facebook, Tweeter and Emails are not widely use by team members.

**Data Table3Reasons for Using SNS**



Source Field Study

After knowing the most used social application networks by the team members, we wanted to find out for what reasons are they used.

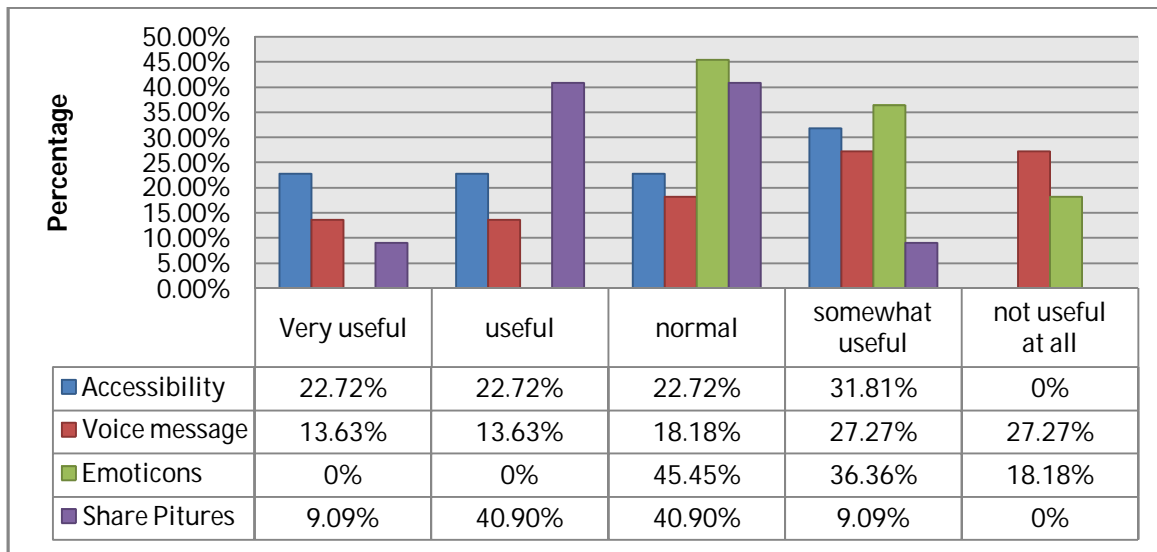
The data table 3 depicts the different kind of people reached by the team members via social network applications. The field study results were as follow:

- 1.The frequency analysis of team members using the social network application to contact with family and friends revealed that roughly 95% of team members always use social network applications to keep in touch with their family members
2. The frequency analysis of team members using the social network application to keep in touch with work colleagues and classmates revealed that almost 68% always use it to keep in touch with colleagues or classmates, and 9,09% rarely use it for this purpose. By contrast, there are 4,54% of team members never use it for this purpose
3. The frequency analysis of team members using the social network application to communicate with strangers revealed that almost 35% sometimes use social network application for this purpose, while 36,36% of team members rarely use it for this purpose. By contrast, there are 27,27% of team members never use social network applications for this purpose.

From the previous analysis, we can conclude that ICEA members always use social network applications to keep in touch with family members, and roughly 70% percent use it for communicating with work colleagues or classmates. And almost 35% of the members use it to chitchat and meet new people who are using the same social network application.

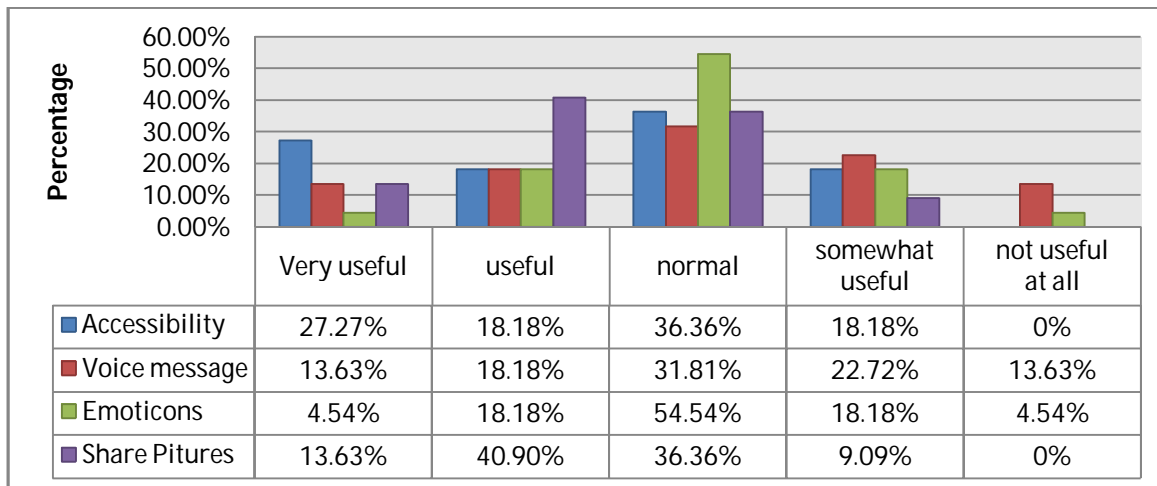
Therefore using social network application for work is not something new for ICEA member “except 30%”, thus we can choose the most used one with the adequate features in the aim to tackle ICEA communications challenges. The subsequent part will give us team members perceptions on how this would work out.

**Data Table 4 the Role of SNS in Tackling Absenteeism Issue**



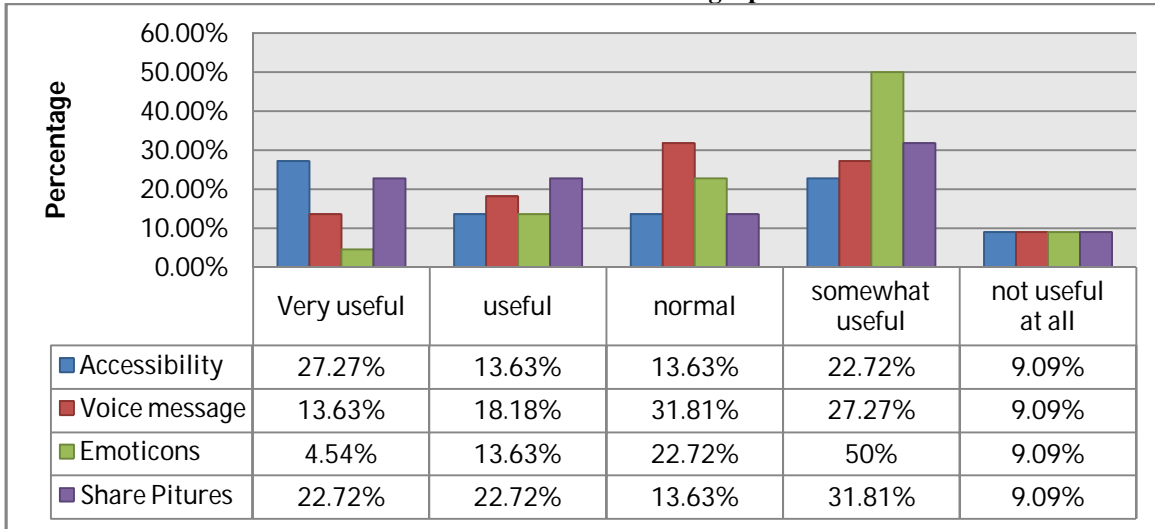
Source Field Study

**Data Table 5 the Role of SNS in Tackling Lack of Motivation Issue**



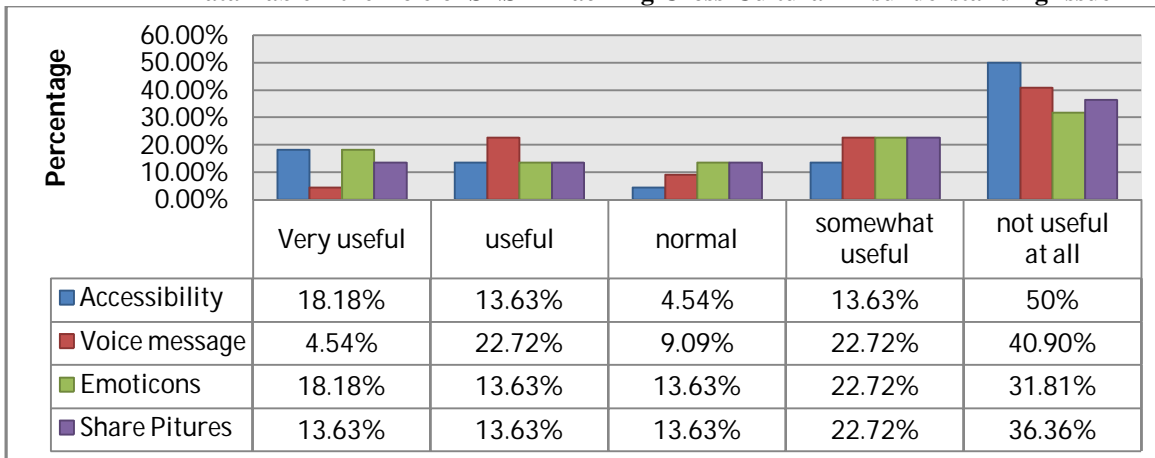
Source Field Study

**Data Table 6 the Role of SNS in Tackling Update Dissemination Issue**



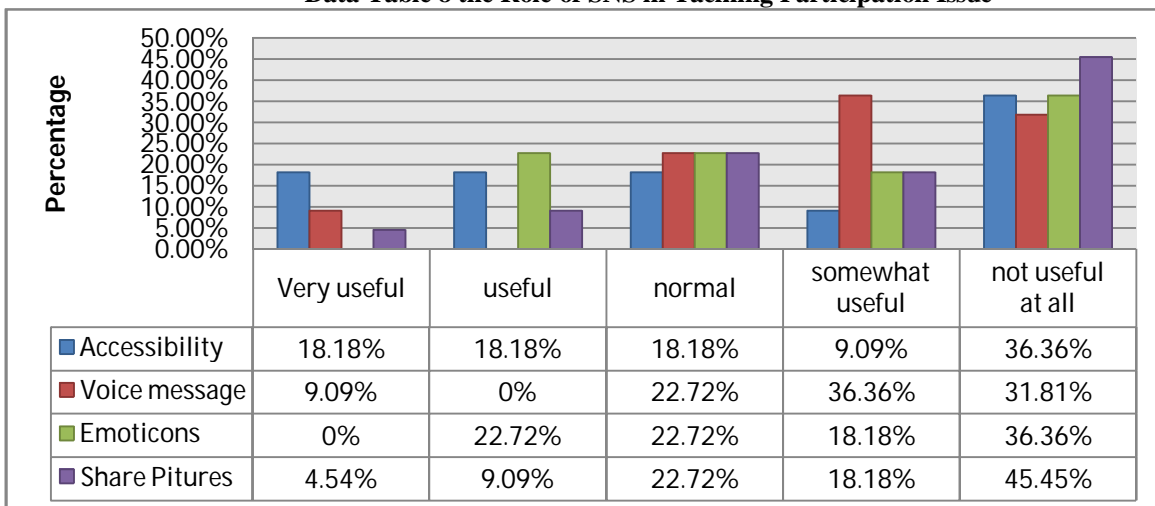
Source Field Study

**Data Table 7 the Role of SNS in Tackling Cross-Cultural Misunderstanding Issue**



Source Field Study

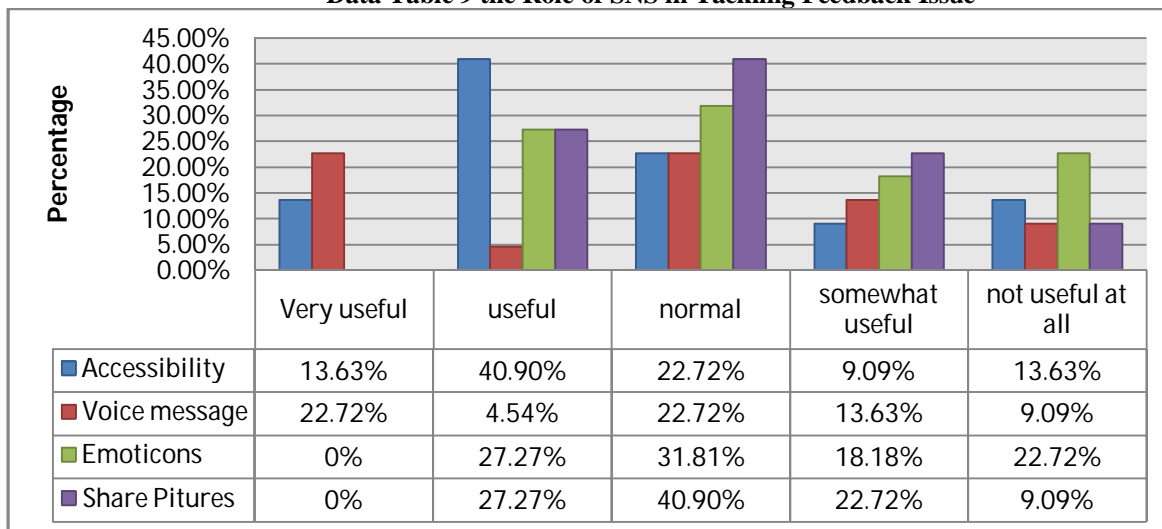
**Data Table 8 the Role of SNS in Tackling Participation Issue**



Source Field Study



**Data Table 9 the Role of SNS in Tackling Feedback Issue**



Source Field Study

Data tables 4,5,6,7,8 and 9 represent the point of views of team member about how the different features of social network applications could help in tackling the communication challenges facing ICEA. The field study results were summarized as follow:

Regarding tackling the issues of lack of participation and body language misunderstanding, most of ICEA members think that the different features of social network application will not help to tackle these two issues.

By contrast, the ICEA members believe that the different features of the social network application can help to overcome the different issue facing the association as high rate of absenteeism, lack of motivation, update dissemination, lack of feed back.

From the previous analysis, we can conclude that most of ICEA challenges could be tackle by using social network application. But it cannot tackle some very important communication issues as lack of participation and body language misunderstanding. Therefore ICEA chairman as well as team members should feel free to speak their minds whenever they have the opportunity to do so and try hardly to learn other cultures in the aim to decrease the cultural gap that will lead to a better understanding between the team members.

#### IV. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study revealed that using smart phones SNS applications would not help ICEA to tackle its communication issues as the lack of member’s participation and cross cultural misunderstanding. These issues could be tackled by using other effective methods, for instance, we can increase member participation by using delphi method in the aim to foster shy people to participate and share their ideas. As for cross-cultural misunderstanding issue, it could be tackle through sincere will from the ICEA members to learn and teach from one another and fully embrace the association mission.

By contrast, the research revealed that using smart phones SNS applications would help ICEA to tackle other challenges. For instance, the different features of social network applications “accessibility, sharing photos and videos” would help ICEA to increase the dissemination of information and updates, and in return it will increase the pace of feedbacks and decrease absenteeism rate. Moreover, sharing pictures and videos of the previous events and activities will incite the members as well as the normal students to take part in the future activities and motivates them to do a greater job.

The research has many limitations, for instance the small size of the association as well as the moderate response rate of 68% “22 out of 32 members” doesn’t give a holistic viewpoints of all the association members. Second limitation could be the finite number of smart phones social networks applications proposed in the survey which didn’t include other applications like: Tango, and Viber, also the finite number of social networks application features proposed in the survey which didn’t include other features like: direct calls, and status “online/offline/busy/don’t disturb”. Nonetheless, the selected list of the smart phones social network applications and their features included the main widely used ones. The research about the effect of SNS application upon team members’ communication could be taken a step further by doing more empirical researches and including more social networks and features.

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