

Building trust and fostering cooperation: How Malaysian LIS professionals sustain a Community of Practice on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Despite the ubiquity of social media in professional development, the mechanisms sustaining trust and cooperation within non-Western library communities remain underexplored. This study examines these dynamics within Sembang Pustakawan, a prominent Malaysian Facebook-based Community of Practice (CoP). Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected via a survey of 174 librarians and in-depth interviews with ten active members. The findings demonstrate that trust is established through demonstrated expertise, respectful communication, and the visible reliability of shared information. Cooperation is enacted through collaborative problem-solving and mentorship, effectively functioning as peer-led professional development. While social media affordances - visibility, persistence, association, and editability - facilitate these interactions, the study also reveals the fragility of online engagement, where participation is threatened by commercial interference and uneven contribution rates. Ultimately, this research extends affordance theory by illustrating how digital features intersect with culturally grounded professional solidarity to sustain a resilient, self-correcting network.

Keywords: Social media affordances; Trust; Cooperation; Facebook; Community of practice; Librarians.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth in the use of social media has established Facebook as a vital platform for professional engagement among librarians, who increasingly use it to supplement traditional professional development. Research confirms that librarians use Facebook not only for patron outreach but also to connect with peers within Communities of Practice (CoPs), which support problem-solving, knowledge sharing, and professional growth (Luo &

Hostetler, 2020; Zhang et al., 2023). This aligns with the view that librarianship is a profession that is inherently "full of communities of practice" (Archer et al., 2021). Wenger (1998) defines a Community of Practice (CoP) as a group of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Even though earlier studies have not explicitly conceptualised Facebook groups as CoP, they nonetheless indicate that such platforms possess the immediacy, accessibility, and inclusivity necessary for CoP formation and sustained professional engagement (Tess, 2013; Veletsianos, 2013; Wang et al., 2012). By enabling perpetual, just-in-time dialogue among geographically dispersed professionals, these online communities have become instrumental in sustaining robust professional networks (Cooke, 2012; Ford & Tolmie, 2016). Consequently, they empower librarians to remain agile and collaboratively solve problems within a rapidly evolving information landscape (Ullah & Ameen, 2022; Warren & Obst, 2012). Grounded in Wenger's foundational framework (1998) and subsequent elaborations (Wenger, 2010), and further clarified by Wenger-Trayner's articulation of core concepts including the nature of a CoP, the role of identity, and the centrality of participation (Wenger et al., 2011), CoP theory offers a social perspective on learning in which power, boundaries, and relational dynamics are integral (Farnsworth et al., 2016). At its core, the CoP framework conceptualises learning as a socially situated process rooted in shared practice and collective identity. Within digital environments, online CoPs enable both explicit and tacit knowledge exchange, allowing library professionals to collaborate, learn, and build collective expertise beyond organisational boundaries (Kim, 2015; Luo et al., 2017; Qutab et al. 2022.) As these CoPs thrive on platforms like Facebook, it becomes increasingly important to examine the role of trust and cooperation, which serve as foundational elements that enable these communities to function effectively.

Trust and cooperation are widely recognised as critical enablers of sustainable CoPs, both offline and online. Trust underpins knowledge-sharing behaviour by reducing uncertainty, fostering openness, and encouraging individuals to contribute without fear of judgement or misuse of information (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Ridings et al., 2002). Recent research continues to affirm this, identifying trust as a key factor that mitigates the perceived risks of sharing, such as the theft or non-recognition of intellectual capital, thereby enabling collaborative knowledge exchange (Dumbura & Eyupoglu, 2025). Likewise, cooperation ensures that shared resources and expertise serve the collective good rather than remain confined to individual members. The interaction between trust and cooperation enables online professional communities to thrive, particularly when members depend on one another for credible information, professional support, and collective problem-solving (Wenger, 1998). In online CoPs, trust often arises from perceptions of other members' credibility and the reliability of their contributions (Hsu et al., 2011; Usoro et al., 2007). This trust enables members to engage in open knowledge sharing and strengthens their confidence in the community's professional competence (Usoro et al., 2007). Furthermore, trust is a critical enabler for sustaining collaboration and accessing distributed expertise across geographical boundaries (Askay & Spivack, 2010).

Conscious that while international scholarship (Cheng et al., 2020; Fraser-Arnott, 2023; Lenstra et al., 2025) has furthered understandings of social media use in professional contexts, Malaysian studies remain relatively dated (Ayu & Abrizah, 2011; Zohoorian-Fooladi & Abrizah, 2014) and continue to focus primarily on Facebook's role in outreach, marketing, and user engagement, rather than on how it cultivates trust and cooperation among library professionals. This article seeks to fill this gap by examining how these elements sustain the LIS professional community as an online CoP. Specifically, the objectives of this study are to explore (a) how librarians develop trust in peers and the wider community and (b) how

cooperation is enacted through practices such as knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and mutual support within this Malaysian professional network.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate the study within existing scholarship, the literature review examines prior research on librarians' professional use of social media, with particular attention to how social media affordances enable trust and cooperation. Affordance theory offers a useful framework for understanding how social media features enable trust and cooperation within professional communities. Core affordances such as visibility, persistence, association, and editability shape how members share, verify, and co-construct information. Visibility promotes accountability and transparency; encourages accurate contributions; ensures persistence continuity and reliability of shared knowledge; facilitates association relational bonds and trust networks; and reflects editability cooperative intent through refinement of shared content. Prior studies (Treem & Leonardi, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013) suggest that these affordances collectively foster social trust and collaborative behaviour, yet their operation within professional settings such as librarianship remains underexplored.

Trust

Trust emerges as a central construct in understanding how online professional communities' function, influencing members' willingness to share information, seek advice, and engage in collective learning. In digital environments, where physical cues are absent, trust enables members to perceive shared information as credible and reliable. Early studies have shown that trust reduces uncertainty and builds confidence in knowledge sharing behaviours (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Ridings et al., 2002). Within professional communities, trust fosters openness, encourages disclosure of experiences, and mitigate the risks of misinformation. In librarianship, trust is particularly significant, given the professional responsibility to provide accurate and authoritative information. While studies on trust in librarians' online networks remain limited (Kazmer, 2006; Islam & Tsuji, 2016; Magoi et al., 2020), evidence from other professional fields suggests that communities with higher trust levels were more sustained in engagement and had stronger collaborative outcomes (Wenger, 1998; Ardichvili, 2008).

Recent scholarship has further demonstrated that trust plays as a mediating role in sustaining members' continuous knowledge sharing. The study has found trust that derived from emotional bonds and shared identity has significantly strengthened the members' willingness to remain as active contributors in online communities (Hashim & Tan, 2015). Their study also revealed that trust enhances effective commitment. Thereby, it fosters long-term relational exchanges and reducing the likelihood of disengagement. This has positioned trust not only as a facilitator of credibility, but also as a critical mechanism in sustaining collaborative participation over time.

Furthermore, Yang et al. (2017) highlighted the role of perceived community support in shaping commitment, while revealing nuanced differences between posters and lurkers. Active contributors were strongly influenced by communication support, whereas lurkers were more responsive to recognition of contributions and freedom of expression. Importantly, trust amplified the positive effect of freedom of expression on lurkers' commitment, even passive members rely on trust as a psychological condition for sustaining their membership. These findings underscore that trust functions differently across participation modes, but in all cases, it remains indispensable for long-term engagement.

Complementing the perspectives, Galehbakhtiari & Hasangholi Pouryasouri (2015) identified trust as one of the strongest motivational paths toward online community participation through a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Their analysis showed that trust is shaped by perceptions of community popularity, security, privacy policies, and the quality of knowledge exchanged. Trust also interacts within a sense of belonging and relationship building, which creates a reinforcing cycle that sustains engagement and identity formation within the community. Conversely, infrastructural barriers such as weak connectivity or threats to privacy were found to erode trust, thereby weakening motivation to participate. These insights highlight the centrality of trust not only as a relational condition but also as a structural and experiential factor in shaping members' willingness to be engaged in online CoPs.

Further extending the body of work, Liang et al. (2019) examined trust through the lens of dual process theories and demonstrated the central determinant of individuals' behavioural intentions in online platforms. They distinguished between cognition and affect-based trust finding, that performance-related cues such as information quality, perceived ability, and reputation exerted stronger effects than affective determinants. Therefore, ability emerged as the most influential factor shaping trust, followed by information quality. Their findings suggest that trust is not a uniform construct but one whose antecedents and impact vary, depending on situational conditions.

In addition, Cardoso et al. (2022) confirmed a strong causal link between trust, loyalty, and perceived brand value. Their structural equation model showed that trust directly fosters loyalty, which in turn strengthens long-term relational bonds. Trust not only reduces transactional costs, but it also enhances commitment, which leads to sustaining the consumer engagement. These results affirm that trust serves as the cornerstone of loyalty, reinforcing members' willingness to maintain active and durable relationships within communities of practice.

Cooperation and knowledge sharing

Cooperation has long been recognised as a fundamental driver of knowledge sharing in communities of practice. Within digital contexts, cooperation enables professionals to collectively address problems, pool expertise, and engage in co-creation processes that exceed the capacities of individual members (Kazmer, 2006; Fang & Chiu, 2010; Islam & Tsuji, 2016; Qutab et al., 2022). Classic perspectives on knowledge sharing emphasise that both knowledge seeking and knowledge contribution are necessary for effective learning exchanges (Kazmer, 2006; Fang & Chiu, 2010; Islam & Tsuji, 2016; Qutab et al., 2022). The absence of either dimension renders the process incomplete, it is limiting the opportunities for mutual growth and innovation (Ahmed et al., 2019; Chang et al., 2013).

Tortora et al. (2021) has underscored the role of knowledge-based dynamic capabilities in sustaining cooperation for innovation. They demonstrated that knowledge acquisition capabilities, knowledge generation capabilities, and market-sensing capabilities are central to digital innovation outcomes. Among these, knowledge acquisition from external partners was found to be most influential, highlighting the importance of cooperation across organisational and community boundaries. The study further confirmed the moderating role of social media, which amplified the relationship between these knowledge capabilities and digital innovation by facilitating co-creation, collaboration, and the rapid circulation of ideas. These findings reinforce the argument that cooperation and external knowledge flows are critical conditions for sustaining innovation in fast-changing digital environments.

Meanwhile, Wang & Beh (2025) examined the paradoxical effects of social media on cooperation and knowledge sharing through a Yin and Yang lens. Their study revealed that while social media promotes collaboration and knowledge-sharing behaviours that improve performance, it also induces technostress which can undermine engagement. Importantly, they found that *guanxi*, a relational construct rooted in trust, reciprocity, and emotion, positively moderated the relationship between social media use and both knowledge-seeking and knowledge-contributing behaviours. This suggests that cooperation is not merely a functional process of information exchange, but one embedded in relational dynamics that either strengthen or weaken collaborative practices. Their findings underscore the necessity of balancing the enabling and constraining effects of social media to optimise cooperative knowledge sharing.

Complementary evidence from research on digital innovation emphasises that dynamic capabilities are inherently cooperative in nature. Tortora et al. (2021) argued that firms' preparedness for digital transformation depends on their ability to integrate knowledge from both internal and external sources. They identified knowledge generation, acquisition, and market sensing as critical sub-capabilities that support innovation, with social media functioning as a powerful tool for extending these processes. Social media platforms foster relational changes that enhance knowledge flows, connect diverse stakeholders, and enable collaborative problem-solving and value creation. These insights affirm that cooperation in digital communities is inseparable from knowledge sharing and is deeply interwoven with both technological affordances and strategic relational practices.

These perspectives suggest that cooperation and knowledge sharing are not linear exchanges, but dynamic. Multi-dimensional processes shaped by individual, relational, and structural factors. Cooperation could be sustained when members perceived value in contributing knowledge, when relational bonds provide psychological safety, and when technological platforms amplify collaboration rather than constrain it. In online CoPs such as librarians' networks, these dynamics are especially pertinent, as professional cooperation is both a prerequisite for addressing information needs and a mechanism for building collective knowledge.

Context of the study

Building on prior research that highlights social media's role in professional learning and collaboration, this study examines how these dynamics unfold in the Malaysian context. Focusing on *Sembang Pustakawan*, a Facebook group comprising over 10,600 Malaysian Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals (Sembang Pustakawan, n.d.), it explores the role of trust and cooperation in sustaining professional online CoPs. This study addresses a crucial gap in the literature by examining how credibility is established and collaborative practices are enacted within online professional groups in the LIS field. The group was selected as the case study because it is one of the largest and most active online communities of Malaysian LIS professionals, providing a rich context for examining how digital platforms facilitate knowledge exchange, collegial support, and professional development. Although this study did not initially consider *Sembang Pustakawan* as a CoP, its evolution and dynamics closely reflect the defining elements of a CoP (community, domain, and practice), as noted by Archer et al. (2021). The group demonstrates a shared domain of librarianship, a keen sense of community, and a collective practice sustained through ongoing interaction and mutual learning. Members' pre-existing professional relationships have fostered trust, enabling open discussion, knowledge exchange, and the co-construction of professional understanding within an informal yet purposeful setting.

The term “*Sembang*” in Malay, which means “casual conversation” or “chat”, aptly reflects the group’s identity as an informal yet professional space for knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration among Malaysian LIS professionals. Serving as a dynamic forum for exchanging ideas, sharing resources, and discussing pressing professional issues, the group fosters continuous learning, collegial support, and informal professional development among LIS professionals who share common concerns, challenges, and professional interests. Through this platform, members actively post and share information, and through ongoing interactions, they collectively expand their knowledge and expertise within their field (Arshad et al., 2023). In this context, the study seeks to understand how trust is built and maintained among Malaysian LIS professionals in the *Sembang Pustakawan* community and to explore how cooperation is enacted to sustain ongoing professional support.

As part of a larger study on social media affordances and the formation of an LIS professionals’ CoP¹, this paper specifically asks: (a) How do Malaysian LIS professionals establish and sustain trust in the *Sembang Pustakawan* online community of practice? (b) In what ways do LIS professionals engage in cooperation to share knowledge and solve professional challenges within the community? Addressing these questions provides valuable insights into how digital platforms strengthen professional practice in librarianship and advance the broader discourse on social media-enabled CoPs.

METHODS

This study is guided by the premise that community-engaged research must align with the values and goals of the community being studied (Eysenbach & Till, 2001; Probst & Borzillo, 2008), a principle that is particularly crucial in the context of a virtual CoP characterised by shared practice and mutual engagement (Wenger et al., 2002). Therefore, the research design was formulated to reflect the collaborative, professional ethos of the *Sembang Pustakawan*. As trust and cooperation underpin interactions in this online professional community, a mixed-methods design was used to capture a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics within the group. A qualitative approach was first employed to capture members’ lived experiences and relational dynamics (Frechette et al., 2020; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). This was followed by a quantitative survey to gauge how widely these values are shared among the broader membership (Östlund et al., 2011; Morse, 2010). Integrating both approaches not only strengthens the validity of findings but also responds to call for ethically grounded, context-sensitive inquiry into community-based knowledge practices.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 purposively selected, active members of the group (Table 1). The sampling strategy aimed to capture a diversity of perspectives by including professionals from academic, public, and special libraries, as well as LIS educators. To enrich the data with strategic insights, the recruitment targeted senior professionals, including chief librarians, who had been influential long-term participants. Their agreement to participate can be plausibly attributed to a strong sense of commitment to the professional community, a desire to formally articulate the group’s value, and the perceived low burden of discussing a familiar and personally relevant topic. The final group of

¹ The work constitutes a component of a doctoral study conducted by the first author. Portions of the text may resemble the original text from the unpublished PhD thesis which is written in Malay (Bahasa Melayu) and bears the translated title: “*Social media affordances of Facebook for supporting librarians’ online engagement and information needs within a Community of Practice*”.

participants was predominantly composed of senior academic librarians. This likely reflects *Sembang Pustakawan's* demographic composition, where academic librarians may form the largest and most active segment. Furthermore, institutional cultures in academia that formally encourage or permit participation in research activities, coupled with these individuals' personal investment in the community's success, provided both the opportunity and motivation for their involvement.

Pseudonyms are used throughout to ensure anonymity (Crow & Heath, 2008; Gerrard, 2020). The interviews explored participants' perceptions of how Facebook supported their information needs, collegial interactions, and professional identity. The interview guide included questions about how participants develop trust in other members, experiences of cooperation, and challenges encountered in maintaining collaborative interactions. Interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Google Meet, depending on participants' preferences, with each session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The interview transcripts were analysed thematically using Atlas.ti software to capture nuanced perspectives and provide illustrative quotes. Initial codes were generated inductively and later organized into broader themes reflecting key dimensions of trust and cooperation within the community.

Table 1: Demographic profile of *Sembang Pustakawan* interview participants

No	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Current / Last position	Library / Institution type	Years of experience
1	Gavin	Male	64	Chief Librarian (retired)	Special Library	30
2	Ava	Female	53	Chief librarian	Academic (public)	25
3	Adam	Male	40	Senior librarian	Academic (public)	20
4	Sophie	Female	48	Chief librarian	College (private)	20
5	Ivan	Male	43	Senior librarian	Academic (public)	17
6	Yale	Male	50	Chief librarian	Academic (private)	24
7	Andrew	Male	47	Senior librarian	Academic (public)	20
8	Eliza	Female	68	Chief librarian (retired)	Academic (public)	30
9	Alex	Male	45	Senior librarian	Academic (public)	20
10	Daniel	Male	72	LIS educator (retired)	University (public)	25

For the survey, purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who were active members of *Sembang Pustakawan* (Campbell et al., 2021; Frechette et al., 2020), a key online community for Malaysian Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals. The survey targeted the group's approximately 10,600 members as an accessible population of active practitioners. The online questionnaire, distributed via Google Forms, yielded 174 valid responses from individuals currently practicing, teaching, or studying in the LIS field. This constitutes a response rate of 1.64%, resulting in a self-selected cohort of engaged community members. While not a statistically representative sample of the broader profession, this cohort provides valuable insights into the perceptions of active participants in this professional network. The instrument included demographic questions and a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 = 'Strongly Agree') designed to measure trust and cooperation across 23 closed-ended items (Rakowska et al., 2022).

The survey items were adapted from recent studies on trust and cooperation in online communities (Zhang et al., 2023), and the scale demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach’s alpha > 0.80). Responses were analysed using descriptive statistics in SPSS. The demographic profile of the survey respondents is summarized in Table 2. Because the survey was disseminated exclusively within Sembang Pustakawan, a specialized professional community of practice, it is reasonable to infer that all respondents, including students and lecturers, have a direct professional or academic affiliation with the LIS field, and that all data were self-reported. Table 2 reflects this diverse composition across various library sectors, professional roles, age, and educational level.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaya, the authors' affiliated institution. Participation in the survey and interviews was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The study also complied with Facebook’s terms of service and Sembang Pustakawan's community guidelines. To ensure confidentiality, personal identifiers were removed, and anonymised data from the group were analysed solely for research purposes. All data were securely stored on password-protected devices with access restricted to the research team.

Table 2: Demographic profile of *Sembang Pustakawan* survey respondents

Variable	Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	64	36.78%
	Female	107	61.49%
	No mention	3	1.72%
Job position	Librarian	105	60.34%
	Non-practising Librarian	21	12.07%
	Paraprofessional Librarian	14	8.04%
	Chief Librarian	11	6.32%
	LIS academic	8	4.60%
	LIS allied professional (e.g. archivist)	2	1.15%
	Retired Librarian/PPM member	6	3.45%
	LIS continuing student	5	2.87%
	Teacher/Teacher Librarian	2	1.15%
Education	Diploma	3	1.72%
	Bachelor’s Degree	70	40.23%
	Master’s Degree	86	49.43%
	PhD	12	6.90%
Age	No mention	3	1.72%
	20-29 years	17	9.77%
	30-39 years	58	33.33%
	40-49 years	71	40.80%
	50-59 years	21	12.07%
	60-69	5	2.87%
	Prefer not to state	2	1.15%

Source: Author’s survey data (2024)

RESULTS

This section presents the findings on trust and cooperation within Sembang Pustakawan. It begins with qualitative insights drawn from interviews, which illuminate the mechanisms through which trust and cooperation are developed and sustained. This is followed by survey results that indicate how widely these patterns are shared across the broader community.

Qualitative insights: The mechanism of trust and cooperation

i) Demonstrated expertise as the foundation of trust

The qualitative data revealed that trust within *Sembang Pustakawan* is not a given but is actively earned and validated through observable actions by members. A primary mechanism is the consistent demonstration of expertise, which provides a robust foundation for perceived credibility. In terms of establishing credibility, analysis of the interviews indicates that a member's credibility develops organically over time, based on the sustained quality, accuracy, and depth of their contributions. In contrast to formal settings, members valued practical help over job titles or institutional positions, often trusting those who consistently shared expert advice. "All the information shared in *Sembang Pustakawan* is trustworthy. In my personal opinion, all the content posted in the group is reliable." (Sophie). This reliance on the group's credibility is also reflected in members' direct information-seeking behaviour. As Adam noted, "I personally searched for information in the group and received answers" (Adam).

Reflecting this cultivated trust, a member's reliability is established organically over time through the sustained quality and accuracy of their contributions. This cultivated trust directly enables the platform's dual role, facilitating both practical problem-solving and social recognition. For instance, a member relies on this peer-validated expertise, noting: "Whenever I face uncertainties about copyright or repository policies, I find it faster to ask here than wait for formal channels" (Ivan). This statement highlights a collective preference for peer knowledge over slower institutional pathways. Furthermore, this credibility strengthens the community's social dynamics, fostering professional validation and networking. Another member explains: "When someone tags me in a post, it makes me feel recognized for my expertise, and I also discover new contacts in the profession" (Ava). Together, these experiences show how earned credibility allows the CoP to function simultaneously as an efficient support system and a dynamic space for professional belonging.

Building on these social dynamics, beyond knowledge-seeking and social recognition, this trust is also reflected in members' willingness to rely on the shared information for actual professional practice. This is evident in Andrew's reflection: "So far, the information shared in the group is indeed trustworthy, and I am confident about that. This is because most discussions in the group are actually followed and adopted by members" (Andrew). This statement demonstrates that trust within the community extends beyond subjective perception and directly influences professional action. The reliance on group discussions as a basis for decision-making indicates that *Sembang Pustakawan* functions not only as a site of information exchange but also as a legitimised reference space that shapes everyday professional practices among its members.

Furthermore, Several participants emphasised how the presence and contributions of recognised experts reinforce the community's culture of trust and professional generosity. Sophie reflected on the value of expert participation in building trust within the group: "I've learned a lot from the experts in *Sembang Pustakawan*, like Mr F and Mrs Eliza. When they share something, it gives us confidence because we know they are experienced and knowledgeable in the field." (Sophie). Her comment illustrates how credibility and expertise help sustain meaningful knowledge exchange in the community. Echoing this, Eliza, an experienced retired academic librarian still active in the group, described her motivation to contribute: "My motivation is really to share knowledge. Sometimes I respond to others' questions, and other times I post about seminars, the SDGs, or IFLA because I feel these

things are useful for the community.” (Eliza). Such contributions reinforce the culture of reciprocity and professional generosity that underpins trust within *Sembang Pustakawan*.

Finally, Yale underscored how professional expertise contributes to the group’s credibility: “If I see a post with incorrect information, like about a place or a library system, I’ll correct it so that other members won’t be confused and to maintain the group’s credibility.”

(Yale). His response demonstrates how knowledgeable members use their expertise to ensure accuracy, reinforcing the group’s role as a reliable and trusted professional space. It also demonstrates how the community actively self-corrects, drawing on members’ expertise to uphold accuracy and trust in shared information.

Collectively, these accounts illustrate that trust in *Sembang Pustakawan* is actively constructed and maintained through demonstrated expertise, consistent contribution, and a shared commitment to accuracy - qualities that position the community as a credible and reliable professional space.

ii) Enacting a system of cooperation and support

While trust forms the foundation of engagement, cooperation represents its active expression within the community. This subsection examines how members enact cooperation and mutual support through their interactions. Within *Sembang Pustakawan*, cooperation and professional support are most visibly expressed through active knowledge sharing. This dynamic transforms the group into a form of continuous, peer-led professional development. As Sophie explained, the forum bridges the gap between formal training and practice: “It’s like an ongoing professional course, but more practical and immediate.” She further added that this practical, real-time access extends to professional opportunities: “Through the group, I discovered webinars and training that I wouldn’t have known about otherwise”(Sophie).

Members treat the exchange of information and resources as a collective responsibility that benefits the entire community. As Gavin, an active member who often serves as an informal mentor to others shared, “Whenever someone asks a question, you can see several others quickly jump in with solutions, examples, or even documents to help”. This reflects how acts of sharing embody both cooperation and support, transforming individual expertise into a common good that sustains the library professional community.

Beyond responding to immediate queries, members also proactively create opportunities for collaborative learning and professional growth. The exchanges within *Sembang Pustakawan* illustrate how members actively create opportunities for collaborative learning and professional growth. For example, Alex’s contribution: “I like sharing articles, sometimes from newspapers and sometimes from journals, so that others can use them as references for their work - reflects the group’s role in facilitating access to professional resources and sustaining continuous learning”. And Gavin’s comment – “Sometimes I deliberately post provocative questions to get others to discuss, so we can share our views and learn together” – demonstrates how dialogue is intentionally stimulated to encourage collective reflection and peer learning. Similarly, Ava highlighted the inter-generational support embedded in the community: The senior members in this group often share guidance for the younger ones, such as interview tips or advice on how to answer panel questions. Such mentorship practices show how the group functions as an informal learning space that bridges experience gaps among librarians. Together, these accounts reveal a cooperative ecosystem in which members contribute in diverse ways - through information sharing,

dialogue, and mentorship - to enhance collective professional competence and strengthen the community's knowledge base.

Quantitative confirmation: Prevalence of trust and cooperation

Survey findings indicate high levels of perceived trust and cooperation within the *Sembang Pustakawan* community. Respondents expressed strong confidence in the reliability and credibility of information shared within the group, with the statement “I trust the information shared in Sembang Pustakawan to be accurate and useful” receiving a mean score of 3.92 (*SD* = 0.65), indicating that most participants perceived the group as a dependable professional resource. Similarly, the statement “Members in the group are open and respectful in their communication” recorded a mean score of 4.05 (*SD* = 0.72), reflecting a shared sense of openness and mutual respect that underpins trust in the community.

Cooperation-related items showed even higher agreement, reflecting a robust culture of mutual assistance. The statement “Members are willing to help each other by responding to queries or requests” achieved a mean score of 4.20 (*SD* = 0.61), while “I often benefit from resources and support shared by others in the group” recorded a mean score of 4.15 (*SD* = 0.70). Together, these findings indicate that members perceive *Sembang Pustakawan* as a highly cooperative and trustworthy environment that promotes resource sharing, collective problem-solving, and sustained collegial engagement.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for items related to trust and cooperation, underscoring the group’s strong interpersonal and professional dynamics. These patterns reflect how Facebook’s affordance of association enables members to form and sustain professional connections based on shared expertise and mutual respect. Through visible interactions, tagging, and comments, librarians identify trusted peers, reinforce social bonds, and collectively uphold the credibility and cooperative spirit that define the *Sembang Pustakawan* community.

Table 3: Trust and cooperation indicators in *Sembang Pustakawan* (N = 174)

Construct	Survey Item	M	SD
Trust	I trust the information shared in Sembang Pustakawan to be accurate and useful.	3.92	0.65
	Members in the group are open and respectful in their communication.	4.05	0.72
Cooperation	Members are willing to help each other by responding to queries or requests.	4.20	0.61
	I often benefit from resources and support shared by others in the group.	4.15	0.70

Note. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

While the survey findings indicate strong overall trust and cooperation, the qualitative data reveal that these dynamics are not without vulnerability. The following subsection examines the challenges that occasionally weaken engagement within the community.

Fragility in sustaining trust and cooperation engagement

The interview data revealed several challenges in sustaining trust and cooperation within the *Sembang Pustakawan* community. Although participants generally perceived the group as collegial and supportive, several noted factors that occasionally weakened engagement. Some expressed hesitation to interact unless they were familiar with the contributor,

highlighting how professional credibility influences online participation. As Andrew explained: "Sometimes I hesitate to reply to a post unless it comes from someone I already know in the profession" (Andrew).

This sense of uncertainty is further reinforced by the cautious perspective of Daniel, the most senior member of the group, on the group's information trustworthiness. He noted that he was "not in a position to decide" whether the information shared in *Sembang Pustakawan* could always be trusted, as he had "no way of checking its validity" (Daniel). He defined trusted information as that which is "valid and accurate," yet acknowledged the difficulty of verifying such qualities in an open online environment. This highlights how the absence of formal verification mechanisms can weaken sustained trust, even within a generally supportive professional community.

Sophie reflected on her limited engagement, noting: "My library is small and resources are limited, so I tend to be more of a 'silent learner' who reads but rarely comments" (Sophie). Her words highlight the coexistence of different engagement styles, where active contributors and observational learners both play integral, if different, roles in the community's knowledge ecosystem. Ivan's experience, however, illustrates a barrier to sustained contribution: "Not everyone responds to posts; sometimes people just read without commenting or liking. It can be a bit discouraging and makes you lose the motivation to share again" (Ivan). His statement reveals how a lack of visible engagement can lead to contributor fatigue - a diminished motivation to share when contributions go unacknowledged. This highlights the delicate balance between active contribution and passive consumption that online CoP must manage.

Challenges to the community's cohesion originated not only from within but also from external sources. One significant challenge was the presence of commercial entities. As Ava noted: "When vendors or publishers join the group, some people feel hesitant to comment because they are afraid it might seem biased or raise commercial issues" (Ava). This suggests that their presence can inadvertently stifle open dialogue due to perceived conflicts of interest. Another challenge, noted by Andrew, was content irrelevance: "In the past, this group had many irrelevant posts, and some people shared things like food, which made it difficult to stay focused on professional discussions" (Andrew). This shows that off-topic posts can distract from the group's primary purpose as a dedicated professional forum.

These recollections highlight the importance of clear community guidelines to preserve *Sembang Pustakawan*'s professional purpose. Taken together, these accounts reveal the fragility of sustaining trust and cooperation in online professional communities, particularly when participation is uneven, motivations differ, or discussions drift from professional purposes. These challenges underscore the need for proactive community management to preserve the collegial environment that members value.

DISCUSSIONS

The integration of survey and interview findings revealed a consistent pattern of strong trust and cooperation within *Sembang Pustakawan*. The survey demonstrated a high overall level of mutual confidence among members, while the interviews provided deeper insight into the mechanisms that sustain these perceptions through both interpersonal and platform-mediated channels. Within this Malaysian LIS CoP, trust developed through repeated interactions with reliable contributors and respectful communication, whereas cooperation was expressed through active problem-solving, resource sharing, and collective support.

While the nominal survey response rate was 1.64% ($n=174$ of $N=10,600$), this figure aligns with established participation patterns in online communities. Empirical research on digital networks has consistently shown that a very small proportion of members are responsible for the majority of activity, a pattern quantified as the 1% rule (Nielsen, 2006; van Mierlo, 2014). Applying this benchmark to the Sembang Pustakawan community (with $\sim 10,600$ members) suggests a theoretically active core of approximately 106 users. The 174 survey respondents likely capture and exceed this estimated core of active members. This deviation from the generalized rule is instructive. It suggests that while the 1% principle is a valid heuristic for content creation, the active, survey-engaged population within this specific professional network may be broader than the 1% benchmark suggests. Consequently, the findings provide robust and meaningful insights into the perceptions of the invested practitioners within this key online professional community.

The findings reveal that trust is a crucial enabler of meaningful participation in online Communities of Practice, consistent with earlier work by Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) and Ridings et al. (2002), who posited that trust reduces uncertainty and fosters engagement in virtual environments. Recent research reinforces this, showing that successful online communities thrive on high levels of trust in user-generated contributions, which in turn promotes increased engagement, knowledge adoption, and knowledge contribution (Connolly et al., 2023).

In the Sembang Pustakawan context, trust was shaped by both interpersonal relationships, particularly familiarity with consistent contributors, and by the platform's affordances, which enhanced visibility and accountability in interactions. Members utilized these cues to assess the accuracy of shared information and to decide on participation, with survey findings indicating high mean trust scores that reinforce Sembang Pustakawan's perception as a reliable and professionally grounded environment. The importance of platform design in facilitating communication and the delivery of truthful information, thereby sustaining online participation, is also increasingly recognized in contexts like Malaysian social movements (Ngu, 2024).

These findings align with Ardichvili's (2008) extensive review, which found trust to be essential for sustaining engagement in multinational knowledge-sharing communities. While cross-cultural studies often note that trust can be challenged by language barriers and differing communication norms, the Malaysian context reveals trust as a form of professional solidarity among librarians who share similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This shared context appears to reduce common barriers to trust formation and reinforces the community's capacity for open dialogue and cooperation, offering a contextual interpretation of Wenger's concept of mutual engagement by demonstrating how trust develops differently across varying cultural and professional contexts.

While trust creates the foundation for community engagement, it is through cooperation that this trust becomes professionally productive. Cooperation within Sembang Pustakawan was evident through collaborative problem-solving, mentoring, and resource sharing—practices that reinforce its function as a driver of professional sustainability. Recent scholarship confirms that self-organizing communities of practice foster continuous development and knowledge exchange through mutual support and shared experiences (Cojorn & Sonsupap, 2024). These communities thrive on the intrinsic motivation of members, particularly when engagement is perceived as self-determined and driven by free choice and autonomy (Nohutlu et al., 2023).

Comparable patterns have been observed internationally. Panahi et al. (2012) found that cooperation in online communities fosters innovation within corporate knowledge networks, while Ardichvili et al. showed that cooperative behaviour is crucial for overcoming cultural barriers in multinational organisations, particularly when knowledge is viewed as a public good that benefits the entire community. In contrast to these organisational settings, the cooperative practices in *Sembang Pustakawan* are notable for their grassroots and voluntary nature. Participation is not shaped by institutional directives or organisational incentives; rather, it arises from a shared professional identity and intrinsic motivation among Malaysian LIS professionals. This bottom-up cooperation underscores the community's capacity to self-organize and operate independently of external instructions (Gu et al., 2022), supporting peers and sustaining collective learning beyond formal institutional structures. This exemplifies Wenger's (1998) concept of joint enterprise, where cooperation is driven less by organizational goals and more by collective commitment to the values and advancement of the LIS profession.

The study demonstrates that social media affordances, particularly visibility, persistence, association, and editability (Treem & Leonardi, 2012), critically shape how trust and cooperation develop within *Sembang Pustakawan*. The trust and cooperation observed do not emerge in a vacuum but are instead profoundly influenced by the technological environment in which the community operates. Specifically, these affordances make members' contributions transparent, maintain the continuity of discussions, and strengthen relational ties, thereby creating the conditions for trust to form and for cooperative behaviours to flourish.

Recent research emphasizes that while online platforms facilitate interaction, the intentional management of visibility, especially in more bounded social media spaces like private groups, is crucial for fostering trust among known audiences and ensuring that content remains within the community (Malhotra, 2024). International research similarly highlights the importance of these affordances across diverse organisational settings: Majchrzak et al. (2013) found that visibility enhances accountability in enterprise social media, while Leonardi (2014) showed that association supports boundary-spanning collaboration in global teams.

Despite extensive scholarship, Peeters and Pretorius (2020) argued that research remains inconclusive on how a sense of community emerges in virtual CoPs and how this influences interaction and learning. They observed that participation in Facebook-based virtual CoPs often revolves around a few highly active individuals, resulting in uneven collaborative dialogue. Comparable dynamics also appeared in *Sembang Pustakawan*, although key figures tended to act as mentors who cultivate engagement rather than dominate conversations. This mentoring orientation may itself reinforce trust, as members perceive these active contributors as invested in collective professional growth rather than personal visibility or status. Such behaviour signals reliability and goodwill that Mayer et al. (1995) identified as foundational to trustworthiness in workplace contexts.

What further distinguishes *Sembang Pustakawan* is its dual function as both a professional network and an informal social space. This Malaysian LIS virtual CoP blends formal knowledge exchange with everyday social interaction, effectively leveraging social media features to balance community objectives and privacy, thereby reinforcing trust and sustaining cooperation (Ngu, 2024). This suggests that social media affordances operate not only as technical features but also as cultural mechanisms that shape the depth and

resilience of online professional communities, particularly in non-Western contexts, influencing how social relations and senses of self are defined (Pedersen, 2023).

However, the very openness that enables this dual function also introduces vulnerabilities. The findings revealed the fragility of these dynamics, showing that trust can be weakened by misinformation and that cooperation may be constrained by unequal participation among members and by reliance on a small group of active contributors. For instance, the prevalence of fake news and the need for communities to actively manage information flow and validate sources can significantly impact trust, even within contexts like Malaysian social movements (Ngu, 2024).

In cross-cultural studies, trust is often threatened by language barriers and differing norms (Ardichvili, 2008). However, in *Sembang Pustakawan*, the challenges are less about cultural diversity and more about ensuring equitable participation among members. The reluctance of newer members to contribute mirrors patterns observed in European and North American online communities, where "lurkers" constitute a substantial proportion of participants (Nonnecke & Preece, 2001). While these "lurkers" can still benefit from community resources without actively contributing, the importance of intentional participation choices and fostering confidence in newcomers to increase engagement is increasingly recognized (Bolger et al., 2025; Rosen & Kelly, 2023). Additionally, these concerns align with studies showing that individual motivations and social capital strongly shape knowledge contribution in online networks, with members more likely to participate when doing so enhances their reputation or visibility (Ridings et al., 2002; Wasko & Faraj, 2000). This pattern underscores the importance of proactive moderation and deliberate strategies to broaden participation in online CoPs, ensuring that trust and cooperation are not concentrated among a select few.

Despite this fragility, the study highlights the significant potential of Facebook to support professional development through a virtual CoP, particularly in contexts where institutional infrastructure or training opportunities may be limited (Luo & Hostetler, 2020). Indeed, studies show that in regions with scarce formal professional development, online platforms like Facebook can serve as pragmatic and accessible "extended staffrooms" for peer support and knowledge exchange (Le et al., 2024; Lund, 2023). In such environments, the affordances of Facebook can help bridge gaps in access, peer support, and collaborative learning, enabling virtual CoPs to function as vital complements to traditional professional development ecosystems.

However, cultural factors such as respect for hierarchy and seniority may further shape members' willingness to speak up, potentially limiting the depth of interaction and the distribution of cooperative effort. For instance, junior librarians may hesitate to challenge or build upon contributions from more experienced colleagues, preferring to observe rather than risk appearing presumptuous. This reticence, while culturally grounded, can inadvertently concentrate knowledge-sharing among senior members and limit the diversity of perspectives within discussions, a pattern observed in high power distance cultures where information flow is often constrained by hierarchy (Lei & Jin, 2025). Interestingly, in some high power distance societies, online platforms have been perceived as liberating, capable of equalizing status differences and encouraging critical discussions (Grothaus, 2022).

These findings illustrate how Wenger's dimensions of mutual engagement and joint enterprise manifest distinctively within *Sembang Pustakawan*, shaped by both the affordances of social media and the cultural norms of the Malaysian LIS profession. While a

shared repertoire of professional language, practices, and resources also emerged through members' interactions, it is the interplay of trust and cooperation that most visibly sustains this community's vitality. These dynamics reveal the need for culturally responsive strategies to strengthen inclusivity, reinforce trust, and sustain cooperative practices within the CoP. Specific approaches include mentorship programs, visible role-modelling by senior librarians, and explicit encouragement of novice participation. Proactive guidance and fostering a welcoming environment for newcomers are crucial to building confidence and increasing participation (Bolger et al., 2024; Pethig et al., 2025). Such strategies can help ensure that the benefits of trust and cooperation extend beyond a core group of active contributors to engage the broader community membership, thereby enhancing the sustainability and impact of this vital professional network.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides empirical evidence that trust and cooperation serve as foundational enablers of professional engagement within Malaysian online CoPs, offering a localised perspective that both aligns with and nuances international understandings of virtual CoPs. It demonstrates that trust constitutes the foundation of engagement within an online CoP, grounded in members' perceptions of credibility, reliability, and professional integrity. Cooperation is manifested through knowledge sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and mentoring, which together sustain a culture of collegiality and continuous professional development. The affordances of Facebook - particularly visibility, persistence, and association - strengthen these dynamics by enhancing transparency, continuity, and interpersonal connection.

Yet these enabling conditions are not without strain. The study also reveals tensions that affect the sustainability of trust and cooperation. Instances of misinformation, dominance of certain voices, and uneven participation occasionally challenge the group's cohesion. Some members adopt a more passive or "silent learner" stance, while others experience participation fatigue when reciprocity is limited. These two patterns may be mutually reinforcing: as active contributors experience fatigue from unreciprocated effort, their reduced participation may further discourage peripheral members from engaging, creating a cycle that threatens the community's long-term vitality. Despite these challenges, the community demonstrates a capacity for self-correction and collective accountability, as evidenced by members' willingness to address misinformation and encourage broader participation, thereby reinforcing its credibility and resilience. Collectively, these findings suggest that *Sembang Pustakawan* functions as a vibrant yet evolving online CoP of Malaysian LIS professionals - one that thrives on mutual trust and cooperation but must continually negotiate the complexities of engagement inherent in digital professional spaces.

These findings carry practical significance for the LIS profession. The implications of this study indicate that online professional networks can complement formal institutional learning environments by supporting peer learning, reflective practice, and informal mentoring. For LIS educators and professional associations, recognising and engaging with such online CoPs offers a pathway to cultivate professional growth, collaborative resilience, and a sense of shared professional identity in the digital era. Specifically, professional bodies could leverage such platforms to extend mentorship programmes, disseminate emerging practices, and foster cross-institutional dialogue that transcends geographical and organisational boundaries.

The study's findings should be considered in light of several limitations. First, the use of purposive sampling from a single online community and the resultant self-selected sample means the results are not statistically generalizable to the entire population of Malaysian LIS professionals. Second, the low nominal response rate (1.64%) introduces the potential for non-response bias. This pattern, however, aligns with the widely recognized phenomenon of participation inequality in large online communities. Research consistently shows that in such groups, a small minority of users generates most of the content, often described by the 90-9-1 rule: 90% of users are lurkers, 9% contribute occasionally, and 1% account for most contributions (Nielsen, 2006). This principle has been empirically validated across various digital communities (van Mierlo, 2014). Some analyses suggest that engagement in branded or actively managed communities can be higher (McNair, 2020), but the underlying pattern of a highly active core persists. Therefore, our 174 respondents likely represent this invested, digitally active minority within the Sembang Pustakawan network. Consequently, their perceptions may not reflect those of the less active majority or professionals outside this specific forum. Future research could employ stratified sampling across multiple platforms and associations to achieve a more representative sample of the field.

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AUTHOR DECLARATION

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper. One of the authors serves as an honorary editor for this journal. To avoid conflicts of interest, this author was not involved in the review or acceptance process of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: [all authors], Methodology: [all authors], Formal analysis and investigation: A.Azizan], Writing - original draft preparation: [A.Azizan; A.Abrizah]; Writing - review and editing: [all authors]

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