

TEACHING ABOUT THE INTERNET

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Amidst the excitement of the Internet and the World Wide Web in 1996, a study was undertaken in conjunction with the introduction of Internet content in two marketing courses. Two measures were taken in fall 1996 and one in fall 1997. The study attempted to measure the effects of teaching about the Internet and compare those effects to what happens to students over time.

The question addressed in the study was "can an instructor's lectures and assignments make a significant improvement in students' knowledge and attitudes about a topic like the Internet."

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was handed out on the first day of classes in September 1996. A total of 142 business students responded to factual questions about the Internet and to attitudinal questions about its value to them plus some questions about their computer usage. About three hours of lecture time and two short homework assignments were devoted to the Internet during the semester. At the end of the semester the same questionnaire was administered to the same classes to see if the students' knowledge had increased and to see if there had been any attitudinal shifts. The identical questionnaire was again administered to a different but similar population of students ($n = 95$) at the beginning of the fall semester, 1997, to see if changes had occurred due to the passage of time.

The students were in either an introductory marketing class or a marketing research class, both undergraduate.

FINDINGS

As an example of a factual or knowledge question, the students were asked if the statement that "the World Wide Web is 15 years old but became popular only in the last 3 or 4 years because of very fast personal computers and modems" was true or false. At the beginning of fall 1996, 57 percent were correct compared to 78 percent correct at the end of the fall semester ($p=.001$). The percentage correctly answering false in September 1997 was 73

(Sept 96 to Sept 97, $p=.01$)

An example of an attitudinal question was "Spending hours on the Internet is really only for computer techies since there is nothing useful on it for me." The scale was a standard five point Likert scale. The *strongly disagree* category proportion for the whole group did not change during the fall semester but an increase from 47 percent in September 1996 to 60 percent in September 1997 was statistically significant ($p=.025$).

Also, a significantly higher proportion of females strongly disagreed with the statement at the end of the fall semester compared to the beginning of the semester, 49 percent compared to 32 percent, ($p=.02$). This proportion moved up to 60 percent for the females in the September 1997 survey.

Students were asked "How many hours do you think we should spend in this course on discussion about the Internet?" The average number of hours in September 1996 was 5.9 but this fell to 4.5 hours in December 1996 and remained at 4.5 hours in September 1997. Consistently males wanted to spend more hours discussing the Internet. For example, in September 1997 the mean hours for males was 5.3 versus 3.8 for females. Several males wanted to spend 20 or more hours during the semester discussing the Internet!

CONCLUSIONS

One objective of this study was to look for evidence that the lectures and homework assignments regarding the Internet were effective at increasing the students' knowledge. The pre and post surveys provide this evidence. There were statistically significant increases in student knowledge according to the survey results. And the students were more inclined to feel that marketing students would benefit from the Internet at the end of the semester compared to the beginning of the semester

There is evidence that an instructor can have a significant effect on knowledge through the use of lectures and homework assignments although there is not much evidence that an instructor can affect attitudes during the semester.