STUDENT LEARNING PROCESS IN A REAL-WORLD TEAM PROJECT: AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY USING THE GOOGLE ONLINE MARKETING CHALLENGE

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Introduction

As markets become more globally competitive, a team-based work system has become popular in many organizations. In response to the team-based system, the paradigm has also shifted in academic environments and team-based practices. In general, this shift has become a mainstream experience in business classes, particularly in marketing classes. Team-based projects represent an innovative teaching method that offers students a chance to develop social skills, increase retention of knowledge, improve self-esteem, foster motivation and enhance the overall learning experience (Parr, 2007).

Despite these benefits such opportunities, team-based learning does not always generate positive outcomes. Furthermore, few research results explain the student learning process. In addition, most prior research has not addressed the topic from a theoretical perspective. The purpose of the study is to explore student learning approaches in a real-world team project (Google Online Marketing Challenge) environment.

Theoretical Foundation

To understand the student learning approach, the presage–process–product model (3Ps) of student learning (Biggs, 1978) will be modified. The model views students' perceptions of the learning and teaching context as the interaction between their previous experiences of learning and learning contexts (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999) and student characteristics and learning contexts affect students' perceptions of context, students' approach to learning, and further, students' learning outcomes.

In this study, a modified model using Prosser's (1999) model will be utilized to examine five constructs (See Figure 1): (1)student characteristics (previous experience, current understanding), (2) learning context (course design, teaching methods, assessment), (3) students' perceptions of the context (good teaching, clear goals), (4) students' approaches to learning (how they learn-e.g., deep/surface),and (5) students' learning outcomes (what they learn quantity/quality).

Google Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC)

The Google Online Marketing Challenge is a real-world project where students can experience and create online marketing campaigns using Google AdWords. To participate in the GOMC, each team needs to choose a real business and write a pre-campaign report. Once they have submitted a pre-campaign report, Google provides a $250 AdWords advertising budget to develop an AdWords campaign over three weeks. During the three weeks, students need to monitor the live campaign and adjust in order to improve the campaign. After launching a three week campaign, a post campaign report should be submitted to Google.

To judge all entries, first Google uses its Campaign Statistics Algorithm to examine entries over thirty variables, such as the number of impressions and online clicks on the client AdWords, the cost-per-click, keyword choices, budgeting for the three-week campaign, etc.   Second, Google employees manually review the 150 short-listed teams to trim down to 15 teams. Third, a Global Academic Judging Panel determines the top teams for five regions and global winners by assessing the written reports (Jansen et al., 2008).
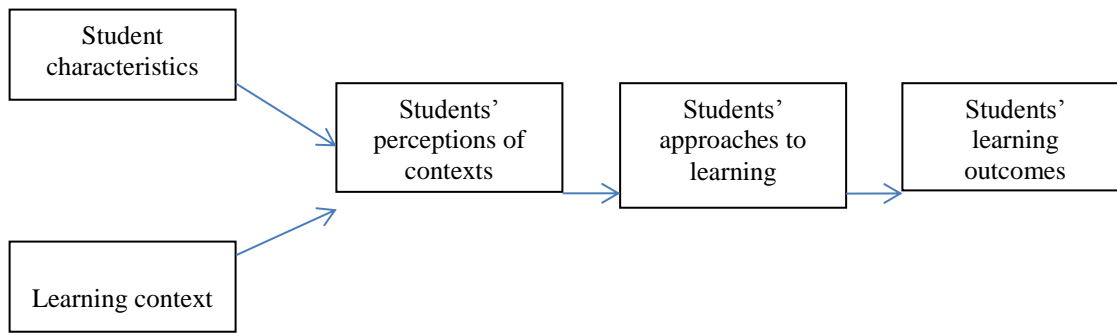
Figure 1: Students Learning Process (source: Prosser and Trigwell, 1999)

Google AdWords is an online advertising service that is placed on Google search engine site. Google's text advertisements are short, consisting of one headline of 25 characters, two additional text lines of displays for a particular search query. The choice and placement of the ads is based on various determinations including quality score. The click-through rate, relevancy and landing page are important items for maintaining and improving quality score. This in turn improves the overall ad rank. Also, advertisers need to find specific keywords they would like to use within their account in order for their ads to show up. Each time an ad is clicked, which was triggered by a keyword, a cost is incurred (cost-per-click). The cost and position are determined based on quality score and ad rank.

Table 1: Comments

Positive comments
"The GOMC provides a real-life experience which was extremely helpful to my learning and understanding of online marketing outside of the classroom. I really enjoyed participating in this project"
"I really enjoyed the GOMC because it really gave me an idea of what companies do in real life. I learned so much and really enjoyed the whole aspect of e-marketing."
"I thought using a real time campaign with real funds made the project challenging and more educational, especially with experience."
Negative and mixed comments
"GOMC was a pain to run and implement, if it was easier and better if we meet in class."
"I think the group project might have been too much for an online class. I think overall the GOMC competition would be a lot for any class. It requires a lot of time and a lot of coordination with group mates, which is difficult to do when there are other classes to worry about. It was a good learning experience and you do feel like you learn a lot after participating in it, but it was a bit overwhelming."

Pre-test Findings and Future Study

To examine students' perceptions toward GOMC, an undergraduate, online, E-marketing class in a college was selected. Twenty eight students registered for the class. Seven groups were formed and each group consisted of four students. For each team, a virtual discussion forum was created to discuss ideas. In addition, several group meetings were organized by the instructor and each group met in-person, especially during the campaign. After launching their

GOMC, 22 students participated in a short survey which included close-ended questions and an open-ended question.

The results explain that most students expressed excitement and enjoyment and felt they learned a lot. However, some negative comments were found which suggested the compatibility of the nature of the modality (online versus in-class). Students also mentioned that they encountered difficulties when they needed to discuss their project with each other. Although students were least positive about the prospect of repeating GOMC, they were most positive about using AdWords in the future to promote their own websites (Table 1 and Appendix).

For future study, a survey will be created based on the model in order to examine student learning approaches. To measure students' approaches to learning, the tendencies of students to adopt deep and surface and strategic approaches should be examined, which was developed by Ramsden and Entwistle (1979). Also, more data should be collected to generalize student perceptions toward real-world group project experience.

References

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Appendix

Perceptions toward course materials

	Strongly disagree←			→	Strongly agree			Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Instructor's materials for GOMC were helpful.	0	0	5%	5%	14%	27%	50%	6.1
GOMC website provides useful information.	0	0	9%	5%	14%	36%	36%	5.9
The 'Pre-Campaign Strategy' report was useful for planning our campaign.	0	0	5%	5%	23%	27%	41%	6.0
The "Pre -Campaign Strategy" report was useful for my learning.	0	0	5%	5%	14%	45%	32%	6.0
The "Post -Campaign Summary" report was useful for my learning.	0	0	9%	0	18%	36%	36%	5.9

Perceptions toward AdWords

	Strongly disagree←			→	Strongly agree			Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I was familiar with AdWords before participating in the GOMC.	45%	20%	0	5%	10%	5%	15%	2.9
I was enthusiastic when my professor told us about participating in the GOMC.	5%	5%	5%	20%	5%	10%	50%	5.5

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I enjoyed setting up our AdWords Campaign.	5%	5%	10%	5%	35%	5%	35%	5.2
I enjoyed monitoring our campaign results.	5%	10%	0	15%	20%	10%	40%	5.2
The AdWords interface was easy to use.	0	10%	10%	15%	20%	25%	20%	5.0

Learning motivation

	Strongly disagree←			→ Strongly agree				Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Compared to simulations, GOMC made me more deeply engaged in the project.	0	0	5%	19%	10%	29%	38%	5.8
The "real time" ability to monitor the AdWords account contributed positively to my involvement.	0	0	5%	5%	33%	14%	43%	5.9
Participating in the GOMC improved my understanding of online marketing.	0	0	14%	0	19%	10%	57%	6.0
The ability to spend "real money" contributed positively to my involvement.	0	0	10%	0	19%	24%	48%	6.0

Post campaign perceptions

	Strongly disagree←			→ Strongly agree				Average
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I would use AdWords if I had to promote a website	0	0	5%	5%	19%	14%	57%	6.1
I would recommend participating in the GOMC to friends.	0	0	5%	14%	19%	10%	52%	5.9
I would like to participate in the GOMC again	10%	0	14%	5%	19%	0	52%	5.3
Instructor should use GOMC in future class for group project.	0	10%	5%	14%	14%	10%	48%	5.5
I am pleased with my experience in the Challenge.	5%	0	5%	19%	5%	14%	52%	5.7