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Experiential Satisfaction with a Wholly Online Marketing Unit

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between students’ satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit, preference for online or face-to-face mode of teaching delivery and intent to major in marketing. The core undergraduate marketing unit was offered only in a wholly online mode, although many of the students had experienced traditional face-to-face classes in previous units. The sample was 112 undergraduate students. Findings indicated students’ preference for face-to-face mode of teaching delivery did not affect satisfaction with the marketing unit, but there was a significant relationship between unit satisfaction and students preference for online mode of teaching delivery. Mode of teaching delivery preferences suggested neither the online or face-to-face mode affected students’ choice in majoring in the marketing discipline, however, there was a significant relationship between student satisfaction and intent to major in marketing.

Introduction

Tertiary institutions are faced with the challenge of developing effective modes of teaching delivery (e.g. face-to-face and online) in order to meet the changing demands of a diverse and changing student population (Bickle and Carroll, 2003; Reisetter and Boris, 2004). The introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) into not only the traditional classroom setting, but as a stand alone mode of teaching delivery has transformed the landscape of tertiary education (Larreamendy and Leinhardt, 2006). However, the integration of ICT into the tertiary teaching environment has implications for student satisfaction with their learning experience (Baxter et al., 2003). According to Marks et al. (2005), “student satisfaction is likely to determine whether the student takes subsequent courses in this format, in the same program, or even within the same education provider” (p. 532).

Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine whether students’ preference for mode of teaching delivery (face-to-face vs. online) affects their satisfaction and subsequent intent to major in marketing. This study is in the context of a core undergraduate marketing unit offered at an Australian-based university. In order to address these issues, the literature pertaining to mode of teaching delivery, student satisfaction and choice of discipline major will be discussed in order to develop the hypotheses. This will be followed by an overview of the methodology, major findings and future research.

Literature Review

Mode of Teaching Delivery and Student Satisfaction

There has been increased interest in the literature relating to the most effective mode of teaching delivery (face-to-face, online or a hybrid mode - a combination of the former) to meet the needs and preferences of a changing tertiary student cohort (Reisetter and Boris, 2004). A number of studies have specifically addressed students’ overall satisfaction with the different modes of teaching delivery with paradoxical findings. Neuhauser (2002) and Diaz and Cartnal (1999) found no significant difference between online and face-to-face mode of teaching delivery with the
majority of students finding the course to be as effective or more effective than the traditional classroom teaching mode suggesting “[…] that equivalent learning activities can be equally effective for learning for online and FTF groups” (Neuhauser, 2002, p. 111). These findings were also supported by Reisetter and Boris (2004) who contrasted online and traditional mode of course delivery and found on the whole, students’ perception of the learning outcome was comparable across the different modes of delivery. However, others preferred the traditional mode of face-to-face delivery, especially in the case where the subject material was perceived as being complex and difficult (Reisetter and Boris, 2004). Summers et al. (2005) appear to support Reisetter and Boris’s (2004) findings in relation to complexity of subject material. In the context of a statistics class, Summers et al. (2005) found students preferred the traditional face-to-face mode of delivery. Students in the ‘web class’ were less satisfied with instructor enthusiasm and explanations, instructor approachability and interaction, the quality of the class discussions and feedback on completed tasks.

However, Roach et al. (1993) found the use of ICT lead to increased student participation in terms of effective team building, participation levels and enhanced student satisfaction. Swan’s (2001) findings indicated increased satisfaction and beneficial learning outcomes were influenced by clarity and consistency across course structure, interaction with teaching staff, constructive feedback and proactive and dynamic peer discussion. Eom et al. (2006) reported course structure (usability, clear communication, logical format); self-motivation (achievement of personal goals, amount of effort); learning styles (written versus oral expression and direction); instructor knowledge and facilitation; interaction with staff and students; and instructor feedback (responsiveness, timely feedback, dedication to student learning) were significant factors in influencing students’ satisfaction (quality on par with face-to-face course, recommend the course and intent to participate in online course again). However, only learning styles and instructor feedback influenced perceived learning outcomes (learnt as much or more as the face-to-face mode of delivery and quality of the learning experience is better than face-to-face courses) (Eom et al., 2006).

Choice of major
The choice of major has implications for both universities and students alike. The ability to attract and sustain student numbers has implications for university budgeting (Kaynama and Smith, 1996). On the other hand, students have a greater variety of universities, courses and majors to choose from in a highly competitive environment. This dual dilemma has prompted researchers to address students’ decision making processes in terms of the criteria used to assess their choice of a major discipline of study in a university environment. According to Kaynama and Smith (1996), “the decision of a college major is a multi-criteria, complex, and unstructured choice decision” (p. 57).

The choice of major at tertiary level is an important decision for students as it has an effect on subject and subsequent degree satisfaction and implications for future career choice (Pritchard et al., 2004). There have been numerous studies conducted addressing the choice criteria for students’ selection of majors at the tertiary level (e.g., Crampton et al., 2006; Galotti, 1999; Galotti et al., 2006; Kaynama and Smith, 1996; Montmarquette et al., 2002; Pritchard et al., 2004). The most cited criteria (although not exhaustive) for choosing a major included:
• career-related attributes (predicted future earnings, employment prospects and stability, job satisfaction) (Crampton et al., 2006; Galotti, 1999; Kaynama and Smith, 1996; Lowe and Simons, 1997; Montmarquette et al., 2002; Pritchard et al., 2004);
• popularity of the major (currency and teaching staff) (Lowe and Simons, 1997);
• nature of the discipline (ability and aptitude to complete, intellectual challenge) (Cohen and Hanno, 1993; Lowe and Simons, 1997; Montmarquette et al., 2002; Pritchard et al., 2004);
• personal attributes (personal choice, perception of self) (Lowe and Simons, 1997);
• social justice (gender role identification and ethnic stereotyping) (Montmarquette et al., 2002);
• peer influence (referent groups e.g., family, friends) (Galotti, 1999; Kaynama and Smith, 1996; Lowe and Simons, 1997; Montmarquette et al., 2002);
• external information (marketing and media sources) (Crampton et al., 2006);
• university requirements (enter score) (Galotti, 1999; Montmarquette et al., 2002); and
• education advisors (secondary school, university faculties) (Cohen and Hanno, 1993; Crampton et al., 2006; Galotti, 1999; Lowe and Simons, 1997).

However, there appears to be no empirical evidence that investigates the relationship between student’s choice of major, specific mode of teaching delivery and student satisfaction. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the following hypotheses have been developed:

• H1a: Student preference for wholly online mode of teaching delivery will be positively related to student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit.
• H1b: Student preference for face-to-face mode of teaching delivery will be positively related to student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit.
• H2a: Student preference for wholly online mode of teaching delivery will not influence their intent to major in the marketing discipline.
• H2b: Student preference for face-to-face mode of teaching delivery will not influence their intent to major in the marketing discipline.
• H3: Student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit will be positively related to their intent to major in the marketing discipline.

Research Methods

The research methodology involved conducting an electronic survey of students from an Australian university who were enrolled in the core, introductory, undergraduate marketing unit. The survey was delivered online from the third to the sixth week of semester with respondents being anonymous throughout. Students were asked to report on their likes and dislikes regarding the core marketing unit whose only mode of teaching delivery was wholly online. That is, there was no face-to-face class offered. The survey, accessible via a secured link, was posted on the unit’s online teaching and learning platform which is similar to products such as BlackBoard and WebCT Vista. Responses were collected utilising an opt-in approach where students clicked on an embedded link in the unit’s online teaching and learning platform. Further, as is university policy for all core units within a faculty, all students enrolled in a degree program must complete this unit. As a result, respondents could only be students enrolled in this core undergraduate marketing unit. Of the 860 students enrolled in this unit, data was collected from 112 respondents.
indicating a response rate of 13%. As the data were collected for managerial purposes rather than for the current academic use we could only use single item measures. However, when the data collection was originally designed it was believed all attributes/items were “concrete singular” (Rossiter, 2002, p. 309) indicating that the attribute is “easily and uniformly imagined” (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007, p. 176) by respondents and effortlessly reflects the meaning of the construct under consideration. Following information theory all items were measured on an 11 point agree/disagree scale since an 11 point scale instrument portrays a larger amount of information and is more accurate in measuring the phenomenon at hand (Alwin, 1997).

**Results**

To estimate and test the validity and structural relations of the proposed model (see Figure 1) we utilised partial least squares (PLS) analysis since our sample was small to enable the use of normal theory covariance structure analysis (e.g., path analysis). In covariance structure analysis the sample size is critical because all the known statistics are ‘asymptotic’, that is, are based on the assumption that N becomes arbitrarily large. However, with PLS being a limited information estimation method, an appropriate sample size tends to be much smaller than the one needed for a full information procedure such as covariance structure analysis (e.g., Barclay et al., 1995; Sambamurthy and Chin, 1994). Furthermore, another advantage of PLS analysis is that it is a nonparametric structural equation modelling technique and therefore does not assume multivariate normality of the data (Wold, 1980, 1985). The PLS analysis in this study was undertaken using SmartPLS (Ringle et al., 2005).

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Likelihood of majoring in Marketing</th>
<th>Overall I am enjoying the Marketing subject</th>
<th>I like the fact that the Marketing subject is offered wholly online</th>
<th>Prefer traditional lectures and tutorials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.430</td>
<td>5.730</td>
<td>5.400</td>
<td>6.350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.744</td>
<td>2.505</td>
<td>3.019</td>
<td>3.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>-.059</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td>-.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE of Skewness</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.908</td>
<td>-.821</td>
<td>-1.226</td>
<td>-1.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1 we report descriptive statistics of the variables under consideration. We note no major problems for departure from normality with regard to skewness and kurtosis.

Results pertaining to the study’s hypotheses are summarised in Table 2 and Figure 1. Results did not support H1b, indicating students preference in face-to-face mode of teaching delivery did not affect student satisfaction with the core undergraduate marketing unit, whereas, students preference for online mode of teaching delivery did lead to satisfaction with the core undergraduate marketing unit. Mode of teaching delivery preferences H2a and H2b were not statistically significant when predicting student intent to major in the marketing discipline suggesting neither the online nor the face-to-face mode of teaching delivery affected students’
intention to major in the marketing discipline. In relation to H₃, results indicated a significant relationship between student satisfaction and their intention to major in the marketing discipline.

**Table 2: Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>stand. β</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>N=112</th>
<th>Hypothesis supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H₁a: Student preference for wholly online mode of teaching delivery will be positively related to student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit.</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>6.839</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₁b: Student preference for face-to-face mode of teaching delivery will be positively related to student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit.</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.535</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂a: Student preference for wholly online mode of teaching delivery will not influence their intent to major in the marketing discipline.</td>
<td>-.156</td>
<td>-.165</td>
<td>.943</td>
<td>.346</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₂b: Student preference for face-to-face mode of teaching delivery will not influence their intent to major in the marketing discipline.</td>
<td>.228</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>1.701</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H₃: Student satisfaction with a core undergraduate marketing unit will be positively related to their intent to major in the marketing discipline.</td>
<td>.532</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>4.823</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1: Hypotheses testing**

![Diagram showing the relationship between preference in wholly online mode of teaching delivery, satisfaction with marketing management unit, and intent to major in marketing.]

Note: The above estimates are standardised

**Conclusions**

Understanding students’ satisfaction with different modes of teaching delivery will assist tertiary institutions in developing strategies to meet student expectations, attract potential students and increase course retention rates in the future. However, it must be noted, the generalisability of this study’s results is limited by its use of ad hoc groups of students sampled in the population at hand. As a result, further qualitative and quantitative research would be beneficial in comparing different student cohorts (distance education, on-campus, cross-cultural groups) across different disciplines and university environments.
References


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