You Can Run But You Cannot Hide:
Building Social Presence in Online Learning Through Voice Thread

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to examine students' perceptions of online learning and identify attributes that contributes to a sense of a community. A total of 228 students participated in the study, which attempted to determine whether students perceived a social presence in the online course as a result of using VoiceThread. Findings revealed students' perceptions of a high-quality course were dependent upon continual communication with the instructor, a predetermined method of connecting students with one another and students' ability to express their opinions. VoiceThread technology allowed online learners to make humanistic connections with students and the instructor.

Social Presence Theory

Positive relationship between students' ability to learn and their interaction with others in the classroom. Social presence theory encourages student to student and student to instructor interaction.

Survey and Data Collection

Data included students enrolled in online Retailing courses at a large university. Students ranged from freshmen to graduate students. Questions were based on Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Sections included: (1) overall agreement with attributes of online education, (2) level of agreement with statement related to group participation, (3) level of agreement with statements related to announcements, (4) level of agreement with statements related to lectures, (5) level of agreement with statements related to written assignments, (6) level of level of satisfaction with aspects of the online course, and (7) experiences with online courses, and demographics. Except for demographic data, all variables were measured.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are students satisfied with a feeling a community within their group?
RQ2: Do students perceive the learning in the course to be of the highest quality?
RQ3: What course attributes contribute to students' satisfaction in an online learning course?

Sample

The sample consisted of the following:
- N=223; 88.8% female; 11.1% male
- 64.1% enrolled in lower division courses.
- 28.3% enrolled in upper division courses.
- 7.6% enrolled in graduate courses.
- 52.9% have taken two or more online courses including this course.
- 79.8% are Caucasian; 9% are African American
- Majority (87.40%) are between 18-22 years old

Results

RQ1 Are students satisfied with a feeling a community within their group?
- Introductions enabled students to form a sense of online community.
- Students were able to form distinct individual impressions of some students in the course.
- Students were comfortable conversing using VoiceThread.

RQ2: Do students perceive the learning in the course to be of the highest quality?
- Students were able to form distinct individual impressions of fellow classmates in the course.
- The quality of information provided by instructor is of the highest quality.

RQ3: What course attributes contribute to students' satisfaction in an online learning course?

- Students felt that his/her point of view on a topic is presented in written assignments.
- Students have a feeling of community within the group.
- As a result of announcements, students are able to form distinct individual impressions of some students in the course.

Conclusions

The examination of coursework at the various levels (i.e., freshmen though graduate level) are encouraging. The predominately female population residing in the same city as the University suggests that students enrolling in the major are a result of the flexibility offered by online education. The quality offered by the courses provides students with the same content and learning outcomes as residential instruction.