World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Educational and Pedagogical Sciences
Vol:9, No:05, 2015

Hard and Soft Skills in Marketing Education: Using Serious Games to Engage Higher Order Processing

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Abstract : This study set out to explore the use of an online collaborative serious game for student learning in a postgraduate introductory marketing module. The simulation game aimed to bridge the theory-practice divide in marketing by allowing students to apply theory in a safe, simulated marketplace. This study addresses the following research questions: Does an online marketing simulation game engage students higher order cognitive skills? Does collaborative activity required develop students' "soft" skills, such as communication and negotiation? What specific affordances of the online simulation promote learning? This qualitative case study took place in 2014 with 40 postgraduate students on a Business Masters Programme. The two-week intensive module combined lectures with collaborative activity on a marketing simulation game, MMX from Pearsons. The game requires student teams to compete against other teams in a marketplace and design a marketing plan to maximize key performance indicators. The data for this study comprise essays written by students after the module reflecting on their learning on the module. A thematic analysis was conducted of the essays using the following a priori theme sets: 6 levels of the cognitive domain of Blooms taxonomy; 5 principles of Cooperative Learning; affordances of simulation environments including experiential learning; motivation and engagement; goal orientation. Preliminary findings would strongly suggest that the game facilitated students identifying the value of theory in practice, in particular for future employment; enhanced their understanding of group dynamics and their role within that; and impacted very strongly, both positively and negatively on motivation. In particular the game mechanics of MMX, which hinges on the correct identification of a target consumer group, was identified as a key determinant of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for learners. The findings also suggest that the situation of the simulation game within a broader module which required post-game reflection was valuable in identifying key learning of marketing concepts in both the positive and the negative experiences of the game.

Keywords : simulation, marketing, serious game, cooperative learning, bloom's taxonomy
Conference Title : ICHE 2015 : International Conference on Higher Education
Conference Location : London, United Kingdom
Conference Dates : May 25-26, 2015