Positive Implications of Weekly Marketing Entrepreneur Pitch Competition Assignments

James Blair

Purpose of the Study: Marketing educators look for ways to provide experiential learning opportunities in their courses to build application and evaluation skills as well as keep students engaged in the course. This was especially true during the COVID pandemic where instructors were forced to innovate quickly and change the design of their courses. Instructors are provided a weekly assignment that could be applied to their marketing or retailing courses where students work in small teams acting as entrepreneurs by pitching marketing recommendations to real small business owners.

Method/Design and Sample: An end of the semester survey was conducted to gauge student perceptions about the marketing entrepreneur pitch competition assignments completed throughout the semester. Students completing several questions pertaining to the variables of interest as well as collecting demographic data. The sample comprised of 25 students completing an upper-level marketing elective, Marketing for Entrepreneurs. They were from a medium-sized, regional, public university in the Midwestern part of the United States.

Results: Students provided positive feedback about the assignment. It received high ratings for being fun and helpfulness as well as students being likely to take another course in the future offering similar assignments. Additionally, students rated being satisfied with the assignment overall.

Value to Marketing Educators: The COVID pandemic has shifted online educators to be able to adapt to teaching in-person, hybrid, and online courses. This assignment provides students an experiential learning opportunity that could be completed in any of these formats. Several positive outcomes are associated with the assignment that educators value.

Keywords: experiential learning, marketing education, entrepreneurship education.

James Blair, Department of Management, Marketing, and International Business, College of Business and Technology, Eastern Kentucky University, 521 Lancaster Avenue, Richmond, KY 40475, Tel: 724-877-0517, Email: james.blair@eku.edu.

Introduction

Experiential learning has taken a larger role in higher education learning. Instructors are looking to add more experiential learning opportunities for their students as they have the potential to improve critical thinking skills and better prepare students for the workforce (Wurdinger & Allison, 2017). We are also facing uncertain times in higher education with significant competition, changing demographics, and new learning technologies becoming available (Keller, 2001; Zusman, 2005). The COVID pandemic has shifted this landscape and expedited some trends to provide new learning opportunities leveraging technology as well as new teaching strategies both inside and outside of the classroom (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020; Aristovnik et al., 2020; Ashfaquzzaman, 2020).

In this new competitive and changing higher education landscape, improving the student education experience and retention rates are imperative moving forward. Higher education is currently facing criticism to its value and worth from news outlets as well as others questioning the value of universities (Belkin, 2020; Burke, 2018; Hoffower, 2019; Horowitz, 2018; Kamenetz, 2014; Kerr, 2019; Lemon, 2021; Morehouse, 2022; Pearlstein, 2018; Shell, 2018;

Svrluga, 2019; Tretina, 2021; Whitford, 2021). Students perceiving and feeling they are getting better and improving their skills should be valuable for higher education institutions with an increased focus on improving recruitment and retainment (Herbert, 2006; James, Swan, & Daston; 2016; Swan, 2001).

As a result, providing instructors with experiential learning assignments to utilize in the classroom that can improve perceived learning is valuable to our field. When creating and implementing these assignments instructors need to ensure students enjoy completing them, that the assignments help them meeting course learning objectives, and that they have the potential to retain more students within their respective programs. This assignment would be one tool to help meet these desired outcomes.

An innovative experiential learning assignment is provided to instructors to help meet some of these goals of higher education institutions, instructors, and students. More specifically, an assignment is provided to instructors to implement in their marketing courses. Results from a student survey measuring their levels of fun, helpfulness in learning, likelihood to take another course utilizing similar assignments in the future, and satisfaction with the assignment are presented to highlight student perceptions. This helps further our

understanding of the benefits associated with experiential learning opportunities and provides educators with an assignment they can incorporate into their courses. Additionally, this assignment was utilized in a hybrid course during the COVID pandemic but has the potential to be utilized in other formats including in-person and online courses.

ASSIGNMENT INNOVATION

Over the course of the semester, students completed 10 marketing entrepreneur pitch competition assignments. This was done in an upper-level marketing course (Marketing for Entrepreneurs). These assignments were completed during a 165-minute class session. This was a hybrid course that primarily met in-person but did have some online class sessions. The flexibility of this assignment allowed students to be able to obtain marketing, entrepreneurship communication, teamwork, application, and evaluation skills during the COVID pandemic.

The first 60 minutes of the class session consisted of lecture and small group activities to reinforce concepts and strategies learned in the assigned readings. After this first portion of the class was complete the students took a short break of about 5-minutes and upon their return they were placed into randomized teams of 3-5 students per team and provided an assignment prompt about that week's scenario. These scenarios involved student teams pitching advertising campaigns and marketing strategy recommendations to real organizations and businesses. Each week's scenario provided a brief background about the organization, current situation they were experiencing in the marketplace, goals for the organization moving forward regarding advertising and marketing, and lastly included some links to their website and social media pages for students to be able to learn more about the organization. Figure 1 provides an example of the assignment students were provided for one of the class sessions.

Figure 1: Example of a Marketing Entrepreneurship Pitch Competition Assignment Prompt

MKT 435: Marketing for Entrepreneurs In-Class Pitch #1 – Mike Rodgers Music

Mike Rodgers Music is looking for your marketing agencies to come up with a campaign for him in the upcoming two years. He is originally from Western Pennsylvania, but currently lives in Nashville, Tennessee. His music style is influenced by country and pop music.

Below are some areas Mike wants the advertising teams to focus on in their campaign pitches. Try to incorporate as many of these into your pitches as these are major areas the client is concerned with for his upcoming marketing efforts.

- Come up with a concept for an album to be released sometime in 2021.
    - Album name.
    - Concepts to include in songs.
    - Potential collaborations.
    - Products to include in songs/music videos for potential partnerships.
    - How to communicate with his fans and reach new fans.
    - Ideas for content to include in messages to fans about new singles and the album.
- Create a tour for Summer 2022.
    - Recommend actual locations and dates for tour.
    - Create a theme for tour building on album from 2021.
    - Identify potential opening acts.
    - Describe how this in-person tour can also leverage online performance revenue (making it accessibly digitally as well).
    - Recommend merchandise (give mock-ups and what they should actually look like).
    - How to communicate to fans about the upcoming tour.
    - Ideas for content to include in messages to fans about the tour.

For more information about Mike Rodgers Music, check out the links below.

Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Mike+Rodgers&i=digital-music&search-type=ss&ref=ntt_srch_drd_B000QKC8L8

Apple Music: https://music.apple.com/us/artist/mike-rodgers/81842925

Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/mikerodgersmusic

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/mikerodgersmusician/

Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/album/2rbdicwwUfq0jeKqeRz3XM

Twitter: https://twitter.com/mrodgersmusic

Website: https://www.mikerodgersmusic.com/

Once the students were placed into teams and read the scenarios, the class was provided the opportunity to ask any questions. After these general questions were answered, students were then allotted approximately 50-minutes to work in their teams to come up with an advertising campaign and marketing recommendations that they would pitch to the business owner or representative of the organization. Students utilized platforms like Google Drive to work simultaneously on creating a brief presentation with visuals to highlight their ideas, delegating team member responsibilities, and practicing their pitch. At the conclusion of their group work, a student emailed their presentation to the instructor.

Another 5-minute break was scheduled for students due to the length of the class session and to allow students the opportunity to refocus their attention. When the students returned, the final 40 minutes of the class session consisted of teams presenting their pitch to the clients. With the COVID pandemic shifting a lot of learning opportunities to online, this also allowed for students to work with clients from significant distances from the university by the clients joining the class setting utilizing an online digital communication technology, Zoom. Local clients were able to visit the class in-person to judge the presentations and ask questions to student teams after their presentations. Out-of-town clients were able to utilize platforms like Zoom to see the student presentations, provide feedback, and answer questions.

Each student team was provided 4-minutes to present their advertising campaign and marketing recommendation. This was to simulate an "elevator pitch" for students to gain experience presenting their ideas just as they will in their future careers to their supervisors, co-workers, potential investors, and other stakeholders. With employers valuing communication skills when hiring job candidates (Coffelt, Grauman, & Smith, 2019), this provides students an opportunity to work on those skills and improve them in front of a professional in a safe classroom space. There was a hard cut off at the 4-minute mark of the presentation. This ensured each student team was provided the same time constraints and they were able to maximize their impact during this time. Throughout the presentation students were notified when 3-minutes, 2-minutes, 1-minute, and 30-seconds were remaining. When time was up a bell rang signaling the end of their presentation time.

At the conclusion of each student team presentation, the professional representing the organization was provided an opportunity to ask any follow-up questions. This provided students the opportunity to clarify points made in the presentation and the client was able to provide feedback to the presenting teams. As a result, students had the opportunity to develop their application and evaluation skills by answering client questions that arose after the presentations. Once all student teams presented, the client chose a winning team. This was based on which student team they would choose to implement the advertising campaign and marketing recommendations presented, just as the client normally would if they had sent out a request for proposal (RFP) and were choosing the best advertising agency or marketing consultants to work for their organization. The winning team was then recognized and took a photo with the competition trophy and the client. For clients visiting virtually, they appeared on the projector screen as students stood by the screen with the trophy. At the conclusion of the class session, the photo was sent out through the course site congratulating the winners. Additionally, the winning team was posted on LinkedIn where the students from the winning team were tagged in the post. This allowed students to promote their personal professional brand online and highlight their work in the course. As a result, students were able to continue to build their personal professional brands online and share their academic achievement with other professionals. This resulted in good online engagement from professionals.

In addition to students being evaluated by the client to determine the winning team, students were also evaluated by the instructor. Table 1 is the rubric utilized by the instructor to evaluate student performance in the assignment. At the conclusion of the presentation, students were provided their score and feedback for how to improve. Instructors could adapt this rubric to meet their wants and needs for their retailing or marketing course. Alternatively, instructors could utilize an established rubric, like the Oral Communication VALUE Rubric provided by the American Association of Colleges and Universities.

Table 1: Assignment Rubric

Entreprener Pitch Rubric							
Criteria	Scale					What Needs Improvement?	Additional Comments
	4: Very Good	3: Good	2: Average	1: Poor	0: Very Poor		
1. Introduction/Hook The problem, need, or opportunity is clearly explained and the significance is evident; (video) the speakers' names and faces are presented clearly.						Problem/Need/Opportunity & Speaker Introduction	
2. Creative Solution to Problems A detailed explanation of the proposed solutions and a convincing statements of how they provide value for the target customer(s) are given.						Solution & Value Proposition	
3. Closing The conclusion highlights benefits, potential for profit, and/or marketing metrics to measure success.						Costs & Pricing & Conclusion & Final Takeaway(s) & Marketing	
4. Clarity Speakers are polished and delivery techniques make the presentation understandable and engaging.						Organization & Length & Grammar & Pronunciation	
5. Impact The presentation inspires and holds attention; the pitch is persuasive, informative, and makes the audience interested to act or learn more						Enthusiasm & Creativity & Compelling Story & Team Participation	

During the COVID pandemic some students did miss class due to contract tracing, being exposed to the virus, or several other issues that arose. This is one challenge many instructors faced during this time. Often, instructors chose to utilize a flexible attendance policy due to the ever-changing nature of the COVID pandemic. Students unable to attend the class session in-person were provided an opportunity to complete the assignment virtually. At the conclusion of the class session, the instructor emailed the assignment to students missing the course and made them a "virtual team." Students were allowed several days to work on the assignment virtually with their teammates. This extra time was provided since students had different schedules with classes, work, etc. Students on this virtual team were able to create a similar presentation

and record it using one of a variety of software programs (Zoom, PowerPoint, etc.). This team was not considered for the competition nor were they evaluated by the client, but the instructor was able to provide feedback to the virtual teams based on the rubric criteria.

Another challenge was finding clients to be a part of this learning activity for students. It is recommended instructors leverage their personal networks. Chambers of commerce and business incubators have clients that are interested in growing their business and helping future business professionals develop their skillsets. Additionally, instructors attending networking events can provide them the opportunity to meet with entrepreneurs and business professionals to connect and determine if there is interest in working together on collaborative experiential learning opportunities like this assignment.

Lastly, due to the format of the class and assignment instructors are forced to sacrifice breadth for depth of content. A potential benefit is that this provides students more opportunity to develop specific skills, like teamwork and oral communication, through more elaboration and practice. Bacon and Stewart (2021) find this to be an acceptable practice of diving deeper into specific skills. With many business programs using curriculum mapping to assess student learning, marketing departments can track what skills are being developed in their courses to ensure students are being introduced to learning outcomes, reinforcing them in later courses, and finally mastering them before graduating (Udelhofen, 2005).

ASSIGNMENT INNOVATION EQUIPPING STUDENTS FOR THE MARKETING AND RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

Within the marketing and retail space, we saw significant changes due to the COVID pandemic (Forsythe et al., 2020). This has resulted in some skillsets being heavily desired by employers. The marketing entrepreneur pitch competition assignment should provide students another experience in their college careers to prepare for the workforce and develop their skills to become highly qualified job candidates. As a result, students are able to practice developing their communication skills, teamwork skills, application and evaluation skills, and marketing and entrepreneur skills.

Communication Skills

Communication skills are some of the most valuable skills employers look for in candidates (Coffelt, Grauman, & Smith, 2019). This includes individuals being able to clearly convey their message to others in both written and oral forms of communication. The marketing entrepreneur pitch competition assignment provides students the opportunities to work on their communication skills by conveying their ideas and recommendations with limited time constraints. Students obtain public speaking experience by presenting in front of not only the class and instructor, but also a business professional. Over the course of the semester, students complete 10 of these assignments which provides them the opportunity to become more confident and comfortable with public speaking in general. Additionally, students gain experience avoiding filler words, projecting their voice, and crafting an engaging presentation while competing with other student teams.

Teamwork Skills

In the business world, we see individuals within organizations working together in small groups in hopes of meeting common goals or objectives. The COVID pandemic has allowed work teams to continue to operate when employees are working in different locations and may never meet their teammates in-person over the course of the project. With improved virtual communication technology options available to organizations, business professionals will continue to utilize these in the workforce when working with others on projects.

With students working in small groups of 3-5 students on these assignments over the course of the semester, they can gain experience working with others collaboratively to achieve common goals under limited time constraints. As a result, this assignment simulates a real-world learning experience like what they will experience in their professional careers. Since student teams are randomized each week, this provides students an opportunity to work with a variety of classmates throughout the duration of the semester.

Application and Evaluation Skills

Employers desire job candidates who can think on their feet, solve problems, and get to work on their own after given some direction (Desai, Berger, & Higgs, 2016). Application and evaluation skills are some levels of learning students can experience (Bloom 1956). Instructors desire assignments that can develop these student skillsets.

During this assignment, students are applying marketing and entrepreneurship strategies to a real organization. They need to be able to first identify which strategies are applicable to the organization. Then students need to decide how they can apply these strategies, adapt them to the busines, and customize them to effectively meet the desired goals and outcomes. During the presentations, students need to be able to persuade the client that their strategies and recommendations are the best to implement of the competition teams. Additionally, students need to be able to address the concerns and questions the client proposes.

Marketing and Entrepreneurship Skills

This course focused on marketing and entrepreneur strategies students could implement in their future careers as well as starting their own business. Over the course of the semester, students learned about these strategies and concepts through assigned readings, lectures, and in-class activities. Additionally, this assignment is another way for students to master those concepts and strategies by applying them to a real

organization. Students can gain experience in idea generation and recommending strategies in pricing, public relations, promotions, distribution, sales, branding, budgeting, and several other areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning theory suggests learning should be closely linked to the origins in work and emphasize the central role of experience (Kolb, 1984). Lewis and Williams (1994) suggest experiential learning is simply accomplished by doing. It has several benefits to the learning experience of students including understanding how organizations operate, future career paths to potentially pursue, connecting with professionals, improving their ability to take initiative, becoming more adaptable to changing environments, refining leadership skills, and gaining experience managing (Lee, 2008).

Kolb (1984) highlighted four stages in the experiential learning process: (1) concrete experience, (2) reflective observation, (3) abstract conceptualization, and (4) active experimentation. During the concrete experience stage, students experience personal involvement in everyday situations. With this innovative assignment, students act as an advertising agency pitching their marketing recommendations to a real business professional. This simulates a similar situation where professionals have a limited time to present and sell their ideas to a prospective client. That client then takes in that information and decides which advertising agency was the best. Students going through this experience simulates what they will experience during an internship, entry-level position, or as a manager in the marketplace.

In the reflective observation stage, students make observations on their learning experience (Kolb, 1984). With this innovation, students experience repetition presenting each week competing with other students to be chosen and win the weekly competition. Therefore, each week students wanting to improve, and win will reflect on their past presentation, teamwork, and collaborative experiences in the class to make changes and adjustments to do better in the next competition. In multiphase competitions, like this innovation, students can be motivated to win especially in earlier phases of the competition (Huang, Etkin, & Jin, 2017). Therefore, students would use this reflection time to aid in future weeks of competition.

Abstract conceptualization is the third phase. In this phase, students incorporate theories, logic and ideas to solve problems they are facing (Kolb, 1984). This is phase is also utilized in the competition. The instructor encourages students to utilize marketing concepts and strategies learned in the class during lectures and other activities. Additionally, the instructor encourages students to incorporate what they have learned in other classes and their work experience (part-time work, internships, and volunteering opportunities completed). During the presentations, students utilize concepts covered in the course lectures as well as other outside experiences to persuade the client that their marketing campaign is the most effective in meeting the goals laid out in the scenario.

The final phase is active experimentation. Here students are experimenting in different situations (Kolb, 1984). Students do this with this activity as they face new challenges each week with different scenarios from different employers from a variety of industries. Additionally, students can apply their teamwork and presentations skills to other experiences outside of the classroom. This includes other courses where they work in teams to complete a task or need to utilize oral communication to present their ideas to others. It can also include when students are working their part-time positions, internships, or volunteer opportunities in the community.

Based on the setup of the innovation, it appears the assignment is applicable to all four phases of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning process. Frameworks for utilizing experiential projects in the classroom have been provided to aid instructors (Blair, Xiao, & Mason, 2019). With consumers changing significantly in the marketplace through new technology available to them which has shifted their consumer decision making process and ways organizations interact with them (Blair, 2019), having students complete experiential learning assignments solving real world problems and issues businesses are currently facing can help develop their application and evaluation skills in preparation for their future careers in the workforce. This assignment attempts to provide students with a positive experiential learning opportunity.

Fun

Fun course content has been found to have a positive impact on student engagement (Tews et al., 2015). Activities stimulating and exciting students improve the class mood and engagement with class content (Bacon & Stewart, 2021). Providing students some autonomy in a gamified assignment resulted in them perceiving the assignment as fun (Bechkoff, 2019).

Passyn and Billups (2019) limited their students to one-page write-ups for assignments. This resulted in students needing to think and rethink what they wanted to include in this limited writing space. Similarly, this assignment consisted of students having limited time constraints, four minutes. This resulted in students participating in substantial engagement and elaboration by participating in this assignment. Since this assignment provides students the opportunity to come up with their own marketing recommendations and strategies through engagement and elaboration of course content while competing with other student teams, it could likely also be perceived as fun by the student population. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H1: Students will perceive the assignment as fun.

Helpfulness

Experiential learning has been found to aid students in the learning process through improved grades and achieving desired course learning outcomes (Gilbert et

al., 2014; Miller & Maellaro, 2016). This can be the case in virtual experiences in addition to in-person experiences (Konak, Clark, & Nasereddin, 2014) which allows instructors to utilize experiential learning in a variety of course formats and situations. When students are exposed to more experiential learning opportunities, they perceive it to be beneficial in their learning process (Hamer, 2000). With this assignment utilizing experiential learning in a hybrid setting, it is expected to be perceived by students as helpful in their learning process. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H2: Students will perceive the assignment as helpful to their learning process.

Likelihood to Take Another Course Using Similar Assignments
Experiential learning opportunities have been found to increase student participation (Coker & Porter, 2015). Additionally, Bradberry and De Maio (2019) found experiential learning helped improve graduation rates and the number of students applying for graduate programs. With experiential learning opportunities having a positive impact on participation rates and students applying to graduate programs in the future, it is anticipated this assignment would encourage students to take additional courses in the future. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H3: Students will have a high likelihood to take another course using similar assignments.

Satisfaction
The perceived quality and value of experiential learning opportunities have been found to impact student satisfaction levels (Zhai et al., 2017). Students have expressed satisfaction when completing experiential learning projects (Daly, 2001). Based on previous experiential learning opportunities receiving positive student feedback and satisfaction ratings, it is anticipated students will be satisfied when completing this assignment. Therefore, it is hypothesized:

H4: Students will have high satisfaction levels for the assignment.

METHOD

Participants
25 undergraduate students registered for an upper-level marketing course (marketing for entrepreneurs) at a medium-sized, regional, public university in the Midwestern part of the United States completed this assignment on a weekly basis. The sample consisted of 56% females. The average age was 24 years old with the youngest at 20 years old and the oldest at 59 years old. The race of the sample was 80% Caucasian, 12% Asian American, and 8% African America. Student majors included marketing, general business, public relations, entrepreneurship, apparel design and merchandising, communication studies, computer information systems, sport management, and criminal justice.

Materials and Procedure
During their final exam, students were giving the option to complete a questionnaire that took approximate 2-minutes to complete. In the questionnaire, students had the option to provide feedback on the marketing entrepreneur pitch competition assignments or explain three things learned from the content covered and how they plan on using that content in their future careers. All 25 students opted to complete the questionnaire instead of completing the open-ended question on the exam. As a result, no students were removed from the sample.

Measures

Fun
This variable was evaluated using a one-item measure on a seven-point rating scale (1: Extremely Unfun, 7: Extremely Fun) that was adopted from Bechkoff (2019). Participants responded to a question, "how much fun were the in-class entrepreneur pitches." Students rated the level of fun using the scale provided.

Helpfulness
The helpfulness variable was evaluated using a one-item measure on a seven-point rating scale (1: Extremely Unhelpful, 7: Extremely Helpful) that was adopted from Bechkoff (2019). Participants responded to a question, "how much help were the in-class entrepreneur pitch activities in developing your marketing skills." Students rated the level of helpfulness using the scale provided.

Likelihood to Take Another Course Using Similar Assignments
This variable was evaluated using a one-item measure on a seven-point rating scale (1: Very Unlikely, 7: Very Likely) that was adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Participants responded to a question, "how likely is it that you would take another class using similar in-class entrepreneur pitch activities? Assume that you will take more college courses in the future (to pursue your undergraduate or graduate degree." Students were asked to make this assumption, since it was an upper-level class, and some students were graduating at the conclusion of the semester. Then students rated their likelihood to take another course using similar assignments using the scale provided.

Satisfaction
Satisfaction was evaluated using a one-item measure on a seven-point rating scale (1: Very Dissatisfied, 7: Very Satisfied) that was adopted from Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Participants responded to a question, "how satisfied are you with the in-class entrepreneur pitch activities this semester." Students rated their level of satisfaction using the scale provided.

RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the results from the student questionnaire. This includes the relevant findings

pertaining to student perception about how fun and helpful the assignment was during the class. Additionally, it reports the likelihood of students taking another course using similar assignments and their perceived satisfaction with the assignment.

Fun
There is support for H1. The average rating for the assignment was "fun" (m = 5.92, SE .20). 76% of respondents rated the assignment as "fun" or "extremely fun." This result suggests students perceived the innovative assignment as fun.

Helpfulness
There is support for H2. The average rating for likelihood to take another course offering similar assignments was "extremely helpful" (m = 6.64, SE = .11). 96% of respondents rated the assignment as "helpful" or "extremely helpful." This result suggests students perceived the innovative assignment as helpful.

Likelihood to Take Another Course Using Similar Assignments
There is support for H3. The average rating for the assignment was "likely" (m = 6.08, SE = .17). 76% of respondents rated themselves as "likely" or "very likely" to take another course offering similar assignments. This result suggests students perceived they they will be likely to take another course using similar assignments in the future based on participating in this innovative assignment.

Satisfaction
There is support for H4. The average rating for the assignment was "satisfied" (m = 6.20, SE = .14). 92% of respondents rated themselves as "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the assignment. This result suggests students perceived themselves to be satisfied with the innovative assignment.

Table 2: Study Results

Variable	Mean	SE	SD	Number of Positive Scale Responses	List of Positive Scale Response Options
Fun	5.92	0.20	1.00	23	Extremely Fun, Fun, and Somewhat Fun
Helpfulness	6.64	0.11	0.57	25	Extremely Helpful, Helpful, and Somewhat Helpful
Likelihood to Take Another Course Using Similar Assignments	6.08	0.17	0.86	24	Very Likely, Likely, and Somewhat Likely
Satisfaction	6.2	0.14	0.71	24	Very Satisfied, Satisfied, and Somewhat Satisfied

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study provides support that students find the weekly entrepreneur marketing pitch competitions to be fun and helpful. Additionally, students were satisfied with the assignment and likely to take another course utilizing similar assignments. This highlights the benefits of utilizing experiential learning in the classroom where students can work on their teamwork, communication, application, and evaluation skills over the course of the semester.

With student retention being a main concern for higher education institutions (Crosling, Thomas, & Heagney, 2008; Tinto, 2006), keeping students engaged in the learning process and enjoying the classroom experience is of the utmost importance. Having fun assignments like this can make students enjoy the course and more likely to retain them in future semesters.

The higher education landscape is becoming even more competitive. This is due to several factors including declining birth rates, online competition, new international instructions competing for students, for-profit institutions recruiting students, and other alternatives to traditional higher education prior individuals to entering the workforce or looking to change career paths (Jongbloed, 2004; Marginson, 2006; Musselin, 2018). Having assignments and courses that can increase satisfaction levels and likeliness of students to enroll in courses are important metrics for these institutions to monitor. Instructors should continue to monitor these metrics and work with retention departments at the university to help tailor content and class offerings to their student population.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A limitation from the study was the primary focus on student perceptions of the assignment like fun, happiness, likelihood to take another course using similar assignments, and satisfaction. These are based on the respondent perceptions, not their actual behaviors. Although the scope of this research was to investigate student perceptions of the assignment, which is valued in the marketing literature and beneficial to understand, future research could explore actual behaviors.

It is suggested that perceived learning does provide some benefit to the students and other stakeholders. This includes possibility for improved student recruitment and retention since they believe that they are obtaining skills (Andrade et al., 2020). These perception measures and results from this research should still be valuable to higher education stakeholders. If students are learning, but not perceiving they are learning, this could be detrimental to higher education institutions who are "selling" students that this significant monetary investment of enrolling in college is worth it. This is especially important in the current environment where news outlets are challenging higher education as not worth the investment of students and sometimes fostering negative perceptions of college to society (Kamenetz, 2014; Morehouse, 2022; Shell, 2018; Tretina, 2021; Wilezol & Bennett, 2015).

With the demographic cliff quickly approaching (Hoover, 2020; Schroeder, 2022) it is important for higher education institutions to find ways of showcasing value in their programs. This can be by assessing actual

learning, but perceived learning could also be a beneficial way to generate positive word of mouth in recruiting new students as well as retaining current students. Perceived learning should provide students some confidence in their skills which is supported by Bandura et al.'s (1996) self-efficacy model. Bacon and Stewart (2021) call for more work to be done in this area, which provides an opportunity for marketing education researchers to investigate this area.

Future research could measure behaviors and actual learning achieved by the students to strengthen the effectiveness and value of the assignment. This would provide more confidence that students will register for courses using similar assignments. Future researchers could monitor student retention rates and course enrollments.

Additionally, Bacon and Stewart (2021) highlight the importance of measuring actual learning occurring with students. They propose stimulating activities can also lead to actual learning. With the marketing entrepreneur pitch competitions being perceived by students as fun, this could also result in actual learning of content and desired learning outcomes. Other gamification activities also appear to stimulate learning (Drea, Tripp, & Stuenkel, 2005). Therefore, future research could investigate this area to determine the effectiveness of this assignment and if students perceive it to be stimulating.

Future research could collect additional data from students completing this assignment to determine if specific marketing skills like teamwork skills and oral communication skills are improving because of the assignment. Understanding if experiential learning assignments that students find to be fun, like this one, result in higher retention rates, mastery of course learning outcomes, and improved course engagement would beneficial to all stakeholders.

Students did self-report that this assignment was helpful in the learning of course material. Self-reported measures can have issues, including bias from the respondent (Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassmer, 2013). Although these are an acceptable form of measurement in research, future research could measure helpfulness of this assignment or other experiential learning activities through student assessment. Utilizing rubrics established through accreditation agencies or assessment offices at higher education institutions for a variety of learning outcomes could provide more confidence that the assignment is helping students obtain specific skillsets.

Another limitation of the study was the use of single-item measures. Although researchers argue this is acceptable (Wanous & Reichers 1996), utilizing multi-item measures could result in higher levels of reliability and validity in the measurement of the variables as well as more confidence in the results produced. Therefore, future researchers could replicate the results utilizing multi-item measures.

The sample utilized from this study was an upper-level marketing course at a medium-sized, regional, public university located in the Midwestern part of the United States. Future researchers could replicate the results with other samples to determine if any demographic or cultural factors make this assignment vary in effectiveness. This includes replicating the results with underclassmen, graduate students, courses in other countries, and even non-business courses.

One of the important and valuable aspects of the assignment is the incorporation of small business owners who actively participate in the scenario creation, student presentations, and judging of the winning team. Soliciting feedback from these individuals about their perceptions of the experience and how the student recommendations impacted their business operations would be insightful. This has the potential for businesses to see improvements in their operations, increased profits, and good fits for employment opportunities. With higher education instructions finding more ways to partner with businesses to better prepare their students for skills needed in the workforce as well as future employment opportunities (Natale & Libertella, 1998), this would be a valuable area for researchers to explore further. We have observed significant changes to the hiring process and career outlooks for professionals with the increasing presence of the gig economy as well as changes to what corporations look like (Blair, 2016). This assignment also provides students with networking opportunities as they work closely with the small business owners and managers during the class sessions. As business programs are looking to build student experiences involving their professional personal brands prior to entering the workforce (Allison et al. 2020), assignments like this could allow students the chance to set positive impressions with employers about their individual skillsets, career aspirations, and a snapshot of who they are.

Some instructors may find the amount of time it takes to partner with local businesses and professionals in this assignment to be too substantial and a limitation of the activity. There are ways to limit the amount of time it takes to recruit participating clients. As business educators, it is expected that we stay close to practitioners. This allows us to stay in tune with what is going on in the marketplace. Therefore, we can incorporate this knowledge in the classroom as well as develop skillsets of our students that current employers value (De los Santos & Jensen, 1985; Dyce & Smernicki, 2018; Ekoh, 2018). Instructors can cut down on recruitment time, by being actively engaged in their community. This includes attending local networking events, joining non-profit organizations and events, being a member of the local chamber of commerce, and working with local business accelerators and incubators. There is up-front work for instructors recruiting partnering businesses, but once the assignment is in place the participating clients can often spread positive work of mouth about their experience to other business professionals in the area. The instructor should also promote the assignment, partnering client, and winning team on social media. By tagging the different stakeholders, this allows the message to disseminate to larger audiences and can result in

recommended future client partner referrals. LinkedIn is an effective place to share this content as many business professionals are active in this space, but other social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter can also spread awareness levels.

There is some time commitment by the instructor but based on the time invested in the activity some could perceive it is worth the student learning outcomes, connections made with local business professionals, and promotion of the university. This assignment can be viewed as a competitive advantage for the instructor, their course and the university, but also due to the current higher education landscape instructors are being asked to do more (teach additional classes, assess learning outcomes for AACSB, recruit and retain more students, produce more research, participate in more service, etc.) with the same (or sometimes less) resources resulting in burnout or other negative outcomes (Handelsman, 2021; McMurtrie, 2020). As a result, future research could explore ways to improve assignment preparation and efficiency. This could reduce barriers to assignment adoption by other instructors.

Future research could also be conducted implementing this experiential learning assignment into different marketing and retailing courses to measure effectiveness and determine if it can produce similar effective results. There has been a significant amount of retailing and marketing teaching innovations in higher education to better help prepare university students for careers in retailing and business (Chatterjee, P., & Kumar, A., 2017; Kumar, Mukherjee, & McGinnis, 2015). With marketing and retailing instructors desiring more experiential learning opportunities to incorporate in their courses (Bobbitt et al., 2000; Daly, 2001; Franco Valdez & Valdez Cervantes, 2018), this could be a potential assignment to add. Instructors could adapt this assignment to fit their respective courses.

Lastly, future researchers could utilize peer evaluations as a metric to show improvements in teamwork skills of students over time. Peers could evaluate their skills over the course of the semester to determine if they are improving, regressing, or staying stagnant. This would improve the confidence with instructors implementing this assignment that it is successfully resulting in actual learning.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (1980). Understanding attitudes and predicting social behavior. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.

Allison, L., Blair, J., Jung, J., & Boutin Jr, P. J. (2020). The Impact and Mediating Role of Personal Brand Authenticity on the Self-Actualization of University Graduates Entering the Workforce. *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, *28*(2), 3-13.

Andrade, M. S., Miller, R. M., McArthur, D., & Ogden, M. (2020). The impact of learning on student persistence in Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *0*(0), 1-20.

Arora, A., & Srinivasan, R. (2020). Impact of pandemic COVID-19 on the teaching–learning process: A study of higher education teachers. *Prabandhan: Indian Journal of Management*, *13*(4), 43-56.

Aristovnik, A., Keržič, D., Ravšelj, D., Tomaževič, N., & Umek, L. (2020). Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on life of higher education students: A global perspective. *Sustainability*, *12*(20), 8438.

Ashfaquzzaman, M. (2020). Pandemic pedagogy in post-COVID age. *Communication Education*, *69*(4), 534-535.

Bacon, D. R., & Stewart, K. A. (2021). What Works Best: A Systematic Review of Actual Learning in Marketing and Management Education Research. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *0*(0), 1-19.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development*, *67*(3), 1206-1222.

Bechkoff, J. (2019). Gamification Using a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Type Platform to Augment Learning and Facilitate Student Engagement in Marketing Education. *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, *27*(1), 10-21.

Belkin, D. (2020). *Is this the end of college as we know it?* The Wall Street Journal. Retrieved from https://www.wsj.com/articles/is-this-the-end-of-college-as-we-know-it-11605196909.

Blair, J. (2016). Gerald Davis, The Vanishing American Corporation (2016). *Markets, Globalization & Development Review*, *1*(2), 1-11.

Blair, J. (2019). Book Review: The Fluid Consumer: Next Generation Growth and Branding in the Digital Age. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *39*(3), 341-345.

Blair, J., Xiao, J., Mason, I. (2019). A framework for practical student projects in global marketing courses. *Business Education Forum*, *73*(4), 4-7.

Bloom, B. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives. Vol. 1: Cognitive domain. *New York: McKay*, *20*(24), 1.

Bobbitt, L., Inks, S., Kemp, K., & Mayo, D. (2000). Integrating marketing courses to enhance team-based experiential learning. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *22*(1), 15-24.

Bradberry, L., & De Maio, J. (2019). Learning by doing: The long-term impact of experiential learning programs on student success. *Journal of Political Science Education*, *15*(1), 94-111.

Brutus, S., Aguinis, H., & Wassmer, U. (2013). Self-reported limitations and future directions in scholarly reports: Analysis and recommendations. *Journal of Management*, *39*(1), 48-75.

Burke, L. M. (2018). Is Higher Education Worth the Cost? It Depends. *Counterpoints*, *517*, 361-374.

Chatterjee, P., & Kumar, A. (2017). Teaching Innovations in Retailing Education. *Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education*, *25*(1), 1-2.

Coffelt, T. A., Grauman, D., & Smith, F. L. (2019). Employers' perspectives on workplace communication skills: The meaning of communication skills. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *82*(4), 418-439.

Coker, J., & Porter, D. (2015). Maximizing experiential learning for student success. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *47*(1), 66-72.

Crosling, G., Thomas, L., & Heagney, M. (2008). *Improving student retention in higher education: the role of teaching and learning*. Routledge.

Daly, S. (2001). Student-operated Internet businesses: True experiential learning in entrepreneurship and retail management. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *23*(3), 204-215.

De los Santos, G., & Jensen, T. D. (1985). Client-sponsored projects: Bridging the gap between theory and practice. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *7*(2), 45-50.

Desai, M. S., Berger, B. D., & Higgs, R. (2016). Critical thinking skills for business school graduates as demanded by employers: a strategic perspective and recommendations. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, *20*(1), 10-31.

Drea, J. T., Tripp, C., & Stuenkel, K. (2005). An assessment of the effectiveness of an in-class game on marketing students' perceptions and learning outcomes. *Marketing Education Review*, *15*(1), 25-33.

Dyce, A., & Smernicki, R. (2018). Bridging the Gap: Music Business Education and the Music Industries. *Proceedings of the 2018 International Summit of the Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association*, 56-60.

Ekoh, A. C. (2018). Traditional pedagogy to innovative pedagogy in business education: a challenge to business educators. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, *3*(2), 133-144.

Forsythe, E., Kahn, L. B., Lange, F., & Wiczer, D. (2020). Labor demand in the time of COVID-19: Evidence from vacancy postings and UI claims. *Journal of Public Economics*, *189*, 1-16.

Franco Valdez, A., & Valdez Cervantes, A. (2018). Retailing laboratory: Delivering skills through experiential learning. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *40*(1), 17-30.

Gilbert, B., Banks, J., Houser, J., Rhodes, S., & Lees, N. (2014). Student development in an experiential learning program. *Journal of College Student Development*, *55*(7), 707-713.

Hamer, L. (2000). The additive effects of semistructured classroom activities on student learning: An application of classroom-based experiential learning techniques. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *22*(1), 25-34.

Handelsman, M. (2021). *Coping with faculty burnout in the pandemic*. Psychology Today. Retrieved from https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-ethical-professor/202110/coping-faculty-burnout-in-the-pandemic.

Herbert, M. (2006). Staying the course: A study in online student satisfaction and retention. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *9*(4), 300-317.

Hoffower, H. (2019). *Nearly half of indebted millennials say college wasn't worth it, and the reason why is obvious*. Business Insider. Retrieved from https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/millennials-college-not-worth-student-loan-debt-2019-4.

Hoover, E. (2020). *The demographic cliff: 5 findings from new projections of high school graduates*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-demographic-cliff-5-findings-from-new-projections-of-high-school-graduates.

Horowitz, J. (2018). Relative education and the advantage of a college degree. *American Sociological Review*, *83*(4), 771-801.

Huang, S. C., Etkin, J., & Jin, L. (2017). How winning changes motivation in multiphase competitions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *112*(6), 813.

James, S., Swan, K., & Daston, C. (2016). Retention, progression and the taking of online courses. *Online Learning*, *20*(2), 75-96.

Jongbloed, B. (2004). Regulation and competition in higher education. In *Markets in Higher Education* (pp. 87-111). Springer, Dordrecht.

Kamenetz, A. (2014). *When college isn't worth it*. NPR. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2014/05/28/316344968/when-college-isnt-worth-it.

Keller, G. (2001). The new demographics of higher education. *The Review of Higher Education*, *24*(3), 219-235.

Kerr, E. (2019). *Is college worth the cost?*. US News. from https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/paying-for-college/articles/2019-06-17/is-college-worth-the-cost.

Kolb, D. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT press.

Konak, A., Clark, T., & Nasereddin, M. (2014). Using Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to improve student learning in virtual computer laboratories. *Computers & Education*, *72*, 11-22.

Kumar, A., Mukherjee, A., & McGinnis, J. (2015). Who Wants to Be an E-tailpreneur? Experiences from an Electronic Retailing Course. *Marketing Education Review*, *25*(2), 117-128.

Lee, S. (2008). Increasing student learning: A comparison of students' perceptions of learning in the classroom environment and their industry-based experiential learning assignments. *Journal of Teaching in Travel & Tourism*, *7*(4), 37-54.

Lemon, J. (2021). *Fox host Tucker Carlson says college education "diminishes you" and "everyone should opt out"*. Newsweek. Retrieved from https://www.newsweek.com/fox-host-tucker-carlson-says-college-education-diminishes-you-everyone-should-opt-out-1586212.

Lewis, L., & Williams, C. (1994). Experiential learning: Past and present. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *1994*(62), 5-16.

Marginson, S. (2006). Dynamics of national and global competition in higher education. *Higher Education*, *52*(1), 1-39.

McMurtrie, B. (2020). *The pandemic Is dragging on. Professors are burning out.* The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-pandemic-is-dragging-on-professors-are-burning-out.

Miller, R. J., & Maellaro, R. (2016). Getting to the root of the problem in experiential learning: Using problem solving and collective reflection to improve learning outcomes. *Journal of Management Education*, *40*(2), 170-193.

Morehouse, I. (2022). *More and more young people are just too good for college*. Fox Business. Retrieved from https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/degrees-are-working-against-many-job-seekers.

Musselin, C. (2018). New forms of competition in higher education. *Socio-Economic Review*, *16*(3), 657-683.

Natale, S., & Libertella, A. (1998). Education-business partnership: shifting sands in the university and corporate community. *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, *32*(2), 257-268.

Passyn, K. A., & Billups, M. J. (2019). How to improve written case analysis and reduce grading time: The one-page, two-case method. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *41*(3), 215-229.

Pearlstein, S. (2018). *Perspective | is college worth it? One professor says no.* The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/why-higher-education-has-little-incentive-to-deliver-better-value/2018/03/08/a02684e0-224a-11e8-94da-ebf9d112159c_story.html.

Schroeder, R. (2022). *A second demographic cliff adds to urgency for change*. Inside Higher Ed. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/digital-learning/blogs/online-trending-now/second-demographic-cliff-adds-urgency-change.

Shell, E. R. (2018). *College may not be worth it anymore*. The New York Times. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/16/opinion/college-useful-cost-jobs.html.

Swan, K. (2001). Virtual interaction: Design factors affecting student satisfaction and perceived learning in asynchronous online courses. *Distance Education*, *22*(2), 306-331.

Svrluga, S. (2019). Is college worth it? A Georgetown study measures return on investment—with some surprising results. *The Washington Post*.

Tews, M., Jackson, K., Ramsay, C., & Michel, J. (2015). Fun in the college classroom: Examining its nature and relationship with student engagement. *College Teaching*, *63*(1), 16-26.

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next?. *Journal of college student retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *8*(1), 1-19.

Tretina, K. (2021). *Is college worth the cost? pros vs. cons*. Forbes. Retrieved from https://www.forbes.com/advisor/student-loans/is-college-worth-it/.

Udelhofen, S. (2005). *Keys to curriculum mapping: Strategies and tools to make it work*. Corwin Press.

Wanous, J., & Reichers, A. (1996). Estimating the reliability of a single-item measure. *Psychological Reports*, *78*(2), 631-634.

Whitford, E. (2021). Survey shows Americans are divided over value of a degree. Retrieved from https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/09/13/survey-shows-americans-are-divided-over-value-degree.

Wilezol, D., & Bennett, W. (2015). *Is college worth it?* Fox News. Retrieved from https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/is-college-worth-it

Wurdinger, S., & Allison, P. (2017). Faculty perceptions and use of experiential learning in higher education. *Journal of e-learning and Knowledge Society*, *13*(1), 16-26.

Zhai, X., Gu, J., Liu, H., Liang, J., & Tsai, C. (2017). An Experiential Learning Perspective on Students' Satisfaction Model in a Flipped Classroom Context. *Journal of Educational Technology and Society*, *20*(1), 198-210.

Zusman, A. (2005). Challenges facing higher education in the twenty-first century. *American higher education in the twenty-first century: Social, political, and economic challenges*, *2*, 115-160.