IT'S NOT THE CLICKS THAT COUNT:
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a theoretical model and purpose for discussion groups using Bloom's Taxonomy of learning. It also shows how online discussions benefit from using these learning objectives as a guideline to course design and it offers a framework for Internet-delivered Marketing courses. This includes course specific discussion objectives and methodologies that go beyond current orientations that emphasize increasing the number of posts or "clicks."

Discussion groups allow students to participate actively and interact with students and faculty. As such, they supplement content delivery. They, along with the content, must be guided by course objectives based on learning outcomes. Therefore, an online discussion group's (threaded discussions) objectives should integrate class learning objectives with technology and a pedagogical approach.

The model suggests a framework to examine Bloom's Taxonomy as viable theory to provide significant outcomes of Internet-based learning. The computer environment offers faculty members a richness of evaluation tools unavailable or extremely difficult to capture in the classroom. In a synchronous class-based environment, the faculty member's time is spent moderating and leading the discussion, and unless it is videotaped, much of the information of the class discussion is lost. In the online world, the discussion stream is saved. The level of interaction can be easily quantified and the discussion content can be reviewed, categorized and measured.

This paper suggests that evaluating the quality of online discussion first requires consideration of its pedagogical objectives and, as a result, requires much more than the measurement of the number of posts. By leveraging the benefit of stored transcripts, we may be able to evaluate levels of community development via inter-student activity, indicators of critical thinking and other measures of enhanced learning as a result of applying Bloom's Taxonomy to online discussions.

The paper provides several recommendations to marketing educators based on the model including discussion guidelines, question content, community development and faculty participation. Finally, the paper presents areas for future research including the development of a survey that can demonstrate the relationship of each level of Bloom's taxonomy to specific learning objectives of the class and the elements of the model.