

## SCHOLARLY NETWORKING: DISCUSSION BOARD ACTIVITY AND OUTCOMES IN AN INTRODUCTION TO MARKETING COURSE

Kristen Walker, *California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St.,  
Northridge CA, 91330-8377, kristen.walker@csun.edu*

Mary T. Curren, *California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St.,  
Northridge CA, 91330-8377, mary.curren@csun.edu*

Tina Kiesler, *California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St.,  
Northridge CA, 91330-8377 tina.kiesler@csun.edu*

Jamie Goldenson, *California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St.,  
Northridge CA, 91330-8377*

### ABSTRACT

Do online discussions enhance student learning and academic outcomes? In this study we examine the relationship between the *type* of online discussion-board usage in an introductory marketing course and academic performance. We also examine student social networking site (SNS) membership and usage to determine if there is any difference in academic outcomes. If SNS usage is related to lower grades (Karpinski & Duberstein, 2009; Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010), yet discussion boards or online forums are related to higher grades, then perhaps the difference between social and scholarly online interactions is an important area for further inquiry.

This study was conducted from Fall 2008 through Spring 2010 in five sections of an introductory marketing course taught in a lecture hall at a large public university. Data from 526 business majors were analyzed. The same marketing professor taught this course across the five semesters. To encourage participation both in the lecture hall and outside of the class, an online discussion board was created utilizing the WebCT online-platform supported by the university. The professor set up the discussion board with threads that covered various class components and monitored the discussion regularly. In addition to data from the use of the WebCT platform, we also collected data from students regarding usage of SNS and gender.

The primary independent variable is the *type* of discussion board activity. WebCT usage data include data on postings read (the number of times a person clicks on discussion threads) and posts (how many times a person contributed in writing to a discussion on the discussion board). The dependent variables include final grade, individual grades (pop quiz and average grade across 7 online

exams) as well as grades on two group assignments (a situation analysis and a marketing plan).

*Reading the Discussion Board and Outcomes:* There were significant effects of gender and major in the amount of discussion board reading. Specifically, females read more posts than males ( $F=27.413, p<.001$ ). This is consistent with the findings of DeNui and Dodge (2006). While the number of posts doesn't vary by major ( $F=.785, ns$ ), the number of posts *read* does differ by major ( $F=2.624, p<.01$ ). Students majoring in Accounting or Finance read more than other students. It is important to note that those two majors are the only two business majors with GPA entrance requirements at the study site. Of greatest interest is our finding that those who read more posts earned higher final grades in the course ( $F=1.394, p<.005$ ).

*Posting and Outcomes:* Those who posted more earned higher grades on their pop quizzes ( $F=2.010, p<.01$ ), their situation analyses ( $F=1.620, p<.05$ ) and their final grades ( $F=3.093, p<.001$ ).

*Social Networking Sites Membership/Usage and Outcomes:* When examining SNS membership and outcomes, we found no significant association between whether a student belongs to a social networking site and final grade, nor the grades earned on individual or group assignments. We did find a significant relationship between belonging to an SNS and the student's major ( $F=2.235, p<.05$ ). SNS weekly usage rate showed no significant relationship with gender ( $F=.687, ns$ ) nor grades ( $F=1.312, ns$ ) and only a slightly significant relationship with major ( $F=2.073, p=.052$ ).

Our findings show that scholarly discussion board activity is significantly related to course grades. It is

encouraging to note that when the discussion board activity is structured, scholarly networking leads to better student performance. In contrast to Karpinski and Duberstein's (2009) findings, there was no significant relationship between academic outcomes and SNS usage. Of concern however are the gender differences found in this study and previous studies.

Our findings show that males do not use the discussion board as much as female students and therefore do not derive the same academic benefits. Faculty who incorporate these pedagogical tools in their courses should be encouraging students to use them.