

ENJOYMENT OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES AS A CORRELATE OF OTHER PERCEPTIONS
AND MEASURES OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN A MARKETING COURSE

Barbara A. McCuen, University of Nebraska, Omaha

ABSTRACT

The evaluation of specific learning activities in a retailing course indicates that there is a positive relationship between the extent students enjoy a learning activity and their perceptions of its instructional value. Depending on the type of activity evaluated, enjoyment of a learning activity may also be a significant correlate of the time students invest in the activity and their performance on a corresponding test or project.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators develop the courses they teach on the basis of many considerations including their beliefs about the instructional value of entertaining teaching techniques. Some professors are convinced that classes and assignments must be interesting, enjoyable, or at least pleasant experiences to motivate students to learn about marketing. Other marketing educators completely discount "entertainment" as irrelevant to classroom instruction or consider it to be a necessary evil at best.

Individualism among marketing professors probably precludes consensus on any topic in marketing education. Nevertheless, research should be conducted to determine if "entertainment" is a superfluous consideration in course development or an important correlate of student performance. Such research may never be conclusive, but it can provide evidence to support or oppose the argument that marketing courses should be enjoyable as well as based on sound content.

FINDINGS AND LIMITATIONS OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Reported comparisons of teaching methods in marketing education clearly indicate that there are significant differences between approaches to instruction in terms of the extent they are enjoyable to students. For example, Cunningham and Cundiff (1973) found that students in an introductory marketing course based on a multi-media format perceived the course to be more interesting and entertaining than the typical large or small class the students were asked to imagine and evaluate in comparison.

The research conducted by Cunningham and Cundiff was limited by the fact that only one instruction approach was actually experienced by the students surveyed. Nevertheless, a factor analysis showed that several variables representing "enjoyment" and "instructional value" were interrelated to a significant degree. In a broader study, Guseman and Dahringer (1976) found that the "interest

rating" of a teaching aid was quite highly correlated with its "effectiveness rating" for all seventeen types of teaching aids they asked students to evaluate. On the basis of the Pearson correlation coefficients varying from .56 to .89, depending on the teaching aid assessed, Guseman and Dahringer concluded that "it would seem the more interesting the teaching technique is to the student, the more it facilitates learning and understanding of the material" (p. 541). However, their research was based on a general assessment of teaching aids and not on a direct evaluation of specific learning activities actually experienced by students. This appears to be an important limitation because Guseman and Dahringer found that "the rated effectiveness of the teaching technique was...influenced by whether the student had been previously exposed to the teaching technique. In general, if a student had been exposed to a teaching aid, the higher the teaching aid would be rated" (p. 541).

The most serious limitation of previous research is that it has not addressed the question of whether enjoyment of a learning activity is a determinant, or even a correlate, of the amount of time students invest in the activity or their performance on a corresponding test, case analysis or project. Yet, this question is the most important to answer if the instructional value of more or less enjoyable learning activities is going to be determined in marketing education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The remainder of this paper is a report of the methodology and findings of a relatively simple, exploratory research project with implications for course development and further investigations based on more sophisticated research designs. To overcome the limitations of previous investigations, the research was intentionally designed to focus on the relative enjoyment of learning activities actually experienced by students in a marketing course and not on a general assessment of teaching techniques which may or may not be frequently used by marketing educators.

One objective of the study was to test the hypothesis that there is a relationship between the extent students enjoy a learning activity in a marketing course and their perceptions of its instructional value which varies depending on the type of activity assessed. However, the most important objective was to determine if the extent students enjoy learning activities is related to the amount of time students invest in them and to the students' performance on corresponding tests and projects. In addition, the project was carried out to examine the importance of the enjoyment and perceived value of learning activities relative to

common predictors of academic performance, namely cumulative grade point average and classification of the student by year in college.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from the students in the introductory retailing course offered by the college of business in a midwestern, medium-sized private university. The retailing course was selected because it offered students the opportunity to experience a simple, yet varied, combination of learning experiences which are common in marketing education, namely attending class, completing reading assignments, and doing projects.

Attending class in the retailing course involved listening to traditional lectures, watching slide presentations narrated by the professor, listening to a limited number of guest speakers in business, participating in class discussion, and taking notes. The remaining learning activities in the course were as follows: reading nine chapters in an introductory retailing textbook and four supplementary articles from current periodicals for the midterm examination, reading eight other textbook chapters for the exam given during final week, completing an assignment requiring each student to interview a person employed in retailing and submit a written report of the interview following specific guidelines, and completing an individual project. Compared to the interview assignment, the second project was unstructured and more demanding since the design and development of the project was completely left up to the individual student. The resulting projects were typically turned in two weeks before the end of the semester, and they tended to range from common term papers to creative presentations illustrated with 35mm slides, print photography, or drawings.

Data were collected during the last week of classes prior to the administration of the final examination in the course. Of the 60 students enrolled in the class, 52 (86.7%) completed the questionnaire designed for this research.

The questionnaire asked the students to rate each of their learning activities in the course, including attending classes, using two 5-point scales. The first scale provided a measure representing the "enjoyment" of the learning activity evaluated:

1	2	3	4	5
This activity was not at all enjoyable			This activity was very enjoyable	

The second measure represented the instructional "value" of the learning activity assessed:

1	2	3	4	5
This activity contributed little or nothing to my knowledge of retailing			Through this activity my knowledge of retailing was greatly increased	

The remaining investigated variables were the amounts of time the students reported investing in learning activities including the percentage

of classes attended, the grades they reported receiving on the midterm exam and the projects they completed, their overall college grade points (GPA) and their classifications as sophomores, juniors or seniors.

The data collected were assigned numerical values when necessary, tabulated and summarized using descriptive statistics. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to determine if statistically significant relationships existed among the measured variables, and a .05 level of probability was used as the basic decision criterion when the coefficients were interpreted.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings summarized in Table 1 confirm the common observation that students enjoy and value some types of learning activities more than others.

TABLE 1

Average Enjoyment and Value of Activity Ratings and the Degree of Correlation between Ratings

Activity	Mean ^a Enjoyment Rating	Mean ^a Value of Activity Rating	Correlation ^b Enjoyment and Value Ratings
Reading textbook for midterm exam	2.57 (0.96)	3.23 (1.17)	.532 (0.00)
Reading textbook for final exam	2.60 (0.95)	3.46 (1.01)	.547 (0.00)
Reading articles from periodicals	3.83 (0.92)	3.94 (0.83)	.552 (0.00)
Completing the interview assignment	4.12 (1.06)	4.14 (0.89)	.479 (0.00)
Completing the individual project	3.64 (1.17)	4.31 (0.73)	.616 (0.00)
Attending classes in the course	3.59 (0.96)	3.86 (0.90)	.769 (0.00)

^aThe standard deviation associated with the mean is presented in parentheses.

^bThe probability of the correlation occurring by chance is presented in parentheses.

Completing the interview assignment and reading supplementary articles from current periodicals were rated as the most enjoyable activities while reading chapters in the introductory retailing textbook were viewed as the least enjoyable. The students also perceived reading textbook chapters as contributing the least to their knowledge of retailing. From the students' perspective, completing the interview and individual projects

was noticeably more valuable as well as more enjoyable.

The evaluation of the specific activities listed in Table 1 suggests that students are more likely to enjoy activities which bring them closer to the "real world" of marketing. When activities are compared in terms of their perceived contributions to knowledge of subject matter, the evaluation suggests that students believe projects requiring "active" involvement have more instructional value than "passive" reading assignments.

The average ratings presented in Table 1 suggest that the students were willing to acknowledge the academic value of a learning activity even if they did not particularly enjoy it. However, the correlation between the enjoyment of an activity and its perceived value was statistically significant for every activity assessed and high enough to suggest that there is a general, positive relationship between the extent students enjoy a learning activity and their perceptions of its instructional value. In addition, the findings support the hypothesis that the specific strength of the relationship will vary depending on the type of learning activity evaluated.

The highest correlation listed in Table 1 is the correlation between the extent students enjoyed attending classes in the retailing course and the extent these classes were perceived to contribute to the students' knowledge of retailing. As shown in Table 2, both of these measures were relatively strong correlates of the percentage of classes students actually attended. Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the percentage of classes attended was also related to all three of the reported test and project grades. Consequently, the findings may suggest that enjoyable classes not only improve attendance but also affect academic performance.

The remaining correlation coefficients reported in Table 2 and Table 3 suggest that the importance of enjoyment and perceived instructional value will vary depending on the learning activity or measure of performance considered.

As shown in Table 2, the enjoyment of reading textbook chapters for the midterm exam was a positive correlate of the time invested in this activity. However, as shown in Table 3, the strongest positive correlate of the midterm examination grade was college GPA, and the examination grade was inversely related to the extent students enjoyed reading the textbook chapters covered on the test, the perceived instructional value of the reading assignments, and the time students invested in them.

The correlations reported in Table 2 indicate that the enjoyment of the interview assignment and the students' perceptions of its academic value were both positive correlates of the time invested in the assignment. In turn, as shown in Table 3, time investment was the strongest correlate of the grade received on the interview report.

Referring again to Table 2, the perceived value of the individual project was the only significant correlate of the time students invested in the project. However, as shown in Table 3, the enjoyment rating of the project and college GPA were the strongest correlates of the grades students received when their projects were evaluated. In interpreting this finding, it should be noted that college GPA was significantly correlated with the enjoyment rating of the individual project ($r = .302, p = .015$). In contrast, college GPA was not systematically related to enjoyment of the reading assignments for the midterm ($r = -.057, p = .345$) or the interview assignment ($r = .010, p = .240$).

TABLE 2

Correlates of Time Investments in Learning Activities^a

Activity	Enjoyment of Activity Rating	Value of Activity Rating	College GPA	Classification
Hours spent reading textbook chapters for midterm exam	.237 (.049)	.195 (.086)	.264 (.030)	-.045 (.378)
Hours spent completing interview assignment	.256 (.035)	.359 (.005)	.406 (.002)	.040 (.390)
Hours spent completing individual project	.139 (.165)	.240 (.045)	.150 (.147)	-.070 (.313)
Percentage of classes attended in the course	.453 (.000)	.407 (.002)	.371 (.003)	.076 (.296)

^aThe probability of the correlation occurring by chance is presented in parentheses below the computed Pearson correlation coefficient. Coefficients with probabilities below the .05 level are highlighted.

TABLE 3

Correlates of Grades Received in the Introductory Retailing Course^a

Performance Measure	Enjoyment of corresponding reading or project	Value of corresponding reading or project	Hours spent on corresponding reading or project	Percentage of classes attended	College GPA	Classification
Midterm Examination Grade	-.490 (.000)	-.339 (.008)	-.144 (.160)	.227 (.054)	.361 ^b (.005)	.090 (.264)
Interview Assignment Grade	.347 (.006)	.306 (.014)	.544 ^b (.000)	.344 (.006)	.405 ^b (.001)	.085 (.274)
Individual Project Grade	.510 ^b (.000)	.400 (.004)	.360 (.010)	.376 (.007)	.577 ^b (.000)	.268 (.041)

^aThe probability of the correlation occurring by chance is presented in parentheses below the computed Pearson correlation coefficient. Coefficients with probabilities below the .05 level are highlighted.

^bThe highest positive correlate(s) of the examination or project grade.

If overall GPA is interpreted as a general measure of ability, skill, motivation and commitment in college, it is not surprising that this variable was a consistently strong correlate of the three measures of academic performance listed in Table 3. On the other hand, classification as a second, third, or fourth year student was not a significant, or even noticeable, correlate of performance except in the case of the individual project.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this exploratory study, it is probably futile to try to determine "the" amount of variance in performance measures that can be explained by the extent students enjoy corresponding learning activities. If scores on specific tests or projects are used as the dependent measures in a series of analyses based on step-wise regression or another more sophisticated procedure, the amount of variance explained by measures of enjoyment for corresponding learning activities will probably vary from one measure of performance to another even if the effects of multicollinearity are taken into consideration in the analysis and interpretation of data.

The results of the research reported in this paper clearly suggest that the correlation between the extent students enjoy a learning activity and their performance on a corresponding test or project may vary in both direction and strength, depending on the type of activity and performance measure assessed. Furthermore, the importance of the enjoyment variable relative to other correlates may also change from one performance measure to another.

The enjoyment of attending class may be an important, if not direct, correlate of general academic performance in a marketing course. On the other hand, in the case of a specific, structured assignment, time investment may be a stronger determinant of measured performance than the extent students enjoy the assignment. In the case of a major, independent project, both the enjoyment of the project and overall GPA may be stronger correlates of performance than the time invested in the project. In still other cases, an enjoyment measure may be a weak or even negative correlate of performance. Consequently, further investigations should focus on determining how the importance of "entertainment" in marketing education varies from one type of learning activity to another. Through such research, we can determine when it is important to use enjoyable presentations and projects to facilitate learning and when it is not.

REFERENCES

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