The First Global Google Online Marketing Challenge 2008: Perspectives of ECU Student Participants

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Abstract University students enjoy experiential marketing education that involves live cases and competition projects. While empirical studies have focused on various marketing education disciplines, few have investigated live global competition projects in the integrated marketing communications discipline. This study explored the perspectives of Edith Cowan University undergraduate and postgraduate students who participated in the first global Google Online Marketing Challenge in April-May 2008 as an optional assessment in an integrated marketing communications unit, which is part of the Advertising and Public Relations majors in the School of Communications and Arts. Participation in the Challenge was analogous to Kolb's experiential learning theory of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and testing as students recruited clients, prepared strategies, monitored the live campaigns, reflected on results, constructed new activities, tested them, and experienced the 'highs' and 'lows' of the whole competition process. 13 of 17 participants returned the qualitative questionnaire. Data analysis uncovered concepts of "Reality", "Challenge", "Discovery", and "Relationships" that ultimately merged into a Relationship Triangle Model for Exhilarated Adult Group Learning Experience (RTM-EAGLE). Implications for theory, practice, and research are also discussed.

Introduction

Students have different learning styles and prefer dynamic experiential learning activities (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005). For many years, universities were criticised for not providing sufficient real-world experiential learning (Kelley & Gaedeke, 1990; Thomas, 1995). Recent empirical studies reveal that university students prefer experiential learning through competitions, field site visits, internships, live projects, presentations, and student-operated businesses (Hamer, 2000; Kennedy, Lawton & Walker, 2001; Karns, 2005; Doren & Corrigan, 2008).

Marketing educators have advocated real-world experiential learning in various courses (Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney & Wright, 2000; Thomas & Busby, 2003; Jansen, Hudson, Hunter, Liu & Murphy, 2008). In the context of integrated marketing communications (IMC), the discipline involved in this study, Luck & Chalmers (2007) discovered that students in Queensland, Australia, benefited from working with schools to prepare marketing communications plans. However, few studies have investigated live global competition projects in the IMC discipline.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of Edith Cowan University (ECU) students of IMC who participated in the 2008 Google Online Marketing Challenge, the first global online marketing competition for university students. This paper

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describes the Challenge, the ECU IMC context, the literature and conceptual framework on experiential learning, the methodology, the findings, and discussion of implications for theory, practice, and research.

The Google Challenge

Google ran its biggest global online competition between February-May 2008. Student teams of four to six members had to find a real client who had a website but had not advertised on Google's AdWords (short advertisements that appear with keyword search) within six months preceding the competition. Students had to understand the client's business, write a pre-campaign strategy, develop an online AdWords campaign over three weeks with a Google-sponsored budget of US$200, monitor the live campaign results, improve the campaign, and write a post-campaign report (Google, 2008).
The pre-campaign strategy had to be less than two pages covering client overview and a proposed AdWords campaign while the post-campaign report had to be less than 10 pages incorporating an industry component (campaign overview, key results, conclusions, and recommendations for the client) and a learning component (reflecting on learning objectives and outcomes, group dynamics and client dynamics, the evolution of the campaign, and future recommendations on overall learning). In February 2008, professors had registered 21,000 students from 466 universities in 61 countries to compete in the competition. By May 2008, 8,000 students from 47 countries actually competed in the challenge, with every participant receiving a Google Certificate of Participation (Google, 2008).

Google judged the entries over three rounds (Jansen et al., 2008). In Round One, Google used its Campaign Statistics Algorithm to examine 1,620 entries over 30 variables, such as the number of impressions or advertisement appearances, the number of online clicks on the client AdWords, the cost-per-click, keyword choices for the advertisements, and budgeting for the three-week campaign that had to run during the competition period of 10 February and 24 May. In Round Two, Google employees manually reviewed the 150 short-listed teams to trim down to 15. In Round Three, a Global Academic Judging Panel assessed the written reports of the top five teams in each competition region - The Americas; Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA); and Asia Pacific (APAC) – to determine the regional and global winners and the finalists (Google, 2008).

The Americas winner was The Pennsylvania State University; the EMEA winner was the Universität Bern (Switzerland), and the APAC winner came from the Australian Graduate School of Management. The global winner came from the University of Western Australia (UWA). The UWA student team and academic coordinator won a trip to the Google headquarters in California while regional winners received a trip to the regional Google office. The global and regional winners also won an Apple Macbook Pro (Jansen et al., 2008).

The winners worked with companies in diverse industries – rock-climbing, tourism and information site, travel agency, a specialty cake business, an online bakery, an online sporting equipment retailer, an online skincare site, and a computer rental company. About 50% of global teams worked on the competition as a mandatory assessment worth 30% of the course grade (Jansen et al., 2008).

ECU Context

170 ECU IMC students (150 undergraduates, 20 postgraduates) were given three optional project assignments worth 40% of the unit grade – the traditional individual learning portfolio, a group IMC strategy on a social cause of their choice, and the Google Challenge,

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which complemented the IMC unit focus on marketing, advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, the Internet, support media, personal selling, and synergistic communication. The Google Challenge also fitted into ECU's mutually beneficial student-community-university engagement strategy.

The author and academic coordinator of the Challenge at ECU had adapted Google's 25:75 grading ratio for pre-campaign strategy and post-campaign report into 10 marks and 30 marks respectively for the two written documents. Students were informed about the assignment options on 28 February 2008, the start of the IMC unit, and were given a week to decide.

Only 10 students or 7% of the IMC undergraduate student population opted for the Google Challenge, with another 14% working on the social-cause project, and 79% preferring to work alone on the learning portfolio so that they could have better control of their time and pace. While the Google Challenge had looked appealing, the massive materials for reading and the anticipated workload for 40% of the grade deterred many undergraduate second year students. Of the 10 undergraduate students, three were Australians while the international students came from Dubai, Germany, India, Sweden, and Zimbabwe. In the postgraduate class, seven students or 35% opted for the Google Challenge, with 45% choosing the IMC strategy and 20% opting for the learning portfolio. The seven postgraduates were international students from Bangladesh, China, Germany, Malaysia, and Venezuela.

The postgraduate students formed their own two teams, with one team having an undergraduate student friend. Three international undergraduate students recruited an Australian student who had responded to their announcement at a lecture for another team member. The fourth team was made up of five international and Australian undergraduate students from various classes.

Most teams had problems recruiting their clients, so the initial timeline for the campaign period was amended twice. Eventually, the four ECU teams worked with surfing companies, a university preparation college, and ECU's Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (Figure 1). The ECU academic coordinator empowered the teams to experience the competition process and assessed the two documents before team captains uploaded them to Google. The team of three postgraduate students and one undergraduate student ended as a Semi-Finalist in the APAC region, having scored sufficiently in the Campaign Statistics Algorithm to be in the Top 50.

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Figure 1 Selected AdWords of the Four Clients of ECU Teams

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The Literature

Kolb's experiential learning theory (ELT) of experiencing-reflecting-thinking-acting (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005, 2008) evolved from the learning theories of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, William James, Carl Jung, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, and Carl Rogers (Kolb & Kolb, 2008).

ELT is a recursive learning spiral where experiences trigger reflections, which in turn influence conceptualisation of concepts for further experiential testing (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Some scholars have criticised the theoretical underpinnings of ELT (Holman, Pavlica, & Thorpe, 1997; Hopkins, 1993; Miettinen, 1998; Reynolds, 1999; Vince, 1998; cited in Kayes, 2002), but the majority of scholars have supported ELT for university education. Since 1971, there have been over 2,500 studies on ELT in disciplines of accounting, education, information science, law, management, marketing, medicine, nursing, and psychology (Kolb & Kolb, 2007a, 2007b).

In experiential marketing education, quantitative studies have focused on ELT in marketing (Petkus, 2000; Kennedy et al., 2001; Karns, 2006; Doren & Corrigan, 2008), marketing communications (Luck & Chalmers, 2007), personal selling and purchasing (O'Hara & Shaffer, 1995), and services marketing (Gremler et al., 2000).
Two studies reported on students benefiting from live cases. Kennedy et al. (2001) concluded that marketing and entrepreneurship students at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, enhanced skills in creativity and problem solving when they developed plans for small-business owners. Luck & Chalmers (2007) in Australia found that undergraduate students at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) enjoyed working with state schools to produce IMC plans through the School Marketing and Real-world Teaching (SMART) project, which was developed in 2005 by QUT and the Department of Education, Training and the Arts.

Students learn more through competitive projects (Stutts & West, 2003; Jansen et al., 2008; Rundle-Thiele & Kuhn, 2008; Zabkar, 2008). Stutts & West (2003) analysed quantitative questionnaires from students who had participated in SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise) and AAF/NSAC (American Advertising Federation/National Student Advertising Competition) projects between 1996-2002 and concluded that most students had favourable feelings towards the competitions and their university, which had coordinated participation in the two projects.

Zabkar (2008) analysed the experiences of 230 undergraduate students in an advertising and marketing communication course at the University of Ljubljana, where students prepared problem-based programmes for brand managers from sponsoring companies. Student teams went through several rounds, with the finalists presenting to partner companies. Winners received company products and extra course-grade bonus as prizes.

The closest to the Google Online Marketing Challenge is the Get Marketer Challenge (Rundle-Thiele & Kuhn, 2008), where student teams from the University of Southern Queensland and Griffith University competed in a course-wide competition to solve marketing problems. 250 teams presented in tutorial classes, 40 teams were short-listed by peers to present at lectures, and six teams were again voted to present to the sponsoring company in the final round. Finalists received certificates and the winning team was given $1, 000.

Jansen et al. (2008), who were involved as developers and academic coordinators of the Google Challenge, reported on the Google competition, the results, and tips for the future. Findings were from an online survey of students, academics, participating clients, and administrators of the competition. While there were several views of student participants, the report did not reveal in-depth feelings of students in a particular university and in the IMC discipline. Hence, this study on ECU IMC students' participation in the first Google online

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marketing competition extends ELT research in marketing education with qualitative 'voices' of respondents.

Methodology

The ELT model of experiencing-reflecting-thinking-acting fitted the Google Challenge. ECU students experienced the competition, reflected, thought through what worked and did not work, and acted again to experience the live competition. Hence, the study explored ECU student perspectives on the Google Challenge.

The guiding research questions were: What were initial student thoughts and feelings on the Google Challenge? What were the attractive and frustrating moments developing and completing the pre-campaign strategy, tracking and managing the campaign, and writing the post-campaign report? How has the Google Challenge developed student knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the disciplines of marketing communications, marketing consultancy, team dynamics, leadership, problem solving, and personal responsibility? What recommendations would ECU student participants suggest for the Google Challenge?

The 17 students who took part in the challenge received a survey questionnaire in July 2008, several weeks after the completion of the competition and during the semester break. 13 students returned the questionnaire (seven postgraduate and six undergraduate students), of which 11 international students were from Bangladesh, China, India, Germany, Malaysia, Sweden, and Venezuela. The participants were coded P1 to P13 to de-identify them. Data were analysed for themes, with common themes evolving into concept labels such as *"Reality Challenge"* and *"Unfamiliar Uniqueness"*.

Findings

The findings are discussed according to the research headings of initial thoughts and feelings, pre-campaign strategy, campaign management, post-campaign report, overall learning, and student recommendations.

Initial Thoughts and Feelings

Three concepts emerged from the data on the initial thoughts and feelings of ECU student participants: *"Real Life", "Unfamiliar Uniqueness",* and *"Incidental Incentives"*.

Students were attracted to the *"Real Life" nature of* the Google competition – real client, real project, real budget planning, real campaign appearing on the global Google network, a real attempt to benefit the client to increase web traffic and business, and a real learning experience for students. Students wrote:

> The most beneficial factor was definitely to work for a "real" company. This helps in getting prepared for real life scenarios and work life. [P7]
> It sounded interesting, as it was a real life project. Here we could actually create a campaign that was to air across geographic borders. Working with both Google and a real client increased the importance of the challenge. [P8]
> The fact that the challenge was a "real life" campaign was of course one of the selling points. Real Money – Real Play. [P9]

There was also a sense of *"Unfamiliar Uniqueness"* behind the Google competition. There was unfamiliarity with AdWords and competition scope but there was the intrigue of being involved in something unique. Three students commented:

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I knew so little about the AdWords and how much work that had to be put into the challenge. I found that after reading a bit more online, at Google AdWords support pages, I thought that the challenge would definitely be something different compared to anything else we've done at university before. [P9]

I wanted to immerse myself into the project and have a real good go at it because it was different, realistic and seemingly worthwhile – much to learn from it. [P10]

I wanted to test myself to know if I can do it or not, and to work as a team with the local client, to get useful experience for my future. [P6]

"Incidental Incentives" – experiencing different cultures, working with dedicated students, and being certified by Google – attracted three students:

I wanted to work with different nationalities because different cultures have different ideas. [P5]

As an optional assignment, I knew the possibility to work with enthusiastic and dedicated students would be higher. [P12]

Knowing we would be certified by Google to boost my resume pushed me without second thoughts to decide yes. [P11]

Pre-Campaign Strategy

There were feelings of "*Foreign Exhilaration"* and *"Frustrated Freedom"* at the same time. It was a "foreign" feeling for teams to be given the freedom to choose their own clients from any industry; it was exhilarating to have a never-met-before client agree to meet the teams and agree to be their clients for the competition; and it was extremely satisfying putting the campaign together. Students wrote:

Finding a client and having the first meeting with them. Exhilarating to have input from somewhere so foreign yet incredibly relevant to us as Communications students. [P10]

It was exciting picking different kinds of business we might work on, 100% of freedom. After confirming the client, we really considered ourselves as an agency. [P4]

It is very demanding but very rewarding the fact that you can get in contact with real clients and do something that can result in real improvements for them. [P2]

The high moment was when we finally found our client and we decided to visit them. [P3]

I was quite excited after we met our client the first time, because they treated us with a lot of respect and were equally excited about the campaign as we were. [P9]

Getting all the answers together and forming the campaign is truly the best! [P7]

The freedom to select their clients was also an issue of frustration. Several students wrote:

It was frustrating finding a client. [P1]

Most clients rejected us. [P3]

It is not easy to get a client because I am an international student. [P6]

We realised that choosing a client with a big international market created a problem for us when choosing where to target our campaign. We had endless discussions about the most clever way to launch our campaign without spending our budget too fast. [P9]

Campaign Management

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There were *"Interactive Impact"*, *"Uncertain Helplessness"*, *"Transferred Tension"*, and *"Near Disaster"* during the campaign management phase.

Students were able to interact with results from their live campaigns and improve the advertisements or budget allocations if their client AdWords were not achieving desired click-through targets. The impact of interactive change was almost immediate, as students commented:

> Developing the campaign, writing the ads, seeing them appear in Google, making changes for a better performance, realizing that there is still room for improvement. [P1]

> The best part of it was making changes and looking how quick you can see the results and interact with them. We got to check the status even twice a day hoping to find big surprises. [P2]

> It was great when we had changed our strategy during the course of the campaign and started to see a considerable impact on the campaign. Our click-through rate had increased dramatically, and it was great to consistently check our account to see if we had gotten any more. [P8]

> Seeing the results going up!! Being able to Google our own work! Knowing other people in the world have viewed it as 'real' work. Getting constant new ideas and thoughts – the campaign was always on my thoughts. Different methods to test and continuously learning.
> [P10]

> The essence of creating something that works was great. [P13]

The downside of campaign management was *"Uncertain Helplessness"* when results were poor and there were no known solutions. Students wrote:

> We were not able to work out some issues with our ads. At the beginning they weren't coming up and we just couldn't figure out why. [P10]

> We had endless discussions, where we could not agree on one way to adjust our campaign to get the best result. [P9]

> We were not getting any results the first week. It is hard to hold a group together at these times, since changes cannot be made immediately. Problems must be understood before making any changes. It is frustrating waiting for more facts of why the campaign does not work, you must have patience. [P8]

One student had experienced *"Transferred Tension"* and *"Near Disaster"*. The student reported:

> There were a couple of low moments. One was after having an argument with one of my team members. The dispute was not related to this project in particular but the tension was dragged into the Google Challenge regardless. The second low moment was after one night when I was experimenting with the 'keywords' and the 'negative keywords'. That night I did deactivate some of the most important 'keywords' turning them into 'negative keywords' and in just a few hours all our increasing CTR [click-through rates] and Clicks just plummeted. It was a big shock when I checked the next morning and saw the results. We fixed back and all the rates went up again. All the other guys wanted to kill me. The good side of this was that thanks to that we realized how important were the ads and how well the keywords were working because without them we could not reach any of the market we wanted to. [P2]

Post-Campaign Report

There were *"Accomplished Relief"*, *"Competitive Face",* and *"Hindsight Regrets"* when the campaign was over and teams had to write their report for Google and the client. The *"Accomplished Relief"* theme emerged from the following statements:

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It was good to summarize what kind of changes we made and what the outcome was. [P1]

The high side of this part was to track back every single change we did and report it. It is helpful when you have the whole graph and it is possible to realize every single variance throughout the campaign. [P2]

We were able to save our campaign during the course of the campaign by adapting it and changing our phrase matches. A dramatic increase in CTR was shown in some geographic regions. [P8]

We were all quite happy about the end results and even though we had wasted a lot of time, we really had a great time during the campaign and became good friends, which helped a lot when we wrote the post-campaign summary. [P9]

Getting the WHOLE thing done!! Such a relief and sense of final satisfaction. Was intense stuff. Looking back on all the work we had done and using it to reflect. [P10]

Two students expressed a competitive nature and the issue of *"Competitive Face"* in Chinese culture. One said, "We saw other teams working harder than us. We saw our weaknesses and found our strategies didn't work. Face to the failure" [P4]. The other said, "Other teams got better results than us" [P5].

The various *"Hindsight Regrets"* were as follows:

Trying to remember all the changes we did (although we wrote down most of them). [P1]

It was a bit frustrating to realize how many other tools we had and we did not get time to use them. [P2]

I wished we'd had more information on the specific ads we had trialled. That was one thing we didn't actually keep solid record of. We were keeping records of the overall campaign and the keywords. Then deleted ads that weren't working before getting their statistical results. [P10]

The most frustrating for our group was that our client didn't fulfil his objectives that were decided amongst each other. The campaign was thereby not as successful as it could have been. The client had agreed upon re-designing the homepage in order to make it more user friendly and thereby improve our ads position because of higher relevancy towards the landing page. [P8]

Overall Learning

The themes for overall learning from the Google Challenge were *"Real Experience"*, *"Diverse Discovery"*, *"Client Relationship"*, *"Team Relationship"*, and *"Personal Motivation"*.

Students were enthusiastic about the *"Real Experience"*. Here are some comments:

The keyword of my overall learning is "real". I found that running a real marketing campaign is not the same as what's discussed in a book. [P5]

I think the Google Challenge really helped me to gain quality practical knowledge in online marketing. The real life experience is probably the best aspect of it all. [P1]

Learned a lot about the real process, and has made me feel more comfortable in the process of making a campaign. What should be done first, which is the right way to go, etc. [P7]

The choice between portfolio, awareness campaign and the Google campaign, provided a wider choice. The choice I made was partly because of real life experience and other projects being too similar to other course projects. [P8]

When asked about unexpected or surprising learning from the Google Challenge, students had *"Diverse Discovery"* on the advertising process, leadership, and client relationships:

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> The whole experience was an unexpected learning surprise. [P2]
>
> Some AdWords we did not expect were useful, however when we tested them, they were effective and got a good click rate. [P6]
>
> We always talk about the power of the Internet. This time we got a glimpse of its power. [P13]
>
> Company Culture and how to portray that in a small text advertisement. I hadn't considered the atmosphere of a company becoming the ad itself. [P10]
>
> I spent a lot more time on the challenge than I expected. I think I learned more about the process of online advertising than I originally expected from this challenge, and because we did a multi-national campaign we took on more work and issues that taught me a lot of the difficulties of doing cross-border advertising. [P9]
>
> Managing a campaign is not easy, including managing group mates and all the things. [P5]
>
> I learned that as a team leader I have a lot to work on. I need to learn how to relax more and not take on every task. [P7]
>
> Real life experience with clients can be a lot more time consuming and hard work than what you find out through reading a textbook in school. There are always elements that a person doesn't know can affect the dynamics of the relationship. Trusting fully that clients will cooperate with you and meet the assorted deadlines is often dangerous to do. You need to be aggressive and understanding to reach these goals together. [P8]

Several students also realised the importance of *"Client Relationship"* in a consulting process:

> It is every important to keep contact with the client to ensure we are moving on a right track. [P3]
>
> Keeping in touch with client and talking to client frequently is important to gain their trust and more advice. [P4]
>
> I think that clients can start to understand that advertising nowadays does not need to be that expensive and with simply combining the right tools a brand can succeed or step ahead to the competence. [P2]
>
> Sometimes we forget to open up and look rationally at everything else there is being offered but when dealing with clients, you have to be open and speculative about all individual options. [P10]
>
> No matter what kind of business we should understand how it works and get the help of our client in order to know briefly about the market. [P6]
>
> As an "online advertising agency" we more or less had to sell our idea to our client who was very interested in the way the campaign was executed. This involved targeting countries and the creative adtext. We learned how to compromise with the client, even if we had a different agenda i.e. winning the competition, whereas the client wanted us to explore new markets. [P9]

"Team Relationship" was an important overall learning theme, from the role of the leader, the responsibility of each team member, and coping with tensions:

> Being the team leader, I learned a lot about holding the team together and especially making decisions that had to be made when discussions took too long. It was extremely fun to be in this position, even if I got very exhausted at times. [P7]
>
> Sometimes we found that it is difficult to follow everybody's ideas at the same time, leadership becomes important at this point. [P4]
>
> Every team should have a captain because sometimes we have argument and should have someone to give the judgment and keep the campaign going. [P6]
>
> Team leader is important to motivate other members to do their work. However all members should also know what they are doing and do the right job without every time being pushed by the team leader. [P3]

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A group mate was lazy and we had to take over the job. It is not good for teamwork. [P5]

Team members were letting each other down, not putting in the work I assumed they would and then having to chase them up for work. I stayed up till 4.30 in the morning once I'd received late work from people to fix everything and basically re-wrote it. [P10]

Obviously the team went through some ups and downs, but overall every team member provided some valuable quality input for the final result. [P1]

At the beginning there were few misunderstandings about the creative executions but the important thing is that the team was able to understand that changes were needed so the monitoring and daily results were the ones that set the creative solutions. [P2]

Related to the member responsibility issue, five students had high *"Personal Motivation"*:

From my point of view, this is the sort of activity that you choose because you want to do it and do it well. Therefore, most of the learning comes from learning by doing and when you see the results everyday, that is enough to keep you motivated. [P2]

All these aspects were really high and lead to high intrinsic motivation. [P1]

By motivating yourself and setting goals for yourself you can push yourself harder. [P8]

Starting with a real passion that is usually lacking when doing our regular studies. [P13]

And through my blog I could contribute and track actions of the visitors of the blog post and thereby see the people that went through the blog to the landing page of the links. [P9]

Student Recommendations

Students gave diverse recommendations to improve the Google Challenge, such as increasing the weighting for the pre-campaign strategy to factor in the difficulty of client recruitment, increasing the campaign duration, simplifying the Google resource materials, and having a Google email or phone contact to "answer queries relating to statistical averages and trends" [P12]. However, two important themes emerged: *"Team Ethics"* and *"Lifelong Gain"*.

Two students in the same group touched on *"Team Ethics"*:

I would recommend that we should be assessed not only on our output but also on our team ethics. There has to be a team agreement made by the teams. [P11]

I believe there should be written guidelines for future teams to adhere to in regards to setting tasks between them and the level of work required. [P10]

When asked to write AdWords to promote the Google Challenge to future students, several students hinted at *"Lifelong Gain"* from the real experience. Here are three of the AdWords:

Google Challenge
Participate today and gain useful practical knowledge.
For the rest of your life! [P1]
The great attendance of your life
This is the chance you can't miss in your life.
Challenge yourself. Don't regret a whole life! [P5]
AdWords Marketing Challenge
Participate in a Real Competition.

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Gain valuable life experience. [P8]

Summarising the findings, the 19 themes that emerged can be approximately and broadly clustered under core concepts of *"Reality"*, *"Challenge"*, *"Discovery"*, and *"Relationships"* (Table 1). The *"Reality"* is from the real experience of working with real-life clients in a context "foreign" or new to students. The *"Challenge"* is in responding to unfamiliarity, frustration, helplessness, personal motivation, and incentives. The *"Discovery"* is in discovering diverse surprises, impact of change, relief of accomplishment, disaster, regrets, and lifelong gain. The "*Relationships*" concept embeds team tensions, team relationship, team ethics, peer competition, and client relationship.

Reality	*Challenge*	*Discovery*	*Relationships*
"Real Experience"	*"Unfamiliar Uniqueness"*	*"Diverse Discovery"*	*"Transferred Tension"*
"Real Life"	*"Frustrated Freedom"*	*"Interactive Impact"*	*"Team Relationship"*
"Foreign Exhilaration"	*"Uncertain Helplessness"*	*"Accomplished Relief"*	*"Team Ethics"*
	"Personal Motivation"	*"Near Disaster"*	*"Competitive Face"*
	"Incidental Incentives"	*"Hindsight Regrets"*	*"Client Relationship"*
		"Lifelong Gain"	

Table 1: Core concepts from data themes

Implications

While the study was delimited to ECU IMC students who participated in the first Google Online Marketing Challenge, there are possible implications for theory, practice, and research.

The core concepts of *"Reality-Challenge-Discovery-Relationships"* can be further re-modelled as the Relationship Triangle Model (RTM) with *"Relationships"* at the centre and *"Reality"*, *"Challenge"*, and *"Discovery"* as three sides of the triangle (Figure 2). It stresses the importance of *"Relationships"* in any experiential group learning, as managing relationships in a real-life situation helps teams to face challenges and discover surprising lifelong gains. Hence, it can be conceptualised as the Relationship Triangle Model for Exhilarated Adult Group Learning Experience (RTM-EAGLE).
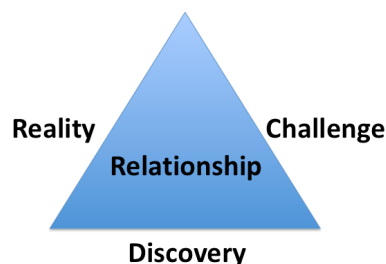

Figure 2 The Relationship Triangle Model

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Contrasted with Kolb's experience-reflection-abstraction-testing model, the RTM-EAGLE is similar and yet different. It is similar in having the *"Reality"* of experiences and the exhilarated *"Discovery"* through experiences, reflection, additional experiential testing of new strategies, and the reflection of the whole learning process. It differs in adding the *"Relationship"* dimension, which is fundamental in an EAGLE environment. Kolb & Kolb (2005) had referred to relationships under learning styles and learning spaces but have not explicitly stated its core importance in working relationships among team members and project clients.

The study supports the findings of scholars who had analysed students' experiential learning through live cases and competitions and found that students increased their creativity and problem solving skills (Kennedy et al., 2001), had positive feelings about the competitions and coordinating university (Stutts & West, 2003), benefited from the real-world experience (Luck & Chalmers, 2007), and were challenged by competition-based projects (Jensen et al., 2008; Thiele & Kuhn, 2008; Zabkar, 2008). However, none of the studies had reported the *"Relationship"* dimension inherent in team cases and competitions.

While 12 respondents may have limited the study, the rich qualitative 'voices' of the participants have provided insightful learning for the author and may contribute to other academic coordinators of future Google Challenges. Since the Google Challenge fits into ECU's community engagement strategy and students see "*Lifelong Gain*", the academic coordinator will continue to incorporate it into the IMC unit as an optional assignment rather than mandating it. Based on student feedback and the experience of the academic coordinator, the optional route would invite and empower the truly motivated students who wish to engage in a unique learning experience.

Nevertheless, it is essential to market the value of the Google competition to attract more Australian students. One way is to invite ECU Google participants who are still students in February 2009 to share their stories on *"Diverse Discovery"* and *"Lifelong Gain"*. A second way is to re-group participants from various tutorial groups into one class facilitated by the Google academic coordinator. A special Google class would provide ample opportunities to discuss specific assessable expectations of individuals in each team for the pre- and post-campaign stages, to have more hands-on practices with AdWords and budget variations, to learn from team sharing during progress reports, and to resolve issues that may surface. Jansen et al. (2008) suggested that academic coordinators should test-run the Google competition and facilitate more exercises on AdWords creation and budgeting during the pre-campaign strategy.

Another way is to upgrade the assessment value of 40%, with an increased weighting for the frustrating client recruitment and pre-campaign strategy. Since two teams had *"Relationship"* problems, with issues such as lack of commitment and personal irresponsibility among a few individuals, it may be worthwhile to include an assessable diary-cum-reflection component, where each participant keeps a log of every interaction with team members, the client, and the academic coordinator. The diary-cum-reflection could incorporate challenges, discoveries, and relationships during initial familiarity with AdWords, discussions, decisions made, client engagement, task allocation, timeliness and quality of task completion, frustration, exhilaration, AdWords creations, budget experiments, campaign change, interactive results and specific IMC learning. The committed team members will have lots to write about and hence be graded accordingly.

As a few students had lamented that they had not kept proper records of trial-AdWords and changes, the detailed diary-cum-reflection could also form the basis for future research on the "*Discovery*" concept: which specific launch keywords, AdWords, and budget allocation worked or did not work; which specific changes during the three-week campaign produced results; and which specific Google Challenge activities helped students learn about IMC tools such as advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, the

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Internet, support media, and personal selling? Most survey participants did not relate the Google Challenge to specific IMC tools.

Future research could also explore the perspectives of clients and the academic coordinator on engagement with students throughout the various stages of the Google Challenge. It may also be worthwhile to test the RTM-EAGLE model on other experiential group learning activities in different disciplines.

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