Including Social Media Marketing With Gomc In An E-Business Course: A Preliminary Examination

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ABSTRACT

An Online Advertising Campaign Project (OACP) based on Google Online Marketing Challenge of 2012 (GOMC12) was integrated into an E-Business course paradigm. GOMC12 incorporated social media marketing component using Google+ with AdWords, the keyword advertising application. One of the OACP goals was promoting awareness of the use of social media platforms in marketing in a novel collaboration between community organizations in Palestine and business studies students at Bethlehem University. Twelve online advertising campaigns were conducted with 12 participating organizations. A participatory action research (PAR) methodology was used to identify the challenges and opportunities of OACP process as part of an E-Business course and to find out how that could impact students' knowledge and understanding. The findings of the study suggest that social media marketing and AdWords for participating in GOMC12 along with the E-Business course content proved somewhat overwhelming for the students, largely due to unanticipated challenges. Despite this finding, much was learned, providing strong evidence of the usefulness of this method in supporting student team-work, understanding and sense of community engagement.

Keywords: *Google+, Google Online Marketing Challenge, Google keyword advertising, Google Hangout, Community engagement, Participatory Action Research, PAR*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, businesses have started to take advantage of the extraordinary capacity of social media platforms to reach thousands of potential customers. This paper discusses how teams of students of an E-Business university course at Bethlehem University in Palestine were paired with members from local businesses to conduct an **Online Advertising Campaign Project** (OACP). The global competition Google Online Marketing Challenge (GOMC) provided students with a hands-on experience for developing and executing online marketing campaigns and simultaneously engaging them with community organizations (Treiblmaier, Neal, & Murphy, 2009). OACP is based on Google Online Marketing Challenge of 2012 (GOMC12). GOMC12 incorporates social media marketing using Google+ (G+) social media platform and keeps this component as an optional choice to include in the execution of the online marketing campaign or not. This is the second year that Bethlehem University has participated in the global competition GOMC as part of an E-Business course. In anticipation of the possible challenges of the inclusion of social media in an E-Business course paradigm, the instructor conducted this study in an attempt to answer to the following questions:

a) What are the opportunities and obstacles of implementing OACP?

b) How does OACP impact students' subject knowledge and understanding?

This paper starts with a presentation of the background of the study and the theoretical framework that guided

the research, with particular attention to Participatory Action Research (PAR) which was adopted in this study. PAR "involves the investigation of actual practices and not abstract practices. It involves learning about the real, material, concrete, and particular practices of particular people in particular places" (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2007, p. 277). PAR also has significant learning consequences on all the collaborators throughout the study (Kindon & Elwood, 2009). The study design, the different stages of the implementation and the methods of data collection are then described. The findings emerging from the OACP engagements and the implications of their potential influence on the approach of teaching and learning of future offerings of the same or a similar course are presented at the end.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The OACP is based on GOMC12, which is a Google global competition program available from January to June for higher education institutions around the world in which teams of students run advertising campaigns for local organizations. This is a highly realistic experience where students work with real money to do an online text-based advertisement campaign in real time. The competition begins when a university professor who is registered on a GOMC platform approves the designated teams. Teams of students work with their clients to prepare an advertising strategy and record that in a report which should be uploaded on a GOMC platform. GOMC then offers each team a $250 coupon to credit the team's AdWords accounts to enable them to start their campaign (Google a, 2012).

GOMC12 incorporates the social media marketing using G+ with its core component Google keyword online advertising application (AdWords). However, those who elect to participate in GOMC12 have the choice to include G+ or not. AdWords is an application where teams create and run their text-based advertising campaign with its relevant keywords for three consecutive weeks. The text-based ads are displayed on a Google search engine page, and/or Google network partners. When an Internet user clicks on any of these ads, AdWords deducts the keyword cost from the $250 budget allocated to him/her. In this course, the instructor included G+, the second optional component of GOMC12 in OACP. The G+ process requires clients to create their G+ pages and assign team members as managers of those pages to run their G+ campaign for six consecutive weeks. In this G+ campaign, teams are required to prepare a social media strategy report and to conduct two Google Hangouts. A Google Hangout is where a small number of G+ page followers can conduct a video chat.

The decision to use GOMC12 for the OACP in the E-Business course was based on the instructor's previous experience of incorporating GOMC which was based only on AdWords in the syllabus of the same E-Business course in the spring 2011 semester. That effort resulted in a Middle East/Africa (MEA) regional winning team in the GOMC 2011 (Google a, 2013). This success prompted the offering of the course for a second time, with an added incentive to students to work toward their advertising campaigns including the new G+ addition. The GOMC experience is also found to be valuable to students since "such opportunities do provide important means for many students to become better versed in business practice" (Lavin, 2010). Another indication of the usefulness of and satisfaction with GOMC pedagogical experience in classroom implementation by professors was evident from the GOMC 2009 survey result, where the majority of professors surveyed indicated that they would enroll in the challenge again (Flaherty, Jansen, Hofacker, & Murphy, 2009).

Two sections of the E-Business course with a total of 60 students were offered in the 2012 spring semester. The students consisted of 42 female and 18 male students, of whom 43 were juniors and 17 seniors. The course was restricted to business major students with a minor in marketing. Those students can be considered as good users of the Internet, savvy in social media but not highly technical with regard to advanced computer applications. The approval of the students to participate in the study had been obtained early on. The students were divided into teams of five to six each. The teams carried online advertisement campaigns allowing 9 non-profit organizations and 3 businesses to deliver their marketing messages for six consecutive weeks.

The course syllabus included OACP along with other topics. Due to an unexpected ten-day delay in the onset of semester at Bethlehem University, the timetable previously planned to avoid the peak workload weeks during the

semester had to be revised to fit in with the revised semester dates. Despite expectations of having to work under time pressure, the instructor decided to go ahead with the study in order to investigate the students' reaction to the anticipated challenges.

To meet the need for a research methodology to the participatory aspect of OACP, participatory action research (PAR) was adopted because it provides a way for educators to learn from the direct classroom experience of the learners involved in the study (Krogh, 2001). Unlike traditional action research, latest versions of action research, such as PAR, involve all participants in the different stages of action research (Gaventa, 1988).

A variety of conflicting definitions of PAR are available (Quixley, 2008), but the following best matches the goals of the current study. At its core, PAR

is a collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships (Minkler, Wallerstein, & Grbich6 as adapted in Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006, p.854).

The improvement is driven by the self-reflection of participants on their own actions. According to Kemmis & McTaggart (2007), this includes:

a spiral of self-reflective cycles that involves: planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of that change, reflecting on these processes and consequences, re-planning, acting and observing again, reflecting again, and so on. This process in reality might not be of neat self-contained cycles, stages might overlap, and initial plans quickly become obsolete in the light of learning from experience, (p.276).

However it was noted that many researchers use the self-reflective cycles as a "method of action research" and that these self-reflective cycles are a basic component of PAR.

To ensure the success of PAR, Savin-Baden and Wimpeenny (2007) stress the importance of creating an environment of commitment, responsibility and mutual ownership of the participants in order to assure them that they are valued and respected. However, they alert researchers that use of PAR poses a potential risk for the experimentation with the non-traditional paradigm. They also emphasize the importance of the validation methods in data collection when capturing the participants' experience within the research context. This holistic PAR practice prepares participants to acquire additional skills, competences and incremental construction of knowledge by reflecting upon their own circumstances.

PAR is suitable in OACP because its objectives are accomplished by all those who are involved. In this study the researcher worked closely with the students to assure that the teams had the technical hands-on experiences to work with Internet applications needed for GOMC12. The clients representing local businesses and nonprofit organizations provided student teams with actual information during the execution of the campaign to be used in the advertising strategy. The advertising strategy was formulated by both parties. Few serious problems occurred during the project execution that involved joint decision making of both the instructor and students. During the execution stage of the AdWords campaigns, the AdWords accounts of several teams were suspended by the AdWords administrator due to different reasons such as the double use of a client's website in different AdWords accounts. As a result, all teams unanimously sought an alternative fair solution on two assessment criteria of the course to continue with OACP.

PAR, with its self-reflective cycle in planning, acting and observing the changes then reflecting and re-planning, etc, was experienced at several stages in OACP. In AdWords the application records the tracking of all the modifications and additions in the AdWords campaigns. This feature is very important for teams in order to observe the performance of their ads and to modify their campaigns accordingly to improve the effectiveness of their campaign during the executions stage.

STUDY DESIGN

The E-Business course syllabus was divided into two distinct tracks and took place in a fifteen-week semester. The first track concentrated on E-Business such as electronic commerce business models, e-market places, Web2.0 environment and privacy protection. The second track dealt with OACP and related subjects with the technical application skills needed for the logistics of the course. The marking and assessment criteria of the learning outcomes of the course were 65% for the OACP and 35% for the E-Business.

The present study focused on the OACP part of the E-Business course and had three overlapping phases stretched along the whole semester.

Phase I: covered general knowledge and background of keyword advertisement, social media marketing as well as GOMC12 and its preparation process. This phase was important in setting up and facilitating the students' engagement in the project and in gaining background knowledge. The tutoring was mainly delivered by the instructor to give the students the ownership of the project according to PAR, but randomly selected students delivered some OACP related issues. A summary of the students' work was posted on the publicly open course blog http://bu266.blogspot.com. Two senior students and previous winners of MEA region GOMC 2011 were also invited as guest speakers to share their experience in GOMC.

Because dealing with AdWords platform and Google Hangout (Hangout) requires knowledge and skills that the course could not cover, the instructor offered some extra class sessions to introduce students to such knowledge and skills. Acquiring new computer application skills could prove daunting to social media savvy students, particularly those who do not have time to invest in practicing (Lachapelle, 2011). Therefore, two hands-on sessions on using AdWords were arranged in the computer lab. With regard to Hangout, the instructor's efforts focused mainly on problems that students might encounter when using Hangout such as technical issues due to the limited Internet connection speed. The instructor, therefore, scheduled additional night time online meeting sessions with teams through Hangout. The meetings helped teams to test the different Hangout features and proved to be very handy, particularly when they formulated their Hangout activities with external customers.

Since team work is one of GOMC requirements, after dividing the students into teams, the instructor arranged a team building activity by meeting with each individual team separately. The Helium Stick team building exercise (North Georgia College & State University, 2012) was used to emphasize the importance of coordination among team members to achieve a common goal. The Helium Stick is a long, thin, light rod that was held by the members' index fingers and their task was to lower the stick to the ground without losing contact of it at any time.

To simulate the formation of small advertising companies by the different teams, a firing team member policy was given to each team (Bergman, 2010). As a result of enforcing the firing policy by some teams and the subsequent expulsion of several team members, the instructor decided to form a new team comprising the expelled members. To teach the students collaborative writing, they were shown the advanced features of Google Documents with special emphasis on discussion through live chat which was built in the program.

Phase II: focused on student collaboration and interaction with the real world. A guest lecturer was invited to talk about how students could gain knowledge from different sources. This proved to be a good eye opener. The lecturer, a fairly young entrepreneur, discussed the successes and failures in his start-up company and how social media marketing and G+ were utilized in his work.

Identifying clients who were willing to participate in OACP was a difficult endeavor for some teams, not because businesses were not willing to cooperate, but because the students had not developed sufficient interaction experience at the start of the course. As a result, the instructor initiated phone calls with each client in order to explain the OACP process and its benefits. Teams later met with their clients in person and established an understanding of the responsibilities of each side and an online advertising strategy was formulated jointly.

Phase III: started with the simultaneous execution of online advertising campaigns for both AdWords and the G+. The first campaign lasted three weeks and the next one continued for another three weeks. During the execution of the campaigns, teams were in close contact with their clients in order to brief them on new developments and to get a business update from their clients. The OACP concluded when teams presented the results of their online advertising campaign in the presence of their clients. The presentations were videotaped after acquiring the students' approval of the students.

DATA COLLECTION

Three methods of data collection were used: (1) reflective diaries, (2) group discussions, and (3) the leaning component section from the GOMC12 post-campaign report. The data collected from various methods were compiled and coded according to the phases of the study in order to develop a better approach to the analysis (Berg, 2004).

Since PAR is a participatory approach, the self reflection of the participants becomes important in giving them the sense that they are important contributors to the OACP and the outcome of the study (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). The students were asked to write *reflective diaries* about their involvement and the challenges they faced. Although the reflection task was required of all students, only twelve students 'volunteered' to keep a reflective diary for the purpose of the study. The students were assured that their diaries would be kept anonymous.

A Google document was created for each volunteer; the instructor had open access to each of these documents. The instructor followed an "open" reflection and did not provide the volunteers with specific questions to reflect on, so students were free to select any aspect to reflect on. However, the instructor posted in each document a few hints about reflective writing quoted from Moon (2004):

Your reflective *writing should include any of the following: self-questioning about these experiences, an honest appraisal of your experience.*

What did I learn from this experience? What was bad about it? What would I like to change and why?

The students were, therefore, encouraged in a rather indirect manner to reflect on any activity or aspect of the course freely using an open-ended style. It was noticed that, during the peak load study weeks, the input into the reflective diaries was minimal.

The data from the *group discussions* were informally conducted during class time. The most important group discussion was the evaluation meeting that was conducted after the semester was over. The meeting was attended by 10 students only who approved the recording of the meeting.

The last type of data provided a summative view in writing from the teams' perspective adopting the *learning component* section for the post-campaign report from GOMC12 guideline (Google b, 2012).

FINDINGS

Four themes emanated from the different data resources as discussed below. It is worth mentioning that these themes reflected change on the academic and personal level as reported by the students. Those themes provide answers to the study question in finding obstacles and opportunities to improving teaching methods and enhance the student subject knowledge.

Enriching Students' Content Knowledge

Contextual understanding and knowledge construction can come from classroom interaction, collaboration with teams, clients and online communities (Hammond, Hicks, Kalman & Miller, 2005). The following paragraphs review how the employment of the adopted PAR methodology made learning come from an array of sources.

The postings of the student teams on their G+ pages were used as a source of information for other teams. The privacy settings for G+ page were open to the public to allow easy access to the page and assist in attracting and interacting with followers from the Internet users. This feature encouraged the instructor to use PAR methodology for the project. The free accessibility of G+ pages to the public and to other teams gave teams a chance to observe and learn from the work of other teams and encouraged competition.

A diary note stated:

It's the first time we were doing something in front of everybody about our campaign and we saw how the other groups did theirs and compared it with ours. In my opinion, we kind of knew exactly what we wanted to do.

Another student noted:

Looking at other pages, one couldn't understand what they were doing but during their presentation *to the client one could understand that they were posting something to attract a certain type of followers.*

The interaction with real clients and G+ page followers did provide life knowledge that students do not usually learn from textbook but from life experiences. One comment showed how the client intervened when a photo was posted on a team page showing an activity of the client including kids with special needs. The client informed the team that this was not in compliance with the ethics of Palestinian culture and personal data protection.

In the PAR methodology in knowledge construction, the online advertising campaigns are the core for the OACP. One student wrote about this experience:

For me it was a completely new marketing tool and it was really useful. Actually I have learned how *to reach our campaign target market in the right way and also how to promote using the Internet. I've learned to implement my marketing knowledge from the different courses I've gained from real work.*

Figure (1) below depicts the practices of the different teams in their exploration of the impact of their online advertising campaigns and what they had to do to improve their tactics. The figure combines the spiral self-reflective cycle of Kemmis and MaTaggart (2007) with Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle of continuous improvement used in quality management (Vonderembse & White, 2004).

The right vertical line indicates the degree of improvement for the participants' knowledge construction. The left vertical line shows the impact on the virtual community after each round of self-reflective cycle. The circle in the figure rolls upwards clockwise. As time passes and students assess what has been done, they use the acquired knowledge that they have gained along the way to move to the second cycle. If a round of plan-act-observe-reflect cycle didn't achieve any impact, the circle would loop in its place. This might give an indication that no learning has taken place.

The learning part of AdWords became evident for most teams when their text-based ads started appearing on Google search results pages and when teams found how those ads drove traffic to their clients' websites. Concepts in the context of AdWords such as keywords, impressions, click-through rate and cost per click were at first difficult to grasp. Introducing those concepts theoretically to students with minimal knowledge in information technology terminologies added to their difficulties in comprehension. With time, however, the plan-act-observe-reflect cycle, which was employed by the students in the implementation of these campaigns, improved their learning process and acquiring of knowledge. The tracking and analysis tools in AdWords made it easy to observe the effect of every single change teams make in their campaigns. From group discussions a student said:

At the beginning, the knowledge we had gained in the classroom was good enough to start the campaign*, but while running the campaign we started to understand the meaning of many of those terms, and our campaign performance improved with time.*

Admittedly, this year's participation and advertising campaign did not run as smoothly as last year's. Most of the teams' AdWords accounts were suspended for a while. After 2 or 3 days of running the campaign, the accounts of five teams were suspended for a variety of technical reasons, such as problems relating to AdWords and multiple accounts. For example, during the hands-on session, teams practiced creating a campaign on their personal AdWords account. Some students used their clients' websites for practice, but when the team created their campaign for the same client, the campaign was suspended because this was against AdWords Terms and Conditions. In another case, the suspension was due to the content of their client's website. The client's website included the name of a branded company for which the client had no license to use. This was in clear violation of the AdWords website policy and so the account was suspended. It took the team at least one week to identify the reason behind the suspension.

Such experiences were discouraging to the team members who were dismissed from GOMC12 against their will. Nevertheless, this taught them some good problem-solving techniques as they had to communicate with GOMC support, AdWords support, AdWords and GOMC community, read many AdWords Terms and Conditions and even call Google's regional office. The students' reactions to those who tried to solve their campaign problems but could not run their campaign were mixed, particularly to those who were motivated by the competitive part of GOMC12. One student went into a "withdrawal mood" as it was noted the following:

Now we are out of the competition (unfortunately). It seems that my fellow group members thought *we could end the course. They are not putting any effort into the G+ page. Only two of us are posting new things. Even in writing, the reports rarely helped us. Thank God, the semester has come to an end. This course made me hate group work.*

But another commented on the experience in a more positive way:

I admit that I wanted to compete in AdWords, but if things went perfect then the value that I would gain would be less, because in real life there are many barriers.

Enhancing Collaboration and Team Work

The Helium Stick exercise was employed to give the students a sense of the importance of collaboration with their OACP. Unfortunately, systematic notes were not made on the performance of the teams during the exercise. A quick observation on the dynamics of the teams during the exercise and after the project has ended could serve as a valid indicator on how Helium Stick exercise can predict coordination performance among team members. An example which could illustrate the experience was that one team kept postponing their meeting for this exercise due to poor coordination among themselves. At a later stage, this team expelled one of its members, according to the policy announced to the students at the beginning of the semester. Although the expelled students from different teams harbored resentment and all parties were stressed during the firing stage, this process stood out as a learning experience. A note from a dismissed team member reflects this experience:

I've learned from my mistakes how to deal with different situations that I faced. I started to like working together. The most important thing in teamwork is cooperation and respect of deadlines and commitment.

The issue of coordination among teams and its contribution to the success of the team was addressed by the guest speakers. This point was highlighted in a diary:

The presentation of last year's GOMC winners encouraged me to read more GOMC guidelines and cooperate more with my group.

Time pressure and course load were significant challenges the students had to face. During the evaluation meeting many agreed that:

… time pressure was one of the difficulties that we faced. Because the project consumed a lot of time, we did not concentrate on the other courses as much as we did on the GOMC project. However, with the passage of time this difficulty weakened because we learned how to manage our time more effectively.

The last comment cannot be generalized as two teams and other team members involved in their senior seminars neglected their duties in the last stages of the project. Interested team mates had no choice but to complete the tasks.

The Hangout tool turned to be very handy to some teams because they reported having a consultation meeting with their client using Hangout. Other teams used the Hangout night meetings to work on their project as they reported that getting in contact with other members at night was much easier than during daytime.

Team report writing was another area that needed special team coordination as teams were required to write four reports according to GOMC12 guidelines. To ease the coordination in writing, the teams were encouraged to use Google Documents. This was not convenient because some team members did not have access to the Internet. Going through the diary notes, it could easily be detected that team members were struggling to coordinate responsibilities of the first report among themselves. However, with the second report, teams started to bring in their own working mechanisms, as we can sense in the following diary note:

I was really satisfied with what I wrote today and what my mates wrote as well. Every one put his own ideas and thoughts on Google Doc and we came up with something good! Step by step we'll be hopefully better. There were too many comments from the instructor; by the way, who will modify the report was based on prior agreement among us. In terms of writing reports my skills have improved, I became careful about the smallest details that can affect the first impression

Another mechanism that was shared in the evaluation meeting and which seemed to work for this team is reflected in the following diary entry:

The way it worked for us was to meet as a group to discuss all the points, then distribute the work in a way that each one of us would write his/her part, then putting the work together and finally each one reviewing the whole document to present a final report.

There was a serious coordination problem among the various team members as was evident from a good number of diary entries. The team size (5-6 members) could be one of the reasons for the lack of coordination. During the evaluation meeting there was a consensus that team size for such projects should be limited to 3-4 members.

Enhancing the Sense of Community Engagement among Students

In this project, the clients learned how to employ targeted social media marketing campaigns at a very low cost. They also experienced the effectiveness of online advertising in driving traffic into their website during the campaign.

At the start of the OACP, some students were hesitant to reach out to local organizations to establish their involvement in the project. This step placed the students out of their university comfort zone as they had to deal with real people. But the team work nature of the project encouraged students to get together and meet with their clients in person.

In addition, the teams dealt with Internet users for the G+ part of the project. This was necessary to build their own network and resources in order to have an effective advertising campaign for their client. The interaction with the Internet community enhanced the subject matter of the students as described below*:*

Getting followers and interacting with them led us to notice that every follower had his own purpose when *he decided to follow the page, which made us aware of all the possible purposes we might face in future experiences.*

Another diary note reflected on the challenges in the online environment about determining the market segment as noted:

We segment our market and then target it, but after targeting it we didn't know if we had delivered the right message to the right people and we had difficulties to figure that out.

Clients, particularly nonprofit organizations, were not familiar with social media and its use in marketing for their business. Therefore, teams had difficulty communicating the basic information needed to attract or convince clients to participate. One team reported in their learning component section about their client:

… every time we wanted to talk with our client about our campaigns, we had to explain every concept in *order for them to understand us*.

The G+ part of the project required clients to create their own G+ pages and assign team members as managers to it. Not all of the clients were aware of G+ platforms. Therefore, some team members took the responsibility to walk-through the steps in creating the page with their client in person. One student said,

Our clients learned from *us more than we tried to learn from them but they were helpful to us, too.*

As planned, the teams presented the results of their online advertising campaign in the presence of their clients near the end of the semester. The importance of the presentations was clearly expressed by the following diary entry:

The presentations *were good because they made us feel proud of the efforts we've exerted through-out the whole project were acknowledged*.

On the other hand, the presentation to a real client added some pressure to the senior students taking this course. The senior graduation seminar presentations were re-scheduled by the department and that caused some timetable clashes and conflicting priorities for some students between the graduation seminars and the course presentation, which led some teams to miss the important presentation for their client.

Improving Teaching Methods

In OACP, the instructor's role varied according to the situation at the particular moment during the semester. One of the objectives of this study was to find a better way to conduct the course and in the meantime to take advantage of the GOMC program. The planning and preparations of all the participants was an important factor in the effectiveness of GOMC12.

Starting with the problem of allocating clients, the process could have been conducted faster had the instructor helped the teams to locate their clients at the very beginning, particularly as it was found that the students were able to comprehend the task only after they started to execute their advertisement and capturing the concept. This was expressed in a diary note:

We used to hear terms in class and did not know what they meant. When met with the clients, we didn't know

what to explain to them. But after the campaign started, I was able explain what these terms meant.

Another approach of giving the students a comprehensive view of the project is to invite guest speakers who are expert in the field of online advertisement. This was successfully done in this study. A young entrepreneur was invited to talk to the students about social media marketing and G+, and how it was used in his company. The presentation was quite motivating and caused genuine enthusiasm among the students. This was reflected in all diaries as in the following two selected comments:

I really enjoyed Mohammed's lecture and I think it's very useful and a novel way of learning about something.

Actually I gained many new ideas, things that will help me in the course, such as G+ and its Hangout.

The use of an AdWords hands-on session during the GOMC preparation was recommended by Jansen, et al. (2008). In this study, the students who took the course recommended that these sessions be conducted during class time so that all students participating in the study will have a similar background. This evidently boosts coordination among team members. Furthermore, during the final evaluation meeting, students pointed to the difficulties they had in dealing with teammates who had not attend the hands-on sessions.

Several mishaps occurred during the AdWords campaign. Five teams couldn't run their AdWords account because their accounts were suspended for several reasons. This caused unnecessary anguish and stress to the students and the instructor alike. Such a situation is expected with PAR as indicated by Kindon and Elwood (2009, p. 25):

Students may feel scared by the unpredictability of PAR or uncertain when lecturers do not immediately *appear* always to know how best to proceed. Lecturers too may lose confidence in the face of unexpected challenges or unforeseen 'mistakes'.

The instructor's main concern regarding such issues is the fair assessment of the coursework and students efforts. An alternative evaluation method might be included in the course syllabus; this step might reduce tension.

The Hangout feature might provide instructors, during as well as after the project, with opportunities to connect with students for consultation during the evening time. This point was taken from a diary entry as

… finally we tried to hangout all the group members with our instructor. It was sort of fun because it was the first time we communicate with a teacher on a video chat and at night.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research were mainly based on volunteer teams who participated in both the reflective diary and the evaluation meeting data collection methods. Asking students to volunteer to keep a reflective diary could have been a faulty decision by the instructor, who was a new comer to PAR methodology. The academic level of the volunteering students who were active in the various data collection methods was higher than the average students. The students with the minimal input in their reflective diaries fall within the class average. This might point to certain hidden possible problems which the non-volunteering students had encountered with OACP.

GOMC12 provided learners with subject knowledge and enhanced the students' transferable skills through their interaction with the public, their clients, and their peers. The note below substantiates this conclusion:

...these internal group problems improved my leadership skills in terms of how I can deal with people who don't follow rules, don't work and don't have any commitment. Now I feel very confident about myself and my abilities.

The participation in GOMC12 resulted in two qualified teams among the finalists for the MEA region; one team was also chosen to be the Social Media Award winning team for GOMC12 MEA (Google b, 2013). However, the instructor's choice not to consider G+ as a mandatory part for the next offering of the course came partially because the students were overwhelmed by the work load they had to put every week, which was much more than the time and effort required for a 3 credit hours course.

Finally, one lesson that was learned is that it is important for an instructor who wants to incorporate GOMC into his/her courses to emphasize the educational aspect of the challenge as well as the hands-on learning experience.

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