"Advertising Psychology – The Blog Seminar"

A weblog-based seminar for Master students

Björn Badura
Bjoern.Badura@fom.de

Media Engineering
FOM Hochschule | University of Applied Sciences
Essen, Germany

Joseph Greve
Joseph.Greve@uni-due.de

Department of Business and Organisational Psychology
Faculty of Engineering
University of Duisburg-Essen

Annette Kluge
Annette.Kluge@uni-due.de

Department of Business and Organisational Psychology
Faculty of Engineering
University of Duisburg-Essen

Zusammenfassung

Ziel des Web-basierten Kurses "Werbepsychologie – Die Blog-Veranstaltung" war es, ein zeitgenössisches Lehrarrangement zu schaffen, welches typische, im Alltag der Studierenden fest etablierte, Web 2.0 Charakteristika, wie Kommentarfunktion, Diskussionen sowie die Integration sozialer Medien (Facebook und Twitter) umfasst. Das Seminar Werbepsychologie wurde Weblog (Blog)-basiert angeboten, um Studierenden verschiedener Campi der Metropolregion Ruhr die Teilnahme zu ermöglichen. Im Folgenden werden sowohl die technischen Rahmenbedingungen des open-source Content-Management-Systems Drupal 6.0 als auch die didaktische Struktur des Seminars, basierend auf den fünf Grundprinzipien der Instruktion nach Merril, vorgestellt. Bis heute wurde die Blog-Veranstaltung insgesamt drei Mal erfolgreich durchgeführt. Die insgesamt 84 Teilnehmenden wurden auf Grundlage des Evaluationsmodells von Kirkpatrick gebeten, die Veranstaltung in Bezug auf den Nutzen der didaktischen Elemente zu bewerten. Das Modell umfasst sowohl a) die aus Sicht der Lernenden wahrgenommene Freude, die empfundene Nützlichkeit und den Schwierigkeitsgrad, als auch b) die Lerneffekte durch Selbsteinschätzung des Wissenszuwachses und die Einstellung gegenüber dem Kurs. Insgesamt wurde die Blog-Veranstaltung sehr positiv bewertet und führte erfolgreich zu den gewünschten Lernergebnissen. Der Erfolg eines blended-learning-Arrangements hängt allerdings sehr stark von der bedarfsgerechten Anpassung an die Lerninhalte und die Lernumgebung ab und kann nicht per se erwartet werden.

Stichwörter: e-learning; advertising psychology, blended learning, weblog-based seminar, virtual learning environments, web 2.0 teaching, case study

Abstract

The aim of the web-based course "Advertising Psychology – The Blog Seminar" was to offer a contemporary teaching design using typical Web 2.0 characteristics such as comments, discussions and social media integration which covers facebook and Twitter support, as nowadays, this is a common part of students' everyday life. This weblog (blog)-based seminar for Advertising Psychology was set up in order to make the course accessible to students from different campuses in the Ruhr metropolitan area. The technical aspect of the open-source content management system Drupal 6.0 and the didactical course structure, based on Merrill's five first principles of instruction, are introduced. To date, this blog seminar has been conducted three times with a total of 84 participants, who were asked to rate the course according to the benefits of different didactical elements and with regard to Kirkpatrick's levels of evaluation model. This model covers a) reactions such as reported enjoyment, perceived usefulness and perceived difficulty, and b) effects on learning through the subjectively reported increase in knowledge and attitude towards the seminar. Overall, the blog seminar was evaluated very positively and can be considered as providing support for achieving the learning objectives. However, a successful blended learning approach should always be tailored to the learning contents and the environment.

Keywords: e-learning, advertising psychology, blended learning, weblog-based seminar, virtual learning environments, web 2.0 teaching, case study

Learning Behaviour 2.0

The way in which students learn has changed significantly with the introduction and establishment of the internet for teaching and learning at universities (cf. Prensky, 2001; Crompton, 2012). While in the past, students had to take notes during lectures in order to have the important information at hand, or had to meet in the cafeteria to conduct group-work assignments, modern-day learning management systems, e.g. Moodle, provide the lecture notes and collaboration online. Hence, there is less need to write down the learning content presented, but students are required to download the materials provided by the lecturers and to use them thoughtfully for learning and practice. This is, of course, a rather simple example of how studying has changed during the past two decades. Classical learning arrangements have further preconditions such as mandatory attendance or an inflexibility regarding different learning styles, especially from the student's perspective. As Crompton (2012) points out, Web 2.0 mechanisms and phenomena such as Darwikinism (applying Darwin's theory of evolution to how Wikipedia information evolves) and Folksonomy (collaborative classification of online contents) have a strong impact on students' learning behaviour, creating "a new breed of students" (Crompton, 2012, p.1). According to Oblinger and Hagner (2005), modern-day students require various forms of communication and, as mentioned above, are less enthusiastic about traditional teacher-and-lecture-centred learning methods. Additionally, "self-directed learning opportunities, interactive environments, multiple forms of feedback and assignment choices that use different resources to create personally meaningful learning experiences" (Glenn, 2000, cited from Barnes, Marateo& Ferris, 2007, p. 2) are nowadays more important. Prensky (2001) emphasises that this development calls for educators to apply the Web 2.0 approach in their lectures and seminars in order to adapt to the novel environment.

The motivation

Taking this proposition seriously, we transformed a Master seminar on Advertising Psychology (5 ECTS attainable), which was originally conducted in the style of lectures and included interactive elements such as student presentations and mini-studies, into a blended learning seminar (cf. Kerres& de Witt, 2003) that was conducted through a weblog (blog). Thus, we implemented a learning arrangement into students' daily life, following Web 2.0 principles of interaction. The target audience of the presented course consisted of Master students of applied cognitive and media science from the University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) and Bachelor students of psychology from the Ruhr University of Bochum (RUB). Interestingly, an attempt to teach Advertising Psychology online was already made at the Humboldt University of Berlin back in 1996 (Grothusmann, 2007), but the level of technical development at the time did not enable the kind of Web 2.0 participation or interaction which is presented in the current paper.

Besides the reasons mentioned above, further motivation for this project stemmed from the fact that in the Ruhr metropolitan area in Germany, there are three cooperating universities, the Technical University of Dortmund (TUD), the RUB and the UDE, which have formed a learning alliance called the University Alliance Metropolis Ruhr (UAMR). The UAMR aims to advance the quality of research, teaching and administration through the development and use of synergies. In reference to teaching, the project RuhrCampusOnline (RCO), an online campus, was introduced in order to modernise teaching, offer courses to the other universities in the alliance that do not offer these topics, and make teaching more flexible (Getto, Hansen, Tobias, Martina, Pullich& Michael, 2009). Furthermore, the project should enable students to attend courses beyond their home campus. The RCO serves as a foundation programme which is intended to support emerging e-learning projects that will improve students' learning experience. Our course was not the first e-learning project conducted in the context of the UAMR. Further examples of UAMR-funded blended learning are the lectures "information management" and "management support systems" offered by the Chairs of business informatics at the UDE and RUB (Gabriel & Weber, 2011).

The aim of the web-based course "Advertising Psychology – The Blog Seminar" is to offer a contemporary teaching design using typical Web 2.0 characteristics such as comments, discussions and social media integration which covers facebook and Twitter support, as nowadays, this is a common part of students' everyday life. Nevertheless, there were three classroom meetings (kick-off, mid-term and final meeting) that were held for organisational and also didactical reasons in order to find an appropriate balance between presence and online participation (Hesse, 2002). The learning contents were imparted through themain entries of the blogs (weekly fundamental input by the lecturer) and students had the chance to contribute to the blog by creatively presenting a study (seminar paper) that corresponded thematically with the fundamental input. Finally, the students had to pass an oral examination in which they had to present an advertising campaign with respect to the theories and concepts learnt.

The blended learning concept

The learning objective of the course and the general structure

Approximately 30 students participated in a course.
The learning objective of the course "Advertising Psychology – The Blog Seminar" is threefold:

a) Students acquire knowledge concerning central themes and theories of advertising psychology such as theoretical theories and models that explain advertising effects (e.g. subliminal priming, evaluative conditioning, Elaboration Likelihood Model),

b) Students acquire knowledge about how to conduct an experimental study for evaluating advertising effects by preparing a presentation based on a journal article in which the experimental study is explained and demonstrated,

c) Students are able to apply their acquired knowledge on advertising psychology to design a print advertisement ("ad") for a magazine.

The course structure consists of a kick-off face-to-face meeting, a mid-term meeting and a final meeting. Between face-to-face meetings, students retrieve theoretical basic input provided by the lecturer from the weblog, upload their assignments and comment on other groups' seminar papers, and take quizzes.

At the end of the course, the students have to choose one out of several cases, each describing a fictitious product of a well-known brand. This can take the form of a brand extension by a prominent company, e.g. a bicycle which is produced by a car manufacturer. They should then create an advertising campaign represented by an advertisement for a magazine of their choice, print it out and bring it to the exam, where they present their advertising strategy taking recourse to the theories and concepts they have learned. The design of the advertisement itself does not play a big role as long as it matches certain layout criteria learnt (e.g. considering the reading direction or placing the brand's name on the bottom right). The main focus is on the rigour and coherence of the developed strategy or campaign, respectively. The final mark is made up of the seminar paper and the examination in equal parts.

The technical concept

Why use a blog?

As introduced above, the aim was to design and implement a hybrid learning arrangement that fits into students' daily life while following the Web 2.0 interaction principles. It was decided to adopt a weblog which, according to Oravec (2003) as well as Baird and Fisher (2006), has great potential in the context of blended education. Oravec states that one major field of application are the formation and maintenance of knowledge communities, which have the ability to store knowledge that is linked, for example, to either complementary or critical information. By doing so, particular useful resources that might be

neglected can be featured and referred to the topic of the blog. Moreover, blogs can serve as a means by which to enable students to deal with a plethora of information and synthesise internet material adequately (cf. Farhoomand& Drury, 2002).

The weblog is based on Drupal 6.0, which is a powerful open-source content management system (CMS) that can even be accessed independently of platform, browser and device (e.g. from smartphones). Advantages of Drupal are that the graphics and layout of the blog can be freely adjusted to the requirements of the lecturer (Fig. 1) and that the blog is very easy for the students to use (e.g. WYSIWYG-editor etc.). Therefore, there is no need to provide training for handling the blog interaction because the "digital natives" are characterised by an increased adoption of computers, internet usage, social networking etc. Students use a multitude of digital tools, in particular when playing, collaborating and gathering information (New Media Consortium, 2007). Hence, they already know how to use the tools, which, moreover, reduces the cognitive load of both students and lecturers.

The development of the blog, which was designed to be as easy to use as possible for all stakeholders, took approximately three months, and the process of turning it into an attractive learning platform was quite challenging at times. Especially during the first of the three implementations, some technical problems were encountered, which had to be fixed during the semester.

Fig. 1: Screenshot of the blog's web page displaying the introductory fundamental input content.

The course elements

In order to take part in the blog activity (comments, quizzes, preparation of the seminar paper etc.), each participant of the seminar is given an account. The contents are only visible when the participants are logged into this account.

The learning content and theoretical concepts that have to be taught are provided through so-called fundamental input (FI, basic information), which covers different aspects of Advertising Psychology such as models of advertising effects, and the impact of humour/fear on advertising success etc. The FI is written by the lecturer and uploaded every week. In addition to the learning contents, the FI contains assignments and questions for discussions in which the students have participate in order to gain grading points allowing them to be admitted to the final oral examination. The grading point system was introduced as an incentive for vivid and enriching discussions (Fig. 2) and for the motivation to perform the assignments. Every comment is rewarded with max. 5 points and every correct quiz answer with 1 point. Overall, students needed 50 points to be admitted to the oral examination.

Quizzes (Fig. 3) are included in the blog every three to four weeks to enable students to gain extra points and to give them the opportunity to practise and to test themselves on the contents. Another incentive for solving the quizzes lies in the fact that some of the new FI are password-protected, requiring the students to pass the latest quiz to unlock the new FI.

Each week, a group of students has to prepare a written seminar paper (SP) about a study that thematically matches the FI and is integrated into the blog. The SP is mandatory and can be regarded as the main part of the user-generated content. The mark for the SP accounts for 50% of the final mark. The students are told to create an inspiring SP that does not only consist of text but also includes photos, videos and assignments so that the other students can enjoy reading their post and comprehensively elaborate on the content. A further incentive lies in the fact that students finally get the opportunity to write a paper for an audience and not only for the lecturer.
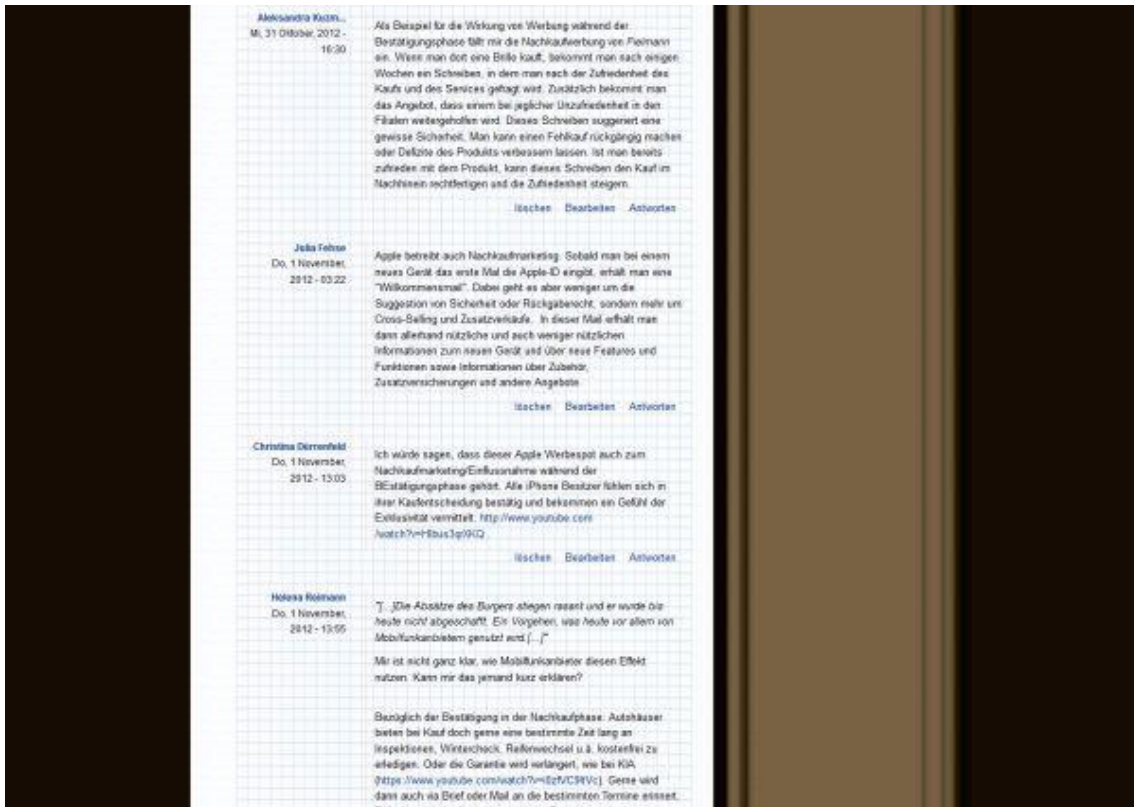
Fig. 2: Screenshot of the blog's web page displaying the students' comments.

Fig. 3: Screenshot of the blog's web page displaying a question from the quiz.

In order to support the learning process, students can either use the blog's forum (in order to compare notes with their fellow students) or contact the lecturer via an online "Skype consultation hour". Furthermore, a facebook and a Twitter account were set up in order to communicate updates of the blog by the lecturer and to spread relevant contents such as interesting advertising clips. Hence, there is no need for the students to always check the blog itself, as they are informed by using their everyday platforms such as facebook.

Topics that are of special importance for the final examination are repeated and emphasized in the mid-term and final meeting.

Course elements	Description
Fundamental Input (FI)	Theoretical concepts written by the lecturer, uploaded each week
Seminar paper (SP)	Online presentation of a relevant research study by students, uploaded each week (makes up 50% of the final mark)
Quizzes	Recurrent monitoring and evaluation of the learning process with online questionnaires
Blog's forum	Platform for students to discuss and converse by posting messages
Skype consultation hour	Weekly timeslot in which students can contact the lecturer via Skype
Final exam	Students develop and present an advertising strategy (including a print advert) with respect to the theories and concepts learnt

Table 1. Overview of the different course elements.

The instructional concept

The instructional concept of the seminar is based on Merrill's (2002) five first principles of instruction (Fig. 4). Merrill (2002) suggests that learning products or environments should be problem-centred and that learning should involve activation of prior experience, demonstration of skills, application of skills and integration of these skills into real-world activities. According to Merrill (2002), the use of authentic problems is assumed to increase learning motivation and integration of knowledge into existing knowledge structures because this applied approach brings about higher motivation as the practical relevance of the learning contents is stressed. Furthermore, activation of relevant information promotes learning, as effective learning processes require a solid foundation such as previous experience or already known structures upon which to build.
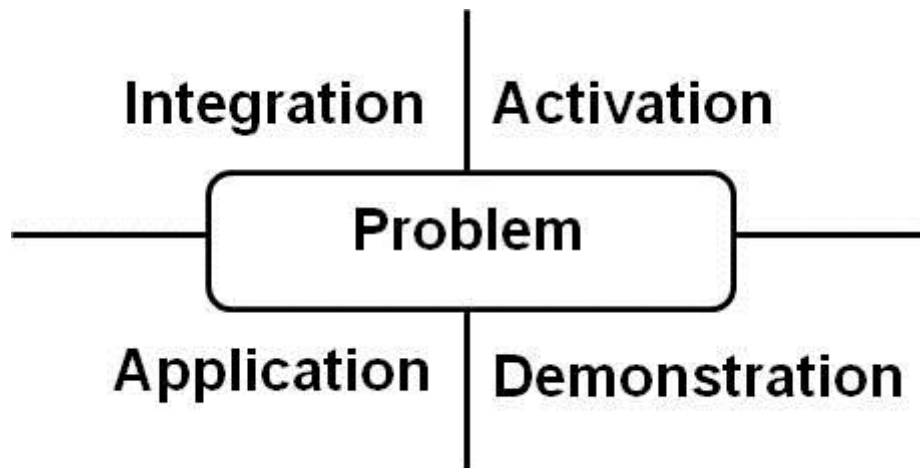
Fig. 4: Merrill's (2002) five first principles of instruction.

In our context, the factor activation was addressed through referencing to contents of the Bachelor lectures "consumer psychology" and "market psychology". Additionally, demonstration, e.g. using adequate examples, visualisations or multiple representations, is a further important factor to strengthen the students' knowledge. This principle is supported, for example, by embedding instances of both good and bad advertising strategies such as advertising clips and pictures. The next principle is application, which refers to the idea that learners should be given the chance to apply their knowledge in the context of exercises or tasks. Application is included on the one hand through the seminar paper, and on the other hand through the preparation for the oral exam, in which the students have to create their own advertising campaign and present their idea with respect to the theories and concepts they have learned. Finally, integration aims at transferring the contents to everyday life. This can be achieved through discussions, publicly demonstrating the knowledge or creating personal ways to use the new knowledge. This part of the instruction is addressed by tasks and discussions within the blog that are induced from the fundamental input.

With respect to Kerres and de Witt's (2003) 3C-model of didactical components (Fig. 5), which provides a framework in which to classify learning environments and focuses on the factors content, communication and construction, the seminar mainly addresses communication and content. As Kerres and de Witt (2003) point out, "in a 'virtual seminar', the communication component is the most prominent feature of the learning arrangement" (p. 104) as it offers interpersonal exchange a) among students and b) between students and lecturers. Moreover, the authors stress that a fully developed communication component is very important when, for example, the contents are theory-centred, complex and consist of various juxtaposing concepts. In our context, this would apply, for instance, to the various models of advertising effects which the students have to differentiate and learn and which are presented in the fundamental inputs. The content component refers to the way in which the learning material is presented to learners. According to Kerres and de Witt (2003), this component becomes particularly relevant when the learning content consists of facts that can be adequately explicated and communicated by media and should be recalled by the learners. This is precisely the case in terms of the knowledge that is imparted in the seminar. With respect to advertising, the blog offers excellent

opportunities to provide multimedia-based examples of both successful and unsuccessful campaigns such as advertisements or commercials. Moreover, the theoretical concepts and constructs can be represented very well, for example with embedded animations.
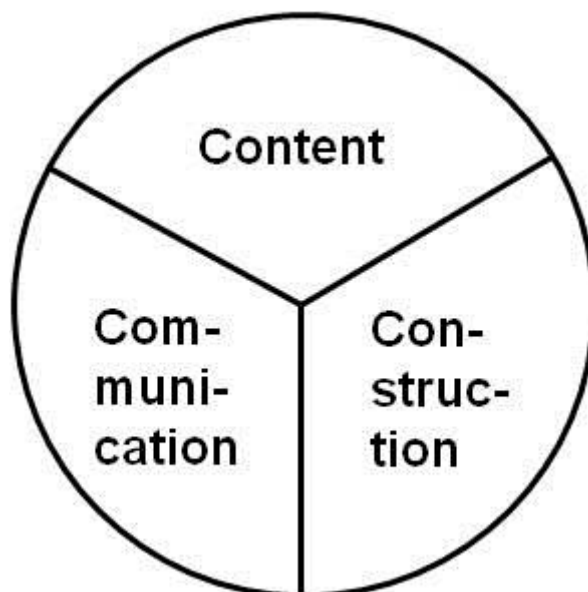

Fig. 5: Kerres and de Witt's (2003) 3C-model of didactical components.

Finally, the constructive component facilitates individual and cooperative learning and is especially important when knowledge consists of procedures that require practice or when students should apply the concepts they have learned. Although the students in our seminar have to apply their knowledge in the oral examination, the first two factors, communication and content, are mainly emphasised in the seminar's didactical design. Ultimately, on the one hand, the emphasis on each component should be balanced, but on the other hand, it is important to take into account context criteria such as learning goals, characteristics of content, target group etc. as they influence the impact of each component.

Evaluating Students' Reactions and Learning

Method

In total, 84 students participated in three courses given.

The three course rounds were evaluated using evaluation sheets, which were handed out while students were waiting for their oral presentation. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: First, it was asked how helpful each of the components of the blog was for learning success (8 items). Second, the evaluation of the seminar was related to Kirkpatrick's (1998) levels of evaluation model. In our setting, we were able to measure reactions such as reported enjoyment, perceived usefulness and perceived difficulty. Effects on learning were assessed by collecting information about subjectively reported increase inknowledge and

attitude towards the seminar. Due to our setting and ethical concerns, we were unable to collect data on behaviour and results such as the final score. As reported enjoyment is closely linked to intrinsic motivation, this reaction should have a positive influence on learning and perceived ease of use (Venkatesh&Speier, 2000). Perceived usefulness, as a type of extrinsic motivation, is a very important factor in order to ensure that the learnt content will be remembered and transferred (Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver&Shotland, 1997; Salas, Wilson, Priest & Guthrie, 2006). With respect to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1994) perceived difficulty has a strong impact on learning success. Furthermore, increase in knowledge and positive attitudes are important antecedents of behavioural changes, as O'Connor, Flin, Fletcher and Hemsley (2003) demonstrated. This is in line with Kirkpatrick's model, which states that lower levels such as reactions should be positively influenced in order to successfully impact on higher levels.

Both Kirkpatrick's (1998) and Merrill's (2002) relevant evaluation components are covered by the training evaluation inventory (TEI, Ritzmann, Hagemann & Kluge, 2013). We used a modified version (22 items) of the TEI to evaluate the course (see Table 2).

Construct	Example item
Reported enjoyment	"The seminar was enjoyable."
Perceived usefulness	"It worth investing time in the seminar."
Perceived difficulty	"The fundamental input was comprehensible."
Increase in knowledge	"I will remember the new contents very well."
Attitude	"I would recommend the seminar to my fellow students."
Activation	"I was able to introduce my own knowledge into the seminar."
Demonstration	"The pictures, videos and graphics used in the seminar were helpful for a better understanding."

Table 2. The TEI subscales with example items (Ritzmann, Hagemann & Kluge, 2013).

We also measured the various facets of students' learning style orientation (LSO) such as discovery, group, experiential, structured and observational learning style orientation (Towler&Dipboye, 2003), by using a short version of the LSO (10 items). These categories reflect the learners' preferred way of acquiring knowledge. Discovery learners appreciate a lot of different learning situations and prefer to deal with complexity and abstract concepts. Group learners like to socialize and discuss, for example with fellow students, and seek social contact. Experiential learners enjoy "learning by doing" and immediately applying new knowledge to a task. Structured learners have developed their own effective learning strategies which they rely on and hold on to. Observational learners are rather passive learners who require external input for effective learning.

Results

84 Master students from three semesters filled out the paper-and-pencil questionnaire with 40 items in total at the end of each seminar.

Table 3 reveals how helpful each component of the blog was rated to be by the students. A one-sample location test was conducted to test whether the values are significantly different from the centre scale (value = 3). It can be seen that especially the final meeting and the FI seemed to be very helpful for the students (Tab. 3).

Components of blog	M (SD)	T(83)	p
Final meeting	4.61 (.60)	24.49	<.000
Fundamental input	4.57 (.59)	24.55	<.000
Mid-term meeting	4.12 (.72)	14.28	<.000
Quizzes	3.82 (.88)	8.55	<.000
Seminar paper	3.69 (.84)	7.57	<.000
Assignments in fundamental input	3.67 (.77)	7.98	<.000
Assignments in seminar paper	3.43 (.77)	5.14	<.000

Table 3. "How helpful were the following components for your learning success?"
(Range: 1-5)
N = 84

Furthermore, the descriptive results (Tab. 4) of the TEI subscales indicate that the seminar was perceived positively. To test whether the values are significantly different from the centre scale (value = 3), again, a one-sample location test was conducted that statistically underlined the positive rating of the seminar.

Additionally, correlations between the TEI subscales were calculated (Tab. 4), which revealed that reported enjoyment is associated with perceived usefulness, increase in knowledge, positive attitude towards the seminar, activation of prior knowledge and demonstration. Moreover, a relationship between perceived usefulness and increase in knowledge, attitude towards the seminar and activation was found. Perceived difficulty correlated with demonstration. Increase in knowledge was related both topositive attitude towards the seminar and activation. Finally, positive attitude towards the seminar was associated with activation of prior knowledge and demonstration.

Evaluation (TEI)	M (SD)	T(83)	p	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Reported Enjoyment (1)	4.62 (.54)	27.71	<.000	1	.583**	.046	.338**	.438**	.294**	.221*
Perceived Usefulness (2)	4.37 (.51)	24.75	<.000		1	.107	.347**	.385**	.246*	.183
Perceived Difficulty+ (3)	4.41 (.45)	28.53	<.000			1	.122	.126	-.108	.379**
Increase in Knowledge (4)	4.16 (.49)	21.63	<.000				1	.307**	.391**	.119
Attitude (5)	4.76 (.46)	35.43	<.000					1	.300*	.277*
Activation (6)	3.90 (.80)	10.35	<.000						1	.122
Demonstration (7)	4.53 (.44)	31.73	<.000							1

Table 4. TEI results (Range: 1-5) and subscale correlations.
Note: +High values indicate low perceived difficulty. N = 84. *significant at p < .05, ** significant at p < .01.

With regard to the data on learning style orientation (Tab. 5), we found that experiential learning style orientation correlated positively with reported enjoyment (r = .290, p = .008), perceived usefulness (r = .268, p = .014), attitude (r = .548, p = .024) and activation (r = .233, p = .033). Both structured learning style orientation (r = .241, p = .027) and observational learning style orientation (r = .270, p = .013) correlated positively with attitude towards the seminar.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
LSO_Discovery (1)	1	.191	-.004	.052	-.120	.085	-.035	.172	.127	.069	.164	.149
LSO_Group (2)		1	.299**	.005	.155	.013	.005	-.127	-.008	-.032	.136	-.143
LSO_Experiential (3)			1	.197	.199	.290**	.268*	-.001	.177	.248*	.233*	.210
LSO_Structured (4)				1	.152	.061	.110	-.002	.169	.241*	.142	.020
LSO_Observational (5)					1	.084	.091	-.030	-.115	.270*	.047	-.075
Rep. Enjoyment (6)						1	.583**	.046	.338**	.438**	.294**	.221*
Perc. Usefulness (7)							1	.101	.347**	.385**	.246*	.183
Perc. Difficulty+ (8)								1	.122	.126	-.108	.379**
Incr. in knowledge (9)									1	.307**	.391**	.119
Attitude (10)										1	.300*	.277*
Activation (11)											1	.122
Demonstration (12)												1

Table 5. Correlations between learning style orientation and TEI subscales.
Note: +High values indicate low perceived difficulty. N = 84. *significant at p < .05, ** significant at p < .01.

Discussion

One of the motivations for the weblog-based Advertising Psychology seminar was to enable students from distant campuses to take part in the same seminar and also to enrich students' daily life by using a social media approach in the context of teaching. Therefore, the theoretical concepts (fundamental input) were presented in blog entries and the

students had the chance to create their own input (seminar paper). Furthermore, interaction was ensured through the use of quizzes and assignments by the lecturer as well as chaired discussions among students. Furthermore, the social media integration provided a communication and information approachthat is already established in students' daily life.

Results of the evaluation indicate that the seminar was a success in terms of instructional design theory. This finding is supported by the correlations between the TEI subscales, which imply that activation of prior knowledge as an instructional design factor leads to higher reported enjoyment, perceived usefulness, increase in knowledge and a positive attitude towards the seminar. Additionally, adequate demonstration of learning contents is related to reported enjoyment, lower perceived difficulty and a positive attitude towards the seminar. Besides the instructional perspective, the seminar was also a great success with regard to the participants' informal feedback, as a great many students expressed joy regarding how well this contemporary seminar was conducted.

Interestingly, both the mid-term and the final meeting seemed to be very important for students' subjective learning success. According to Kerres and de Witt (2003), this finding can be explained by the design of these meetings, which complemented the fundamental input of the weblog. Instead of simply presenting knowledge which the students could have acquired at home, we included presentations by learners and "keynote" presentations by experts in our meetings in order to prepare students for their examination. Furthermore, this result is in line with Hesse (2002), who states that it is essential to find the right balance between presence and online participation in order to establish functioning groups that provide efficient results - a central idea of blended learning (Kerres, 2001).

With regard to Merrill's (2002)five first principles of instruction, the moderate correlations between experiential learning style orientation and reported enjoyment, perceived usefulness, attitude and activation reveal that the design of the seminar, which stresses interaction and experience-based learning, was in accordance with the demands of students who had an experiential learning style. Interestingly, there were two positive correlations between observational learning style orientation and structured learning style orientation, respectively, and attitude towards the seminar. The former finding could result from the fact that students who tend to observe others in order to orient themselves in their studies had the chance, for example, to read comments and seminar papers unhurriedly. According to Bandura and Walters' (1963) social learning theory, this could lead to a more positive attitude towards the weblog-based seminar. Moreover, as Towler and Dipboye (2003) point out, "observational learning is positively related to preference for informational methods and active-reflective methods" (p. 226), which corresponds very well with the characteristics of a weblog. The latter finding, which reveals that more structured learners have a more positive attitude towards the blog, might be attributable to a) the blog's structure (external) and the systematic approach of the seminar, and b) the fact that structured learners might apply their own structure (internal) when it comes to choosing, for example, learning time without being bound to weekly seminar hours (c.f. Towler&Dipboye, 2003).

A personal experience gained from our work was the fact that a web-based seminar does not necessarily imply less work for the lecturer than a presence seminar.This is in line with the experiences of Starkloff, Zumbach and Reimann (2003). The preparation took a great deal of time, and occasionally, new issues and bugs emerged that had to be fixed. Even when the blog was up and running there were some technical problems that had to be

solved during the semester. Nevertheless, this form of teaching has great potential for so-called pull-orientedlearning, in which students have to work independently and unsupervised, as is typical for universities (Hesse, 2002). Taking up this thought, it becomes clear that e-learning might not be the ideal form of teaching for first-semester students, who have a higher demand for communication and socialisation with their fellow students (McNeely, 2005). Nevertheless, under certain conditions, e-learning environments have the ability to facilitate connections between students (Aspden& Helm, 2004; Irwin & Berge, 2006), especially when time management plays a role. And this is exactly what we found in our course, when the participants used the blog features to exchange ideas, communicate about the topics and even to socialise with one another, providing, in most instances, first-class commentaries.

A crucial point of criticism is the fact that the liberal nature of blogging stumbles against the restrictions of education (formally and with respect to contents), and therefore, the full potential of blogging cannot unfold. The fact that students are engaged in blogging because they plan to collect credit points might lessen both authenticity and engagement and therefore lead to negative experiences (cf. Krause, 2004; William & Jacobs, 2004; Homik&Melis, 2006, cited from Kerawalla, Minocha, Kirkup&Conole, 2009). This resulting dilemma for teachers gives rise to the question of whether blogs are simply used to replace "old-fashioned" learning-management platforms such as Moodle e.g. for organisation and providing content, or whether the "true nature" of blogging (with all of its disadvantages) can be used for didactical improvements. Another important factor to keep in mind is the system's security: As attacks on CMS platforms are increasing and mischievous students or cyberpunks might try to hack the system, the implementation of a secure system that is backed up recurrently is essential.

Last but not least, it is very important to state that, of course, not every lecture or seminar has the potential to be held online. A laboratory practical will, by definition, always include phases of attendance. In addition, the use of blended learning is rather context-sensitive, for example, advertising is more appropriate for being integrated into an online learning arrangement than maths. Finally, in our opinion, the aim should not be to fully virtualise a university, but rather to offer some variety for students to experience different teaching methods that are closer to their personal habits and constitute a counterbalance to more structured approaches such as lectures.

From our experience, the students enjoyed this method, which replaces the classical presentation that is obligatory in most other Master's seminars. As a result, the students put a great deal of effort (e.g. recording and cutting their own videos instead of simply inserting a clip from youtube) into their SP and mostly produced an excellent output. This reflects the modern idea of social media, which is characteristic for the blog.

Note: Due to the fact that the blog is password protected, you will have to request an account from the authors mentioned above in order to get complete access to the blog's contents.

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