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## Research Article

### Delivering A Transformational Learning Experience Online

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore how to deliver a transformational learning experience in an online classroom. Using qualitative action research, it examined expectations and experience of learners who participated in an online event marketing undergraduate course for a term. This study finds that experiential lessons, such as storytelling lectures and collaborative project requirements, and the teacher's caring attitude and enthusiasm help learners master concepts, enhance skills, and develop positive attitudes, values, and beliefs towards learning. It also finds that teachers should focus on nurturing learner engagement to keep them motivated and persist in the course. This study contributes to the discussion on event marketing and management pedagogy, transformational teaching, and transformative learning experience.

**Keywords:** *Event marketing education, Transformational learning, Transformational teaching*

## Introduction

Events marketing and management educators were faced with many issues when the global pandemic broke out in 2020. The early stages of the pandemic opened many opportunities to examine not just how events marketing and management courses are taught, but also what is taught since the pandemic has affected not just the academe but also the events industry itself. Both classrooms and events moved into the virtual space.

Shifting from in-person learning to virtual learning means shifting classroom goals, redesigning course requirements, and reorienting class engagement and communication conventions. These shifts created what Mezirow's

(Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1978) transformative learning theory refer to as a "disorienting dilemma," a situation that prompts learners to reflect upon and question previously held beliefs (Mezirow, 1997; Baumgartner & Merriamed, 2001). Disorienting dilemmas may result from changes that individuals face (Baumgartner & Merriamed, 2001), such as living in a global pandemic and shifting lifestyles. The crucial next step towards transformation is critical reflection.

Teachers may encourage critical reflection and deliver learning experiences that result in learner transformation and improved self-efficacy (Robertson, 1996; White & Nitkin, 2014) through the transformative teaching approach

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(Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Aside from the mastery of subject matter and enhanced learning strategies and skills, transformative teaching aims to develop and enhance positive attitudes, values, and beliefs towards learning (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

Many transformational learning studies (White & Nitkin, 2014; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012) focus on the transformational experience of students. However, teachers are learners, too, and may be transformed in the experience, particularly since the global pandemic compels them to adapt to teaching in new learning delivery modalities.

Mezirow's transformative learning theory proposed that learning follows from a "disorienting dilemma," described as an event or situation that triggers critical reflection and questioning of previously held beliefs (Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1991, Mezirow, 1997). Transformational learning results in a change in perspective (Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow, 1978), which explains the prominence of transformational learning in education literature. A precursor to Mezirow's learning theory (Kitchenham, 2008) is Freire's critical pedagogy, which proposed the transformation of classrooms by encouraging students to learn to think for themselves and not merely depend on teachers for instruction (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1970).

The discussion on transformational learning is often accompanied by the discussion of other learning approaches (Kitchenham, 2008). Kolb's experiential learning proposed that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 1984). This means that learning occurs through experience or by going through experiences. The collaborative learning approach, on the other hand, supports the notion that learning occurs best in group settings because of group dynamics that afford better motivation than working alone (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2013). There is also the challenge-based learning approach, which, as defined by (Nichols & Cator, 2008), and as affirmed by real world examples (Baloian et al., 2006; Conde et al., 2019; Leijon et al., 2021), is a collaborative approach that involves not just the students but also teachers, parents, peers, and other relevant parties in finding a solution

to real-world problems. Challenged-based learning experiences tap into the student's desire or meaningful learning experiences while developing various skills in the process (Malmqvist et al., 2015).

Slavich and Zimbardo studied similarities between these contemporary learning approaches, particularly their emphasis on transforming learners' disposition toward learning, and proposed a teaching approach they call transformational teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). The goal of transformational teaching is to enhance mastery of key course concepts while transforming skills, beliefs, values, and attitudes about learning. The fundamental principles of this approach define the three roles a teacher plays in the classroom: (1) help students understand and master key concepts, (2) help students develop skills and provide strategies for learning and discovery, and (3) promote positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs. They also identified six core methods or strategies that teachers employ in transformational teaching: (1) establish a shared vision for the course, (2) provide modeling and mastery experiences, (3) challenge and encourage students intellectually, (4), personalize attention and feedback given to students, (5) create experiential lessons, and (6) promote opportunities to prelection and reflection (Malmqvist et al., 2015).

Experience became the core of marketing literature after Pine and Gilmore published their seminal work on the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). A precursor to this is Holbrook and Hirschman's proposition on the experiential aspect of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). The value of experiences becomes more pronounced in the study of event marketing and management because it is in the business of experience delivery (Berridge, 2020). Pine and Gilmore defined experience as an evolved economic offering that provides high consumer value because they are "inherently personal," making them unique and memorable to each consumer (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The most profound experience typology is what Duerden and Rossman refer to as a transformational experience, which they describe as the kind of experience that "sticks with you"

because these experiences involve reflection, emotion, discovery, and a change in perspective, attitude, or behavior (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). Duerden and Rossman, drawing from psychology literature, explain that transformational experiences result in positive outcomes (Rossman & Duerden, 2019): produce positive emotion (Seligman, 2004), engage a person's attention (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008), help develop and strengthen relationships (Dolan, 2014), and provide meaning through connections to others, promote competence, and afford autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These positive outcomes that result from transformational experiences are outcomes conducive to learning.

While the subject matter of experience has been widely studied in marketing literature, there is yet to be a consensus on a methodological approach or framework to fully capture experience (Becker, 2018). There is, however, a growing body of literature focused on developing an experience delivery framework. The first is developed by the Disney Institute (Kinni, 2011), a delivery systems framework that explains how the brand delivers its signature experience through three key elements: employees or people, setting or place, and processes. Rossman and Duerden, on the other hand, developed an experiencescape framework that uses the same core elements of the Disney delivery system, specifically people, place, and rules (or processes), and adds three more nuanced elements: relationships, objects or props, and blocking (Rossman & Duerden, 2019). These elements are based on storytelling or theatrical elements because they argue that experience design and delivery are based on affecting storytelling.

The challenge posed to events marketing and management educators in the early stages of the pandemic is how to teach the subject matter to undergraduate students using the online distance learning modality while delivering a relevant learning experience. Given the transformational learning opportunities put forward by the pandemic, the pivotal question to ask is how to deliver a transformational learning experience to learners, both students and teacher, of an undergraduate events marketing class taught using the online distance

learning modality. This research contributes to the growing but limited pedagogical discussion on event marketing and management education, offers transformative teaching strategies that apply to event marketing and management education and to online learning in general, and contributes to the discussion of transformational learning and transformational experiences.

## Methods

This study seeks to understand student expectations of the course prior to their participation, their experiences throughout their participation in the course, and their evaluation of the course delivery to identify appropriate teaching strategies that deliver a transformational learning experience. To do so, it employs action research as this methodology seeks to have a deep understanding of the challenges in online learning and to make changes and improvements (Burns, 2005) by understanding the gap between what exists and what participants want to see exist (Burns, 2015).

Given the research focus on experiences, which are non-linear, multi-dimensional, and context-specific (Palmer, 2010) and because of the nature of action research (Burns, 2005), this study employs qualitative methods. It used two main research instruments: an online survey questionnaire and a diary log.

A survey questionnaire is the most used instrument in the study of experience in marketing literature (Becker, 2018). In this study, students were asked to accomplish two survey questionnaires: a pre-course survey questionnaire at the beginning of the term and a post-course survey questionnaire towards the end of the term. In the pre-course survey questionnaire, students were asked to describe their learning environment, identify potential distractions while learning at home, assess their skills, express their expectations on the course, and define what success in the course means for them. In the post-course survey questionnaire, students were asked to describe their learning experience, and assess their experience and performance in the course. A total of 27 students responded to each survey.

I kept a diary to log my thoughts and feelings while teaching the course and to record

any notable incidents in the class or involving other learners. According to Becker, the diary method satisfies the three methodological requirements of describing an experience: (1) it is a first-hand description of the experience, (2) it provides an account of participants, and (3) it captures the experience within its context (Becker, 2018). Furthermore, because a diary entry is logged in the present, it is a more accurate record of events compared to retrospective data (Kenten, 2010).

A majority of the questions on the survey were open-ended to allow the students to express themselves freely. These responses were then coded and categorized for analysis. The

responses were also compared against the diary log.

## Results and Discussion

### Teaching strategies

I used three core teaching strategies in this course: experiential lessons, contextualized communication, and survey questionnaires that assessed learning expectations and evaluated learning experiences. Each of these strategies conform to one or more of Slavich and Zimbardo's (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012) core methods of transformational teaching. Table 1 provides a summary of these teaching strategies and the corresponding core methods each strategy fulfills.

*Table 1. Summary of teaching strategies*

| Teaching strategy   | Corresponding transformational teaching core method<br>From Slavich & Zimbardo (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012)                          |
|---|--|
| Experiential lessons  | Providing modeling and mastery experiences<br>Intellectually challenging and encouraging students<br>Creating experiential lessons |
| Contextualized communication  | Personalizing attention and feedback   |
| Assessing learning expectations and evaluating learning experiences | Establishing a shared vision for a course<br>Promoting prelection and reflection   |

#### (1) Experiential lessons

I used the learning by doing approach in teaching events marketing courses in previous in-person classes and continued to do so in the online distance learning set up in accordance with Kolb's (Kolb, 1984) learning theory to provide learners opportunities to gain practical experience. In the traditional in-person classroom learning, the course required students to accomplish five requirements. In the online set-up, I reduced the requirements to three events projects to accommodate challenges that learners face in the online learning set-up (Finlay et al., 2022), such as Internet connectivity issues, adapting to the new learning modality, communication

challenges, and, more particularly, learning during a global pandemic.

Each project was designed to be incrementally more challenging so that students learn incrementally more complex concepts, as prescribed by Slavich and Zimbardo (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Previous projects serve as models for succeeding projects. Furthermore, succeeding projects provide opportunities to master concepts learned in previous projects. All project requirements are announced and explained in the first week of class, including deadlines and grading criteria. Table 2 provides the summary of these projects.

*Table 2. Summary of course requirements*

| Project and description    | Challenge to address                | Pedagogical approach            |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Individual Experience Vlog | To understand the guest experience. | Experiential<br>Challenge-based |

| Project and description   | Challenge to address                                 | Pedagogical approach                             |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Description: Students choose a virtual event, based on specified criteria. Students then shoot and edit a video log (vlog) describing and evaluating their experience.</p> <p>Midterm Group Project: Classroom Event</p> <p>Description: Students organize into groups of their choosing, and activate an online event based on a teacher-determined theme. These events are carried out during class hours and attendance is limited to the learner cohort.</p> | To learn how to activate an event concept.           | Experiential<br>Challenge-based<br>Collaborative |
| <p>Finals Group Project: Online Fundraising Event</p> <p>Description: Students, in the same group as their midterm project, conceptualize and activate an online event to help support a cause-based organization or individual beneficiary of their choosing. Students conceptualize the event, plan and organize around this concept, promote event, and execute event plans.</p>   | To learn how to conceptualize and activate an event. | Experiential<br>Challenge-based<br>Collaborative |

Lectures are delivered in storytelling style, loosely using the experience frameworks of Disney's delivery systems framework (Kinni, 2011) and Rossman and Duerden's experiencescape framework]. Each lecture is used to explore and explain event marketing concepts such as guest experience, event design, event marketing, and planning and logistics. These lectures draw from the teacher's experiences in attending events as a guest and activating events as an event professional.

Each lecture is designed to provide learning support for each project requirement. It also serves as a model for students as each lecture mimics the experience of attending an online event. All lectures incorporate elements found in events, such as but not limited to program planning and flow, costumes, props, videos, and other multimedia learning aides to enhance the storytelling delivery.

## (2) Contextualized communication

I structured a simple communication protocol to encourage students to engage with fellow learners and to contextualize the communica-

tion, because poor social interaction is a challenge faced by learners in the online learning set-up (Finlay et al., 2022). This communication protocol was designed to ensure that students receive important information, to simplify how they access relevant information, and to establish open communication lines to allow students to consult with and seek feedback for the teacher. This also allowed me to provide relevant communication and feedback, satisfying Savich and Zimbardo's core method of personalizing attention and feedback given to students (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

Synchronous online classes were held through Zoom. Students accessed the course syllabus, learning materials, video recordings of synchronous lectures, course calendar, and official grades through the university's learning management system. This ensures that students have access to lessons and learning materials outside of class hours, giving them leeway should they have difficulty attending or participating in synchronous classes. The online learning experience is dependent on access to technology (Finlay et al., 2022), which is

why it is important to provide students flexibility and options on how they access learning materials as access to technology varies among learners.

For informal communication outside of class hours, the social media platform Facebook was used predominantly as it provided features to contextualize communication. I created and maintained a private Facebook Group Page for the class to send out weekly reminders and instructions. For project-related communication, each project group created a private chat group where students are encouraged to send project-related inquiries and where I provided project-specific guidance, feedback, and encouragement. I also met project groups through scheduled video conferencing. For individual issues, I encouraged students to reach out privately through private messaging during official school hours or through email communication.

### (3) Assessing learning expectations and evaluating the learning experience

These survey questionnaires were initially designed as research instruments to help me understand student expectations on the course, motivations for participation and success, and evaluation of their learning experience. However, the surveys satisfied two of Slavich and Zimbardo's core methods of transformational teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). In understanding their expectations and motivations, I was able to align my lessons and communication with their interests and learning objectives, thereby helping create a shared vision for the course. I also learned and observed that the pre-class surveys allowed students to reflect or think about what they want to learn, why they want to learn, how they define success, and what they need to do to achieve success (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). The post-course survey, on the other hand, provided an opportunity to reflect on their experience and performance, whether they achieved their objectives, whether their preconceived conceptions of the course have changed, and how their perspectives, attitudes, and behaviors may have changed through participating in the course.

### **Student expectations vis-à-vis performance in course**

In the pre-class survey, students claimed that they enrolled in the class because they wanted to learn how to activate events (63%) and develop relevant skills (22%), which they claim they will need for future endeavors (41%). These motivations align with how they define succeeding in the course: acquiring new knowledge (37%), developing skills (37%), and applying what they learned in class (33%).

In the post-course survey, students claimed that they acquired new knowledge (33%) and developed important skills (33%), including communication, collaboration, creativity, adaptability, and decision-making skills, through their participation in the course.

When asked in the pre-course survey what it would take for them to succeed in the class, most acknowledged that success is a result of taking responsibility (70%) while others point to external factors (30%), specifically the teacher's expertise, performance, and disposition during the entire course, as crucial to their success. Students were then asked to assess their performance in the course in the post-course assessment survey. Many students believed that they succeeded in the course (85%), while the rest believed that they performed better than expected (15%). Some have also expressed enjoying the learning experience (11%). Students believed that the teacher played an important role in their performance, such as providing encouragement and meaningful feedback (44%). However, they also expressed that their success in the course was a result of developing the right skills (44%), developing the right attitude (56%), and applying themselves and behaving accordingly (56%).

Students developed a positive attitude towards learning and a better understanding of the role personal responsibility plays in success. They also exhibited an improved perception of their strengths and capabilities. Many students claimed that they developed self-complexity (44%) resulting from their participation in the course.

*"This course (took) me out of my comfort zone and made me realize that I can do things that I thought I couldn't."*

*"It helped me learn to work with others since I usually prefer to work alone; but because of this class, I enjoy working with others more now."*

What these students experienced is transformation, which in Mezirow's framework (Mezirow, 1991) means shifts in knowledge, shifts in attitude, or shifts in perspective (White & Nitkin, 2014). Students also demonstrated desired results of transformational teaching: subject matter mastery, enhanced skills and learning strategies, and positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Some examples of responses that demonstrate these are the following:

*"This course has allowed me to be a better leader. The skills that I have learned in this class have helped me become more organized and creative in any type of situation."*

*"Online courses can be fun and, in my opinion, I can learn so much more through experience than tests or quizzes."*

*"The most valuable lesson I've learned was definitely to be accountable (for my participation)."*

*"I learned that some things won't go your way, but you can make things work."*

*"You need to work really hard for the things you want and you usually learn from experience."*

### ***Value of experiential lessons***

I focused the storytelling lectures on experience contexts that I assumed students would relate to or events that they have experienced themselves, such as visiting amusement parks and attending concerts. Concepts, problems, and questions are framed appropriately to the students' level of knowledge and skill. One student said that the lectures were "... easily relatable," while another said "... it was easy to digest." Cercone asserts teaching strategies should allow learners to connect their past experiences with concepts they are learning in the present so that they may see possible future

implications (Cercone, 2008). While learner experiences differ, these lectures focus on similar or comparable experiences so that learners may explore new concepts using contexts that they can relate to and understand. These lectures were also meant to help students call into question preconceived beliefs and explore alternative perspectives. For example, some students noted that my previous experiences allowed them to learn what they needed to keep in mind when attending or activating events:

*"It (helped me understand) that not everything will go as planned ... so (I should) be prepared and (learn how) to (respond to) these situations."*

Furthermore, the experiential elements of lectures, such as content programming and use of various media, provided models for how to entertain and engage the audience in the virtual setting. My experiences and storytelling methods served as models on how to accomplish their events project requirements. Students considered these storytelling lectures as lessons that provided a creative, fun, engaging, and impactful learning experience, which helped them develop healthier attitudes toward learning.

*"How (the teacher) discussed his lessons was so good and it made it easier for students to digest the learnings."*

*"(By) discussing his experiences, we (were given) standards to follow on how to activate events."*

*"(I enjoyed the) lectures about customer experience. The professor's family videos were fun to watch and showed how customer experience (looks like)."*

*"(I enjoyed) the energy and passion (he) puts in his lectures."*

*"It's good to know that learning doesn't have to be so serious ... to be able to get the message that the professor is trying to deliver."*

Event projects, on the other hand, provided students opportunities to apply what they have learned through lectures by allowing them to do hands-on experiments to test out their pre-conceived ideas on how to activate events. Students found these events projects challenging for different reasons. Some were challenged because it required them to do something new and different, while others were challenged to work with available resources, which students felt were limited in a virtual learning environment.

*"There were several opportunities for me to try newer things in taking up this course."*

*"I was challenged because this was my first time planning an event ... (I had no idea) how hard it (was) ... I had fun because I learned a lot."*

*"(It was challenging) to find the resources to make (the online event) fun and engaging."*

Many students felt online communication to be problematic, which made collaborating difficult. Learners experienced problems with their Internet connection, and it impacted their ability to participate in the class, to activate events projects, and to communicate and engage with fellow learners. However, these challenges encouraged students to adapt, be creative, and develop better communication and collaboration skills.

*"We had to think of ways to innovate and be creative with what was given to us."*

*"I (learned how) to communicate our goals and objectives (clearly) to get everyone (in the group) on the same page."*

A disadvantage of online distance learning is its socially isolated nature (Finlay et al., 2022), which made collaboration a crucial aspect in the course's learning experience. The event projects provided multiple opportunities for students to engage and interact not just with their project groups but also with the rest of the class. Many students acknowledged that they found the events projects fun and

entertaining because of the interaction. These interactions were learning opportunities as students were able to observe and experience how other groups executed their events projects.

*"I (was able) to interact (with my classmates in class) ... All the events were very fun and entertaining."*

*"(I found the classroom events enjoyable because of) how the students were able to execute the different activities and the participation of everyone as well."*

*"The interactive aspect of the class events and being able to see each of the groups' creative ideas (made it enjoyable)."*

Furthermore, the finals project provided students with the opportunity to engage and interact with people outside of the classroom. In the transformational teaching approach, the most beneficial lessons and activities take place outside of the classroom (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012) because these expose students to a wider range of perspectives, which helps them enhance or revise their frames of reference (Mezirow, 1997). In this case, working with individual beneficiaries or cause-based organizations gave students a sense of purpose and made working on the project a meaningful and impactful learning experience.

*"It gave me a sense of purpose aside from the motivation of getting a good grade. It made me want to do well for the beneficiary and my teammates."*

Overall, students found these experiential lessons to be enjoyable, challenging, and impactful. Students enjoyed these lessons because they were collaborative and engaging (33%), fun (30%), and creative and unique (15%). Following the flow theory in positive psychology, students are more likely to develop new skills, increase self-confidence, and improve self-complexity when they are not only challenged but also enjoy the learning experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Enjoying the learning experience positively impacts learning

outcomes because it enhances learner engagement (Armstrong et al., 2009), motivates learners to perform better (D'Mello, 2013), and results in greater retention of learning (Lucardie, 2014).

### **Value of a caring and enthusiastic teacher**

Teachers perform an important role in keeping students engaged and motivated. Teaching styles affect learning outcomes (Rong-Da Liang, 2021) and students who are encouraged by a caring and enthusiastic teacher feel more confident in performing challenging tasks (Kirillova & Au, 2020). Moreover, teachers have the capacity to help students become more aware of the importance of certain skills and knowledge they need to pursue future careers (Kirillova & Au, 2020). Students are more likely to actively participate in the course and view the course experience more positively when the teacher incorporates their viewpoints into the learning experience (Rong-Da Liang, 2021). Conversely, students were less motivated to perform when they perceive their teachers to be cold and uncaring towards them (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986).

Following the self-determination theory, students who are intrinsically motivated (i.e. motivated to perform because they enjoy doing the task) show interest, enthusiasm and confidence, and are more likely to perform and persist (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Students become intrinsically

motivated when their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, following the cognitive evaluation theory, external factors may enhance or undermine intrinsic motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Caring and enthusiastic teachers nurture an environment that support the psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which leads to intrinsically motivated students.

Teachers can support student competence by providing what students need to succeed in the course. Slavich and Zimbardo's core methods (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012), particularly experiential lessons and opportunities for modelling and mastery experiences, support student confidence and competence, just as

each project requirement in the course was designed to provide a foundation for succeeding requirements. Teachers should also provide instrumental support, which improves skills and concept mastery (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012) and self-efficacy (Woolfolk & Shaughnessy, 2004). Instrumental support includes time, resources, and assistance for students to accomplish course requirements (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012), specifically giving clear guidelines for projects, transparent criteria for grading, and straightforward class policies.

*"The professor was always very thorough in discussing the topics and modules and made it very easy for me to understand. He was also very open when it came to questions and inquiries, and he was always open to help."*

Ryan and Deci believe that open communication and feedback is important in building competence and confidence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Given perceived challenges in online communication, it is important for teachers to define communication protocols because communication in in-person classes is different from communication in virtual classes. By designing a contextualized communication system suitable for the online setting, I ensured that each discussion, whether with individual students or with project groups, was relevant, appropriate, and personalized. Students valued the open communication and believe that it is important in course success.

*"I think constant communication is the key to support student success. The consultations are a huge help in ensuring that we are on the right track."*

Following the cognitive evaluation theory, a subset of self-determination theory, competence by itself is not enough to enhance intrinsic motivation but students must also feel that their behavior is self-determined and have a sense of autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this course, students were allowed choose who they work with (choose their project group and beneficiaries), what they work on (choose the theme of project events), and how they

accomplish tasks and projects, provided they fulfill the requirements of the course.

*"I think it is nice that (as a group,) we were able to work independently and to think on our own instead of relying on our professor."*

Relatedness becomes more important in the online setting, given that students feel isolated. Active collaboration is essential in keeping students motivated (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2013). Based on the experience of the students in the course, engagement and collaboration is key in succeeding in the course and having an enjoyable and impactful learning experience.

*"I love how the whole class is having fun and even though we do not know each other well, it felt like we were in one solid block."*

*"I really enjoyed the class events. It was something I looked forward to during the week because I knew my classmates would prepare something fun and interactive ... it was definitely an engaging time, especially now when interaction with others can be so minimal (in the online setting)."*

*"It was my favorite online class out of all, and the professor was very engaging, which made me participate in all activities as much as possible ... Also, instructions are always relayed in the most simple and clear manner."*

### **Self-reflection**

The physical classroom democratizes the learning experience because it allows students equal access to the teacher and their peers within the same four walls. A distinct disadvantage of the online classroom is that the learning experience is dependent on the learner's access to technology and the quality of their physical learning space. The size of the screen, quality of microphone and speakers, and the ambiance of the physical learning space, among other external factors, impact the learner experience, particularly how they engage in the online classroom.

It is difficult to make the learning experience gadget neutral and doing so reduces engagement. For example, because many learners in this cohort complained about unstable Internet connectivity, it has become practice for students to keep their cameras off unless otherwise asked. This means that I often deliver lectures to what looks like an empty classroom, which felt discouraging and impacted my motivation to teach. To counter this, I encouraged students to ask questions through chat, participate in polls, or use Zoom's engagement features. Despite these measures, the engagement in the online classroom remains low compared to in-person classes. Some students have expressed that it was easy to *"mentally check out"* and disengage in online learning.

As such, there is a need to focus on improving engagement in the online classroom, because the lack of engagement impacts learner motivation and performance. The focus of learning literature has been on developing a learner's competence and autonomy in the classroom. However, through this experience, I found that students need the most help in nurturing the psychological need for relatedness to keep them engaged and motivated throughout the course.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights how to deliver a transformational learning experience to a cohort of undergraduate students taking an events marketing course delivered in the online learning modality. The experience shows that experiential lessons and a teacher's caring and enthusiastic attitude towards learning and learners promote learning transformation by helping students master concepts, enhance skills, develop strategies for learning and discovery, and reinforce positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs. Experiential lessons include storytelling lectures that mimic an event activation and collaborative project-based requirements that call for students to activate events. These lessons provide opportunities for students to engage with both the subject matter and fellow learners. A caring and enthusiastic teacher supports learner confidence and nurture their intrinsic motivation through instru-

mental support, clear and open communication, and personalized feedback. These teaching strategies keep students engaged and motivated to perform and persist despite challenges in the online learning set-up.

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