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Globalizing online learning: Exploring culture, corporate social responsibility, and domestic violence in an international classroom

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Globalizing online learning: Exploring culture, corporate social responsibility, and domestic violence in an international classroom

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Abstract

The construction of a successful online collaboration between distinct cultural groups requires an informed cultural awareness. This is the exploration of such an online collaboration between American and Turkish Students. The focus of the shared student interaction was the concept of corporate social responsibility. As the concept is enacted differently in different cultures, this represented an ideal opportunity for topical student reflection and for cultural exploration. The approach utilized focused on relationship-building as a preface to content discussion based participant preferences suggested by relevant cultural research (e.g., Hofstede). Corporate social responsibility campaigns in the United States and Turkey focused on domestic violence were considered with an eye toward the distinctions between each. Results suggest positive student outcomes emerged from this approach. Implications for intercultural online learning and diversification of public relations curricula are considered.

Keywords

Online learning, diversity, corporate social responsibility, international public relations

Globalizing public relations education

As the need to reach diverse constituencies becomes more salient for public relations practitioners, it should follow that diverse perspectives would inform the field. Unfortunately, a wealth of scholarship suggests that public relations remains strikingly homogeneous despite attempting to reach a heterogeneous world (Vardeman-Winter and Place, 2017). This is particularly salient when considering the extent to which public relations is dominated by

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American models and American assumptions when attempting to reach international constituencies (Freitag and Stokes, 2009). Diversification of the perspectives upon which the field is based should begin with education for future practitioners, but creating a classroom where global public relations includes students from around the globe can be challenging in the American university setting. As Sriramesh (2002) succinctly states:

Public relations (PR) education has not kept pace with the rapid globalization... The existing PR body of knowledge, and PR curricula around the world, have a US bias. In order to prepare PR students ... (to) become effective multicultural professionals it is essential for experiences and perspectives from other continents to be integrated into PR education. (p. 54).

With that in mind, this project explores the best practices and student outcomes of an online collaboration between students in the United States and students in Turkey. The nature of international online learning collaboration requires careful attention to shared content between multinational student populations with close attention paid to the needs and preferences of students in a global classroom (Brindley et al., 2009; Bruhn, 2017; Labi, 2011; Marcillo and Desilus, 2016; Villar-Onrubia and Rajpal, 2016). Considering a research-based approach to building online content for international learning is crucial and, when enacted with care, can create opportunities for students to not only appreciate the importance of global diversity in public relations, but to actually engage with the challenges and opportunities diversity can bring.

Virtual internationalization

Online education has become a significant pedagogy in higher education, particularly since the demands of today's students have shifted to accommodate their specific professional and personal needs as they pursue various undergraduate and graduate degrees. The online learning environment not only provides the necessary flexibility for students who cannot attend a traditional face-to-face college environment, but also offers an alternative learning community to traditional students, which frequently supplements traditional classes with online learning opportunities. According to a recent Babson Survey Research Group study (Allen and Seaman, 2016), one in seven of all higher education students are enrolled in full-time online degree programs, and another one in seven report to have taken "some but not all" courses at a distance (p. 11). Clearly, online teaching and learning has become a viable option for certain student segments in higher education.

Brindley et al. (2009) note that online courses can create highly social learning environments, offering participation and interaction among students and instructors. In such a collaborative learning environment, learners actively share and transmit knowledge with other classmates, which in turn assists students in developing higher level thinking skills through shared exploration, discussion, and shared meaning making. Even more so, involvement in a learning community has been found to increase self-worth, social support, interpersonal connectivity, and a stronger sense of self (Johansen and Ornelas, 2012). In the online learning environment, students have the opportunity to share a variety of life experiences and even different cultural and international backgrounds. While such classroom diversity can be present in traditional, face-to-face classes, access to even more additional and different perspectives can be enhanced and supplemented in the online learning space. This kind of interaction and collaboration "can facilitate critical thinking, promote

awareness of alternative life views, broaden perceptions of problems, and assist in developing creative solutions” (p. 26).

One specific advantage online courses provide, is the ability to easily connect with students around the globe, whether it be for the duration of an entire class, or for a short-term collaborative project. Internationalization has been embraced by many institutions of higher education, with institutions and departments promoting the idea of turning their students into “global citizens” (Gemmell et al., 2015; Guth, 2013; Tyran, 2017; Villar-Onrubia and Rajpal, 2016). Traditionally the idea of internationalization required students to physically move to different countries to get exposed to foreign cultures and environments. Digitalization has changed this significantly by providing learning environments for “virtual mobility, globally networked learning, virtual exchange, telecollaboration and collaborative online international learning (COIL)” (Bruhn, 2017: 2).

Telecollaboration as part of university foreign language education can probably be seen as the earliest version of digitally connecting learners from different countries going back almost 20 years. Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence has provided a theoretical foundation and includes: (1) *intercultural attitudes* referring to curiosity and openness to learn about a new culture; (2) *knowledge* of social groups and their products and practices in both one’s own and other’s cultures; (3) *skills of interpreting and relating* to interpret the meaning of events from one culture to another; (4) *skills of discovery and interaction* to enable the acquisition of new knowledge about a culture and its processes; and (5) *critical cultural awareness* in order to “evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram et al., 2001: 7). Similarly, Deardorff (2006) describes intercultural competence as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (pp. 247–248). It is important to point out that intercultural competence doesn’t automatically happen simply because of the presence of diversity. Engagement, interaction, and communication form the basis to attain the qualities needed to develop intercultural competency, such as respect of others, understanding of one’s own position in the world and how we view others, listening skills, being able to adapt to another person’s perspective, building cross-cultural relationships and showing cultural respect through self-awareness (Boehm et al., 2010).

Today, many technological tools such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video-sharing, etc. are available to faculty to allow students to engage in a much more active role with other students. With the introduction of a multitude of Web 2.0 communication and interaction tools, intercultural collaboration and communication appear to be more pedagogically effective than in the early days of online collaboration. Jin (2015), for example, found the use of Facebook in a telecollaboration project between Korean EFL learners and American undergraduate students to be pedagogically effective when applying Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence. Similarly positive effects were found by Gemmell et al. (2015) analyzing students’ experiences in an online Master of Public Health program at Manchester University, UK, describing that a majority of students (84.5%) indicated that learning alongside students from other countries was positive. Students particularly enjoyed the “added dimension of using discussion boards and wiki’s to undertake group work with students from other countries” (p. 143). Kerlin et al. (2013) report similar promising findings from FLEXE (*From Local to Extreme Environments*), an instructional project to expand the science classroom by involving students in Global Learning. At times, problems with the technology can negatively impact the learning experience, such as

described by Marcillo and Desilus (2016) during a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) program between two universities in the United States and Mexico. While both institutions used the same online learning platform, one of the institutions had only recently adopted the LMS leaving faculty and students to deal with several technical problems that hampered the interaction between the two groups. Attrition rates for the COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities (Guth, 2013) showed that 30% dropped out of the course due to technological inequalities, budget, or institutional issues, 50% dropped out because of time conflicts, language barriers, structural barriers and perceived little personal contact and 50% dropped out due to internet connectivity problems, difficulty working with different time zones, and difference in academic cultures. The technical challenges associated with online international collaboration can be immense, ranging from varying levels of IT support across institutions to potential LMS incompatibility if different systems are being used. Faculty ability to mitigate such issues can be challenging, but the benefits of establishing intercultural (communicative) competency are clear.

One significant area of consideration related to the issue of online engagement is culture. As such, there is an inherent danger in assuming American models of engagement in facilitating cross cultural, educational interaction online. International learning online is a growing and important development in higher education. Despite its growth, however, the study of effective methods for facilitating engagement in intercultural online learning communities is somewhat limited (Gemmell et al., 2015). As noted, the necessary levels of technology that would allow for global online learning has only emerged in the last decade. As the bulk of online pedagogy has primarily come from the United States and other Western countries, the adaptability of the course content to account for varying cultural needs is only recently being considered. While there are undoubtedly some elements of online learning that are not culturally discrete, creating a climate for effective international learning requires thoughtful construction of online content. As Gemmell et al. (2015) note:

In an online learning environment where students remain in their own country, embedded in their own culture, the benefits of internationalization may be undermined unless specific teaching methods to increase collaborative working are utilized. However, if used effectively these teaching methods may increase the benefits of internationalization as it may be easier for students to appreciate the international context of issues when working collaboratively with students resident in different countries. (2015: 140)

Reflecting on the work of Hofstede, one of the most referenced researchers on culture for all the social sciences, he argues that culture acts as a sort of “software of the mind;” mitigating, framing, informing, and shaping the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. This mitigation has direct impact on classroom motivation and interaction. Raufelder et al. (2017), for example, analyzed learning motivation and outcome differences between Turkish and German students in mixed classrooms. Their findings showed that German students, who come from a more individualistic culture (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005), tend to prefer self-directed projects where the bulk of reflection was done at the individual level. Turkish students, in contrast, tended to prefer collaboration with the instructor and their peers (Turkish culture tended to be more collectively focused). Distinctions like these are immensely relevant for online courses directed toward a multinational, multicultural audience of students.

Corporate social responsibility and culture

A key reason for the importance of multinational and multicultural interaction among public relations students is readying them for participation in the global economy. Public relations no longer operates within discrete borders and preparing students to understand the rich and varied climates in which organizations operate is now an important function of higher education. In disciplines like public relations, the need is even more salient. An understanding of cultural difference will be a key skill for the next generation of practitioners who will need to craft and disseminate messages across borders and to culturally unique constituencies. This is particularly relevant when considering corporate social responsibility (CSR). Corporate social responsibility has gained traction both in practice and in academic literature regarding public relations, marketing, and sustainability in business. CSR initiatives “reflect the organization’s status and activities with respect to its perceived societal obligations” (Brown and Dacin, 1997: 68). Scholder Ellen et al. (2006) note that CSR is the basis of modern corporate reputation with both research and popular press publications such as magazine operationalizing the concept as a central component of an organization’s public identity. The notion that companies should be responsible and sustainable has been well established in research and practice, however the conception of what that responsibility looks like is distinct in different countries (Choi et al., 2016). CSR’s importance in public relations has been well-documented, but its culturally appropriate, multinational implementation has lagged far behind that understanding (Ho Lee, 2017). As Arthaud-Day (2005) notes, organizations “must therefore develop unique approaches to CSR for every society in which they are engaged (p. 9).” Providing public relations students with the foundational skills necessary to explore these “unique approaches” is something that cannot be done in a vacuum. Exploration of specific CSR initiatives from different cultures and discussing those initiatives with people from those cultures can provide a contextual depth of understanding that would not be possible with mere lecture and textbook learning.

Cumulatively, there is an established value in creating international learning experiences for students online. The literature also suggests that international online student collaborations should be informed by the cultural experiences and preferences of participants. Finally, corporate social responsibility is an important area of study for business and public relations students, but needs to be grounded in cultural understanding as its function differs by country. The collaboration examined in this research had a specific population with distinct needs, but the project still presents an opportunity to explore several key investigative inquiries. Specifically, does the initial utilization of a relationship focus rather than a course task focus prime students from a collective culture for subsequent course engagement? Does the utilization of CSR cases from different cultures enhance engagement and understanding in an international online course? What insights do students receive from discussion of global issues when their colleagues are from another country? Such questions guided both the construction of this collaboration and the assessment of the collaboration’s outcomes.

Collaborative online international learning and CSR

Student population overview

An opportunity to explore effective learning techniques about CSR in a multicultural context emerged with the facilitation of an online course composed of 40 students from the

United States and 55 students from a university in Turkey. The American student population was composed of students at a campus in rural New York. The students from both countries were communication majors with a majority focusing specifically on public relations. As an introductory course, the class population was composed primarily of sophomores and juniors. The nature of the course is applied, so learning is expected to focus on experiential processes and case based learning (as opposed to classes structured according to a lecture format). The student population in Turkey generally came from a more urban background with students coming primarily from the Izmir region. They all majored in public relations, marketing, and/or business. In terms of learning focus, the Turkish class had a similar structure that emphasized discussion and applied learning based on tangible public relations projects (which was one basis for the collaboration). It should be noted that the Turkish students regularly interact in English and complete projects in English, however they are non-native speakers and a substantial portion of their course instruction is in Turkish.

Collaboration structure

This collaboration was initiated as part of the State University of New York's Collaborative Online International Learning initiative. Created in 2006, COIL is supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and represents "a central element of the vast statewide system's overall global strategy" (Labi, 2011). The program pairs courses and instructors located in different countries. A COIL project, according the standards of the program, is an:

... approach to teaching and learning that brings together geographically distant instructors and students from different lingua-cultural backgrounds to communicate and collaborate through the use of online communication tools. The COIL method promotes interactive shared coursework, emphasizing experiential learning and gives collaborating students a chance to get to know each other while developing meaningful projects together. (Guth, 2013: 3)

Similar and complimentary courses are typically selected and faculty members at each respective institution collaborate on shared online modules that students from both countries contribute to.

Collaboration focus

In this particular case, students at both institutions were enrolled in an introductory course in public relations. The purpose of this collaboration was to make students globally aware of the similarities and differences associated with CSR in different cultural contexts. The theme of corporate social responsibility was chosen because the concept is enacted quite differently across the globe (Choi et al., 2016) and the intent of the project was to offer students PR perspectives from clear and distinct cultural worldviews. As such, students would be asked to collaborate and reflect on various successful cases in both the United States and Turkey and consider relevant differences in the PR approaches of both countries. This necessarily meant that the interaction would have an applied, practical focus. The cases would be viewable to each student population and interaction about the cases would serve as the basis of the collaboration. Students would be able to ask questions about the differences in approach and share experiences from their cultural perspective. The outcome

sought in this instance would be that students would not only understand how CSR looks different across cultures but also have an understanding of the cultural perspectives that might inform that difference. That can only be accomplished by meaningful interaction with people from other cultures.

Processes and procedures

As time difference and scheduling would have made synchronous interactions difficult, an asynchronous approach using discussion forums was agreed upon by the instructors. In terms of platform, the respective institutions involved in this project were each using a different learning management systems (LMS). Creating a shared online space for these discussions through official university channels proved problematic. A workable solution was to use a publicly available blogging service for which students would be invited to join. Only students from the two courses would be allowed to contribute and post content. This approach had the side benefit of making the discussion feel less formalized and made sharing more comfortable, as the format and space of the blog more closely matched the sort of informal interaction students regularly have through social media.

It is important to note, however, that beginning the online collaboration immediately with content related items that ask important questions about the nature of culture, communication, responsibility, and public relations could prove jarring. As noted, collegiality, trust, and relationship functions are integrally important for successful online engagement. There were also cultural variables that needed to be considered in relation to the establishment of engaged learning. Returning to the work of Hofstede, the key values he examined included power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. His research on national cultures argues that a culture can be ranked according to its corresponding score in each area (Hoffman and Robertson, 2000). Each element in his initial research produced a sort of continuum along which the basic problem-solving mechanisms of a culture could be revealed. A highly collective culture, for example, might be inclined to seek consensus on group needs even at the expense of individual preferences. The idea that a culture may be more collective and relationship focused was particularly important for this collaboration because of its implication on engagement. Collectivism, as it relates to cultural dimensions, describes an individual's integration into cohesive in-groups in which they enjoy collegiality and for which they offer loyalty (Hofstede, 2001). Continuity of relationship is crucial in such a cultural context. In contrast, individualism fosters decisions based on individual preferences with connection to the group based on the gratification it provides the individual.

It is important to note that no one person, society, or group exists at either pole of this continuum. That said, when looking at comparative metrics, the distinction in this area is profound between the United States and Turkey, with the United States scoring 91 (out of 100) on Individualism and Turkey scoring 37 (Özdaşlı et al., 2016). From this, a focus on building relationship connections between both cohorts of students was considered as initially important before any content related collaboration could occur. This approach is further suggested by research on the distinctions between Western students and Turkish students in terms of classroom expectations and needs (Raufelder et al., 2017).

In sum, this project presented a unique opportunity for American and Turkish students to interact about the dimensions of CSR. The online nature of this collaboration required course construction that reflects best practices in terms of online learning pedagogy. It also

required attention to the cultural dimensions of the students in both countries and an adaptive approach to course construction that takes into account the cultural expectations and needs of both groups of learners.

Collaboration implementation

When preparing this project, careful consideration was given to construction and the strategies for evaluating its effectiveness in fostering student learning. The first element considered was the need to ensure a climate of collaboration and engagement between the two cultural groups participating. As noted previously, Turkish students tend to want relational engagement as part of their learning experience. While important for all online learners, such a focus would be particularly crucial when working with a culture that places a strong value on interpersonal connection as a component of collaborative work. With that in mind, the course actively *avoided* any content related items in the first few sessions of online collaboration. Instead, students were encouraged to discuss the following items in the introductory module's forums:

- What social media do you like using?
- What did you have for breakfast today?
- What fun things will you do this weekend?
- What are some questions you have for students from the other country participating in this course?

With these items posted, the goal was that students from both countries would immediately feel comfortable sharing with one another. Experiences and preferences could be discussed informally building the necessary relationships for the analysis subsequent content. Differences in the cultural groups could then become less threatening and with those differences serving as sources of curiosity and interest. Several questions forecast subsequent exploration of items related to public relations (specifically, social media preferences and exploration of cultural differences), but they were introduced as items of interpersonal connection rather than as content related items.

After concluding these introductory and exploratory units, the course would then focus on content related items. As intercultural engagement is a stated goal of the program, Turkish and American CSR campaigns were selected in consultation between faculty in both Turkey and the United States. While creating overt cultural tension between students was obviously not the intent of the project, there is value in encouraging students to explore challenging material that would encourage reflection about cultural assumptions regarding difficult issues. The issue of gender based abuse and violence is relevant to both the United States and Turkey. Abuse and harassment in the United States is widespread and recognized as a serious problem. Structural attempts to combat these abuses include legal remedies, visibility and protection for victims, and awareness raising campaigns. The situation in Turkey, however, is starkly different where 41.3% of women experience domestic violence, and the majority (89.2%) had been subjected to violence by their spouses. Educational status, income status, spouse's age, spouse's education level, marriage age, family type all correlated predictively to abuse with the cultural status of women being a particular challenge for reducing gendered violence (Basar and Demirci, 2018). Returning to Hofstede's work, the role of gender in structural violence based on power is typically an outcome of

distinct cultural dimensions (Caffaro et al., 2014). With both Turkish and American companies recognizing a responsibility to end such abuses as part of their mission to serve diverse constituencies, the topic of domestic violence proved to be ideal for examining public relations initiatives and facilitating student dialogue on challenging topics related to cultural values.

Specifically, the American campaign selected was the Allstate Insurance Foundation's "Purple Purse" campaign. In articulating the goals of the campaign, the Allstate Foundation's website states:

Allstate Foundation Purple Purse is aimed at creating long-term safety and security for survivors through financial empowerment. We are making the invisible visible. Since 2005, we have been working to bring financial abuse out of the shadows so victims can get the healing and support they deserve. (Purple Purse-Allstate Foundation, 2018)

The campaign is uniquely focused on the financial abuse that accompanies the physical abuse in situations of relationship violence. The "Purple Purse" is a charm that can be worn as a display of advocacy for this cause; much like ribbons of different colors are worn to raise awareness for issues of concern. Stated goals like "empowerment," "visibility," "making the invisible visible," and moving victims "out of the shadow" were particularly relevant to this project as public visibility of an individual's experience are considered a culturally important value in the United States (Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005).

In contrast, the campaign selected from Turkey was Vodafone's "Red Light" smartphone application. Vodafone Red Light (Kırmızı Işık) was awarded the Media Grand Prix by the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity. The app works when a woman in an unsafe domestic situation shakes her phone. An alert message and her location would then be sent to three contacts, requesting assistance. The difficulty Vodafone faced in this situation was that the application had to be disseminated to women without their abusive partners being aware of its existence. Vodafone's strategy was to secretly embed information about the app in media that was unlikely to be consumed by men (videos on make-up tutorials for examples). Other placements included placing Red Light app information on lingerie tags and in gender specific hair salons. The success in disseminating application information is astounding with "more than 250,000 women downloading the app, which constitutes 24 percent of all women in Turkey who use smartphones. To date, it has been activated over 103,000 times" (Bruell, 2015).

The decision to select these two campaigns was based on the fact that they each focus on similar CSR objectives (helping victims of domestic violence) with a culturally distinct approach. The American campaign focuses on making the problem as visible as possible and offering victims the chance to publicly proclaim their status as survivors. The Turkish campaign, in contrast, focuses on support from established relational contacts and reducing the chance for public visibility of victims. The goal in selecting these two similar (but culturally distinct) campaigns was for students to interact on those differences and share information with one another about the cultural context that can explain those differences.

Outcomes

Initial data collection in this collaboration was achieved through analysis of student postings in the online discussion. Specifically, the student responses were grouped

based on their reactions to instructor created prompts designed to facilitate student interaction. These response groups allowed for the examination of the themes broadly emerging from shared class discourse about the prompt. Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik (2018) utilized similar investigative techniques when evaluating online sharing by youth with different perspectives and experiences. They argue that “online spaces facilitate connections between the personal and the political, while highlighting the social aspects of youth participation and learning” (2018: 400). For purposes of evaluating outcomes related to course design, two response groups were considered: relational prompt responses and CSR case prompt responses. From these response groups, representative student responses were identified. For purposes of consistency, these representative responses were given to two external reviewers tasked with evaluating the extent to which they represented the themes of the response group being considered. While this process is somewhat speculative and reliant upon interpretation, establishing satisfactory connection to between the themes of these student posts and their overall relevance in assessing course outcomes was important. External review validated that these posts were consistent with the linked themes.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of this online, intercultural interaction is based on several approaches. Initially, the effectiveness of the first units in which students were encouraged to share non-content related posts to interpersonally engaging questions was considered based on the student responses generated (relational prompt). While quantifying the extent to which this created a collaborative climate across cultures is somewhat problematic, examining the cross-cultural responses these posts generated offers some insight into the extent of initial interaction. Based on this, more extensive posts in the content related questions to these two CSR campaigns were reviewed (CSR case prompt). The rationale for this approach is that in a climate where relational interaction has taken place, a sense of community (potentially important to the Turkish participants) will allow students to more freely share insights related to content items. Finally, students were asked to complete a concluding assessment detailing their experience in the course. Gemmell et al. (2015) provides a series of themes to look for in evaluating student narrative responses in assessment of online international learning projects. Specifically, to assess open ended responses given by students, analysis should be based on the knowledge, attitude, skills, and process that students felt were enhanced by the international context. Student responses to the concluding assessment prompt were placed in the categories proposed by Gemmell et al. (2015) and given to two external reviewers. While the categorization of student responses is exploratory and based on a subjective and contextual reading of these responses, review provided consistency with placement of students’ online posts into Gemmell et al.’s categories. As understanding the distinct value the course brought to each student population is an important element of this research, student nationality was identified in considering which outcomes were preferred by each group of students.

The decision to begin the collaboration with the series of informal questions proved immensely successful based on the student interaction it generated. As noted, the discussion items were quite informal and overtly linked to the content items in the collaboration. Students shared what they were doing during the upcoming weekend, discussed what makes for a good breakfast, commiserated about complaints regarding school work (and managed to do so cross-culturally), and shared what social media platforms they preferred.

Some samples of the cultural interaction facilitated by the discussion included:

I would love to know how people our age in Turkey communicate with each other, especially concerning social media. Do you rely heavily on your phones/computers to communicate and stay connected to your friends, or do you rely more on physical presence?

Hey [Mary]! In turkey, college culture is kinda boring, generally we start to study our exams when we have 1 week or less sometimes it could be 1 day: p

Which generated the following reply:

I'm with you on that one. I try to give myself a few days to study before an exam but in reality, I study the night before (in the U.S.) LOL. How do your school days work? I have one class on monday wednesday and fridays and four classes on tuesdays and thursdays.

Another student posted:

I think Facebook is losing its fame in Turkey, especially teenagers use Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat more than Facebook. I like hanging out on Instagram too, but I dont like taking photos, I like looking my friend's photos.

Which generated the following reply:

Hi there, I agree with you, Facebook in America is definitely losing its fame, it's probably because parents are taking over!

These sorts of interactions may seem trivial, but in the context of cross-cultural online learning, building these relationships is crucial for the meaningful exploration of challenging public relations topics (Boehm et al., 2010; Brindley et al., 2009). In the collaboration's construction, it was speculated that Turkish students' emphasis on a collaborative and relational environment would need to be especially well supported in this project. The collaboration between the cultural groups was mirrored in the shared discussion generated by the CSR content items. In terms of the presentation of these two cases, students were shown videos, directed to campaign websites, and provided with written materials that were distributed as part of the campaigns. For purposes of consistency (and because improved English language proficiency was a goal that the Turkish instructors had for their students), these materials were given to students in English. For each campaign, students were asked to share with one another responses to the following items:

- In looking at this campaign, what values are being expressed?
- In what ways does this benefit the campaign's sponsor?
- Does this match the values of the country you reside in?
- Would such a campaign be as effective in your country? Would there be some changes that might make it more effective? What target audience do you think they are trying to reach?

Meaningful replies from the students included posts like these:

“Even though the Purple Purse Campaign is a very unique take on domestic violence, because it looks at it from a financial standpoint, I do think it represents America’s basic values of fighting for those who are “invisible” and the importance of financial stability.”

America takes a strong stand in raising awareness about people who are looked over and look down upon. Empowering them to overcome their pasts and helping them move forward.

In Turkey women are not important, they are treated as a slaves. We see terrible things such as murder and rape. Our values are corrupted now, I dont know where we are going in Turkey. . . . This campaign might help some people to wake up from their sleep. But I dont think our government will allow a campaign like this.

In Turkey, we should change something to create a world without violence. For example, we create lots of campaign like All State Foundation’s campaign. It will be effective and striking. I think we need campaigns like Purple Purse.

I don’t think this campaign would work very well in the US. This campaign is very different because of the way it is marketed which is very secret. I feel like campaigns in the US are always advertising, sometimes to a crazy extent. So I feel like a discreet placement in a clothing tag for a product may get ignored over a television advertisement. I feel like to make this campaign more effective in the US there would need to be a more obvious advertising strategy.

I find it remarkable that the United States ad focused on awareness through merchandise while “Turkey used an app that although secret actually helped the victim in their time of need.

Recently Turkey faced with disappointing events towards women violence such as raping, murdering. Conscious people protested these events and informed to humans more about importance of women. “How can we keep them in safe?” Vodafone proved its awareness by this way.

These sorts of insights on challenging topics were shared with students from another culture that they had never physically met. The diversity of cultural perspectives in the posts suggests that students learned a great deal from their colleagues across the globe and had a connection that allowed for meaningful pedagogical exploration. As noted previously, the two campaigns that were selected were chosen based on their use of a culturally specific approach to CSR and an issue of social concern. The interactions the students had suggested that students were able to see these distinctions in a space that they “owned” through their discussion. More meaningfully, that discussion space appeared to have a shared ownership by students in each country.

Student assessment of the learning outcomes further supported the success of the interaction. As the course was discussion based, students were allowed to share their own feelings about the experience and interact with other students regarding their perception of achieved learning outcomes. In looking at student replies, the work of Gemmell et al. (2015) provides a framework for evaluation. Specifically, responses were considered according to the four areas they identified in assessment of an international online learning project. For knowledge, responses were examined to identify the knowledge and information that students felt they had gained. For attitude, the review of responses attempted to identify an appreciation of working with students from another country and finding it rewarding to do so. In looking at skills, responses indicating that the collaboration provided potentially useful expertise for future career were identified. Finally, process focused responses

discussed any items related to the process of interaction the students felt was important or relevant.

The concluding discussion allowed students to share freely about the project. This generated a total of 65 student replies. These replies correlated to knowledge, attitude, skills, and processes, as expected.

In terms of knowledge gained, students reported learning a great deal from the interaction. Some sample student replies included:

Each week's topic taught different informations to me. Students expressed themselves in free with own ideas about topics. Firstly I learned about the understanding of media in USA via my dear foreign friends. This blog helped us to learn more things about culture of our countries. We criticized social responsibility campaign such as purple purse and vodafone. By this way I learned to attitudes of my friends towards these campaigns. I think this collaboration reached successfully its purposes.

This collaboration was entertaining for me and it shows me different culture. Talking and sharing ideas is pleasure with the other country. It helps me to understand a lot situations better. I think this collaboration is successful.

I have learned so much about how Turkey values certain things in society and how their values either relate or differ from ours in America. I loved openly discussing topics revolving around the media, values, and society because I believe it is so important to be aware of not only your own idea of society, but other societies as well.

The attitude dimension of the interaction was also favorably received by students who reported a feeling of positive goodwill toward the experience as a whole. Students described one another in friendly terms and expressed personal satisfaction at getting the opportunity to receive CSR perspectives from a different cultural context. They also noted that there was something truly unique about gaining these lessons from students as opposed to an instructor or textbook. In sum, a positive feeling about participation was almost universally noted by all respondents.

Skills that were relevant for students in their professional lives were also noted in student comments. Some examples include:

I gained a lot of insight about different PR campaigns around the world. Also, hearing opinions on them were very interesting.

The best thing I took away from this collaboration was learning about Turkey's culture, and using that information to consider the ways in which it affects PR in Turkey as opposed to PR in the US. I think we take for granted that things are the way they are in our respective countries and often times don't think about the fact that other countries' differences in culture, beliefs, religions, and politics have a big effect on how PR needs to be approached differently.

This collaboration has added a lot of value to me. Thanks to this collaboration I have to learn about different cultures and I have a chance to talk with friends from different country.

This collaboration is very effective, successful and instructive but according to in my opinion this campaign can use more visual preferences to achieve a better results.

In terms of process items, students commenting on this noted that they would have liked the collaboration to be extended. While the two campaigns considered were very interesting, students noted that a longer duration interaction would have allowed for exploration of

additional international public relations topics and more helpful interaction with their global colleagues. Other students noted that the use of asynchronous discussion was practical, but that they would have liked to virtually “meet” the other students in some sort of synchronous interaction. In sum, the process items greatly indicated the project’s success with numerous students expressing an interest in even more participation; one of the stated goals of the project.

Discussion

By focusing on relationship building, the students (especially from Turkey) appeared to have greater ease of discussion with their American counterparts. Subsequent discussion of content items produced a great deal of informed contributions from students from both countries. The success of the collaboration should not be wholly surprising, as heterogeneous learning groups composed of multiple cultures have consistently been shown to improve student outcomes (Benton, 2012). The challenge for educators, particularly those working with collaborative online modules, will be to ensure that cultural needs of all groups are reflected in the module’s construction. This would suggest that prior to facilitating an online interaction, instructors would do well to consider some of the cultural preferences of the groups engaging. When thinking about a range of intercultural projects, there is a tendency for any organization to have “widespread acceptance of the fallacy that they can use the same approaches, theories, methods, and scales in different worldwide locations” (Taylor and Brodowsky, 2012: 150). As is too often the case in public relations, there is a tendency to retreat toward “what works” in one’s own context. Building effective connections in a multinational context requires a willingness to reconsider assumptions and approaches. This is especially true when engaging with challenging topics like CSR. Corporate social responsibility requires asking difficult questions about what an organization means and what its obligations are to the constituencies it serves. In this particular project, the distinct responses to domestic violence were considered. Is domestic violence best remedied by empowerment and visibility? Or is the best response confidentiality and the maintenance of discreet relational networks? How does culture inform one’s response? And what role should the market play in fostering these sorts of approaches? Ensuring that these sorts of challenging topics are considered in a productive and collaborative way can only occur when the cultural context of the interaction is accounted for.

Finally, the nature of international public relations needs to be studied by students and intercultural interaction should be a foundational part of any such investigation. The distinct values that a country has greatly informs the messaging that emerges from that country (Arthaud-Day, 2005; Choi et al., 2016). Lectures, articles, and videos with accompanying study of cultural research that explain international public relations in an international context can be a starting point. Such an exclusive focus, however, could limit overall student understanding. By hearing the insights and perspectives of another culture, follow-up questions are possible. This sort of interaction also limits potential tendencies to assume macro truths at the micro level. Cultural measures may provide a broad insight into the public relations of a country. Focusing on those measures exclusively, however, discounts the need to understand and consider the experiences of individuals from a culture, which can frequently be quite distinct from the broader cultural metrics (Bing, 2004).

Globalization has ensured that an organizations activities are no longer confined to discrete borders (Taylor and Brodowsky, 2012). Students entering the modern economy need

to be prepared for that reality. As educators, much can be done to prepare students to adapt to the intercultural and international challenges that modern practitioners will face. That preparation, however, will always be limited by the perspective of the instructor. The internet has provided an incredible opportunity for global interaction. By creating opportunities for global interaction and ensuring those opportunities match the cultural values of participants, the classroom can grow beyond the walls that previously limited it. Studying corporate social responsibility globally can become instrumental in creating responsible global citizens.

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