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Enhancing Student Experience in Online Learning: A Social Capital Perspective

Research in progress

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ABSTRACT
Due to the shifting trend from face-to-face learning to online learning in higher education and challenges encountered by students in the pandemic era, it is imperative to understand how to enhance student experiences in online learning settings. The objective of this work-in-progress research is to uncover how social capital gained through online interaction impacts a student’s utilitarian and hedonic learning experience. This paper develops a research model to meet this objective and outlines a proposed methodology to validate the proposed model. We expect that this study would contribute to the online learning literature by investigating this novel context, extending social interactions to social capital, and differentiating between utilitarian and hedonic student experiences. This study also has potential to provide implications for online learning designers and instructors in higher education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, universities worldwide have had to pivot to remote learning to minimize the disruption of educational experiences for students. However, students have reported feelings of isolation and disconnection due to physical separation and inferior learning experience in online learning settings, which may ultimately lead to high dropout rates. Due to the shifting trend from face-to-face learning to online learning in higher education and challenges encountered by students, it is imperative to understand how to enhance student experiences in online learning settings.

Our research questions are as follows:
1) How do multiple dimensions of social capital influence students’ utilitarian experience toward online learning?
2) How do multiple dimensions of social capital influence students’ hedonic experience toward online learning?

RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES
We propose a theoretical model to investigate how the three dimensions of social capital impact the two aspects of learning experiences, as shown in the figure 1.

![Figure 1. Proposed Research Model](image)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The proposed model will be empirically validated through a survey from MBA students in a North American university.

CONCLUSION
Our study will advance online learning literature by exploring the social capital gained through social interactions. We differentiate utilitarian based and hedonic based student experiences to provide insights on promoting different dimensions of student experience. The implications of the current research findings will be beneficial not only to the field of online learning but also to blended and face-to-face courses with an online component. The findings of this study will be particularly critical to instructors who seek to develop instructional strategies to facilitate better students experience.