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In These Unprecedented Times: A Critical Incidents Technique Examination of Students’ Perceptions of Satisfying and Dissatisfying Learning Experiences

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Higher education has and continues to be sharply disrupted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper, our focus is on the pandemic’s impact on higher education, specifically on undergraduate marketing students’ perceptions of learning experiences during the switch from traditional face-to-face learning to online approaches. Understanding student perspectives on which specific aspects of their learning experience were satisfying or dissatisfying offers faculty valuable insight as to how to navigate this (for many) new teaching environment and enhance student experiences and outcomes. Collecting data during spring semester 2020 offers a unique view from students as universities abruptly pivoted from previously face-to-face instruction to online learning. The Critical Incidents Technique was used to capture the voice and perceptions of marketing students. Results are reported and aligned with teaching strategies for faculty to utilize in this new (for many) learning environment, as well as future learning/teaching shifts necessitated by other disruptions in higher education.

**Keywords**: Critical incidents technique, student satisfaction/dissatisfaction, online teaching, Covid-19 Pandemic.

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In These Unprecedented Times: A Critical Incidents Technique Examination of Students’ Perceptions of Satisfying and Dissatisfying Learning Experiences

Introduction

In these unprecedented times. If ever a phrase summed up widespread sentiment about an event that will likely continue to dramatically shape our lives for some time to come, this frequently invoked one regarding the COVID-19 pandemic is it. Even the most casual examination of news headlines or shared personal experiences with friends, family, and colleagues, shows the challenge of finding any facet of our lives that has not been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. A simple online search of the terms “COVID-19 pandemic impact” brings up a long list of issues, ranging from various aspects of physical health and morbidity, the economy (across a variety of industries and personal finances), supply chain, mental health, entertainment, social dynamics, and education. In this paper, our focus is on the pandemic’s impact on higher education, specifically on undergraduate marketing students’ perceptions of learning experiences during the switch from traditional face-to-face learning to online approaches. Understanding student perspectives on which specific aspects of their learning experience were satisfying or dissatisfying offers faculty valuable insight as to how to navigate this (for many) new teaching environment and enhance student experiences and outcomes.

While the notion of students as consumers is not without controversy (Bowden, 2011; Swanson et al., 2015), it has been suggested that students’ perceptions of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with learning experiences may impact student motivation and learning outcomes (Elliott & Shin, 2002; Guolla, 1999) and, as such, are worthy of consideration. Arrizi et.al (2020) highlight the role of student satisfaction for retention and recruitment as important
due to increased competition for a smaller pool of potential students. Student satisfaction with face-to-face courses is well studied (see de Oliveira Santini et al., 2017 for an excellent meta-analysis). With increased use of various types of online learning pre-pandemic, studies of student satisfaction with those modes of course delivery have also increased in number. Researchers have examined a variety of topics including the relationship of student satisfaction between online-only and hybrid models (Estelami, 2012), between students’ perceptions of course interactions (Eastman et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2014), assignment type (Florenthal, 2016), and type of course (Eastman et al., 2017). These studies of student satisfaction, whether in face-to-face or some form of online learning, all assume students chose that mode of instruction. Our study addresses the student experience of an unplanned and abrupt transition from planned face-to-face teaching and learning to online-only formats in response to a crisis or emergency. Specifically, this research identifies marketing students’ most memorable (dis)satisfactory critical incidents from the COVID-19-initiated shift from the traditional to online classroom and students’ improvement suggestions.

The next section of the paper provides a brief literature review of expectancy disconfirmation theory and pandemic effects in higher education. This is followed by an examination of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction with online learning, followed by a presentation of the methodology and research findings. Finally, the results are discussed, and implications presented.
Literature review

Expectancy disconfirmation theory
Expectancy disconfirmation theory is widely applied and explains satisfaction as the result of the discrepancy between expectations and perceived performance (Oliver, 1977, 1980). The theory suggests that satisfaction/dissatisfaction will result from a student's comparison of the perceived performance of a service, in the current study the abrupt switch from face-to-face to online educational delivery, with predetermined expectations of performance. Expectations are what the student anticipates or predicts will occur. Perceived performance refers to a student’s perceptions of what did occur. Disconfirmation of beliefs are the evaluations that a student makes with respect to the perceived performance in comparison to the student’s original expectations. When the experience of switching to online learning outperforms the student’s original expectations, a positive disconfirmation occurs, which is theorized to increase satisfaction. When the experience of switching to online learning underperforms the student’s original expectations, a negative disconfirmation occurs, which is theorized to decrease satisfaction (i.e., to increase dissatisfaction). The current study identifies distinct incidents, as perceived by undergraduate marketing students, that both negatively and positively disconfirm their expectations when unexpectedly having to shift from face-to-face to online learning. The driver of this unexpected shift was the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and its disruption in the classroom
Much has been written about COVID-19 and its disruptive effects on higher education. For context, it is useful to first consider what a pandemic is and the likely prevalence of them in the future. As stated by Madhav et al. (2017):
Pandemics are large-scale outbreaks of infectious disease that can greatly increase morbidity and mortality over a wide geographic area and cause significant economic, social, and political disruption. Evidence suggests that the likelihood of pandemics has increased over the past century because of increased global travel and integration, urbanization, changes in land use, and greater exploitation of the natural environment (Jones and others 2008; Morse 1995). These trends likely will continue and will intensify. Significant policy attention has focused on the need to identify and limit emerging outbreaks that might lead to pandemics and to expand and sustain investment to build preparedness and health capacity (Smolinsky, Hamburg, and Lederberg 2003) (p. 315).

This suggests that it is important not only to understand the recent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and identify best courses of action, but also to use student perceptions as a starting point to develop strategies to better manage these effects in anticipation of possible future pandemics or other forms of disruption in higher education. Alternative scenarios with the potential of causing disruptions similar to pandemics include civil unrest or movements, like protests or riots, as well as natural disasters, such as hurricanes, wildfires, and earthquakes, among others, which would make it unsafe or hazardous to physically attend a university campus.

In higher education, the impact of COVID-19 has come at a time when institutions of higher learning were already grappling with strategic questions regarding appropriate business models, student load debt, price-to-value ratio, and relevancy (Bok, 2015), as well as financial recovery from the 2008 recession and reduced funding for state supported schools (Whitford, 2020). Popular press and business/industry press coverage since the pandemic has stressed the
financial impact on these institutions (Nietzel, 2020). The American Council of Higher Education has sent Congress a letter asking for an aid package of $120 billion dollars, clearly underscoring the intensity of financial instability (Murakami, 2020).

With the rapid onset of the pandemic, universities and colleges were faced with more immediate operational considerations, namely, a switch from traditional face-to-face teaching to online or remote learning environments. According to a survey by the International Association of Universities, only 1 in 454 worldwide institutions reported no disruption (survey conducted in May, 2020), with a majority reporting temporary closures and dramatic changes in teaching format (Marinoni et al., 2020). While financial concerns are of critical importance to the future of higher education, hearing the voice of the student and their perceptions of the learning experience is equally important given that course delivery may continue in the near future in modalities that are a departure from what students (and parents) expected when matriculating to a given university.

Effective learning experiences occur within well-structured environments comprised by people, technologies, facilities, practices, and resources designed to interact with each other to enhance the learning process (Sawyer, 2005; Whittle, Tiwari, Yan, & Williams, 2020). Successful transition to remote from traditional classroom pedagogies can involve changes in the responsibilities, design, and delivery of content (Dhawan, 2020, Johnson, 2008; Keengwe & Kidd, 2010; Miyagawa & Perdue, 2020, Panda & Mishra, 2007). For example, while in traditional face-to-face learning environments, a physical classroom, lectures, and exam-based assessments are popular and effective elements; in online learning environments technological tools are leveraged to shift the instructor’s role to that of a facilitator or guide of the learning journey (Schultz & DeMers, 2020). Faculty “cannot be expected to know intuitively how to
design and deliver an effective online course” (Palloff et al., 2001, p. 23). In addition to the increased amount of labor it takes to teach online (Lao & Gonzales, 2005), “converting a traditional course to a successful online one requires more time, skills, and knowledge related to course delivery and facilitation” (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010, p. 535). Researchers have noted the difference between well-planned and intentionally designed online courses and those that were suddenly moved online due to the pandemic (Dhawan, 2020, Hodges et al., 2020). Hodges et al., 2020 used the term emergency remote teaching (ERT) to describe the latter. This modality is characterized as being a temporary response to a crisis or emergency in which the learning experience is delivered via a blended or hybrid format that uses synchronous and asynchronous instructional activities in a fully remote way. Even though crisis management studies abound for the service industry, when it comes to marketing education there is a dearth of research addressing how the quality of students’ learning can be maintained during emergency crises. (Rayburn et al., 2020).

Given the very recent identification of ERT as a learning format in the academic literature, the availability of studies developing educational frameworks and identifying best practices is scarce. Notable exceptions are Hodges et al. (2020), Schultz & DeMers (2020), and Whittle et al. (2020). Fortunately, the unique aspects of teaching in online learning environments have garnered research on best practices, since being approached to teach online is recognized as likely over the course of one’s teaching career (Dhawan, 2020, Clark-Ibanez & Scott, 2008). A brief examination of this research is provided next to help us identify effective practices to apply in ERT formats.
Online learning and student satisfaction/dissatisfaction

As Singh and Thurman (2019) note, online learning has been a research focus for more than two decades and has developed rich streams of inquiry related to it.

Early studies examining successful online instruction (Bretz & Johnson, 2000; Ma et al., 2000) suggested that providing effective technology, appropriate support services, with strong course evaluation and instructional design were important. Muilenburg and Berge (2005) sought to determine the principal factors that comprise student obstacles to online learning. In their critical incidents study, the four primary barriers included the student procrastinating or lacking motivation to complete assigned work (i.e., learner motivation); poor responsiveness by the instructor regarding availability of course materials and feedback to inquiries (i.e., instructor issues); lack of available time or support from family, friends, or co-workers (i.e., support/time for studies); and isolation due to little interaction with the instructor or classmates (i.e., social interactions). Feelings of isolation and a lack of community have also been identified as challenging by other researchers (e.g., Song, et al., 2004; Vonderwell, 2003; Woods, 2002). Lesser barriers identified by Muilenburg and Berge (2005) included technical and internet concerns, poor skills or lack of confidence with using online learning technology, or knowledge about the subject area. Chen et al. (2008) examined previously identified learning factors (Lin & Chen, 2002) and reported that the most important factors for student satisfaction in e-learning were interaction (e.g., with instructor and among classmates) and course instruction (e.g., materials, recorded lectures, planning, and design). Eastman, et al., 2017 examined the role instructor factors such as knowledge, feedback, and structure of the course, along with interaction, student motivation, and student-learning styles played in perceived learning and satisfaction. Estelami (2012) explored student learning and satisfaction with marketing course
experiences and reported that “instructor quality, clarity of assignments and tasks, quality of the instructional material used, and course communications are the primary contributors to positive student experiences” (p. 152) for both hybrid and online delivery methods.

McFarland and Hamilton (2005) proposed that key factors to improved student satisfaction and performance in online course delivery may sometimes be outside of the instructor’s control (e.g., the number of hours worked at a job, the number of courses being taken, hours studied per week, prior experience with the course topic). Similarly, in the current COVID-19 environment, students may be dealing with mental health concerns, physical health issues, and/or household financial distress. To improve the student learning experience in the current disruptive environment, marketing faculty need to be aware of the types of critical incidents students are experiencing. As a service, learning is coproduced via a partnership between the faculty member and their students (McCulloch, 2009; Swanson, et. al., 2015). To successfully partner with students requires marketing educators to assess the incidents that result in both negative and positive student perceptions and identify ways to improve the learning experience.

COVID-19 has continued to ebb and flow through communities, leaving many universities grappling with changing realities that impact the delivery of their educational offerings. Prioritizing the safety and health of faculty, staff, and students has resulted in a move to full-time distance learning or various hybrid options where both in-class and at-home scheduling is utilized. The disruption to traditional face-to-face instruction has introduced many instructors (students) to an entirely new way of delivering (receiving) content. Professors need to identify the drivers of student satisfaction to better ensure a successful transition that meets desired outcomes. Learners’ satisfaction is “affected by both positive and negative experiences in
a learning process” (p. 115) and a critical factor for successful implementation of online education (Chen et al., 2008). Our study addresses the following research questions from the student experience of a transition from planned face-to-face teaching and learning to online-only formats:

Research question 1: What types of class-related incidents create satisfaction after course disruption due to the coronavirus?

Research question 2: What types of class-related incidents create dissatisfaction after course disruption due to the coronavirus?

Research question 3: What are the suggested improvement approaches to improve satisfaction?

Research question 4: Do students share these incidents, with whom, what is the word-of-mouth valence, and are these outcome variables significantly related to the satisfactory nature of the reported incident?

Methodology

Measurement

A critical incident is “an observable human activity that is complete enough in itself to permit inferences to be made about the person performing the act and contributes to or detracts from the general aim of the activity in a significant way” (Bitner et al., 1990, p. 73). The critical incident technique (CIT) provides insights into first-hand experiences useful for generating empirical data and classifying data into thematic categories (Zhang et al., 2010). It has been shown to be particularly effective for generating concrete responses to issues related to classroom instruction (e.g., Hoffman & Lee, 2014, 2015; Rasooli et al., 2019; Swanson et al., 2015; Vianden, 2015), including e-learning (Chen et al., 2008; Lin et al., 2011). The CIT was utilized due to its
appropriateness for the exploratory nature of this research and its demonstrated reliability, validity, and usefulness to obtain data (Keaveney, 1995). To qualify as a critical incident, the response obtained from a student must have: (1) involved a (dis)satisfactory incident; and (2) taken place in a course that had to shift its approach to delivery of classroom material due to the coronavirus (i.e., not incidents associated with courses that were established as distance/hybrid learning environments).

The participants were invited to think of their most satisfying/dissatisfying experience in any marketing course after transitioning to online delivery due to COVID-19. As such, respondents were not limited to reporting on experiences in a specific marketing class. They were then asked to “Please describe in detail the situation that created the positive/negative online experience in your own words (what happened, what was said, how you felt, etc.).” Respondents were then asked to think about the story they had just provided, and share “what if anything could have been done to improve the satisfactory/dissatisfactory situation you described.” Overall satisfaction with the reported incident was ascertained with a single Likert-type question with anchors of Very Dissatisfied (1) and Very Satisfied (7). Demographic information (e.g., age, class standing, gender) was also collected from the respondents. No incentives were provided, and participation in the study was voluntary. Data collection took place during the final two weeks of the spring 2020 semester.

**Sample**

Data was collected from undergraduate marketing students at a Midwestern public university (n = 211) and Southern private university (n = 98). Potential respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a study about their classroom experiences. Participants ranged in age
from 19 to 36 years (mean = 20.9, SD = 1.7), were somewhat more likely to be male (54.7%), and included sophomores (22.9%), juniors (50.2%), and seniors (26.9%).

Each respondent was afforded the opportunity to share a single satisfactory and/or dissatisfactory incident. Ten of the provided incidents failed to meet the previously noted criteria for this study and were removed from further consideration, leaving a total of 608 incidents for analysis ($n_{satisfactory} = 307$; $n_{dissatisfactory} = 301$).

Qualitative content analysis was used to classify the student responses to the open-ended survey queries into categories. This study utilized a conventional approach to content analysis where preconceived groupings were avoided so the categories could flow from the data. To obtain a general understanding of the data, all the responses to each open-ended question were read several times. This was followed by a more intense reading of each response to begin identifying important thoughts being conveyed in the text. A preliminary coding scheme came to light via this process. Similar codes were combined to create categories. In this way, the categories developed are based solely on the incidents provided by the student respondents. The absence of research related to sudden and unexpected changes in content delivery in a classroom context guided this decision.

A test-retest approach was utilized to determine intra-rater reliability. Exhaustive and mutually exclusive response categories were independently created by three coders (i.e., one marketing professor and two trained graduate students) who each worked with a different third of the questionnaires. After 60 days, the three coders classified the same student answers into the previously formed categories. Having reached at least a .80 cutoff for each of the open-ended questions (Keaveney, 1995), the independently developed response categories were then shared. Intra-rater reliability was assessed by having all three coders reanalyze all the open-ended data.
into the agreed upon categories. Following the approach advocated by Perreault and Leigh (1989), the results demonstrate satisfactory levels of inter-rater reliability ($I_r$) for the incident type ($I_r$ satisfactory = .93; $I_r$ dissatisfactory = .89) and improvement suggestions ($I_r$ satisfactory = .97; $I_r$ dissatisfactory = .95). Disputed responses were determined by discussion amongst the judges. Please note that some of the student responses referenced specific instructors by name, in these cases the name has been substituted with “professor” where appropriate to avoid identifying specific individuals.

**Results**

*Satisfactory incidents*

Research Question 1 sought to identify the incident types that created satisfaction ($\text{mean}_{\text{satisfaction}} = 6.29$, $\text{SD} = .83$) after course disruption due to the coronavirus. Table 1 provides a typology of the reported positive experiences derived from marketing undergraduates provided incidents, associated definitions, frequency and percent of occurrence, along with a sample incident. Six types of satisfactory incidents were identified (i.e., course flexibility, adapted content, responsiveness, social contact, assurance, empathy) and are discussed next.

*Course flexibility*

Course flexibility was the most noted category (23.6%) and includes incidents where the student is satisfied due to the professor making course adjustments that provided more time accommodations for the student to interact with the course material. A key theme for this group of incidents was the student being appreciative of having additional time to learn course
materials at their own pace or around their personal schedule as illustrated in the following quotes:

While in the traditional classroom the professor would sometimes go through the course content too quickly […] since the online class I can comfortably go through the online lectures, take notes and play back parts if I needed clarification. (subject #8 - 21 year old Junior Male)

The thing is that I was able to arrange my time flexibly by having lectures videoed and assignments posted in advance I could start whenever I can (subject #66 – 22 year old Female Junior)

The professor recorded the online lectures so I can pause and replay what the professor says to write it down fully…the most satisfying part of this experience is the freedom to do schoolwork/assignments when it is most convenient to me (subject #76 – 22 year old Female Senior).

/Table 1 near here/

The result of this added flexibility was a greater understanding of the course material with students being able to review content again and again as described in the following quote: […] students at times can miss something that was said or zone out for a period of time. But, by providing the recording of lectures, I could just go back and review anything that I missed or did not understand. [This] was also beneficial for studying purposes and allowed for flexibility within my schedule to go back and be able to focus, take breaks if needed. The result [was] I learned more than I did just being in person as it helped me understand what to expect so I was able to time manage more effectively (subject #42 - 21 year old Female Junior)
Adapted content
For some students (17.5%), a course ended up being satisfying because the professor altered the material and assignments to be more appropriate for the transition to online learning environment:

[…] he restructured the entire thing to meet an online quality class […] all professors were instructed to structure their course to online for the remainder of the semester, but few did it well. (subject #201 – 21 year old Male Senior).

This adaptation might involve changing testing formats, replacing exams with other assessment activities, or simply “changing the course materials and associated expectations to effectively accommodate students” (subject #222 – 19 year old Female Sophomore). Students also indicated that changes in the course material and/or assessment activities resulted in improved student learning:

[…] the new assignments made me think and actually know the content of the class deeper than just the surface level […] it would make me think about and learn about the content but not stress out. (subject #159 – 20 year old Male Junior)

Responsiveness
The third most noted satisfactory incident type (16.8%) included situations where:

[…] the professor was available, helpful and extremely responsive […] being able to answer my questions and help me out as efficiently as if we were on campus together. (subject #138 – 21 year old Male Junior).

Responsiveness-based incidents include the professor willingly reacting quickly and positively to student inquiries and questions. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in
dealing with students’ requests, questions, complaints, and concerns. In these incidents, it was pointed out that when the student had a problem or question, the professor responded right away to help get the problem solved. In addition, students also appreciated it when the professor encouraged interaction and promoted their accessibility.

Social contact

Fifty students (16.2%) reported that their most satisfying experience of the switch to online courses was related to the use of technology to encourage and/or require personal connections for class engagement. By “being able to participate in a class discussion despite the circumstances…it made me feel happy because it was almost like we were back in the classroom” (subject #294 – 21 year old Female Senior). With respondents noting that:

[…] it was satisfying that the group was all able to get on Zoom and devote time to work together rather than working separately…it was pretty cool to be able to work together and hear how my classmates were holding up. (subject #149 – 24 year old Female Senior)

Students also shared positive incidents of social interaction where the professor engaged with the students, as described in the following quotes:

We were able to be in a breakout room with a partner […] the professor joined the different breakout rooms to help us one-on-one with any difficulties providing a more personal experience. (subject #273 – 20 year old Male Junior)

Prof broke us into breakout rooms to practice assigned problems with a group of 4-5 people and we could all write on the same "whiteboard" provided by Zoom and the prof. came in and edited or drew on our work so that we could see exactly
what we should change, which allowed a really cool interaction for the students and the teacher. (subject #257 – 20 year old Female Sophomore)

**Assurance**

Assurance-based incidents (15.5%) included the professor conveying trust and confidence to the student. This was accomplished via consistent and clear communication with the student which students felt helped to set expectations and keep them on track with the material and assignments.

[…] the professor communicated with us very often and made sure that we got weekly updates of the expectations and basically laid out the play-by-play each week and for the rest of the semester, and it really took a lot of the stress off and made switching to online classes more comfortable. (subject #134 – 21 year old Female Junior).

Assurance was also communicated to some students by providing a clear and consistent structure for the transitioned class This was important because the student knew what to expect and what needed to be done.

Transitioning from in-person to on-line is a hard thing for students and teachers and this professor was very organized with everything you needed to do for each class in one place […] there was not a time where I didn't feel I couldn't find something and the professor was really good about communicating what our plan for the week was. (subject #188 - 21 year old Female Junior)

The overall result of these assurance-based efforts was that “there were never any surprises…it wasn't ever confusing” (subject #11 – 20 year old Male Junior).
Empathy

The final satisfactory incident category that emerged from the analysis was the professor demonstrating *empathy*. This category comprised 9.7% of the responses and includes professor actions or expressions that the student perceived as a recognition and understanding of what the student was feeling and the ability to see things from the student point of view in a caring manner. Some of these empathic moments occurred early in the transition period as evidenced by the following quotes:

When we first transitioned to online learning, we were given a survey about how we felt our course-load and stress levels have changed [...] the professor took the time out of her day to read through our responses, address them in class, and I felt like a burden had been lifted that a teacher had actually listened to what students were saying and reacted accordingly. (subject #304 – 20 year old Female Junior)

Some instructors were able to convey empathy through their recorded content, for example:

One moment that sticks out to me as being particularly satisfying was about 2 weeks into the online class experience. I was watching a lecture and taking notes when during the middle of the video, the instructor took a second to say: "Okay I want us all to take a break now, let our minds rest for a moment because from what I've heard from your fellow classmates things have been quite stressful lately. So why don't you stop, take a break and pause the video and get up to walk around for a bit, get a cup of coffee, or a snack, and then come back and play the video and we will continue. But just take a moment for yourself before we start back up again." It showed me that the professor really understood how stressful
the transition could be for some people, and that they want to bring a calm over the students. (subject #123 – 21 year old Male Senior)

The result of these incidents was that the student felt the professor really cared about the student and their learning.

**Dissatisfactory incidents**

Research Question 2 sought to identify dissatisfactory (mean \(_{satisfaction} = 2.32, \ SD = 1.07\) incident types from the marketing students’ viewpoint after course disruption due to the coronavirus. Table 2 provides a typology of the reported dissatisfactory experiences, associated definitions, frequency and percent of occurrence, along with sample incidents. Six types of dissatisfactory incidents were identified (i.e., failure to adapt content, lack of assurance, technology failures, peers, lack of fairness, lack of responsiveness) and are discussed next.

*Table 2 near here*

**Failure to adapt content**

Course material modified to be more appropriate for the transition to an online learning environment was identified as an important determinant of student satisfaction when traditional face-to-face instruction is disrupted. *Failure to adapt content* after the switch to online instruction was the most noted (23.0%) driver of student dissatisfaction. In these incidents, students report that:

The professor absolutely ruined my online experience as he did nothing to update his course to accommodate for the pandemic and his class structure DOES NOT WORK for online format […] he provided absolutely no help at all to his students
other than offering to come to his office hours DURING QUARANTINE.

(subject #27 – 21 year old Female Junior)

The key for incidents being placed into this category is that changes to the course were viewed as being needed for effective learning to occur. Students noted situations where readings and assignments were kept the same, no online office hours provided, no video lectures or Zoom meetings, and “not being available for any face-to-face virtual interaction which made learning the content very difficult (subject #175 – 20 year old Female Senior).

In some cases, the student recognized that:

[…] the professor had good intentions, because in-person class with her was OK, she did a horrible job transitioning to online as she is asking us to read the book without putting in any of her own time to make lectures online with video or audio options, which is just disappointing. (subject #22 – 23 year old Female Senior).

The lack of a shift in approach or customization of the course based on the shift to a different teaching delivery system could result in students being overwhelmed, frustrated, and feeling powerless.

Lack of assurance

Lack of assurance-based incidents (19.1%) involved the professor failing to convey trust and confidence due to a lack of consistent communication with the student and/or providing a clear course structure. For example:

[…] my professor was very unclear about directions, was very unorganized, and the information was hard to access and find. So, for a few weeks I was not sure
what was happening in the class or what was expected of me or where any of the online resources were located...it caused a lot of anxiety. (subject #208 – 21 year old Female Junior)

These situations were often due to poor course organization and lack of sharing important details, or a “failure to update us on the changes that were happening with the online class which made everything confusing and stressful” (subject #98 – 20 year old Male Junior). Some specific expressed concerns included the professor not having a consistent place for students to find course related information, not providing a modified schedule or syllabus so students could appropriately plan, and “being entirely inconsistent with assignment uploads or giving adequate time frames for assignments” (subject #75 – 22 year old Female Senior).

Lack of fairness
The third most noted type of dissatisfying incident (15.5%) included situations in which the student perceived that they were being treated unfairly. Fairness issues might relate to grading issues, in particular lack of feedback on assignments, or unreasonable demands:

How can a teacher realistically expect a student without a printer to print and scan a final? How does adding an extra 10 minutes help? The professor recommended scanning apps to download to assist with the uploading aspect of the final, yet cannot provide a solution for printing. How is it fair? Absolutely ridiculous.

(subject #297 – 27 year old Male Junior)

The majority of dissatisfying fairness-based incidents were focused on what were perceived as unreasonable changes in course workload which increased stress and hindered performance. Students shared experiences where there was an “overloading of homework in a short period of
time…on top of other assignments assigned late that were added after the shift to distance learning” (subject #21 – 23 year old Female Junior). The trigger for eliciting unfairness tended to be that “there was so much extra work for the class that we were not scheduled to have done in the normal class” (subject #89 – 21 year old Male Junior). The impact of “when we switched to fully online the rest of the semester she basically shoved weeks of additional work into the online class” which resulted in “negative feelings towards the class because I always felt like I was drowning in homework” (subject #98 – 20 year old Male Junior).

Technology failures

Failures in the technology used to deliver course content were noted as a driver of student dissatisfaction in 14.6% of the reported incidents. Two issues stood out. First, were issues related to the professors being unable to upload course material as illustrated in the following quote:

The professor was supposed to upload videos detailing what to do with each assignment but she could only upload the assignment and not the videos due to lack of internet speed at the professor's home which left us feeling stuck and not sure what to do. subject #146 – 19 year old Female Junior

Second, were problems with livestreaming:

[…] his video kept cutting in and out and I couldn’t hear him, so about every 5 minutes we had to wait a minute for him to unfreeze and repeat what he said. subject #298 – 22 year old Male Senior

Students also experienced their own technology problems that resulted in negative experiences. Similar to the previously noted examples, internet reliability was an issue at times:
My WiFi could not support the class demands and resulted in my computer being unresponsive [...] I felt helpless and saddened. subject #111 – 19 year old Female Sophomore

Incompatibility issues with different programs being used were also noted as problems, as expressed in the following quotes:

The class work was Windows-based but I have all MacBooks at home, so my professor sent over an alternative system to run but I found that it was extremely laggy and very frustrating to use. subject #238 – 19 year old Female Junior

Taking a quiz I assumed I would be able to take it using Safari but some of the questions were imported and would not load, so all of the questions that would not load I got zeros [...] I was very disappointed by this because it was a technological issue and not reflective of my knowledge in the subject. subject #49 – 19 year old Male Sophomore

Peers

Frustration with the (in)action of other students in a course accounted for 11.7% of the reported dissatisfactory incidents:

The biggest issue was communication with my group members because some responded, but some didn't [...] it was an issue because I was unsure if they were getting my messages or just didn't want to respond. subject #50 – 20 year old Male Sophomore

Many peer-related problems were associated with poor communication between group members and a perceived lack of motivation with some students reporting that they had group members
that contributed nothing to assignments and projects, complained constantly, or failed to attend class. In addition, some classmates engaged in online behaviors viewed as inappropriate:

[...] a boy in my class very inappropriately began saying how this situation would not have happened if China had not restricted information and lied, and as someone who is half-Chinese I felt like he was making an unverified claim which I felt that it was extremely inappropriate [...] at that point in time there had been several racial attacks against Asians on the news and I still think his comments were unnecessary for a class environment. subject #269 – 21 year old Female Junior

and/or disruptive:

[...] making vulgar sounds and saying inappropriate things almost the entirety of the class time. subject #276 – 22 year old Female Senior

[...] “a student in one of my classes that would not stop interrupting the teacher and slowing down the lecture over and over again the entire class. subject #271 – 20 year old Male Sophomore

Lack of responsiveness

The final category that emerged for dissatisfactory incidents included situations where the professor failed to respond to student requests or did so in an untimely manner, as illustrated by the following quotes:

I would often email the professor asking questions; however, about 85% of my emails were ignored/not responded to which was incredibly frustrating as email
was my only way to communicate with this professor as there was no in-person
instruction. subject #13 – 20 year old Male Junior

[…] one of my professors just stopped caring about teaching the class as I
probably emailed him around 4-5 times since we started Zoom and never got a
response. subject #224 – 21 year old Male Junior

While we are in-class it is very easy to have clarification, while in an online class
environment it makes for less immediate answers and when the professor does not
respond to me for over a week the information is not even relevant anymore.

subject #128 – 21 year old Female Junior

Lack of responsiveness accounted for 10.7% of the dissatisfactory incidents.

It is worth noting that respondent age or gender was not significantly related to
satisfaction with the provided incident for either the satisfactory, or dissatisfactory, incidents (p >
.05). However, ANOVA findings indicated that a respondent’s class standing was found to have
a statistically significant relationship to the level of reported incident satisfaction for both
satisfactory (F2,304 = 3.63, p = .028) and dissatisfactory (F2,298 = 5.39, p = .005) incidents. Scheffe
post-hoc analyses indicated that, when reporting satisfying incidents, sophomores were
significantly more satisfied than seniors (satisfying incidents: mean_{sophomores} = 6.51). For dissatisfying incidents, sophomores were significantly less
satisfied than seniors (mean_{sophomores} = 1.97). Findings
suggest that students who have more classroom experience are more tempered in their
evaluations when faced with an unexpected change in course delivery method.
Incident improvements

Nine student incident improvement suggestions were identified: assurance, social contact, adapt content, technology, responsiveness, course flexibility, empathy, engagement, and nothing.

Overall, the most noted improvement suggestion (n = 145) was that nothing could have improved the students’ satisfaction with the reported incident (“I honestly could not think of a better way my professor could have reacted” subject #212 – 19 year old Male Sophomore).

Doing nothing was provided as a response only to satisfying incidents, which is not particularly surprising. Table 3 provides a representative sample of each of the other improvement suggestions and their frequency of mention.

Providing additional assurance was the most suggested improvement for dissatisfactory incidents and top suggestion overall (excluding doing nothing), indicating the importance that students placed on the professor to build trust and confidence. The other provided improvement suggestions included adapting the course to better fit a distance learning environment (i.e., adapt content), reacting more quickly to student inquiries (i.e., responsiveness), encouraging and/or requiring more personal forms of class engagement (i.e., social contact), demonstrating a caring and concerning demeanor (i.e., empathy), and adjusting the course to allow the student to work at their own pace (course flexibility). The final improvement category was a recognition by the student that they needed to be better prepared or more involved with the course (i.e., engagement).

The type of incident was not significantly associated with the suggested improvement for satisfactory situations ($\chi^2 = 34.87, p = .091$), but was for dissatisfying incidents ($\chi^2 = 203.90, p = .000$). Table 4 provides the frequencies and percentages for each improvement category in relation to each of the previously identified dissatisfying incidents.
Word-of-mouth, satisfaction, and incident type

Research question 4 sought to determine if students shared the reported incidents, with whom, the valence of the provided word-of-mouth, and if these outcome variables were significantly related to the satisfactory nature of the reported incident. Students were asked if they had discussed the shared incident, and if “yes”, with whom (e.g., family, friends, classmates, other professors), and the valence of the provided word-of-mouth on a single item 7-point Likert-type scale with anchors of “Very Negative” (1) and “Very Positive” (7). Regarding satisfactory incidents, 52.8% of the respondents engaged in word-of-mouth. The valence of the word-of-mouth was positive (mean = 6.44; SD = .89) and the incident was shared with friends (81.0%), family (73.6%), classmates (57.1%), and other professors (15.3%). Utilizing t-tests, the level of satisfaction was not found to be associated with the respondent engaging in word-of-mouth or the likelihood of them discussing the incident with others (p > .05). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between student satisfaction and word-of-mouth valence for the reported satisfactory incidents. There was a positive correlation between the two variables (r = .738, n = 163, p = .000). Satisfaction with the discussed incident was found to not have a statistically significant relationship to the reported type of incident (F5,301 = 2.047, p = .072). Crosstabs indicate that the incident type was not associated with the likelihood of engaging in word-of-mouth for the satisfying incidents (χ² = 9.97, p = .076).

For the dissatisfactory incidents, 68.1% reported engaging in word-of-mouth with a mean valence of 2.34 (SD = 1.07). The incident was shared with friends (84.4%), family (74.1%), classmates (66.3%), and other professors (15.6%). Utilizing t-tests, the level of satisfaction was not found to be associated with the respondent engaging in word-of-mouth or the likelihood of
them discussing the incident with others (p > .05). A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between student satisfaction and word-of-mouth valence for the reported dissatisfactory incidents. There was a positive correlation between the two variables (r = .627, n = 205, p = .000). Satisfaction with the incident described was found to not have a statistically significant relationship to the reported type of incident (F<sub>5,295</sub> = 1.74, p = .125). Crosstabs indicate that the incident type was not associated with the likelihood of engaging in word-of-mouth for the dissatisfying incidents (χ<sup>2</sup> = 7.56, p = .182).

**Discussion**

Not surprisingly, in most of the dissatisfying situations, what the students suggest could have improved the reported incidents was more of what was deemed lacking. For example, when the professor failed to adequately provide assurance, the student predominately sought clear and consistent communications and course structure. Similarly, incidents in which the professor was perceived as not being responsive, students wanted more timely replies to their inquiries and concerns. This direct relationship was also identified for incidents where students expressed frustration with content not being adapted to better fit a distance learning environment and technology failures that disrupted the learning experience. Interestingly, when the student experienced problems with other students in the course, the most noted improvement strategy was for the professor to use available technologies to encourage and/or require more personal connections between students to encourage more class engagement or to adapt the course, presumably to reduce the need for having to rely on others in the class to be successful. Although a lack of perceived fairness by the professor has been previously identified in face-to-face classrooms (Gruber et al., 2010; Houston & Bettencourt, 1999; Swanson, et al. 2015; Voss et al.,
2010), this is the first study we are aware of that has also found this to be a concern for online learning. For situations in which the student reported unfairness, greater empathy, more assurances, and adapted content were all equally noted as being important.

The study findings provide support for expectation disconfirmation theory. For undergraduate marketing students, the abrupt switch from face-to-face to online educational delivery resulted in both positive- (i.e., course flexibility, adapted content, responsiveness, social contact, assurance, empathy), and negative-disconfirmation events (i.e., failure to adapt content, lack of assurance, technology failures, peers, lack of fairness, lack of responsiveness). The satisfaction/dissatisfaction associated with the identified critical incidents were found to impact the sharing of information about the reported incidents. Specifically, undergraduate marketing students report sharing course disruption based experiences with friends, family, classmates, and other professors. This is true irrespective of incident type. This may be due to the finding that student satisfaction did not significantly differ across the reported incidents, which suggests that the identified incident types are equally important to the students experiencing them. These relationships held for both satisfactory and dissatisfactory based incidents.

Several useful take-a-ways emerged from the analysis of the incidents shared by undergraduate marketing students when experiencing a disruption to the learning delivery process. First, students look for clear and consistent communication and course structure. Providing assurance to students, particularly when experiencing abrupt shifts to different learning delivery environments, requires good instructional design. Organization is key (Song, et. al., 2004). Providing explicit objectives, directions, deadlines, and illustrative examples so students have a clear understanding of what they need to be doing is needed. Students need information as to the technology platforms being utilized and clear expectations on how to
communicate with both their professor and their classmates; where to find the course information regarding exams, projects, and assignments; and what to do if they need help or have questions. While some technology failures are beyond professor or student control, having a clear set of protocols for when they do occur may minimize the disruption or dissatisfaction they create. For example, professors can provide students with a list of “what if” scenarios (what if the professor’s internet connection goes down during a synchronous session, what if a student’s does, etc.) to reduce uncertainty. Too, creating time within a class session to discuss technology problems and how the professor and/or individual students resolved them, or using the course’s learning management system where FAQ’s can be a co-created to offer troubleshooting advice, is a simple way to reinforce a sense of assurance.

Professors who react quickly and positively to student inquiries, even if they do not have all the answers will likely be associated with higher levels of student satisfaction. Immediate feedback to the student is an advantage in the traditional classroom (Petrides, 2002; Vonderwell, 2003; Zhang, et al., 2004), but can be challenging online if utilizing a variety of communication tools (e.g., email, chat, discussion boards). Poor responsiveness from the professor can accentuate the missing immediate feedback students are accustomed to during face-to-face instruction.

Greater course flexibility will be required to adapt to the problems and disruptions that will likely occur when having to shift from a face-to-face to a virtual or hybrid learning environment. Course flexibility was the most noted positive aspect of moving courses online. This greater ability to learn at times other than, or in addition to, regular meeting times and the convenience that it provides was identified as a strength of online instruction in prior studies (Petrides, 2002; Schrum & Hong, 2002; Song et. al., 2004). Professors who build in flexibility by
providing additional time for the student to interact with the course material by recording synchronous lectures or providing pre-recorded content that can be revisited will be appreciated by students.

The online learning environment differs whether utilizing an asynchronous or synchronous approach. To encourage learning in a non-physical classroom means some teaching approaches and assigned work may need to be adjusted. Similar to findings with Principles of Marketing students by Zhang et al. (2004), an important satisfier for students can be the professor providing content archivally that allows for future sharing and revisiting.

A key challenge in the virtual environment is helping students engage and remain attentive. Awareness of the technology and features available to the professor and students to provide options that support interactivity will be important. Students are looking for opportunities to make personal connections in the virtual environment, just as they do in the traditional face-to-face classroom. This desire for greater interactivity among the students, and between student and professor, supports prior findings that suggest creating a friendly social environment is an important faculty role for online learning (Chen et al., 2008; Kearsley, 2002; McFarland & Hamilton, 2005). Song, et al., (2004) suggest that “the formation of a community in an online course could occur if the instructor facilitated this notion” (p. 66). In addition to its role in student satisfaction, “social interaction is strongly related to online learning enjoyment, effectiveness of learning online, and the likelihood of taking another online class (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005, p. 45).

Shifting from traditional to online instruction can leave students feeling isolated. McFarland and Hamilton (2005) suggest that “requiring and/or rewarding collaborative learning or other forms of teamwork might increase the effectiveness of other students on learning, which
could in turn affect overall student satisfaction of the online learning environment” (p. 30).

However, the findings in the current study suggest that simply requiring students to collaborate can lead to frustrations due to some students’ lack of engagement. Although disengaged students are not completely avoidable, marketing faculty can provide the structures and motivation opportunities for students to interact and connect socially.

Finally, professors should assess what is happening with students. An understanding of what is happening with students is important for both the instructor and their students. This is always a good practice, but in the virtual environment it can be difficult to “read” how students are grasping and connecting with the material. The professor might include some less formal approaches such as just checking in to see how the students are doing and sharing issues and concerns around not only the course, but also the disruptive situation that has impacted the necessity of the course transitioning. Getting students to share their concerns, and perhaps the professor sharing theirs, can act to promote joint points of view and a better understanding of what each party is experiencing. The result is a more supportive and empathetic learning environment.

The results of the study affirm what Miyagawa and Perdue (2020) assert, namely, that effective teaching is effective teaching. Moreover, they report a greater sense of faculty engagement as they have been forced to rethink what they do in class, why they do it, and how they do it. This illustrates the importance of faculty members doing regular assessment of their courses using student input to have a better understanding of what is, or is not, working. This may be particularly important in unexpected situations that can create added stress and/or uncertainty for both the student and faculty member.
In spring 2020, and again during the fall 2020 semester, the COVID-19 pandemic forced many universities to halt face-to-face courses and abruptly change to some type of online or remote learning approach. The sudden shift to online learning has been difficult for educators and learners. For online education to be successful, “it is equally important to maintain the positive aspects as it is to rectify problems” (Chen et al., 2008 p. 124). The findings provided in the current study offer marketing faculty a first look at the types of positive and negative critical incidents that impact student satisfaction and provide associated improvements.

**Limitations and directions for future research**

Our research was limited to undergraduate marketing students sharing their experiences with marketing courses using open-ended questions at two universities. The results should be viewed with that in mind. If marketing students experienced the change differently from how students in other types of courses or other majors experienced the change, it could be useful in identifying the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could also expand the scope of the current research by looking at additional universities and conducting interviews when applying the Critical Incidents Technique to obtain a greater depth of analyses.

It would also be interesting to determine if the results from spring 2020 were unusual because it was the first semester of an unexpected shift. A year later higher education is still experiencing this disruption and perhaps there is a wear out effect and/or changes in student expectations impacting the drivers of student satisfaction. Continuous data collection is necessary to understand how COVID-19 impacts higher education over time. Another limitation of the study is that faculty in whose classes the data was collected were not explicitly asked what types of changes (if any) they made to the course during the shift to online learning. While the
student responses offer insights as to what faculty did or did not do differently, it is solely from the student perspective and they may not have been fully aware of all the alterations to the professor’s normal mode of course design and delivery. Future studies might include that information.

In this preliminary look at student satisfaction, all the courses were being taught face-to-face at both participating universities prior to abruptly moving to an online course delivery mode. Instructors at both universities were given the option to utilize asynchronous, synchronous, or a hybrid approach that blended both formats. Synchronous learning happens in real time and is generally tied to a set class meeting time, while asynchronous learning provides content for students to access when it best suits their schedules. Unfortunately, the current study did not assess which delivery format was being utilized to allow for an analysis of the potential relationship of satisfactory/dissatisfactory incident types across specific content delivery approaches. This would be an interesting future research opportunity. A final limitation and possible area for future consideration is gender effects. Data was collected on student gender, but not faculty (although some narratives do use pronouns that signal faculty gender), and a better understanding of gender impacts might also offer valuable insights.

Conducting this research “in unprecedented times” has provided useful insights into the drivers of classroom satisfaction and dissatisfaction as shared by undergraduate marketing students experiencing an abrupt shift to online classes due to COVID-19. One purpose of this article was to use student experiences and perceptions to stimulate marketing faculty to reflect on which strategies were most effective and satisfying when transitioning to online pedagogical platforms from traditional in-class teaching. During the spring semester 2020, many marketing faculty no doubt assumed, or hoped, their institutions’ change in instruction mode would be short
lived. A year later many institutions continue to employ methods that are outside the norm for them. Lessons learned from the past year may provide insights for future disruptions in higher education, whether those come from pandemics, technology advances, changes in mission and support, or competitive forces.

References


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Table 1: Satisfactory Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sample Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course Flexibility</td>
<td>Professor adjusted the course to provide additional time for the student to interact with the course material.</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>“The assignments were all posted ahead of time along with the video lectures so that I could learn at my own pace and work ahead when desired. I truly appreciated this flexibility. It provided the ability to choose my schedule and work at my own pace. I could start the lectures at a time that was convenient for me and I was able to pause the lectures and take notes. The ability to work at my own pace was nice.” subject #94 – 21 year old Male Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapted Content</td>
<td>Course material modified to be more appropriate for the transitioned to an online learning environment.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>“I think the best online class experience I had was when a professor made sure to change the structure of the course. We shifted to weekly assignments and a final research paper to demonstrate what we learned throughout the semester rather than tests. I think the way the professor structured the course made it better. For the most part, moving to online classes was very demotivating, regardless of the course content; however, this professor showed understanding and tried to make the course more engaging which made learning better.” subject #253 – 20 year old Female Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>Professor reacted quickly and positively to student inquiries.</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>“When class moved to online I struggled immensely, and I was unsure how to move ahead with the class because I was struggling. I sent an email to the professor about a question, and he responded that same night with screenshots with the answers to my questions He made it very clear that if I had any questions or even needed advice that he was available and even gave me his phone number in order to assist with any questions. He also encouraged me to schedule Zoom calls which were incredibly helpful. Also, he offered to meet with me whenever I needed to ensure I felt more prepared and had a better understanding of the material. I was very thankful/surprised/impressed with how much he cared about my success.” subject #99 – 21 year old Male Senior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Social Contact        | Facilitation of personal connections for class engagement.                 | 50 | 16.2| “There was only one course that I was taking this past semester that came close to maintaining its educational value during remote learning. The specific satisfying online experience that I will share is the experience of watching digital projects created by our classmates and getting to have a
short collaborative discussion with our classmates after viewing their work. In a time where interaction is hard to come by, having productive and relevant social interaction in a class setting is one of the few ways to keep students engaged in the course material while teaching through remote learning.” subject #261 – 22 year old Male Senior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assurance</th>
<th>Professor conveyed trust and confidence via consistent communications and course structure.</th>
<th>48</th>
<th>15.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Professor demonstrated understanding of student feelings and point of view.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The best experience I had this semester being online would have to have been the walk-through assignments my professor did for us in my marketing analytics class. My professor first off was very open about communication and would send emails regularly to clarify hard material. The best was when she put up detailed step-by-step walkthroughs of what she wanted us to gain from a pretty hefty assignment. It helped immensely and it actually felt like I was learning the material I was supposed to. With this class being specific to my major and necessary for my internship this summer I felt like I was still getting the learning that I wanted.” subject #57 – 21 year old Male Junior

“A few weeks into online instruction, my marketing professor sent out a Google Form asking for updates on us. It did not ask necessarily about classes, but more about our mental health and well-being. I thought this was very kind, and I filled out an honest answer of how I was doing at the moment (which wasn't too great). Afterwards, my professor personally emailed me asking about my response; checking in to make sure I was okay. It was incredibly kind of her to do this, as it seemed many professors only cared about lectures and assignments once online learning began, not the mental well-being of their students. I wish more teachers did this.” subject #13 – 20 year old Female Junior
Table 2: Dissatisfactory Incidents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sample Incidents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Adapt Content</td>
<td>Course material not modified after transition to online instruction.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>“My marketing professor in my Principles of Marketing class was a pretty competent teacher in an in-class setting. With the switch to online classes, she did not adapt her class AT ALL, and in fact, tried to cram in more material at a FASTER pace. She didn't amend any of her assignments to being more online/global pandemic friendly and wouldn't even post the Zoom recordings of the class online because she didn't want attendance to suffer or want the information she was teaching in class to be &quot;going around the internet&quot;. The professor just lectured for entire class periods by simply speaking into the screen and seeking no involvement from the students.” subject #232 – 20 year old Female Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Assurance</td>
<td>Professor failed to convey trust and confidence.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>“The most unsatisfying experience I had was related to not knowing when something was due or not knowing an assignment existed because it was not thoroughly communicated. My professor kept changing what platform we were using for lecture and was overall very confusing with how she relayed information to us…everything was very disorganized, and I didn't know what was due when or what I was supposed to be doing.” subject #134 – 21 year old Female Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Fairness</td>
<td>Incidents reported as being unjust, not reasonable, or not right.</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>“One of my professors did not post any new material on Canvas for the first 4 weeks of online classes. No lectures were posted or any resources for how to complete problems. Finally, after a few weeks we began to receive emails from the professor with various excuses until April 28 when she finally began to post lectures and resources. She completed uploading the lectures on May 1 and then opened the assignments and an exam on May 1 and is giving us until May 5 to complete the work. I feel like having 1-5 days to complete four weeks of work is not fair.” Subject #173 – 20 year old Male Sophomore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Failure</td>
<td>Disruptions in technologies used to deliver the</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>“For my final sales role-play, an unanticipated error occurred. This technical error was surely my most unsatisfying on-line experience this semester. My product presentation contained 7 different animations that made information and visual fade in, then fade out once it was time to move onto the next product on the slide. I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
successful
uploaded the file to Canvas Blackboard prior to the sales role-play and when it came time to share the file to all the viewers, the presentation was going well until it turns out that Canvas Blackboard does not support PowerPoint animations, so it displayed the slide with everything puked on the slide (metaphorically speaking), looking as if the PowerPoint was just exported to a pdf. Despite my efforts to resolve the error by simply sharing my computer screen and running the presentation on my computer, Canvas Blackboard wouldn’t allow it due to an “unknown error.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>Dissatisfaction with the (in)action of classmates.</th>
<th>36</th>
<th>11.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“The most dissatisfying online experience I had this semester was because I had group members that would not reply to messages. It was hard because I didn't see them in person two times a week in class where I would have been able to talk to them and remind them or set up meetings in person. Instead I sent many messages and tried to set up virtual meetings to do the work but they always said they had other stuff going on so they couldn't meet or they just wouldn't reply. I finished my part of the paper and I emailed my teammates and told them the project was due at midnight and they reassured me they would finish their part and turn it in. In the morning I checked on the assignment, I saw my teammates forgot to do their part and turn in the project. I was furious!”</td>
<td>Subject #63 – 22 year old Female Senior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lack of Responsiveness</th>
<th>The professor failed to respond to student requests or did so in an untimely manner.</th>
<th>33</th>
<th>10.7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“I missed a quiz due to illness in the last week of in-person class, and it has been very difficult to try and retake the quiz. I emailed the professor asking if it was possible to put the quiz on canvas (as another professor did for me as I also missed an exam while ill) and the professor never responded to my email so I emailed them again two weeks later and the professor said they did receive my email (and never responded) and still had not decided how I would take the quiz. I emailed him a few more times with no response. Now it has been two months since I originally was supposed to take the quiz and I have been frustrated because I have been the one reaching out but it feels like the professor is dragging their feet.”</td>
<td>Subject #45 – 21 year old Male Junior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Incident Improvement Suggestions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestion</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Dissatisfactory</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Sample Improvement Suggestion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>44 27.2%</td>
<td>70 23.3%</td>
<td>114 24.6%</td>
<td>“Be better organized and provide unambiguous instructions and sufficient resources to make things clear” subject #121 – 21 year old Male Junior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Contact</td>
<td>49 30.2%</td>
<td>31 10.3%</td>
<td>80 17.3%</td>
<td>“I think if lectures could be interactive by prompting user responses to solve problems or offer personal insight it could engage students more” subject #309 – 20 year old Male Sophomore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt Content</td>
<td>14 8.6%</td>
<td>54 17.9%</td>
<td>68 14.7%</td>
<td>“Class needs to be augmented more by the professor to make it as engaging as possible and institute accountability in terms of participation” subject #249 – 20 year old Male Sophomore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>34 21.0%</td>
<td>20 6.6%</td>
<td>54 11.7%</td>
<td>“Provide better digital literacy for the professors trying to teach online classes” subject #302 – 22 year old Male Senior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47 15.6%</td>
<td>47 10.1%</td>
<td>“The professor could have actively tried to engage with her students and try to help” subject #56 – 21 year old Male Junior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Flexibility</td>
<td>21 13.0%</td>
<td>25 8.3%</td>
<td>46 9.9%</td>
<td>“Providing a longer time frame by sharing assignments earlier” Subject #296 – 20 year old Male Sophomore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30 10.0%</td>
<td>30 6.5%</td>
<td>“Because of the very unique crisis that we are in the professor could be more understanding!” subject #250 – 20 year old Female Sophomore.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>24 8.0%</td>
<td>24 5.2%</td>
<td>“If I would have been more on top of the due date of the project and talked to my teammates further in advance, this problem probably would have never came about” subject #107 – 22 year old Female Senior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 162 100.0% 301 100.0% 463 100.0%
Table 4: Relationship of Dissatisfactory Incident Type with Categories of Improvements\(^a\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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\(^a\chi^2 = 203.90, p = .000\)