Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Innovations in Education and Teaching International

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/riie20

Enabling international student engagement through Online Learning Environments

Treasa Kearney, Chris Raddats & Lixian Qian

To cite this article: Treasa Kearney, Chris Raddats & Lixian Qian (10 Oct 2024): Enabling international student engagement through Online Learning Environments, Innovations in Education and Teaching International, DOI: 10.1080/14703297.2024.2413435

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2413435

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 10 Oct 2024.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 112

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=riie20

INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION AND TEACHING INTERNATIONAL
https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2024.2413435

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

Enabling international student engagement through Online Learning Environments

Treasa Kearney [a], Chris Raddats [a] and Lixian Qian [b]

[a]Marketing Department, University of Liverpool Management School (ULMS), University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK; [b]International Business School Suzhou (IBSS), Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU), Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China

ABSTRACT

Within an international context, the role Online Learning Environments (OLEs) play in offering students opportunities to engage with other students to co-create positive experiences is complex. This paper examines the engagement facilitated by an OLE between students at a UK university and its Chinese partner. Findings show that OLEs can facilitate international student-to-student engagement and provide opportunities to co-create positive student experiences when the value offerings are engaged with (i.e. the OLE is used as intended). It is through students' active engagement, or non-and negative engagement (i.e. intentional or accidental misuse), with the OLE that ultimately affects their student experiences.

KEYWORDS

Online Learning Environments (OLEs); internationalisation; student engagement; student experience; value Co-creation; value co-destruction

Introduction

Given the highly competitive Higher Education (HE) landscape, universities need to understand the student experience (Carey, 2013; Coneyworth et al., 2020) and engage students in co-creating rewarding experiences. Internationalisation allows for valuable experiences to be co-created and may embody aspects such as co-taught degrees, to work internationally, participate in international group collaborations, achieve intercultural awareness, and be aware of cultural differences (Robson, 2011; Vahed & Rodriguez, 2021). Within United Kingdom (UK) universities, these cultural differences are often most pronounced with Chinese students, who are the 'leading source of international students in the UK' (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022, p. 275). Despite the large numbers of Chinese students studying in the UK, their inclusion and engagement have been problematic, as they tend to minimise interactions with non-Chinese students (Bamber, 2014) and are quieter in the classroom (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2020).

To offer improved student experiences, many UK universities are trying to better integrate and engage Chinese and non-Chinese student cohorts through developing innovative pedagogies (Arthur, 2017; Quan et al., 2016). Despite these new pedagogies, there has been little consideration to date of students' opportunities to engage and

CONTACT Treasa Kearney tkearney@liverpool.ac.uk Marketing Department, University of Liverpool Management School (ULMS), University of Liverpool, Chatham Street, Liverpool L69 7ZH, UK

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

communicate with other students through internationalisation (Kurpis & Hunter, 2017). Whilst COVID-19 reduced some opportunities for internationalisation, other opportunities opened up using Online Learning Environments (OLEs) and virtual exchanges. For example, initiatives such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) are being integrated into taught programmes (Naicker et al., 2022, Vahed & Rodriguez, 2021).

However, barriers to international collaboration have often been related to language, cultural differences, and pedagogical differences (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022), with little consideration of the OLE and how it can facilitate international student engagement. Kahn (2014) highlights that student engagement relates to students taking responsibility for their actions; for example, contributing to their learning through their time, commitment, and other resources (e.g. using the OLE). This omission is surprising given that enabling students to collaborate and communicate with international peers appears to be an effective way to help them to better understand intercultural differences; a skill which is often required by graduates (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). In comparison to previous research, and given the identified gaps in the literature, the aim of this research is to *consider how OLEs can facilitate student engagement and facilitate a positive student experience in an international HE context*. The paper addresses the following research questions:

(1) How can OLEs facilitate student engagement and the student experience?
(2) How can OLEs facilitate student collaboration and communication in an international context?

A value co-creation lens

The concept of value co-creation is one of the most important developments in marketing literature over recent years and has been adopted to better understand HE as a service (Fleischman et al., 2015; Ng & Forbes, 2009). Qi et al. (2020) note that value co-creation provides a lens to better understand how different actors within HE, i.e. teachers and learners, can integrate resources, such as OLEs. Value co-creation is one of the tenets of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), is central to customer experiences, and is addressed in the customer-centric approach of service logic (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). The term 'customers' or 'consumers' is widely used within the marketing literature, and as noted by Ng and Forbes (2009) who discuss HE as a service, it can refer to students. However, in a similar vein to Raaper (2019), we do not argue that all students are customers; rather a value co-creation lens can provide an in-depth understanding of student engagement and student experience.[1]

Value co-creation refers to customers' creation of value-in-context; that is, the extent to which a customer experiences value, and that value co-creation is the process by which customers mutually create value through their experiences (Wieland et al., 2015). Thus, it is considered a longitudinal process that focuses on creating value through experiences, rather than a single encounter (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). For example, the student experience is ever-evolving throughout the three/four years of his/her degree, with differing levels of motivation, interactivity, and resources (Chalcraft et al., 2015). In discussing student experience, many authors have referred to student satisfaction (Lai et al., 2012), student success

(e.g. achieving goals) (West et al., 2015), and student well-being (Nielsen et al., 2017). The student experience is considered a core factor in student satisfaction and there has been a clear focus on ways to maintain, build, and develop it (Arthur, 2017; Wardley et al., 2017).

In line with the value co-creation lens, there has been a move towards a more student-centred approach within the HE sector where students are put at the heart of the HE experience and their engagement is of key concern (Healey et al., 2014). Students are the key stakeholder group for universities and given escalating fees in the UK for international students (Fazarkerly, 2022), understanding student experiences and student engagement is of major concern to educators, institutions, and students themselves (Chung & McLarney, 2000). Student engagement is most widely accepted as a behavioural perspective and can be viewed as an 'evolving construct that captures a range of institutional practices and student behaviours related to student satisfaction and achievement' (Kahu, 2011, p. 759). However, in taking a value co-creation lens, it is important to acknowledge that students can commit themselves behaviourally (e.g. attending the lectures), emotionally (e.g. co-creating the experience), and cognitively (e.g. co-learning to improve) to their engagement (Kearney et al., 2022; Trowler, 2010).

Both value co-creation and student engagement suggest that students are active participants in their learning and not passive recipients of universities' offerings (Coates, 2007; Kalafatis & Ledden, 2013). Although the collaborative and engaging role of students in their HE experience and its centrality to value co-creation is conceptually accepted, empirical research is still needed as there is much to learn regarding student engagement and the student experience (Qi et al., 2020; Woodall et al., 2014). Kahn (2014) highlights that student engagement has become more problematic as more students attend university and that further research is needed to understand their engagement whilst there. Taking a value co-creation lens allows this research to understand further student engagement and how it aligns with students' experiences.

Through the value co-creation process, actors (e.g. service providers, community) engage with other actors to influence the experience (Wieland et al., 2015). Within a HE context, these actors relate to the students as well as academics and support staff. These actor-to-actor interactions are with other actors' resources (e.g. lecturer/student knowledge, OLEs) and processes (e.g. learning process, assignment process) in a collective or social value creation manner (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). This social or collective value creation ties in closely to our understanding of student engagement, as Coates (2007), p. 122) highlights it is 'participation in challenging academic activities, formative communication with academic staff, involvement in enriching educational experiences'.

Furthermore, student-to-student engagement is a vital part of the student experience as learning is unstructured, interactive, uncertain, and hedonic (Ng & Forbes, 2009). Thus, other students' engagement plays a vital role in a student's experience (Chalcraft et al., 2015). The impact of other students on a student's experience at university should not be underestimated, for example, in seminars, if a cohort of students is known to be quieter (e.g. Chinese students) (Zhu & O'Sullivan, 2022), then this could impact on the engagement within the seminar. Ultimately students are the primary actors involved in the value co-creation process that can influence positive experiences (e.g. student success in learning) or potentially negative experiences (e.g. alienation) (Mann, 2001).

Value co-destruction

Value co-destruction can be a deliberate or accidental act of destroying value, by not engaging in other actors' value propositions or offerings, or by not integrating one's resources to co-create value (Smith, 2013); for example, students deliberately not engaging with those of other nationalities. Value co-destruction has also emerged as a way to conceptualise negative outcomes from actor interactions (Prior & Marcos-Cuevas, 2016). In exploring engagement, Trowler (2010) highlighted the positive nature as well as the non- and negative nature of engagement. Thus, value co-destruction includes both non- and negative engagement. For example, resistance to value co-creation can stem from students questioning 'why they should step out of their (often comfortable) traditional role in order to engage in co-creation?' (Bovill, 2013, p. 199). If students resist positive engagement; for example, through missing lectures (non-engagement) or disrupting lectures (negative engagement), it can create negative actor interactions and result in value co-destruction for other students. Interestingly, Wardley et al. (2017) suggest that whether students engage in co-creation is fundamentally outside the control of the institution, so instead institutions need to encourage and enhance positive student engagement.

Methodology

This research focused on a Chinese University that partnered with a UK University on a 2 + 2 programme[1]. The commitment to transnational education between China and the UK is prominent with many universities offering 2 + 2 programmes and, thus, this makes the context suitable for this study.

Data collection and analysis

The case study was of a collaborative assignment undertaken on a Consumer Behaviour module. The module was taught through lectures and tutorials, during the same semester at the UK University and its Chinese partner. There were c. 80 students in China and c. 320 students in the UK. 30 groups (c. 150 students) were formed from a mix of UK based students only, while another 50 groups (c. 250) comprised predominantly of two students in China and three students in the UK. For this study, the 50 groups of c. 250 mixed China/UK student were those under investigation.

Groups were asked to write two assignments. 1) a 2,000-word essay about intercultural differences in consumer behaviour. The assessment was designed to improve engagement between the UK and Chinese students, as many of the latter subsequently joined the UK institution to continue their studies on the '2 + 2' programme. 2) each student wrote a 500-word reflective account of their experience of completing the group task using the OLE and working with other students.

Kearney et al. (2022) highlight that an OLE should be, 1) accessible, 2) easy to use, 3) all in one place and 4) interactive, to create a positive learning environment for students to engage with. Therefore, an OLE was selected for the module, which contained the following five attributes that aligned with these four criteria:

(1) Accessibility: As this was for international group work, it needed to be easily accessible by both cohorts of students, unlike some existing Web 2.0 tools e.g. Google Docs, Facebook, which are not easily accessible in China.
(2) Communication: It had an interactive messaging service that students could easily use.
(3) Contribution: It tracked each person's contribution to the essay to avoid 'free-riding', which is a common problem with group work (Saghafian & O'Neill, 2018).
(4) Collaboration: It provided a way for students to collaborate on one document, in a similar way to Google Docs.
(5) Feedback: It allowed for formative feedback from tutors (if requested by students) and for student-student feedback.

Students at both universities were given training by the module leaders on how to use the OLE. It was also explained to UK students that Google Docs and Facebook were not accessible in China, meaning that the OLE had to be used for constructive group work.

Qualitative data for the study were collected in three phases. 1) The reflective accounts of the students. 2) Four focus groups were conducted with 23 students. Recruitment of participants for the focus groups was through emails and each one lasted between 45 to 90 minutes. Focus groups were a good method of data collection for this study as they can bring together hard-to-reach informants who can interact with each other (Hair et al., 2010). 3) Four in-depth interviews were undertaken with educators working on the module in the UK (2 educators) and China (2 educators). Interviews with educators enabled a distinct perspective on the research questions to be investigated since these educators could observe how students went about completing the essay and the student-to-student collaboration.

Data from the focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed and all data (from all three phases) was thematically coded using NVIVO 14 and then analysed. Content analysis was undertaken, and two qualified researchers undertook the thematic coding independently. The two researchers jointly identified four themes that address the research questions, see 'Findings' below.

Findings

RQ1: How can OLEs facilitate student engagement and the student experience?

Theme 1: Opportunities for personal development

Personal development is part of the student experience, and students were provided with the opportunity to actively engage with fellow students to co-create this valuable experience. The OLE offers students the opportunity to engage with other students by providing a platform for writing the essay and critiquing each other's work:

> I think students tend to think that if they write something, they don't particularly want anyone other than the tutor correcting it, but in reality, another student can make some quite important and valid comments about other student's work and improve the entirety of the whole work (UK tutor 1).

Enabling students to write comments next to other students' work within the OLE can remove the sometimes-critical nature of this activity if it had taken place face-to-face. In particular, students noted the benefits of personal development through giving and receiving peer feedback. A key facet of the value co-creation process is the integration of resources such as knowledge and the active participation of the actors (Wieland et al., 2015). Students felt that through these value co-creation processes a positive experience was created for themselves and the other students, which led to personal development:

> I was then able to gain advice from my group through sending them these drafts to be critiqued. This was very beneficial for me as it allowed me to get a different viewpoint on my work and make changes that were necessary. It also gave me the opportunity to critique pieces of work done by the other group members and therefore develop my analytical skills (UK student 1).

> I also learned people management skills throughout this process; I found myself in the position of needing to give feedback to a group member regarding their section of work (UK student 2).

Theme 2: Trusting the value offerings of the OLE

One of the main benefits of the OLE is to prevent 'freeloaders' on group assignments. This is probably one of the main gripes that students have with group work (Saghafian & O'Neill, 2018) and it is this issue that OLE was particularly designed to address, with the platform providing a running percentage (based on word count) of how much each person in a group has contributed to the task:

> There could be no freeriding, and where you make a contribution displayed on the screen, you can see the percentage of your part of the work. (Chinese tutor 1)

Of course, it may be that students are contributing to a task by doing background work such as reading journal papers. However, there seems a clear desire from most students to see a written contribution from others in the group, in terms of words:

> I think one of the main reasons we used it [the OLE] was just to check up on your teammates. It's alright to say you're doing stuff, but if there's no physical evidence of it on [the OLE], they haven't got a leg to stand on (UK student 7.)

Thus, OLEs can help create more of a 'level playing field' in terms of student contributions of their resources to the task. No matter where students were based, how vocal they were in group meetings, or what their level of spoken English was, everyone's written contribution could be made and assessed.

When I sent my part of the essay to my [group]leader, what I expect was some advice and criticism, so that I can modify that [my work]. However, she just praised my work and finished the modification herself. Of course, she is very kind, but for Chinese students, it means distrust, which hurts us a lot. So, I learned that the most difficult thing for teamwork in a temporary cross-country group is building up trust'(Chinese student 1).

Despite the opportunities for a co-creative student experience, which enabled personal development, we also identified several instances of value co-destruction; that is, a deliberate or accidental act of destroying value, though not engaging in service providers' value-propositions or offerings (Smith, 2013). Problems with the task often centred on a lack of trust between group members and students not engaging with the

OLE. This was manifested through students sometimes being reluctant to share work or engage in providing feedback:

> She [Chinese student] wanted us to send it [our work] to her before we'd seen any of her work . . . . but we were like 'we need to see what you've done first before we send it'. I think she wanted to see how we were writing .(UK student 3)

> When I sent my part of the essay to my [group]leader, what I expect was some advice and criticism, so that I can modify that [my work]. However, she just praised my work and finished the modification herself. Of course, she is very kind, but forChinese students, it means distrust, which hurts us a lot. So, I learned that the most difficult thing for teamwork in a temporary cross-country group is building up trust'Chinese student 1).

If students had used the OLE to put up their contributions, comment on each other's work, and communicate, then some of the trust issues could have been alleviated, but this did not always take place, leading to feelings of alienation. For example, some UK students were reluctant to use the new technology per se, as they felt alternative platforms such as Google Docs were perceived to be 'better'. This preference was even though UK students were aware that Google is not easily accessible in China. This issue was sometimes dealt with by not treating student(s) in China as fully-fledged members of the group:

> We just used Google Docs, purely between the homes students and just copied her [Chinese student] bit in. (UK student 8)

Underlying this approach was the issue that students perceive Google Docs to offer higher levels of functionality, reliability, and usability than the designed OLE. That said, for the specific task in question, it appears that the designed OLE offered superior functionalities (i.e. access in China, measuring contribution to the task) and therefore, reluctance to use it was slightly surprising given the help that was available to ensure that students could use it effectively.

Furthermore, some students appeared prepared to forsake the opportunity to receive formative feedback and instead prioritised their use of favoured technologies (e.g. Google Docs). However, this might have been a decision some groups regretted. This is also an example of value co-destruction, where students alienated themselves from the process resulting in a less positive student experience:

> I see our biggest failure as a group to be not taking on as much formative feedback as there was available to us. The actions we could have taken in response to feedback would have allowed us to produce a better-quality piece of work however this was an action that wasn't taken by our group.(UK student 9)

RQ2: How can OLEs facilitate student collaboration and communication in an international context?

Theme 3: Experiential learning

The students were encouraged to work together to determine how the assignment should be structured and to each write part of it. Both the UK and Chinese student cohorts felt that an interesting benefit of the assignment was having an international team to complete the work since cultural differences in consumer behaviour

(individualism and collectivism) could be assessed firsthand. Students felt that their experience was enhanced by the international collaboration as it '*added value*' by creating a more experiential learning environment for them to engage with:

> I found the input and knowledge of the Chinese students within our group to be very interesting and insightful with regards to the multi-cultural element of our assignment. I certainly felt as if this aspect added value to the assignment that wouldn't have been present otherwise'. (UK student 10)

> 'This synergy [working with international students] allowed us to embed a strong experience-based understanding of each topic for discussion, thus allowing us to compare cultural ideologies and develop our argument. (UK student 11)

Chinese students, who were due to come to study in the UK, also noted the benefits of the project in terms of getting a better understanding of the differences they would experience when studying in the UK. Through engaging with the OLE, the Chinese students could get a feel for the student experience they would get in the UK.

> I think it was quite creative because we had some ideas based on our Chinese background and UK students had their ideas based on their background. (Chinese student 4)

> The experience can help us to adapt to studying in (city) more gradually. It was the first step. (Chinese student 5)

> Because of the education [in China], I think most people are waiting for the orders from the teacher and they will tell us what to do, and we will do that. What I find here is that if you are in a group . . . you must engage in the meeting. (Chinese student 6)

In particular, the students understood the value of engaging, sharing knowledge, and adapting their resources to co-create value with their peers, as it could lead to a better student experience for them. Some findings from this study supported previous work in that there is often reluctance on the parts of Chinese and non-Chinese students to work together (Tian & Lowe, 2009). For example, some UK students felt that multi-national groups based in the UK were more effective than ones that included students based in China. This issue was exacerbated by the large time difference between the UK and China, which made setting up meetings problematic. However, despite these issues, in general, students felt that the OLE allowed them to engage with their international colleagues in a more meaningful way, resulting in a positive student experience:

> The time when they met together was my sleeping time, and they had done most of the job and just told me what I should do, but this was still a good experience. (Chinese student 7)

> I was unsure about how myself and my group members were going to cope with not being able to physically meet with the student from China, but this quickly became less of an issue through the use of technology. (UK student 12)

There appeared to be some pre-conceived ideas among UK students about how useful Chinese group members would be in completing the task, with sometimes an expectation that a contribution from a Chinese student would need to be re-written. Some of these stereotypes were clearly broken during the task, although communication problems may have reinforced some of them. For example, some Chinese students were asked to work alone, and this led to a degree of marginalisation, alienation, and non-engagement.

Theme 4: Communication tools

Although the OLE offers a messaging facility, students tended to use other messaging platforms; namely Facebook or increasingly WhatsApp (UK students) and WeChat (Chinese students). However, like Google, Facebook is not available in China, and UK students using this platform for group communication caused frustration with Chinese group members. This led to cases of value co-destruction occurring as students misused or did not share their resources in a way that contributed to value co-creation:

> We cannot communicate with them efficiently because the common communication tool they used is Facebook which cannot be used in China. (Chinese student 8)

He knew I may not have a VPN (Virtual Private Network), so hedidn't use Facebook or Twitter. He just let me download WhatsAppand told me how to use it' (Chinese student 9).

Unlike Facebook, both WhatsApp and WeChat are available in both the UK and China and there was evidence that some Chinese students were joining WhatsApp groups to communicate with their UK peers about the assignment:

> When we had our meetings, we would read the essay and make corrections and then let the student from China know the changes and plans via our WhatsApp group chat, so they were involved every step of the way even if they were not physically there(UK student 13)

> He knew I may not have a VPN (Virtual Private Network), so he didn't use Facebook or Twitter. He just let me dowtnload WhatsAppand told me how to use it (Chinese student 9).

This knowledge sharing between students on how to engage with resources was both constructive and destructive to the student experience. For example, using WhatsApp also benefited Chinese students, some of whom found voice calls with UK students using Skype quite challenging because of UK students' accents and speed of speaking, and therefore, text-based messages made communication easier. There was some indication that UK students were using WeChat. Despite students' preference for using a separate messaging system (e.g. WhatsApp), the messaging facility in the OLE captures communications between group members, which provides a record of work on the task (linking back to the 'freeloaders' issue).

However, students see their mobile devices as their main means of communication, and, therefore, any technology they use must link to their mobile devices, which the OLE did not easily do at the time. Resource integration is a central component of value co-creation, as it allows for engagement and collaborative interaction (Smith, 2013; Vargo & Lusch, 2004), unfortunately, the value offering of the resource (i.e. OLE on the mobile device) did not facilitate the type of engagement that students valued.

Discussions and implications

This research answers recent calls to consider students' opportunities to collaborate and communicate with other students through internationalisation (Arthur, 2017; Kurpis & Hunter, 2017). Of theoretical interest is how a value co-creation lens can illuminate the student engagement process and how this process influences the co-creation of the student experience. This lens can also help to provide practical insights to universities in providing value propositions.

Our first contribution is that students found that using the OLE (i.e. the value proposition) provided opportunities for intercultural learning and collaboration. Through using

the OLE, students were able to collaborate with their international counterparts on a more 'level playing field' so reducing the need for face-to-face communication, which could disadvantage students whose English skills are weaker or who are remote from other group members. Working with UK students gave Chinese students, due to study in the UK on the 2 + 2 programme, the opportunity to improve their understanding of the UK education environment. Through engaging with the OLE in a co-creative process, these Chinese students were able to familiarise themselves with paedological and cultural differences. Zhu and O'Sullivan (2022) highlighted that strategies are needed to address cultural and pedagogical issues. We found that through using a collaborative OLE before arriving in the UK, Chinese students were able to prepare themselves for their studies in the UK.

Our second contribution is that students can enhance their experiences through active personal development and engaging in experiential learning, which can be facilitated by OLEs. In the assignment, it was the role of the OLE in facilitating student-to-student feedback and monitoring each other's contribution that was particularly important to student engagement and enhancing the student experience. Through this value co-creation process, students felt that they were able to positively engage with international students, which otherwise would not have been possible for them. Given the inadequacy of some OLEs in providing opportunities for students (e.g. personal development and international collaboration), it is not surprising that students/tutors have looked to Web 2.0 tools to fill this void (Deng et al., 2018). However, the weaknesses of using Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, for group work were magnified for this assignment, since it was not accessible in China.

Our third contribution is that students are responsible for their value in co-creating resources and processes and that by being the driver of their experiences, they can ultimately have positive co-creative experiences (e.g. resulting in enjoyable learning), or create negative co-destructive experiences (e.g. resulting in alienation). We demonstrated that through engaging with the OLE, value offerings, and processes (e.g. acknowledging written contributions, using the messaging service, peer-to-peer and tutor feedback opportunities) students were able to influence positively their experiences. Whilst a positive student experience is considered an essential part of a university's service offerings (Scott, 2014), we argue that it is students' active engagement, or lack of engagement (non- and negative), with the value-propositions, that ultimately affects their positive or negative experiences. Thus, we address Kahn's (2014) concern about the lack of student engagement and posit that value propositions that students are often offered through an OLE can make or break positive experiences.

Our fourth contribution centres on students who engage in value co-destruction behaviours. Some students felt that there was no need to use new technologies when they already felt there were adequate Web 2.0 tools for the job (e.g. Google Docs and Facebook). Of course, these were not always adequate for the job, but nonetheless some students made a conscious choice to use them, a negative form of engagement. In this regard, students' behaviour appears to be a case of value co-destruction resulting in negative student experiences. This research shows intentional misuse (Prior & Marcos-Cuevas, 2016); that is, deliberately not using the OLE, as well as accidental misuse (Smith, 2013); that is, trying to connect with Chinese students through Facebook (not available in China) or rewriting, rather than commenting, on their work. Saghafian and O'Neill (2018) also found that some students struggle to choose and establish a common communication channel. This misuse of the value-propositions by UK students led some Chinese students to have feelings of isolation. Whilst this research found

that some students felt alienated at times, most students who actively engaged with the OLE found it to be a positive experience.

There is growing recognition within HE of the significance of students' engagement to enhance their overall student experience. Thus, universities need to provide students with suitable OLEs that can help them engage with fellow students and create a positive student experience. Given that some OLEs are limited, it is not surprising that students are using Web 2.0 tools such as Google Docs or Facebook to engage with other students (Deng et al., 2018; Kearney et al., 2022). However, these Web 2.0 tools can be too focused on singular aspects of co-creation (e.g. Twitter or X, short conversations) or as our study showed not appropriate (e.g. Facebook, not available in China), thus leading to non- or negative engagement.

From a practical standpoint, we urge educators to carefully consider the introduction of Web 2.0 tools when trying to encourage student engagement and improve student experiences. We note that more research is needed to illuminate the process of technology-supported learning (i.e. OLEs and Web 2.0 tools), and this is particularly true in an international context. Whilst educators play an important role in choosing suitable technologies for learning, students need leeway in choosing the tools that work for them. Deng et al. (2018) note that tension can occur between student engagement with technologies in formal and informal contexts. When there are multiple tools (e.g. Facebook, Google Docs), students choose the one most familiar to them. In an international context, this becomes complex due to the multiple Web 2.0 tools that can be used (e.g. WeChat, WhatsApp, microblogs), and what is most familiar to one group of students may be different from what is familiar to another group of students. Therefore, from an international perspective, students using what they know can cause tension, isolation, and trust issues for students, leading to value co-destruction activities; that is, non and misuse of the OLE.

Note

1. Chinese students' study at the UK university's partner in China for two years, followed by two years at the UK university.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethics approval

Ethics approval was granted by the University of Liverpool ethics committee to conduct the research. The application for ethics approval was submitted by Dr. Treasa Kearney and the name of the application was 'Online Learning Environments in the Actor-to-Actor Co- Creation Process: A Higher Education Perspective' 455

All participant completed a consent form and consented to take part in this research. If you require further information on this please contact Treasa Kearney, email: Tkearney@liverpool.ac.uk

Notes on contributors

Treasa Kearney is a Senior-Lecturer in Marketing and Director of Education at the University of Liverpool Management School. Her research focuses on value co-creation, customer experiences and HE. She has published across several academic and business publications, such as *Times Higher Education*, *Developing Academic Practice, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Services Marketing*.

Chris Raddats is a Reader in Marketing at the University of Liverpool Management School. His research addresses how traditionally product-centric B2B businesses can build a chargeable services capability to enhance market differentiation and sales (servitization). He also writes about other aspects of B2B marketing, such as branding, customer experiences, innovation and social media.

Lixian Qian is a Professor in Marketing and Innovation at International Business School Suzhou, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China. His research interests include adoption and diffusion of innovations, data-driven marketing strategies, smart mobility and sustainability. He has published over 30 research articles in internationally renowned journals, book chapters and conference proceedings.

ORCID

Treasa Kearney http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4655-3749
Chris Raddats http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3206-4343
Lixian Qian http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8467-4384

References

Arthur, N. (2017). Supporting international students through strengthening their social resources. *Studies in Higher Education*, *42*(5), 887–894. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1293876

Bamber, M. (2014). What motivates Chinese women to study in the UK and how do they perceive their experience? *Higher Education*, *68*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9679-8

Bovill, C. (2013). Students and staff co-creating curricula: An example of good practice in hgher education? In E. Dunne & D. Owen (Eds.), *The student engagement handbook: Practice in higher education* (pp. 461–476). Emerald.

Carey, P. (2013). Student as co-producer in a marketised higher education system: A case study of students' experience of participation in curriculum design. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *50*(3), 250–260. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2013.796714

Chalcraft, D., Hilton, T., & Hughes, T. (2015). Customer, collaborator or co-creator? What is the role of the student in a changing higher education servicescape? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *25*(1), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2015.1044790

Chung, E., & McLarney, C. (2000). The classroom as a service encounter: Suggestions for value creation. *Journal of Management Education*, *24*(4), 484–500. https://doi.org/10.1177/105256290002400407

Coates, H. (2007). A model of online and general campus-based student engagement. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *32*(2), 121–141. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930600801878

Coneyworth, L., Jessop, R., Maden, P., & White, G. (2020). The overlooked cohort?–improving the taught postgraduate student experience in higher education. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *57*(3), 262–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2019.1617184

De Mooij, M., & Hofstede, G. (2011). Cross-cultural consumer behavior: A review of research findings. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *23*(3–4), 181–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2011.578057

Deng, L., Li, S. C., & Lu, J. (2018). Supporting collaborative group projects with Web 2.0 tools: A holistic approach. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *55*(6), 724–734. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2017.1321494

Fazarkerly, A. (2022, June 19). UK universities warn tuitiion fee crisis could mean home student cutbacks. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2022/jun/29/uk-universities-warn-tuition-fee-crisis-could-mean-home-student-cutbacks

Fleischman, D., Raciti, M., & Lawley, M. (2015). Degrees of co-creation: An exploratory study of perceptions of international students' role in community engagement experiences. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *25*(1), 85–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.986254

Grönroos, C., & Voima, P. (2013). Critical service logic: Making sense of value creation and co-creation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *41*(2), 133–150. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-012-0308-3

Hair, J., Black, W., Babin, B., & Anderson, R. (2010). *Multivariate data analysis: A global perspective* (Vol. 7th). Pearson.

Healey, M., Flint, A., & Harrington, K. (2014). *Engagement through partnership: Students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education*. Higher Education Academy.

Kahn, P. E. (2014). Theorising student engagement in higher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, *40*(6), 1005–1018. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3121

Kahu, E. R. (2011). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(5), 758–773. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.598505

Kalafatis, S., & Ledden, L. (2013). Carry-over effects in perceptions of educational value. *Studies in Higher Education*, *38*(10), 1540–1561. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.643862

Kearney, T., Bailey, J., Matthew, T., Miopoulos, F., & Heywood, D. (2022, January). Key attribute of online learning environments: Creating positive student experiences. *Developing Academic Practice*, *2022*(January), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3828/dap.2022.1

Kurpis, L. H., & Hunter, J. (2017). Developing students' cultural intelligence through an experiential learning activity: A cross-cultural consumer behavior interview. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *39*(1), 30–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475316653337

Lai, L. S. L., To, W. M., Lung, J. W. Y., & Lai, T. M. (2012). The perceived value of higher education: The voice of Chinese students. *Higher Education*, *63*(3), 271. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-011-9439-6

Mann, S. J. (2001). Alternative Perspectives on the student experience: Alienation and engagement. *Studies in Higher Education*, *26*(1), 7–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070020030689

Naicker, A., Singh, E., & van Genugte, T. (2022). Collaborative online international learning (COIL): Preparedness and experiences of South African students. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *59*(5), 499–510. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2021.1895867

Ng, I. C. L., & Forbes, J. (2009). Education as service: The understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, *19*(1), 38–64. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841240902904703

Nielsen, I., Newman, A., Smyth, R., Hirst, G., & Heilemann, B. (2017). The influence of instructor support, family support and psychological capital on the well-being of postgraduate students: A moderated mediation model. *Studies in Higher Education*, *42*(11), 2099–2115. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2015.1135116

Prior, D. D., & Marcos-Cuevas, J. (2016). Value co-destruction in interfirm relationships. *Marketing Theory*, *16*(4), 533–552. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593116649792

Qi, D., Zhang, M., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Resource integration, value co-creation and continuance intention in MOOCs learning process. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *31*(2), 701–713. https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1802299

Quan, R., He, X., & Sloan, D. (2016). Examining Chinese postgraduate students' academic adjustment in the UK higher education sector: A process-based stage model. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *21*(3), 326–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2016.1144585

Raaper, R. (2019). Students as consumers? A counter perspective from student assessment as a disciplinary technology. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *24*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1456421

Robson, S. (2011). Internationalization: A transformative agenda for higher education? [Article]. *Teachers & Teaching*, *17*(6), 619–630. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.625116

Saghafian, M., & O'Neill, D. K. (2018). A phenomenological study of teamwork in online and face-to-face student teams. *Higher Education*, *75*(1), 57–73. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0122-4

Scott, P. (2014). Student experience' is the new buzzword, but what does it mean?,*The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/feb/04/university-education-not-just-about-student-experience

Smith, A. M. (2013). The value co-destruction process: A customer resource perspective [Article]. *European Journal of Marketing*, *47*(11/12), 1889–1909. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-08-2011-0420

Tian, M., & Lowe, J. (2009). Existentialist internationalisation and the Chinese student experience in English Universities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *39*(5), 659–676. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920903125693

Trowler, V. (2010). *Student engagement literature review*. Higher Education Academy.

Vahed, A., & Rodriguez, K. (2021). Enriching students' engaged learning experiences through the collaborative online international learning project. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *58*(5), 596–605. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2020.1792331

Vargo, S., & Lusch, R. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, *68* (January), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.1.1.24036

Wardley, L. J., Bélanger, C. H., & Nadeau, J. (2017). A co-creation shift in learning management: Work design for institutional commitment and personal growth. *Higher Education*, *74*(6), 997–1013. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0090-0

West, B., Moore, H., & Barry, B. (2015). Beyond the Tweet: Using Twitter to enhance engagement, learning, and success among first-year students. *Journal of Marketing Education*, *37*(3), 160–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/0273475315586061

Wieland, H., Koskela-Huotari, K., & Vargo, S. L. (2015). Actor participation in value creation: An institutional view. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, *24*(3–4), 210–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2015.1095225

Woodall, T., Hiller, A., & Resnick, S. (2014). Making sense of Higher Education: Students as consumers and the value of the university experience. *Studies in Higher Education*, *39*(1), 48–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.648373

Zhu, H., & O'Sullivan, H. (2020). Shhhh! Chinese students are studying quietly in the UK. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *59*(3), 275–284. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2020.1813603