

THE EFFECT OF VIRTUAL CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES OF UNDERGRADUATE MARKETING STUDENTS

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Abstract

Virtual Cross-Cultural Experiences (VCCE) are virtual meetings facilitated through web-enabled technologies such as WebEx, Skype, or WhatsApp that allow students in one country to hold virtual meetings with marketing students from a different country over the Internet. In the present paper, we describe and demonstrate how this innovation was used in two parallel undergraduate marketing courses to expose students to low cost technologies for virtual meetings and to enhance students' ability to effectively communicate in virtual team settings and adapt to culturally diverse environments without the more costly, resource intensive travel abroad experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Developing and integrating cross-cultural experiences that improve students' cultural knowledge, intercultural competency and awareness of cultural biases has become extremely important in developing effective marketing curriculum (Demangeot et al., 2013; Johnson & Mader, 1992; Koenig, 2007; Metcalf, 2013; Tanner, 2002), especially one that is aligned with the needs of the real world (Aistrich, Saghafi, & Sciglimpaglia, 2006) and designed to provide students with competitive advantages (Hopkins, Raymond, & Carlson, 2011), improving their employability (Jackson, 2014). Deardorff (2006) notes that intercultural competency is one of the most important outcomes of the internationalization efforts within post-secondary educational institutions. This is particularly true in business schools, as globalization of markets requires both cross-cultural communication skills and intercultural savvy (Friedman & Antal, 2005). In addition, current research offers insight into global virtual teams and their overall effectiveness, but few have addressed the needs of teams with modern day technologies such as video conferencing (Daim, et al., 2012).

In an effort to increase this competency, we introduce Virtual Cross-Cultural Experiences (VCCE) as an innovative pedagogical tool for improving students' intercultural competencies. VCCE are meetings facilitated through web-enabled virtual technologies (e.g., Skype, WhatsApp, WebEx) that allow students in one country to hold virtual meetings with students from a different country over the Internet and without travel. Virtual technologies enable students to see each other, hear each other and work together as a team. This research study explores how to effectively implement a VCCE in a marketing course and the insights that can be gained from the VCCE implementation process on faculty and students. The paper also examines what we can learn about the integration of VCCE on student cross-cultural experiences, cultural knowledge, intercultural competency and/or cultural biases.

We begin by discussing current research on global virtual teams and its importance to our study. Next, we discuss current cross-cultural experiences and the need for global education and more innovative and cost-effective delivery methods in the marketing curriculum. We then discuss VCCE, and how we integrated it into the marketing curriculum in order to build cross-cultural communication skills, and to develop cultural knowledge (i.e., intercultural sensitivity; Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen, 2002) without traveling abroad. Finally, we discuss our findings, implications and directions for future research.

PAST RESEARCH ON GLOBAL VIRTUAL TEAMS (GVT)

A great deal of research has been conducted on virtual teams, primarily over the past twenty years with the widespread use of the Internet for communication. Early research focused primarily on the use of asynchronous email or discussion boards as communication tools. Only recently has the common use of Face Time, Skype, WebEx and other video conferencing tools allowed for research and the examination of face-to-face meetings in virtual groups. Our focus in this paper is primarily upon global virtual teams and the intended use of video technologies for team meetings. Global teams face challenges not typically found with domestic teams, namely that of relationship building and trust.ⁱ Multiple studies have noted a number of challenges for GVTs, many of which can be traced to cross-cultural differences and the problems that can result. Another challenge which frequently occurs is conflict, which can arise due to cultural misunderstandings, linguistic difficulties or differences in conflict resolution (Cramton & Hinds, 2014; Magnusson, Schuster & Taras., 2014; Rosen, Furst & Blackburn, 2007; Stahl, Maxneviski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2010). This combination of miscommunication and conflict often manifests itself in a lack of trust, particularly where face-to-face meetings and shared social norms are absent (Brandl & Neyer, 2009; Daim et al., 2012; Ferreira, Pinheiro de Lima & Gouvea da Costa, 2012; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Rosen et al., 2007; Sarker, Ahuja, Sarker & Kirkeby, 2011). Some authors, though, have noted that using face-to-face meetings in GVTs does help to develop both a stronger team culture and

trust, which can lead to better performance (Jarvenpaa, Knoll & Leidner, 1998; Powell, Piccoli & Ives, 2004; Henttonen & Blomqvist, 2005). It is worth noting that virtually all of the studies examining GVTs have noted the importance of building trust early in the formation of the team. A number of these studies note that face-to-face meetings facilitate the development of trust, but none of this research specifically examines the use of Skype or WebEx as a substitute for face-to-face communication in the early development of trust in GVTs.

Much of the early work on GVT focused on computer mediated communication (CMC). Walther, et al.'s (1994) meta-analysis on the impact of CMC focused primarily on email and asynchronous communication. Their study highlights that interpersonal interactions take more time using CMC than communication which is face-to-face (F2F), however, CMC can help communication and the building of a trusting relationship. Walther (1997) also examined GVT by studying ten groups with 54 members both from the US and the UK. He found that while diversity is often an asset in group performance, it can be a problem if it negatively impacts trust. Since all of the teams were dominated by Americans, he also questioned whether the majority subgroup norms may have exerted a significant influence on the behavior of the group. Finally, Walther and Bunz (2005) examined the role of trust in virtual groups using asynchronous CMC. They found that following specific communication rules that required high levels of communication acted to bolster both trust and perceived performance within the group.

Jarvenpaa, Knoll and Leidner (1998) found that trust building exercises early in the formation of a GVT, positively impacted the perception of the abilities, integrity and benevolence of group members. They also identified the presence of 'swift trust' in a number of teams. In another study, Powell, et al. (2004) in their examination of 24 research studies investigating domestic virtual teams and 18 research studies exploring global virtual teams, found that where face-to-face interactions are not possible, relationship building is often achieved through an increase in social communication as a precursor to building trust. Further, in a case study of a global virtual team with 23 members, Henttonen and Blomqvist (2005) found that group members communicated primarily via phone and email, using Netmeeting™ only for reporting and almost never for discussion. They found that face-to-face initial meetings help develop trust and stimulate relational communication, creating a stronger team culture and better performance. This study was one of the first to examine video conferencing, but the technology was in its infancy, and thus, did not have the functionality or ease of use that we see today. Finally, Daim, et al. (2012) examined factors that impact communication breakdown in global virtual teams. They noted that GVTs are difficult because the typical trust builders used by face-to-face teams, such as common social norms, shared past experiences and regular social interactions are not present. However, they indicated that trust can be increased in GVTs with the use of synchronous communication media, such as telephone and videoconferencing.

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CROSS-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES IN MARKETING CURRICULA

One of the most common types of cross-cultural experiences offered as part of the business school curricula is a study abroad program. These programs are either short study tours, ranging from single country to multi-country, one discipline to multiple disciplines and varying in length from as short as eight to ten days to as long as four or more weeks, or they are semester/year study programs where students are enrolled in a foreign university (Clarke et al., 2009; Johnson & Mader, 1992; Wright & Clarke, 2010). Prior research shows that study abroad participants demonstrate better cross-cultural navigational skills, improved academic performance, higher graduation rates (Sutton & Rubin, 2010), global engagement (Fry, 2009), and even experience extraordinary, life-changing events (Wright & Larsen, 2012). Not surprisingly, this trend has encouraged accreditation agencies, such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB 2013, p. 6 and 31), to integrate such learning outcomes into its accreditation standards and many universities to intensify their efforts to expose students to other cultures, especially through study abroad programs. Indeed, 60% of all 4-year institutions provide students with such opportunities (Koenig, 2007). Moreover, the business field is the second highest in study abroad programs, with 20.5% of U.S. students enrolling in a business study abroad program, compared to 22.4% enrolling in social sciences. In 2011-2012 academic year, 58,091 U.S. students studied abroad for academic credit in a business field of study (Open Doors, 2013).

Even though study abroad programs provide great opportunities for marketing educators to use cross-cultural experiences to broaden students' perspectives on business and marketing (Loroz, 2009) and improve their employability (Jackson, 2014), integration of such experiences in the curriculum and achieving student participation in them can be very challenging (Gordon & Smith, 1992). First, study abroad programs can be very expensive for students, both in terms of airfare and day-to-day living expenses (Gordon & Smith, 1992; Johnson & Mader, 1992). Moreover, the additional expenses for short study tours and cost of living in a number of foreign locations can be quite burdensome. Furthermore, many students work at least part-time to defray the high costs of a college education, and it may be difficult for students to take time off, both for financial and time management reasons (McInnis, James, & Hartley, 2000). This makes study abroad programs, particularly long-term programs, more difficult to pursue. Indeed, in the 2011-2012 academic year, 59% of students enrolled in

short-term study abroad programs (i.e., summer or less than eight weeks) 38% enrolled in mid-length programs (i.e., up to one semester) and only 3% enrolled in long-term programs (academic or calendar year; Open Doors, 2013). In addition, students have questioned the value of these experiences, particularly for very short-term study abroad programs (Koenig, 2007). Anecdotal evidence suggests that even though U.S. student participation in study abroad programs has more than tripled over the past two decades, it has markedly slowed down over the last four years. U.S. student participation in study abroad programs between 2003 and 2007 increased by about 53% as compared to an 8% increase between 2008 and 2012 (Open Doors, 2013).

The innovation discussed here, the VCCE, was designed as a low cost alternative for the purpose of cross-cultural immersion. Faculty, students and colleges benefit from this cross-cultural experience through the use of technologies that support virtual communities, such as Skype (owned by Microsoft), WhatsApp (owned by Facebook), and WebEx (owned by Cisco Systems). One of the main advantages of these technologies is the ability to allow users to cross-geographical boundaries and interact in a team setting in order to develop and strengthen students' intercultural sensitivity in much the same way as a travel abroad experience. Although we believe that the VCCE is not a substitute for a study abroad experience, we do believe that it can be an alternative to an international travel experience. The next section will describe how VCCE was integrated into a marketing course.

INTEGRATION OF VCCE INTO MARKETING COURSE CURRICULA

This particular VCCE required linking two classrooms taught by two marketing instructors who knew each other, one from the United States and one from the Republic of Ireland. In marketing, students undertake a variety of assignments (e.g., exercises, presentations, client projects) that for cross-cultural integration using VCCEs. These assignments can range from simple, less involved and less time intensive exercise to a very complex, highly involved, more time intensive project. The present application is in the context of a less time intensive and fun assignment, completed by teams of students from two different marketing courses: 33 students enrolled in Integrated Marketing Communication course at a university in Ireland and 36 students enrolled in Global and Cultural Issues in Marketing at a Midwestern university in the United States. Each team, with a few exceptions, consisted of four students, two from each of the respective universities, that completed the assignment with integrated VCCE in a 15 day period, during the Spring 2015 semester. VCCE was integrated into both courses in two phases.

The main objective of the first phase, Preparation phase, was to prepare the instructors and the course assignment with an integrated VCCE prior to the beginning of the semester. This phase was critical as there were significant

differences in course structures and, importantly, university policies with regard to acceptable course requirements (e.g., student work load). Thus, we wanted to ensure that this VCCE could be instituted without resulting in any substantial coursework changes that would result in a disproportionate amount of work for the instructors and/or the students. First, the instructors collaborated via Skype to discuss ideas about the various assignments into which VCCE could be integrated. Both instructors agreed to generate these ideas and share them via DropBox. Next, the instructors discussed those project ideas that were likely to be the most viable or “exciting” potential projects for their courses. In this case, instructors decided to complete a two-week marketing assignment in the context of a problem related to a brand that was familiar to both groups of students and required them to conduct cross-market SWOT analysis to identify how to improve brand’s marketing activities in each market. The assignment’s learning objectives were (a) execute SWOT analysis of the brand in the U.S. and Ireland, including identification of its target customer, positioning benefits, value proposition, and marketing mix, including how the product is presented in local supermarkets (i.e., image of shelf placement to identify major direct competitors) in each market, (b) integrate outcomes of cross-market SWOT analyses to determine how to improve brand’s marketing in each market, (c) present the outcomes of the analyses in the format of a three page report, including profile of the cross-cultural team.

The final step for this phase was to determine the appropriate number of VCCE meetings for the student groups. This required providing a rationale to the students with regard to the topics for each of the meetings as well as the content for the deliverables. The instructors agreed to require students to participate in two meetings, spread over a two-week period. In this step, it was important to align calendars in order to ensure students were provided with the necessary knowledge required prior to each meeting.

In the second phase, Realization phase, the assignment with integrated VCCE was presented to students at both universities. First, students were given assignment instructions in PDF format, including suggested VCCE meeting schedule and type of virtual meeting platforms they may consider using (e.g., WebEx, Skype, and WhatsApp).ⁱⁱ Second, to assure that both groups were presented with the same assignment introduction and instructions, the American instructor presented the assignment to the students in the classroom and asked one of the students to video record it, using instructor’s smart phone. The video was then shared with the Irish instructor and students. Next, the U.S. and Irish students formed teams of two or three and selected one of the members to be team captain who then became the primary contact to develop schedules and organize meetings. This process resulted in 17 cross-cultural teams.ⁱⁱⁱ Team captains were asked to initiate the first contact via provided e-mails to introduce themselves and exchange contact information, including suggestions how to schedule their VCCE meetings (e.g., Doodle poll, Facebook).

The first team meeting was used for “getting to know each other” and obtaining information needed for team profile part of the assignment. Teams were also asked to discuss when they would send their marketing works in the required format to their foreign counterparts and when they wanted to have their second meeting. The second meeting was used to discuss their works, agree on marketing recommendations for improving brand’s (Nutella) marketing in each market, and decide who would complete and submit the final report.

THE EFFECT OF VCCE ON STUDENTS’ LEARNING EXPERIENCES

To assess the effectiveness of this innovation, we conducted an online pre- and post-survey of both American and Irish students. Seventy-eight percent of U.S. students (N = 28; 68% female) and 88% of Irish students (N = 29; 66% female) completed both surveys. More Irish students reported prior travel abroad (96% vs. 43%). Furthermore, 59% of Irish students visited the United States whereas 4% of American students visited Ireland prior to the VCCE experience. Finally, more American than Irish students had a prior experience with WebEx (29% vs. 3%) and Skype (96% vs. 90%), and more Irish students had an experience with WhatsApp (93% vs. 25%).

Our first goal was to provide students with an international experience using virtual technologies that are commonly used by today’s businesses. On average, students had about four virtual meetings, with Skype being the most dominant video platform for idea generation, discussion and implementation of the shared project task. As summarized in Table 1, the most frequently used platform for discussing ideas and information related to the assignment between countries was Facebook (39%), followed by Skype (30%), and e-mail (19%). With regards to Facebook, 58% reported using it with 73% reporting that Facebook was effective or very effective with regards to discussing ideas and information related to the assignment. These results suggest that VCCE allowed students to use virtual technologies, especially Skype, and that their use was effectively complemented by using Facebook.

Our second goal was to enhance students’ intercultural communication skills without traveling abroad. To assess the effect of VCCE on such skills, we measured intercultural sensitivity prior to the VCCE and after VCCE. Specifically, we asked students six questions adopted from Fritz et al. (2001) that measured intercultural sensitivity in terms of *engagement* (“I have a feeling of enjoyment towards differences between my culturally-distinct counterpart and me,” “I often show my culturally-distinct counterpart my understanding through verbal or nonverbal cues”), *confidence* (“I always know what to say when interacting with people from different cultures,” “I can be as sociable as I want to be when

TABLE 1
General VCCE Questions

Question	American (n = 28)	Irish (n = 29)	Total (N = 57)
Which of the following platforms did you use most frequently?			
<i>WebEx</i>	0%	3%	2%
<i>Skype</i>	43%	17%	30%
<i>WhatsApp</i>	4%	7%	5%
<i>Facebook</i>	29%	48%	39%
<i>E-mail</i>	21%	17%	19%
<i>Group me</i>	4%	7%	5%
How many virtual meetings did you have using ___?	3.43 (2.89)	4.93 (3.16)	4.19 (3.10)
How was your overall experience with ___? (1-very poor/5-very good)	3.68 (1.19)	3.82 (1.09)	3.75 (1.13)
How effective did you find ___? (1-not effective at all/5-very effective)	3.61 (1.17)	3.36 (.99)	3.48 (1.08)
How much, if at all, did you use Facebook? (1-none/4-a lot)	2.82 (1.31)	3.00 (1.41)	2.91 (1.35)
How effective did you find Facebook? (1-not effective at all/5-very effective)	3.76 (1.18)	4.30 (.87)	4.02 (1.06)
How was your overall cross-cultural experience? (1-very poor/5-very good)	3.71 (1.08)	3.97 (.82)	3.84 (.96)

interacting with people from different cultures”), and *attentiveness* (“I try to obtain as much information as I can when interacting with people from different cultures,” “I am very observant when interacting with people from different cultures”). Each dimension was measured with two items on a seven-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree/7-strongly agree).

As summarized in Table 2, a repeated-measures analysis of variance revealed that the VCCE technique produced a significant increase in engagement ($F(1,53) = 7.14, p < .01$) and overall intercultural sensitivity ($F(1,53) = 3.9, p < .05$) and

marginally significant increase in confidence ($F(1,53) = 3.05, p = .08$). The effect of VCCE on attentiveness was not significant. These results suggest that this innovation has the capacity to increase students' intercultural sensitivity, especially their competence for interaction engagement and confidence in intercultural communication. Notably, these effects were observed across both groups of students even though Irish students had more abroad experience than American students, suggesting that VCCE may enhance or reinforce such competencies even for students with abroad experience.

TABLE 2
Repeated Measure Anova Results

Dependent variable	F	p	American		Irish	
			Before	After	Before	After
Engagement ($\alpha = .79 / .81$)	7.14	.01	5.27	5.52	4.63	5.17
Confidence ($\alpha = .50 / .61$)	3.05	.08	4.30	4.50	4.36	4.61
Attentiveness ($\alpha = .82 / .73$)	.89	.35	5.61	5.70	4.95	5.13
Overall cultural sensitivity ($\alpha = .80 / .80$)	3.9	.05	5.06	5.16	4.63	4.79

There was no effect of course used as covariance factor. (α) refers to Cronbach's alpha in the pre- and post-tests.

To further explore the effect of VCCE on culture-related learning, we examined students' open-ended comments to the question about what they enjoyed most about their virtual cross-cultural assignment. The most frequent comments were related to learning about cultural differences and similarities, working with different people with different skills and work ethic, learning about college life in a different country, and learning skills needed in future career (see Table 3 for selected comments). What makes this project more innovative and 'exciting' than the normal single in-class university team project was the dimension of doing 'something different' and even how products are 'marketed differently in different countries.' This was the first time that both sets of students from respective universities had engaged in this form of team assignment.

We also asked students about what they would do differently if they did the assignment again. Although a majority of many students noted that they would not change anything, some suggested having more Skype meetings, having

TABLE 3.
**Selected Comments To The Question “What Did You Enjoy About Working
On This Project?”**

“I got to know what it was like studying in US, which is something I would love to do in the future.”

“I enjoyed the diversity of cultures working on the project and new fresh faces to work with for the project with different ideas and advice!”

“I enjoyed the fact that I got to work with people who had different opinions and different viewpoints on the topic of the project. It gave me a lot of insight into the company. “

“I enjoyed meeting new people and getting a broader view of different cultures interpretation of ideas.”

“I enjoyed getting to know our American colleagues and reading each others’ personal profiles.”

“It’s always enjoyable to be able to compare the exact same items in a different culture. I found the project to be extremely useful in the sense that it gave us first hand experience in working with others abroad, which will prove beneficial in the future.”

“It was cool to hear their accents and know they’re excited to know about our culture.”

“I found it really enjoyable because I myself have really been looking into potentially moving abroad one day and to see that with a little of patience and communication people are all alike. It was fun becoming friends with them on Facebook and seeing what their everyday life and weekends were like.”

“It was enjoyable to meet and work with new people and even though we live on different continents it was nice to see the similarities that we had. It was also a benefit to all of us to come out of our comfort zone and engage with new people in order to get a good grade.”

“Seeing the difference between both countries and their written pieces. As it varied in a lot of ways, the facts were very interesting.

“Seeing how the others worked.”

“I learned how to work strictly through virtual communication and it is something I now feel I can use as a skill in my future career.”

“Sometimes I find myself being consumed in our region; it was interesting seeing how a product like Nutella is marketed elsewhere.”

“Learning how Nutella is marketed differently in different countries.”

Note: No negative comments were reported.

meetings better organized, being more pro-active early on, and relying less on Facebook. These insights provide further support for VCCE capacity to improve students' cross-cultural competencies, especially with regards to learning about cross-cultural differences, work ethics, and cross-market differences, but also suggest that such learning could be improved by making VCCE experience longer.

Discussion

The importance of integrating cross-cultural experiences that improve students' cultural knowledge and experience and ultimately enhance their intercultural sensitivity has become a critical component of marketing curriculum, especially in AACSB accredited business colleges. Our initial assessment of VCCE provides promising evidence for the effectiveness of this innovative pedagogical tool that marketing educators can use to enhance students' intercultural sensitivity without the cost and challenges often encountered in travel abroad experiences. Secondly, it can be used to make students more interested in study abroad programs. We believe VCCE provides marketing educators with an innovative tool that can provide students with not only better intercultural sensitivity, but also something they can use in their "future careers," "a point to touch for job interviews," or to get "a broader view of different cultures and their interpretation of ideas." It also emerged that following the completion of the 15 day assignment, one of the US students visited the university in Ireland on a short-term study abroad project. This provided the student with a fantastic precursor to the study abroad program reducing the anxiety of traveling to a new country.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Implications for Business Educators

First, we used VCCE in a context of a marketing assignment completed in a two week period. Some students experienced issues coordinating, organizing, or scheduling their meetings in such a short period of time. It is then possible that if we provided students with a VCCE assignment that took up a longer time period, students' intercultural sensitivity may have increased due to more interaction and more virtual meetings. Similarly, we allowed students to self-organize their VCCE meetings rather than requiring them to follow a specific schedule, which may have helped some students to avoid procrastination in completing the assignment, including VCCE meetings. Finally, we found that many students relied on Facebook as the main meeting platform, possibly reducing the number of virtual, face-to-face, meetings. The effect of this innovation could be improved if we required the use of virtual meeting technology for a minimum number of meetings and recommending using Facebook for specific tasks (e.g., scheduling or confirming virtual meetings, exchanging information relevant to the assignments). A template of platforms

with uses could be created in class between students and Instructors to aid effectiveness of the interaction.

Implications for Managers

It is important for managers to understand the varied number of virtual meeting technologies that exist and to encourage organizational members to choose a technology that works for the team. WebEx is a popular virtual meeting technology, but is it the best in all applications? That is something to which managers must give thought. More importantly, however, managers need to understand the necessity and value of social media and social integration. The fact that the students in this study sought to learn more about their foreign team mates through social media supports existing literature and the role that socialization has for teamwork effectiveness. (Cohen & Bailey, 1996). Social media tools or company-generated ones may be necessary to further close the distance between virtual teams and to increase performance.

Moreover, there are significant implications for management of global firms, in terms of recruitment and training of staff in terms of enhancing team communication and collaboration through the use of VCCE. Business graduates who have experience of working in VCCE prior to entering a multi-cultural organization, will have a better understanding of cultural differences and technology use. This benefit will help them feel more at ease with the experience whilst in their new role. Also, VCCE could be adopted in terms of training for new employees to allow them a simulation of the multi-cultural global workforce.

Future Research

Overall, the implications for both managers and educators, as well as the limitations are indicative of the many possibilities for use of VCCEs in the future as well as future research studies in this area. There is the need to examine the impact of a single web technology platform versus multiple web-enabled technology platforms (i.e. using a combination of WebEx, Skype, Facebook, etc.) on student performance and learning outcomes with the use of a VCCE. Future research could examine the impact of these differences on learning in order to determine the efficacy of one, two, three or more platforms. In addition, a VCCE provides a great opportunity for other business schools to apply this type of experiential learning across a number of disciplines such as Accounting, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Human Resource Management, Organizational Behavior and/or Operations Management. This particular approach can be easily simplified or made more complex, and it is relatively easy to replicate. The main requirement is finding two lecturers who are willing to be flexible and open to the needs of each of the partner schools with regard to the learning outcomes in each of the programs.

CONCLUSION

The integration of cross-cultural experiences into the curriculum provides students with the cultural experience and knowledge that can enhance their sensitivity to cultural differences. This type of knowledge is a critical component in the global business world as well as in the marketing curricula of AACSB accredited business schools. The VCCE can provide students with meaningful cross-cultural experiences to heighten their intercultural sensitivity. The VCCE described here is a low cost alternative to a study abroad experience that fulfills many of the same learning goals without the need to travel abroad. Through the use of low cost technologies, such as Skype and WhatsApp, students are able to enhance their cross-cultural communication skills as well as improve their business acumen in a global environment applying tools which are commonly used by the student population. In addition, marketing educators also have the opportunity to enrich their cross-cultural knowledge and skills as they develop and implement the VCCE. Clearly, the VCCE is not a substitute for the same type of immersion experience as a study abroad, particularly for those programs that feature a long term immersion. However, VCCEs are a reasonable alternative for the student who is not able to study abroad as well as a precursor to a future study abroad class for those students who develop an “international itch” to continue working in a global context.

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ⁱFor a thorough review of the research on domestic virtual teams, the reader is directed to Connaughton and Shuffler (2007), Powell, Piccoli and Ives (2004) and Walther, Anderson and Park (1994).

ⁱⁱ We selected these applications as they are commonly used by businesses, yet sparsely used in classrooms (Strang 2012).

ⁱⁱⁱDue to different class sizes, the instructors ended up with 14 equally balanced teams with two American students and two Irish students, and three teams with unequal balance: two teams with three Americans and two Irish students and one team with two American and one Irish student.