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A Method for Gamifying Online Discussions

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Online discussions are critical to the online classroom as a means for student collaboration, enhancing learning and supporting intrinsic motivation to succeed. Engagement in online discussions, however, is difficult to maintain. Gamification involves the use of gameplay mechanics for non-game applications (Deterding et al. 2011). It is designed to encourage users to compete with the ultimate goal of obtaining better results. While gamification has been shown to increase student engagement in the online classroom (Kapp 2012; Deterding 2012), very few studies have applied gamification as a learning analytic tool for online discussions.

In response to this gap, the present study uses the theoretical foundation of flow theory (Csikszentmihalyi 1998) to develop and evaluate a method for gamifying online discussion boards. Specifically, this study proposes a method for the gamification of any online discussion board that has the ability to export data such as weekly posts and replies by student. We demonstrate the method by developing and evaluating a prototype based on the proposed method. Results from the evaluation of the prototype within an online university classroom show that the proposed method can improve motivation of students to engage in online discussions.

Our work makes several important contributions to the information systems literature: First, it provides substantive evidence regarding the significance of gamified versus traditional discussion boards. Second, we provide a learning analytics tool in the form of a leaderboard which demonstrate its significance over the traditional discussion board in both student engagement and activity. Finally, our work makes significant contributions in the application of flow theory as it relates to information systems and education. From a practical perspective, our study shows that the implementation of a leaderboard as a learning analytic tool for traditional online discussion boards results in increased collaboration and engagement with the discussion.

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