Development of a smart-phone application to improve lecture communications and feedback: eBreep

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The aim of this project will be to develop and test an online software application (SAAS) that will improve group communications, interactivity, and feedback in a lecture. The small application, easily installed on smart phones (with legacy functions for older SMS style phones), will enable a real time communications link between the student’s phone and the web based application on-screen (projector) during a lecture. When a question or comment is sent from the student’s phone, the web application will display the sent message bottom right on the screen for a 5 second period (similar to a taskbar notification in windows). All class members see the message. The comment or question may be handled on the spot by the lecturer as it is received or retrieved post lecture for action. Messages are logged into a database driven comment repository and grouped according to key words in a tree structure using Boolean Logic (similar to a “word cloud”). The comment repository will enable like comments to be grouped giving an instant indication of which topics of the lecture were poorly understood, which parts of the lecture sparked the most interest, and which topics students would like to learn more about. This information can either be used in a class debrief at the end of the lecture, tackled in real time throughout the lecture, or stored for later follow-up or knowledge mining (for example, because the source of the message is recorded, an email may be sent at a later stage to the sender for follow-up or clarification).

The proposed application solves several traditional problems associated with teaching medium to large size groups (>20 students). Large classes, environmental conditions, cultural differences, seating arrangements, and even the time of day or week can have a significant impact on students’ motivations and ability to ask questions or comment on lecture topics. The eBreep application also acts as a real time feedback tool to monitor and evaluate lecture quality by grouping common themes in student questions and comments.

The application will initially be integrated into the Internet Marketing 325-665 course. Though it is envisaged this application will prove very useful for all med-large sized lectures in Universities. A secondary aim of using the application on the Internet Marketing class will be to demonstrate social media technologies for marketing communications. This is a fast growing and important topic for Internet Marketers and Management in general. Though students are not expected to learn back-end architecture of social media and mobile technologies, they are required to learn how these technologies can be used to facilitate communications.