EXPLORING USER-GENERATED CONTENT AS AN EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATIONAL TOOL IN MARKETING COURSES

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Abstract

An important role in marketing education is to expose students to up-to-date techniques and tools needed to make them more successful. We propose a selective experiential learning approach that uses the exploratory research method of content analysis. Our primary aim is to address the call to blend conceptual knowledge with technical skills. The growth of social media, user-generated content (UGC) and social tagging continues to be a growing area of expertise for academia, marketing practitioners and students. As we look for avenues to incorporate these aspects of marketing education, applying useful tools such as social media analytics can pave the way providing students with cutting edge technology.

User-generated content (UGC) refers to media content created by users to share information and/or opinions with other users (Tang, Fang, & Wang, 2014). Because UGC is created and shared by users as opposed to the firm, it has the benefit of being perceived as credible and trustworthy (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Brand managers can easily access consumers' opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward a brand by analyzing UGC. In the Web 2.0 age, consumers acquire product-related experiences from organic word-of-mouth and buzz created by social media. Nam and Kannan (2014 p.28) argue "the social tagging creation process is similar to the brand recognition or brand recall test." For example, consumers are given a brand-related cue (e.g. blog or article) and then they create keywords or tags that come to mind. In this way, brand managers are given insight to both the volume and the extent to which consumers recognize brand-related content. Brand managers can monitor and adjust their brand image and brand positioning by tracking UGC to identify their points of parity and points of difference (Keller, Sternthal, & Tybout, 2002).

A Sample UGC Project Analysis

Instructors direct students on how to collect all available historical data on a brand category using an analytical system Social Mention via www.soicalmention.com. When using Social Mention, have the students enter in the brand name in the search bar and hit enter. A report can be viewed from the Social Mention webpage as well as downloaded to an excel file. Most free analytic websites will not allow you to download the results however with Social Mention you will easily have access to the last 12 months of data. An additional tool that is useful in narrowing down the company specific information is Google Trends (www.google.com/trends/). Google Trends allows you to enter in a company name and find the top 5 keywords associated with the brand name. If the search for company social analytic data through socialmention.com does not come up with successful results, Google Trends can help the student narrow down the appropriate terms related to the company in order to narrow the search. For example, the *Coach* brand often comes up with sports coaches while utilizing the key terms can limit the social media analysis to *Coach* Handbags. The analysis covers over 100 media sources archived within a 12-month period. Typically, you would have the students pull the data on the same day and then the information would reflect all social tags up to that date of data collection. The total number of entries per brand includes appropriately 300. Students are directed to scrub the data and delete duplicate entries as well as entries that do not apply to the brand. For example, when using the brand Prada, there were results for the movie The Devil Wears Prada. On the far right is the tab that lets you download the social media data to an excel file.

Resnik and Stern (1977) have developed a list of 14 evaluative criteria to analyze information content in television advertising. Originally, the coding instrument applied to television commercial information content. Information content found in social media is often counted but

not explored for specific context. Following the Renik and Stern evaluative criteria enables researchers to look at several categories of information content to establish guidelines for companies on how to communicate with the final consumer. The authors recommend the use of multiple social media search engines such as Social Mention (http://socialmention.com/), Social Searcher (http://www.social-searcher.com/), Topsy (http://topsy.com/), and Smashfuse (http://smashfuse.com/). All of which are currently free of charge. Social media search engines search all social media platforms including blogs, Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, LinkedIn, Google, and many more. Past research efforts have included only one social media platform, (i.e. Facebook or YouTube) which limits the richness of data.

Students were given a one-hour training session on the interpretation of the Resnik and Stern coding scheme. This enables students to ask questions related to their specific brand as well as reduce fear of understanding the analytic systems. After reviewing several UGC, the instructors worked with the students to identify trends in the companies UGC formulate goals for the companies' social tagging campaign. For example, a study analyzing luxury brands found trends towards improvement in the social media campaign when there were individual testimonial in the posted videos. Students were able to run descriptive statistics using SPSS from the coding schemes and look for high means and trends. Additionally, students are able to choose high means and run correlation analysis to help improve the conversation and formulate guidelines. For example, the student would take the high means and run a report using SPSS tab Analyze, then Correlations and looking for significance about .500. At this point, students can look at a variety of quantitative and qualitative options to analyze their organic findings.

Learning Objectives

Teaching fundamental marketing techniques are as important as providing student with technical skills such as those found in social media analytics. Recent research found the importance among practitioners regarding the development of evidence-based decision-making (Finch et al 2012). Bridging together the conceptual and technical skills may greatly enhance the student experience. For example, content analysis based projects allow students quantitative and qualitative research techniques while still applying critical thinking in the final analysis of the project. This personal assessment of the UGC findings allows the students to apply fundamental marketing concepts in order to understand the development of a marketing campaign. Finally, students gain experience with hands-on marketing analysis giving them a cutting edge in the job market.

References Available upon Request