

AN APPLICATION OF A SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN IN A MARKETING FIELD EXPERIENCE COURSE

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Abstract

Most university students today use social media daily, are knowledgeable about a myriad of applications, and can navigate numerous platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Despite their affinity for social media, however it's not clear whether or not they understand how social media can be used to create effective marketing strategies. This paper describes an assignment in which we incorporated a social media marketing campaign in a field experience course for undergraduate students. Our goal is to inspire other instructors who may wish to use social media campaigns in their marketing courses. The objective of the assignment was to teach the effective use of social media in marketing by allowing the students to engage in a real-time, social media marketing campaign with a major fashion marketer. Student testimonials indicate that this active learning approach successfully assisted our students in understanding the marketing potential for social media.

The Course and the Assignment

In order to have a distinct advantage over their peers in the job market marketing students should be well-equipped with the latest knowledge and technology in the field of social media marketing. The ever-changing platforms of social media demands that we consistently maintain industry driven applications of choice.

Field experience courses are a required part of the marketing curriculum at our university. Principles of Marketing course is the prerequisite course for all other marketing courses. All marketing students are required to have an understanding of the basic foundation for marketing concepts and theories before moving on to more application based on theory heavy courses. It is also mandatory for the students to prepare a complete marketing plan in their principles course. The course in this case was a field experience in New York City. A group of ten female and three male marketing and fashion marketing undergraduate majors at a West Coast university spent a week in NYC during their spring break as part of their field experience course. During the period of five business days students visited several companies across a variety of industries that included a clothing designer firm (DKNY), a marketing communications agency (Drafftcb), an automotive company (Mercedes Benz), an international magazine for teenagers

(TeenVogue) and a media and entertainment company (NBCUniversal). The students interacted with company executives during presentations on a wide range of topics. For example, the Senior Vice President of Global Communications of a company we visited focused on how the effectiveness of social media campaigns used for public relations is measured, and the Director of Digital Event Marketing described how Mercedes Benz used social media to market autos via their sponsorship of New York Fashion Week.

For the purposes of the social media assignment, all of the female students were given a tote bag by a well-known international shoe/bag/accessories brand and they were required to carry this bag with them at all times during the field trip. The company, which provided the bags, requested the students to take photos of the bag and post them on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter. All students either already had existing accounts or opened accounts for the first time in the above-mentioned social media applications. Some of the students also had their own micro-blogs, which they utilized for the purposes of this assignment.

Use of Social Media and Experiential Learning in Marketing Courses

Social media, undoubtedly, is a reality of our lives. The latest editions of marketing textbooks are dedicating entire chapters to social media, and the number of books on social media is increasing rapidly. Given the importance of social media in marketing strategy and communication, marketing professors are finding it a necessity to incorporate it into their courses (Demirbag Kaplan, Piskin, and Bol, 2010; Hollenbeck, Mason, and Song, 2011; Lowe, and Laffey, 2011; Buzzard, Crittenden, Crittenden and McCarty, 2011; Granitz and Koernig, 2011; Paynel, Campbell, Anjali, Piercy, 2011; Rinaldo, Tapp and Laverie, 2011). Twitter has been used successfully to engage students in experiential learning and also as a medium for direct communication with students to generate discussion and interest in the course topics and examples (Rinaldo, et. al., 2011; Lowe, and Laffey, 2011). Similarly, blogging as part of a Marketing Management course has provided an experiential exercise in marketing as it produced significant improvements in students' soft skills (Demirbag Kaplan et. al., 2010).

By nature marketing is an ever-evolving discipline that must keep up with the latest technological and cultural changes. As educators, we strive to prepare our students to the business world upon graduation. This requires them to have solid theoretical knowledge and opportunities for practical applications. We believe that marketing is best taught with hands-on experiences with theory applied to real-life situations. Kolb (1984, p. 41) defines experiential

learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience”. Paynel et. al.’s (2011, p. 204) research indicates that “the inclusion of an experiential project into the core curriculum was associated with student motivation, engagement, team management, and communication skills. Furthermore, this integration promoted learning of technical and theoretical knowledge related to consumer-generated advertisements and virtual viral marketing”. Add another sentence of your own.

Granitz and Koerning (2011, p. 57) claim that “[a]lthough both experiential learning and Web 2.0 tools focus on creativity, sharing, and collaboration, sparse research has been published integrating a Web 2.0 paradigm with experiential learning in marketing”. They position Web 2.0 as “a philosophy that can advance experiential learning through greater student construction of pedagogical materials, by bringing more of the outside world into the classroom and by modifying the role of the professor” (2011, p. 57).

References Available upon Request