CONSUMING MARKETING IN A STRATEGIC WAY: SOCIAL MEDIA, CURRICULUM DESIGN AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

This study aims to unravel the often tangled relationship between teaching and active learning through applied strategic development and promotion for nonprofit organizations. In this course mock organizations are presented to participants. Participants are charged with development and implementation of innovative promotional strategies that engage *real* consumers solely through social media channels. Each developmental segment of the task is plotted via online channels and measurement of effectiveness is evaluated via ability to capture and increase awareness of the nonprofit organization. Schulman's (2005)" Signature" approach is influential in the pedagogy used for this course. Scholarly articles/ books, industry/ trend periodicals and course lectures are used as underpinning instructional tools, while interactive components including: Blogging, Twitter and Facebook were used as interactive and supplemental teaching components.

Introduction

While much research has been done on technology in the classroom, little research has been done to examine the use of social media as a primary teaching tool in an intensive format (7-week course) classroom setting. The use of "Backward Design" as introduced by Wiggins and McTigh (2005) examines teachers as designers and argues that the essential act of our profession [as teachers] is the design of curriculum and learning experiences to meet specified purposes […] the design of classroom curriculum thus begins with the end in mind (2005). The intricate process of curriculum development is a practice that necessitates clear purpose and intention with a drive to execute and a willingness to step outside of conventional pedagogical norms.

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now, so that the steps you take are always in the right direction (Covey, 1989).

Traditional curriculum development embraced lecture, textbook and exam layout for teaching and assessment. Although this design was, and arguably still is, conducive to efficient classroom instruction, students have evolved technologically and it is imperative that educators modify teaching techniques in a way that keeps pace with the wants, needs, and desires of the student.

New technology has provided the luxury of convenience and although this convenience does come at some cost- if used correctly, one is able to navigate through and meet the social, professional and personal commitments of their everyday lives. Popular social media channels such as Facebook, Linkedin, Myspace and Youtube, are amongst countless other networking sites that are available to consumers. These social networking platforms have evolved into not only networking communities for users of all ages but also into online communities seen by many users as a venue for making friends.

 With the classroom seen as a community in and of itself, it is reasonable to assert that it serves as an attractive setting for the implementation of a social media oriented learning community. Specifically, the current paper examines the curation of social media, technology and textbook instruction as primary tools used in an intensive learning environment.

The objectives and desired outcomes of this study were to:

Objective 1: Promote active learning via use of social media platforms

Desired Outcome(s):
- Introduce participants to non-traditional ways of thinking
- Increase awareness and support of nonprofit organization via use of social media channels as primary tools for communication

Objective 2: Demonstrate understanding of theoretical concepts learned in class through practical design and implementation

Desired Outcome:
- Develop electronic portfolio that actively demonstrates understanding of business strategy, advertising and social media

Explanation of Study

The standards of modern promotion require the ability to understand and relate to various consumer markets via active use of modern networking tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogs. Demonstrating (teaching) and understanding (learning) the importance and capabilities of these tools can best be done through applied task. Bell Hooks (2003) has suggested that teaching from a standpoint that is aimed at liberating the minds of our students rather than indoctrinating them into traditional standards is essential in classroom pedagogy. For individuals preparing for careers in the 21st century, having the ability to adapt to quickly changing consumer desires is necessary. Implicitly or explicitly, faculty want students to learn more than basic content; we want them to understand and practice disciplinary ways of thinking (McIetyre 2008,Chick, 2009, Schultz et. al, 2010, Scott 2010) and in order to provide students with the tools needed to achieve this, Lee Shulman (2005) proposes that the adaptation of *Signature pedagogy* is helpful. According to Shulman, *Signature pedagogy* must be distinctive in the profession, pervasive in the curriculum and found across institutions of teachers. It is only through this type of learning will students have the opportunity to develop the skills needed to succeed in industry.

When assessing the liner progression of traditional to innovative pedagogical styles, Wiggins and McTighe (2005) assessment of *Backwards Design* has been influential in providing an objective viewpoint on development of varied teaching approaches; as *Backward Design* promotes the conceptual understanding of course objectives and measurable learning effectiveness. By designing a clear blueprint of expected learning outcomes, the instructor thus develops core values and expectations as it applies to discipline (2005) allowing for clarity in charting objectives and effectiveness.

The pedagogical approach used for the course concentrated primarily on the use of social media as foundational tools in nonprofit business development and design. In this study two mock agencies are presented to participants. Participants are charged with development and implementation of innovative promotional strategies that engage *real* consumers solely through social media channels. The pedagogy for this course utilized scholarly articles/ books, industry/ trend periodicals and course lectures as underpinning instructional tools, while interactive components including; blogging, Twitter and Facebook were used as interactive and supplemental teaching components. No textbook was required for the course.

Building off of both Shulman (2005) and Wiggins & McTighe (1999 & 2005) this course aimed to incorporate both objective course outcomes with pervasive curriculum content that

mirrors industry expectations. This intensive 7-week initiative required participants to demonstrate understanding of course components through practical application of concepts presented each week. A group of 16 participants were divided into four agencies and assigned a mock nonprofit organization. Groups individually developed a collection of tangible resources that were used to support strategic decisions, including advertising, target market, effectiveness of message, etc. McIetyre (2008) suggest that portfolio development allows for reflective assessment of learned outcomes thus providing students with tangible reflection tools. In the current study, these *tangible* items served as a component of the company's final organization and development portfolio. Further measurements of message effectiveness and increased awareness of the brand is evaluated based on agency ability to generate a significant following on Twitter and Facebook, as well as engage consumers through blogging and other socially motivated forms of media.

It is important to note that all participants included a statement on each of the agency websites and supplemental social platforms, informing users that the information communicated within these sites were for "educational and instructional use only." When evaluating Facebook's *Community Standards* regarding account types, it is noted that:

Facebook is a community where real people connect and share using their real identities. When you represent yourself accurately on Facebook you are helping to build trust and safety for everyone. Claiming to be someone else, creating multiple accounts, or falsely representing an organization undermines this trust and violates our terms. Please also refrain from publishing other people's personal information. (Identity and Privacy, Facebook 2012)

All student participants adhered to these standards and clearly identified themselves via use of their real names and organization/ university affiliation.

Method

A group of 16 participants were divided into four agencies and assigned a mock nonprofit organization. Groups individually developed a collection of tangible resources that were used to support strategic decisions, including advertising, target market, effectiveness of message, etc. Agencies were comprised of 5-7 non-profit organizations. Each agency was charged with the development and implementation of innovative promotional strategies that engage *real* consumers solely through social media channels. An agency blog, website (basic set-up) and Facebook page were designed during the first week of the 7-week term and each

medium implemented by agencies incorporated a disclaimer stating that the information posted within was for educational purposes only. Participants were not allowed to accept donations for their non-profit organizations, yet they were encouraged to educate consumers on their individual organizations. All participants were responsible for creating a following on each of the social platforms used by their individual agencies (Facebook, Twitter, Blogger) and maintenance of each social media tool was overseen my agency leaders. Appendices A- E illustrates two sample non-profit organization websites and blog post entries that were developed by participants.

Results and Discussion

A key premise of the pedagogy utilized for this course is that applied application of concepts learned in an intensive learning format (7-week session) is conducive to building upon the understanding of concepts already familiar to students upon entrance to the course and further; allows for an increased understanding of new concepts introduced within the course. This research did not aim to analyze the number of followers/ friends or web hits an agency could generate but rather to examine the relevance of use with regard to social media as a supplemental teaching tool. In this section we discuss relevant themes that emerged during the study, as it applies to social media implementation within an intensive style course. We will also examine the contribution of the study to current pedagogical literature as it applies to social media and fostering innovation and creativity in the classroom. The following themes were observed during this research.

Active Learning and Social Media

Active learning is operationally defined by the author of this paper as a style of learning that requires consistent practical application of concepts introduced to the student within a learning environment. The promotion of active learning was fostered by means of team oriented assignments/ activities, as well as the development and implementation of individual strategic branding initiatives for each non-profit organization.

Blogging and Consumer Chat

Students were charged with development and maintenance of a Blogging site for each agency and team leaders were responsible for ensuring that all agency members posted to the agency blog site, weekly. The weekly blogging exercise was instrumental in allowing for students to maintain a less formal line of communication between the consumer and the non-

profit organization. Each posting was informative in nature with a goal of blending socially oriented information. For example, one agency post may explore "The top 5 reasons to support your local animal shelter" while also outlining the statistics for homeless pets in the United States in 2010. Each weekly post was also required to highlight an element of discussion as it applied to the course concepts for each respective week. *The Go-giver (*Burg and Mann, 2009), a supplemental course reading that was used throughout the course in order to provide students with an understanding for the ethical importance of business strategy. This text also served as a focal point for many of the blog post written by each agency. Topics including, but not limited to, *Authenticity, Influence and Value* served as points for discussion and development of strategic initiatives of each agency.

Teams also design organizational websites. Websites provided online participants with a source for learning more about the organization and its mission. Teams designed each website via use of a free program call Wix and updated information over the course of the 7-week term. The agency website and blogging post ultimately served as student portfolios, as these sites demonstrated understanding of how to design and implement a preliminary marketing strategy for a non-profit organization.

<center>Engaging Consumers</center>

Development of websites and social media platforms for each agency was completed during the first two weeks of the course. Students were then required to implement strategies that would engage real consumers via use social media platforms such as facebook, blog post and via the organization website. Each agency was instructed to send out e-mails with links to their organization webpage and Facebook page to friends and family and request that they distribute to people on their e-mail list. In doing so, students would be able to create awareness about their organization. As mentioned earlier, all promotional material (online and print) incorporated a statement notifying the viewer that the organizations were a part of a course and were being used for educational purposes only.

 This aspect of the assignment proved to be the most challenging, as although each organization focused on real cause (i.e., healthcare, afterschool activities for youth, pet health, etc…) students were attempting to promote an organization that was fictional in nature. The use of Facebook proved to be the most successful in raising awareness, as much of the discussion on that platform centered on the mission of the organization and simply raising awareness and not as much on trying to urge a potential customer to move to action. Organizational websites

<center>101</center>

were also instrumental in raising awareness on the cause presented by each organization. Students incorporated a contact us page on organization websites that allowed for visitors to submit comments which further allowed for them to not only keep track of the traffic on their websites, but also to get an idea of what real consumers think and feel about the cause of the organization. The themes that emerged from customer feedback, over the term, show that consumers were more comfortable with participating via the organizational website and Facebook. Website and blog interaction were measured based on number of website hits, and consumer feedback submitted via the organization website, while Facebook and Twitter interaction was plotted based on number of friends/ followers participating with the agency Facebook page.

Understanding Through Practical Design

For the course students are assigned a pre-assignment that is to be completed prior to the first class session. For this assignment students were asked to consider and discuss something that they were passionate about. They were then asked to build off of this passion by developing a blueprint for a non-profit organization that would allow for them to explore their passion. This blueprint necessitated the incorporation of a mission statement, code of ethics, the goals and objectives of the organization as well as an organization name and logo. The first two class session focused on culture and diversity of business and examined the art of targeting and positioning. Although the topics are foundational in nature, it is important that the student understands the complexities than can potentially arise if an organization miscalculates, misreads or at worst, offends their desired audience with the organizations intended message. The student's ability to understand how strategic positioning of a company/ organization was facilitated by their ability to recognize potential target audiences for the organization introduced within the pre-assignment. The blueprint of their proposed organization allowed for motive and intention with regards to understanding the overarching concepts being introduced in the classroom as well as allowed for them to add a bit of personal expression to the assignment.

The idea that people behave differently if they are doing something that has relevance to them personally is not terribly surprising to anyone who has ever had both a job and a hobby, as human motivation is based off of the simple idea of stimulus- adding any reward to an existing activity will make them want to do more of it [the activity] (Shirky, 2010). The pre-assignment allowed for a non-traditional way for students to learn about the foundational constructs of marketing strategy. This assignment was also an introduction to the culture of the class, as all

assignments submitted during the term allowed for personalization of the message being conveyed and active consideration of the consumers that were receiving those messages.

Conclusion

Shirky (2010) noted that knowledge is the most combinable thing we humans have, but taking advantage of it requires special conditions. Those conditions can be as simple as providing directions to a person when they are lost or as complex as a doctor conducting research to further their understanding of the benefits of a new medication. In both instances, although very different, one human is serving as an instrument to facilitate progress. When we translate this "service" to the classroom, social media has allowed for educators to add another tool to the toolbox of teaching and learning, as when used efficiently, educators are constructing a creative and successful learning environment for students. The social media initiative implemented in this course pull from the foundational blueprint of traditional pedagogy such as Schlman (2005) and Hooks (2003) and incorporates a new cognitive challenge for students.