

BLOGGING AS A TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

This paper presents blogging as an innovative teaching methodology for building and improving necessary marketing skills. This approach requires the students to create and maintain a blog as part of a Fashion Marketing course. Findings show how blogging enables students to further understand the course material, while enhancing their technology and presentation skills. The assignment also promoted four essential elements of learning: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity.

Introduction

Today's technological innovations and social media enable students in higher education to have more choice and autonomy in their learning. Although traditional course curriculum focuses primarily on lectures, textbook readings, and exams for teaching and assessment, studies have shown that students have become more technologically evolved and wish to use these skills in their education (Buzzard, Crittenden, Crittenden, McCarty 2011). The student's desire to be challenged in the classroom, combined with the evolving demands from employers in the industry, intensify pressures on marketing educators to modify their teaching techniques (Way 2012). Due to the widespread use of social media, especially in the field of marketing, this teaching methodology study explores how a technology, such as blogging, can create effective student engagement and learning.

The pedagogical approach that seems to be most effective in higher education integrates both formal and informal learning using social media and traditional methods (Dabbagh & Kitsantas 2012). Prior research has promoted the integration of social networking media in the marketing curriculum (Cronin 2011; Granitz & Koernig 2010). Some of these social media methods include using Twitter (Lowe & Laffey 2011), website platforms (Hollenbeck, Mason, & Song 2011), and blogging (Demirbag, Kaplan, Piskin, & Bol 2010). Blogging and other forms of social media communication, allow marketing educators a strategic tool to create an innovative learning environment in the classroom. Other tools that have proven effective are e-portfolios, which, like blogs, provide multi-dimensional evidence of students' abilities and concept understanding (Rhodes 2011).

This study presents blogging as an advanced teaching approach for building and improving essential marketing and communication skills. The assignment required students to maintain blogs, which they updated weekly with posts on applying textbook concepts to current and historical events in society. This article empirically evaluates the students' experience using a blog, and demonstrates how innovative technologies can add value to the contemporary marketing curriculum.

Overview of Assignment

The blogging assignment was for the class "Fashion, Culture, and Society", a core course in the Fashion Marketing department. The course discusses the impact of fashion on human behavior, incorporating theories of marketing, psychology, social psychology, sociology and anthropology. This particular course section had 16 students, primarily juniors and seniors, which were divided into 4 groups with 4 students in each group.

Every week the class was assigned to read a chapter from the textbook, and then each group was assigned an article that related to the chapter for that week. Groups then wrote a blog post discussing their particular article and how it related to theories discussed in the textbook. They were then to give examples of how these topics relate to current events in the media. These group blogs would serve as visible demonstrations that textbook concepts were both understood and applicable to real-world paradigms. Once a week each group would present their blog in class and lead a round-table discussion on their topic.

Assignment Objectives

The objectives and desired outcomes of this assignment were to:

Objective 1: Promote active learning with the use of blogging platforms

Objective 2: Allow students to communicate their understanding of textbook concepts learned in class, and be able to apply these to real world scenarios.

Objective 3: Improve social media skills

Below are links to the student's group blogs they created:

<http://wemarkedit.blogspot.com>

<http://3girlsoneguy.blogspot.com>

<http://expression-through-fashion.blogspot.com>

<http://fashionpmu.blogspot.com>

Findings

At the end of the semester I administered an assessment survey to the students in order to further understand their experience using a blog as part of their coursework. The survey asked questions to determine what they learned, what they liked and did not like about the assignment, and what improvements they would like to see in this assignment in the future. Below I have included direct quotes from the surveys to further emphasize the importance of this study.

The first important result was that for 100% of the students this was the first blog assignment they had ever had in a course. Since this was the first time students had experienced this type of project, I had expected that there would be mixed feelings on its usefulness and overall level of acceptance. From the survey and in class discussions, the students replied that they were enthusiastic about the project and felt that it was much more beneficial than traditional assignments, such as essays. The students found the process interesting, and since they enjoyed the assignment it made “doing homework more exciting”.

The students remarked that as “marketing students, it makes more sense to start writing blogs during classes”, and that this assignment “related to the way the industry is going now.” Students also enjoyed that this assignment allowed them to express themselves artistically, and that they “retained more information because (their) creativity was able to be free.” This project encouraged students to think critically and “really take the chance to go in-depth on (their) opinions when creating blog posts.”

Students also commented that the blog allowed them to apply textbook concepts to real life scenarios and helped them to better summarize their ideas in a concise way. The surveys also revealed that this project improved the student’s communication-styles, and gave them “the opportunity to voice (their) opinions in a simple and clear manner.” This particular class had a few international students, and since English is not their first language they felt uneasy speaking up in class. From their surveys they alleged that the blog gave them an avenue to communicate their ideas that they would normally be too shy to share in class.

Another benefit of this project was that it allowed students to collaborate with each other. Students mentioned that “working in groups helped when writing because we could see other opinions.” Students liked working in a group and seeing what insights other group members had on the same articles. The students also enjoyed the process of putting their ideas together,

since often they took away different elements depending on their background. Overall, the activity helped them learn how to communicate properly within a team, and deal with group dynamics.

The students did have some difficulties with this assignment that are important to mention. These difficulties included design issues, technical issues, and writing issues. Design issues occurred with students who had no prior experience with blogs and did not know how to get started or update designs. Also a few students had technical issues while using the blogger website and had to contact the site technical support to remedy the problems. Some students also mentioned that they had some writing issues at first as they learned how to create the proper length of a blog post.

This assignment allowed students to acquire several skills including technology skills, blog writing skills, and presentation skills. The students commented that it improved their overall technology skills, particularly on creating and maintaining a blog, and design features such as banners. Students also felt that it increased their overall knowledge of social media.

Improved presentation skills were an unexpected bonus to this project, especially since this part of the assignment was implemented later on. After reading the teams' posts the first few weeks, I realized that the students had interesting ideas and perspectives, and that others in the class would benefit from these blogs being shared in class. Once a week the groups would show their blog post in class and lead class discussions on their topic. This created an open environment that was welcome to new ideas, and helped students feel more comfortable presenting in front of their peers since they had to do so frequently. These presentations also greatly benefited my international students who believed that this activity helped them with their language skills and confidence.

Although the students enjoyed this assignment, they did give some a few suggestions to help improve the assignment and I plan to utilize these in the future. Most of the students believed that they could have greatly benefited from blog writing and design workshops. In the future I plan to invite professional bloggers to guest lecture in the course, to create blogging workshops during the first few weeks of the semester. These workshops would educate students on how to create better formats, enhance visual designs, and also learn how to monetize blogs.

Students also suggested that the assignment become more interactive, so that groups are required to read and comment directly on the other groups' blogs. The students were also

interested in having their blogs somehow connected to the university's blog, Facebook, or homepage so their ideas could be shared with other students on campus. I plan to look into incorporating both of these interactive opportunities in future courses.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the possibilities associated with utilizing blogs to enhance learning in marketing courses. Overall, the students and I believe that this was a very successful assignment to promote subject learning and technology skills. And as expressed by one of the students, this was “a creative way of expressing what you've learned, sharing your thoughts, working in a team, and getting feedback from peers.” This blogging assignment promoted four essential elements of learning: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Furthermore, after both professor and student evaluation, the objectives for this project were all met:

Objective 1: Promote active learning with the use of blogging platforms

Objective 2: Allow students to communicate their understanding of textbook concepts learned in class, and be able to apply these to real world scenarios.

Objective 3: Improve social media skills

This project was assigned in a fashion marketing course, but I believe that it would be just as successful in any other marketing or business course. A possible adaptation would be to administer the project as an individual assignment, but this would then eliminate students enhancing their collaboration and group communication skills. While the presentation element worked particularly well in my course, I did have a small class of 16 students and perhaps this piece could be eliminated in larger courses depending on time constraints.

Although there was a learning curve for maintaining a blog, I have identified strategies to increase students understanding and skill level such as inviting bloggers and social media experts to teach workshops in class, and linking blogs to the university website. I plan to implement this assignment again in my next course using the recommendations of students, and will conduct a follow-up study to further improve this teaching methodology.

References available upon request