

TEACHING ELECTRONIC WORD-OF-MOUTH THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE PLAY

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Social media could serve as an excellent platform for educational purposes. Students, who are arguably called Generation Y, have been using social media on a daily basis for communicating and connecting with others. While some university instructors may find social media a distraction to class, others have successfully used these media as a platform for class discussion and engagement. This paper illustrates how social media could be used to conduct a role play activity to teach how marketing communication practitioners manage electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In the first section, a brief review of electronic word of mouth is provided followed by the discussion on the activity. Students' comments and participation in this activity on Facebook will be used as data to exemplify the value of social media role play in marketing classes. Ultimately, the paper aims to highlight that social media could be used as a platform that allows students to 1) construct and apply marketing communication strategies; 2) critique strategies in a safe environment; and 3) engage and create a lively and interactive atmosphere in cooperative learning online.

Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM)

Electronic word of mouth or eWOM is any positive or negative remarks made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multiple of people and institutions via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). As these comments could be either positive or negative, they have the potential to either benefit or harm the organizations. In the case of negative eWOM, marketing communication practitioners need to handle it with care and this paper suggests the following strategies:

1. *Respond as quickly as possible*: ignoring a negative comment is not going to make it go away. On the contrary, the longer you take to answer, the more negative comments will appear on the matter until the situation is harder to handle. Particularly on social media, in that case it is necessary to respond within the first 24 hours.
2. *Stay positive*: Be polite, respectful and listen to what your customers are saying, even if you think they are wrong. Stay calm; you should never sound angry or defensive. "Even if you do get negative feedback, you can turn it into a positive by engaging in a constructive way and showing that you're a genuine business," said Shama Kabani, author of *The Zen of Social Media Marketing* and CEO of The Marketing Zen Group.
3. *Reframe the issue*; while apologizing is an important aspect of dealing with negative reviews, correcting your consumers can also be done if their information is incorrect. Again, this must be done quickly before incorrect assumptions spread on the Internet. Furthermore, this is the company's opportunity to turn things around, and highlight the positive aspects of the company instead.
4. *Offer compensation* (moral or economic): depending on the type of negative experience your customer had, you will have to make your consumers understand that you take their opinion seriously and tell them what you are going to do about it.
5. *Keep in touch*: give consumers a way to maintain interaction with you and invite further feedback. What Internet is doing to consumer-business relations is that it is turning their interactions into a two-day dialogue; therefore, companies must make sure they keep up with this expectation. There are many unanswered negative reviews out there, because not enough companies use monitoring tools. Companies must not forget that they are being watched online; therefore, whatever they do might help them gain or lose customers.

eWOM Role Play on Facebook

This role play activity will equip marketing communications students with the skills in dealing with online profiling of an organization. It provides insight for organizations on the importance of eWOM and especially the importance of handling negative feedback. Students will learn up-to-date information about the importance of eWOM, the effects of eWOM, the seriousness of negative feedback, and how to handle this. After the informational part, students will get a current case study. After reviewing this, they will have to put their theoretical knowledge to practice and work in teams to generate advice for the organization discussed in the case online in a closed Facebook group. The class finally concludes by comparing the participants' advice with what actually happened and what they could have done better.

The author has run this role-play activity in his class and found it effective instructional strategies for students. Students' comments and participation on Facebook were collected and coded to exemplify the value of social media role play in marketing communications classes. Ultimately, the paper aims to highlight that social media could be used as a platform that allows students to 1) construct and apply marketing communication strategies; 2) critique strategies in a safe environment; and 3) engage and create a lively and interactive atmosphere in cooperative learning online.

References

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