

USE OF MARKETING EXERCISES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' PERSONAL BRANDING

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Abstract

Developing a personal brand is becoming increasingly important for students and, as a result, Personal Branding courses are gradually appearing in marketing curricula. Given the prominence of social media nowadays, personal branding has a strong digital component. In addition to helping students represent themselves (their personal brand) well in person and on paper, they must also do so online.

In fact, practitioner advice regarding building a personal brand consistently includes advice about a focus on the online component: **Audit your online presence (Hyder 2014)**, build your online presence (Smale 2015), and flesh out your social media profiles (Demers 2014).

Motivated by the desire to help students improve their digital personal branding, I began using graded application exercises in my Consumer Behavior course. The exercises intend to have the students also master course material by applying them in a practical context that can be personally meaningful and beneficial to the students. As is usually the case, the fact there is a grade associated with the exercise also works as a motivating factor.

A substantial part of my Consumer Behavior course addresses the psychology of influence and persuasion, based largely on the work of Robert Cialdini (Goldstein, Martin, and Cialdini 2008). After discussing each topic, I have the students think of how they can apply what learned in a way that improves their personal brand. Then they have 24 hours to actually implement it, and, if they do successfully, they get credit for the exercise.

For example, one of the topics is the influence principle of liking through similarity. This is often used in personal sales where the salesperson tries to establish a connection with the prospect by identifying similarities between them. Students applied the concept by searching on LinkedIn for alumni of our university in positions relevant to the students' career interests and goals. Then, they invited them to connect through customized invitations that highlighted similarities that were inferred by the person's profile (same alma mater, same student organizations while in college, etc.).

Almost every student's request was accepted, even though they were sent to complete strangers (some of whom in high leadership positions). A few even wrote personal messages back to the students thanking them for the personalized message and facilitating the opportunity for further interaction. One actually wrote that she normally deletes connection requests from people she does not know but reading in the invitation about the common alma mater made her not delete that one and accept it.

In summary, the exercises provide a simple way of applying course concepts in a practical context and they do so in a way that is helpful to the students as they build their personal brand and improve their professional image. It allows synergy between a Consumer Behavior course and the basics of Personal Branding. Instructors of other marketing courses may also think of similar exercises applicable to the course content that can also help in the context of personal branding.

References Available upon Request