

TRANSFORMING SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE INTO PERSON BRANDING

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a learning module serving the need to incorporate social media marketing into the curriculum as well as to prepare students for the rapidly growing employment practice of using social media to screen job applicants and recruit candidates. Reading materials and instructions on creating an integrated mobile-friendly personal profile on key social media platforms have been tested in marketing classes. Assessment results are examined. The module is easy for adoption, the learning process engaging, the outcome measurable, and the deliverables practical.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing educators suggest using experiential learning to enhance social media competency of students [2] [5] [10] [12]. While some introductory marketing textbooks incorporate a chapter in Social Media Marketing [4], industry practices in social media are making sweeping changes in all aspects of marketing, from promotions to customer services, from product development to distribution, from consumer behavior to sales management, from branding to strategy, from analytics to metrics, and from marketing research to customer community management. Therefore, marketing educators also proposed courses in social media marketing [8]. A few textbooks offer resources that support an entire course on social media [1] [15]. However, not all marketing majors will take a class in social media marketing or digital marketing even if these classes are offered. Therefore, creating an engaging learning experience with social media in the introductory marketing class would encourage students to continue studying marketing as well as to further pursue the subject of social media marketing on their own and perhaps even in their careers.

To what extent does faculty incorporate social media in teaching? According to a national random sample of educators in higher education (3875 respondents), Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane [9] found that the use of social media in teaching is still in its infancy: 21.6% of faculty use Blogs and Wikis (involving students to post, create, comment, or view), 14% use Podcasts (involving students to post, create, comment, or listen), 7.6% use Facebook, 4.4% use LinkedIn, 2.7% use Twitter. About 25% of faculty gave students video creation assignments.

In contrast to the above pedagogical use of social media, a Pew Research Center reported that among the older teen internet users, 89% use a social media networking site and 73% of them visit these sites daily. A strong 94% of all teen social media users maintain a Facebook profile [6]. This social media landscape reveals a potential mismatch between the social media habits of college students and the pedagogical use of social media by faculty. Put optimistically, the social media experiences and technology skills of the digital generation are the untapped potential and strength of students that marketing educators can leverage in the classroom to accomplish advanced learning in social media marketing.

Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane [9] also identified the key barriers to faculty use of social media, including: grading and assessment issues (54% of faculty respondents), inability to measure effectiveness (49%), lack of integration with learning management systems (LMS) (44%), and the extra time required to learn and/or use (37%). Concerns about privacy (64%) and the lack of academic integrity (71%) are also reasons for not using social media for teaching. Indeed, faculty has valid concerns about social media based pedagogy. On the other hand, recent developments in recruiting practice create opportunities for marketing educators to engage students in personal branding on social media that might circumvent the above barriers or issues.

Recently, social recruiting has become widely practiced as this method allows employers to reach a larger quantity of better quality candidates, to more easily receive employee referrals, and to save time during the hiring process [3]. Based on a sample size of 1600 recruiting and human resources professionals across industries, 94% of recruiters use or plan to use social media in recruiting, and as many as 78% of recruiters have successfully hired a candidate who was identified or introduced through social media or a social network. Human resources and recruiting professionals increasingly use social media to fill positions: 92% have made a hire through LinkedIn, 24% through Facebook, and 14% through Twitter. While reviewing candidates or screening job applicants, 93% of the recruiters are likely to look at candidates' social profiles. Recruiters use LinkedIn profiles to gauge a candidate's professional experience, tenure, and specific hard skills. They use other networks such as Facebook and Twitter to study the cultural fit and characters of candidates [3]. How might educators prepare students for this new social media based recruiting practice?

This paper reports the implementation of a social media learning module with the theme of developing and promoting the professional profiles of students [7]. Exhibit 1 describes the learning objectives of the module which entails seven assignments on various social media platforms:

1. Creating a Facebook Ad seeking an internship opportunity
2. Conducting a Google Hangout with Team
3. Creating a LinkedIn Profile with Recommendations
4. Conducting Research of a Brand on Twitter
5. Creating a YouTube Video Promoting Self
6. Creating a Public Profile web page and QR Codes
7. Creating a LinkedIn Ad seeking employment

Statistical analyses of learning assessments are reported and discussed.

IMPLEMENTATION

In a large public university, this individual project of Personal Branding on Social Media (Exhibit 1) was assigned to and completed by 103 students in four sections of a core marketing class in a semester. This learning module on Social Media Marketing takes only one week, (about 2 ½ hours) out of a 15-week class. After a brief introduction into the topic, the lecture(s) focus on going over highlights of reading materials related to various social media platforms, as well as instructions on completing assignments. Students were given about eight weeks to complete the project, about one assignment due per week. The project accounted for only 10% of the class grade. Upon completion, students gave feedback via an online survey, the results of which are presented and discussed in the following section.

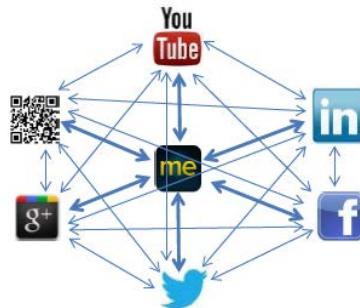
Exhibit 1. Personal Branding on Social Media

Learning Objectives

1. Learn the production aspect of social media;
2. Gain insights into marketing trends that are driven by development in media technology;
3. Acquire practical knowledge of using key social media platforms;
4. Produce a media-wise professional profile for employment; and
5. Build a knowledge base for further learning modules on social media performance measures and analytics.

Learning Outcomes: Students will possess...

1. Working accounts on key social media platforms
2. Basic knowledge and skills in content creation on key social media platforms
3. Basic knowledge of marketing and advertising on key social media platforms
4. Integrated professional profiles accessible via key social media platforms



Creating An Integrated Profile on Key Social Media Platforms

ASSESSMENT AND RESULTS

The students, 103 in four sections of an undergraduate marketing class, were 59% male and 41% female, 61% aged 22-25, 19% under 22, 19% aged above 26. They belonged to diverse ethnic backgrounds: 41% Caucasian, 31% Asian, and 18% Hispanic. About 36% of them were the first generation in their family to attend college. Hispanics were disproportionately represented in the group of first generation college students; about 97% more than in other ethnicities or about twice as many ($\chi^2 > 16$, $p < 0.001$). About 97% of students were taking a full course load. About 51% were working part-time, and 23% were working full-time.

Respondents indicated their opinions on each assignment for its contributions to career, knowledge, enjoyment and course satisfaction, on a 7-point scale, with 7 indicating that they Strongly Agreed and 1 indicating that they Strongly Disagreed. Table 1 shows mean ratings of their responses, all of which are above the neutral 4.0. Independent Sample T tests show that all ratings are statistically significant in exceeding 4.0 ($p < 0.05$). Among all assignments, students strongly agreed that the LinkedIn assignment is the most useful for their careers, and that it contributes the most to their understanding of marketing activities, their enjoyment and their course satisfaction.

Table 1. Assignment Mean Ratings¹ on Value, Knowledge, Enjoyment, and Satisfaction

Assignments	I believe this assignment would be most useful for my career.	This assignment enhances my understanding of marketing activities in:	I enjoy the learning experience of this assignment.	This assignment increases my overall satisfaction with the course.
A Facebook Ad	5.7	6.2 C W	5.9	5.8
Google Hangout with Team	5.1 R	5.1	5.6	5.5 C
A LinkedIn Profile with Recommendations	6.7	6.3	6.2	6.2
Twitter Research of Brand	5.7 G	6.1 W	5.9	5.7
A YouTube Video Promoting Myself	5.3	5.6 W	5.2 C G R	5.2 R
A Mobile Profile and QR codes	5.9 R	6.2 W	5.9 R	5.9 W
A LinkedIn Ad	5.9	6.3	5.9	6.0

¹All ratings are statistically significant in exceeding the neutral rating of 4.0, p<0.05.

C—responses differ between FG college students and non FG;

G—responses differ between genders;

R—responses differ among race;

W—responses differ among part-time work, full-time work and no-work groups

Membership on Social Media Platforms and Experience Gained

Before the assignments, most students had already opened personal accounts on key platforms. Upon completion of the project, there were increases of membership in Google (7% increase), Yahoo (no increase), Facebook (no increase), LinkedIn (83% increase), YouTube (19%), Twitter (36%), Blogger (100%), Pinterest (85%), Instagram (229%), and Tumblr (18% decrease.) The project contributes to membership increases on LinkedIn, Twitter, and, to a certain extent, YouTube. However, membership on social media platforms does not show how engaged the students are in using these tools for marketing related activities.

Table 2 shows the extent to which the assignments increase the percentage of students who become experienced in creating personal web pages (95% gain), Facebook ads (96%), and QR codes (95%). Significantly more students gained experience in conducting Google hangouts (88% gain), completing a LinkedIn profile (68%) and Ad (93%). There were 79% more students who considered themselves to “have some experience in social media marketing.” About 20% of the students considered they had prior experience in social media marketing as their internships or work required them to post for employers on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Foursquare, etc... Only 1% of students have launched campaigns on key platforms for their own businesses.

Table 2. Survey of Student Experience Before and After the Learning Module

Student Experience	Pre-assignment	Post-assignment	% Gain
1. Have a personal web page	5%	100%	95%
2. Have created Facebook Ads	4%	100%	96%
3. Have created QR codes	5%	100%	95%
4. Have conducted Google hangouts	12%	100%	88%
5. Have a completed LinkedIn Profile	32%	100%	68%
6. Have created LinkedIn Ads	0%	93% ¹	93%
7. Have some experience in social media marketing	21%	100%	79%

¹About 7% of students did not complete the assignment.

PROJECT ADAPTATIONS FOR MARKETING CLASSES

Social media marketing, as a topic and practice, is transforming what we teach in traditional marketing classes such as Consumer Behavior, Marketing Research, Advertising and Promotion, Retailing and Distributions, Services Marketing, Professional Selling, Sales Management, and Marketing Strategies. The learning module described in this article may be a good start, at the introductory level, to engage students in studying marketing, inspire them to take advance classes or motivate them to pursue the subject on their own. Assignment details usually need adjustments or modifications, from semester to semester, to reflect new changes in the technology platforms. An idea of creating a meaningful learning experience with visual content sites like Pinterest and Instagram is to create a class site for student teams to post Infographics they created on marketing principles, concepts, or tip sheets [13].

Beyond the introductory class or a social media marketing class, the module may serve as a good starting point to fashion assignments adaptive to different course focuses. Depending on the course objectives, instructors may modify, add or drop assignment components. For example, for a topic on audience/channel segmentation, instructors may add a component of creating a Twitter “Promoted Account” for Brand Page advertising, so as to compare and contrast the target audience, ad format and strategy among social channels of Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

Other adaptations of assignments include social media branding for businesses. Indeed, the skills in creating and promoting a social media profile for an individual are transferrable to those of products and businesses. Therefore, instead of an individual project, student teams can offer business clients a learning service to create a social media or networking profile and hand over its management at the end of class. Many small and medium businesses in the community would welcome the free service and support the learning experience of college students. In short, adaptations should be considered to better serve the learning objective of gaining hands-on experience in branding, content creation and advertising.

CONCLUSION

The concept of using social media marketing assignments to create a professional social media profile appeals to students. They become motivated to study the reading materials and find the work of branding and advertising themselves intuitive. Through completing the assignments, students gain

practical experience and feel satisfied with the deliverables. Survey and statistical results in this study confirm the value of the exercises and benefits to students.

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