"Liking" Social Media into Marketing Courses

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to highlight how instructors may integrate the different social media into various marketing classes. The paper will address the major social networks, and then follow with discussions of microblogging, media sites, virtual communities, social news, and social gaming. Given that there is a great deal of research highlighting the effectiveness of utilizing social media in academic classes, this paper focuses on providing practical guidance as to how social media could be integrated into the classroom and project experience.
Key Words: Social media, marketing curriculum, experiential learning.

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INTRODUCTION

As students are becoming more and more involved with the social media as a personal communications channel, it opens up the possibilities of integrating many of the social media platforms into the classroom and project experience. The goal of this paper is to discuss the various social media and highlight how instructors may integrate the different social media into various marketing classes. While it seems logical to use many of the social media in online classes, this paper will focus on the use of social media as a supplement to the traditional classroom experience. This paper will begin by addressing the major social networks, and then follow with discussions of microblogging, media sites, virtual communities, social news, and social gaming. Integrated with the discussion will be examples of how specific social media may be used in the traditional classroom and as a basis for experiential learning through project assignments.

SOCIAL NETWORKS

The discussion will begin with the most popular of the social media: Facebook and MySpace. While MySpace's popularity has declined in the last couple of years, it is a platform used by many students and by creative artists. In fact, many students who had left MySpace may have been reminded of the network when it was announced that Justin Timberlake had acquired an ownership stake in the company last year (Ehrlich, 2011). As of the end of 2008, Facebook had achieved the number one slot over MySpace in the number of users (Schonfeld, 2008). At the end of 2009, Facebook averaged over 400 million active users, although only around 116 million were located in the United States (Saleem, 2010). By the end of 2011, Facebook was reporting a user base of over 800 million people with eighty percent of its users being outside the US (Facebook Statistics, 2012). The most obvious method for integrating Facebook (and MySpace) into the classroom is to utilize examples of marketers who are using those sites to promote their goods. For example, Citibank currently is allowing Facebook fans to share rewards points when fans visit the "Thank You Point Sharing" tab, download the app, and then connect it to their Citibank Rewards account. Users can promote rewards pool for personal, business or non-profit use and Citibank is giving away 2500 Rewards Points to the first four thousand users who sign up for the promotion (Citibank, 2011). This is an excellent business example for a Principles of Marketing class or an Advertising class that highlights the advantages and disadvantages of social media for brand awareness, generating consumer interaction with Citibank, and the growing popularity of virtual or online currencies.

Another method to pull the social media into the classroom is for professors to create Facebook pages for their classes which can help students keep track of class activities and current events. This method can be used for regular classroom situations, hybrid classes and online classes as well. While it is not complex, it is not quite the same as creating a personal page since one must go through the link to create a page for educational use and follow the instructions given. However, before doing so, the instructor should check with their university as to whether it has any guidelines or rules for creating and maintaining a Facebook page for educational purposes, especially with the use of any school or college logo as the picture on the Facebook page. This adds another channel of communication between the professor and student,

which means that the professor will need to spend the time and effort to not only maintain the page, but to answer messages or questions posted by students and possibly delete any inappropriate comments.

There are some ethical issues that professors should think through before setting up a Facebook page for their class. First, the instructor must decide whether to require the class to "like" the Facebook page or whether it is optional for the student to subscribe to the page. The division between personal and professional realms will be blurred by the students and the professor (as the administrator of the page) will learn a great deal of detail about the students' personal lives and, possibly, about their attitude toward school and work. Many students like having a Facebook page for a class since it keeps them updated on class topics (and they are on Facebook anyway, most students rank visiting the social networks as one of the top five internet activities they do each day (Pew, 2007)), but few use Facebook programming to hide specific posts or photos from certain individuals or, specifically, from the professor of the class they are taking. For example, what happens when a student posts about how much they partied at the frat house on Sunday and how hung-over they are and then calls or emails the professor on Monday to say they are have a stomach virus? Situations such as this may raise more questions than answers as to whether the benefits of a class Facebook page outweigh the time and effort spent to maintain the page (Stripling, 2010). It does however provide an opening to discuss with any marketing class the privacy settings on Facebook (along with the other social media) and how one's online presence in general may impact one's professional world. Given that in a current study, nearly seventy percent of human resource professionals had rejected a job candidate due to postings on a social networking site, this offers an excellent opportunity to have an interactive discussion with the class about online screening of job applicants (Reppler, 2011) and what should be made public or private on Facebook.

No discussion of social networks is complete without a look at LinkedIn, the business social networking site. Most students have not heard of it, but it would be useful for them to be aware of its existence and benefits as part of career networking. LinkedIn users tend to be older and more affluent that the national average and most have a college education. Of the approximately 24 million unique visitors to the site around a third of them have graduate degrees (Arronson & Male, 2010). An assignment to have a student setup a LinkedIn account would be an excellent career tool since nearly half of human resource professionals look up applicants' LinkedIn accounts (Reppler, 2011) and it is expected of a job applicant in the social media world to have a current and complete LinkedIn account. Examples of marketing related groups on LinkedIn include the American Marketing Association Group with over 6,000 members who have discussions on online promotions, job and internship openings, marketing metrics and other relevant topics; however one must be a member of AMA to join the LinkedIn group. More specific marketing related groups include the eMarketing Association (over 380,000 members), Mobile Marketing and Advertising (over 43,000 members), Advertising Professionals (over 33,000 members), Supply Chain Today (with over 45,000 members), and Macy's Alumni Group (with over 3,000 past and present employees) (LinkedIn, 2012). The alumni organizations and career services of many colleges tend to have a presence on LinkedIn as well.

The newest entrant online the social networking scene is Google+ (Plus), launched in 2011 and features different "circles" and the user selects what content each circle sees or does not see (Kaste, 2011). The numbers are rather sketchy due to Google's forced sign-up process, but it is reported that ninety million users have signed-up to the new social media site (Bodkin, 2012). Along with the international social networking sites such as Orkut and.Faceparty, there

are many niche social networks in operation: CafeMom (sponsored by General Mills and Johnson & Johnson), GoFISHn (fishing caches), and myTransponder (aviation site for pilots to interact and job hunt) to name a diverse few (Lindblad, 2010). For an overview of the various social media highlighted in the paper, refer to Table 1 at the end of the paper.

MICROBLOGGING

Are you twittering? Have you ever posted a tweet? Twitter.com answers the question: what are you doing right now? One then has 140 characters to post (or tweet) the answer to that question. In January 2010, 75 million people visited the twitter site, with 23.5 million of them being U.S. visitors, which amounts to around 50 million tweets posted a day (Wilhelm, 2010). Over a year later, the 50 million tweets a day have grown to over 140 million tweets a day (Twitter Blog, 2012). Coming into the forefront in 2008 was microblogging which is capability to update a blog with short text messages using a computer, a cell or smart phone, or a PDA (Technology Terms, 2009). Many of the large marketers have a twitter presence: Coca-Cola (@CocaCola with 460,000 followers), Starbucks (@Starbucks with 2 million followers, Dell Outlet (@DellOutlet with 1.5 million followers), Ebay (@Ebay with 82,000 followers), and Kraft Foods (@KraftFoods with 29,000 followers) to name a few. Amazon has two twitter accounts; one it uses for general purpose information (@Amazon with 202,000 followers) and one for information on sales, promotions and discounts (@Amazondeals with 290,000 followers) (Twitter Searches, 2012). Marketers also use twitter to post about new products, new videos posted on YouTube (it allows a short url address to be in the "tweet"), coupons codes or links for purchasing at their e-commerce sites, charity functions they are involved with, recipes using their products, and many others. Companies have to be prepared to monitor and respond to tweets since many customers use it to complain about anything from lousy customer service to defective products and out of stock items.

Twitter can be accessed without having to sign up for an account which makes it easier to demonstrate a firm's twitter page in class as opposed to having to either open an online account or to install software. A professor could also set-up a twitter page for any marketing class to send announcements and reminders, much as can be done with a Facebook page as well. Since most of the mobile apps for twitter are free, students are able to know what is going on with the class without having to pay money for the product (although depending on their service plan, they may have to pay for each text message received on their phones). Some universities have added twitter to their emergency communication strategy to relay information about school closings and weather updates.

Tumblr has come onto the social media scene as one of the fastest growing microblogging sites, moving from a $3 million dollar valuation in 2007 to an $800 million valuation in 2011. It is different from Twitter in that nearly half of the posts on Tumblr are photographs. Nearly forty percent of all of Tumblr's post come from around two percent of its users (Tumblr Numbrs, 2011). A class Tumblr account would be well-suited to an advertising and promotion class for posting advertisements or to retail class to post pictures of displays and fashion items. Like with the other microblogging sites, Tumblr will also expose students to the use of "tags" or "hashtags". A good example to use in class would be the hashtag of #BlackFriday to highlight special sales for price conscious consumers. While Twitter and Tumblr are the two largest and most well-known of the microblogging sites, friendfeed and microblogr have all been gaining in popularity for the last couple of years as well.

MEDIA SITES

The major media site would be YouTube, which in April 2010 had more Google Searches than MySpace, although not quite as many as Facebook (Marshall, 2010), illustrating the rising popularity of both YouTube and Facebook and the declining popularity of MySpace. Many large retailers have their own Channel on YouTube using it to promote their products, show advertisements, and drive traffic to both their brick and mortar and their online stores. Blendtec blenders took a relatively unknown brand name and used YouTube videos to attract the consumer market for what was until that time a product used mostly in commercial kitchens (Bernoff, 2007). It succeeded wildly and not only does Blendtec still have their YouTube videos up (one of the latest is placing an iPad into the blender), but has launched their own domain name: willitblend.com. While flickr does not have the same kind of volume of users as YouTube, it is still very popular with consumers for posting photographs. Many fashion companies have their own flickr albums to show off the styles for the latest season. Students can also use flickr to search for pictures that show store logos, layouts, merchandising, and promotions for various retailers internationally without ever leaving the city they live in. Seeing what consumers are using to "tag" both YouTube videos and flickr photographs can help aid marketers in choosing what search terms to purchase for sponsored listings on Google and other search engines.

VIRTUAL WORLDS

While Second Life is the most well-known of the virtual worlds or communities, it is not the largest virtual world. That title goes to Webkinz, the stuffed animal with a numeric key that allows one into its Webkinz virtual world, where the online avatar of the stuffed animal can play games, go to school, get hungry, buy furniture for a room, earn money from a job, and even take a vacation trip. Webkinz has been a gold mine for small specialty gift retailers in the last few years, although Ganz (who is the manufacturer of Webkinz and is privately held) has declined to discuss sales figures; however estimates are in the $100 million dollar range per year (Ogles, 2007). Second Life is the virtual world with the most brand recognition and an estimate of $350 millions dollars in sales of virtual goods in 2009 (Linden, 2009). Ford Motor Company, Coca-Cola, Sears and Circuit City all have some form of a virtual presence and/or storefront in Second Life. Of all the online worlds to demonstrate in class, Webkinz would be the simplest since all it requires is a computer with a high speed Internet connection and a twenty dollar Webkinz stuffed animal. Second Life has a major learning curve, which involves installing software on the classroom computer, setting up an avatar to use in the world, and learning how to navigate in Second Life, although there are many videos on the Second Life website and on YouTube that can be viewed without installing any software.

SOCIAL NEWS

Social news sites (or in the past social bookmarking sites) have become more popular in the last few years. Social news sites allow users to rate news stories and the most popular news stories are shown on the homepage of the site. While browsing the web, a user may commonly see the blue or yellow digg logo next to a story with the option to "like" it. If a registered digg user "likes" a story, then it becomes one of the votes which may or may not push the story into popular status. The Firefox add-on called StumbleUpon works much the same way. A web user

registers with Stumble-Upon (which is owned by Google), the site notes the websites the user has already seen, then steers the users to websites the user has not seen that align with their tastes. The user then rates whether they like or dislike the site they are on and their vote is tallied in with other users. digg would be fairly easy to demonstrate in class since the professor would only need to go to the homepage (digg.com), while Stumble Upon would need to be installed on the computer. Companies monitor both sites for highly rated news stories that featured their firm, product or brands. As compared to 2008, digg saw traffic statistics rise 91% and Stumble-Upon experienced a much higher increase of 180% for 2009 (Nielsen, 2009). Newer start-ups Pinterest and Pinboard are also attracting marketers and consumers to post and rate content.

SOCIAL GAMES

While many people are logging into the social media to update their status, post pictures or upload videos, over sixty-eight million American consumers are expected to play one of more social games this year (Schreier, 2012). The top three Facebook games by usage in 2011 were: Gardens of Time, Sims Social, and Cityville (Facebook Platform 2012). Over 65 million people each day play one of the popular online games by Zynga: Mafia Wars, Farmville, Café World or Zynga Poker (Gross, 2010). Since there is a good chance that most of the students have played or knows someone who plays one of the popular social games, this is an excellent topic to bring up to discuss online consumer behavior and how marketers can use games to pull in traffic, highlight brand benefits, and entertain consumers. Scvngr, a location based game played on mobile devices, teamed up with Coca-Cola and Gamestop in 2011 for a "Happiness in Numbers" challenge game. Players could earn rewards from both companies and could post their activities to Facebook or Twitter accounts (Kats, 2011).

CONCLUSION

Forrester Research (2009) reported that consumers used the social media to make over 500 billion impressions about products and companies last year with over 95% of those impressions coming through Facebook, MySpace, Twitter or LinkedIn. As businesses become more entrenched in the social media, educators and students will need to keep up to date on the different platforms that people will use to publish, communicate and share content online now and in the future. It is important to note that the use of technology should not be for technology's sake, but for bringing added value into the marketing curriculum and classroom (Chao, Parker, & Fontana, 2011). Furthermore, as students become more and more accustomed to the social and digital media in their personal lives, they will expect to have social media be a part of their academic (and later professional) lives.

TABLE 1: SOCIAL MEDIA EXAMPLES

Type of Social Media	Explanation	Examples
Social Networking	Share and communicate personal and business information	Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Google+, Orkut, Faceparty
Microblogging	Blogging that is text based (around 140 characters or less)	Twitter, friendfeed, tumblr, microblogr
Media Sites	Sharing various types of media, especially videos and photographs	YouTube, flickr
Virtual Worlds	Online virtual worlds which can mimic real life or be a fantasy world.	Second Life, WebKinz
Social News	Rating of news stories as either "like" or 'dislike"	StumbleUpon, digg, Pinterest, Pinboard
Social Games	Games integrated into the different social media	Farmville, Mafia Wars, Scvngr

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