

BUILDING MOBILE APPLICATIONS AND EMPATHY: HOW TO UTILIZE DESIGN THINKING IN MARKETING EDUCATION

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Extended Abstract

This paper presents an innovative teaching methodology for building and improving digital marketing and critical thinking skills. The course assignment outlined demonstrates how marketing students can utilize the design-thinking process to create a mobile application. The objective of this paper is to give insight on how to implement this process in a marketing course, and further develop guidelines to create an enriched experience for students. This paper empirically evaluates the students' experience, and validates a project that can add value to the contemporary marketing curriculum. Findings show how design thinking enables students to further understand the course material, while building empathy, and improving communication and technology skills.

As marketing educators, we are given the difficult task to train our students for their future careers without really knowing exactly what those future careers will look like, what technology will be used, or what problems future customers and companies will have. In order to better prepare our students for a future with so many unknowns, it is essential that we teach critical thinking processes that will always be important, no matter what the future brings. At the same time we must also educate our students on technologies that are currently available so students are better equipped to enter the modern marketplace.

One example of a current important development is mobile technology, which has potential for many opportunities in the classroom. Due to the widespread use of mobile marketing, I employed the design-thinking method in order to create a mobile application in my Consumer Behavior course. Prior research has promoted the integration of social networking media in the marketing curriculum (Cronin 2011; Granitz & Koernig 2010). Some of these methods include using Twitter (Lowe & Laffey 2011), website platforms (Hollenbeck, Mason, & Song 2011), and blogging (Schiele 2013; Demirbag, Kaplan, Piskin, & Bol 2010). This research shows how marketing educators are utilizing strategic technology tools to create an innovative learning environment in the classroom and improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

In Consumer Behavior course of fall 2014, students used the design-thinking process to create a mobile application for new students at Woodbury University. The project empowered the class to think creatively in order to solve the problems of others. In the assignment, the design thinking method from Stanford University was utilized to create a unique learning experience (dschool.stanford.edu). Using this process, the class first created an Empathy Map to discover the needs and problems a new student at Woodbury may encounter. Next they brainstormed how to solve these problems using a mobile application. Then they utilized the Wix program to design a mobile app, and tested these applications in focus groups made up of their target user. Presentations give students an opportunity to publicly demonstrate knowledge they have learned (Pascerella & Terezini 2005), so the final step of the project was for the groups to present their final products to the Chief Marketing Officer of Woodbury, and the Dean of the School of Business. These two key decision makers for the university are judging which of these mobile applications will actually be created to launch next year at the university to improve the student experience.

At the end of the semester I administered an assessment survey to the students in order to further understand their experience using design thinking and creating 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. The survey from the students had interesting results, such as most

students had heard the term “design-thinking” in other courses, but this was the first time that they used the formal process in class. Another interesting finding was that 100 percent of the students had never created a mobile application before, so learning how to design an app was one of the biggest challenges. But on the other hand, it was also the biggest reward. The students also indicated that they learned more about how to apply the needs and wants of a target consumer directly to the design of a product.

The area that the students felt were most difficult about this assignment was actually using the technology. Since we were using a free program to create the applications, the students were frustrated when the software would not allow them to create features that were advanced. This free site offered good templates for mobile applications, but were very difficult to manipulate to create the user-experience they were hoping to achieve. The students suggested several improvements to this assignment, many of which I would like to implement the next time I use this project for a course. Overall the students enjoyed the project, but thought that this would be even more beneficial if the class collaborated with a company that creates mobile apps.

The students found the most rewarding part of this assignment to be that this project was being presented to key decision makers at the university. They were driven to work harder on the project since they knew that there was a chance their product would actually be implemented on-campus. The fact that they could have a part in creating a solution to benefit others was very rewarding to them, and made them more engaged in the assignment.

This study demonstrates the possibilities associated with conducting design-thinking projects in the classroom. Faculty guided experiences create authentic forms of engagement, but it is important that the project is implemented in an intentional manner. A successful project can enhance student confidence, while promoting subject learning and technology skills. The distinct curriculum in this course created a memorable student experience, and promoted four essential elements of learning: critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. This paper demonstrates the possibilities associated with utilizing mobile application technology to enhance learning in marketing courses.

References Available upon Request