Intention versus reality: Exploring the use of Facebook for teaching and learning in three sports marketing modules

The infiltration of social media into our everyday lives has transformed the way in which people communicate, do business and is even beginning to change the way in which higher education institutions teach their students. The new generation of students are 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001), having grown up with an array of new technologies and as such they expect the use of multiple information media (Aragon, 2007). Of the hundreds of social networking sites available online, Facebook is the most well-known and most widely used, with over 500 million active users worldwide (Facebook, 2011). Previous studies also suggest the pervasiveness of Facebook use among student populations, with Connell (2009) reporting that 92% of respondents in a sample of US college students use Facebook. Similarly, Facebook was found to be the most popular social networking site used by students in studies by Smith and Caruso (2010) and Hoyer *et al* (2010). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore the views of students at a UK university, regarding the use of Facebook for teaching and learning purposes. This paper will also present early reflections on the use of Facebook as a tool for teaching and learning in marketing. Within the study, Facebook pages have been created for three modules in sports marketing (two at undergraduate level and one at postgraduate level). In light of the work-in-progress nature of this study, further research is planned to explore the views of students on using Facebook within the sports marketing modules and whether/how they would like to see Facebook used for university modules in the future. As such, the overall aim of this multi-stage project is to build our understanding of ways in which social networking sites can enhance our teaching in the field of marketing.

The use of technology in the teaching of marketing is not a new phenomenon and many higher education institutions use learning management systems such as Blackboard and eLearn within their teaching and learning activities. One criticism of such learning management systems is that they tend to encourage an instructivist approach to teaching (Salavuo, 2008), while social networking sites allow for greater interaction, both student-teacher and student-student. Social networking sites such as Facebook allow students to interact with each other and with module materials outside of the classroom and can therefore create a greater number of learning opportunities (Boostrom *et al*, 2009). In a study of Turkish university students, Baran (2010) found that 84% of respondents felt that Facebook could be used for information sharing relating to their studies, a view echoed by Boostrom *et al* (2009), who identified that information sharing and interactivity characterised positive student experiences with social networking sites for educational purposes. However, despite some support for the use of Facebook, students in Baran's (2010) study were undecided overall as to whether Facebook was of high value to teaching.

Over 60% of student in Baran's (2010) study felt that communicating with classmates via a module Facebook group helped to motivate them in their learning. However, in contrast to this, a recent study from Ohio State University suggests that students who use Facebook spend less time studying and have a lower grade point average than do those students without an account (Grabmeier, 2011). There is also some concern reported among academics who feel that the way in which so called Generation Y students use social networking sites will not easily translate into an educational context (Bull *et al*, 2008). An additional concern over the use of Facebook for teaching and learning purposes is that Facebook is often seen by students as a private space (Connell, 2009) for their social activities, which is not to be invaded by lecturers. The problem of mixing personal and educational was overcome by Boostrom *et al* (2009), who used a segregated social networking site (Ning.com) for their modules, therefore

benefitting from the interactive features of social networking sites without the potential barriers of student reluctance to merge personal and professional identities.

If social networking sites are to be successfully used in teaching and learning within marketing, a key requirement is to get students to "buy in" to the process and to encourage student ownership of pages (Hoyer *et al*, 2010) so that there is an added value over and above traditional teaching materials. The keys to effective learning in social networking environments have been identified by Salavuo (2008) as participation, presence and ownership. It is therefore apposite to consider, as the present study does, the views of students regarding the use of social networking sites for university work, so as to maximise the probability of students valuing, participating in and taking ownership of module/course social networking sites or pages/groups.

This study explores the views of students regarding the use of social networking sites and the use of Facebook pages set up for a series of modules in sports marketing. In order to examine these issues, a multi-stage mixed methodology is employed. The first phase of the research involved an online survey of students at a large UK university, regarding their current use of social media and their views on using social networking sites for study purposes. In total, 112 useable responses were received. Of course, there are limitations to using online surveys, particularly in terms of failing to reach those students who do not engage or feel comfortable with technology. Equally, those students with a strong interest in the topic will be more drawn to completing the online survey than those who are less interested or ambivalent to the subject (Duda and Nobile, 2010). Particularly when exploring the potential for using social media for teaching and learning in marketing, the potential omission of views from students not making regular use of technology represents a limitation of this research. Therefore, further research using more traditional survey or interview methods is advocated. The second stage of the project involved the development, updating and monitoring of Facebook pages for three sports marketing modules. Finally, the third phase of research involves a series of focus groups with students of sports marketing to explore their experiences of using Facebook in conjunction with their modules and their thoughts on the future use of such technology for teaching and learning. While stage one represents the large scale collection of quantitative data, focus groups were selected in order to explore in detail the views of students in their own voice – that of the digital native.

Of the 112 respondents to the online survey, 69% were male and 31% female, which may be indicative of the sports focus of degree courses studied by the targeted students. Three quarters (75%) of respondents were aged between 18 and 21, with 96% being full-time (both undergraduate and postgraduate) students. No claims are made about the generalisability of this sample to other student populations. Of the survey respondents, 97% of students reported using social networking sites, with Facebook being the most popular site, used by 95% of these respondents. Using chi-squared tests, no significant difference was found between male and female students in their likelihood of using social networking sites ($\chi^2 = 0.455$, p = 0.500). Student respondents reported using Facebook for a wide variety of activities including keeping up with what friends are doing (80%), posting status updates (67%), live chat (69%) and arranging events (63%).

Somewhat in contrast with the views expressed in the literature about the information sharing potential of social networking sites, only 30% of respondents reported using Facebook to post links/videos. Over half of respondents reported being interested or very interested in posting links (82%), online tutorials (76%), discussing work with others (86%), commenting on

articles (81%) and accessing links/articles related to module content (90%). A full table of results relating to students' interest in using Facebook for a range of university module purposes is shown in Appendix 1. It appears from this data that there is evidence of a willingness among respondents to use Facebook for university purposes.

In line with previous studies, some resistance to using Facebook for university purposes was noted, with 33% of respondents saying that there is something which would put them off from using Facebook in such a way. Among the most common reasons given were that Facebook is not as good as other tools for university work, that they would get easily distracted from study by being on Facebook, a reluctance to let tutors see their personal pages and that Facebook is something they use in their private life, not for study. As such, the responses in this study echo many of the concerns raised in previous literature. Consequently, it may be necessary to modify the approach to the use of social media in the teaching of marketing to reflect these concerns, whilst embracing the benefits perceived by the majority of students.

Within the second phase of the research, relevant links relating to topics discussed and presented in class were posted by the module tutor on the three Facebook pages for modules in sports marketing. The pages were set up so that students could 'like' the page without having to add the tutor as a friend. Using Facebook analytics, the use of the pages was tracked and students were found to be regularly accessing them, with many links receiving over 50 impressions (clicks). This suggests that many students were accessing the links more than once. However, while students were accessing the materials, no students commented on any of the links or posted any links themselves. This stands in contradiction to the interactive nature of social media and highlights a lack of participation in two-way communication by students. The effect achieved, with students simply accessing links, could consequently have been achieved through a regular learning management system. Therefore, the focus groups in the forthcoming phase of the study will explore the reasons for students' lack of active participation and examine if/how students would like to use Facebook on future modules.

The experience of using the Facebook pages for these modules is contradictory to the survey findings, where there was interest among students in not only accessing but also posting links and commenting on/discussing links. This highlights a weakness of surveys eliciting self-reported intention; it is easy for respondents to claim that they would be interested in doing something, but it requires considerably greater motivation to actually engage in that behaviour. Brenton (2009) suggests that the reason for the failure of many e-learning initiatives may be an insufficient purpose for the intervention in the first place or a failure to build the online element into the day-to-day teaching and assessment on the module. If Facebook is to be a valuable tool for teaching in marketing, there is a need to find out how to foster student ownership, participation and engagement with the designated module pages.

The results of this study and the forthcoming focus group analysis will have implications for marketing educators as we try to unlock the educational potential of sites such as Facebook. This study is still in progress and therefore the results presented here are preliminary. Further research is ongoing but the key conclusions thus far appear to be that there is interest from students in using Facebook for teaching and learning purposes but the reality of its use in three marketing modules indicates a passive reception of information by students, rather than an interactive, information sharing experience. The problem may be an issue of design and the way in which the pages are currently set up and managed by the tutor, therefore a much deeper investigation into student motivations to contribute to the pages is in progress.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: How interested would you be in using Facebook for the following purposes related to university modules?

	Very interested		Interested		Not really interested		Not at all interested	
	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
Updates or changes to times/venues of lectures	58	56.3%	32	31.1%	7	6.8%	6	5.8%
Accessing links/articles related to modules being studied	52	51.0%	40	39.2%	5	4.9%	5	4.9%
Discussing university work with staff and other students	44	43.1%	44	43.1%	7	6.9%	7	6.9%
Online chat/tutorials with lecturers	38	37.3%	39	38.2%	17	16.7%	8	7.8%
Downloading/viewing lecture notes	52	50.5%	36	35.0%	7	6.8%	8	7.8%
Posting links/articles related to modules being studied	44	42.7%	40	38.8%	12	11.7%	7	6.8%
Sending messages to lecturers	51	49.5%	35	34.0%	9	8.7%	8	7.8%
Sending messages to fellow students (about university work)	59	58.4%	30	29.7%	5	5.0%	7	6.9%
Discussions/commenting on links/articles related to modules being studied	39	38.2%	44	43.1%	12	11.8%	7	6.9%