

Collective Brand Lab: A Case Study of Innovative Teaching Technique in a Brand Management and Advertising Course

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In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, courses in higher education worldwide have been pivoted towards distance education that involves an online-based teaching and learning method (Hebebcı, Bertiz, & Alan, 2020). Same as face-to-face teaching method, distance education emphasizes quality information, resources, and expertise (Natarajan, 2005). Online teaching can be regarded as a promising innovation due to its flexible learning environments. Yet, with a sudden transition from face-to-face method to online method, instructors may find it difficult to enhance interactivity in the online classroom. Meanwhile, students are reported to experience a variety of difficulties related to the delivery of online learning such as disengagement and insufficient communication with the peers and the instructor (Yan et al., 2021). In order to promote interactivity, two main ways are suggested in the online teaching and learning environment, including activity learning (Chen, Bastedo, & Howard, 2018) and technology (DeCosta, Bergquist, & Holbeck, 2015). Active learning refers to an instructional method by which students are engaged in the learning process (Prince, 2004). Furthermore, integrating with technology enables faculty to create more engaging and inclusive learning environments for students and improve diversification of communication between faculty and students.

The objective of this Brand Management and Advertising class was to develop a road map of planning, building, measuring, and managing consumer-based brand equity (CBBE), namely, the differential effect that consumers' brand knowledge has on their responses to the marketing and advertising messages to a specific brand. In an effort to enhance interactivity in a Zoom classroom setting, collective brand lab activity that combines both active learning and technology approaches was developed for this course. Collective brand lab allowed each student to work with peers for activities that reflect key knowledge points from the lectures in assigned breakout rooms.

For instance, in this course, the content of branding in the digital era was emphasized through the lectures and enhanced through class activities on digital branding topics such as influencer marketing and social listening. Social listening is defined as "the process of monitoring social media channels for mentions of a brand, its competitors, product, and more." (Tran, 2020). Among those, one collective brand lab was designed to enhance students' understanding of CBBE in digital media, which included the following four strategies. First, each student was asked to collect consumer reviews of a local store from Yelp or Google Review.

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Second, one peer was assigned to review the student's collected reviews and was guided to utilize a natural language processing tool (e.g., *Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count, LIWC*) to analyze the emotions of the reviews expressed by consumers. *LIWC* is an online text analysis software that detects the psychological and linguistic features of natural language text such as consumer reviews. Using *LIWC*, students were able to conduct sentiment analysis to analyze whether these consumer online responses are positive or negative. In addition, students were guided to conduct further text analysis such as *Word Cloud* to create visual representations of consumer reviews and to identify the keywords that were frequently mentioned in the data. Lastly, students were asked to provide recommendations on branding for the local business based on the analysis results and to discuss the findings and suggestions with their peers in the breakout rooms at Zoom.

As Natarajan (2005) indicated, virtual lab can be adopted as an innovative technique in distance education that actively engages students in performing "experiments" themselves with simulated responses. Built with active learning and technology strategies, collective brand lab can be an effective type of virtual lab to create a sense of community of learners for interactive education. A survey was conducted to assess whether collective brand lab activities enhanced student learning of course contents. Students ($N = 18$) participated in the survey by providing qualitative and quantitative responses. In the qualitative part, students considered collective brand lab as one of the strengths of the course: "the strengths would be the activities done to apply the teachings because every activity directly related back to the lectures." Students considered collective brand lab emphasized "collaboration" and offered "real-life application." In the quantitative section, students were asked to answer questions regarding the collective brand lab using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). Students responded that the collective brand lab activity (1) was helpful to their learning ($M = 4.3$) and (2) was helpful in achieving course goals ($M = 4.4$).

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