An experiment in form and content, its aim is to be a guide and map of some of the opportunities to develop more open and networked practices while navigating the potential downsides of social media, including perceived loss of privacy and amplification of disadvantage and abuse. It is an excellent and accessible starting point for, as well as route to, a deeper understanding and a more sophisticated use of social media.

—Prof. Shân Wareing, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, London South Bank University

How does social media affect working life in Higher Education? How are universities harnessing its power to aid student learning? This innovative collection brings together academics and those working in professional services to examine these questions and more. The diverse and expert contributors analyse the many ways social media can be used to enhance teaching and learning, research, professional practice, leadership, networking and career development. The impact of social media is evaluated critically, with an eye both to the benefits and the problems of using these new forms of digital communication.

This is the first volume to give such detailed attention to this area of high interest. Its innovative approach extends to its creation, with contributors found via their presence on Twitter. The short and impactful chapters are accessible while retaining an academic focus through their application of relevant learning theories and educational context.

Social Media and Higher Education is essential reading for any professional working in higher education, including lecturers teaching education courses. It is also significant for researchers looking at more recent developments in the field and what it means to work in a modern higher education environment.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com

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Introduction

In this chapter I shall explore the use of social media to support and increase student knowledge on a BA (Hons) Advertising course. The following analysis will explore whether students were more engaged with the visual learning because they also took part in the construction of that learning using social media apps. The study I will be discussing took place at the London College of Communication (part of University of Arts London), with the kind cooperation of the Programme team headed by Dr Paul Caplan and Steve Spence. It is a critical study into student engagement and learning, using social media to support and increase student knowledge of design and advertising, particularly for visual learning and understanding.

On this BA programme, we teach the concepts and practice of advertising, to students mainly of the so-called millennials generation (which is widely agreed to be the people born between 1981 and 2000). Some of the students are from an era that has never known life without
the Internet, apps, smartphones and all of their many benefits and distractions! Their generation are used to communicating far more widely and socially through their screens, via social media, Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter. They are very aware of their online presence and curate their own digital identity based on what they post, their preferences, likes and follows. With this in mind, the programme team decided to embed some of these social media platforms into their teaching to see if it helped with engagement, relevancy and even preference for their learning experience. As these tools were already familiar to the students, we were curious to see if they could adopt the new formats quickly and put them to work immediately.

This chapter will therefore focus on a new approach to teaching over one term, which incorporated social media tools, to determine whether their use enhanced the learning experience for students and assisted in their engagement with the subject of advertising. By focusing on the newly enrolled first-year BA(Hons) Advertising students at LCC, we could compare their learning and engagement with that of previous cohorts. This study was carried out from September 2017 until December 2017 at LCC and we introduced our own visual boards of Pinterest and Instagram pages. These two platforms provided the best visualisation and both are very familiar to, and popular with, many of our current students.

**Background to the Course**

As this is an advertising course, knowledge is gained through observing, engaging, doing, reviewing and reiterating (though not always in this order!) Creative work can be chaotic at times, but advertising provides a framework for this sort of expression as it is channelled and framed by a strategic business problem that needs solving. It is not art for arts’ sake (unless, of course, art is the product that needs selling). Rather, advertising is all about selling. If the advertising does not help to sell or somehow promote the brand in a positive light, then it simply is not working. The challenge is to create meaningful advertising that surprises and engages the consumer, whilst meeting the specific objectives of the client’s brief. The student has to master many strategic and creative skills in order to be successful on the course and then to secure a job within
this competitive industry. The students need to build their knowledge rapidly, to be able to learn all about the various aspects and nuances of advertising so that they have enough time to develop a portfolio of work to take to job interviews once they have graduated.

**Exploring the Related Learning Theories**

The BA programme has been shaped and influenced by different theories of learning. A central learning theory that effects the design and curriculum on this course is the work of the Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) who created the foundations of Constructivist learning. Vygotsky’s theory asserts three major themes regarding: social interaction; the more knowledgeable other; and the zone of proximal development.

In Vygotsky’s time, many schools traditionally held a *transmissionist* or *instructionist* model in which a teacher or lecturer ‘transmitted’ information to students. In contrast, Vygotsky’s theory promoted learning contexts in which students played an active part in learning. The roles of teacher and student therefore shifted, as a teacher collaborated with his or her students in order to help facilitate their construction of meaning, and learning could therefore become a reciprocal experience. Constructivism, then, is the theory that learners construct their own meaning through their own social and interactive experiences.

The Cognitive learning approach is one based on students being involved in learning through memory, insights and problem solving. This theory was developed from Gestalt psychology, which held that students become more intelligent through information processing and memory. Creating memories through their experience of these key attributes of successful advertising, does play a large role on the Advertising course. Through the memory recall of past advertising campaigns (through the Pinterest page for example), students are provided with useful frameworks and support in their own creative development.

The main theories that this course employs are Constructivist theory and Constructive alignment. Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall (2010) noted that the idea of Constructivism is based on ‘continuous building and amending of structures in the mind that ‘hold’ knowledge.’ This is far
more student-centred and allows students to construct their own learning — building on their own knowledge and reconstructing it to augment their own understanding. The Constructivist approach is also known as ‘scaffolding’, allowing us to build on a student’s existing knowledge by supporting them as they increase their understanding and make their own connections.

In the context of the BA Advertising course, the Cognitive and Constructivist approaches are being employed through the use of Instagram, as the students continuously update and review their Instagram feeds. One could also state that by actively encouraging students to look at more advertising via the Pinterest page, students are potentially learning more by seeing more. And they may learn at a faster rate. Students are encouraged to discuss what they have seen and add their own examples, thereby building their own personalised learning structure.

Within teaching and learning theory, it is well known that a wide range of different learning experiences should be utilised to capture more student engagement. Novotney (2010) discussed how to engage with the typical undergraduate learner: ‘New research suggests that offering variety may be the best way to engage today’s undergraduates.’

Some of our students may be kinaesthetic learners, who learn by doing, while others may be auditory or visual learners. Students may utilise a combination of their senses to take in information, but each will have a preference for how they learn. In order to help our students learn, we need to include as many of these preferences as possible. With the inclusion of social media platforms, we have encouraged students to engage with their learning from a familiar and comfortable space that they would typically inhabit daily in their personal lives. As a programme team we still have the traditional lectures and workshops, but the emphasis is always on interaction and encouraging students to join in with debates and demonstrate their learning through ‘crits,’ in which students present their work for everyone to see and accept feedback from their tutors and peers. The whole process prepares the student for an industry in which they will have to persuade senior creative teams, and ultimately the clients, to buy into their advertising ideas. Therefore, the practice of showing and telling is very common in most of the units on the Advertising course. Social media gives students
another voice for this showing and telling, and it can also help them to organise their thoughts.

Connectivist theory (Siemens 2005) also helps us to understand the digital forms of communication within the course. It describes a process of acquiring knowledge that is rooted in digital connections and social media. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) argue that being more knowledgeable can consist of: the ability to nurture, maintain, and traverse network connections; the ability to access and use specialized information sources just-in-time; and the ‘capacity to know more’ rather than the individual’s ability to construct meaning from prior knowledge, or ‘what is currently known’ (Siemens 2005).

The Study

At the beginning of the term the students were asked to create new Instagram accounts for their university work. These had to be completely separate from their personal ones. They were able to follow, respond and react to posts by tutors on the official LCC Bad Instagram page (See Fig. 8.1). Separately, within their own university Instagram accounts, the students were able to keep a visual record of their own work. They were required to use their accounts as digital sketchbooks, including captions as part of their reflective writing. As part of their summative assessments, the students had to use Instagram to showcase their thinking and creative work over the ten weeks of the course, whilst using the course hashtag to link their work back to the official page.

The work and the thought processes were then photographed and uploaded onto the site and the students used the hashtag #LCCBad so that their page would be linked to the official programme Instagram page. Currently, this is still live and the Instagram feed has 46 followers and 23 posts. All of our current Advertising students have their own university Instagram accounts, so there are approximately 300 users in total. Along with capturing their initial sketches, students also wrote captions as part of a reflective piece of work — therefore replacing their assessed short reflective essays with 10 to 12 entries of 25 words each. As formal essay writing is already a part of other units in the course, within the creative units the writing is kept to a minimum with a simple written reflection. This type of reflective writing is something that
students often struggle with (since they have to switch from a more academic style of writing), but by including the reflective written work on Instagram, students were able to do this far more naturally, referring to their creative work there and then, as the weeks unfolded. This was also a more effective way for them to manage and speed up their work, and keep it organised in a weekly structure.

At the same time a Pinterest board (Fig. 8.2) was created and a large collection of ads were ‘pinned’ to the board for students to look at and comment on. At first it was set for private viewing only, but this proved difficult for students to view easily (because some students had not responded to the emailed invitation to follow the private board) so it was switched to public view. This allowed students (and members of the public) to view casually, without becoming followers.

Fig. 8.1 Serena Gossain, Screenshot of LCC Bad Instagram page (2018), CC BY 4.0
8. The Use of Social Media with Creative Students

The online visual board was continuously populated over the term, with many advertising campaigns — mainly print ads — which were either award-winning campaigns, political ads or interesting or inspirational visually or through the copy. Students could go to the board without ‘following’ it and look at the many examples easily. They were also invited by email to become contributors to the board and therefore to become active followers. The board is still active and public, although you cannot contribute to it unless you are personally invited by email. At the time of writing the board has 26 followers and 168 posts; the board is also viewed by many other students who, for whatever reason, have not chosen to become followers (perhaps because they did not want to log in to the site).

The Results

After one complete term from September to December 2017, the newly introduced Pinterest and Instagram platforms were reflected upon. Was the introduction a success, what difficulties did we face and what could we improve upon to take us forward?
Pinterest

The Pinterest board was created with the idea that tutors and students could share advertising campaign examples with each other. The board provided a very useful visual resource and a resource for class discussion. It also provided a creative inspiration bank — helping students to become more aware of creative thinking, of the challenges of communicating a clear idea in an interesting way, of layout styles etc.

The Pinterest board has become a useful resource for the course; when working with students on creative briefs it is a good knowledge bank of ideas and styles that tutors and students can refer to, which help to frame the student’s own creative work. The Pinterest board will hopefully continue to grow thanks to the addition of new ‘pins’; if the department promoted it more actively it could increase its audience still further. Tutors could also utilise it more and populate the board with more examples, and students from all years could more actively contribute to the board too.

It has been evident that Pinterest has improved and enhanced students’ learning, especially for those in their first year, enabling them rapidly to become more fluent in visual and verbal approaches to advertising. As well as providing a bank of ideas for inspiration, it allows students to see whether an idea can be taken further or be enhanced with a unique and challenging approach. It has definitely helped them to grasp the basics of visual communication and effective formulas of advertising.

This use of Pinterest follows a Constructivist approach, enabling students to build their own knowledge by actively taking part, applying what they have seen to actual practice. Even those who have chosen to remain passive viewers are still learning from the Cognitive aspects of observation and memory.

Instagram

The adoption of Instagram to record student sketchbooks has been very interesting to observe. Students on most of the creative modules have physical sketchbooks/layout pads that they use to capture their ideas for ads, mind maps, and scamps (sketches of ads).
The use of Instagram had a number of benefits. It became an online ‘sketchbook’ of student work as part of their formal assessment, a practice that was eventually adopted throughout all the year groups. The students could add to their profile and reflect on their work in a digital format, allowing them to include video, links and their own photos of their work, including their physical sketchbooks/layout pads. This followed both a Constructivist and a Connectivist model of learning. Instagram was also used to circulate news material — for example, information about special events and guest lectures — and it acted as a showcase for excellent student work. In this way, it provided a platform for the course to market itself to the wider world.

The Instagram platform also allowed students the opportunity to include other creative work — finished ads, website links, videos, and animations. In essence this experience has been helpful to ensure students are organising their work and therefore their process, which is helpful preparation for building their final portfolios in the second and third year.

Connectivist theory has also been adopted through the use of Instagram, as students are able to share, review and develop their own work in progress as the weeks go by. Siemens (2004) stated that the starting point of Connectivism is the individual. Personal knowledge is comprised of a network, which feeds into organizations and institutions, which in turn feed back into the network, and then continue to provide learning to the individual. This cycle of knowledge development (personal to network to organization) allows learners to remain current in their field through the connections they have formed. Connectivism therefore provides insights into learning skills and tasks for learners to flourish in a digital era.

Nowadays, most portfolios are created on a digital platform so this study has been a useful exercise in learning how to present and share work within a popular and familiar social media platform. Students appear to be very engaged with the platforms that have been introduced and have responded well to using Instagram as a vital part of their final assessments.
Conclusion

The addition of the two social media platforms to the Advertising course has overall been beneficial and they have been adopted quite naturally.

The introduction of Instagram was a completely natural evolution by the Programme team, given the digital nature of the advertising industry. The students have been, and are currently, engaging very well with it and it is a helpful tool to organise their work and show the stories behind the final projects they create. There are some areas in which students could be a little more active — perhaps in commenting on the official LCC Bad Instagram posts or ‘liking’ them. As far as the tutors are concerned, more frequent and varied posts by the students would be a good way to keep the feed fresh and up to date. The use of Instagram as part of the assessment process has also been very successful — mainly as the students did not have a choice here to use anything else! Since it was mandatory, students used Instagram to organise their work well and learned how to communicate ideas clearly from a familiar platform.

The introduction of a specific advertising Pinterest board has been helpful for giving the students ideas and as a useful backdrop for discussion or data points. It will continue to grow as a visual knowledge bank. In future, students need to be encouraged to add their own contributions and also to follow the board. Tutors should also add more examples to the board so that a wider variety of work is shown. From the experience gained last term, it seems that more would be made of the Pinterest board if students are required to follow it, and to contribute at least a few pins.

In comparison to previous first years who did not use these platforms as part of their studies, the platforms have definitely had an impact on this first-year group, enhancing their rapidly growing knowledge of, and curiosity about the world of advertising. The Pinterest board acts as a guide for good practice and it has been noted by the tutors that subsequent first-year-student output has become fairly sophisticated, relatively quickly, as a result.

Given that students use social media in their social lives and as part of their ‘down time’ there is some bridging that needs to be addressed to bring these platforms to the fore in an educational environment. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) summarised this in their study of formal and informal learning through the integration of social media:
Others argue that only a small proportion of young people are actually using social media in sophisticated ways that educators might value (Eynon and Malmberg, 2011). Complicating this tension, there is a lack of current models that theorize social media as a space for informal learning. There is also considerable debate about the benefits and challenges of appropriating technologies (e.g., social media) in everyday use for learning and little exploration of the connections between formal, non-formal, and informal learning such technologies might facilitate.

However, one could argue that social media could provide a more rounded and holistic approach to our students’ learning experience, if its capabilities are better understood and if we are prepared to make more responsive changes to our courses.

Technology has the potential to disrupt the boundaries between sites where learning takes place. It can empower learners through greater agency, opportunities to participate in networked communities and access to a wide range of resources to support knowledge building and collaboration. There seems little doubt that engagement with digital cultures offers potential for self-directed or spontaneous learning opportunities of varying degrees. (Greenhow and Lewin, 2016)

On final reflection, the ways in which we can continuously review and respond to the ways in which students are choosing to learn is probably one of the biggest things we have learned from this study. Having experienced how students adopted the new platforms, some valuable insights and learning have been gained. Traditional one-way instructional teaching is not and never will be a part of a creative education, so the adoption of social media platforms has definitely found a place as it helps to address and support many of the learning objectives we aim to fulfil as tutors. As the advertising industry has evolved over the last twenty years to use various digital platforms alongside traditional media, it is also imperative that the course remains completely connected and related to this. When social media platforms in the future morph into another communication format (as they definitely will!) it is critical that the course should reflect the industry symbiotically while also actively engaging with it. There is certainly much more to do, but this has been a really interesting start, with some positive results.
References


