

## The Use of Social Networks as a Tool for the Teaching of Marketing at the University Level: The Role of the Student

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**Abstract:** The changes imposed by the implementation of the EHEA have modified the role of the teacher who has had to assume a driving or guiding role, being able to facilitate a development in the student of the competences included in the Degree Report. In this scenario, students assume an active role, participating to a certain extent in their own training, as well as in that of their peers.

In previous editions of this project, we implemented a methodology based on social networks, understanding that these can be a useful tool for promoting the teaching-learning process. We have verified the function of these tools in improving the involvement of students, as well as in maximizing the use of the complementary activities scheduled in the course and in serving as a forum for clarifying doubts, among other benefits.

Our intent now is to go deeper into this already implemented model, introducing the “veteran student” element, this being the one that already completed the course and can be helpful for “current students”. We aim to enhance the collaborative vocation which comes from assuming that teamwork achieves a better optimization of resources and results.

**Key words:** collaborative work, social networks, innovation, continuous improvement, creativity.

### 1. Introduction

The ultimate and most general objective of this Teaching Innovation Project is to enhance the performance of the student so that effective use and learning are substantially improved. The idea that led us to propose this experiment was the same one that steadily guides us in the training of students: getting them to be adequately trained according to what the market demands, in order to achieve an optimum employability. In general, it is intended that the student assumes a professional role and acts accordingly, making the appropriate decisions and working with the team. In this sense, the experimentation used takes into account aspects such as market conditions, interaction among agents and the active search for solutions, among other things. Ultimately, collaboration among equals favors individual and collective learning, allowing students to construct their own knowledge. These results in the development of the creativity that will help them to stamp their own differentiation on what they do.

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## 2. State of the Issue

As a result of changes derived from the mutation found in a teaching process which poses a role reversal in the teaching-learning process, we decided to launch an innovative project three years ago, based on two key aspects: on the one hand, to make the student a fundamental part in the process (Adell & Castañeda, 2010; Cabero, 2011; Bueno, 2013); and on the other hand, to use ICT-based tools in order to accept them as LKT (Learning and Knowledge Technologies) and EPT (Empowerment and Participation Technologies) throughout the process (Lozano, 2001; García, 2008; Abuin, 2009; García & Alonso, 2009; Espuny et al., 2011; Fernández, 2012; among many others).

In previous editions of this project we managed to design appropriate tools for the promotion of student learning and participation. Moreover, we gradually accepted the challenge that students become guides by strengthening their empowerment through the use of their own knowledge at the service of their classmates (Moreno, 2004; Santamaría, 2005; Badia, 2005; Castañeda & Gutiérrez, 2010).

Social networks fostered a proactive attitude among students, who felt useful because they could make helpful contributions to their peers (Haro, 2010; Gómez, Roses & Farías, 2012; Herrera, 2013). The project grew with a “snowball effect”: the more contributions were made, the more participation of the most reticent students was provoked. The result was fantastic, not only in the development of the process, but also in the final result. Students managed to master the subject matter as well as certain competences of great value when it comes to favoring their employability.

In this edition we wanted to go a step further by adding an element to the teaching-learning process: the “veteran” student (Moreno, 2004; Rué, 2009; Fandiño, 2011). The main objective was to ensure that the new students enrolled in the course could get to know, with the guidance of their peers from the previous year, the work to be developed throughout the course. In addition, we wanted to reward those who had made a significant effort in the completion of their work and we thought that the ideal way to do so was by presenting it publicly, once the assessment of the course had concluded.

The result was a success because of the involvement of both the “veterans”, who enjoyed explaining their projects, and the “current students”, who were encouraged and able to perform the work required for the course.

We need to clarify that for this project the same course as in previous years was used: Commercial Management II, included in the third year of the Degree in Business Administration and Management.

## 3. Objectives

The objectives which led us to continue this project initiated in previous years are the same ones that justified its inception and can be specified as follows:

- To introduce in the classroom more active techniques and tools which motivate students to participate in their training process and in that of their classmates. Ultimately, to ensure that students become true protagonists in their learning process.
- To identify the problems arising from the application of these tools in the teaching process, in order to design models and techniques capable of overcoming those difficulties.
- To improve access to advanced educational experiences, allowing students and teachers to participate in remote learning communities, at appropriate times and places, using computers at home, on campus or

at work.

- To foster the creativity of students, both in the design of resources and in the development of tools that favor learning.
- To encourage the active participation of students towards learning based on competences, rather than on knowledge acquisition, by developing actions and assuming roles throughout the training process.
- To awaken and stimulate the critical mind of students through the assessment of contributions made by the rest of the group.
- To achieve that the student understands the advantages of collaborative work towards reaching an optimum result.

In addition to the above objectives, we must add the achievement of a high level of empowerment among students, in order to ensure that they are able to deliver a dynamic, innovative and creative oral presentation before an unknown and large audience.

#### **4. Methodology and Description of the Experience**

For the development of the project we initially followed the same steps as in the previous years: grouping the students in teams of 5 or 6 people (this year there were 6 groups), choosing a name for the team, selecting a product for the marketing plan (preparation of the SWOT, design of the product strategy, price, communication and distribution), all with the intention of basing the business in the old quarter of Soria (Spain). The reason for focusing the projects in this area of the city is to give this part of town a greater importance and realism as well as to collaborate with a project developed by the City Council of Soria in which young people can contribute their ideas for the dynamization of the area. This project led to a transversal workshop, involving our students, in which different audiences shared ideas. The workshop was named “Soria en Construcción” (Soria under Construction) and was celebrated on March 21st at the cultural center Palacio de la Audiencia, located in Soria. We will inform as to its content and development later.

Furthermore, the same social network profiles from previous years were used: Facebook closed group, Twitter profile and Pinterest page. Using them helped to boost these networks while nurturing the resource bank we already had with new contributions from current students.

We will now explain each one of the resources used in the development of this teaching innovation project.

##### **4.1 Workshop “Soria under Construction”**

If one of the objectives of this project was to get the so-called “veteran” students to contribute to the training of their peers in a later year, sharing with them what they learnt, we had to get them to spend a day together in which to get to know each other and interact.

And it would be even better if, during that day, we could be in contact with students coming from other centers, whose training could be complemented by that of Business Administration students, as happens with those studying Graphic Design.

Thus, in collaboration with the Soria City Council and with the School of Art and College of Design of Soria (Escuela de Arte y Superior de Diseño de Soria), we organized a workshop which gathered different groups of young people able to share their work, their ideas and their way of providing solutions to real problems. In the case of our students, this was the forum where the “veterans” and the “current students” met. The first ones presented the work done for the Commercial Management II course in the previous year and the second ones

attended in order to learn from their peers since the requirements for passing the course were the same as what their classmates had done.

The workshop took place outside the university environment, a challenge for those who presented their work as a master class. The session was divided in three parts. The first one was led by a multidisciplinary group of students called “Transforming your city.” In the second part, our students and those from the Degree in Graphic Design presented their ideas, whereas our students (from the Degree in Business Administration and Management, as we have already mentioned) talked about their product projects. The third part was a debate among the three segments mentioned and the attending public.

#### **4.2 Facebook Profile. Closed Group**

Obviously, Facebook is a social tool which makes it possible to share events, by means of comments, videos or images. In this sense, on the occasion of the celebration of different events such as visits to companies, meetings with businesspeople or talks from professionals delivered in the classroom, students maximized their network use and this became a fantastic tool for measuring the usefulness of those events for students, in addition to serving as a test mechanism to find out about the level of acceptance of such events. In this sense, special mention should be made of the II Business in the Classroom Week, which was held during the month of March and in which more than 15 professionals coming from companies and various activity sectors were brought together. These professionals brought students closer to the labor situation, thus contributing to their training with regard to a better employability. The success of the event could be verified by the comments made; students responded to lessons from the speakers, posed questions in connection with them or linked such lessons to others learnt from their teachers, among other things.

#### **4.3 Twitter Profile**

Twitter is still the least popular tool among students. Knowing this from our experience in previous years, we decided to encourage participation from the very beginning and so, just as in a prior edition, we challenged them to be the ones who dynamized and assessed the work done by their network peers through what is already known as “peer assessment”. Students decided to assess three key aspects: the frequency, opportunity, impact and interest generated by the use or omission of the hashtag, the frequency and constancy of the publications, and the usefulness of the content.

### **5. Results**

We will analyze the results following the structure outlined in the previous section but, in general, we can affirm that group interaction through social networks, complemented by what is generated within the classroom, led to better competence training for students, in addition to greatly raising their involvement with the subject and their illusion in the learning process.

#### **5.1 Results of the Workshop “Soria under Construction”**

The day was intense and very profitable, both for those who presented their work (a challenge due to the large audience) and for those that attended and learnt a lot from their peers, who were clearly their “teachers” that day. The workshop was so well accepted in Soria that it was even reported by the press.

We must emphasize, because we consider it of great interest, that the event was attended by professionals who were invited by the organizers and wanted to listen to the proposals and solutions of those who were still

learning. This fact provoked more enthusiasm, if possible, among the students. Aware of the audience that was going to see them, they prepared their presentations and questions more thoroughly.

### **5.2 Results of the Facebook Closed Group**

As in previous years, the Facebook profile has served to generate an interesting and useful resource bank for the course. Students have shared those resources (articles, posts, links, etc.) which they have found in the research process to conduct their work and which they have considered as helpful for their peers. They have also contributed some content which complemented the resources provided by their teachers, especially examples that were added to those discussed in class.

The profile has also served as a forum for doubts, in which some students solved those questions raised by others, always under supervision by teachers who have made the corresponding comments.

Also worth highlighting are the contributions made and the advice given by the “veteran” to the “current” students, as a result of the learning process conducted in the previous year. These have not been very numerous but they have been very valuable in content, especially after the workshop previously mentioned “Soria under Construction,” due to the contact that was established that day.

### **5.3 Results of the Twitter Profile**

The interaction between students and professionals by this means, due to the interventions of these last in the different events organized by the School (Facultad de Ciencias Empresariales y del Trabajo de Soria), deserves special attention. We understand that such interaction favors the communication of students with company representatives in a real way, just as they would do in a market situation. This supports the training of students, professionalizing it and thus giving it a valuable educational complement.

## **6. Conclusions**

We conclude by underlining the positive nature of introducing in the classroom changes aimed at emphasizing the role of the student in the teaching-learning process, as well as the positive aspect of promoting teamwork among different groups which provide different ways of facing the same problem.

The necessary involvement of students on a daily basis requires that they assume their responsibility towards the group and that they make teaching a continuous process in which daily contributions must be made proactively. Gone are the passive students who are recipients of a unidirectional speech; they are now involved in a process which they face with much more illusion knowing that they are useful and able to contribute.

In this process, it is very important to develop collaborative work, either by using LKT and EPT or by organizing forums in which the student is the transmitter and assumes the responsibility and the challenge of teaching.

Social networks help to work with empowered, participative and creative students. Therefore, these tools should continue to be used as a support, properly managed and controlled by the teacher, who must set certain objectives and guidelines, not being excessively controlling, as this could limit the students, but with the aim of guiding them to avoid dispersion.

The commitment to assigning students' work in real market conditions helps to make their learning process tangible and more useful in their eyes. If this work is adequately complemented with university extension activities (such as the II Business in the Classroom Week), an exciting effect is achieved in the students, who

understand that their work is worthwhile.

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