How Practitioners Would Design the Ideal Social Media Marketing Course

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Abstract

The growth in social media marketing has been explosive. Spending on social media marketing in 2017 was projected to be $13.5 billion (Statista 2018). Also, demand for employees with digital marketing experience had the highest growth rate in 2017 and these employees were considered to be important across all marketing functions (McKinley Marketing Partners, 2017).

Given the growing importance of social and digital media marketing, developing the ideal course design to better prepare students for careers in social media marketing is essential. This paper proposes a research design to further tap into the expertise of practitioners in social media marketing to help in developing a course design which would work well in the dynamic world of social media marketing.

Studies on social media marketing curriculum have consisted of conducting content analysis on syllabi from various universities (Brocato et al, 2015), studying both academics and practitioners in social media marketing (Faulds & Mangold, 2014), and examining specific social media tools such as how using LinkedIn in the classroom would bridge the gap between academics and practitioners (McCorkle & McCorkle, 2012). Munoz & Wood surveyed marketing instructors teaching social media (2015). Although these studies have attempted to bridge the gap between academia and practice using various methods, because of the dynamic nature of social media marketing, more research is needed into the best way to provide classroom instruction which effectively prepares students for jobs in this field.

The proposed research design consists of conducting focus groups with social media marketing professionals. The goal is to build on the existing research. Composition of the focus groups will be modeled on the variety of industries and job titles such as what Honea et al (2017) did in their research on micro and macro competencies desired by practitioners. Focus groups will be used to draw out the respondents and to provide comparisons and discussions across different areas. The interactive discussions are expected to stimulate creative thinking and lay the foundation for consensus building for course design.

Focus group research would consist of exploring the following topic areas:
- What skill set social media marketers are looking for when hiring new graduates.
  - How rapidly that skill set is changing

- o Whether or not a base set of skills exist which can be incorporated into course design
- What skills student currently lack which would be essential in social media marketing jobs
- Best approaches to preparing students
  - o Nature of involvement with practitioners
  - o Best course activities for preparing students for social media marketing.
  - o Attractiveness of certifications to marketing professionals (following up on the Goldring, 2017 study)
  - o Which certifications are recommended
- How to provide evidence of student skills to enhance employment opportunities
  - o This will be based on the Honea et al. study of what practitioners consider to be evidence of student skills (2017)
- What areas/approaches are being missed by academics

These focus group discussions can then be used to inform course design changes and updates to improve social media marketing courses.

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

Designing social media marketing courses is extremely challenging given how rapidly this area is growing and changing. Professors are taxed with how to balance educational principles, practical experience, and course revisions. Although research has been done into what is currently being offered, not enough is known about how to match course content and activities to the situations faced by social media marketing hires in the business world. This research seeks to address this gap by exploring expectations and recommendations of social media marketing professionals.

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