

#Engagement: A case for using Twitter in a hybrid sport management course

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Synopsis:

This paper will present an investigation into the utility of Twitter in increasing engagement in a hybrid sport management course

Abstract:

AIM OF PAPER

The purpose of this study is to explore the usefulness of Twitter as an engagement tool in a hybrid sport management course.

BACKGROUND

Maintaining student engagement in the classroom has long been a challenge in higher education. Given the technology (e.g., smartphones, tablets) and plethora of content available (e.g., via apps or websites), the potential is high for students to become distracted during class (Gehlen-Baum & Weinberger, 2014). Yet, some have shown that certain innovations, such as social media, can be used to increase student interaction and engagement (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014). Despite calls for investigation into the effectiveness of digital media innovations in the sport management classroom (cf. Skinner & Gilbert, 2007), there has been a dearth of research to date.

When applied in an education setting, using Twitter has been labeled as, “exciting, messy, and tentative” (Carpenter & Krutka, 2014, p.430). The interactive nature and reach of the platform—along with the apparent widespread use by Millennials—would suggest that Twitter has the potential to become an important part of today’s classroom environment. Thus, it would appear that instructors are at a crossroads: employ social media as an educational tool or continue to ignore its (potential) utility. At risk could be the level of engagement of today’s college student.

Despite the increased implementation of this phenomenon in higher education, however, there is a dearth of scholarly research as to its effectiveness; this is

particularly true within the discipline of sport management. While the general education literature features a growing body of work examining the use of digital media (e.g., Gehlen-Baum & Weinberger, 2014) to enhance classroom delivery, there is a need to extend this line of research to consider alternative course delivery methods (e.g., hybrid design) as well as a wider variety of disciplines.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from sport management majors (N=36) enrolled in an upper-level undergraduate course in sport media. The course was delivered using hybrid design—approximately 50% of the course meetings were virtual, using a variety of digital platforms. The instructor employed asynchronous and synchronous activities within the structure of the course, including small-group discussions, ‘one tweet’ reflections on lecture content, as well as crowd-sourcing of industry examples representing theoretical concepts. As a contingency of course enrollment, students were required to maintain a Twitter account for the purposes of participating in class activities; students were given the option of using their personal Twitter accounts or creating one for the specific purposes of the course.

There were both quantitative (i.e., survey) and qualitative data collected for this study. To capture survey data, the researcher employed a pre-post design, issuing an online survey to students in week one and again in the final week of the term. Survey items designed to assess student engagement were adapted from existing pedagogical research (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011). Junco and colleagues (2011) defined engagement as the amount of effort expended by a student in the academic experience (e.g., interactions with faculty) and utilized items from the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE). Qualitative data included observation of class-related social media use (i.e., tweets using the class hashtag), informal interviews with students, as well as comments on course feedback forms.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

This investigation represents ongoing research during the Spring 2015 semester; as such, results of the survey (pre-post) are not available at this time. Survey responses will be analyzed at semester’s end (May 2015) and prepared for presentation. While quantitative results are not yet known, preliminary implications of this study can be offered with support from observational data generated from the first eight weeks of the term.

The purpose of this research was to explore the utility of a social media tool (i.e., Twitter) as a means of increasing student engagement in a hybrid sport management course. Use of microblogging platforms—such as Twitter—has received limited attention in the scholarly literature (Gao, et al., 2012) and this study aimed to contribute to ‘best practices’ in sport management education. Given the pervasiveness of social media use by student populations (Junco et al., 2011)—58% of the current sample reported using Twitter at least once per day—the results of this study could be helpful in designing courses to be more engaging for students of today (and beyond). Moreover, with the continued transition of courses into the digital space, studies such as the current effort may assist in allowing students to remain connected to course content (i.e.,

'continue the conversation') beyond the brick-and-mortar classroom.

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