

Chapter 6

Pitch This: Storytelling as a Means to Enhance Your Personal Brand

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ABSTRACT

The following chapter describes the design and implementation of a teaching and learning strategy that aimed to explore the affordances of storytelling when it comes to the management of students' personal branding skills. Designed to help students craft their online professional persona and produce video-based pitches, this strategy was developed taking into account the concepts of personal branding and digital storytelling, as well as a preliminary questionnaire focusing on participants' perceptions. Having been implemented within English for Specific Purposes classes, this strategy was successful in promoting students' engagement and making them aware of the importance of having a strong personal brand, something that can be enhanced through contemporary storytelling methods.

INTRODUCTION

Relying on individual experiences and reflections, Digital Storytelling (DS) has become particularly relevant in today's highly mediatized world. As it became increasingly popular and widely available, mostly due to the pervasiveness of digital devices, the use of DS in educational contexts has also become widespread. Considered to contribute towards the enhancement of learning experiences, DS can also provide contextualized and multimedia materials, appealing to different learning styles and skills in different levels and fields of study, including language learning.

As more and more researchers are analyzing and documenting the affordances of digital storytelling in language learning, this chapter aims to further research carried out within this scope by giving

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6605-3.ch006

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a detailed account of a strategy used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses in two different Portuguese Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This strategy addressed the need to develop the students' communication skills in regard to their online persona and self-marketing, particularly in current job search scenarios.

Based on these premises, and focusing on the students' pursuing degrees in Management and Tourism, in this chapter the authors describe how they combined the use of storytelling techniques and the creation of professional video-based personal pitches, in order to help students to establish and convey a strong and distinctive personal brand. In addition to exploring the affordances of storytelling and develop students' personal branding skills, this strategy was designed to allow students to position themselves professionally online, raising their awareness as to the importance of personal branding and the value of language learning through digital storytelling.

In order to achieve these goals, the authors start out by establishing a theoretical rationale, in which they define the concepts of personal branding and DS, highlighting how these can converge to leverage language learning. Based on a literature review, this research was instrumental in framing the teaching and learning strategy to be implemented with students. Next, following up on an entry questionnaire outlining students' digital presence, their awareness on the topics of personal branding and storytelling and their willingness to use digital devices and produce videos, the authors describe the design and implementation of a teaching and learning strategy. Drawing on preliminary data, the second half of this chapter focuses on how the teaching and learning strategy used was tailored to meet both the students' and the market's needs.

Aiming to develop students' language competence, their ability to create an effective technology-based personal pitch, making use of storytelling techniques, and to raise their awareness as to the importance of developing a strong online personal brand, this strategy intends to be effective in providing a space for personal narratives and fostering reflections about not only recruitment trends, but also about the impact online presence and behavior can have on their future.

BACKGROUND

At a time when networking and social media have become paramount, particularly for recruiters, it is important that HEI are able to adapt and develop strategies that help students navigate these complex and, at times, murky platforms. Moreover, students must be made aware of the importance of engaging their audience by telling a compelling story, which can be shared across different media, employing different methods and techniques. As this is part of an ongoing, never-ending process, developing transferable skills such as self-awareness, critical-thinking and digital competences is key.

Defined as the "strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based in a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery" (Gorbatov, Khapova & Lysova, 2018, p.6), the concept of personal branding can be associated with the creation of a professional image to apply for a job. Enhanced and highlighted by social media, this image should reflect not only your technical skills and expertise, but also soft skills, the ability to communicate efficiently and correctly on multiple channels and platforms.

As recruiters become increasingly demanding and mindful of the importance of soft skills and the challenges of finding competent and multifaceted candidates, social media has also become a valuable

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