Chapter 10
Instagram as a Learning Space to Introduce Virtual Technology Tools Into Post–COVID Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines an innovative learning project in which undergraduate marketing students manage and generate content on an official Instagram profile. The project is designed to provide students with a more active role in the learning process through the application of new virtual technology tools. During the pandemic (course 2020-21), students shared their knowledge about marketing and related topics through storytelling, transmedia, gamification, and virtual/augmented reality via Instagram. The students' perception of the learning outcomes, and their satisfaction, were compared with those of students from three previous courses (2017-20). The findings revealed that students assessed the Instagram activity more highly in the context of the pandemic than in previous years. Interestingly, the students also reported better learning outcomes and improvement in their soft skills and consequently were highly satisfied with the project, which suggests the activity should continue in the future.

INTRODUCTION

This book chapter presents a teaching project that uses social media as a paradigmatic new information technologies (ITCs) space to introduce new virtual tools, that is, storytelling, transmedia narrative, gamification, and virtual/augmented reality, into higher education (these terms, along with other key concepts, are defined in the key terms and definitions section at the end of this chapter). The project was undertaken as a part of the Product and Brand Decisions subject of the third year of Marketing and Market Research degree at the University of Zaragoza (Spain); it was based on the students' management of a subject-related Instagram account. The project is one of the several activities assessed in the continuous subject evaluation system. In particular, the activity focusses on the benefits of Instagram as an information and knowledge dissemination channel, and the potential of innovative virtual tools to increase student motivation and engagement.

The project aims to add value to the subject by renewing the pedagogical processes, that is, complementing traditional teaching and theoretical content with active learning based on attractive virtual practical contents (e.g. examples of brand storytelling). The subject "Product and Brand Decisions" is very suitable to the use of Instagram as a learning space because it addresses topics closely related to brand image management and allow the inclusion of virtual tools. This approach is particularly novel because it combines the use of Instagram as a learning space and the implementation of specific innovative virtual tools by students on this channel. In this regard, the project also aims to enhance the students' management of new technologies through the creation of content and critical analysis of brand-generated content. Instagram provides students with an online networking channel for interaction and implementation of innovative virtual tools. Although the project started in the course 2017-18, the teachers considered that in the course 2020-21 this project could be particularly useful to maintain student interest through on-line learning introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The project entails the students creating, and posting, subject-related educational material on social media. Thus, the teaching methodology involves user-generated content (UGC), which encourages students to take a more active role in the learning process as they search for supplementary, updated sources of information. The project tries to take advantage of the virtual tools that can be implemented in social media, and which allow the students to link the subject content with current, more practical aspects (e.g. brand campaigns based on augmented reality) they encounter in their environments, in a simple, appealing way. On the other hand, the classroom-based use of a social network, such as Instagram, as a learning tool, allows students to acquire communication and analytical skills that will be very useful in their professional futures.

An end-of-course survey allowed a comparison of the activity during the pandemic (2020-21) and the three previous courses (2017-20), in terms of students' perceptions (e.g. usefulness), learning outcomes, improvement in soft skills (e.g. team work), and satisfaction. Instagram metrics related to each post and Instagram story published in the account were also analysed to compare the results of the four content categories (storytelling, transmedia narrative, gamification, and innovative virtual tools).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. After this sort introduction, the background is explained. This involves a literature review about the use of Instagram as a learning space in higher education, the benefits of collaborative learning and the presentation of the innovative virtual tools being employed in this project (i.e. storytelling, transmedia narrative, gamification, and virtual/augmented reality). Then, the objectives and the design of the project are described. A specific section explains the methodology and the data collection procedure. The results of self-reported measures (e.g. student's satisfaction) and

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