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S.PLA.S.H.

SALES PLATFORM STUDIES FOR HE

S.PLA.S.H - SALES PLATFORM STUDIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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Introduction

The S.PLA.S.H. project aims to create, test, disseminate, and systematize an original learning format, based on e-learning platforms, for courses on international sales and digital selling at European level, in order to develop the skills for university (undergraduate) students, enrolled in business, marketing and sales university programs.

The starting point is a common research in the contexts of the partnership, updating the research on training demand and offer. In part this research was carried out in the realization of the first intellectual output of the project, providing a general overview over the sales education topic and methodologies, focusing on international sales and digital selling.

The demand for highly professional sellers and Sales Managers is increasing in the current labor market. Despite the proliferation of digital commercial channels, companies are seeking individuals with commercial, marketing, organizational skills, and a strategic vision. Often, these companies turn to universities to recruit new professionals. Sales organizations today require sellers who differ from their predecessors: motivated individuals capable of adapting to the ever-changing economic environment. However, many university education systems do not yet offer Sales Management or Key Account Management (KAM) courses in their bachelor's or master's degree programs. As a result, university students often do not view careers in commerce as viable options. Studies conducted over the past five decades consistently show that students' reluctance to pursue sales careers has remained constant, despite personal selling offering a rewarding and satisfying career, particularly in BtoB contexts.

1. Sales education

Sales remains the primary career path for marketing graduates and is a popular choice among students studying business, economics, international affairs, and management. To meet the growing demand, higher education institutions are introducing new undergraduate and graduate programs in sales. As a result, sales education is becoming a widely recognized field, and educators are exploring innovative teaching methods to enhance sales learning. The traditional lecture-based approach in higher education is gradually giving way to more active, student-involved teaching methods, acknowledging the importance of students taking responsibility for their own learning.

Dedicated educators are committed to equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills for success in the workplace. They strive to motivate students to perform at their best and employ various techniques to achieve this goal.

The immense demand for sales professionals underscores the importance of providing high-quality sales education. Such education not only enhances the employability of sales students but also offers a competitive advantage to companies. Consequently, higher education institutions can play a crucial role in fostering well-prepared and skilled sales professionals who can thrive in the job market.

The aim of this study is to present the main teaching methodologies adopted in the sales field, proposing a literature review of academic papers and reports on the subject issue.

The present document is structured as follows: the first section provides a classification of the main teaching methods traditionally implemented in sales courses, characterized by face-to-face interaction. The second section describes some teaching methods and applications allowed by the digital transition.

2. Traditional (face-to-face) learning

Face-to-face learning is the more traditional way of instruction, where students and teachers attend an in-person session at the same time. Course content and learning material are taught in person to a group of students. This allows for a live interaction between a learner and an instructor. Learners benefit from a greater level of interaction with their fellow students as well.

The world of professional selling and sales management offers students and university professors alike myriad opportunities and challenges.

This section shows some of the main face-to-face teaching methods implemented in sales courses.

1.1. Story-selling

In an over-communicated world like the current one, sales representatives need to become expert storytellers or "story-sellers," and they need to master the skill of telling persuasive stories. The goal of sales representatives is to communicate a convincing story to persuade people to buy their products/services versus those of their competitors. Stories are effective in gaining attention, establishing rapport, building trust and adding value in the context of sales. A recent article appearing in Marketing News presented 14 reasons why a company's brand needs signature stories (Aaker, 2018). The first reason was that "stories are powerful" as they are more impactful than facts and can break through the distractions, disinterest and content overload, making an audience take notice, stay engaged and remember.

Salespeople use stories to establish rapport by emotionally getting in sync with the prospect who can relate to the story being told. They use stories featuring satisfied customers with testimonials to help build trust with prospects and to demonstrate the positive impact of a purchase decision. These genuine customer satisfaction stories provide value to the selling context as they shed light on the experiences of satisfied customers. Salespeople may connect prospects with current customers who are willing to elaborate on their stories (Spiller, 2018).

According to Futrell (2013, p. 297) "Top salespeople are great storytellers. Weaving similes, metaphors, analogies and parables throughout their presentations allows them to paint a beautiful picture of how their product will fulfill the needs of the buyer. This is a skill that can be learned with experience."

The power of storytelling has been widely researched and adapted by many disciplines, including psychology, sociology, communication, management and marketing. However, most marketing applications have been limited to advertising and branding (Woodside, 2010; Pulizzi, 2012; Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015; Pera, Viglia & Furlan, 2016).

For college students planning a career in sales and even for those who are not, storytelling is a powerful skill that everyone should acquire (Spiller, 2018).

1.2. Case-study with guest speakers

The overarching goal of working through the CMGS Method (Case Method with Guest Speakers) in Sales Management courses is to provide Business and marketing learners with practical knowledge about how a sales manager can deal with a wide variety of possible professional scenarios (Ruizalba Robledo, Almenta López, and Vallespín Arán, 2014).

Using case study as a teaching method has proven to be exceptionally effective (Kreber, 2001). Advantages of case study include student and faculty greater interest and interactivity, vicarious learning, and increased reflection (Mark & Mary, 1996). In real life most of the time it is not necessary to only recall certain information. As a matter of fact, knowledge has to be applied and executed in order to find creative solutions (Vaziri, 2010). In that sense, experience is a crucial element in all types of learning, but especially in an applied science such as Marketing and Sales (Ruizalba Robledo, Almenta López, and Vallespín Arán, 2014). In practice, marketing and sales decisions routinely require the application, analysis, evaluation, synthesis, and creation of information, a process that is consistent with critical thinking and educational learning hierarchies (Krathwohl, 2002; Klebba & Hamilton, 2007).

Marketing and sales students should acquire practical knowledge about how a sales manager can deal with a wide variety of possible professional scenarios. In that sense, case studies can evaluate the application of concepts to real life situations, building analytic skills which can distinguish high priority from low priority elements (Ruggiero, 2002).

According to Barnes et al. (1994), one of the missions of Business Schools is training students not only to know, but to act. Business education is known for its commitment to an active, discussion-oriented learning mode, disciplined by case problems drawn from complexity or real life (Barnes et al., 1994); a commitment to linking knowledge and application. The case method enables students to discover and develop their own unique framework for approaching, understanding, and dealing with business problems (Pearson, 1951). They deal with real-life business problems confronting business managers and researchers at a particular situation.

Management teaching using an experiential educational approach is extremely important and effective. When educational objectives focus on mind qualities (curiosity, judgment, wisdom), personal qualities (character, sensitivity, integrity, responsibility), and the ability to apply general concepts and knowledge to specific situations, discussion pedagogy may well be very effective (Barnes et al., 1994).

A key element of the academic goal to provide a practical approach and a real and close view of business reality is to bring guest speakers from the business world and particularly sales managers. The main requirement is that sales managers are professionally active and therefore can speak not only from past experience, but also provide his insight into current issues, challenges and opportunities of the sales market (Ruizalba Robledo et al., 2014).

1.3. Client-based projects

Business scholars agree that well-constructed experiential learning and specifically client-based projects (CBPs) provide an opportunity for students to apply concepts they learn to solve particular problems. As an additional outcome, they provide value for multiple stakeholders including the client, business community, university, and the instructor. However, CBPs can be inherently complex and demanding on instructors, impeding adoption and sustained use (Shanahan, Palmer, and Salas, 2019).

A report summarizing the findings from a massive online forum of 6,000 participants (scholars, students, and practitioners) discussing the future of management education (Ayling et al., 2015), similarly explicitly called out the need to increase co-construction of learning experiences between industry leaders and academics to address the expanding gap between theory and practice. Internships, simulations, case studies, and practicums are typical forms of experiential learning used in business schools.

In the applied discipline of marketing and sales, client-based projects (CPBs) have been recognized as a particularly advantageous form of experiential learning (de los Santos & Jensen, 1985; Bove & Davies, 2009; Strauss, 2011; Oh & Polidan, 2018).

However, while CBPs have become more commonplace in undergraduate marketing curriculum, their use in graduate business school curriculum remains sporadic (Hagan, 2012). CBPs provide students with projects that bring together real companies, real products or services, real competitors, and real decision makers (Burns, 1990).

Correctly constructed, CBPs provide the opportunity to create an interactive experience central to the learning process whereby students are able to learn what strategies are most effective in solving certain problems, and as a by-product, have the potential to provide value for multiple stakeholders, including the client, business community, university, and the instructor. Furthermore, tacit knowledge gained through business-relevant problem solving has the promise of improving student employability (Barr & McNeilly, 2002).

1.4. **Drama-based role-play**

Role playing is a common activity used as a training tool, allowing students to rehearse sales skills by performing the sales process using realistic scenarios that are consistently practiced (Widmier, Loe, & Selden, 2007). Role-play exercises are a form of experiential learning designed to help students develop valuable skills in a sales curriculum (Maher & Hughner, 2005; Inks & Avila 2008; Knight, Mich & Manion, 2014). Sales role-plays are viewed as one of the most effective teaching methods in basic and upper-level sales courses around the world (Deeter-Schmelz & Kennedy, 2011). Role-play exercises allow students to engage in an interactive environment to develop their communication and critical thinking skills in real time while also allowing for the ability to identify and experience differences between theory and practice (Widmier, Loe, & Selden 2007; Alvarez, Taylor & Rauseo 2015).

In most sales courses, role-plays include two classmates in the roles of buyer and seller, or one student playing the seller role and either the instructor or an outsider professional playing the part of the buyer. However, recent sales-based experiential learning exercises have shown the benefits that can exist by having two different classes engage with each other in differing roles (Chapman, Schetzsle & Whalers, 2016). When the players are familiar with one another, as in the case of classmates, the role-play does not always offer an authentic experience to accomplish what is necessary for students to be successful. Because of this familiarity, role-plays can sometimes be more performance art than a sales-focused learning tool, effectively eliminating the factors of listening and adapting which have been identified as gaps between sales theory and sales practice (Pullins et al., 2017).

There has been an increased interest to teachers and scholars in using drama in sales learning and teaching. Drama education covers all drama and theatre activity that occurs in educational settings (Andersen, 2004; Nicholson, 2000) and has its roots in theatre art (Bolton, 2007). It includes several genres, such as forum theatre, Theatre in Education (Boal, 1995), and process drama (O'Toole, 1992). The central philosophical concept is serious playfulness, which is driven by the need to use stories to explore issues of human significance (Heikkinen, 2002); it means that although we play and have fun, our serious intention is to learn.

Drama is a social art form that is created by participants working collaboratively; learning in drama is an active, creative, and communal process (Østern & Heikkinen, 2001). Drama education creates a fictive time and space. Participants create and adapt to roles and use the conventions of drama to learn about the selected theme, social skills, themselves, and drama as an art form (O'Toole, 1992). Drama conventions are ways of organising time, space and action to create meanings (Owens & Barber, 2001).

Since drama education is based on group activity, a psychologically safe learning environment should be created. Learning in drama is based on aesthetic doubling (also referred to as metaxis), which Augusto Boal defines as "the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of image" (Boal, 1995). This means that participants act in roles in fictive time and space, see the world simultaneously from fictive and real perspectives, and analytically reflect on their experiences (Østern, 2007). Operating in a fictive environment allows the participants to experiment within a dramaturgical frame (Heikkinen, 2002) and try out alternative solutions.

Sales experts today need strong communication skills in order to accomplish sales processes, resolve conflicts (Hung & Lin, 2013), and manage customer relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987). Simulation-based instruction can be applied successfully to communication skills training.

With the current popularity of sales courses, some educators find themselves struggling to keep up with the time demands of playing a part in role-plays for an increasing number of students. Moreover, while including professionals in the role-play enhances community engagement and increases the value of the role-play for the students as a networking opportunity, the recruiting, scheduling, and creating consistency with the feedback of those professionals can pose challenges for some schools. There is a need for an innovative, short-term module in sales education that prepares students for the "role of the salesperson within the modern firm and within today's overall business systems" (Marshall & Michaels, 2001).

1.5. Sales competition

Job opportunities in the field of professional sales are fast growing, with sales organizations striving to hire sales students who are prepared to embark on a sales career. Unfortunately, university business programs and faculty often lack the resources necessary to thoroughly prepare students for a sales career, or to expose them to career opportunities within their local market. An intracollegiate sales competition is a university-level contest in which rewards are given to students of the university based on their demonstration of selling skills (e.g., Loe & Chonko, 2000; Heinze et al., 2018). Student competitors typically demonstrate skills by role-playing a personal selling case, but other methods such as mock interviews, team selling, or elevator pitches may be utilized as well.

We propose a study conducted by Magnotta, Peev, and Steffes (2020), which posits an intracollegiate sales competition as a tool to benefit students, corporate partners, business schools, and faculty, and in doing so, provides considerations and best practices for initiating a competition. The initial motivation for hosting an intracollegiate sales competition varied across the five schools included in the study and covered all of the four previously mentioned critical stakeholders: students, corporate partners, business schools, and faculty.

Ideally, preparation for an intracollegiate sales competition should begin a year prior to the event by assessing the business school administration's (Dean's office) level of support, since implementing a competition requires support from many administrative areas (e.g., physical space, fundraising). If the benefits to the business school (e.g., exposure in the business community, corporate partnership development, and funding opportunities) and benefits to students (e.g., skill development, learning, networking, and job opportunities) are clearly articulated, administrative support should be relatively easy to obtain. In addition to providing assistance with catering, photography, parking, promotion, and public relations, administrators can be a valuable resource for coordinating physical space and providing financial and logistical support. In addition to gaining the support of administration, starting a year early allows time to initiate relationships with potential corporate sponsors and gauge their interest in participation. This task can seem daunting to a competition initiator, particularly one who has not recruited sponsorships in the past. The primary motivation for corporate partner participation (and financial support) is to identify potential new hires and interns, thus, it is the responsibility of the faculty and students to be prepared to showcase the students' selling skills on the day of the competition. A common theme among interview respondents was that recruiting students in the inaugural year was challenging, particularly when faculty wanted to ensure that the school's best and brightest were being featured. This challenge is made more difficult since the best and brightest tend to be heavily involved elsewhere on-campus and off-campus resulting in very full student calendars. Top students also tend to accept jobs earlier than their counterparts; thus, they may not reap the networking benefits of the competition.

Finally, the logistics of an intracollegiate competition can be overwhelming and are, at times, challenging for one person to manage. This task can be particularly challenging if the organizer is a junior tenure-track faculty member with intense research productivity requirements. As such, the organizer must consider the trade-off between the positive outcomes from organizing such an event (e.g., benefits to the four stakeholders, recognition for promotion purposes, accolades from other departments) and the time and effort required to run a successful event. For these reasons, it is recommended that an inaugural competition be small, and that nonfaculty members such as sales program support staff or other administrative resources be utilized whenever possible (Magnotta, Peev, and Steffes, 2020).

1.6. Shadowing

As stated by Jones (1981): "If a picture is worth a thousand words, a demonstration by a model is probably worth several thousand." The introduction of modeling into higher education has led to the rapid incorporation of terminology such as 'action learning' and 'experiential learning' (Whetten, 2007). Educational research has likewise shown an increased focus on opportunities that more holistically engage students in the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Van der Schee, 2007). Business schools have long sought to introduce concrete learning opportunities and realism into the classroom due to the practical nature of the discipline itself (Mullen and Larson, 2016).

Efforts to enhance the university sales curriculum has increasingly turned towards student-centered approaches to learning, not just as a response to the desires of the current student cohort for hands-on experience, but also as a response to the needs and interests of the business community (Lamont & Friedman, 1997). With the high cost of training and turnover in sales (Adidam, 2006), companies are acutely aware of the value in both high-quality sales education and the ongoing recruitment relationships that can be fostered with Universities. As an applied discipline, professional sales curriculum is a clear fit for experiential learning projects. Recent publications on active sales course components have explored simulations, role-plays (Bobot, 2010; Serviere-Munoz, 2010), and even projects in which students sell an actual product (Inks, Schetzlsle & Avila, 2011). Shadowing, a form of in depth interaction and observation, is unique in that it occurs outside of the classroom, and therefore enhances career readiness in a distinctly unique way (Shermont & Murphy, 2006). Shadowing a sales professional allows the student to engage with a one-on-one experiential learning experience while simultaneously connecting with insights from the larger course in which the student is enrolled.

1.7. In-class exercises, discussions, presentations, and team activities

Rocco and Whalen (2014) demonstrated that team-based experiential projects had benefits to students including additional satisfaction, and improved applicability to their future careers. It has been shown that team-based learning facilitates the active learning environment and improves student preparation, cooperation and serves as a basis for thinking that leads to improved critical decision making (Stamatel, et al 2013, Gullo, et al 2015).

Honeycutt, Ford and Tanner (1996) stated that Sales Managers are one of the primary individuals involved in training salespeople and that is even more true in smaller firms. Little has changed since this assertion. Therefore, one of the key responsibilities of sales managers is to train their salesforce.

The inspiration for the project implemented by Favia and Welliver (2019) is the quote “If you want to learn something, read about it. If you want to understand something, write about it. If you want to master something, teach it.” (Yogi Bhajan). The general objective of the project is to provide students with an opportunity to think and act like sales managers and develop valuable sales skills.

Students, in teams of 4-5 students depending on class size to produce no more than 10 teams, complete a training module and deliver a training exercise of approximately 30-45 minutes to their classmates. To facilitate students readiness, presentations are typically scheduled beginning in week five thus allowing for multiple presentations per week throughout the remainder of a 15-week semester. Each team works on the project throughout the semester, with class time scheduled to assist teams in meeting deadlines.

There are three distinct components that comprise this sales management project realized by Favia and Welliver, including the training exercise, where teams will conduct a training session with their classmates; an evaluation tool to assess the training program; and a written training plan, with a discussion of what the topic is and why it is important to sales people.

The first project component, the training exercise, is approximately 30-45 minutes long. The training exercise is presented by each sales team (sales trainers) to their classmates (sales trainees) and focuses on a discussion of the chosen topic, providing information on why it is an important topic for the salesforce. This requires students to research the topic and provide relevant information from reliable sources that salespeople could utilize in the field, and properly cite the information.

The second project component is the evaluation tool, where students can design and collect their own assessment of the presentation. Instructors may guide students to design their evaluation tool using both closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain both quantitative and qualitative feedback from sales trainees. By requiring students to design their own evaluation tool, rather than using one created by the instructor, they are forced to organize and focus their training efforts around a desired result they hope to achieve from their classmates, thus aiding in their concentrated learning of the specific sales topic. The third project component, the written training plan, is essentially the lesson plan to accompany the training presentation.

It should not reiterate the content of the presentation, but rather discuss how the presentation should be conducted, just like a lesson plan. Students are encouraged to include enough detail in the written training plan so that if the preparer is called away, the plan could be given to someone familiar with the topic who would be able to easily conduct the training. The training plan should include objectives of the training exercise, details and a timeline for all lecture components, and references.

With specific reference to team activities, Team-based learning is a pedagogical approach designed to promote authentic student collaboration (Chad, 2012). Among its many benefits, team-based learning is thought to increase student engagement and improve interpersonal and team skills (Michaelsen & Sweet, 2008; Chad, 2012). Moreover, teamwork enhances education through peer-topeer learning methods; active, experiential learning; and exposure to diverse viewpoints (Amato & Amato, 2005; Chad, 2012). The ability to work well within a team is an important skill for employment and advancement (Chapman et al., 2010; Deloitte, 2016; Ryder, 2016).

Effective teamwork requires communication, collaboration, cooperation, compromise, conflict resolution, planning, and coordination—skills vital to employers (Stevens & Campion, 1994; Katzenbach, 1997; Bravo, Catalán, & Pina, 2018). Research concerning teams has shown these skills become even more essential to workplace success when teams are composed of specialists from different areas of knowledge and experience (Lichtenstein et al., 1997).

1.8. Sales coaching

Most sales management undergraduate courses teach students about sales management rather than how to successfully manage a sales team. A desire to change this paradigm inspired O'Reilly to leverage the case method with the “soft” skills of sales coaching and the “hard” quantitative skills of data analytics and performance evaluation to design a new sales management course.

The design of the course involved the following steps: (a) determining knowledge outcomes, (b) selecting curriculum content areas, (c) identifying appropriate business case studies, (d) developing a sales coaching model, and (e) integrating analytic assignments using data from case studies. In particular, one of the biggest contributions made to the course that the students seemed to fully embrace and understand was the development of a sales coaching model that incorporates the theoretical perspective of feedback, role modeling, and trust (Rich, 1998), with a user-friendly model that is easy to remember, practice, and deliver.

O'Reilly named this model the “C-U-R-E Model for Sales Coaching”, which stands for Connect → Understand → Refocus → Expect (Figure 1). Students receive a course pack describing the model in detail. Additional course materials such as the course syllabus and C-U-R-E model course pack can be found in the online supplementary information. This coaching model is used for in-class role plays whereby it is “deconstructed” element by element using a Harvard case (“Career Coaching: Darcy Gallagher”).

In addition, once the model is practiced and understood, students are assigned a salesperson from another Harvard case. The first assignment involves a sales coaching session where students are instructed to prepare for a coaching session using the C-U-R-E model and the case data and information. During the interaction, they are filmed role playing as the sales manager meeting with the salesperson they are assigned (played by another student). Approximately 30 days later, they are given additional quantitative and qualitative information about their salesperson for use during a year-end performance evaluation.

After that session, students complete a written report highlighting their recommendations for the salesperson, compensation, and territories. Finally, to solidify the C-U-R-E model, as part of two additional exams using case study materials, students developed a script using the C-U-R-E framework for a specific, assigned topic that is identified in the exam case(s).

Figure 1. C-U-R-E Model for Sales Coaching

<u>C</u>ONNECT	Fairness, respect, and credibility are the hallmarks of building an effective connection with colleagues. When connecting as business people, remember that rank and power issues can be tricky. Sometimes a two- to three-point simple agenda works best to set the frame and context for the meeting.
<u>U</u>NDERSTAND	In this step, it is critical to understand each person's perspective since your goal is to determine the "gaps" in perspective between yourself and that of your salesperson, which you will do using effective questioning techniques. Until you uncover the "gaps in understanding" (aka: questions, concerns, issues, or problems) between you and the salesperson, the salesperson will likely be resistant, doubtful, hesitant, or downright ornery toward your attempts at coaching—how could you possibly have a solution to their problems before finding out and understanding what the issues are?
<u>R</u>EFOCUS	Refocus the coaching around the "moments of truth" sales skills necessary to succeed in the job. This part of the meeting may need focus on different issues than what the salesperson perceives to be the issue; hence the term "refocus." Here you are refocusing the salesperson's perspective on the critical steps in the sales process that are not working and "coaching to the gaps."
<u>E</u>XPECT	Lastly, set clear, measurable, and realistic expectations for the changes needed.

Source: O'Reilly

1.9. Assessments

One goal of marketing instructors is to equip students to succeed by motivating them to learn as much as possible during the term. At the same time, instructors must also evaluate students, giving them numeric or quantitative feedback on their performance. Grades function as an important tool for instructors, both to communicate information to students about their performance and to motivate them to try harder to succeed.

A research conducted by Ackerman and Yang (2020) examines student reactions to the presentation of grades in a marketing course to observe their impact on student ratings, perceptions, attributions, and emotions. Research on reactions to positive and negative information has found that negative information has a much greater impact on its recipients than positive information.

There is a recognition advantage for negative information (Alves et al., 2015). A below-average grade has a greater impact on students than a similarly above-average grade. The results indicate that improvement in grades has a positive impact on student perceptions of the instructor's impression of them, satisfaction with the grade, and instructor rating, among other effects. Everyone, particularly those students holding malleable views regarding academic studies, appreciates a perception of improvement.

These findings suggest that instructors can help mitigate the negative impact of below-average grades and motivate students to learn by designing and organizing their exams and assignments around improvement. Students could then focus on learning processes and progress, rather than attaining certain grades.

Another study conducted by Zemack-Rugar, Corus and Brinberg (2019) proposes that academic goals are often long-term goals, which require multiple goal-directed behaviors (Carver & Scheier, 2001), and commonly involve failure (Baumeister, Heatherton, & Tice, 1994). Such goals are commonly divided into smaller pieces called sub-goals (Carver & Scheier, 2001). For example, to earn a marketing degree, students must complete multiple sub-goals, such as various assignments, tests, and courses. While completing a marketing course, students might miss a deadline or fail to attain a sufficiently high score on an exam.

Such failure, commonly referred to as “sub-goal failure,” can lead to relenting, characterized by reduced efforts toward the long-term goal, or persistence, characterized by continued efforts toward the long-term goal (Cochran & Tesser, 1996). Key determinants of which of these occurs are individuals’ cognitive and emotional responses to sub-goal failure (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999).

2. Digital learning and applications

Digital learning is an instructional practice that makes use of a broad range of technology-enhanced educational strategies and tools. The technology can be adaptive, augmentative, personalized and/or virtual.

Technology and media have created skill needs that modern educators are compelled to address to stay relevant. Innovations in technology lead to innovations in education (Rounghuai, Kinshuk, and Price, 2014).

2.1. Digital role-play

Video-recorded role-plays increased student confidence and performance in job interviews (Castleberry, 1989) and decreased training costs for newly-hired salespeople (Ingram, LaForge & Lee, 2002). Many companies are augmenting many of their face-to-face interactions between salespeople and clients with virtual communication and videoconferencing technology (HR Blog 2015).

In addition to communication skills, problem-solving, and self-management, the use of new technologies is one of the most important skills necessary for students to gain in a marketing education that prepares them to be "work ready" (Rundle-Thiele, Bennett, & Dann, 2005). The effective use of presentation skills on videoconferencing platforms is becoming a mainstay in sales careers.

According to a study conducted by Pelletier and Hopkins (2018), adding videoconferencing technology and unfamiliar role-play partners can introduce layers of ambiguity and adaptiveness that are found in modern-day sales situations. Instructors from two medium-sized regional state universities developed an exercise that not only reduces the familiarity between students but also increases the need for the seller to listen to the buyer and adapt to his or her concerns. Sales students can practice elements common in the professional selling environment and do so in a space that allows for students to make mistakes and learn from them.

Consequently, students from one university act as buyers and students from another as sellers to complete a sales-call role-play exercise using video conferencing technology. Acting as the buyer would allow sales students to empathize with the buyer role, an ability that has been shown to lead to increased trust and satisfaction with the salesperson (Aggarwal et al., 2005).

This role-play exercise limits some of the challenges of traditional role-play exercises described above, while also introducing the use of new technology and a sense of unfamiliarity between the buyer and the seller, and uncertainty of response from the other party.

2.2. Case Study of Fictitious Product and Virtual Market

According to a study conducted by Švec and Selby (2019), the aim of the Marketing communication course taught at the Faculty of Economics and Management at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS Prague) is to provide students with an understanding of the basic objectives, principles, and processes of marketing communications. The course consists of lectures, workshops, and students' teamwork, all with the support of digital media of various forms. The lectures are focused on the theoretical issues of marketing communications, together with examples of practical applications, short videos, and discussions with the students.

In contrast, the workshops are designed as sessions of training in practical skills, where students deal with practical tasks from different fields of marketing communication, evaluate their own work, mutually share and discuss their advances, and are methodically guided during the development of marketing communications' skills. Lectures and workshops are supplemented by e-learning activities in the Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Developmental Learning Environment) Learning Management System (LMS), where resources, forums, lessons, wikis, and workshops were used as basic tools for skills development courses, according to Cole and Foster (2007). There is a time limit for each task (packaging, press release, storyboard and video, sales promotion proposal, and personal selling proposal), which ends with start of the explanatory workshop for a new topic. In this way, the ongoing work of the students across the whole semester is arranged, thus avoiding the tendency to wait until the last minute to complete the main task (a presentation for the virtual market).

This course of Marketing Communication builds on the Marketing Fundamentals course and is followed-up by these courses: Marketing Research, Strategic Marketing, and Global Marketing. As the students enter this course with the basic knowledge of marketing principles from their previous course (Marketing Fundamentals) and continue to study different marketing issues in their later courses, the Marketing Communication course focusses on teaching the basic principles and tools of marketing communication. At the end of the semester, students should demonstrate an understanding of various communication tools and techniques, their use, planning and control in the marketing context.

In particular, as showed by Švec and Selby (2019), the sequence of workshop topics in course design with virtual market is:

- Product idea and package;
- Public relations idea and tool;
- Advertising idea and tool;
- Personal selling idea and plan;
- Sales promotion and plan;
- Competition on virtual market.

As the first topic, the students are introduced to the Product's idea and package development, and this assessment works as a motivation and creativity booster for the students. The special topics then follow: for the field of public relations it is the press release and media list, in the field of advertising it is the storyboard and producing the video advertisement, in the fields of personal selling and sales promotion students must make a proposal of the plan. The final task to which all previous tasks are orientated is the presentation of the students' promotion on the virtual market. As a background process of these topics and their sequence, students must go through five essential stages (Edmondson, 2013):

1. Aim high,
2. Team up,
3. Fail well,
4. Learn fast, and
5. Repeat.

The 1st (explanatory) workshop consists of an explanation of the importance of packaging for the product promotion and for the game, which will involve the students in the process of marketing promotion. The game helps to engage the students' motivation. For this purpose, the game "Design the Box" (Gray, Brown and Macanufo, 2010) was reworked. In this game teams get the task of making packaging for the imaginary product. The product might be anything they are able to think up. It might be an already-existing product, something waiting to be discovered, or even a product which has not or would not even ever exist. 'By imagining the package for their idea, the teams make decisions about important features and other aspects of their vision that are more difficult to articulate.' (Gray, Brown and Macanufo, 2010). The students are given blank white or brown cardboard boxes. From these boxes they create the professional packaging for their imaginary products with all legal requirements according to law in the European Union. They can use any equipment, such markers, craft papers, stickers, tapes, images, etc. The process of creating the package box is very important for the course. It is the start of students' creative thinking. It is a connecting element for their enthusiasm, as they will discover they have no borders (except ethical and moral). It is also a great asset to their teamwork, as it is their first mutual output and they all are always very proud of it. They can also imagine their product and its features better, which is also important for the following workshops.

During the course, we use this game as a focusing device (Gray, Brown and Macanufo, 2010), as students use the developed box in all workshops to remind them of their vision of the product and its characteristics. This idea is supported by Hackbert (2006), who says it is possible to use some teaching methods as a “hook” that enables them to engage and motivate students to learn. Edmondson (2013) mentions the importance of emotions as a motivator and reference point to return to in difficult times. By the end of the workshop, several of the teams will still not know what product they should choose, but this does not matter. The main goal, before the workshop ends, is to make sure all teams know that during the next workshop (which will be an advisory one) they will have to present at least their idea of the product and its packaging proposal.

At the beginning of the following advisory workshop, each team presents its idea of the product and its packaging. After each team presentation there is a discussion between all the teams and the lecturer. When all teams are done with their presentations, the brainwriting session starts. In this session, each team sums up the ideas, comments, or suggestions for other teams. During the brainwriting session, the proposals for the products’ packaging are circulating around the classroom, so each team can analyse in depth each packaging from other teams. The lecturer does the same. When the brainwriting session is over all the teams have five lists of comments. It is up to each team whether they use the advice of the others or not. The advisory workshop ends with the repetition of the task and deadline for it to be uploaded onto the Moodle LMS (Švec and Selby, 2019).

The explanatory workshop for the field of public relations starts with an explanation of the basics of media relations, and continues with the press release, its characteristics, and ways to write a press release and produce a press kit. The advisory workshop starts with the presentations of situations for which press release is made, various press release proposals follow. After discussion about each proposal the brainwriting session starts, where each teams’ press releases circulate the classroom, so each team can analyse the content in depth.

After the brainwriting session, teams deliver the lists of comments to the particular teams, so each team has five lists of comments to their press release proposal. The explanatory workshop for the advertising begins with the analysis of advertisements, description of components which the advertisements consist of, explanation of how an advertisement is formed, storyboard concept, ways to do storyboards, and examples of storyboards. After this introduction, students are asked to do their own storyboards for the fictitious product they possess. At the beginning of the advisory workshop students present their proposals of their storyboards. After discussion about each proposal the brainwriting session starts. The proposals circulate the classroom, so each team can analyse the content in depth and make a list of comments. Teams deliver the lists to each other, so at the end each team has five lists of comments to their proposal of storyboard.

Explanatory workshops for personal selling and sales promotion have almost the same procedure. They start with the explanation of the field tools and how to make a plan in sales promotion and personal selling.

After that the students start their teamwork on planning their own sales promotion and personal selling for their fictitious product. The advisory workshops always start with the presentations of the students' proposals, followed by discussions, and brainwriting sessions with proposals' circulating the classroom and the exchange of lists. When all topics are explained, and all tasks are completed and uploaded to the LMS, the competition on a virtual market starts.

Although students perceive the process of competition on virtual market as one phase, the truth is that the process consists of four phases. The starting phase is the part where the students start to be drawn into the process of marketing communication because of their own ideas which they share, thus quickly transforming the group of individuals into a team. Edmondson (2013) divides this phase into two: aim high (choose the highest aims you can) and team up. The next phase is the phase where students prepare their promotion tools – it takes eight workshops, in which students discuss their ideas and have their opportunity to find whether their ideas might be accepted or not, and to rework it: "fail well, learn fast", according to Edmondson (2013).

In the phase of preparation for the competition on the virtual market, the students consider making changes in their promotion tools, they should recall all the information and knowledge they have, or repeat (Edmondson, 2013). The process of competition on the virtual market itself is again the composition of all the phases according to Edmondson (2013), and it is the final process for students as they go through and evaluate the projects of the others – they should look up identical and different, compare, etc. The competition on virtual market serves as a social game with its competitive character, but it is also repetitive learning for students. As they evaluate as a team (each team has only one vote for each evaluated promotional mix), they have to communicate all the issues within the team first. This cycle ensures team communication and repetition of what they have been taught during the course.

2.3. Text Assignment E-mail submission

Faculty employ different techniques in classes to help students perform well. The importance of good communication between faculty and students has been one of the principles of high-quality education for some time (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Communication is important to examine in today's environment as college students today are digital natives. College students have grown up surrounded by technology (Prensky, 2001).

One approach is to facilitate students with timely assignment submission. Ackerman and Gross (2005) found that faculty could reduce student procrastination by designing interesting assignments with clear instructions. Humphrey Jr., Laverie, and Shields propose another method to encourage students to submit assignments on time and to follow syllabus directions using assignment text message reminders. These reminders can help students meet course learning objectives and assure competency. Text messages have been found to be effective in health care to promote positive changes in patient behavior (Sharifi et al., 2013; Buller et al., 2014). Texts have also been found to be an effective way to enhance communication with students from college/university administration and to support students' transitions to the university (Harley et al., 2007).

Since this method has proved to be effective in other contexts, it can potentially improve student performance in the classroom. For pedagogical tools to be effective, students need to be interested in completing them and understand instructions and deadlines (Ackerman & Gross, 2005). Students who fail to meet course deadlines frequently email their instructors for policy exceptions or extended deadlines so that the late or missed assignments do not affect final course grades, which can add significantly to faculty workloads (Curtis et al., 2013); this back and forth typically takes multiple emails, shifting the faculty member's attention away from teaching and scholarly research and reducing assignment effectiveness. While Learning Management Systems (LMSs) are designed to assist students with meeting deadlines through features like calendars and email course announcements, the reality is that this technology does not eliminate missed deadlines and the associated cascade of emails with each deadline. Email messages to students are one way to remind students about upcoming assignment deadlines; however, researchers have found that students ignore email (Carnevale, 2006), and the authors posit that students often neglect emails directly from instructors or those originated by the LMS.

Email communication between faculty and students can be beneficial, but it also has drawbacks. While productive email exchanges have been shown to deepen faculty–student relationships (and is tied to higher course evaluations; Sheer & Fung, 2007), the immediacy of response and availability is a contributing factor (Wilson & Taylor, 2001). The time constraints placed on all faculty members makes immediacy of reply a challenge. Tenure-track faculty must balance the demands of teaching-related communication with research productivity, while non–tenure-track faculty, particularly adjunct faculty, frequently balance a higher number of courses and students per course (Cosman, 2014). These constraints may act as impediments to immediate response to student inquiries. Not surprisingly, email has been shown to be a significant source of stress for faculty members (Jerejian, Reid, & Rees, 2013). Across many industries, email overload is a phenomenon that reduces productivity and increases stress (Hole, 2008; Sumecki, Chipulu, & Ojiako, 2011; Reinke & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2014). To mitigate this email overload, some faculty encourage students to attend office hours versus sending emails (Jackson & Knupsky, 2015), which serves to focus the student–faculty interaction in set hours. This more-focused faculty access may reduce immediacy of response and corresponding student satisfaction with the course.

2.4. Online Behavioral Advertising and Privacy Implications

Sophisticated technology advances are delivering new and powerful ways for marketers to collect and use consumer data. These data-driven marketing capabilities present a unique challenge for students, as they will soon be expected to manage consumer data and make business decisions based on ethical, legal, and fiscal considerations. A study conducted by Labrecque, Markos, and Darmody (2019) attempts to address shortcomings related to the "information privacy gap" in marketing education by providing educators with an online behavioral advertising exercise that they can employ in their courses.

We present a brief description of the reference context. Research examining behavioral advertising indicates that consumers are generally unaware of the amount of information collected about them, what information is collected when visiting a website and how it is then used (Ur et al., 2012; Martin & Murphy, 2017). The same study finds that consumers are not well-informed about the role of advertising networks, or the icons intended to notify behavioral targeting practices online. According to a TRUSTe (2011) research survey, only one third of respondents were aware of the term online behavioral advertising, and only 37% reported knowledge of how to protect personal information online and took appropriate measures. More recently Pew Research Center reports that a majority of Americans are unsure of what happens with information collected online, yet 73% of respondents feel it important to have control of who can access their information (Rainie, 2018). Research supports that publicly giving users control over their personal data can increase their acceptance of behavioral advertising practices, reinforcing the benefit of privacy controls for both consumers and companies (Tucker, 2014).

While receiving customized advertising content can be beneficial in a multitude of ways, many consumers are not comfortable when companies collect and use their browsing history and online actions for this purpose. In fact, some consumers harbor negative attitudes about online advertisements, because of the monitoring and tracking of their every move (Rainie & Anderson, 2017b; Turow et al., 2009). As a result, consumers do take precautionary actions to hide online (such as using aliases or changing privacy settings) and/or carefully select what bits of personal information to share and display (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011; Samat, Acquisti, & Babcock, 2017; Rainie, 2018).

Traditionally privacy has been defined as the right to control information about oneself (Westin, 1967) and the right to be left alone (Altman, 1976). Today privacy includes, but is not limited to, the protection of personal information across contexts, the desire to control personal exchanges that are increasingly happening online, and the right to control how personal information is used after initially collected (Margulis, 2003; Schwartz & Solove, 2011; Smith & Anderson, 2018). Past privacy research supports this notion of privacy in that many consumers do indeed want control over personal information. Those with higher perceived control over their data tend to disclose more, and often to more people compared with those who are not as confident (Mothersbaugh et al., 2011; Schwartz & Solove, 2011; Acquisti, Brandimarte, & Loewenstein, 2015). Higher perceived control also prompts more engagement with branded messages (Tucker, 2014). While a large body of evidence supports that control is desired by consumers, other studies find a “privacy paradox,” which implies that consumers are concerned about privacy, yet share a great deal of their personal information through different platforms, and do not incorporate best practices to safeguard themselves or access to their information (Barnes, 2006; Norberg, Horne, & Horne, 2007; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). Hargittai and Marwick (2016) highlight three causes for the privacy paradox for younger consumers (aged 19-35 years) as: (1) a lack of adequate understanding of risks associated with data sharing; (2) a lack of skills to protect their personal information, a point often exacerbated by marketers/social media platforms regularly changing their privacy settings; and (3) a feeling of social pressure to use platforms that necessitate large-scale data sharing as these are key for their socializing, education, and even employment opportunities.

Consumer trust is widely based on perceived consequences of sharing personal information, including secondary data use (Miyazaki, 2008) that in effect can mitigate privacy concerns

(Milne & Boza, 1999). Research shows that the more trust consumers have in a business, the more likely they are to exchange personal information to complete a transaction (Moorman, Deshpande, & Zaltman, 1993; Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1999).

Perceived risk can be conceptualized as a dichotomous choice that may result in either potentially positive or potentially negative outcomes (Dowling, 1986; Stone & Gronhaug, 1993). Risk is defined as a subjective experience, and the higher likelihood of a loss equals higher perceived risk (Stone & Gronhaug, 1993). As it is subjective, risk perceptions differ by context and individual (Hoover et al., 1978), which is to say different consumers placed in similar risky situations will each judge the potential risk differently. Some of these individual differences are based on experiences. For example, if a Facebook user has had her profile hacked in the past, her perceptions of risk and concerns will be greater than a user who has never experienced a profile hack—the nonhacked user will not be as alarmed (Weber & Milliman,1997; Sweeney, Soutar, & Johnson, 1999).

In their research, Labrecque, Markos, and Darmody (2019), demonstrate that both active and passive learning activities are effective in influencing change for some of the factors under review, such as privacy protection practices. Active learning is a highly personalized form of learning as it allows students to link new information to what they already know (Hamer, 2000), and assumes that knowledge is actively constructed by people, rather than passively received (Diamond, Koernig, & Iqbal, 2008). The antithesis of this type of learning is passive learning, where the instructor has a focal role in the learning process. An archetypical passive learning example would be traditional classroom lectures, whereby the lecturer talks to a room of quiet students whose primary role is to listen and take notes. Marketing education is replete with examples of students taking active learning roles in Experiential Learning activities. Examples include students conducting marketing projects with real-world marketing clients (Brennan, 2014), operating simulated businesses (Russell-Bennett, Rundle-Thiele & Kuhn, 2010), testing and observing marketing interventions and consumer behaviors in 'laboratories' (Valdez & Cervantes, 2018), recording and reflecting on marketing activities (e.g., through blogging) (Fowler & Thomas, 2015), engaging with world-real business problems through tools such as the Google Online Marketing Challenge (Canhoto & Murphy, 2016), and even partaking in classroom staples such as role-playing or group activities.

The research study implemented by Labrecque et al. (2019) find that after completing either an active or passive exercise, groups reported less trust in marketers and higher levels of privacy risk. In the active learning exercise, students reported a greater increase in perceived risk compared with those students in the passive learning activity. This is perhaps because they encounter this topic through a more personal experience with their own data making the potential privacy risk more salient (McWilliams & Nahavandi, 2006; Baker & Comer, 2012). In fact, one feature of active learning is that it is more personal to the student relative to passive learning (e.g., Hamer, 2000). Passive learning activities, such as the lecture hall example presented earlier, are by design less personal, and less interactive.

Plausibly students, who are considered digital natives, feel that data collection and use are norms in this digital society, and/or that they can control data flow through their privacy settings, which may indeed mitigate their privacy concerns (Labrecque et al., 2011; Aguirre et al., 2015). For instance, social media platforms provide a number of personal settings that users can customize to control what information is visible to their connections, whereby content is blocked from some audiences, but not from others. Still, even as more and more reports show that a majority of Americans have experienced some major data breach and generally do not trust the government or businesses to protect their personal information (FTC, 2017; Olmstead & Smith, 2017), social media usage and digital connectedness, especially in the era of the IoT is unlikely to decrease. The privacy paradox is a tension that consumers will continue to contend with (balance); thus, it is imperative that students are armed with knowledge around personal privacy protocols as well as best business practices that they can carry over to the workplace.

In sum, understanding the many, dynamic privacy issues germane to the current marketplace is more important than ever in this digital age as online information sharing will continue to proliferate in consumers' daily lives, information increasingly exchanged like a commodity, and the monetization of social media websites and models will evolve. Educators should teach and share with students how to best protect their own personal information, and equally important how to act both ethically and business-minded when managing consumer data once in the workplace.

While the challenges of maintaining and protecting privacy are many, understanding and being aware of current privacy practices (in addition to the many social and business implications) are imperative for a comprehensive business education. Through just one exercise (both passive and active examples), scholars underline that the potential for positive learning and change are possible in the classroom, particularly through active learning exercises.

2.5. Certifications in Digital Marketing and Digital Badges

An emerging educational tool in marketing and media courses is the integration of third-party certifications that give students an industry credential for current topics or media platforms (i.e., Google, HubSpot, Hootsuite, etc.). To understand the diffusion of these certifications among educators, how they are being integrated, and current perceptions of their effectiveness, Cowley, Humphrey Jr., and Muñoz (2020) conducted a cross-disciplinary survey of 122 college faculty who teach digital marketing and media topics. Findings revealed that certifications enjoy high awareness, with a small number receiving higher adoption rates.

To analyse what are truly certificates, it is important to understand the classifications of offerings available to professionals. Cohen (2012) delineates certifications from professional licensures. Certifications are created and administered by vendors and independent entities, while government agencies oversee licensures (Cohen, 2012). The finance and accounting regulatory bodies administer professional licensure exams, such as the Series 7 in the financial industry or the CPA exam in accounting, while third-party certifications are not required for licensure.

However, these offerings can help a job candidate stand out and help existing workers to upskill. Yet there exists significant complexity in the number and formats of certifications available.

Bishop and Frincke (2004) classify professional certifications into three key areas, including vendor-specific certifications, domain-specific certifications, and practical certifications. Vendor-specific certifications are offered by a company, typically focused on mastery of core skills related to a platform or technology offered by that vendor (e.g., Google Ads and Analytics certifications, HubSpot software certifications). Domain-specific certifications focus on a specialized body of knowledge with an emphasis on application in real-world contexts (e.g., Email Marketing and Content Marketing certifications offered by HubSpot).

In conclusion, practicum certifications require the completion of specific tasks versus the general knowledge of a domain. Platform-specific companies, like HubSpot, offer certifications that fit multiple types of certification classifications, with HubSpot Marketing Software Certification, including both domain-specific knowledge and testing, along with practicum elements. In short, many permutations of certification types exist, creating potential complications for students and educators (Cowley, Humphrey Jr., and Muñoz, 2020). The use of certifications in marketing education is new compared with other fields in business, such as project management and information technology. In these other fields, certifications to support self-directed learning and continuing professional development are highly valued. Certifications also fill gaps in both degree offerings and practitioner expectations of program graduates (Fisher et al., 2005; Fawcett & Rutner, 2014).

Several industry organizations are now providing marketing certificates and certification programs. To illustrate, the American Marketing Association offers a Professional Certified Marketer certification in Digital Marketing, Sales Management (American Marketing Association, 2019), and the Professional Certified Marketer. Association of National Advertisers (ANA) offers digitally related certificates and a Certified ANA Marketing Professional (CAMP) certification (Association of National Advertisers, 2020). The National Institute for Social Media (NISM) offers a Social Media Strategist Certification (National Institute for Social Media, 2020), whereas, the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2020) offers three certifications related to digital media.

For example: Google offered one of the first widely available platform-specific certification programs with its Google Advertising Professional Program; HubSpot offers multiple free domain-specific certifications focused on inbound marketing, including e-mail marketing, content marketing, and social media marketing and two platform-specific certifications with practicum elements for the HubSpot Marketing Software and the HubSpot Sales Software; Brandwatch for Students is a package initiative that includes access to its software platform for monitoring and measuring social media conversation around brands and keywords, as well as a certification exam testing proficiency with the platform; Facebook offers paid certifications under the title of Facebook Blueprint; Hootsuite was another early entrant in its social media platform-specific offering.

The adoption of certifications is consistent with the recent marketing pedagogy call for a “digital-first approach” (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2016; Rohm et al., 2019). Muñoz and Wood (2015) propose that marketing educators have an opportunity to balance conceptual and applied knowledge with the use of industry certifications, and marketing educators are adapting pedagogies to address the needs of digital natives (Crittenden & Peterson, 2019). Indeed, marketing departments are adapting. As of 2019, 73% of all institutions offer at least one digital marketing course, with 37% offering more than one course focused on digital topics (Langan et al., 2019), and this penetration is only likely to continue.

Staton (2016) provided early recommendations for the use of certifications in digital marketing courses, tying certification materials from Hootsuite, HubSpot, and Google to industry talent needs to improve assessment and student job placement. Similar to other business disciplines, marketing certifications signaln achievement of skills or a baseline knowledge to the hiring manager (Goldring, 2017), and Kinsky et al. (2016) found that including certifications on personal branding and résumés often opened the door to interviews and signaled a willingness to learn. As with the other disciplines previously discussed, certifications pair effectively with applied assignments, such as leveraging Google Ad Grants to apply skills from the certifications (Clarke et al., 2018). Moreover, according to a recent study by Payscale, Google Ads and Analytics certifications have been associated with salary bumps and are considered to be "expected knowledge" for digital marketers (White, 2017).

Digital and social media advancements will continue to spur sizable change for educators (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2015). Accordingly, Zahay et al. (2019) found that educators perceive digital marketing courses to be more challenging to prepare compared with traditional marketing courses. Certifications are one way educators can keep up with the pace of change, as 48% of educators polled learn about digital marketing from past industry experience and 37% learn from online resources like certifications (Zahay et al., 2019).

While these tools have been helpful to educate the educator, they aid in reducing the scope of course preparation, especially for educators who need up-to-date content that facilitates a flipped-classroom approach (Spiller & Tuten, 2019). Furthermore, educators may save time leveraging certification materials instead of developing custom material, and these educators may enjoy perceptions of higher credibility for the course (Spiller & Tuten, 2019). These tools also aid educators in providing students with marketplace signals in the form of third-party verified skills attainment (Honea et al., 2017) and personal branding efforts (Kinsky et al., 2016).

The pedagogical use and value of certifications and certification exams is a nascent area of research in marketing. Individual instructors report positive student perceptions and benefits from achieving certifications in class (Kinsky et al., 2016; Key et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Laverie et al., 2020), while others find that certified students may not reap all of the purported benefits to certification (Hartman & Andzulis, 2019).

Research has also begun to examine the potential benefits to instructors who use digital marketing certifications and how instructors might effectively integrate these into a course curriculum. These perspectives propose that incorporating certifications is cost-effective, time-efficient, and more relevant for students in facilitating their preparation for industry, all while increasing instructor efficacy through continuing education (Goldring, 2017; Spiller & Tuten, 2019).

A study conducted by Humphrey Jr., Laverie, and Muñoz (2020) explores the potential of using digital badges as a learning platform. Digital badges provide a visual depiction of a learned skill to employers, typically earned in a virtual learning environment and containing metadata on the context, meaning, and the results of the learning activity (Gibson et al., 2015). Badges incentivize and engage learners, identify progress, and signal achievement (Gibson et al., 2015). Scholars have proposed badges as a worthwhile extension of other types of hands-on marketing learning tools (Saxton, 2015; Cadotte, 2016). Badges have industry awareness, and their completion can be publicly communicated and understood by hiring managers. However, research outlining the use of badges in the marketing education literature is scant, nor does any marketing-focused research explore the efficacy and student outcomes from a marketing technology–focused digital badge learning platform.

Humphrey Jr., Laverie, and Muñoz (2020) analyse Salesforce Trailhead badges as an experiential learning option. Salesforce has created Salesforce Trailhead, a platform for online learners that offers a free, module-based program with digital badges organized by role, skill level, and functional area (Salesforce, 2019e). Modules may be conceptual with knowledge checks or conceptual with a practicum component. Practicums can include completing projects, such as creating an Amazon Alexa skill, designing analytics dashboards, or configuring customer CRM forms (Salesforce, 2019b). Projects are quick to complete for students, with estimates of the time investment varying from 15 minutes to 2½ hours. This type of online learning platform for marketing technology provides a useful resource for marketing educators. First, it includes vital areas of digital marketing knowledge that are in demand by industry, including e-commerce, community, analytics, artificial intelligence, sales and sales management, CRM, Internet of Things, and the integrated Marketing Cloud platform (Salesforce, 2019e). The platform further breaks out modules by role (admin, business user, developer) and current skill level (from beginner to advanced). Furthermore, faculty can create a Trailmix, which is a playlist-type collection of badges for students to complete. This capability allows faculty to choose precisely the content that matches a course and its learning objectives. Most other technology companies that provide learning resources lack this ability to focus content, requiring completion of all modules to earn a certification, providing more flexibility for marketing educators. Another feature of the learning platform is the use of gamification, with users earning badges and points with achievement levels (from Scout to Ranger).

Salesforce offers two additional learning sequences, including Trails and Superbadges. The company-curated trails provide a cohesive learning path focused on a concept or Marketing Cloud product area that consists of multiple badges (Salesforce, 2019f). At the same time, superbadges combine various modules to signify a higher level of expertise in areas such as analytics, data integration, and service cloud product (Salesforce, 2019d). Thus, faculty can use a guided learning path created by Salesforce (trail) or create a custom playlist of modules that fit a course's goals (Trailmix), providing flexibility and the ability to narrow the focus of the learning activity.

Students felt that certifications and badges related to marketing technology signaled to the marketplace that they had achieved a level of competence in relevant and in demand skills. As marketing and technology continue to converge, more roles will require knowledge of and hands-on experience with marketing technology platforms. Learning resources like Salesforce Trailhead provide flexible and customizable learning activities in the classroom. They can also serve as a faculty development tool.

3. Conclusions

The world of professional selling and sales management offers students and university professors alike myriad opportunities and challenges. For example, the professional selling discipline offers tremendous personal and career opportunities for well-prepared college and university graduates. On the firm's website, Humres Technical Recruitment (2017) proposes that "sales is one of the most enduring and versatile occupations on the planet, with a career in sales bringing you endless job options'. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reported that there will be more than 980,000 sales and sales-related positions that need to be filled annually through the year 2020.

Selling Power Magazine (2016) reported that the top 200 sales firms in America will seek over half a million new salespeople. This same research showed that the top 30 direct-selling firms employed more salesforces totaling more than 24 million professionals. In 2013, Cummins, Peltier, Erffmeyer and Whalen reported predictions of continuing strong demand for professional salespeople. And the world of professional selling is evolving in the wake of technology and changing consumer decision making.

Canaday (2012) wrote that "social media has become the fastest-adapted new tool to hit professional B2B sales since…well maybe since time began." He also noted that salespeople use social media for a variety of uses, including collaboration with other reps and to work with customers. Agnihotri et al. (2012) concluded that social media tools can be used by salespeople to build social networks and to develop knowledge bases. In their work published in 2015, Moore et. al. found that a 'substantially high' proportion of sales people, and an even higher proportion of sales managers, in both B2B and B2C settings utilized social media for customer relationship management purposes. Featherstonebaugh (2010) reported that in a global survey of salespeople, nearly half of their buyers acknowledged an increase in the role of social media in buying process.

Education today increasingly differs from that at the end of 20th century. We are living in a time of growing implementation of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) into the education of children and adults of all age groups (Hruby, 2008). This trend is called the "Read-Write Web", which is a social software, where everyone publishes resources on the web using simple and open, personal and collaborative publishing tools (O'Reilly, 2005). Cachia (2008) defined "Social software" as those applications that enable a wide range of interaction, collaboration and sharing between users. These include applications for blogging, clipping, instant messaging, forums, web directories, social bookmarking, social networking, multimedia sharing and cataloguing, social cataloguing, social citations, and social gaming, virtual words, wikis, eLearning, etc. Social software applications are based on digital media and digital technologies. As "Digital media" we include any media that exists in a computer-readable format, and can reside on a local device (CD, DVD, Blue Ray, or hard drive), or remote location (website) (Caputo, Wolf and Borho, 2006). This paper deals with curriculum development, therefore, we will only be considering the role of digital media in education here.

According to Watson and Pecchioni (2011), digital media in education are either demonised or viewed as the panacea for curriculum ills. Hedberg (2011) sees the possibility of using in producing positive learning outcomes, which, in terms of efficiency and usefulness, also confirms the findings of Aberson et al. (2002) and Law, Lee and Yu (2010). On the other hand, Dillenbourg (2000) understands that challenge as reaching a deep understanding of the relationship between technological choices and teaching processes. A similar view of this problem is presented by Mayer (2005), who states that the question “What can we do with multimedia?” is adopting a technology-centred approach that is doomed to fail. This is also confirmed by Young (1995), Huddleston and Unwin (1997), and Joshi et al. (2003), who all say that the teacher (or technology) cannot be in the central position of teaching, but it must be the student. The teacher nowadays has evolved into a “manager of education” or “facilitator”, and technology becomes a medium, not the central point. Therefore, the question leading us to a student-centred approach, with proper use of digital media, should be how, or whether, to adapt digital media designs to help students more (Mayer, 2005). There are several ways to answer Mayer’s question. One of them offers the traditional methods of learning and education enhanced with new forms and learning methods, using digital media (Polackova and Jindrova, 2010). This is supported by Dillenbourg (2000), who sees the virtual learning environment as not only integrating a variety of digital media, but also integrating all the physical tools that can be found in a classroom (Dillenbourg, 2000):

A variety of non-computerised learning resources: physical tools, instruments, books, etc.

A variety of interactions that are not computer-mediated: face-to-face discussion among students, lectures by the teacher, group discussions, including traditional media such as letters, TV, phone, fax, etc.

A variety of activities that are not computer-based: field trips, role playing, etc.

So, according to Dillenbourg (2000), there is no need to draw a boundary between the physical and virtual worlds: the key is to integrate them, not to separate them.

In university level sales education, the importance and effectiveness of experiential learning has been recognized and is being emphasized. Chapman, Schetzsle and Wahlers (2016) introduced an innovative experiential pedagogy for the teaching of sales management and professional selling skills. In their Marketing Education Review manuscript, Alavrez et. al., (2015) reported that a structured experiential simulation in a professional selling course improved students’ critical thinking skills. Described as an innovative and highly flexible pedagogy used in sales courses, Hawes and Foley (2006) introduced Professional Activity Reports (emphasizing professional involvement, oral presentation, and written communication) and found them to be a key factor in enhancing the student learning experience. Within experiential learning the authors (Cummins et al., 2013, p. 71) noted, “Today’s Generation Y students respond positively to experiential learning and the opportunity to garner business experience while still in school.”

To improve student learning, educators must understand as much as possible about how students learn (Byrne et al., 2002; Byrne & Willis, 2008). The major marketing education journals devote a good deal of space to publications whose focus is to enhance student learning (Boyer et al., 2014; Delpechitre & Baker, 2017; Diamond et al., 2008; Labrecque et al., 2019; Vander Schee, 2011; Zarzosa, 2018). Also featured are reflective pieces that question and assess the relevance of current program content and the manner in which it is delivered (Dahl et al., 2018). These periodic self-assessments are critical to high-quality marketing education, as instructors strive to achieve the optimal balance between imparting conceptual knowledge and building the applied skills required of students to obtain good jobs and grow as professionals (Honea et al., 2017; Schlee & Harich, 2010; Schlee & Karns, 2017). For over four decades, researchers in higher education have explored the existence of different approaches to learning based on the seminal work of Marton and Säljö (1976) and scale development by Entwistle et al. (1979).

There is strong evidence for the practice of three distinct approaches: a surface approach, driven by rote learning without self-reflection; a deep approach, centered on comprehension of course material and seeking to relate ideas; and a strategic approach, based on the intention to achieve the highest possible grades (Entwistle et al., 2000; Entwistle et al., 2013). Lucas (2001) contends that learning approach inquiries within a disciplinary context would be of value.

It is important to develop a deeper understanding of marketing and sales students' approaches to learning and educators' methodologies of teaching. To achieve this goal, a review of the extant literature about some of the most relevant learning approaches is presented. It is crucial to strengthen dialogue between academic research and education systems to set up monitoring activities and to support teachers' reflection and learning from the work accomplished (Olimpo et al., 2010).

References

For the the full list of the references please ask to the authors.