



Developing critical perspectives in a media saturated world: Using digital video clips to shape learning in marketing

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This paper describes how digital video clips are being used to support the development of critical perspectives and greater awareness of the location of marketing practice in wider moral, social and political arenas. The context is an undergraduate marketing subject, *Brand Management*. Adobe CAPTIVATE 5.5 facilitates the combination of video clips sourced from *YouTube* along with music, images and educator voice-overs into integrated online learning resources for the subject. Discussion in this paper is limited to just one topic area for the subject, ethical issues in branding. To engage students to explore contested ethical issues a multimedia resource has as its focus the Australian Government's proposed legislation to mandate plain cigarette packaging. This illustration of the use of digital video clips highlights the significant potential for development of online marketing curriculum and meaningful learning in marketing, providing greater attention is paid to the pedagogy that underpins the use of digital videos.

Keywords: digital video, critical perspectives, blended learning, marketing, brand management

Introduction

In a media saturated world marketing students do not lack stimulation in their area of study. In fact as consumers, they are immersed in the phenomena that they are studying – in this particular case, brand management. Brands are part of marketing students' daily lives – they buy particular branded products, they are exposed to high levels of marketing communications, to TV programs such as the *Gruen Transfer* that focus on advertising and brands, and to online corporate and user generated content about brands on websites such as *YouTube*.

In this context, a key challenge for marketing educators is how to make what is familiar and everyday into a subject of study, of critical analysis, and to help students view branding strategy and practices from more than a user (or a managerial) perspective.

The author is currently developing online resources in a project exploring innovative ways of introducing blended learning that challenges learners in marketing subjects with more demanding and higher-level cognitive tasks based around the use of digital video (Burden & Atkinson 2007). An undergraduate marketing subject *Brand Management* that is offered in both face-to-face and distance modes is the subject of the trial.

The use of video technology by marketing academics is not new. For example videos provide by textbook publishers and *YouTube* clips are commonly used in teaching in the discipline. However, this use is often confined to purposes of stimulating student engagement, illustration of how marketing concepts can be applied and provision of a variety within a lecture format. It is likely that, to date, the pedagogic opportunities afforded by digital videos have been not been fully realised in the discipline.

One particular area where digital videos can be used is to develop rich learning resources to support the development of critical perspectives. The next section provides a short discussion of critical perspectives in the marketing discipline and the capacity for digital videos to assist meaningful learning in this regard. This is followed by a specific illustration of how digital videos have been used to develop a resource that engages students and stimulates them to explore multiple perspectives around a Government proposal to mandate plain packaging for cigarettes. The paper concludes with a brief discussion on future directions for this work and wider implications for the use of digital videos in the marketing discipline.

Using digital videos in to develop critical perspectives in marketing

Discussion on optimising educational benefits from video use is not new in business education. In 1998 management educators Marx and Frost (1998) highlighted the power of videos to engage students by heightening arousal and motivating students to become more responsive to content being presented. They cautioned however, about the dangers of embracing video as a teaching tool then using it in ways that reinforce learning modes that support passive, superficial consumption of video offerings rather than more desirable approaches to learning. Their warnings are just as relevant today.

In marketing education and more broadly in higher education there is a need for learners to not only acquire knowledge, but to actively and critically engage with new knowledge and make meaning from this new knowledge. The style of learning being encouraged in the brand management subject under review could be characterised as what Kappinene (2005 p.238) terms *constructive learning*.

Constructive learning means that learners accommodate new ideas into their prior knowledge. This process of constructing knowledge is a process of meaning-making not of knowledge reception. This meaning-making process results from puzzlements, perturbation, expectation violations, curiosity or cognitive dissonance.

This view of learning aligns well with calls in the marketing discipline for a more critical perspective on marketing education and practice. What is needed, argue Catterall et al. (2002) is a shift from:

- a narrow focus on marketing as a management function within a firm to a focus on how managers do marketing in wider social, cultural and historical contexts
- studying marketing from a single (managerial) perspective to studying marketing from multiple perspectives: marketing managers in companies, consumers and citizens
- marketing concepts as needing to be learned, to marketing concepts and techniques made problematic

This approach obviously also requires a shift away from a content based approach to teaching and learning and a greater emphasis on students making meaning of marketing knowledge from both a personal and a wider societal perspective. If rich learning environments developed using digital video clips can be designed with a critical edge there is the potential for powerful learning outcomes.

Background to the resource development project

Brand management is a second year undergraduate subject in marketing and advertising programs and is offered in both distance and face-to-face modes. An important goal of this project is to enhance blended and flexible learning experiences across all cohorts. The use of multilayered resources provides a way to create dynamic learning environments and move towards more equitable learning experiences across diverse cohorts.

Adobe CAPTIVATE is being used as a tool to bring together video clips, images, music and educator voice over. The voice over serves a number of purposes including: providing context, giving explanation and direction, questioning and stimulating critical reflection. Pauses are inserted in various places to encourage

students to reflect on the stimulus presented and consider their own position and the contested positions around the issues in question.

There are a variety of sources of material in this subject, much of which can be sourced from *YouTube*. These include:

- Ads for branded products
- Company brand overviews
- Subject related cases provided by publishers on DVD
- Video clips from business schools (uploaded to *YouTube*)
- Student presentations (uploaded to *YouTube*)
- Marketing consultant presentations (*YouTube* & SlideShare)
- Advocacy group campaigns e.g. *GetUp!*
- News items relevant to branding
- Television entertainment programs such as *MadMen* and the *Gruen Transfer*

The resource outlined in the following section uses ABC news clips and a segment from a 2010 episode of the *Gruen Transfer*. All of this material was downloaded from *YouTube*. This resource relates to just one topic in the unit – ethical issues in branding. Rather than talk about ethical issues in an abstract fashion, the selection of the current debate on plain cigarette packaging was chosen a vehicle to surface various ethical issues in branding in an engaging and substantive way.

Illustration: Examining perspectives on plain cigarette packaging

The Australian Government's intention to legislate to mandate plain packaging for cigarettes is a topical ethical issue in branding that can be brought to life by the use of multimedia. The use of real or hypothetical scenarios to provide context to explore ethical issues in marketing is not new. However, use of video clips adds richness, authenticity and greater depth to the presentation of multiple perspectives around a contested issue. There is a stronger base for student engagement and a greater opportunity for students to appreciate the rational and emotional appeals being made by the various stakeholders.

A detailed discussion of the specifics of how the video clips are used is now presented. For distance students, pauses are inserted at question points to provide students to take the time to consider the relevant issues and their response to them. In face-to-face-mode the Captivate presentation is paused at relevant moments to provide time for reflection and discussion in small groups and then the larger group.

Initially students are presented with two short ABC news clips. The first clip presents the Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, announcing the proposed changes to cigarette packaging and the arguments that support the change (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtQQVWKJjug>).

The second clip reports on a poll commissioned by the Cancer Council indicating strong community support for plain cigarette packaging (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgz055UhiDQ&feature=related>). The following questions are then posed to students:

Is the Australian Government entitled to legislate to mandate plain cigarette packaging?
What is your response to the arguments presented by the Health Minister supporting the Government's position?

Having been presented with government and community perspectives the students are directed to consideration of the financial position of tobacco companies as discussed by a representative from British American Tobacco Australasia in another ABC news clip (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEXH7mqEEWE&NR=1>).

Students are then asked:

If you accept that cigarette brands represent very valuable assets for tobacco companies, do you believe these companies should be compensated for this government restriction on the use of their intellectual property?

If the tobacco industry funds advertising to create opposition to the changes (for example amongst small retailers) should the fact that tobacco companies are funding the advertising be made known

to viewers of that advertising?

Or is it OK for them fund other organisations, such as a small retailers alliance, to argue against the changes?

Students are invited to explore the potential limits of regulation on portrayal of harmful products, for example, whether regulation should be extended to representations of smoking in popular culture.

If as a society we want to discourage smoking, should the depiction of cigarette advertising in movies and television be regulated?

The focus is then switched to a personal position where students need to reflect and draw on their personal experience and values to respond to the following questions:

If your uncle, a heavy smoker, had been diagnosed with lung cancer do you imagine that this would influence your views on the promotion of cigarettes?

Would you take a well-paid marketing job in a tobacco company? Are there particular industries that you would choose not to work in as a marketing/advertising graduate?

At this point, students are shown an episode of the *Gruen Transfer* that canvasses all these issues, both reinforcing what has been already explored and demonstrating to students how they have comprehensively dealt with a variety of perspectives on this topic. Finally, students are invited to reflect on their positions on these issues and consider whether exposure to the different perspectives has provoked any change in their views or understandings. Presenting the video clips along with voice over and text in an integrated resource sets up the potential for students to associate the video clips with other media (e.g. stimulus questions) and find the relationship between the video clips and the other media (Young and Asensio 2005).

Currently the activities linked to the use of the multimedia resources are not assessable. After a trial period of use of the resources, consideration will be given to the appropriateness and potential benefit in assessing particular aspects of tasks. Ways of enhancing interactivity will also be explored. Refinement and development of the resources and activities will be informed by evaluation of not just this topic area but more broadly of the use of digital resources across the various topics in this unit.

Concluding comments

With the proliferation of online media that can be used to enhance learning in marketing, there is a strong need for wider discussion of the learning designs that underpin the use of digital videos and other online material. Learning design is described by (Young & Asensio 2002) as a dialogue between pedagogy and technology. Frameworks such as the *DiAL-e framework* (Burden & Atkinson 2008) and the *Three 'I's framework* (Young & Asensio 2002) framework provide a conceptual basis and language to elicit and describe taken for granted teaching practices and to challenge and enhance practices around learning design. These frameworks will be drawn on in other parts of this more comprehensive project and results of their use disseminated at a later stage.

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