Title: *Making Students Future Ready Through Active Learning Approaches at the Digital and Marketing Nexus*

Summary:

This case study covers the implementation of an innovation inspired module design (Curran and Murphy, 2019) of Digital Marketing which seeks to engage today's cloud native, device savvy students in more practice-based approaches to today's wider marketing challenges (Beetham and Sharpe, 2013). The Quadruple Helix Model (QHM) of innovation (West and Bogers, 2017) provided an appropriate framing to integrate insights and activities and embed knowledge opportunities related to Policy, Industry, Society and Academia (PISA) within an Active Learning pedagogy (Timmermans and Meyer, 2017). The outcome has been an increase to 25% over the university average of students who strongly agreed their overall experience was positive (see figure 1 in Further Information). One student recounted that *"the coursework was fun & interesting & applies to outside of uni."* Further examples of feedback are presented in 'Further Information' section.

What was done:

Building on five& fifty's Academic Excellence aim to develop/deliver innovative curricula through contemporary pedagogy, an active learning approach was adopted to deliver the module 'The Digital and Marketing Nexus' to a cohort of 96 students in semester 1 of 2019-20. Students could choose from several case companies which they could develop a digital strategy for (including Ulster's Student Wellbeing, NI's impressive sports technologists StatSports and a unique departmental in-house web-based experiment called AltMarketing.co.uk). ALTMarketing.co.uk challenged students to develop a digital marketing solution to support their own future learning. As a pre-cursor to students' own strategy development and using emergent technologies to facilitate and complement teaching (Johnston et al., 2018), students revised for a class test and increased their digital skills base by participating in an Inbound Marketing certification process with a globally renowned Marketing Technology platform. 66% of the cohort gained further accreditation with this additional industry recognised certification. This foundational knowledge gave students a common language through which to underpin their later strategies and to empower them to create digital assets to support their final assessment and presentations to industry via explainer videos (Henderson et al., 2017). The process encouraged a healthier student community through better understanding of wellbeing issues (Civic Contribution), developed and facilitated creative, independent learning and inquiry (Academic Excellence) and delivered working strategies channelling solutions to global issues through supporting local impact (Global Vision).

Motivation and aims:

Digital Marketing is an evolving craft which is challenging in its nature as a subject to teach, particularly to such digital natives who are often skilled in technology use but are in need of strategic perspective and knowledge (Schwieger and Ladwig, 2018). The motivation of engaging and using an innovation framework to support this active learning pedagogy (Peberdy, 2013) was to extend and integrate learning around consumers, end-users and key stakeholders, in so doing, to foster dynamic collaboration as a means to inspire student innovation in digital marketing solution development. Drawing from an innovation model, we re-designed the module to integrate four critical perspectives - those of Policy, Industry, Society and Academic practice (PISA), while promoting learners' active and experiential engagement in their learning processes (Schütz et al., 2019). Initially engaging industry through LinkedIn, we were able to create suitable challenges (see figure 2a).

Implementation:

Building on the process of applying the Integrated Curriculum Design Framework (ICDF) through its seven stages of development (Curran and Murphy, 2018), I had confidence to create an active learning experience framed in formative assessment processes as the central construct of the module (Nicol et al., 2006). A pilot website was developed prior to the module starting to enable students to actively assess the process and outcomes of building a digital marketing solution that was integrated with the latest marketing technology. This gave a unique 'behind the scenes' perspective of a working solution and leveraged an industry leading provider and their resource base. The domain ALTMarketing.co.uk was chosen which is shorthand for "Developing Marketers Through **A**ctive **L**earning and **T**echnologies." To sustain a minimum viable product (MVP), a small amount of content was created to support the initial experience and to highlight the potential of automation as part of enhanced digital marketing solutions which use bots and email automation. Additionally, this asset's inclusion fed into wider discourse on digital automation of marketing practice and supported students in developing practice-based solutions for the other case studies engaged. Speakers were brought in from the case companies as well as from an agency and this was supported by an innovation whereby industry could feed 'challenges' into seminars by sharing a short brief via the website (enabled by using the social network LinkedIn) which saw good industry uptake (see figure 2b).

Successes and lessons learnt:
In this module, the range of strategic approaches adopted, and solutions developed were remarkably good and facilitated those partner organisations to gain new knowledge and insights in partnership with the students. Some examples of the solutions created can be seen in the accompanying evidence (see below) where groups provided short 'explainer videos' of their solutions and how these would impact – here is a link to an example. There were successes and failures in this stage with varying levels of effort toward the quality of communication but some incredible and impactful pieces of content were created and strategies evidenced as a result (Nicol et al., 2006). My experience of active learning would suggest that post placement students can grasp much more challenging tasks and their outputs are more pleasing to other stakeholders across the quadruple helix model but the practice approach provides important experience for knowledge of threshold concepts to be underpinned and thus consideration should still be given to such engagements even if at a less complex level of engagement (Schwieger and Ladwig, 2018).

Transferability:
Adopting such approaches in engaging students in active learning requires a degree of comfort with certain unknowns and the willingness to work within a framework where you are a co-learner with the students at times (Hannon et al., 2005). This model of active learning has emerged from prior practice I have engaged in and has impacted on the experience of colleagues previously associated which can be evidenced by Dr Peter Bolan's comment below in support of a recent successful application for Senior Fellowship of the HEA:

"*John has a reassuring way of supporting a range of abilities in academic and support staff in the use of digital technology, particularly in active learning projects. His ability to engage us in co-developing solutions with students during practical sessions really impacted on confidence and risk taking with a variety of platforms and has been a valuable learning for those academics he engaged across several modules within the department and in the successful interdisciplinary projects he led also.*"

Further information:

1. **Publications related to this activity (in review):**

Bustard J.R.T. and Joseph-Richards, P. (2020) *Making Students Future Ready Through Active Learning: The effects of a Quadruple Helix Model Inspired Module Design*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

2. **Link to Website ALTMarketing.co.uk:**
https://altmarketing.co.uk/

3. **Link to Student Explainer Video (3 minutes):**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMOnnFEnVV0&feature=youtu.be

4. **Feedback from Students:**

"John always uses different teaching and interactive learning styles, this has been very helpful in learning and assessment."
"I enjoyed John's delivery of the content and the ability for co-creation to occur. The assessment is exciting to work on as you feel your suggestions will be implemented. Overall, it's been a great experience. "
"It was engaging, and we were able to get accreditation for inbound marketing. It also gave us insight to a fun side of marketing "
"This module was engaging and very enjoyable, I loved this class. Nearpod was engaging for student, and a good idea for those who have the answer but don't want to speak out and this builds confidence throughout the 12 weeks. "
"Applicable learning - applied theory with the assignment (Altmarketing)"
"John - he was enthusiastic and enjoyed teaching. The coursework was fun & interesting & applies to outside of uni. "
"The research topic was actually interesting, and I feel like it gave me good experience for what I might have to do in the future in my career. John was really helpful "

"The lectures linked well with the coursework and feedback was provided when needed."
"John was extremely approachable with any queries I had and took the time to ensure we understood what was required."

5. **Feedback from Stakeholders:**

Claire Drummond (Head of Student Experience and Wellbeing) commented that she was "really excited about using our students' skills to enhance the digital presence and promotion of our service to improve engagement and understanding (and remove stigma)."

Ryan Clarke (Digital Marketing Manager, Statsports) suggested "the ability to gain both variety and quality of thought, especially from a research lead perspective, is incredibly valuable to STATSports digital marketing process. Many of the wonderful contributions the Ulster University students have made in their research will go far beyond the paper they are printed on."

6. **Module Feedback from _ students who responded to the Survey**
Figure 1. (from Ulster's module feedback survey 19-20) presents that 25% over the university average strongly agreed that their experience was a positive one. Feedback from students was also very positive with some examples below from the survey:

7. **References**:

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Curran, R. and Murphy, C. (2018). Integrated Curriculum Design Framework, Ulster University. Available from: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/cherp/academic-development/icdf

Hannon, P.D., Collins, L.A. and Smith, A.J. (2005) Exploring graduate entrepreneurship: a collaborative, co-learning based approach for students, entrepreneurs and educators. *Industry and Higher Education*, 19(1), pp.11-23.

Henderson, M., Selwyn, N. and Aston, R. (2017) What works and why? Student perceptions of 'useful'digital technology in university teaching and learning. *Studies in Higher Education,* 42(8), pp.1567-1579.

Johnston, B., MacNeill, S., Smyth, K. (2018) *Conceptualising the Digital University: The Intersection of Policy, Pedagogy and Practice*, Palgrave.

Nicol, David J. & Debra Macfarlane-Dick (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice, *Studies in Higher Education*, 31:(2): 199-218.

Peberdy, D (2013) The Case for Active Learning Environments in University Education, Available at: http://www.top-tec.co.uk/assets/downloads/Whitepaper-ActiveLearningEnvironments.pdf (Accessed: 28th June 2019).

Schütz, F., Heidingsfelder, M.L. and Schraudner, M. (2019) Co-shaping the Future in Quadruple Helix Innovation Systems: Uncovering Public Preferences toward Participatory Research and Innovation. *The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation,* 5(2), pp.128-146.

Schwieger, D. and Ladwig, C. (2018) Reaching and retaining the next generation: Adapting to the expectations of Gen Z in the classroom. *Information Systems Education Journal*, 16(3), p.45.

Timmermans, J.A. and Meyer, J.H. (2017) A framework for working with university teachers to create and embed 'Integrated Threshold Concept Knowledge'(ITCK) in their practice. *International Journal for Academic Development*, pp.1-15.

Ulster University (2019a) Draft Ulster University Learning & Teaching Strategy: 'Learning For Success' 2018/19 – 2023/24. [online] Jordanstown, pp.1-7. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/346791/Draft-LT-strategy-260618.pdf [Accessed 31 Jan. 2020].

Ulster University (2019b). Learning and Teaching Strategy (2013/14 - 2017-18). [online] Jordanstown, pp.1-17. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/132396/Learning_TeachingStrategyGraphicVersion.pdf [Accessed 31 Jan. 2020].

Ulster University (2019c). Five & Fifty Five Year Strategic Plan Fiftieth Year Strategic Vision 2016 – 2034. [online] Coleraine, pp.1-25. Available at: https://www.ulster.ac.uk/fiveandfifty/strategicplan.pdf [Accessed 31 Jan. 2020].

West, J. and Bogers, M. (2017) Open innovation: current status and research opportunities. *Innovation*, 19(1), pp.43-50.

8. Appendix

Figure 1. Module Responses vs University Average for The Digital and Marketing Nexus
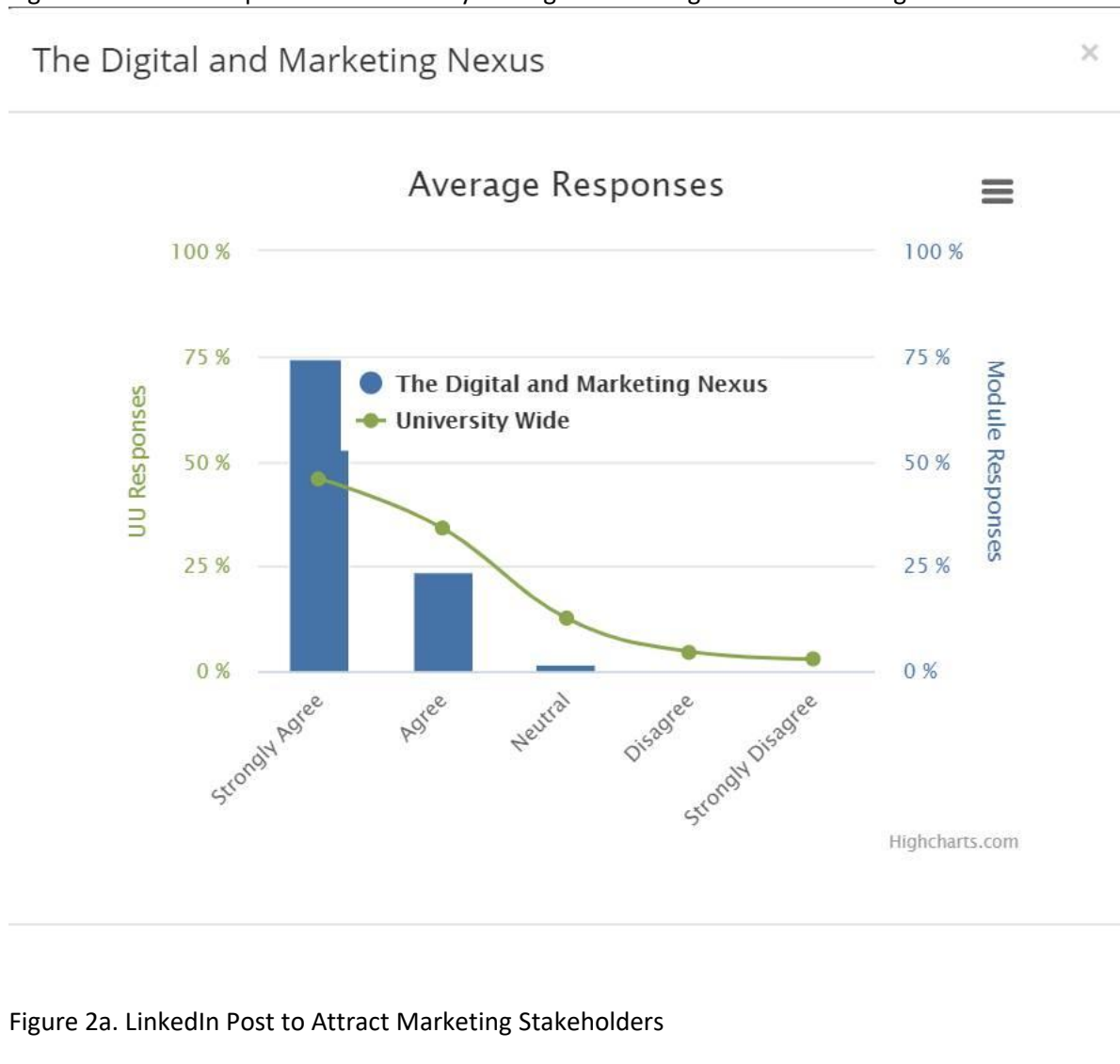

Figure 2a. LinkedIn Post to Attract Marketing Stakeholders

At **Ulster University Business School**, our final year undergraduate Digital Marketing students are seeking to augment their learning through short challenges set by industry. As an experiment - if anyone with a digital marketing challenge (real or theoretical), would be willing to share their focused idea for discussion and exploration, please do so via the following link. The website is a developing student led project.

https://lnkd.in/dsXJf6p

#businessschool #digitalmarketingtraining #highereducation #highereducation #digitalmarketing #university #university #practice #business #engagement #marketingstrategy #marketing #highereducationresearch #socialmedia

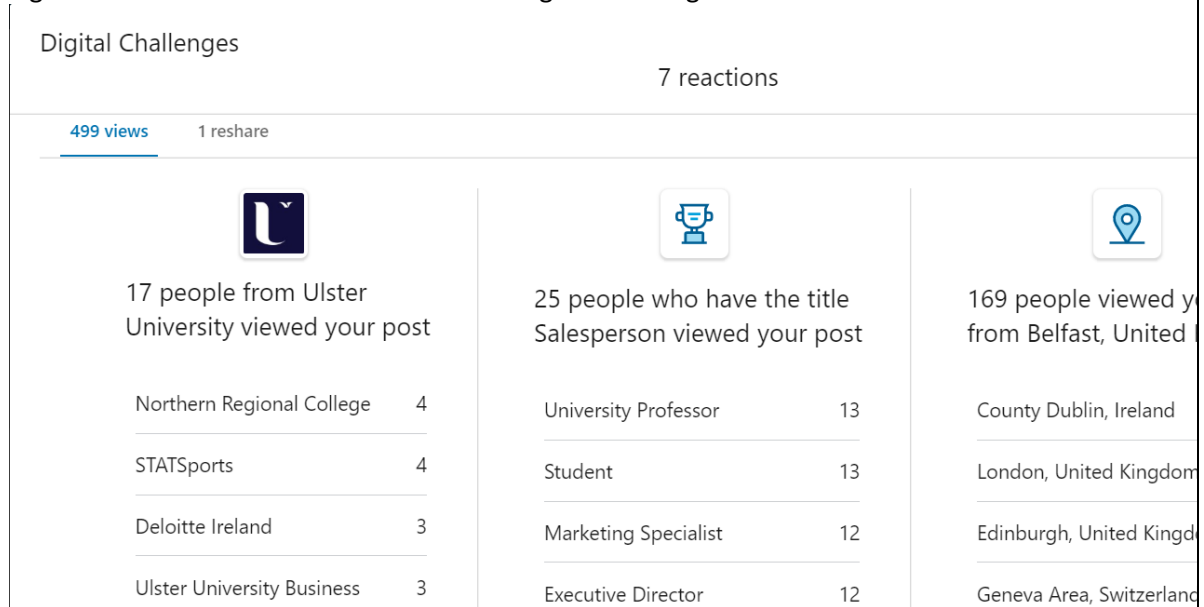Figure 2b. Statistics from LinkedIn Post on Digital Challenges

Digital Challenges

7 reactions

499 views   1 reshare

17 people from Ulster University viewed your post

Northern Regional College	4
STATSports	4
Deloitte Ireland	3
Ulster University Business	3

25 people who have the title Salesperson viewed your post

University Professor	13
Student	13
Marketing Specialist	12
Executive Director	12

169 people viewed y from Belfast, United

County Dublin, Ireland
London, United Kingdom
Edinburgh, United Kingd
Geneva Area, Switzerland

Figure 2c. Idea Capture Area on ALTMarketing.co.uk which garnered 6 industry challenges

**Do you have an interesting challenge which our final year marketing undergraduates could tackl
would you like to introduce your brand by creating a case study for our digital marketing class?**

Please set a Digital Marketing Challenge below. Consider suggesting an issue which would require students to research strategy, tactics or actions related to your business goal.

Enter Your Challenge Here:
Be clear and brief in your challenge. E.g. Sell more of product X in area Y, with a budget of Z.

Email*

First name

Last name

Website URL