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DEVELOPING INSIGHTFUL AND TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED INTERNSHIP IN DIGITAL MARKETING CONTEXT

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Abstract

Digitalization and technological rapid change are revolutionizing the marketing field, the related labor market and needed competencies. Based on the literature review, the adoption of new technologies have a great effect on the implementation of marketing. Thus, it can be stated that it also influences the work-related learning, such as internships in the higher education. The purpose of this study is to create a conceptual framework which describes the phenomenon. The framework consists of technology enhanced internship, community for educators and internship employers and processes and outcomes related to internship. A Model of Integrative Pedagogy (IP) is used as a frame to guide and understand work-integrated pedagogy.

For a research methodology, a design thinking methodology was chosen since it aims to involve participants from multiple disciplines. The design thinking process between theory, practice and experts draws insights that enhances new ideas. It integrates three major perspectives: first, the new digital marketing internship environment, second, the characteristics of a model of integrative pedagogy focused on concepts related to internships, and third, the characteristics of technology and tools that can help to change and improve the current practices.

As a result, the framework deepens our understanding of the current and new practices of the internship process. In order to optimize the learning outcomes and competences in the future, it is important to understand how current practices can be enhanced and managed in a new way. Another advantage of such framework is that it may direct the future technology investments, may create new capabilities and may reveal resources in both, educational and internship employers', organizations.

Keywords: higher education, internships, technology enhanced learning, integrative pedagogy.

1 INTRODUCTION

Digitalization has accelerated the development and adoption of marketing technologies. The rapidly changing environment challenges marketing teachers globally: they struggle to keep up with the vast variety of required skills and technologies [1]. In order to ensure the currency and expertise of the marketing studies in the universities of applied sciences, an ecosystem of students, employers and digital marketing agencies is needed [2] [3]. This research paper describes the ecosystem using the internship as an example.

In universities of applied sciences, internships are an important part of marketing studies [4]. [5] proposes that workplaces as learning environments are "understood as a complex negotiation about knowledge-in-use, roles and processes and essentially as a question of the learner's participation in situated work activities". Internships enable the students to adopt their marketing knowledge and skills in authentic business environments, such as marketing agencies, SME companies and tourism and service sector.

The main question of this paper is what kind of ecosystem could support the marketing teaching in universities of applied sciences? The question is addressed by decomposing internship using the integrative pedagogical model as a theoretical background. As a result, a description of the ecosystem is presented.

Although there is a large understanding that rapidly emerging digital technology is changing the existing marketing practices, the consistent understanding of the term 'digital marketing' remains missing. One view is that digital marketing can be just an extension to traditional marketing practices. According to [3], the key difference between digital and traditional marketing is the use of technologies to create digital relationships, with the latter being more oriented to mass communication. Although the digitization changes the way we think about the practice of marketing, there is still a hybrid of old and new. Another approach to digital marketing is to describe it as a new approach to marketing rather than adding digital elements to traditional activities [6]. In this paper the term 'digital marketing' refers to the definition of the American Marketing Association [7] any marketing methods conducted through electronic devices which utilize some form of a computer. This includes online marketing efforts conducted on the internet'.

All in all, these perspectives on the other hand lead to considerable changes in marketing education and learning processes and on the other hand, provide noteworthy opportunities.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design approach

Design thinking methodology was chosen since it combines theory and practice and is seen from managerial perspective as the best way to be creative and innovative [8]. Discussion draws upon design thinking as a methodology (DTM) 'that imbues the full spectrum of innovation activities with a human-centered design ethos' [9]. According to [8] there is not a unique meaning of "design thinking". Instead the concept is used in different situations. A literature review reveals some amount of prior research on applications on DTM, however especially in the context of industrial manufacturing of physical products [10] [11]. DTM can be a source of competitive advantage [12] in connecting people, approaches, methods and tools to assist in problem solving. Thus, DTM can be viewed also as a pedagogical concept since all human-centered activities are embedded in it. Although DTM begins with understanding of the human need, it quickly moves to 'learning by making' [11].

2.2 Research process, selection of companies and experts

The research process consisted of three phases. The aim of the first phase was to identify the key dimensions and categories of the role of internship in the model of integrative pedagogy based on a literature review. The aim of the second phase was to collect and analyse field-based data. Further literature was reviewed and with the help of empirical data the first version of the conceptual framework was developed. The aim of the third phase was to finalize the first version of the concept of internship in digital marketing environment framework.

This study is part of the Fudix (Future Digiexperts) research project funded by the European Social Fund. The project looks to ensure that companies in the future have digital marketing professionals with the necessary practical skills. The following criteria were used to select the participants for this study. Marketing agencies and SME case-companies agreed to participate by providing interviews and participation in the workshops. The representatives of the case-companies expressed a strong interest in developing internships and cooperation between education and the world of work in digital marketing. Instructors and students were selected from the networks of Jamk University of Applied Sciences and the condition was, that they have studied or taught digital marketing.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

The researchers began by collecting, understanding, and analysing the existing information. The data was gathered by several data collection methods in the frame of design thinking methodology. The data consists of job advertisements, in-depth and themed interviews of the instructors, digital marketing experts and students.

Data from job advertisements was analysed by the artificial intelligence of the HeadAI Microcompetencies service from 1/2021 – 2/2022. The AI searched from the job advertisements keywords and produced a skills map as a result. In addition, and to get a broader perspective, data from the interviews was analysed by four researchers following in-depth analysis framework. Everyone read the full transcripts of interviews and then a group analysis session was organized. All the four researchers met to discuss the findings and to agree on the main themes, dilemmas, key questions, and underlying assumptions. The analysis process continued by the authors by reviewing the internship in digital environment theme and by considering the key questions it raises.

3 RESULTS

The resulting concept is composed of applying the practices and technologies to a selected pedagogy, namely internship period. The parts of the concept are described in the following, using the model of integrative pedagogy as a starting point.

In the research it was identified that internship employers would need a step-by-step guide on how to employ a marketing trainee. This guide should give advice e.g. on the required paperwork, namely the internship contract, the need for feedback discussions and the employer's assessment. The guide can

also be used to communicate the possible internship contents and tasks to the employers. The communication can use e.g. different levels, where the first level has the basic marketing topics, for example, creating company homepages. The other levels can then have more demanding topics, for example, defining key words and optimizing the web contents. It is expected to ease the employment of the internship trainees when their possible employers can see what kind of skills or tasks can be expected from the trainees. Mapping this step-by step guide to the model of integrative pedagogy, the guide would serve as an integrative tool in the elements of *theoretical and conceptual knowledge and in its appliance into practice* [13]. Technologies to implement the described guide can include dynamic web-pages, where the contents can be presented as text, multimedia, video etc. There can also be augmented reality or virtual reality additions to facilitate the communication. In addition, webinars or other online meetings could serve as an information and communication channel between the possible employers and the university. The described guide can support the students to have a successful internship experience, for early communication increases their confidence, and they will not feel anxious about starting in a new job, as described in [14].

Regarding the *appliance into practice*, it can be noted that in addition to the marketing skills, the internship trainees can bring other skills and knowledge to the company. This knowledge can be, for example, a work process or practice that the student has learned during their studies. Young people can be very knowledgeable for instance on sustainable development, and hence can bring new perspectives on the topic to their workplaces. This refers to the *sociocultural knowledge* that may not be visible in the written artefacts but is embedded into the communities and practices of the workplace [13]. It can be particularly valuable for those employers who don't have experience of employing the younger generations.

However, the sociocultural knowledge does not transfer on its own, but an introduction is needed for both the student and the employer. Without introduction to the sociocultural knowledge, the trainee can be confused on the unwritten workplace practices, as well as the employer can be confused on the needs of the young trainee [14]. This kind of introduction could be implemented with synchronous discussions face to face or online, or even with asynchronous discussions via web- discussion boards, as presented in [4]. In the future also virtual reality environment or metaverse could bring benefits on the introduction.

In addition to the actual internship period in the company, the *students' role as active participants* must be supported [13]. This can be done in reflective discussions together with the other internship students and the teacher. Further, sharing experiences and feelings on the ongoing or past internship periods and hearing other students' reflections support the students to *deal with their emotions* and allows them to develop their *self-regulation skills* [15], [2]. The discussions can be arranged as group discussions in a live setting, applying for example the agile retrospective meeting practice [16], or online discussions arranged either synchronously or asynchronously. Technological enhancements include for example, virtual meetings, chat or discussion boards.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Digitalization and disruption hits both the marketing field and education industry hard. Hence, technological and practical enhancements and improvements are needed to provide the students the skills and knowledge needed in the rapidly changing working life. As a result of this study a learning environment is described, where the marketing teachers, students, internship employers and possibly also the digital marketing experts from marketing agencies can collaborate. The learning environment would need to have a digital collaboration space, where students find their courses and the needed digital tools, but also an environment for the possible employers to find the guide for providing an internship place for a marketing student. In addition to the digital environment, a physical collaboration space is needed so that the teachers, students and employers (both current and future) can meet and network with each other. Physical networking is valued by all parties, and it can be supported with various digital tools (eg. streaming, online discussion boards etc.). The collaboration space also supports mentoring of the students [4] and enables supporting the students' emotions, that can potentially impact interns' well-being. [2]

Hence, the concept describes a marketing ecosystem that adds value to all its participants. For marketing teachers, the ecosystem brings a network of business experts, whose expertise can be used in teaching, eg. as case studies or visiting lecturers. The network can also facilitate teachers' own learning and keeping up to date with the current marketing needs and technologies. For the students the ecosystem serves as an environment to learn marketing in practice and to apply their skills in real business cases. The purpose is also to facilitate their employability after graduating. For the internship employees involved, the ecosystem provides possibilities to develop their marketing and to get

resources for their marketing operations. The cooperation in the marketing ecosystem can also be a steppingstone for a larger scale business development together with the university.

Marketing agencies are valuable partners in the ecosystem, for they often have the latest knowledge and skills on specific marketing techniques and technologies. The agencies benefit in the ecosystem would be both networking with the students and teachers and hence being able to recruit new skilled employees, but also to meet their potential customers, the local companies. Further, co-operating with the university can create possibilities for larger scale projects, where the agency could not get involved on their own.

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