

Creating and Teaching an Online Business Case Study Using Twine

Enseigner une étude de cas en gestion avec Twine

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Volume 17, Number 2, 2020

Le numérique en pédagogie universitaire au temps de la COVID-19 –
Partie 1

The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education and Educational
Technology – Part 1

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1080256ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18162/ritpu-2020-v17n2-07>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

CRIFPE

ISSN

1708-7570 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Kervyn, N. O., Gómez Zúñiga, R. A., Vangrunderbeeck, P., Castillo Villar, F. R. &
Cavazos Arroyo, J. (2020). Creating and Teaching an Online Business Case Study
Using Twine. *Revue internationale des technologies en pédagogie universitaire /*
International Journal of Technologies in Higher Education, 17(2), 61–66.
<https://doi.org/10.18162/ritpu-2020-v17n2-07>

Article abstract

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Creating and Teaching an Online Business Case Study Using Twine

Enseigner une étude de cas en
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Mis en ligne : 23 novembre 2020

Abstract

In this practice report, we present how, in the face of Covid-19, we have transformed a traditional case study into an interactive online case study. This was done during a six-week course from mid-March to May, which had to be reinvented at the last minute as a fully online course. We present the advantages and limitations of this transition and the areas for improvement for the future.

Keywords

Case study, online pedagogy, Twine, narcoculture, drug trafficking

Résumé

Dans ce rapport de pratique, nous présentons comment, face au Covid-19, nous avons transformé une étude de cas traditionnelle en une étude de cas interactive en ligne. Cela a été fait pendant un

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cours de six semaines de la mi-mars à mai, qui a dû se réinventer à la dernière minute en tant que cours entièrement en ligne. Nous présentons les avantages et limites de cette transition et les pistes d'amélioration pour l'avenir.

Mots-clés

Étude de cas, pédagogie en ligne, Twine, narcoculture, trafic de drogue

In the following practice report, we present how, faced with the Covid-19, we turned a traditional case study into a flexible online business case study. This case study was developed for a six-week course from mid-March to May that had to be reinvented at the last minute as a fully online course.

Fall 2019: Traditional Case Study Format

In 2019 we published a business case study titled “What to do when your brand is kidnapped by Narcos? The case of Buchanan’s whisky” (Kervyn et al. 2019a; 2019b). This case study was part of a more comprehensive ongoing research project investigating the marketing implications of Narcoculture, the subculture that has developed as a result of the strong presence of drug cartels in northern Mexico. Buchanan’s is a Scotch whisky brand that is part of the brand portfolio of Diageo, a major international alcohol group. In Mexico, as in other markets, Buchanan’s brand identity is based on classical qualities of Quality, Tradition, Scottishness, the founder’s persona and the brand value of sharing. However, the brand has been adopted as the drink of Mexican drug-traffickers. This brand appropriation is quite visible given the impact the narco cartels have on Mexican society and the large audiences reached by narco culture through narco corridos music and other cultural products and practices (Castillo Villar et al., 2020). The case study discusses how the nature of the group that has adopted the brand creates a dilemma for Diageo, which can neither openly oppose nor embrace this subculture’s appropriation of one of its brands, thus opting to ignore it. This case is designed to be used in a marketing management, brand strategy, or consumer culture course. Specifically, the case is written for college seniors or Master’s students with basic strategic marketing training. It provides the basis of discussions on brand management, consumer culture, brand portfolio management, international marketing, repositioning strategy, brand architecture, brand equity, brand communication, brand assets, brand appropriation and consumer relationships with brands.

In practical terms, as with any case study, it consists of a few pages of text in PDF format ending with several questions. There is also an accompanying teaching note. For each question asked, the teaching note presents the students with learning goals, probing questions, and an extended answer. In the fall of 2019, we did this case study with Master’s students at the start of a consumer behaviour course. In small groups, students were given 3 hours to prepare their answers to the questions while the professor circulated among the groups to answer questions and provide feedback. Then, in front of the whole class, each group of students presented their answers to one of the questions and commented and asked questions when the other groups did their presentations. The questions were a good fit for an introductory consumer behaviour course: “How could Diageo segment the market in order to prepare a strategic reflection around Buchanan’s in Mexico?” “What segment of the Mexican population is most likely to be drawn toward Buchanan’s because they associate its brand image with narcocultura?” “Why does Buchanan’s have an aspirational appeal for some consumers?” “How is Buchanan’s appeal different in cases of private vs. public consumption?”

Spring 2020: Online Case Study Format

In 2020, this case study was used for a Master's-level Marketing Communication course. The six-week course, from mid-March to May, was initially planned as a standard in-person course with lectures followed by a full day case study and an exam. Rather than simply moving all the lectures online, with online meeting tools such as MS Teams®, we decided to decrease the number of lectures and add an extra case study as an introduction to the course in order to get students involved with the content straight away. To make the case study more engaging, rather than just posting the PDF file online, we developed an online version of the case using Twine. This tool allows users to create interactive stories in the form of full-screen⁵ web pages. Instead of a five-page text, the case was divided into 33 interconnected blocks that the students could explore (Kervyn, n.d.). In one instance, the introduction described a fictional Buchanan's Brand manager that had commissioned a business study about the brand. That business study had produced three reports covering the Whisky market in Mexico, Buchanan's official brand identity, and Buchanan's brand image in Mexico. Students had the option to start by opening any of these three reports; each report was divided into different sections between which the students could freely navigate. For example, the brand identity report had an introduction followed by three sections developing Buchanan's brand history, Buchanan's Pricing, and Buchanan's communication. The Twine story also presented six questions that the fictional brand manager had to address. In groups of four, students were asked to prepare written answers to the first five questions and a video answer to the sixth question. They were given a week to produce a preliminary version of their written report. They then received written feedback on this preliminary version and ten days to write the final version and the video answer to the last question.

Advantages of the Online Format for a Business Case Study

Compared to the traditional way of running case studies, we found a number of advantages to this online flexible version.

- **User-friendly:** For the writer, Twine is free and open-source. It is user friendly and uses simple codes, making it easy to use even for someone without any programming experience. Tutorial videos are easy to find, and there is a whole Twine wiki available.

Case studies on Twine are also ergonomic and intuitive for digital native students. We received no comments or questions about the accessibility and navigability of the case study.

- **Flexible storyline:** The flexible story structure allowed us to create a mix of linear and non-linear structures for the case (Holmberg, 2019). For instance, in Buchanan's official brand identity report, students can start by reading the brand history, brand communication strategy, or brand pricing strategy. This activity is consistent with the way a project manager would receive data when conducting a marketing study. Other parts of the case used a linear structure, such as for the part of the case presenting Narcoculture in which the information was presented chronologically.
- **Multi-media content:** Moving a story online allowed us to embed various media to illustrate and enrich the case study (Holmberg, 2019). Pictures and videos were used to show students the official brand communication as well as the brand touchpoints in Narcoculture. We also

5. Participants have to select the full screen button in order to view the case properly.

embedded a timeline of the war on drugs, from the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Tax Act in 1914 to the present (Kervyn, 2020). Previously, with a PDF type case study, students had to open a web browser and look up the different media referenced in the case. However, by doing so, they ran the risk of getting distracted: if they opened a narcocorrido video on YouTube, they would then be tempted to watch many other videos suggested by the platform. With the online case study, the Twine story takes up all the screen. Therefore, the use of embedded media allows a variety of content to be presented while limiting the risk that students will be distracted by other content, as would be the case with hyperlinks opening a new tab.

- **Flexible content:** Moving a story online also allowed us to adapt the case study to the course. As this was a Marketing Communication course, we added a whole section presenting a summary of another paper that is also part of our ongoing project investigating the marketing implications of Narcoculture. For this paper (Castillo Villar et al., 2020) entitled “Music subculture as a source of conspicuous consumption practices: A qualitative content analysis of ‘altered movement’ songs and music videos.” we analyzed the lyrics and video of 78 recent narcocorridos. In the case study, we presented an example of a typical song and discussed the role of brands in the four narratives identified by our content analysis: From rich to poor; Power through violence; Lavish lifestyle; & Power over women.

We also adapted the question to fit the course content. The new questions led students to apply the Paid-Owned-Earned media model, think about the role of social influencers, and the difference between traditional and new media.

These adaptations mean that the case was good preparation for the online lectures that followed and developed the theory behind these models using examples from the case study. It also brought more constructive alignment between the course’s pedagogic goals and the pedagogic activities (Biggs, 1996).

- **Constructive learning:** Combining all the advantages listed above allowed us to propose a more engaged approach to the course content, thus creating the conditions of more in-depth learning as recommended by the Interactive, Constructive, Active, and Passive (ICAP) framework (Chi & Wylie, 2014). The ICAP framework provides a roadmap on how to increase student engagement from passive to active, then constructive and eventually interactive. By providing a flexible storyline, embedded media and adapted questions we believe that the online version of the case study allowed for a constructive approach in which student were not only actively involved in generating additional inputs by using the whole case to write and script there answers.

Challenges and Limitations of the Online Flexible Story Format for a Business Case Study

Despite the clear advantages listed above, this move from paper to an online story was not without its challenges. The traditional method takes half a day, all included. This online method required much more time. Despite all the available technologies, students struggled to work efficiently in small groups, thereby making the whole process slower. Instead of going group to group, we had to ask for a preliminary version to collect their questions and provide feedback. This preliminary version was also necessary to maintain motivation and raise the bar for the weaker groups at a time when some students found it hard to remain engaged in their studies during the lockdown period. So it took two weeks for the students. It also took a lot more time

for the professor to provide written feedback for the preliminary and final versions than for giving immediate face-to-face feedback using the traditional methods.

Unfortunately, we do not have quantitative data to evaluate the way students experienced the two different versions of the case study. In the fall, the course was assessed as a whole; the case study was just a part of it. In the spring, given all the disruptions brought by the pandemic, our university decided not to conduct student evaluations. For both versions, students were enthusiastic about the case in personal interviews. Still, understandably, they commented about the content (Narcoculture and application of marketing theory) rather than the form of the case. In terms of the quality of output, here too, it is hard to compare as there were some differences between the two semesters besides moving online: in-class presentation vs. written & video report; single day vs. three-week timeframe; & questions adapted to two different course contents.

There are also some more technical issues to reckon with. Embedded media remains the property of the original content provider. So if, for instance, Buchanan's official YouTube channel removes any videos, they also become unavailable for the case study.

Twine is a story editor that creates HTML files. These files need to be hosted somewhere in order to be available online for students. We used itch.io, which provides an efficient, free service that is responsive to screen size. However, itch.io is not primarily an academic website, so the case study is hosted alongside some much less serious content. Even though our target audience consisted only of the students in the course, the content on itch.io is readily available to anyone.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we are looking forward to the day when we can go back to face-to-face teaching while retaining the teachings from the 2020 lockdown. For this type of case study, we would like to retain the flexible online version but still be able to allow students to work in small groups in person and allow the professor to provide immediate face-to-face feedback during the case preparation and presentation. This would mean combining our online case study with the in-person advantages of direct dialog, both between the instructor and students, and among the students themselves. Coming back to the ICAP framework (Chi & Wylie, 2014), this would allow us to move from constructive learning to interactive learning. Indeed we would keep the advantages of an online case study that fosters the condition for constructively engaging with the case and add the possibility of presenting and debating answers with peers and arguing their answers to answer the professor's probing questions (provided in the teaching note of Kervyn et al. 2019a; 2019b).

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