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Research Article

Storytelling in the Classroom: Why it Matters in Event Marketing Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines why students value storytelling in the classroom and explores how they learn event marketing through this pedagogical tool. Using a post course assessment survey, this qualitative study finds that students value storytelling because stories make it easier for them to understand and digest the subject matter in fun and relatable way. Listening to stories allow them to take on a different and new perspective, allowing them to make sense of new information and master concepts. Storytelling can be entertaining and immersive, which helps develop in students positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs.

Keywords: *Event Marketing Education, Event Marketing, Storytelling*

Introduction

Ancient societies used storytelling to educate, entertain and nurture communities (Hamilton & Weiss, 2007; Lawrence & Paige, 2016). In marketing, storytelling has become an indispensable tool in communicating to customers. It engages the audience (Ching et al, 2013; Coker et al, 2021; Escalas et al, 2004), and impacts brand image and brand attitude positively (Kim et al, 2018). In education, storytelling has been shown to engage and motivate learners (Anderson & Muirhead W, 2011; Binks et al, 2009; Dyke, 2009; Lawrence & Paige, 2016; van der Meij et al, 2016).

In the events marketing class taught by one of the authors, storytelling is one of two pedagogical tools used. Based on feedback

communicated through casual conversations through the years, many students have expressed that the hands-on projects fun, challenging, and impactful. Some students have also acknowledged that they enjoyed the storytelling lectures. However, it was only through a formalized feedback system established during the pandemic that revealed that students found these storytelling lectures not just fun and entertaining but impactful, too. For this reason, this research aims to understand the significance and impact of storytelling lectures in the students' learning process and goals. Specifically, why do students value storytelling and how do they learn event marketing principles through this pedagogical tool?

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The value of storytelling in education

The stories we tell are reflections of our experiences—it is a reflective process (Binks et al, 2009). As these experiences occur in the past, the reflective process may take on the form of a retrospective introspection or sharing the examination of a past experience to someone else (Rod, 2011). When we tell stories, we don't merely recount or retell events in its chronological order (Binks et al, 2009). We choose which details to share and which ones to leave out, filtering them through our prevailing perspective or perspectives Lawrence & Paige, 2016. We attach meaning to the experiences that we share to others (Barley & Southcott, 2019; Binks et al, 2009). Through these stories, we make sense of the world around us.

When we reflect on our past experiences, we gain a level of critical distance and awareness (Rod, 2011) of our mistakes, successes, and the process we go through that lead to these mistakes and successes. When we tell these stories, we reveal the impact of our past experiences in our decisions (Barley & Southcott, 2019). Essentially, when we share our stories, we also declare the lessons we have learned from our experiences. Viewed in this way, storytelling affords vicarious learning or learning through the experience of others (Anderson & Muirhead W, 2011; Dyke, 2009; van der Meij et al, 2016). Vicarious learning maybe argued as a form of indirect experiential learning (van der Meij et al, 2016). Storytelling provide insightful lessons learned vicariously when direct experiences are not possible (Anderson & Muirhead W, 2011; Myers et al, 2019).

Storytelling provides experiences that learners can model (Vergara, 2022). Furthermore, these stories provide concrete examples of abstract ideas (Myers et al, 2019), which allows learners to contextualize the meaning of abstract concepts that reinforces their learning. These opportunities for modeling and mastery experiences are core methods in transformational teaching because they promote learning and develop positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

Ancient societies used storytelling to educate and transfer knowledge (Hamilton & Weiss, 2007; Lawrence & Paige, 2016) because

stories are easier to remember (Hamilton & Weiss, 2007). More importantly, stories engage not just thoughts but also emotions, which is essential in building connections with the audience (Myers et al, 2019). Revealing ourselves to others through our personal stories demonstrates humanity and authenticity to others, encourages connection, and builds a sense of belongingness (Syrdal et al, 2023). It also develops rapport. When teachers and students develop rapport, students benefit through enhanced learning and better course performance (Granitz et al, 2009).

Methods

This study aims to understand how undergraduate students enrolled in an event marketing course regard storytelling as a pedagogical tool. A qualitative approach is used in this study as it examines student perception, as has been used in similar studies (Granitz et al, 2009).

The data used in this study came from responses of post course assessments from four classes that students fill out at the end of the course. The classes were taught in four different terms. The analysis pays attention to the responses to the following open-ended questions:

1. Which course material, lesson, or activity did you enjoy the most?
2. Which course material, lesson or activity delivered the most significant lesson to you?
3. How did the course material, lesson, or activity you mentioned impact you?
4. What should the professor change in order to improve the delivery of this course?

The responses to these questions were coded and categorized for analysis. The analysis focused on the responses that referred to the teacher's storytelling approach because the study's focus is on understanding how the students perceive storytelling as a method of instruction. This study is not interested in identifying which course material or pedagogical tool was most effective in teaching event marketing, but rather to understand why students value storytelling and how they learn event marketing through this pedagogical tool. In understanding student perceptions on storytelling,

the study aims to facilitate a discussion in the use of storytelling in event marketing education and provide useful recommendations.

Results and Discussion

Storytelling in class helps students master new concepts

"It's easy to digest"

An advantage of storytelling is that it provides students with concrete examples of abstract ideas (Myers et al, 2019). To study event marketing is to study the concept of experience or customer experiences (Berridge, 2020). Literature is filled with various definitions of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) (Gentil et al, 2007) or even a taxonomy of experience (Duerden, 2018). Students found that these concepts were best understood through stories because these lectures were "easy to digest."

"(I found) the lesson related to Disneyland about creating a memorable experience (most impactful) ... it made me understand why Disneyland is a successful theme park and how the customers' experience should be valued."

"I enjoyed it when the professor shared his experiences and personal stories. I enjoyed it the most as I was able to learn and appreciate the theme of the discussion more compared to using traditional means of discussions."

"It's easily relatable!"

Furthermore, a new lesson is easier to understand or imagine if students can draw from or relate a previous experience to the new concept or idea. Stories provide learners a means to make sense of new concepts (Hamilton & Weiss, 2007) in a way that is relevant to them because stories are "easily relatable." When we listen to stories that others tell, our tendency is to find similarities or elements that relate to our own experiences. Our previous experiences become reference points to help us make sense of and organize new information.

"(I found the lecture on) customer experience (most enjoyable) because I (got to) reminisce the time when (I visited) Disneyland. It was a fun lecture!"

"I didn't think of it that way!"

People may share similar experiences but reflect on each event through different lenses that are formed and developed by past experiences. Listening to other people share stories provide opportunities to view our past experiences from a different perspective. Listening to stories told in class provide opportunities for students to re-examine past experiences or challenge existing beliefs to help them make sense of new concepts or take on new perspectives.

"As an officer of a school organization, the lessons from this class gave me a new perspective (on how to conduct) events. I learned (that I need) to prioritize not only the preparation and execution process but also the welfare and experiences of (guests)."

"(I found the) Disney lecture on the guest experience (most impactful). I've never analyzed events in such way. The lecture helped me gain a better understanding why Disneyland is a successful theme park and how the customers' experience should be valued."

Storytelling in class develops positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs

"It's immersive"

There are many techniques teachers can use to make storytelling lectures fun and engaging. In this events marketing course, storytelling lectures used elements employed in event programming such as physical props, videos, and other multimedia learning aides to help enhance the delivery. In doing so, storytelling lectures can become an engaging and immersive learning experience, like hands-on challenged-based projects.

"I enjoyed the lesson about the Disney experience and events since it felt like I virtually toured in Disney for the first time."

"Learning can be fun"

Stories are engaging. They help learners understand concepts in a fun, relatable, and entertaining way. When learners are engaged, they

are more likely to pay attention and have a better recall of what they have learned.

"(I found the) lectures about customer experience and how theme parks (deliver experience most enjoyable. The teacher's) videos with his family was fun to watch and showed how customer experience (looks like). It was a first-hand experience and I believe that this is the best way to teach ... it was very relevant."

"I always appreciate (storytelling when used to discuss) the lesson of the day. I think it's good to know that learning doesn't have to be so serious ... to be able to get the message that the professor is trying to deliver."

"I want more!"

Students who are engaged by stories view the course more positively and are motivated to continue learning. They look forward to attending classes and, in the process, develop positive attitudes towards the subject matter and learning in general. Some students have expressed looking forward to attending the class, while others have expressed the intention to pursue a career in events marketing. Other students expressed that the course may benefit in increasing more storytelling lectures.

"Even though the whole process of event planning was quite difficult, (the professor) still made it enjoyable for everyone. I looked forward to your videos and stories in class because I found it entertaining and inspiring."

"(I want the professor to include) more stories relating to events. The experiences that was shared in class made me really interested ... connecting (those personal stories) with real world situation makes (learning) more enticing."

"I loved the Disney Guest Experience lecture. Customer experience is something I often hear in my other courses but having a clear example of how Disney applies all the different types of experience made me understand the material better. It also solidified the idea and feeling that events is something I want to pursue after college."

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study finds that students value storytelling because stories make it easier for them to understand and digest the subject matter in fun and relatable way. Listening to stories allow them to take on a different and new perspective, allowing them to make sense of new information and master concepts. Storytelling can be entertaining and immersive, which helps develop in students positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs. This motivate students to learn the subject matter and be motivated to learn in general.

Teachers use students' interests and experiences as an anchor to explain new concepts and information. Teachers may refer to an experience that most students are familiar with or share with others. In this case, a visit to Disneyland was used to explain the concept of customer experience. Most students have visited a Disney Park, and all students have seen a representation of a Disney park in popular media. Using a familiar experience allowed students to draw from their past experiences to imagine an abstract concept. Students find this approach fun and engaging. It reinforces recall and learning because new information is filtered through their personal perspectives resulting from past experiences. It helps them reflect on their past experiences and draw connections so that they can organize abstract ideas in a meaningful way.

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