HKBU BEST PRACTICES CASE 2

Advertising students engaged in course-based research project to measure effectiveness of MTR advertising

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CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

ADVERTISING DESIGN

QUANTITATIVE METHOD

I taught a course called Audience Measurement and Engagement. The learning outcome of the course was to explore the principles and practice of media audience measurement and engagement. The course covered different media, including both traditional and digital media. The course discussed the characteristics of different media and how to measure their effectiveness. For television, audience size is expressed in the form of TV ratings.

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For newspapers, readership. For digital media, the number of likes, shares, and comments are used for measurement of audience engagement. However, there is no way to out-of-home media. That is the research gap identified in this project, therefore I designed a course-based research project to collect empirical data about the effectiveness of advertising.

One obstacle I encountered is how to motivate students to conduct the study. Students are digitally savvy, and they know the new media well. They do not have a strong interest of traditional media. In the end, I decided to challenge them with a difficult task to see if they can examine traditional media in a different way.

This was a group project with 5 to 6 students in each group. Their task is to launch a campaign with out-of-home (OOH) media. The students had to conduct market research about OOH media, and especially about advertising design. The objective of this assignment was to examine the respondents' awareness of MTR advertisements, and measure the respondents' attitudes toward advertising in MTR.

This project was 4-weeks long. Over these 4 weeks they had several tasks to do (see Figure 1). Each group needed to take 10 photos of the MTR advertisements. Then, they design the survey questionnaire in Qualtrics and apply for ethical approval. Then they proceed with data collection, data analysis, and then a final presentation. We invited the general manager of JCDecaux, the official agent of MTR advertising, to attend the presentations and give recommendations.

Figure 1

Roadmap of Project

1	Survey preparation
2	Questionnaire design
3	Ethics clearance
4	Data collection
5	Data analysis
6	Presentation

I supervised students' research process throughout the project. During survey preparation, I ran a workshop teaching the students how to use Qualtrics. Questionnaire design was the most intensive part. I had to get back to students within three days so that students could move on with ethics clearance. I was involved a lot in this part to make sure the questionnaire was well-organized and the questions are phrased appropriately. The last part that required my involvement was data analysis. Luckily, my students were all third year students who have taken the research methods course. They have some basic concepts of how to do data analysis and how to use the basic functions of SPSS.

Students love using new technology. For this assignment, we used the hot spot question feature in Qualtrics. To set the hot spot questions, students can set a region on a photo as a hot spot. These hot spots can help gather audience feedback on a particular part of the advertisements. For example, you can select brand name, logo, headline, visuals, celebrity, gender, male only, female only, and advertising appeal (sexual, humor, etc.). Respondents can click on the hot spot regions to show the visual part of the ad that they are most interested in. Hot spot questions were applied to each of the 10 selected advertisements. This type of survey question saves respondents' time and is fun to implement. The instruction is clear and direct. All the respondent has to do is point and click. The response rate for this was very good.

One group of students compared the effectiveness of in-train advertising and platform advertising. They found that respondents liked in-train advertising because they have sufficient time to read it. This is especially so when the ad features a celebrity they like. Based on the finding, they concluded that small-size in-train ads can be an effective advertising format.

In the beginning, when I first designed the project, I kept worrying about whether or not the assignment was too difficult for the students. However, it turns out that they love it and would like to select a specific focus in the study. For example, one group decided to focus on the health supplements product category and found out that the use of female celebrities generate higher awareness than male celebrities. This is consistent with some of the literature review we studied. From this, I learned that it is best to never underestimate our students. They will find ways to surprise us.

I would like to share more about how we invited Shirley Chan, the General Manager of JCDecaux to join us on the presentation day. The students felt excited because a real client came to see how we were doing. The level of involvement was very high. Shirley gave some recommendation to the students. She was happy as students' marketing insights were grounded in research findings.

Finally, I did some self-reflection at the end of this project. The first takeaway I have is to never underestimate our students. I had worried about the difficulty of the project and felt anxious about the intensity of the process. However, I was surprised at the end. The students love doing the project and have so many things they want to explore. The next takeaway I have is that real is best. Collecting data in person, taking photos in person, and experiencing the research process in person increased students' research literacy.

About the author

Dr. Melannie Zhan a lecturer in communication at the College of International Education, Hong Kong Baptist University. She received her both PhD in Communication and MSocSc in Media Management at the School of Communication in Hong Kong Baptist University. Her research interest mainly lies in the field of advertising, health communication, and strategic marketing communication, GenZ. In particular, she examines the message framing effects, health communication campaigns, and motivational effectiveness relating to self-regulation. She teaches courses including Data and the Media, Introduction of Media and Communication, Audience Measurement and Engagement. Her research publications are in PR magazine (Germany), The new generation Z in Asia, and International Journal of Human Movement and Sports Sciences. Before she joined academia, she worked in the advertising profession in Hong Kong for more than six years.