

Enhancing Students' Understanding of Social Media Marketing and the Use of Advertising and Public Relations Terminology Within IMC: A Participatory Action Research Project

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Abstract

The rapid growth of social media popularity and consequently social media marketing is creating a challenge in terms of the appropriate teaching strategy. Advances in technology are racing ahead of clear terminology. The definitions of Public Relations (PR) and Advertising are being widened to encompass more digital activities and this turf war is causing confusion within the industry, the academic world, and the classroom. This article addresses the need for more research on teaching social media marketing from a strategic perspective based on Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) objectives. It explores the use of the Paid/Owned/Earned Media (POEM) framework as a form of engaged pedagogy and part of the Active Blended Learning framework. Adopting a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, 40 student applications of the POEM framework were analyzed, and the results indicate that it enables students to identify activities within an integrated campaign and their impact on the customer journey. These results were supported by a qualitative analysis of the views of three experienced educators in this field. It is proposed that the application of classifications, such as Paid, Owned, and Earned media, are more useful when teaching social media marketing within IMC than the classifications of Advertising and PR.

Keywords

participatory action research, social media marketing, advertising, public relations, integrated marketing communications

Historically, Public Relations (PR) and Advertising have been perceived by many as uncomfortable bedfellows, with distinctive professional bodies, agencies, academic journals, and education. The development of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) has challenged this division and demonstrated the advantages of adopting a more integrated outside-in approach with emphasis on relationship management and media neutrality. This process has been disrupted again by the rapid increase in popularity of digital marketing, more specifically social media marketing, which facilitates user-generated content and increases the need for organizations to build trust and credibility (Digital Marketing Trends, 2022).

Social media marketing is developing so rapidly that it is a challenge for the industry and academia to stay current. Social media has facilitated many new communication opportunities for both brands and customers and enabled significant increases in dialogue and engagement. However, clear classification of these activities is lagging behind the technology. An examination of the most recent definitions of PR and Advertising indicates that both disciplines are

attempting to claim social media activities as their own which has resulted in the definitions becoming increasingly similar. This domain similarity is evidence of a turf war and causing confusion within the industry, the academic world and the classroom. In addition, there are inconsistencies in how terminology is used across the various marketing communications specialisms. Amid this turmoil, the use of the Paid/Owned/Earned Media (POEM) framework is emerging within the industry and some academic textbooks as a more appropriate and relevant way of describing and analyzing social media activities within the digital landscape.

This article addresses the need for more research on teaching social media marketing from a strategic perspective

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based on IMC objectives. It first examines the confusion that exists in both the practitioner and academic literature on existing definitions and terminology. It discusses the importance of clarity and adopts a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore how the POEM framework can be used in the classroom as part of an Active Blended Learning framework. More specifically, the article has three purposes:

1. To examine the impact that social media marketing has had on the remit of PR and Advertising within IMC.
2. To study the utilization of the POEM framework in the classroom and test its usefulness as an assessment tool in identifying and analyzing different activities within an IMC campaign.
3. To propose appropriate terminology for marketing communications activities to aid in the teaching of social media marketing and IMC.

Literature Review

The basic philosophy of IMC is that the starting point for any communications strategy is with the consumer. This is referred to as the outside-in-approach where the emphasis is placed on the marketing communications objective, from the consumer perspective. Kliatchko (2008) provided a definition of IMC which is still referred to by many as: “an audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels and results of brand communication programs” (p. 140). Kliatchko and Schultz (2014) developed this further and identified four key components of IMC as being the use of multiple channels alongside media neutrality, consumer centricity utilizing data-driven customer insight, consistency across the whole customer experience and the inclusion of all business departments at a strategic level.

The move toward IMC and media neutrality has challenged the prominence that Advertising has held within the marketing communications mix for many years. Historically, Advertising has been seen as the most creative and “sexy” side of the industry. The adoption of media neutrality challenged this hierarchical position. In fact, the development of IMC has been seen by some as an opportunity for PR to play an increasingly important role and enjoy more prominence and recognition. B. G. Smith (2013) acknowledges the potential for PR to play an important part in IMC, particularly because of its strength in relationship management and experience of communicating with a diverse group of stakeholders, including but not exclusively customers. He recognizes that the PR approach to creating a communal relationship, which is based on engagement and a shared concern for the other, is a strength within an IMC approach to planning and managing communications. Naumovska and

Blazeska (2016) support this view, suggesting that Advertising is losing its influence and could be replaced by PR as the leading marketing communication tool. They argue that, because of the infinite number of messages on social media, brands need to create trust and credibility through interaction and third-party endorsement. PR is the recognized tool to achieve this. Meanwhile they propose that Advertising is more costly and less effective online because of its linear form of communication. This increased status is perhaps summed up by Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012) who refer to social media as “Marketing Public Relations’ new best friend” (p. 319).

This approach of integration and the necessary co-operation between PR and Advertising is not an easy pill to swallow for some, because of the historical competitiveness between the two. From an educational perspective, PR and Advertising education is often separate, particularly in the United States, with PR being taught in mass communication schools with a rather journalistic perspective while Advertising being normally part of a Marketing course run within a business school linked to sales and profits (Kerr, 2009). PR professionals have often had their own professional bodies and their own agencies and/or internal departments within a client organization. The PR industry has perceived Advertising, and Marketing more generally, as a threat to their industry, encroaching on their identity and integrity. Gesualdi (2019) identifies several ways in which PR and Advertising are increasingly overlapping or encroaching on each other, for example, social media influencers, content marketing, and states that social media has blurred the lines between earned (PR) and paid or owned media (Advertising) leading to more encroachment. This domain similarity has strengthened in terms of the shared goal to seek to build and maintain relationships with external stakeholders as well as a shared use of channels, due to the various ways that social media can be used by organizations and consumers. Because of the real-time dialogue that social media demands, and the conversations between consumers that it facilitates, both PR and Advertising practitioners are facing the same challenges of managing these conversations with stakeholders and responding in real time (Komodromos & Nicoli, 2014).

This increase in domain similarity between PR and other marketing communication tools can be demonstrated through the traditional four models of PR framework proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984), which is still evident in many PR textbooks today. The fourth model, the two-way symmetrical model, is recognized as best practice, if rather idealistic, and is based on two-way communication “to promote mutual understanding and respect between the organization and its stakeholders” (Waddington, 2018). Although the PR spectrum may range from the corporate end to Marketing PR, all PR activity is based on building relationships with stakeholders by a two-way conversation, which hopefully leads to

a relationship built on transparency and honesty. This is where social media is key. Philips and Young (2009) identified various digital marketing activities across the Four Models to illustrate how social media sites facilitate both one- and two-way communications. Within the two-way symmetrical model, he suggests utilizing an open corporate social media site and an interactive online community contribution to facilitate that two-way interaction, while acknowledging that such activity has a lower level of control and a higher level of trust.

Although digital media can be used for such interactive communications with all stakeholders (Grunig, 2009), the main area of overlap, or encroachment, is in the area of Marketing PR. This is defined as

any program of effort designed to improve, maintain, or protect the sales or image of a product by encouraging intermediaries such as traditional mass media, the electronic media or individual to voluntarily pass a message about the firm or product to their audience of businesses or consumers. (Giannini, 2010, pp. 4–5)

The voluntary passing on of messages between consumers and businesses is obviously what social media facilitates. Much of this communication is through user-generated content, also referred to as consumer-generated marketing, where consumers create new sources of online information, and share with other consumers leading to e-word of mouth communications, or buzz. This can also be through blogs, forums, and video sharing. Papasolomou and Melanthiou (2012) state that the impact of word-of-mouth is even stronger online. Individuals can reach large groups of like-minded people who are more receptive to the message because of the third-party endorsement. These sources of information are perceived to be more reliable than one-way communication from brands, that is, Advertising. Marketeers are having to learn how to contribute and take part in conversations taking place online in a personal and more informal way to influence the conversation but not be seen as an outsider (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012).

This blurring of the role of the different marketing communication tools has led to the situation where it is questionable whether consumers can or should be able to differentiate between them. A study by Laurie et al. (2019) found that U.S. and U.K. Millennials did not differentiate between different types of communication and perceived marketing communications activity just as “promotion.” This links to the idea proposed by Finne and Gronroos (2017) who state that much of the integration of messages is actually undertaken by the customer, referred to as communication-in-use. They acknowledge that social media plays a big part in this merging of messages and that the classification by the industry of different types of communication activity is irrelevant to the customer. This is referred to as Customer-Integrated Marketing Communication.

Kerr and Richards (2021) argue that clear definitions are important for practitioners, clients, researchers and students. One reason for this is from a legal perspective. Some differentiation is essential as the consumer has the legal right to know when something is being sold to them. This is why, here in the United Kingdom, the U.K. Advertising Standards Authority (ASA, 2022) has been battling with the expanding world of online influencers to enable consumers to differentiate between the genuine views of an influencer as opposed to when they are being sponsored to promote a brand. The recognition that some Marketing PR activity needed to be covered by the ASA was acknowledged in 2010 when their Digital Remit was created. Although some PR activity, such as press releases, are excluded from the ASA code. The ASA acknowledged that “some boundaries are particularly complex in the online environment” (ASA, 2022).

However, attempts to define clearly what Advertising is in this social media landscape are not helpful. Multiple definitions have been proposed over the last 20 years, in recognition of its dynamic nature. In 2002, Richards and Curran defined Advertising as “a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future.” However, it was felt by some that this definition had become too restrictive, and another was proposed by Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) as “brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people” (p. 339). However, this was criticized for being so wide that Advertising was losing its identity (Rust, 2016). Kerr and Richards (2021) also questioned the sample selection and the interpretation of the results. Kerr and Richards (2021) replicated the work of Richards and Curran (2002) in a Delphi study and found agreement on defining Advertising as “. . . paid, owned, and earned mediated communication, activated by an identifiable brand and intent on persuading the consumer to make some cognitive, affective, or behavioral change, now or in the future” (p. 190). The article proposes that Advertising has moved from just paid media to include owned media and earned media which is an extension of the definition and can be seen as stepping on the toes of PR and including areas traditionally considered as PR.

The POEM Framework

The use of the terms “paid, owned and earned mediated communication,” in this, new Advertising definition is evidence of the growing popularity of the POEM framework which is used widely in the industry even though its relationship with the traditional classification of marketing communications tools is disputed. If one refers to the earlier definitions of Advertising and PR, before domain similarity became an issue, it could be argued that “paid” refers mainly to Advertising as previously defined, “owned” refers to communication taking place on websites and social media pages and “earned” referring mainly to PR (Stephen & Galak, 2012). This array of various

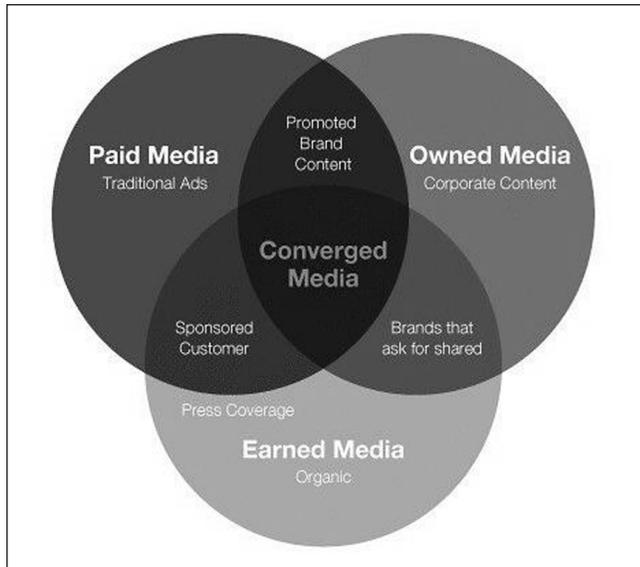


Figure 1. POEM (Owyang, 2012).

touchpoints and how they integrate is illustrative of the multi-channel nonlinear journey that many customers are now undertaking (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

POEM has been suggested as a useful tool to identify and understand how the various activities integrate and can demonstrate these linkages in a clear way. The integration of POEM is acknowledged by Green (2011), who suggests that the objective of paid media is to move the customer over to earned and/or owned media and that integration is key to facilitate this movement. This is illustrated in Figure 1 which demonstrates how the three areas overlap (Owyang, 2012). For example, influencers may be sponsored (i.e., paid) to share their thoughts about a brand with their followers leading to other conversations (i.e., earned media). The PR literature has also acknowledged this terminology and identified an increase in the demands on organizations to produce media content to feed their owned media channels (Savic et al., 2016), suggesting that owned media is also in the PR domain.

Fill and Turnbull (2019), in their popular *Marketing Communications* textbook, also present POEM as one way in which media can be classified. They also acknowledge that POEM has been expanded by some to include another category of shared media, which they explain is similar to earned media but emphasizes the fact that brands can facilitate the sharing of branded content with friends. There are some differing views on this introduction of shared media. It has also been referred to as social media, with the same meaning, leading to the acronym, PESO. Others have suggested that shared media is in the middle of the three overlapping circles (Urban Renstrom, 2021).

The PR Academy has identified PESO as “a media channel framework for digital public relations” (Bailey, 2019),

another demonstration of the turf war that is taking place. In the same article, Bailey talks about PR being media neutral and incorporating any appropriate communication, reflecting definitions of IMC.

Teaching Social Media Marketing

This discussion demonstrates that it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify Advertising and PR activity within an IMC campaign because of domain similarity, caused by the increasing dominance and dynamic nature of social media marketing. It is this challenge that is facing educators in this field. Even in 2015, the difficulty for marketing academics of keeping up to date with fast moving developments in the digital world was identified and this difficulty has increased pace since then (Brocato et al., 2015). Different terminology and approaches are also being adopted in the Advertising, PR, and digital marketing textbooks which make it even more difficult to provide clarity to marketing students.

It is important for students to understand how elements of a marketing communications campaign link together and support each other to achieve the objectives of the campaign. Chaffey (2022) in a recent blog, aimed at industry, states that “Summarizing a brand’s current use of paid-owned-earned media is a powerful technique as part of marketplace analysis for developing marketing strategy.” Ang (2021) recognizes POEM as an aid to selecting complementary marketing communication tools to synchronize activities and achieve a synergistic effect. This reaffirms the recognition of POEM as a useful framework for planning and analysis.

To demonstrate this and provide support for the POEM classification, the use of the POEM framework as a formative and summative assessment tool was explored at a U.K. university by four Higher Education (HE) academics to address the challenges faced in IMC education in preparing students for work.

This application of the framework by students could be considered as a form of engaged pedagogy, which K. Smith and O’Connell (2020) describe as “purposeful, meaningful and congruent with practices in the discipline.” Such an approach increases student engagement and thereby student performance as well as providing them with skills that employers are looking for because they are constructing their own knowledge and understanding rather than being informed of it (O’Connor, 2022). This type of student activity and engagement is also referred to as active learning which contrasts with the more traditional lecture approach (Brennan, 2013). The U.K. university in which this research was undertaken is recognized as being the first university to adopt the Active Blended Learning framework as its standard approach to learning and teaching across the whole University which led to the building of a new campus with no lecture halls (Armellini & Rodriguez, 2021). The blended

element here has a wider inference than online and face-to-face, as is sometimes made, but types of activities and approaches to assessment adjusted to context and the needs of the students.

The special issue of the *Journal of Marketing Education* in 2015 on digital and social media marketing in education identified the usefulness of a more applied approach to the teaching of this subject. One analysis of curriculum content in social media courses found that 87% of social media courses in the U.S. utilized projects as part of their syllabi (Brocato et al., 2015), and another study found that case study analysis was being adopted by over a third of undergraduate courses (Munoz & Wood, 2015). This study is therefore in line with this applied and engaged approach.

The purpose of the study was to first explore if the students were able to apply the POEM framework to complex integrated campaigns, and thereby identify the various activities that were taking place using the six classifications; paid, owned, earned, paid/owned, owned/earned and paid/earned, that the Venn diagram provides. Second an analysis of the student work was undertaken by utilizing the Advertising and PR definitions to establish how they related to these six classifications to contribute to the literature on creation of current and useful classifications.

Methodology

This article presents the outcomes of the third cycle (over three academic years) of a PAR project. The study was undertaken by four colleagues into their professional practice in teaching IMC and how this has informed, and continues to inform, their practice and the practice of others within a U.K. university business school. There are many proposed PAR models, all of which recognize the spiral of cycles involving in essence planning, acting, observing/evaluating, reflecting, and re-planning (Wellington, 1996).

The authors, between them, manage and teach undergraduate modules as part of the marketing communication curriculum across four undergraduate degrees in Fashion Marketing, Advertising and Digital, Marketing (top up), and Marketing, using Active Blended Learning principles (Armellini & Rodriguez, 2021). These modules include Introduction to Marketing Communications (Level 4), PR Management (Level 5), Integrated Marketing Communications (Level 5), Advertising (Level 6), Advertising Consultancy (Level 6), and Campaign Planning (Level 6).

In this anti-positive approach, the tutors are both the researcher and the researched. Zuber-Skerritt (1992) defines action research as

... collaborative, critical enquiry by the academics themselves (rather than an expert educational researcher) into their own teaching practice, into problems of student learning and into curriculum problems. It is professional development through

Table 1. Sample Data.

Cycle	Number of cases selected	Total number of students
Cycle 2 2020/21 (pilot)	9	52
Cycle 3 2021 /22	31	48

academic course development, group reflection, action, evaluation and improved practice.

PAR is a collaborative cycle to improve an identified issue (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013) and has been proven to be a successful method for education research and was successfully used by Laurie et al. (2015) in an earlier study of Assessed Group Work.

The PAR project, therefore, had three aspects:

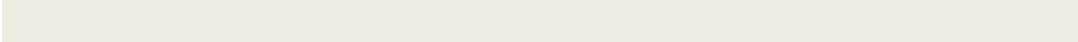
1. An “affirmative approach” to agree elements of practice currently used within our teaching of marketing communications, PR, Advertising, and Digital Marketing within an IMC approach.
2. A “problem solving approach” to identify challenges of engaging students in teaching media planning and the integration and selection of tools to achieve marketing objectives and wider business objectives and to seek, evaluate, and agree trial solutions.
3. A trial of the POEM model and an explicit alignment of the learning outcomes and assessment that required students to demonstrate their learning using the POEM model and refine their discourse around Marketing Communications and IMC, specifically in the context of POEM in identifying the source of messages and the customer journey.

The data were collected over a 2-year period, across two semesters from one module. In total, around 100 students were involved in this activity. The justification for using this IMC module was that the assessment required students to analyze a campaign utilizing the data within a case study. This meant student applications of POEM were under a certain level of control (only data from the case study could be used when applying POEM). Table 1 presents the number of selection cases from each year. In Cycle 2 of this PAR study, the use of the POEM was optional as it was a trail run. Consequently, only a small number of students’ work was appropriate for analysis. Our experience from Cycle 2 led to the mandatory use of the POEM Venn diagram in Cycle 3. From that, 65% of the students’ work was chosen for examination due to their comprehensive application of the diagram which demonstrated a strong understanding of the campaign.

The students were given a recent Institute of Practitioners in Advertising Effectiveness 2020 Award case study to

Table 2. Quantitative Findings.

Table 2 Key

✓	Correct application
×	Incorrect application
U/A	No answer
	Advertising identified
	PR identified
	Other identified

Note. PR = Public Relations.

Case No	Paid	Owned	Earned	Paid/Owned	Paid/Earned	Earned/Owned
1	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	✓
3	×	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓
4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓
7	✓	✓	✓	U/A	×	✓
8	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓
9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	✓
11	✓	✓	✓	U/A	U/A	U/A
12	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
16	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	×
17	✓	✓	✓	U/A	U/A	×
18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	U/A
19	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	U/A
20	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	✓	✓	U/A	U/A	✓	U/A
22	✓	✓	×	×	✓	✓
23	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×
24	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	U/A
25	✓	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓
26	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

28	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x
30	✓	✓	✓	✓	U/A	U/A
31	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
32	✓	x	U/A	✓	U/A	U/A
33	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	✓
35	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	x
36	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	✓
37	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	U/A
38	✓	✓	✓	x	✓	U/A
39	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
40	✓	✓	✓	U/A	✓	U/A
Total	39 (98%)	39 (98%)	34 (85%)	24 (60%)	31 (78%)	25 (63%)

The qualitative research adopts a process of observation of tutors' experience of using POEM in teaching and assessing students. This allows for themes to be drawn, further supporting the quantitative analysis. Qualitative data included independent comments collected from the three tutors involved in the teaching of POEM. The following questions were asked:

- What challenges have you faced in teaching the identification of marketing communications activities and the use of terminology?
- What were your experiences of using POEM in the classroom?
- What was your observation of students applying the model in a learning activity?

Findings

Quantitative Findings

The first finding, displayed in Table 2, indicates that overall, the students are correctly applying the model, as indicated by the ticks. This is perhaps not surprising given that the sample of analysis was work from the stronger students of the cohorts. However, it does demonstrate that the POEM framework can be successfully applied to complex integrated campaigns. Nonetheless, the percentage of correct answers does indicate that it becomes more difficult when activities in the merged areas are being identified, particularly Paid/Owned

which is 60% correct and Earned/Owned which is 63% correct. Examples of Paid/Earned included instore campaign using influencers and Paid social media activity. Paid/Owned included brand merchandise and partnerships.

The second important finding, as illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 3, is the prominence of PR activity across all the elements of the POEM framework, including Paid. It reinforces the view that PR is becoming the prominent tool in today's integrated campaigns, as suggested in the literature. On the contrary, Advertising, is almost exclusively found in areas of Paid activity, that is, Paid, Paid/Owned, and Paid/Earned. It is important to remember that these classifications of PR and Advertising have been identified by the researchers, using the given definitions (Gesualdi, 2019; Richards & Curran, 2002).

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative responses to the three questions were analyzed to identify the main issues identified by the three researchers who had extensive experience of utilizing the POEM in the classroom and for assessment purposes.

1. What challenges have you faced in teaching the identification of marketing communications activities and the use of terminology?

The findings suggest that students often get confused between the terminology linked to marketing and marketing

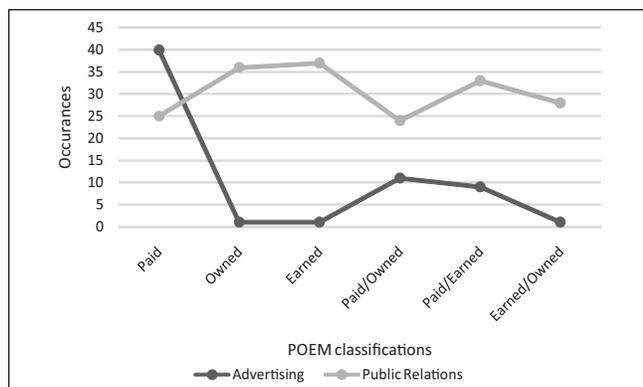


Figure 3. Advertising and PR Activity Across the POEM Model.

communications. Within communications, their understanding is often based on their own experience, and they use terminology generically, for example, calling everything Advertising. As one researcher explained:

They find it hard to understand the media landscape beyond their own view that “television is dead” and everything needs to be on social media because that is what they use.

Specific definitions can be adopted in the classroom to provide some clarity, but wider reading can expose the students to alternative views and conflicting classifications. There is also a reluctance from students to undertake critical analysis of a case study, preferring a quick answer or solution.

2. What were your experiences of using POEM in the classroom?

The POEM model is found to be a useful tool in analyzing complex integrated campaigns. By applying the model to selected case studies, the students are able to identify the sources of messages and also explore the role of social media alongside the other elements of the campaign, for example, TV Advertising or in-store sales promotion. The model helps to identify how one activity, for example, paid media can lead to other outcomes, for example, earned media, without getting bogged down in various classifications. As one researcher explained,

it is an approach that requires students to be active in their construction of understanding and to apply this when planning or understanding the customer journey.

3. What was your observation of students applying the model in a learning activity?

The researchers found that the students were able to apply the model and this application created discussion in the classroom about brand engagement and how the various

elements of the campaign can work together as part of the sales funnel, to move engagement with the message on to engagement with the brand linked to trust and credibility. It was also a simple a clear visual learning tool to unpack a campaign.

The overlap between traditional PR activities, traditional Advertising, social media and digital marketing can be explored.

However, it was noted that the areas of convergence were sometimes challenging for students to comprehend which can again stimulate discussion and debate.

The model challenges and makes students think about where different messages within a campaign originate from.

Discussion

First, both the quantitative and qualitative results from this piece of PAR demonstrate that the POEM model is a useful tool to enable students to understand how integrated campaigns work. More specifically, the students can identify social media marketing activity and how it supports and works with other elements of the campaign. In many cases the students were able to correctly identify Paid, Owned, and Earned media activity in the campaigns. This level of accuracy drops somewhat when activities are placed in the merged areas of the Venn diagrams. This is perhaps not surprising as it can be challenging for the academics and was an area of discussion across the team. However, the important issue is that it stimulates conversation and encourages the students to think about how the various elements work together to achieve the integrated campaign objectives. These findings support the work of Ang (2021) who argues that such models are useful in visually bringing together the online and offline activities and as a planning tool to maximize results. The application of the POEM framework also provides students with experience of a tool that is increasingly recognized in the marketing communications industry and reflects the increasing importance of social media marketing as part of the marketing communications mix.

The second interesting finding is identification of where Advertising and PR activities sit in the POEM framework. The choice of definitions used for this exercise is important. If the more recent all-encompassing definitions had been used, then the activities would all be identified as both PR and Advertising as both disciplines would claim that most of this activity belonged to them. This clearly demonstrates the muddle that the industry has found itself in and the pointlessness of these classifications. Therefore, the more specific definitions proposed by Richards and Curran (2002) for Advertising and Gesualdi (2019) for PR were utilized to attempt to separate the two from each other. Kerr and Richards (2021) argue that up to date and clear definitions

are important to provide clarity to the industry, regulatory authorities and educators.

Figure 3 first shows that the relationship between Advertising and paid media is very strong. This is an important finding as it is imperative, from a regulatory perspective, for customers, clients, agencies and students to clearly identify paid media. For example, this category includes not only Advertising on social media sites (and non-digital sites) but influencers who are also required to inform their customers that they are being paid by the brand owners and are regulated by the self-regulatory organization within that country e.g., Advertising Standards Authority in the United Kingdom. It would seem that the dominance of Advertising within the Marketing Communications tools has been considerably diminished due to prominence of social media marketing, and its main role seems to be to stimulate earned media activity.

The findings also demonstrate that most of the activity outside the Paid media can be classified as PR and reinforces the argument by Giannini (2010) that most social media activity and other digital marketing activities outside of paid can be identified as PR because of the prominence of interaction and engagement. However, importantly, the utilization of the Paid, Owned, and Earned classifications are more explicit and relevant because they help to identify the purpose of the different activities and how they work together and support each other, as expressed by the PR Academy (Bailey, 2019).

This may be an important step forward in recognizing that terminology needs to change. However, this does have consequences and raises several questions. First, if POEM is an acceptable way forward, then is it still appropriate for most marketing communications textbooks to have a separate chapter on each marketing communications tool? Second, whichever classification system is utilized, is it still ethically important for customers to be able to identify when a message has been paid for by the brand or are the waters so muddied that this goal is becoming unachievable?

This move away from identifying Advertising and PR also has consequences for practitioners and academics. Within agencies, this is already happening. On the WPP (2022) website they describe Ogilvy, traditionally considered an Advertising agency, as “an award-winning integrated creative network that makes brands matter” and Finsbury Glover Hering, classed traditionally as a PR agency is described as “a global strategic communications advisory firm,” all descriptions seemingly widening their remit. Despite these changes, we still have bodies, such as “Advertising Standards Authority” in the U.K. and the American Academy of Advertising, many of them representing the marketing communications industry or academic community as a whole.

In academia, Kerr (2009) found that most of the expert panel in her Delphi study felt that Advertising and PR degrees should be replaced by IMC courses, although IMC is not a term necessarily familiar to students and therefore not seen as a good title for promoting a degree program. It was also recognized in the Kerr study that many IMC texts were just rebadged Advertising and promotions management books. The continual evolution of social media has made these changes even more valid. Clarity in the textbooks would obviously assist faculty in teaching social media marketing. Because of increasing integration within the industry, it seems unhelpful to teach different elements of marketing communications in silos. The POEM framework assists in providing that overview.

Finally, the study was an examination of this visual framework as a pedagogical tool to increase student engagement and deeper learning. In applying the tool to a marketing communications campaign, students were able to construct their own understanding in an active manner and thereby provide themselves with skills that will be immediately useful when joining the workforce. All that is required for any Marketing Communications lecturer to adopt this teaching approach is a comprehensive case study, such as award winners from Cannes, Superior Achievement in Branding Reputation (SABER) or the Marketing Society, a list of definitions of the various categories within POEM and a blank POEM Venn diagram for the students to fill in. An example of a completed POEM diagram from another campaign may also be helpful. This exercise can be useful as a formative assessment class exercise as well as being incorporated as part of a summative assignment as in this PAR. To aid this, a possible rubric has been provided in the appendix. The assignment can therefore be utilized numerous times by just assigning a new case.

Conclusion

The marketing communications landscape is fundamentally changing because of technology. Social media is enabling customers to create and share information in a similar way to brands and organizations need to integrate their campaigns to ensure a strong and consistent message is being communicated with the help of their loyal and engaged consumers. This article demonstrates the challenge of applying the terminology of Advertising and PR to today’s digital heavy campaigns, and it explores the best way to teach this ever-changing area. The findings suggest that the application of the POEM framework under the umbrella of IMC, addresses some of these issues and provides an active learning exercise for students to understand how these campaigns are constructed. It moves students away from the confusing Advertising and PR terminology to classifications that work in today’s world and prepares them for the exciting and dynamic industry that they are joining.

Appendix

Rubric for POEM Assignment.

Learning outcome	Fail	Pass	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Identify and critique real-world integrated marketing communications through analysis of Paid Owned Earned Media (POEM) framework using a Venn diagram	Partly answered/or shown limited or no understanding	Satisfactory answer—one or two of the POEM elements not covered or generally weak understanding of the award-winning case study provided	Sound attempts across all elements of the POEM framework to demonstrate an understanding of the award-winning case study provided	Good—across all areas or excellence in one or two of the POEM framework to demonstrate an understanding of the award-winning case study provided	Excellent across all areas showing excellent use of the POEM framework to demonstrate an understanding of the award-winning case study provided
Understanding of the customer journey, and media touchpoints in complex integrated campaigns	The answer fails to address the question set due to significant content omissions and lack of understanding	Content shows some important deficiencies in understanding of the customer journey and media touchpoints A basic analysis of the consumer experience is provided	Content is satisfactory, with some omissions but there is sufficient understanding of the customer journey and media touchpoints A satisfactory analysis of the consumer experience is provided	Content is good and mostly relevant and shows a clear understanding of the customer journey and media touchpoints A good analysis of the consumer experience is provided	Content is complete and highly relevant throughout showing an excellent understanding of the customer journey and media touchpoints. An insightful analysis of the consumer experience is provided

Note. POEM = Paid/Owned/Earned Media framework.

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