

Teach Social Media: A Plan for Creating a Course Your Students Will Love

Reviewed by
Natalie T. J. Tindall, Lamar University

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Author: Matthew J. Kushin
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If you didn't know this already, prepare to be shocked. Teaching public relations and strategic communication in this multimodal, multimedia world is a hard job. Beyond grading and the actual physical act of teaching, those of us who profess for a living also have to maintain a connection to industry, understand and manage new trends and platforms (hello, virtual reality, Discord, and TikTok), as well as attempt to make sure we cover the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students will need in the "real world." It feels like we can never bridge the gap between what we can teach in our courses (which may be regulated through curriculum committees, accreditation standards, and semester/quarter time constraints) and what practitioners want. The Commission on Public Relations Education's most recent report (2018) noted that employers are concerned about the skills and abilities of incoming practitioners and what they can produce and do with (and without) those competencies. This sentiment echoes what other associations have reported. Lum (2017), in the ANA's Educational Foundation's report on the talent gap, wrote:

College and university curricula cannot keep pace with the rapid change going on in the industry. Course work and textbooks are out of date almost as soon as they're published,

and much that is taught about marketing and communications is outdated and unrelated to management expectations and students' actual experience in the field. (p. 2)

Social media is one of those skill sets that many employers desire and professors must teach. Several academics, such as Sandra Duhe, Karen Freberg, and Carolyn Mae Kim, have written books that provide guidance on social media best practices, campaign development, message development and theory. What has been lacking is how instructors deploy these into a classroom environment. How should social media be taught, and what content, strategies, and approaches can we use in the classroom to not only teach social media but have students apply it? A new addition to that crop of books is Matt Kushin's *Teach Social Media*, a tome that doesn't traverse the same material as earlier books.

Contributions of the Book

Thanks to Kushin, we have a new book that fills the missing piece on classroom deployment. For a long time, Kushin has generously shared his time and expertise via his blog, and now this book fleshes out how to operate and manage a social media class. *Teach Social Media* builds a bridge between the university curricula and the demands of your classroom. *Teach Social Media* is a teaching preparation guidebook that offers a template for laddering students' theoretical knowledge, application skills, and implementation capabilities. Few academics learned how to teach emerging social media or how to develop a social media class in an ever-evolving media environment. These factors collide when we are asked to lead, take over, and develop a social media course. The genius of this book is that Kushin walks you through the phases of the class from the start when you, as the professor, are determining what you want your students to learn through each week of the semester. *Teach Social Media* is not focused on the how-to's of social media, nor is it a highly theoretical tome. It's a book that offers the fundamentals for scaffolding and

implementing an introductory social media course. It provides adaptable, ready-to-use class lectures and assignments on learning outcomes focused on knowledge, skills, and abilities to guide the course and each lesson.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Book

One of the strengths of the book is the format of each chapter. Building a new course is challenging. Luckily, Kushin lays out a 15-week semester plan for the reader. The first chapter acclimates the reader. Each subsequent chapter follows a pattern; also, each chapter has a full appendix. Applying theory and practice into courses is what many of us claim to do. Kushin offers a framework that encapsulates contemplation, reflection, and action. The WWHDR framework presented with each unit provides the professor with a way to plan his or her lessons. Some teaching books drown you in theory and case. This book encourages interactivity with the text. The goal with the book and Kushin's overall philosophy is not to just acquire knowledge but to put that knowledge into constructive and beneficial use. The strategy chapter (Chapter 5) and the onboarding chapter (Chapter 1) were eye-openers. Rarely does one get the chance to see how others assimilate the students to a course or teach strategy. It was refreshing to see how his thinking takes the first days of class away from the standard "introduce yourself and review the syllabus" into substantive discussions about the structure of the course and the overarching "why" guiding the class.

One of the book's weaknesses is accessibility. What I liked about the book (and I bought the hard copy edition via Amazon) is you have ebook access, which includes all assignments mentioned in the book. However, only Kindle users will have access to the ebook, which is great for Amazon book users but frustratingly terrible for others. The book does not have an index, which makes it difficult if you need to zoom to a particular place. For several years there have been broader discussions about trolling (#yourslipisshowing as an early example that is still relevant

today), race and diversity in Web 2.0, and digital blackface. Given the issues with memes from a branding and a diversity aspect, I do wish that these matters had been covered in the course materials. Our students will act as brand ambassadors and communicators, and these matters are real-life, real-time situations they will need to diagnose, manage, or extinguish. Giving students and ourselves more room to work through these issues while in praxis is undeniably vital to the enterprises of teaching and public relations.

Who Would Benefit from Reading this Book?

A lot of books overpromise and under-deliver. Kushin's work is the reverse: he under-promises and over-delivers in a concise volume that should be on every public relations professor's shelf. This is a teaching text with an abundance of resources, templates, and classroom strategies. Matt Kushin's book is a godsend for seasoned social media professors redeveloping their social media courses or newbie academics who are incorporating social and digital projects into their classes. The book is a step-by-step course plan for anyone teaching a social media class, and I would argue that some of the assignments can be reconfigured for a writing or research class. Even the most adept professor can learn new things from this text. I know I have, and I cannot wait to put them into practice in my own (non-social media) classes.

References

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