



Dynamic Capabilities and Social Media Education

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Abstract

Equipping students with a dynamic capabilities mindset is critical, especially in social media education. Although students have access to industry-level tools and training (*e.g.*, Hootsuite, Hubspot, Google), some scholars have suggested that educators and industry professionals alike see the gap between what is being taught and what is actually happening at the jobsite. Supporting previous studies on social media, this study suggests that applying a dynamic capability mindset, one that actively engages in sensing, seizing and transforming activities to gain competitive advantage, toward social media education will help educators be on the cutting edge of the latest industry trends, tools and issues. This study also found that the working out of the dynamic capabilities mindset would include intentional partnering with industry organizations and professionals, providing students with mock scenarios and the replication of real-life-industry pressures. These kinds of experiences will also equip students with a dynamic capabilities framework to help them continually be equipped with the knowledge, skills and abilities they need to be competitive in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) marketplace.

For many years, it has become abundantly clear that having training in social media is an essential part of knowing how to reach one's organization's publics (Kruset *et al.*, 2018; Plowman *et al.*, 2015), making social media a mainstay in the public relations educational curriculum (Meganck *et al.*, 2020). Educators are now providing students with access to industry-level tools such as Hootsuite, Hubspot, Meltwater, and Google Analytics (Ewing *et al.*, 2018; Kinsky *et al.*, 2016), and industry professionals have provided insights into educational practices (Freberg & Kim, 2018). Nevertheless, there is still a gap between educational experiences and industry practice (Freberg & Kim, 2018). The theory and framework of dynam-

ic capabilities (Teece, 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018; Teece *et al.*, 1997) may provide insight into how to bridge the constantly changing environmental dynamics, especially in social media education.

Literature Review

Dynamic Capabilities and Strategic Communication: In a highly competitive world that is constantly changing there is a need to adapt accordingly. Chakravarthy (1982) argued that there is a need for the "old fit be consciously disturbed for the sake of a new and higher fit" (p. 42). There is, however, temptation to stick with the status quo as complex and changing situations make it difficult to identify the right solutions

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(Bennet & Lemoine, 2014). The dynamic capabilities (DC) theory and framework of Teece *et al.* (1997) and Teece (2007, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018) provides a structure that suggests that it is possible to gain organizational competitive advantage in spite of a continually changing and uncertain business landscape. The three areas of dynamic capabilities, sensing, seizing, and transforming, can be understood as the

capacity (1) to sense and shape opportunities and threats, (2) to seize opportunities, and (3) to maintain competitiveness through enhancing, combining, protecting, and when necessary, reconfiguring business enterprise's intangible and tangible assets (Teece, 2007, p. 1319).

In other words, dynamic capabilities can be seen as “a fundamental asset to get and sustain competitive advantage, as they allow organizations to rearrange their resources and processes according to environmental changes and demands” (de Araújo *et al.*, 2018, p. 391).

De Araújo *et al.* (2018) conducted a systematic literature review on the scales for DC based on the context for which they were developed. In this study they found that DC were scales were made in regard to brand innovation, knowledge (other related aspects of knowledge such as absorptive capacity and organizational learning), strategic alliance, relationship with stakeholders (partners, customers, suppliers), organizational capacity and brand. Despite the broad range of research and business application in which dynamic capabilities has been studied, there has been limited exploration of dynamic capabilities strategic communication practices (K. Kim, 2021) despite calls to do so (e.g., Bundy *et al.*, 2017; Gómez & Ballard, 2013; Helfat & Peteraf, 2015).

Discussing communication practices, Gómez and Ballard (2013) identified information allocation, which allows the identifying of opportunities and threats in the environment in a timely manner, as one way in which to engage in dynamic capabilities. Additionally, Bundy *et al.* (2017) suggested that there should also be studies that look at both dynamic capabilities and crisis communication as they have similar processes and are an important area to managing effective change management. Responding to this call, K. Kim (2021) examined dynamic capabilities in light of the real-life practices of strategic communication using the 14-factor scale for dynamic capabilities that Kump *et al.* (2019) developed that they described as a “solid predictor of business and innovation performance” (p. 1149), In this study, K.

Kim (2021) identified eight themes related to dynamic capabilities connected to the real-life practice of strategic communication: “1) listening; 2) responding; 3) responsibility; 4) planning; 5) reaction; 6) human dignity in communication; 7) action orientation, and 8) agility” (p. 13). As one considers the technology landscape, further research is needed to understand how to develop these communication themes for dynamic capabilities within the digital world.

Digital Leadership based on Dynamic Capabilities in a VUCA World

The need to engage in sensing activities has been amplified in the last few years as we live in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world (Christensen *et al.*, 2017). For this study's purpose, volatility is a construct that indicates that changes happen rapidly and on a large scale, and uncertainty means there is no way to predict what will happen in the future. Complexity is understood to indicate that the challenges we face are complicated and influenced by many factors. At the same time, there are few causes or solutions, and ambiguity suggests that it is challenging to ascertain clarity on what events mean and what effect they may have (Petrie, 2014).

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has only elevated VUCA dynamics and the need to have digital leadership and innovation (Cockburn & Smith, 2021). Cockburn & Smith (2021) asserted that leaders must develop new capabilities alongside resilient systems to steer their communities through this age of social change with constantly new and emerging ways of connecting on social media in a global world. In other words, business as usual is no longer a viable option, and organizations need to have leadership models that should focus on “learning agility, self-awareness, comfort with ambiguity, and strategic thinking” (Petrie, 2014, p. 9). Similarly, Schoemaker, Heaton and Teece (2018) argued organizations need to “move beyond reactive or incremental innovations” (p. 16). In other words, there need to be thoughtful and strategic management of the organization that will allow for future thriving of the organization. Mi-hardjo *et al.* (2019) helped bring all of this together: the role of leadership in the digital era becomes important to ensure the creation of development capabilities and the mobilization of organization to secure its sustainability under VUCA ... Disruptive innovation stems from a firm's failure to anticipate changes in the cus-

tomers base and market (p. 1060).

Some studies have examined the nature of digital leadership and how it is required to drive digital transformation. Industry 4.0 is the fourth industrial revolution that has come after “mechanization, electricity, and information technology” and refers to the “introduction of the Internet of Things ... offering new business models” (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018, p. 1). In order, however, for an organization to demonstrate digital leadership, Toduk and Gande (2016) found that the following characteristics are required: (1) entrepreneurship and innovation with the ability to disrupt, (2) digital capabilities and understanding that it is a new way of thinking that requires both digital literacy and development, (3) strong networks and cooperation, and (4) participative commitment with vision.

In today’s world, therefore, the ability to have digital leadership based on dynamic capabilities “has a significant direct and indirect effect on innovation, which, critically, can be accelerated when the leaders focus on market orientation” (Mihardjo *et al.*, 2019, p. 1067). Moreover, Goulart *et al.* (2022), discussing the skills needed for the future jobs that do not yet exist, emphasized that because students do not have clear and convergent information what the future job market looks like, there is a possibility that students will have underdeveloped relevant job skills. The development of cognitive soft skills in addition to knowledge, tools training, and abilities, therefore, need to be developed in students to help them make decisions and adapt to new situations more effectively (Goulart *et al.*, 2022).

Whereas dynamic capabilities provide a framework to understand how organizations survive and thrive in VUCA environments, there is a necessary connection with digital leadership because digital leadership “will significantly enable sensing market changes, seizing opportunities, and reconfiguring organizations” (Mihardjo *et al.*, 2019, p. 1059). Therefore, a key consideration for educators is how to train their students to engage in digital leadership related to dynamic capabilities.

Social Media in Public Relations Education

Social media has become a mainstay medium, and its full potential, on a global scale, has not yet been reached (Barrot, 2020). Attansey *et al.* (2008) argued that public relations educational programs should reflect the changes in the industry and “requires teach-

ing methods that are not immutable to change ... problem-based learning has an important place in our contemporary approaches to teaching public relations” (p. 37). In a study that examined 1,000 public relations job ads, Meganck *et al.* (2020) found that social media management was in the top five “most desired knowledge areas” alongside writing, research and analytics, and problem-solving (p. 2). As a result, Meganck *et al.* (2020) suggested, “social media should be a part of every curriculum as a stand-alone course or incorporated into various courses. We are living in an era of convergence, not divergence” (p. 5).

However, social media education needs to constantly be updated to reflect the changing industry and work environment. Kinsky *et al.* (2016), for example, found that while “the rapidly changing digital environment has paved the way for many academic and popular texts on the topic of successfully leveraging social media” (p. 2), there is a gap in competency between university programs and students, and public relations professionals need to be equipped with the right tools to be effective in the digital landscape. This change in the industry was confirmed by Freberg and Kim (2018), who argue that “students are facing constantly changing expectations and ever-demanding skillsets in order to excel and meet the needs of corporations, agencies, and practitioner needs” (p. 78).

In an attempt to address this constantly changing landscape in social media, research on social media pedagogy has focused on specific social media assignments (Anderson *et al.*, 2014; Anderson & Swenson, 2013; Gallicano *et al.*, 2014; Kinsky *et al.*, 2016), the opportunities that exist for experiential learning (Fraustino *et al.*, 2015; Madden *et al.*, 2016) and the recommendations from industry leaders that impact social media curriculum design (Freberg & Kim, 2018). Academic books have also been coming out that highlight the best practices of social media within the industry (Freberg, 2018; Quesenberry, 2020; Zhang & Freberg, 2018), how social media works within a framework of a cohesive campaign (C.M. Kim, 2020), and even the impact of influencers (Watkins, 2021).

Research into social media education and how to also apply it to the professional world is critical. McCleneghan (2006) suggests that “probably no other profession requires greater knowledge of ‘how-to’ communicate than public relations” (p. 42), indicating that professionals need to keep apprised of the latest trends and tools. Teece (2007) takes this argument to

the next level, stating that “the element of dynamic capabilities that involve shaping (and not just adapting to) the environment is entrepreneurial in nature” (p. 1321). In other words, students do not just need the “how-to” education, but they also need to be given opportunities to adapt to and shape the environment of social media. Scholars have suggested that entrepreneurial and innovative practices can teach students the “how-to” skills and how to act and think in the professional world. Fraustino *et al.* (2015), for example, explored the usage of Twitter chats as a way to help foster conditions for experiential learning. On the other hand, Childers and Levenshus (2016) employed their students to work with the university communications office to partner with the client on work. While the project was successful, Childers and Levenshus (2016) found that with “evolving accreditation, curriculum, and professional standards and needs, it can be hard for professors to keep pace” (p. 194).

There have also been studies of how faculty members have used student-run agencies to provide students with experiential learning opportunities to prepare them for the professional world (C.M. Kim, 2015; Swanson, 2008, 2011). In support of this, Ranta *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that providing opportunities to practice learning from the classroom is vital in preparing students for their professional careers, which is possible through student-run agencies. Interestingly enough, Ranta *et al.* (2020) also found that those engaged in student-run firms found that they had a strong perception of professional self-efficacy when it came to social media aptitude.

To the author’s knowledge, this study will be the first to connect the framework of dynamic capabilities, now associated with public relations literature (Kim, 2021), and try to provide clarity in how social media research, which is fundamental to the sensing abilities for an organization, can be taught in social media courses in light of a VUCA environment. In an attempt to understand how to bridge the gap between social media education and ever-changing industry practice with the lens of dynamic capabilities, the research question of this study is as follows:

RQ: How can educators prepare students with dynamic capabilities based on digital leadership in social media research required for VUCA environments?

Method

This study utilized a two-staged, qualitative research approach between October 2020 and November 2020 to explore the connection between social media education within public relations education and dynamic capabilities. Using a purposive sampling method for both stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the first stage reached out to public relations university students. The study recruited students using social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, with an incentive of \$25 Amazon.com gift cards given to four random participants. The desired participants were professors experienced in social media education and industry professionals who manage or have experience with social media professionally for the second stage. Purposeful recruitment was used for this second stage, as it required participants to meet a set of specific criteria.

Sample

For the first stage, there was a total of 25 students who responded. Among the 25 respondents, 12% (n=3) identified as freshmen, 40% (n=10) identified as sophomores, 12% (n=3) identified as juniors, 24% (n=6) identified as seniors, and 12% (n=3) identified as graduates from public relations programs. A large majority, 80% (n=20) identified as female, whereas just 20% (n=5) identified as male. With a similar distribution, 72% (n=18) attended private institutions, and the remainder, 28% (n=7), attended a public university. As far as participation in experiential learning activities, 48% (n=12) said that they were active in their local Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter, and 44% (n=11) said that they were active in their school’s student-run agency. Of these students who participated in either PRSSA or a student-run agency (n=19), 21% (n=4) stated that they were involved in their PRSSA chapter and student-run agency.

For the second stage, five public relations and social media faculty members and four professionals were engaged in this study. The majority of the participants, 55% (n=5), had 15 or more years of public relations and communications experience; 33% (n=3) of the participants had 10 to 14 years of experience, and just 11.11% (n=1) had 3-4 years of experience. The industries that the professionals represent include economic development, food and beverage, financial services, and public relations/digital marketing. From a title perspective, the professionals have roles as a

marketing director, a senior manager of public relations and brand experience, a vice president, and a co-founder of a public relations and digital marketing agency.

Instrument Design:

For both stages, to facilitate respondents' ability to have deep reflective thoughts while completing the survey (James, 2017; James & Busher, 2006; Hawkins, 2018), an asynchronous approach was utilized. Additionally, the asynchronous method provides room for the respondents to answer without pressure from the interviewer (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015; James, 2017); thus, to reach students, faculty members, and professionals whom all have different time frames and availability, especially while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, this method was utilized.

Public Relations Students: The first stage of research utilized SurveyMonkey as the platform to collect the data for the study. To norm all responses, all participants were provided with a description of dynamic capabilities and the study's purpose to provide a framework of dynamic capabilities. After this, participants who confirmed participation in this study were asked some basic demographic questions, such as rank as a student, gender, state that they live in, university type (public or private, two-year or four-year institution), major (or minor as it relates to public relations), and whether or not they participate in a public relations student-run agency and/or PRSSA.

The participants were then asked the following question with the consideration of how students may best learn dynamic capabilities: "Based on your experience, are there any assignments, activities, or hands-on learning that you feel would be most effective at preparing students in cultivating dynamic capabilities?" The participants were then asked to consider dynamic capabilities abilities in light of the eight themes Kim (2021) identified: listening, responding, responsibility, planning, reaction, human dignity in communication, action-orientation, and agility.

Social Media Professors and Industry Professionals: This second stage of research also utilized SurveyMonkey as the platform to collect qualitative data for the study. First, respondents were informed of the intent of the study and were asked some demographic information, such as gender, ethnicity, age range, location, years of public relations and strategic communication experience, whether they are an educator or professional, and their industry. No names or other

identifiable information were collected to maintain privacy.

Following this information, participants were asked three open-ended questions. The first is related to managers' expectations for entry-level digital professionals to be equipped to engage in research, environmental scanning, and identify and evaluate threats and opportunities in social media and whether they perceived if entry-level professionals are prepared for this kind of responsibility. The second question explored recommendations for educators to help students grow in their ability to engage in this kind of data-driven environmental scanning. Finally, the last question asked if there was anything that entry-level professionals could do to increase their credibility with management when presenting their work and recommendations related to environmental scanning.

Analysis

In both stages of the study, an inductive approach was used to understand and explore the answers provided by the participants. The researcher and a secondary coder used the *in vivo* method to code data and identified meaningful themes in the analysis. Significant units usually comprised either a complete sentence or phrase, but there were also often presented concepts that made sense in the context of the study. The researcher and the secondary coder coded and categorized the findings until saturation was reached (Saldaña, 2009) and achieved intercoder reliability.

Applied Experiences and Campaigns

Stage One Results and Analysis of Public Relations Students

The ability to gain practical and real-life experience was a consistent theme that came from the students. One student, a female sophomore who is also involved in her local PRSSA chapter, said, "I think it would be really fun to be able to act as an organization in mock practices. Like at the start of the semester each class, shake up groups and give new challenges each class to address so we can experience the agility and reaction skills ... this can build the other skills."

A few students discussed the importance of engaging in campaigns to nurture the development of dynamic capabilities skills. One student stated that it would be effective to have an "assignment where the rules change drastically at the drop of a hat." A graduate shared that while it is "difficult to replicate an environment in which students can truly practice the

more action-oriented skills in a classroom setting” this challenge could somewhat be mitigated with client work where “students are actually given the autonomy and ownership of a project’s implementation” which would then provide the “necessary training ground for developing these skills.”

All in all, it was clear that applied experience, especially ones where the students are responsible for the outcome, was a theme that came out. This could be done through class activities but also real-life client engagement and exposure.

Case Studies: The second theme identified using case studies to learn from the past and identify themes and theories. One student said they would want to see and learn from examples from when someone did not listen to their public and have “failed campaigns.” Other students discussed the importance of seeing positive campaign results as well. For example, a student who is active in her school’s PR firm shared, “an activity around PR cases and pinpointing theories used would be so helpful, looking to see how an organization pivoted and either effectively addresses the issue or did not is key.” The idea of learning from an organization or individual’s previous experience through the lens of a case study would be “an effective way to prepare students in cultivating dynamic capabilities,” said another student. Another student, a sophomore involved in both her PRSSA chapter and student-run agency, had the same idea, stating that having case studies to examine followed by a “situation to overcome” would be a helpful way to gain and learn the skills related to dynamic capabilities. Case studies, however, were also coupled with the ability to practice and pretend within a situational experience or scenario.

Scenarios: The usage of skills or learning from situations “where major companies have demonstrated them on their way to success” and then “emulating them” through practice leads us to the third theme, scenarios. Students identified that, in addition to learning from case studies, it would be helpful to have situations where students would have the opportunity to “practice coming up with solutions.”

One student said that having “projects involving real-world, current events and situations that help students learn how to react and make decisions involving dynamic capabilities would be effective and useful.” Another student identified the concept of acting as an organization as a “mock practice” where they have an entire semester to build skills and perform the plan. One student argued that these scenarios should hap-

pen within a group setting and individually so that people are not “always leaning on group members.”

Stage Two Study Results and Analysis from Educators and Professionals

Question 1: Entry-level employee’s ability to engage in research and sense-making

Knowledge of technology: A theme was identified among the five professors that there was a lack of preparation for the students entering the workplace as it came to research. The responses indicated that while it may differ on the curriculum, graduating students are “not prepared” or “not very prepared.” A professor with 15 or more years of experience in public relations and the co-founder of a digital marketing agency highlighted that at her university, “students studying social media must complete a course of social media monitoring and measurement that has a focus on social listening and environmental scanning.” A repeated theme, however, was that “tools are an issue.” An associate professor who has 15 years or more experience stated that “the biggest challenge is getting students access to these tools. Most of these tools are super expensive, which hinders educators’ opportunity to give students the experience needed to be successful in this area.”

From the professionals’ perspective, there was also a theme of lack of preparedness to enter into the industry with the current preparation for entry-level professionals. A marketing director in the economic development industry said, “while they may be active on social media in their personal life, that does not necessarily correlate to good social media practices in the workspace ... I have seen many people lose their jobs over inappropriate social media activity.” Other professionals focused not on the tools or abilities that entry-level professionals bring in but rather the lack of experience, which is the second theme.

Lack of experience: Professionals expressed the theme of challenges for students who only knew the tools but had limited experience to give context to that process. A vice president at a public relations firm said that the very assumption that “entry-level professionals (digital or not) would be experienced enough and have the wherewithal to perform duties and tasks of someone who has been exposed to that type of work in the past is a bit preposterous.” He continued to share that it should not be the expectation of individuals in entry-level positions to manage and lead environmental scanning efforts. A senior manager of public

relations & brand experience at a food and beverage organization with 10-14 years of experience provided a distinction between environmental scanning, which is something that he believes entry-level professionals bring to the table, and the ability to evaluate threats and opportunities which “evolves with experience and may be hard for young professionals to grasp.” He also stated that another challenge is that this is something that “varies from industry to industry, company to company.” Finally, a social media professional in the financial services industry shared:

Younger professionals sometimes have trouble knowing how much to dig into the data – and how to best present the data to leadership. Leaders need to help digital professionals set boundaries on how much data to analyze – and how to summarize the data clearly and quickly that can provide leaders with insights that lead to actions.

Question 2: Recommendations for developing relevant skills

Case studies: Throughout this second stage, professionals and educators stressed the value of case studies to help students understand the industry’s requirements. A professor, for example, stated that “it would be helpful to have case studies examples to share with our students – offering context for how it’s done, why it’s important, expectations, where scanning can go wrong, etc.” This concept was echoed by the professional in the food and beverage industry who stated that training with case studies, specifically in crisis communication, would be essential. The financial industry’s marketing director took this a step further, saying that students should immerse “in the industry and stay active in it, so you always know what’s going on.” Finally, scenarios and experiential learning were other related themes shared.

Scenarios and experiential learning: Another central theme was that scenarios would help cultivate more robust learning experience for students. A concept presented by a faculty member, who is also a co-founder of a digital marketing agency, was that real-time scenario-based activities could be given to students where they “must develop and implement listening plans and activities then recommend actions.” Mirroring this idea was presented by a professional who stated that students could be given exercises where they have a limited time to “analyze an issue on social media and how it impacts a brand.” They would

then have limited time to write up the situation and provide recommended action items, giving students the skills to “read, analyze and communicate quickly.” These experiential learning outcomes, however, were also connected with partnerships with professionals and organizations.

Partnerships: A VP in public relations suggested that educators could bring in professionals who do this for a living to “explain to students what a job like that entails and advice on how to sharpen their skills as they enter the job market.” The theme of partnerships was prevalent with the faculty member. One professor mentioned, “more industry-related partnerships are needed. We have to create a win-win situation for educators and industry professionals.” Even with the case study theme, the requirement would be to help provide students with relevant and current real-life examples, something that industry professionals could provide.

Question 3: How entry-level professionals can better present data to management

Professionalism: One theme that emerged was the need for entry-level professionals to elevate their professionalism to garner credibility among management when sharing insights gained through social media. Comments included ones such as these: “Treat it like a big presentation (even if it’s not) – package it professionally, come prepared with questions, critically think through questions someone receiving this info would ask,” “keep it brief (bullet points), check for accuracy, proofread (and have someone else look it over, too),” and “write in clear and concise ways. Leaders don’t have time to read lengthy emails. They need executive summaries, bullets with key insights and recommended actions.” While this is unrelated to using tools, it indicates a belief in training students to engage in digital spaces and then communicate about those findings in a professional context.

Data Analysis with an Executive Perspective: Thinking critically and conveying messages succinctly to managers was also another common theme found with both professors and professionals. A communication professor with 10-14 years of experience said it would be essential to connect the insights “to the broader organizational goals.” Similarly, a public relations agency VP said that it is crucial to “think strategically and holistically from the brand’s perspective. Ask yourself, ‘how does this information that I have possibly affect the brand, and how can I use these find-

ings to strategically position the brand now or in the future?” Another professional said it was also necessary to provide “examples of similar scenarios (positive and negative). Clear recommendations and potential outcomes. Implications, financial or emotional.”

Discussion

Dynamic Capabilities Mentality: The world is moving faster toward digitalized industries and online environments where there are new business models and new roles (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018). Goulart *et al.* (2022) suggested that there is a need for students to develop cognitive soft skills in addition to the practical workplace skills. This study supports the value of having a different cognitive ability that empowers both educators and students to be able to sense and adapt accordingly to the situation – a dynamic capabilities mentality. Whereas previous studies have pointed to the gap that exists between the academy and industry (e.g., Freberg & Kim, 2018), the solutions have often been focused on building connections with industry partners. This connection with industry, which helps build the ‘how-to’ of public relations that McCleneghan (2006) argued was so vital, however, is only a temporary solution. There will, as industry continues to change, always be a gap that requires sustained adjustment to be bridged.

Whereas the students in this study generally believed that they need to have an education in social media skills to be successful, the educators and professionals understood that there is also the cognitive soft-skills that needs to be taught in addition to the workplace skills that are being offered to the students (Ewing *et al.*, 2018; Kinsky *et al.*, 2016). The theory of dynamic capabilities offers a strong explanatory conceptual framework that helps move beyond knowledge acquisition and encourages critical thinking and an executive perspective (Gomez & Ballard, 2013). The continual processes of sensing, seizing, and transforming that dynamic capabilities are built upon (Teece *et al.*, 1997) challenges individuals to consistently take in more information, make sense of the situation, translate that into actionable processes, and transform accordingly.

Practiced Skills Required: Practical ways in which the dynamic capabilities mentality can be taught is through case studies and scenarios. Case studies provide students with real-life insights into successes and failures, situational dynamics, and learnings beyond the basic framework of knowledge about the tools.

Case studies also take students a step beyond certifications and training of tools (Ewing *et al.*, 2018; Kinsky *et al.*, 2016). The scenarios give the students the practical experience and training to engage in the actual practice. The ability to have critical thinking skills, however, seems to be lacking in these two areas. While students did not highlight this distinction, it became apparent in interviews with faculty members and professionals. The VP of a public relations agency, for example, shared that the ability to engage in sensing activities is not reasonable to expect of a recent graduate as they lack the “practiced skill.”

This study, however, suggests that attaining this “practiced skill” is not outside of the range of the educational scope of a social media program at the university level. It is not unreasonable to expect students to gain and practice relevant skills before graduation through experiential learning and real-life practice. However, as highlighted by the professors, giving students access to many industry tools is not reasonable as they are so expensive. Whereas there are certainly some listening tools such as Hootsuite Academy and Muck Rack Academy that are free, social media listening tools such as Cision and Meltwater can cost thousands of dollars to use. Even with Hootsuite and Muck Rack, the free tools are limited to basic functions that are not representative of industry-level usage. Especially for smaller programs with limited resources and budgets, it can be challenging to provide students with the practiced skills that make their graduates competitive in the workplace. As Ranta *et al.* (2020) found, social media skills, among many others, can be developed within the context of a student-run agency.

Partnerships are Key: Another insight that this study has found is the importance of partnerships with external professional organizations and individuals. Suppose educators move beyond just teaching students and instead want to instill them with the dynamic capabilities skills related to communication, including listening, responding, responsibility, planning, reaction, human dignity in communication, action orientation, and agility (Kim, 2021). In that case, it will be essential to have access to individuals and organizations who can help provide real-time insights and opportunities to learn. As a faculty member highlighted, “more industry-related partnerships are needed.” A professional echoed this by stating that professionals can share what the work looks like and provide practical tips and advice on how students can

“sharpen their skills.” This kind of partnership would also help address the VUCA world (Christensen *et al.*, 2017) and the challenge that educators face with trying to bridge the gap that is constantly growing between the classroom and industry. If a program, for example, partners with an organization, they would have professionals guest speak in class, provide current case studies, and run scenarios of new situations they are facing. Additionally, partnerships can result in sharing or demonstrating tools that may or may not be taught in the classroom, provide students with internship opportunities, and even partner with the student-run agency. Attansey *et al.* (2008) also highlighted the importance of “problem-based learning” in “contemporary approaches to teaching public relations” (p. 37), and working with industry professionals can help provide the contemporary information while also introducing students to the problems that are being faced in the industry today.

The social media industry is constantly changing the skillsets and practices (Freberg & Kim, 2018), making the educational practices in the social media classroom a continuous game of “catch up.” Educators are required to update their educational practices. However, this study suggests that by engaging in partnerships with industry professionals, the students can gain the relevant skillsets to learn social media practices and those required of dynamic capabilities communication (Kim, 2021). These findings also directly support the areas of digital leadership that Toduk and Gande (2016) highlighted, especially the need for digital capabilities and understanding that there is a requirement of having both digital literacy and development. This finding also maintains McCleneghan’s (2006) mandate that the public relations profession needs great amounts of “how-to” knowledge. Finally, given that dynamic capabilities are all about scanning the environment to constantly shape and adapt organizations for the future (Teece, 2007), partnering with organizations that are demonstrating these capabilities would also provide a good fit for educational purposes.

Limitations and Future Research

Gathering data from students, professors, and industry professionals amid COVID-19 was a challenging component of this study. In future studies, gaining a larger sample size would also help factor in changing requirements for the various industries and the independent expectations they have regarding envi-

ronmental scanning. It would also be interesting to analyze the themes related to communication in the dynamic capabilities scale that K. Kim (2021) found with the perceived learning outcomes students have in their courses and experiential learning opportunities. It should also be acknowledged that K. Kim’s (2021) initial study was with a small sample size and future verification of these findings would be important.

Conclusion

In a VUCA world (Christensen *et al.*, 2017; Mihardjo *et al.*, 2016) transitioning into industry 4.0 (Oberer & Erkollar, 2018), the importance of providing social media students with the educational knowledge and framework and equipping them with a dynamic capabilities mindset and approach cannot be understated.

Although students have access to industry-level tools and training (e.g., Hootsuite, Hubspot, Google), educators and industry professionals alike see the gap between what is being taught and what is actually happening at the jobsite. The business construct of dynamic capabilities, which examines how organizations gain competitive advantages by sensing, seizing, and transforming the way work is done, provides additional insights for social media educators seeking to bridge the divide between education and industry.

Through a partnership with industry professionals and organizations, students would have access to live-time case studies on the state of the industry, be able to engage in relevant and timely scenarios, but also have the opportunity to engage in experiential learning opportunities that would otherwise not be afforded in the classroom alone. Furthermore, having a dynamic capabilities mindset may help bridge the divide where learning independently is insufficient, leading to the lack of the “practiced skill” that only comes with experience.

This study suggests that the theory and framework of dynamic capabilities (Teece *et al.*, 1997) have provided insight and practical solutions to bridge the constantly changing requirements for social media education through applied experiences and campaigns, case studies, and industry connections so that students may be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to be competitive in an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) marketplace.

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