

Can you secure a job through Twesume? Examining strategic communication for self-promotion on social media

(Original Teaching Idea – Single)

Courses: Digital Media, Survey of Social Media, Professional Communication Skills, Interviewing, and Mediated Communication

Objectives: The goal of this classroom activity is for students to understand strategic communication for self-promotion on social media platforms, especially Twitter, and utilize them effectively for job application.

Introduction and rationale

The advent of social media provides job seekers with more channels for landing a job than what traditional media can offer. People strategically utilize social media platforms, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter, to manage professional online identities and promote themselves for career purposes (El Ouiridi et al., 2015). Self-promotion on social media is essentially the practice of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) for professional goals (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). Empirical evidence has shown that self-promotion, or describing relevant qualities that one possesses (Kacmar et al., 1992), is positively associated with interview performance (Barrick et al., 2009). In the era of social media, one of the popular self-promotion approaches to securing recruiters' attention is through "Twesume" – a contraction of "Twitter" and "resume" (Weinberg, 2011). "Twesume" is an abbreviated resume or biography, within a 140-character limit (approximately 20 words), posted on one's Twitter profile (Jacoway, 2010). Within the character limit, employers are interested in two key aspects from the candidates: 1) their qualification and 2) their potential to fit the company culture (Baker, 2018). A recent survey indicates that 94% of advertising and marketing executives relied on social media for recruiting, and 14% of the surveyed participants used Twitter (Robert Half, 2018).

Social media are especially popular among U.S. young adults aged between 18-24 (Pew Research Center, 2019). In response to the increasing practice of online self-promotion, training college students to judiciously present themselves on social media and manage professional online identities have been experimented in higher education curriculum (Novakovich et al., 2017). Promoting new media literacy (e.g., strategic content creation) among young adults (Lee et al., 2015) necessitates relevant class activities to be incorporated in higher education. Given this, this activity attempts to equip students with digital

communication skills needed for the trend of self-promotion through social media, thus increasing their chances of securing job opportunities.

The activity

Preparation

One class period before the activity, students are asked to collect information about a job post (e.g., internship, part-time or full-time position) through digital platforms. They are expected to have a thorough understanding of the job description, including qualifications, responsibilities, and application instructions. To develop a theoretical foundation for students to participate in this activity, instructors should explicate the concept of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) and introduce critical new media literacy, including interactive participation in online environments and strategic creation of online media contents (Lee et al., 2015). Then instructors should emphasize the importance of managing professional online identities (Hancock & Dunham, 2001) on social media platforms, such as LinkedIn (Chiang & Suen, 2015), Twitter (Brems et al., 2017), and YouTube (Chen, 2013). In addition, instructors may want to lead students to visit a certain company's website and its social media page, followed by a brief explanation of the dimensions of company culture, such as the nature of human relationships (e.g., individualism and collectivism), time orientation (e.g., past, present, and future), and the organization's relationship to its environment (e.g., dominant and submissive; Schein, 1990). Lastly, remind students to bring their digital devices to the next class.

Procedure

This independent activity can be used in any communication courses that are aimed at honing students' digital communication skills. It can be applied to classrooms of any size. The activity begins with an overview of what a Twesume is, how it is used for job application, and what the writing strategies are. Instructors should introduce key writing strategies, including 1) writing clearly and concisely (Barnard, 2016), 2) highlighting a unique and

unforgettable image of yourself, 3) substituting hyped self-promotion for factual information (Gorbatov et al., 2018), 4) showing your personality that is relevant to a particular job post (Crompton & Sautter, 2011), 5) inserting URLs which can lead to web pages of more detailed personal introductions (Weber, 2010), 6) using commonly used acronyms on Twitter, and 7) using proper hashtags to gain the targeted employer's attention (Jacoway, 2010). To give students a general idea of what a Twesume looks like, instructors can provide an example, such as "Santa Claus: World traveler and toy expert. 300+ years management experience. Looking for position in entertainment industry. <http://tinyurl.com/c9ursdp> #twesume" (Weinberg, 2011).

Next, students are given time to think about what information they decide to include in their Twesumes and then experiment with composing a draft. After that, two students form a pair to exchange their drafts and share their comments with each other. Considering the privacy and ethical issues of using personal Twitter accounts for this activity, instructors may use Padlet.com, which is an easy-to-use free online tool allowing users to create fake social media posts. Students can follow the link that instructors create to post and share their crafted Twesumes with others on this platform. In the end, instructors should lead a discussion with the entire class guided by the following questions.

Questions about the content

- (1) What are the keywords used in your Twesume to describe your qualifications for the position you are applying for? Why?
- (2) How does your past experience you included in your Twesume demonstrate that you are a good fit for the position? Why?

Questions about writing strategies

- (1) How did you manage to balance succinctness against informativeness?
- (2) What are the highlights of your Twesume that would differentiate you from other applicants?
- (3) How did you ensure that your Twesume presents your qualifications objectively without exaggeration?
- (4) What types of personality are required for this position? How did you describe your personality characteristics in your Twesume?
- (5) Did you insert a link in your Twesume? If so, what information does the link direct the audience to?
- (6) What acronyms, if there are any, did you use in your Twesume? Why did you use them?
- (7) What hashtags did you use in your Twesume? Why did you choose these hashtags?

Questions about the whole activity

- (1) What did you find to be the most challenging aspect of drafting your Twesume? Why?
- (2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of self-promotion on social media platforms?
- (3) What other communication strategies would you employ to facilitate your job application through social media?

Debriefing

After guiding students to discuss the above questions, instructors may conclude by reviewing the activity and responding to questions to ensure the intended learning outcomes.

During the debriefing period, students often share the challenges they encounter when drafting Twesumes. For instance, regarding the balance between the desired content (responses to the questions in the first block listed above) and the concrete writing strategies (responses to the second question block), students mention that the 140-character limit

restrains them from presenting detailed information relevant to the desired positions. However, some students comment that the character limit pushes them to identify their most relevant and outstanding qualities. Relatedly, instructors can guide students to use online self-assessment tools, such as The Keirsey Temperament Sorter, to more accurately identify their unique personal attributes (Crompton & Sautter, 2011). Furthermore, when exchanging their opinions on the overall activity (responses to the third question block), students often mention their concern about the effectiveness and consistency of messages posted on social media when it comes to career purposes. For instance, it might not impress recruiters if a candidate only fills their Twitter profile with one Twesume but nothing else. Also, instructors should address that Twesume is part of one's online profile along with their presence in other social media platforms. Thus, it would be unwise if one markets themselves for different companies on different social media platforms.

In addition, instructors should lead students to become aware of the potential pitfalls of posting information on social media for career purposes. For example, using emojis and memes in a Twesume may be deemed as lacking professionalism, unless one is applying for a job valuing creativity. Remind students that although Twesume is a novel approach for self-promotion, it is crucial to carefully prepare traditional materials (e.g., curriculum vitae, cover letter, or portfolio) since they are still essential in most of the job announcements.

Appraisal

This activity allows students to explore strategies for creating Twesumes and practice self-promotion on social media. Overall, students find this activity very engaging, actively sharing their comments and questions during discussion and debriefing. Students also report that this activity helps enhance their self-promotion competency, strategic communication, and digital media writing skills for future job seeking. Moreover, writing strategies mastered through drafting Twesumes in this activity can be applied to other online job-seeking platforms. For

example, students can employ similar strategies when adding a “Summary” on LinkedIn, an “About me” on Glassdoor, or a short biography on their personal websites. Besides, the practice of self-promotion for achieving brevity and clarity can be extended to develop students’ skills of oral communication (e.g., elevator pitch) and visual communication (e.g., presentation) in various job application scenarios.

One limit is that students based in countries with no access to Twitter may lack the opportunity to develop a sense of strategic self-promotion in the specific technological environment. Instructors in this situation may instead use locally available social media services and adjust the writing strategies accordingly.

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