Evaluation of a Novel Simulated Consulting Project in an Undergraduate Marketing Course

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Purpose of the Study: This study examines the effectiveness of a simulated consulting project (SCP) developed to engage Generation Z undergraduates in a principles of marketing course in the face of an abrupt shift to remote learning due to the pandemic.

Method/Design and Sample: Experiential learning theory was applied to the development of the SCP and the technology acceptance model (TAM) framed faculty and student perceptions of the SCP's utility and flexibility. A case study design was used, collecting quantitative and qualitative data from 185 student surveys (n = 755, response rate 25%), a subset of 66% (n = 497) student midterm and final exams, and five faculty interviews.

Results: Over 70% of the students reported that the SCP was real-world and engaging, and the team experience was successful and organized. Students somewhat or completely agreed with improvement in specific learning outcomes including the ability to evaluate quantitative business reports and apply marketing strategy. Faculty found the SCP useful and customized it to meet their teaching needs.

Value to Marketing Educators: Marketing educators can use hypothetical consulting projects and team-based learning in an online environment. Generation Z, the dominant generation of undergraduate marketing students, was engaged and student perceptions of learning were enhanced as they applied fundamental marketing concepts to a real-world scenario.

Keywords: Generation Z, marketing education, online learning, pandemic, simulation

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Like many universities, this flagship state university pivoted abruptly from in-person teaching and learning to a fully virtual environment in the spring 2020 semester. Students and faculty left for spring break and more than one year later, had not returned to in-person learning. The overarching challenge facing faculty in the marketing department was to create an engaging online learning experience for the core marketing course taught by six faculty to over 1,200 students across 21 sections on two campuses. While these metrics were daunting, the pandemic disruption encouraged the development of an approach that would engage students and provide greater curricular consistency across the various faculty and formats offered.

Experiential learning theory emphasizes the process of learning (Kolb, 2015) and can manifest in a variety of pedagogical tools including case studies, internships, service-learning, and simulations (D'Angelo et al., 2015). Typically, simulations are computer-based (Caruana et al., 2016) or offered as a simulated consulting experience with the faculty acting as a 'client' (Maher & Hughner, 2005). Since the course was already structured within the campus learning management system (LMS), embedded the textbook publisher's online management system, and required students to purchase the publisher's content for $80, an additional interface was not desirable. Considering the demands already placed on faculty to pivot to fully online learning, requiring faculty to play an additional role of "client" and incorporate a third learning system seemed onerous. Thus, in the midst of a rapid change to fully online learning, ease of use and sensitivity to additional cost led to the development of a novel consulting simulation.

The learning experience created for the principles of marketing course is best described as a simulated consulting project (SCP) (Bos & Gordon, 2005). The students' "client" is a fictitious restaurant in a real neighborhood in Washington, D.C. and students offered their weekly consulting recommendations through the LMS. This core course serves as an introduction to marketing while acknowledging that students are exposed to marketing strategy and tactics as consumers. Course objectives emphasize the importance of marketing within an organization and highlight the role of business tools like SWOT and data analysis to determine segmentation, targeting, and positioning; and tactical decisions regarding product, price, place, and promotion. Thus, a simulated neighborhood restaurant seeking marketing consultation situates the learning in a familiar context.

Simulated Consulting Project (SCP) Design and Implementation
An SCP was developed to engage undergraduate marketing students and deepen learning through team-based, hands-on applications, while also being

manageable by faculty and students adapting to fully online teaching and learning. Attention was paid to the needs of Gen Z students: real-world situations, collaboration balanced with appropriate "credit" for work, and the integration of technology.

The SCP developed, named "Zambo's Beans and Rice," included a client dossier (available as an online supplement, https://spark.adobe.com/page/4uWhTWPJBZiKC/) explaining the history of the restaurant, the change in ownership to the students' client, and details about the current menu and customer base. Students were also provided with access to the fictitious client's website and income statement. The Zambo's Beans and Rice restaurant is in an ethnically and racially diverse area, the 16th Street Heights neighborhood in Washington, D.C. During the first week of class, faculty explained that students would be working in groups as marketing consultants to Isabella, who had inherited ownership of the restaurant from the founder, her grandfather, a Guatemalan immigrant.

Weekly, students were presented with new challenges to solve as consultants. The assignments were designed to apply the concepts introduced in the textbook and explored in synchronous class discussions. For example, during the week marketing research was covered in the textbook chapter and live discussion, students analyzed real-time marketing research about quick-service restaurants, the impact of the pandemic, and generational cohorts' use of delivery services to make recommendations to their client. Students used these proposals later in the semester when they identified additional market segments to target, developed new products, and created promotional campaigns. To appeal to Gen Z's proclivity to seek out videos to learn new skills, PepsiCo was approached to record a sales presentation role play. The local territory representative and sales manager demonstrated the approach and solution presentations including objection handling and closing skills. Students recommended whether their client, Isabella, should switch suppliers, considering the preferences of the targeted market segments proposed earlier in the semester. Thus, the weekly "Zambo's" assignments required students to build on their past recommendations as they continued their "relationship" with the client. Students were encouraged to use website development tools to mock up menus and social media campaigns on behalf of their client. The client dossier and assignments were designed to include links to timely market research, photos of potential clients, and the sales role-play with a beverage supplier available for both asynchronous use and faculty-led live discussions. Consistent with the expectations of Gen Z, students received weekly feedback on their submissions.

The client dossier, weekly assignments, and grading rubrics were posted to a master LMS site available to all instructors who agreed to adopt the consulting scenario into their sections. Faculty met one-on-one with the course coordinator and regularly as a group to discuss implementation initiatives. They had the flexibility to determine group composition, deadlines, grading requirements, and asynchronous or synchronous teaching. Consistent with the expectations of Gen Z, faculty provided weekly feedback on students' submissions.

Thus, this research explores an SCP in an online undergraduate marketing core course and extends the literature on the development, pedagogical utility, and experience of Gen Z students and faculty with an SCP. Three research questions were explored.

RQ1: To what extent did the SCP engage Gen Z students throughout the semester?

RQ2: To what extent did the SCP enhance learning marketing fundamentals?

RQ3: To what extent did faculty perceive student engagement and use and modify the SCP to meet the needs of their individual students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature on simulated experiences in business education, engaging Generation Z, and faculty adoption of new technology and pedagogy follows.

Simulated Experiences in Business Education
The role of the educator, according to Kolb (2015), is to facilitate the development of new ideas by "bringing out the learner's beliefs and theories, examining and testing them, and then integrating the new, more refined ideas into the person's belief systems" (p. 39). Students are routinely the target of marketing efforts and undeniably enter the classroom "with more or less articulate ideas about the subject at hand" (Kolb, 2015, p.39). Simulations allow students the opportunity to blend previously acquired knowledge and experiences with new concepts taught in class and apply them to a real-world scenario (Burch et al., 2019). They address the pedagogical need to bring the theory to life and practice skills needed for the workplace.

A meta-analysis of experiential learning examined the impact of four moderating variables on efficacy: the type of learning outcome measured, the type of assessment used, whether feedback was provided, and the duration of the activity (Burch et al., 2019). In all, 89 studies were considered, and the authors noted experiential activities "generate better learning outcomes than control groups who do not receive experiential activities" (Burch et al., 2019, p. 256). The learning outcome of cognitive development, which includes moving up Bloom's revised taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) from remembering and understanding to applying, evaluating, and creating, was enhanced with experiential learning (Burch et al., 2019). In a subset of 20 studies in business disciplines, experiential learning produced improved cognitive development ($p<.001$). The post hoc analysis comparing experiential learning using a simulation to a service-learning project had a more robust positive effect on cognitive development and social development ($p <.001$) (Burch et al., 2019). This work suggests value in using experiential activities in

business courses particularly when cognitive development is the desired outcome.

Maher and Hughner (2005) compared the efficacy of experiential research projects with real versus hypothetical clients and found them equally effective in enhancing student perceptions of learning. Students did not feel that a real client in a live case was more practical or realistic than a well-constructed hypothetical client case. The issues presented in the hypothetical client case were typical of those facing real clients. Both forms of experiential projects scored similar average scores on the Likert question "The course increased my knowledge and understanding of the subject" (Maher & Hughner, 2005, p. 6). Given the challenges of abruptly switching from in-person to virtual learning due to the pandemic and the ability to eliminate the complexity of scheduling a semester-long project with a live client, Maher and Hughner's (2005) findings are particularly appealing.

Engaging Generation Z
The pandemic is the latest event that will shape the perspective of Generation Z (Gen Z), the generation of traditional college-age students in undergraduate classrooms born after 1995 (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Often referred to as digital natives (Beck & Wright, 2019), Gen Z has only known a world with technology at their fingertips and answers via online search (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). They have been shaped by social media, seen as both a connection to others and a threat to mental health (Beck & Wright, 2019). According to the Pew Research Center, Gen Z is the most ethnically and racially diverse generation, more accepting of social change around family and gender definitions, and potentially the most educated (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Indeed, Gen Z appears to have been hard hit by the pandemic facing interruptions to college life and job loss or pay cuts in the service sector where they are overrepresented (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

Pedagogical considerations for this generational cohort include leveraging the opportunity to learn through group work, particularly with practical hands-on projects (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). In a service-learning applied managerial accounting project, students' reflection papers emphasized the value of teamwork and collaboration to address the local community's problem of homelessness (Edmond & Driskill, 2019). Skills such as budgeting, networking, communication, and leadership were enhanced by the project. In a personal selling course, students played both buyer and seller roles while tackling more demanding scenarios as the semester continued (Thacker, 2016). The applied teaching method earned more positive satisfaction and value ratings from students compared to a didactic approach. Further, there was greater appreciation for selling skills and their usefulness across business situations.

Research in pedagogy shows that Gen Z prefers a varied learning environment including problem solving, constructive feedback, and partnership in learning between peers and instructors (Cruz, 2020). Schlee et al. (2020) compared Gen Z attitudes about group projects to the previous generation, Millennials. The authors organized survey questions into three factors relevant to student perceptions of group projects: fear, fun, and faculty guidance. The fear factor was positively correlated with the statement "Group projects bring out the worst in people" (Schlee et al., 2020, p. 143). The fear factor increased significantly in the Gen Z cohort, leading the authors to conclude that students are far more concerned about unequal contributions of team members and receiving appropriate credit for their contributions than Millennials. The faculty guidance factor also changed significantly between the two cohorts. Gen Z demands more input and direction from professors. Notably, the fun factor, "highly correlated with camaraderie, creativity, and leadership, did not significantly change" (Schlee et al., 2020, p. 143).

Video communication is ubiquitous in social media frequented by Gen Z, (i.e., Discord, Snapchat, Twitch, and TikTok) (Wilson, 2021), and offers new opportunities to create engaging projects. Namin et al. (2021) used an experimental design to compare a video-based marketing plan project with a traditional paper/presentation project. Students completed the project in groups and were assessed using the Association of American Colleges and Universities Oral Communication VALUE Rubric. Across all dimensions, "the video-based projects led to significantly higher average performance than the paper/presentation project" (Namin et al., 2021, p. 11). The authors noted that students felt more engaged, that the project was more "fun," and using the technology was "preparing them for the real world" (Namin et al., 2021, p.13).

Gen Z values authentic and collaborative learning situations. Educators should endeavor to insure equal contribution by all team members and credit commensurate with effort. Gen Z prefers more instructor feedback and guidance than previous generations of students. Given the constant use of technology, real-world business challenges should leverage the use of online tools for communication and problem solving.

Faculty Adoption of New Technology and Pedagogy
Adoption of new technology is frequently viewed through the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016; Ball & Levy, 2008; Wingo et al., 2017) and its subsequent enhancements, TAM2 and the Unified Theory of Acceptance and User of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The technology's perceived usefulness and ease of use are salient constructs impacting a user's intention to adopt a new technology (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016; Wingo et al., 2017; Venkatesh et al., 2003). Among the factors influencing perceived usefulness are relevance to the user's job, and the results and benefits of using the technology (Wingo et al., 2017). The SCP was developed appreciating the wide range of faculty and student acceptance and comfort with technology and faculty's role in managing student concerns. That is, given the need to adopt a host of new technologies including Zoom and Panopto to facilitate fully online

instruction, it was important to build the SCP in a platform familiar to both faculty and students, the LMS.

Faculty report that the shift to online course development is time intensive and requires a different pedagogical perspective (Chaisson et al., 2015). Faculty comfortable teaching as the "the sage on the stage" find themselves as the "guide on the side" (Chaisson et al, 2015, p. 235). Faculty who may have "favored informative and spontaneous oral instruction" (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016, p.17) in an on-campus environment now find reading body language and holding students' attention beyond ten to 15 minutes (Anderson, 2020) challenging. Thus, the methods of teaching online change. Videos developed for asynchronous instruction were shown to be an effective pedagogical tool in an introductory accounting course. Students who availed themselves of the videos performed better on summative assessments (Meade and Parthasarathy, 2020). Orlov et al. (2021) found that prior online teaching experience and the use of "planned student peer interactions...played important roles in ameliorating the potentially negative effects of the pandemic on learning" (p.3). Videos for asynchronous viewing and small group activities in breakout rooms are time consuming to develop. Not all faculty are equally fluent with technology and may find some tools difficult to use and of questionable value.

METHOD

Participants
Student Participants. Undergraduate students taking the core principles of marketing course in the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters participated in the SCP (N = 755). Students aged 18 to 23, the Gen Z cohort, represented 93% of students. Students were enrolled in seventeen sections (81%) in the marketing major and four sections (19%) in the marketing minor. Section sizes ranged from 37 to 65 students. Due to the pandemic, students virtually attended either the main campus meeting once weekly (93%) or a satellite campus (7%) meeting twice per week.

Faculty Participants. Five clinical faculty, including the two authors, taught one to three sections of the undergraduate principles of marketing course at the main or satellite campuses in the fall 2020 and/or spring 2021 semester. All five faculty participants agreed to use the SCP materials, assignments, and provide weekly student feedback. All had taught the course in previous years using an online textbook and LMS. This course had not previously been offered online; thus, online delivery was new to these faculty.

MEASURES

Students completed an anonymous questionnaire via the Canvas LMS at the end of the semester. The survey instrument was designed to measure student engagement with the SCP, teamwork, and application to real-world business situations. The first two items provided positive, negative, and neutral adjectives students could select to describe the SCP and teamwork (e.g., fun and boring, challenging and easy, engaging, repetitive, real-world, and organized). The remaining questions collected student self-reported measures of the acquisition of skills described in the course objectives: analyzing data to make decisions in the areas of segmentation and targeting strategy, and decisions about product, price, place, and promotion. The final open-ended question allowed for additional feedback.

A subset of students taught by the authors (n = 497) was assessed by multiple choice questions on the midterm and final exams. Fifteen questions were developed for the SCP test bank, seven for the midterm exam and eight for the final exam. The SCP test bank included application questions situated within the context of "Zambo's" (e.g., marketing research, SWOT analysis, segmentation, integrated marketing communications, pricing, channels, etc.) that applied content aligned with the course objectives. Five SCP multiple choice questions were randomly selected by the LMS and included on each student exam, representing 16% of the overall test questions.

Faculty semi-structured interviews included items related to perceptions of student engagement, usefulness, and flexibility of the SCP.

PROCEDURE

This research uses a case study design. Ridder (2017) notes that case studies offer the opportunity to examine how knowledge is constructed given a specific set of circumstances. Descriptions of experiences are provided with interpretation by the authors. Readers take these interpretations and align them with their own experiences (Ridder, 2017). The case study design used here examines the applicability of experiential learning theory (Kolb, 2015) to the development and testing of an SCP delivered and completed virtually. The unique needs of Gen Z were considered in the development and implementation of the simulation. Of interest is the experience of Gen Z students and their educators. This case study also examines the utility and acceptance of the SCP to marketing educators using the technology acceptance model (Angolia & Pagliari, 2016; Ball & Levy, 2008; Wingo et al., 2017). Institutional review board approval was received for prospective and retrospective data collection from students and faculty to examine the following research questions.

RQ1: To what extent ***did the SCP engage Gen Z students throughout the semester?***

Student surveys administered during the final week of the fall and spring semesters assessed student engagement with the SCP. The survey was completely voluntary and no incentives for completion were provided. Survey items one and two asked students about their experiences with the SCP and team performance, respectively. Student survey data was extracted from the Canvas LMS at the conclusion of the semester and after grades were submitted. Descriptive statistics were calculated for items one and two.

RQ2: To what extent did the SCP enhance learning marketing fundamentals?

The student survey instrument included items examining self-reported perceptions of specific knowledge of marketing fundamentals gained during the SCP. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree).

To further explore the extent to which the SCP enhanced learning marketing fundamentals, application-oriented multiple-choice questions pertaining to the SCP scenario were included on the midterm and final exams for a subset of students taught by the authors. Seven questions in the midterm bank and eight questions in the final bank were designed to be specific to the SCP scenario. The LMS randomly selected five of these questions for each student, so not all students answered the same SCP questions. Each student completed unique online versions of the exams consisting of a total of 32 midterm and final exam questions randomly pulled by the LMS from test banks.

Student test data was extracted from the Canvas LMS by item and student at the conclusion of the semester, after grades were submitted. Data were anonymized and coded by question topic. Midterm exam topics included data analysis, consumer decision making, positioning, research, segmentation, strategy, and SWOT analysis. Final exam topics included channel, data analysis, integrated marketing communications, personal selling, pricing, and promotion mix. Descriptive statistics were calculated by topic, student major or minor designation, and semester.

RQ3: To what extent did faculty perceive student engagement and use and modify the SCP to meet the needs of their individual students?

Faculty interviews were conducted at the conclusion of the spring semester. The authors interviewed faculty participants. The authors were interviewed by an independent graduate assistant. All five interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and coded to reveal themes related to perceived student engagement, faculty use, and flexibility of the SCP.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

RQ1: To what extent did the SCP engage Gen Z students throughout the semester?

Student engagement with the SCP was revealed in the student surveys (*N* = 755). The response rate was 25% (*n* = 185). Students indicated words that described the SCP as real-world (88%), engaging (74%), fun (46%), repetitious (44%), boring (5%), and pointless (3%). Students indicated words that described their team experience as successful (80%), organized (71%), easy (38%), challenging (34%), complex (26%), difficult (21%), and failure (3%).

The final survey item was opened-ended and answered by 9% (*n* = 67) of students and included comments on one or more issues. Coding identified three themes: SCP engagement, teamwork challenges, and repetitious assignments. Students reported the SCP engaged them and deepened their understanding of marketing concepts, "each week was a new challenge that helped conceptualize the textbook." Students even came to see the protagonist, Isabella, as a real client, "it really felt like we were working with Isabella. I got to know the business so well that ideas...came to me all the time."

The second theme, teamwork challenges, included comments about accountability, size, and equitable work. Students noted examples of teammates that did not contribute enough: "While everyone in my group was great, we had very different academic levels and put different amounts of effort into each project." Smaller groups and individual grades were suggested by students as possible remedies. Further, the online environment raised challenges, "…we worked together reasonably well, but I felt that some interaction/team cohesion was lost through the (unavoidable) online environment."

The final theme that emerged was repetition. Students were required to build upon their previous decisions, and this was interpreted as repetitive, "I enjoyed having a weekly practicum that relates to the ones before it so we can continue to build off of it." Further comments indicated that the continuity across the semester was helpful, "I believe that the repetition was required to give me a better understanding of the problem and help me find effective solutions."

Both the quantitative and qualitative feedback from students indicated that from their perspective, they were actively engaged with the SCP. More than 70% of students described the simulation as "real-world" and "engaging" and the team experience as "successful" and "organized." The SCP aligns with Gen Z's desire for "relevant, applicable, active learning…working with learning partners" (Cruz, 2020, p. 14). The results are consistent with Gen Z attitudes about group projects noting concerns about unequal contributions (Schlee et al., 2020). Students saw themselves as real marketing consultants facing weekly challenges presented by the SCP, even though the details were hypothetical. This supports the notion that the simulation need not include a real client to be effective (Maher & Hughner, 2005).

RQ2: To what extent did the SCP enhance learning marketing fundamentals?

The second research question examined perceptions of the extent of specific knowledge and skills learned by participating in the SCP, reported on the student survey instrument (Table 1). Overall, means ranged from 2.20 to 1.50 indicating on average, students somewhat or completely agreed with improvement in specific learning outcomes. These results are consistent with research that suggests experiential learning improves student perceptions of learning (Burch et al., 2019; Maher& Hughner, 2005).

Table 1

Student Self- Reported Perceptions of Marketing Knowledge and Skills Learned

Given my experiences this semester…	*M*	*SD*
I am better at evaluating quantitative business reports to perform an analysis.	2.20	1.03
I am better able to apply the concept of marketing strategy to business situations.	1.50	0.71
I am better able to make a marketing recommendation to a business owner.	1.57	0.76

Note. (*n* = 185). Rated on Likert scale 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree).

To further explore the extent to which the SCP enhanced learning, performance on midterm and final exam SCP application questions was analyzed from a subset of students taught by the authors in the fall and spring semesters (*n* = 497). Scores on the SCP midterm exam questions ranged from 49.44% to 94.78% correct (M = 76.95). Scores on the SCP final exam questions ranged from 76.04% to 98.88% correct (M = 83.47%).

Post hoc analysis of the exam questions revealed it was possible to match nine of the 15 SCP questions to general questions covering the same topic. For example, some students answered a specific SCP application (SCP-A) question and a general application (GA) question on consumer decision making, and/or pricing, and/or strategy. Nine pairs of questions were considered in the post hoc analysis. Because all questions were randomly selected by the LMS, the number of students with matching pairs of SCP-A and GA questions varied (range 81 to 194). After identifying the subsamples of students assigned both types of questions, student responses were sorted and analyzed by condition in terms of the percentage of students that answered: (a) both the SCP-A and GA questions correctly (62.70%); (b) only the SCP-A question correctly (16.75%); (c); only the GA question correctly (13.69%); and (d) incorrectly the SCP-A and the GA questions (6.87%). Further analysis was performed to determine if there was a significant difference between groups. Because the test for normality showed that groups (c) and (d) were not normally distributed, the Krushal-Wallis test was used to examine the differences between groups. At least one of the groups was significantly different, X^2 (3, N = 9) = 17.99, *p* = 0.0004. The pair-wise comparison of means between groups shows group (a) significantly different from groups (b), (c), and (d), *p* < .05. The analysis demonstrates that the percentage of students that correctly answered both the SCP-A and GA questions is significantly different from the percentage of students that correctly answered either the SCP-A (*p* = .02) or GA (*p* = .01) question, or incorrectly answered both (*p* = .0038).

The exam question results demonstrate that knowledge gained in the SCP was reinforcing and students transferred this knowledge, applying the concepts in other situations. The practice afforded by weekly SCP assignments scaffolded students' learning, allowing them to apply the concepts to new contexts.

RQ3: To what extent did faculty perceive student engagement and use and modify the SCP to meet the needs of their individual students?

Faculty perceptions of student engagement and use and modification of the SCP were revealed in the thematic analysis of the interviews. Overall, faculty perceived a high level of student engagement with the SCP based on the quality and quantity of ideas students shared in class discussions, assignment submissions, and office hours. The link between engagement and student performance is evident; "...a weekly project that builds on previous weeks gives more ownership to the students and...makes them work a little harder and, ultimately, perform better because success was cumulative." All faculty reported the SCP provided a useful, realistic framework to incorporate new concepts taught each week. Three of the five instructors noted the amount of information in an introductory course can make the course feel disjointed, yet the SCP provided a "story…told throughout the semester." One instructor noted, "we speak about theory...it sounds easy...it just goes from A to B to C and D, no problem. I think [it] became more real and [that]...marketing is about solving problems." The SCP allowed students to "tackle [problems] like a consultant...a really good thing because they normally don't get this until...they are seniors doing strategy." One faculty member noted that the sales role-play demonstration prompted students to ask about careers in sales. Building analytical and conceptual thinking into introductory courses appeals to Gen Z who are looking for "practical learning opportunities" (Seemiller & Grace, 2017, p. 25). In general, faculty felt the SCP had a positive impact on their teaching because the ongoing project provided a mechanism to tie together the fundamental marketing principles in a more unified manner easily understood by the students.

One of the goals of the SCP was to provide faculty with a turnkey solution for student engagement with the opportunity to customize it as faculty found necessary. All faculty reported incorporating the assignments into their weekly class sessions. They created teams ranging from two to six students and adjusted grading rubrics to align with their teaching style and grading

preferences. The SCP assignments were worth 16% - 33% of the overall course grade. Faculty were intentional in weighting the assignments; concerns over grading group projects versus ensuring sufficient effort were noted. Faculty were encouraged to exercise their professional judgment and share their experiences, factors likely to increase the adoption of new pedagogy (Anderson, 2020). Overall, instructors were positive about the unified framework the SCP provided and the flexibility to adapt it to meet their teaching needs. All faculty noted some improvements that should be made to the SCP in subsequent semesters. A theme relevant to both students and faculty is team member accountability. Students noted inconsistent team member productivity and contributions. Faculty strive to balance providing meaningful and timely feedback and managing the grading process by creating teams. More attention to developing team member accountability through best practices in communication, peer reviews, and penalties for noncontributors (Schlee et al., 2020) may address this tension.

All instructors were mindful that the SCP incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion in the framework of the project. They noted the immigrant-founded, woman-owned restaurant located in a diverse neighborhood serving food from around the world resonated with students. Compared with traditional business cases that feature less diversity, a faculty member noted, "when you don't see yourself [reflected in examples], it is a breath of fresh air when you do see yourself as the protagonist in something." One faculty member noted that some students did not immediately comment on the diversity and suggested this could be because the case characters "felt normal and natural" to the students. Gen Z students are the most diverse generation (Parker & Igielnik, 2020) and social justice issues dominate their support for equality (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). The representation of diverse characters in the SCP is a small step toward more inclusive pedagogy.

CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

The pandemic was a catalyst to develop and adopt innovative experiential pedagogy to meet the needs of

Gen Z students: real-world applications requiring collaboration between classmates and educators that leveraged technology. The uncertainty of whether courses would be fully online, hybrid, or face-to-face required a flexible tool faculty could adopt regardless of the situation. Based on objective and subjective measures of efficacy, the SCP achieved the goals of engaging Gen Z students as they applied marketing concepts and providing faculty a customizable option for teaching. The hypothetical aspects of the SCP were overlooked as students engaged weekly with "Isabella," giving further credence that simulations need not include "real" clients. Faculty embraced the SCP using it in all sections taught during the academic year, reaching over 1,200 students, and noting its usefulness as a consistent thread throughout the course. It is anticipated that faculty will continue to build on the framework: create more challenging assignments, update the details to reflect the post-pandemic reopening, and add more team accountability measures. Future research could examine how faculty modify the SCP to a face-to-face course. Additionally, research could examine the value of this unifying SCP and how it impacts Gen Z's interest in pursuing a marketing major, performance in upper-level courses, and careers in marketing.

The conclusions of this work are limited by several factors including the quantitative assessment of student learning. While faculty were encouraged to alter various parameters to meet their needs, more consideration could be given to how the weighting of the SCP impacts student effort. It is important to acknowledge that due to the pandemic, university policy allowed students to choose a pass/fail option until the final week of the semester. This may have impacted student productivity and commitment. Matching general application questions to the SCP questions was done post hoc and did not reflect an intentional design to assess all course objectives. Nonetheless, the real-world details, situating the restaurant in a diverse neighborhood and facing on-going marketing challenges, afforded students the opportunity to learn by doing, often a heavy lift for faculty teaching 50 or more students per section.

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