

CO-CREATION AND ACTIVE LEARNING WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

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Abstract

The contemporary Higher Education System is full of challenges. The traditional teaching system was based on expositive lessons where the teacher was the center of attention, but this is no longer effective. Nowadays, students have become the center of attention, with a teaching system based on flexible structures and an active learning environment. Active learning activities such as co-creation are part of contemporary education and are key to better preparing students for the job market. This research examines co-creation and active learning experiences within higher education students. Particularly, the research analyzes the implementation of active learning activities in the development of an advertising campaign. It used groups of students from the Communication and Journalism Bachelor at a Portuguese University and supporting tools, such as Mentimeter, Jamboard, Google Slides, and Storyboard.

Gamification, generation of Artificial Intelligence-based advertisements, outdoors, mupis, posters, online publications (websites and social media) and PowerPoint presentations are some examples of the outcomes of the implemented activities. Active learning activities proved to motivate and engage students individually and as part of the team. Additionally, the research evidenced the achievement of results such as critical thinking, research, written and oral presentation and problem-solving skills development.

Keywords: Co-creation, Active Learning, Teamwork, Critical Thinking, Problem-Solving.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education System (HES) is facing substantial challenges. First, there is a new higher education landscape [1], with savvy and high expectations profiled students [2,3]. Second, the digitalization phenomenon is an unavoidable and ever more present reality, along with the emergence of tools such as Artificial Intelligence, Augmented Reality or cloud-based systems [4,5]. Third, in recent times the world faced a major external shock that fundamentally changed the modus operandi of many businesses, including education [6]. This forced higher education institutions to move online on short notice and adopt new education models of knowledge transmission [7, 8]. While defying, these changes brought greater flexibility and innovation in teaching, new and diverse learning strategies (e.g. project-based learning, case study, simulation, problem-based learning, gamification and role-play) and new class formats (online and hybrid).

Within this context, the traditional teaching system based on expositive lessons where the teacher was the center of attention, is no longer effective [e.g. 9]. Nowadays students are at the core of the teaching system, which is based on flexible structures and active learning environments [10]. Active learning strategies refer to activities carried out by students that promote their involvement in thinking, reflecting and performing tasks [11]. These strategies call for the participation and involvement of students in any course-related activity, disregarding a passive stance such as mere observing, listening and taking notes [12]. To be able to do so, students need to be involved, engaged in class and motivated to learn [10,9]. In this regard, the concept of co-creation in education appears to be relevant.

The co-creation term was first introduced in the marketing literature by [13]. It is then seen as a significant perspective in the new dominant logic for marketing [14]. Co-creation is defined as “joint collaborative activities by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties” [15, p. 1520]. As such, co-creation involves interactions and

cooperative initiatives between parties [16]. This concept has been applied in different contexts, namely education settings such as overall education [e.g. 17] or specific settings as medicine [e.g. 18], dental [e.g. 19], business [e.g. 20] or engineering [e.g. 21].

Co-creation in education involves collaborative innovation towards a shared goal, engaging students as valuable partners alongside educators and stakeholders [17]. It involves combining student engagement and partnership and the development of meaningful collaboration between students and staff [17, 20]. In this context, students assume the role of active participants in the learning process, collaborating with the academic staff in the process of resource generation and knowledge building. It is, thus, important not only for the student-teacher, and even other stakeholders, involvement, but also for the engagement of the students themselves in the learning process [22]. This is what [23] calls “learner empowerment”. More than taking an active role in the process, students become the protagonists of the activities [24].

The activities that can be used in co-creation strategies are several and have acknowledged benefits. Elective provision, crowdsourcing, game-based learning, student university identification, experience sharing/interaction through university, work-integrated learning and educational program design are some examples of the mentioned activities [22]. Higher student engagement and motivation to learn, increased sense of belonging and evaluation, and the development of job market-valued skills are some of the benefits [e.g. 25, 26, 27]. Still, this pedagogical practice also has its intricacies. First, there may be some implementation barriers, such as time constraints or lack of resources [28]. Second, potential cultural resistance to innovation and out-of-the-box initiatives may lead students to withhold from making the effort or commit [29, 31]. Last, but not least, it is crucial to clarify the role and responsibility of the different stakeholders in the process, to ensure all understand what they are supposed to do in it [32, 22].

Considering the importance of active learning activities, namely co-creation, to the higher education institution setting and the job market, it is key that contemporary education includes them in the methodologies implemented. In that line, this article focuses on active learning experiences developed with higher education students, analyzing the application and achievements of a co-creation process. In particular, this research shows the results of the use of co-creation in the development of an advertising campaign by students of the Communication and Journalism Bachelor at a Portuguese University. The study presents the several stages and multiple tools that were used by the groups of students involved in the process. Furthermore, results and achievements are presented.

2 METHODOLOGY

The co-creation of students' behavior through active learning activities was implemented as part of the Marketing and Advertising curricular unit of the third year of the Communication and Journalism Bachelor Degree at the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal. The study reports on the teaching and learning experiences of students and teachers during the first semester of the 2023/2024 academic year.

A total of 39 students were enrolled in the class. Of the total students, 67% were female and 33% were male. In this class, 2,5% were working students. From the total of students, 41% are from different countries, more specifically 13% were from Brazil and 28% were from Portuguese-speaking African countries. Their ages range between 20 and 25 years old. This cultural diversity among students promotes an inclusive and differentiated teaching-learning process.

The teacher's purpose is to do an **Advertising Campaign**, formed by several phases.

- 1. Negative advertising campaign-** The students should identify and analyze an advertising campaign that had a negative impact. Students need to do a critical analysis explain why the advertising campaign was not successful and justify their answers with some evidence. The students presented their work to the whole class. For this activity, the students used the Jamboard and Google slides.
- 2. Role-play activity-** Students should learn how an advertising agency should prepare the first meeting with a client, and at the same time learn to put themselves in the “client's shoes” and understand their needs and requirements. The class was divided into twelve groups, six were from advertising agencies and the other six were clients. This activity was formed in three phases.

2.1 Planning- This activity began with the viewing of a short 3-minute video about the **marketer job** in an advertising agency and having a meeting with a client. The students had to identify three main characteristics and answer through the mentimeter. After, the group of students that were the advertising agencies had to develop a **creative briefing**, and the clients had to prepare specific needs to request an advertising campaign from the agency. This activity

started with the small movie of “mad man” was carried out on the Jamboard platform so that the teacher could follow the work done by each group and give feedback on it in real-time.

2.2 Role-play action- The students had a visible timer indicating the time limit for the meeting between the advertising agency and the client. The students used the previous work done, i.e. the Creative Briefing outlined by the Advertising Agency and an advertising problem previously defined by the clients. This activity was filmed by the teacher, with the students' consent.

2.3 Role reversal- The students reversed the roles so that all the students could understand the role of a marketer in an advertising agency, but also understand the client's role. At this point, the students were able to complete the activity in a limited time.

At the end of the role-play activity, the students presented their creative briefing to the whole class and their client preparation (needs, requests and limitations). The students were invited to comment and give some positive contributions to the other groups.

3. **Creative process-** The students need to read three scientific articles per group and need to identify different **creative processes**. Next, they must select the creative process with which they identify, and which they will implement in their creative advertising campaign work. Students can use just one creative process, or choose two or more that complement each other and justify it.
4. **Media Planning-** The students elaborated a **Media Planning**. In the first moment, the groups need to learn about each media (radio, television, digital television, outdoors, digital outdoors, social media, press, and other information). Each group needs to do research about one media (characteristics, advantages, disadvantages, price, different formats, main advertisers, and other information). This work was carried out on the Jamboard in order to help the later work on media planning. In the second moment, the students need to have information on how to elaborate a media planning document. They did some research, they asked to teacher about and they could see and asked about the other group. Based on this information, and taking into consideration the goals of the advertising campaign, the students prepared their Media Planning. At the end, each group presented their work through Google Slides. Like in the role-play activity, the students were invited to comment and make some positive contributions to the other groups.
5. **Copy Strategy-** In this activity, students need to elaborate a proper copy strategy that support the final advertising campaign (Advertising Objectives; Advertising Targets; Promise: product attribute, consumer benefits and identification. Proof or support of the promise (Testimony of a person, or spectacular performance of a product). Tone and personality of the campaign (Demonstrative, Emotive, Humorous, Authoritative, Great Spectacle, Aesthetic, Cheerful, Dramatic); Adverse instructions and limitations (Media to be used and type of format); How to present the product; Logo issues, legal rules; Brand expression rules). They work on Jamboard in order to have and follow the teacher's instructions.
6. **Advertising film (pre-production)** The students need to prepare an advertising film that can be introduced on television, outdoors, or on social media. For this activity, the students need to use a Storyboard. Each student works on it, and at the end, all groups need to select the best storyboard to put into practice.
7. **Media production-** In the final moment, the students need to develop an advertising campaign, creating a short advertising film using the storyboard selected before and other media resources that were defined through Media Planning in the previous activity.
8. **Final Evaluation-** The students presented a final presentation. All class could make some contributions to the final presentation. Each student should fill in a questionnaire on self- and hetero-evaluation.
9. **Final report-** All phases described before, were introduced in the final written report work.

At the end of the advertising campaign activity, the students presented their final work to the whole class. Such as the previous presentations, the students were invited to comment and gave some positive contributions to the other groups. Direct observation and video recording of the activity throughout the students' work complemented the teacher's final assessment.

3 RESULTS

This section presents the results achieved during the diverse activities accomplished by the students in order to present the final advertising campaign. Considering the needs of companies and future communication professionals and with the aim of involving, motivating, engaging and preparing higher education students with the skills necessary for the profession, different activities were implemented in the classroom and some results will be presented in this section.

3.1 Skills, abilities, roles and responsibilities

At the end of the semester, the students identified, throughout a questionnaire, some skills acquired during the group work such as: i) communication 89,7%; ii) bibliographic research 44,8%; iii) information sharing 93,1%; iv) responsibility 82,9%; v) cooperation and mutual help 68,9%. Through different activities, the students achieved and identified different skills and abilities necessary for the job market. For example, When the students watched the small advertising film, they identified some marketer skills, see Fig. 1.

Table 1. Mentimeter activity

Updating on trends. Developing creative strategies. Getting to know the client better.	Understanding "resistance" to innovation. The importance of understanding the customer needs; Apply on authenticity.	Understand what the target audience wants (market research). Split professional and personal interests. Respect the company's values.
Knowing how to innovate. Attract the public's attention. Valuing the values of the company you work for.	Learn self-control with the client. To be more professional. Taking into account the image the company wants to convey	Meeting what the client wants. Take the company's image into account. Create diversified options.
Understand the target audience and what they are looking for. Make a calm and organized presentation.	Thinking about the values of the company (client). Knowing how to deal with negotiations.	Taking into account what the client really wants and knowing how to deliver good results.

One of the activities proposed was role-play. In this activity, the students had the opportunity to play different roles: marketer and customer. In this way, they were able to communicate better when they had the opportunity to put themselves in the other person's position. The students were very autonomous and accepted well the responsibility to do research and find solutions. They understood also that they needed to be proactive, and the teacher had the responsibility to guide their work and was like a facilitator, the teacher did not give a solution, but she helped them to find one. The students had the freedom to find solutions, to be innovative and to use also their critical thinking.

3.2 Co-creation activities

One of the activities carried out by the students was media planning. In this activity, the students began researching different media, such as television (fig.1), radio, outdoors, etc. The information that you can see by fig. 1 and 2. includes the identification of the group, the general and specific characteristics of the media, the main Portuguese advertisers, positive and negative examples, advantages and disadvantages, the main audiences and a critical reflection. All works had to include references. As the class had more groups of students than media, in order not to repeat the research on the same media, one of the group's purposes was to do a case study, analysing how the Barbie movie used different media (fig. 2). The orange square is the teacher's comments, who plays the role of facilitator, she comments and assists the group work throughout the lesson. All students were very interested, and they highly participated with some positive comments at the time that the group did their presentation. The Barbie movie's case study was used within the evaluation, in the Intermittent test, because was a very good example of how a company can use different media within integrated communication. Here we can identify two important co-creation activities, work-integrated learning and experience sharing.

One of the groups also used the Kahoot game in order to present their group work about advertising history. This was also a specific co-creation activity, that worked very well and demonstrated the empowerment of the students, engagement, commitment, collaborative innovation, and creativity.

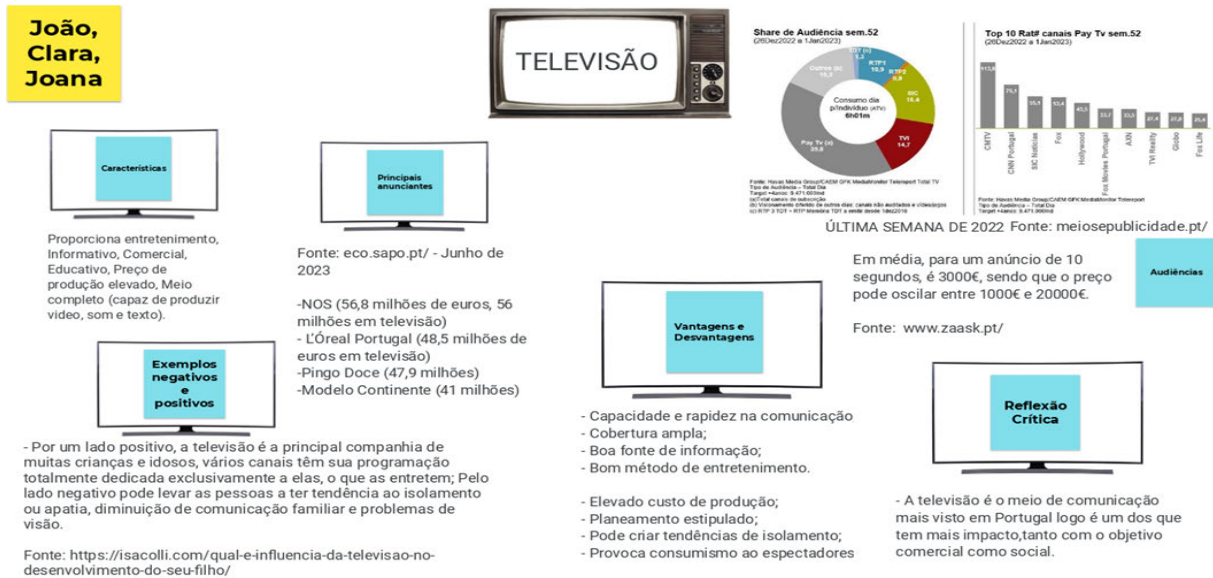


Figure 1. Research about different media, the case of television (Jamboard activity)



Figure 2. The Barbie movie: the use of different media (Jamboard activity)

Figures 3 and 4 below are good examples of Media Planning activity. The information that you can see by figures 3 and 4 includes the group identification, advertising objectives, target audience, promise, media selected, tone and personality of the campaign, budget/investment, verbal and non-verbal elements, instructions and limitations, and references used. The students' research was very complete. It is visible that the group's creativity and the way they exposed the information and used the Jamboard platform were very creative and innovative. The students also demonstrate critical thinking of the work done.

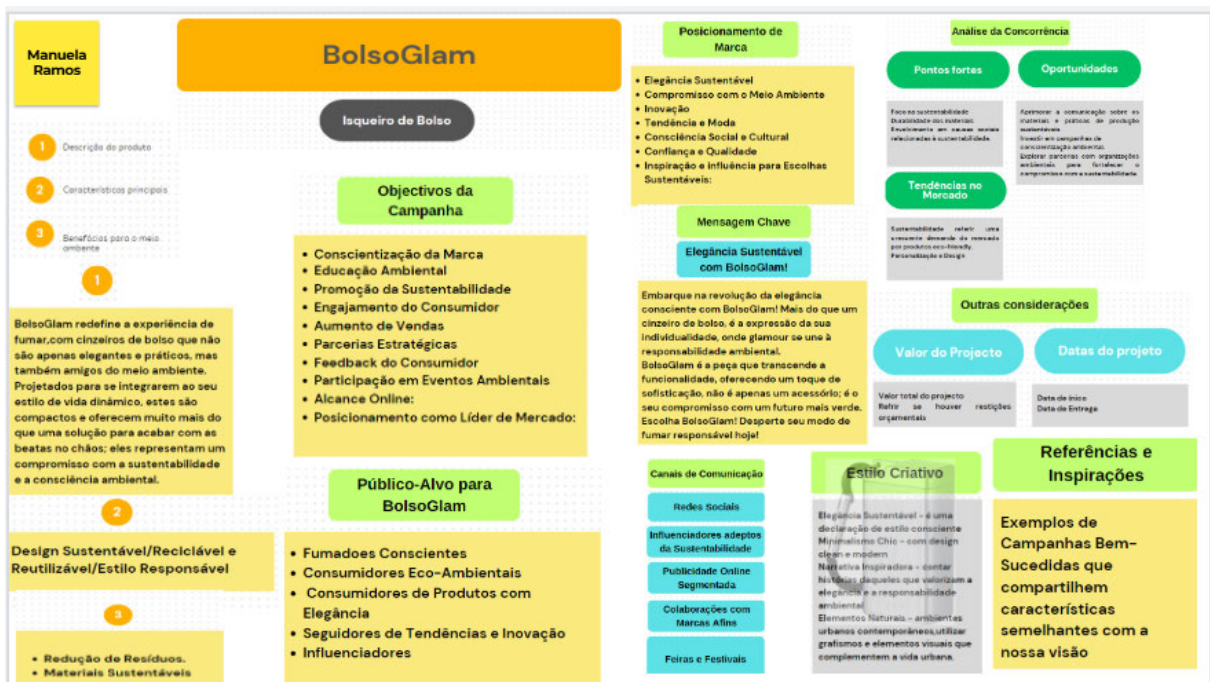


Figure 3. The Media Planning of group 1 (Jamboard activity)



Figure 4. The Media planning of group 2 (Jamboard activity)

3.3 The results achieved

All the students who had accomplished these activities had a positive evaluation, ranging from the lowest score of 14 to the highest of 19. The students did a final questionnaire about their self and hetero-evaluation. The group showed an assessment, both individually and collectively, that was very close to the final assessment. This represents an ethical and genuine commitment to their colleagues and teachers. It was found that although the students demonstrated different skills and abilities, all the students showed a high level of interest in carrying out these activities and working collaboratively with their working group. The main result was the involvement of the whole class, promoting teamwork.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article was analysing the learning experiences throughout the co-creation of students' behavior through active learning activities. The students learned how to do an advertising campaign; several tasks were developed until they achieved the final advertising campaign. The preceding activities supported the following activities. All activities were divided into groups of three or four students, and the activities were supported by different tools, such as Mentimeter, Kahoot, Jamboard, Google Slides, Role-play and Storyboard.

One of the important conclusions acquired was that co-creation of students' behavior through active learning activities is part of contemporary education, to better prepare students with important skills based on learning experiences that are important for the job market. Critical thinking, research, written and oral presentation, problem-solving, cooperation and mutual help, are some important job market competences recognized by companies.

The students were very committed and motivated throughout all the activities. The students began to introduce the topic "History of advertising" and produced different active learning activities. Gamification, the production of advertising films using Artificial Intelligence, outdoors, posters, online publications (websites and social media) and the presentation of PowerPoints were some examples of these activities.

Teachers engage, empower, and attract students' interest and motivation based on co-creatin behaviour through active learning activities that are student-centered. The main result was the involvement of the whole class, promoting teamwork. The relationship between teachers and students was very close and suited very well, such as between students.

Time constraints were the biggest challenge identified. In order to overcome this challenge, sometimes timers were used to limit the time taken to carry out the activities, which was also well understood by the students, because this is how the job market operates.

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