



THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS  
*Department of Marketing*

March 22, 2013

Dear Ralph Stair Prize Committee,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce the innovative educational approach used within my undergraduate Electronic Marketing course and be considered for the Ralph Stair Prize in Innovative Education. I am a fourth year doctoral candidate in the Department of Marketing with research interests in newer electronic media used within the current marketing landscape. These research interests strongly support my lesson plan and topics in my Electronic Marketing course. In fact, it was my interest in social media marketing that caused me to create an exciting and innovative project within my class. Please allow me to explain the details of this project.

Social media is a newer phenomenon compared to some traditional marketing approaches. As such, I am constantly learning about new tools and metrics that current textbooks fail to discuss. One such example is social media influence metrics. These metrics assign a number to a person based upon how much they engage with other people via social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. In effect, these metrics quantify each person's degree of social media presence and influence. The market leader in social media influence metrics is a company named Klout. A Klout score ranges from 1 to 100, with a higher score representing a higher degree of social media influence.

Two years ago I began reading news stories about firms using Klout in marketing application. Firms were seeking to engage with consumers who had a high score. These brands hoped that these people would disseminate favorable word-of-mouth endorsements about their products to their social networks. I asked one local marketing agency in Tallahassee how it used Klout. The response was eye-opening. This marketer informed me that his company, which hires a lot of Florida State students, uses Klout primarily as a screening tool to assess applicants for full-time positions and internship opportunities. His rationale was a higher scoring student is probably more experienced at using social media to engage with other people than a lower scoring student. His agency actively handles social media campaigns for brands, meaning he prefers the best candidates. He summed up his criteria as, "Any applicant who has a Klout score under 35 is automatically removed from consideration." After this conversation I soon realized this screening logic was not limited to this one agency. Several news reports began to emerge regarding screening applicants based on Klout.

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The marketer peeked my curiosity about my current students' scores. Klout is a publicly accessible metric, meaning if a person has, for example, a public Twitter profile, that person has a publicly viewable score on Klout.com. I began checking some of my students' scores and was upset to find the average score of my Electronic Marketing undergrads to be approximately 20. Hardly anyone eclipsed the marketer's subjective threshold of 35. This was disconcerting to me, because many of my students took my class in the hopes of landing a job in social media. It didn't matter how well they scored on exams or how well they understood class concepts. These students would not be considered for jobs from some marketing firms based on a Klout score.

This situation fueled my drive to create an innovative class project which I have named "The Klout Challenge". My rationale was to create a project to allow students to apply hands-on social media engagement strategies using their own social media accounts. In this way, students were reinforcing course concepts discussed in the classroom by using an experiential project. The interesting aspect of this project was that the final grade earned would be solely determined by each student's Klout score at the end of the semester. The project was worth 10% of the student's final course grade.

I first implemented this project in the fall semester of 2011. When the project began most students had a very low Klout score: the average score was 17. I then proceeded to lecture in class about different social media engagement strategies. Students then were asked to apply these strategies using their own Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, or Google+ accounts in an effort to reinforce these concepts, as well as improving their Klout scores. The project was a huge success as evident by the final Klout scores: the average score improved to 39. This project produced similar results in the spring 2012 and fall 2012 semesters. I had found a way to not only reinforce learning concepts, but also improve my students' chances in the job market.

The success of this project caused me to reach out into the business world and academic world, respectively. In regard to the business world, I sent an email describing my class project to a man named Mark Schaefer. Mr. Schaefer is a highly regarded social media consultant, owner of a syndicated blog devoted to social media marketing topics, and the author of the best-selling book *Return On Influence: The Revolutionary Power of Klout, Social Scoring, and Influence Marketing*. He liked the project so much that he invited me to write a 600-word guest post to be published on his syndicated blog.

The blog immediately created international discussions about my class project and went viral. The original post was viewed tens of thousands of times, with more than 2,000 people sharing the post via Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and through their own blog postings. *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, among others, ran stories about my project. The reactions from many were both positive and negative. The positive aspects supported the notion that higher education is teaching students usable skills to help them begin their careers. The negative aspects

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were due to the controversial nature of social media influence metrics. Some people believe such metrics are unfair to use to compare people for a job opportunity, while others debate the accuracy of the measures or the ease in which they can be manipulated upward. However, I don't view dissenting opinions as a sign of my project being of poor quality. Rather, many innovations are risky and will be met by unsupportive people wishing to avoid change and wanting to maintain the status quo. My project met these unsupportive people head-on.

In regard to the academic world, the details of the project were submitted to a special edition issue on innovations in teaching at *Marketing Education Review*. This is a peer reviewed journal; and is one of my disciplines top marketing education journals. The paper was one of few accepted from several submissions and will appear in the journal's special edition later this year.

In addition, a summary of the paper was submitted to and accepted by two of my disciplines leading academic marketing conferences: *The Academy of Marketing Science – World Congress* and the *Society for Marketing Advances*. Within the last few months I presented my project at these conferences. The feedback after my presentations was extremely positive from marketing faculty who teach at institutions all around the world. The response from one senior professor at a large university summed up the reactions: "Just so you know, we are stealing this for our class!" Several other faculty members from other schools approached me with a similar desire.

Based on the creation, implementation, and success of this project, along with the attention I have brought to Florida State University's College of Business in the national news media and academic circles, I would like to humbly submit my application to be considered for this award. This particular innovative educational approach has made use of technology to enhance learning, the evaluation of learning, and how the business landscape evaluates some of my former students. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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