

Next-Gen Marketers: Exploring the Use of ChatGPT to Create Online Marketing Content

Courtney Meyers, Ph.D.

Professor

Department of Agricultural Education & Communications

Texas Tech University

courtney.meyers@ttu.edu

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Within the broad context of artificial intelligence (AI), generative AI (GenAI) refers to AI models that can “generate human-like text, graphics, audio and videos” (Anisin, 2023, para. 4). GenAI tools provide communications professionals with the potential to generate more ideas, tailor writing for specific audiences, customize content for different platforms, and much more (Gomez, 2023). Although student use of GenAI raises concerns, the reality is that these types of tools are being widely adopted by industry and students should gain experience using them (Peres et al., 2023). One specific example of GenAI is ChatGPT, which is an online chatbot that generates text in response to a user’s prompts (OpenAI, 2023). According to a study from Resume Builder (2023), 90% of companies said ChatGPT experience is a beneficial skill they look for in employees. With the potential applications of GenAI in communications and marketing roles, students who aspire to these positions should gain experience using them. This poster describes an activity in a senior-level agricultural communications course that allowed students to explore the potential of using ChatGPT to create online marketing content.

How it works/steps

During the class session before this activity, I assessed how many students already had a ChatGPT account and all but 3 of the 46 students indicated they did. To help students explore the capabilities of ChatGPT in online marketing efforts, I developed 16 prompts. Groups of three students received the same prompt to enter into the program then compare responses. All the prompts were to create content for online marketing efforts on behalf of the department and/or agricultural communications major. This allowed students to judge the authenticity and accuracy of the created content. Some examples of the prompts were:

- Create an Instagram post that provides advice for students in the agricultural communications program. Include three main points for a carousel and a caption no more than 100 words long.
- Write a LinkedIn post that describes the major skills students learn in the agricultural communications program.
- Outline content for an email marketing campaign geared toward prospective agricultural communications students. This content should also contain suggestions for five email subject lines.

After experimenting with ChatGPT, students completed an activity worksheet in which they provided ChatGPT’s content and answered reflection questions about the quality of content; strengths and weaknesses of the platform; and how they might use this tool in the future.

Results to date/implications

Based on the student reflections, this activity helped them recognize the potential of using ChatGPT to complete tasks relevant to online marketing. Several students noted the content provided was well-written and better than they expected. One said the content was so good it could be used as is, which was both “cool and scary all at the same time.” They commented that this tool would be helpful in the brainstorming phase when struggling with creativity or needing to spark ideas. ChatGPT could also save time in generating many ideas or summarizing information. From the reflections, it was apparent many students had used the tool for ideation purposes in the past. One student who said she had little experience using ChatGPT before this

activity wrote that she knew students were “using it to help them with school work, but never with a job or creating content so I thought it was helpful it was able to do that.”

Despite the potential of the platform, students did note several limitations of using ChatGPT, typically regarding the potential inaccuracy of the provided content and the need to fact check. Others said the content sounded “robotic” and “impersonal;” lacked authenticity; and it may “sound fake, failing to encompass your brand’s identity.” Many students wrote that the responses given were generic and would require more “tweaking” to be used. One student commented: “I also think there is a lack of humanity and emotion to the content ChatGPT spits out.” Interestingly, some students noted they are hesitant to use ChatGPT too much because it does not feel like they did the actual work. Others were critical of using this tool and noted that using ChatGPT “could ruin your reputation” so it should be used with caution because it takes away from the credibility of the work. One student noted that the tool may help people get a job when they really do not have the necessary skills or ability.

Students often acknowledged that ChatGPT can be a “double-edged sword.” One student wrote: “I think it is effective in the sense of getting past writer’s block and opening up your mind to new creations. On the contrary, I find it really hard to want to implement it in our world and profession. I feel like it takes away from us as communicators when a robot is able to spit things out that we are going to school to learn how to strategically do.”

It was evident students have considered the impact ChatGPT and similar GenAI tools might have in their future careers. One student helped convey this: “I learned that it can be a helpful tool when used correctly. Whether we embrace it or not, AI is becoming increasingly integrated into company communications. It's wiser to embrace and master its usage than to overlook its potential. I intend to refine my skills in leveraging its capabilities.”

Future plans/advice to others

Communications professionals are embracing GenAI tools such as ChatGPT to help them complete a variety of tasks. It is important agricultural communications students are able to recognize the benefits and risks of these tools so they are prepared to use them effectively and ethically in the future. Within this class, we will continue to use ChatGPT as a resource while emphasizing the need to think critically about its application. This activity was scheduled to take 30 minutes of class time, which was a good length of time for students to experiment with the prompts and evaluate responses with group members. They completed the reflection questions after the class ended. In the future, additional time is recommended so students can review the responses from other groups who had different writing prompts and have a general discussion about using this platform. Others teaching similar courses should discuss leveraging GenAI tools for content creation to help students become career ready.

Costs/resources needed

ChatGPT is free with paid options to upgrade. It can be used on any device with internet access. The platform does occasionally have issues loading during high traffic times. The only additional resource was the list of prompts students used to experiment with the platform. Chat GPT could even be used to write these initial prompts.

References

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