

It's a PowerPoint Party!: Leveraging Social Media Trends to Inspire Creativity and Productivity in Gen-Z Agricultural Communications Students

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Introduction

Gen Z students are digital natives who engage deeply with social media, where trends like *PowerPoint Parties* have gained popularity. These informal, fun presentations allow individuals to creatively share ideas with friends, making a traditionally serious medium feel more engaging and social. Originating as a viral trend on platforms like TikTok, *PowerPoint Parties* have been used for entertainment, career networking, and even informal education. Integrating social media-inspired trends into the classroom can enhance student engagement, foster collaboration, and build digital literacy, particularly when aligned with students' existing digital behaviors (Hayman & Smith, 2023). This innovative teaching approach applies the *PowerPoint Party* concept to an academic setting, encouraging students to explore productivity tools while fostering creativity, student autonomy, and critical thinking. By blending pop culture trends with higher education, the *Productivity PowerPoint Party* engages students in a format they already find compelling, making learning more relevant and interactive.

Methodology

This activity was implemented in a senior-level agricultural communications seminar with 14 students over two class periods. Students were tasked with selecting a productivity or life-hack tool of their choice and presenting it in the style of a *PowerPoint Party*, a trending social media format encouraging creativity and humor in slide-based presentations. The goal was to make learning fun and interactive while reinforcing critical thinking and communication skills. To ensure independent thought and creativity, students were provided with minimal instruction beyond an assignment sheet containing an overview, example topics, and a five-minute presentation limit. Example topics included time-management apps (e.g., Trello), note-taking strategies (e.g., color-coded notes), and workflow optimization techniques (e.g., the Pomodoro Technique). Presentations were given live in class, with students encouraged to use humor, props, and storytelling to engage their peers. After the first day of presentations, a guided reflection discussion — referred to as a "think tank" — allowed students to analyze their experiences, discuss challenges, and receive additional guidance before the second round of presentations. To increase engagement and peer-to-peer learning, students voted on their favorite presentations, and the top three were awarded certificates and small prizes. The activity concluded with a written reflection in which students assessed their own learning, discussed how they might apply these tools in their future careers, and provided feedback on the *PowerPoint Party* format as a learning experience.

Results and Implications

Student reflections revealed the *Productivity PowerPoint Party* format was initially challenging due to the lack of strict guidelines but ultimately encouraged them to think critically and creatively. Many students reported gaining confidence in their ability to present information in an engaging way, a crucial skill in agricultural communications. Additionally, students discovered productivity tools they could immediately apply to their coursework, internships, and future careers. Several students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to experiment with humor and storytelling in presentations, noting these techniques made learning more enjoyable and memorable. Others found that the minimal instructions mimicked real-world workplace

scenarios, where employees must often determine how to complete tasks with limited direction. Many recognized the value of digital tools they had not previously considered, such as AI-powered transcription services or collaborative project management software. The integration of a trending social media-inspired format allowed students to engage with the content in a way that felt relevant and entertaining while reinforcing communication and adaptability. Bringing digital-native learning preferences into the classroom increases motivation and knowledge retention (Hayman & Smith, 2023). It is important to align teaching methods with relevant educational theories and trends, particularly those proven to foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking (Herodotou et al., 2019). The *Productivity PowerPoint Party* offers a scalable, low-cost way to introduce students to emerging tools while reinforcing essential skills in agricultural communications and beyond.

Advice to Others

Future iterations of the *Productivity PowerPoint Party* will continue to be implemented in senior-level agricultural communications courses, with adjustments made to align with current social media trends and evolving digital tools. While the minimal instruction approach proved effective in fostering creativity and critical thinking, some students initially struggled with the lack of structure. Educators considering this activity may find it beneficial to provide additional scaffolding in the form of a brief discussion or example presentation before students begin their work. Offering optional guiding questions or checklists could also support students who are less comfortable with open-ended assignments while still maintaining flexibility, making this activity engaging. One consideration for future use is the potential expansion of the concept beyond productivity tools. This format could be adapted for other topics, such as media literacy, emerging technologies, or industry trends, allowing students to research and present on issues relevant to their field. Another area for refinement is the assessment process. While peer voting was an effective engagement tool, incorporating a structured rubric for instructor feedback could provide students with more detailed evaluations of their presentation skills and content comprehension. By continuously adapting this activity to align with student interests and technological advancements, educators can use social media-inspired teaching strategies to create an interactive and relevant learning environment. The *Productivity PowerPoint Party* demonstrates integrating digital culture into the classroom can enhance engagement while reinforcing essential communication and critical thinking skills.

Costs and Resources

The *Productivity PowerPoint Party* is a low-cost, easily implemented activity requiring minimal resources. Students primarily use their own laptops or tablets along with free presentation software such as Google Slides, PowerPoint, or Canva. Because the activity is designed to mimic an informal, social media-inspired format, there is no need for additional software or specialized tools beyond what students already have access to. Educators may choose to enhance engagement by incorporating small incentives, such as certificates or prizes for top presentations, as was done in this implementation. These elements help gamify the activity and encourage student participation but are not required for success. The simplicity of this activity allows for flexibility in both in-person and hybrid learning environments. Because it does not require extensive setup or financial investment, the *Productivity PowerPoint Party* can be adapted across different course structures, disciplines, and student experience levels, making it an accessible and effective tool for engaging Gen Z learners.

References

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