

The Academic Challenge

The MSMR Insights Collaborative

University of Texas at Arlington
March 19, 2024

The Academic Challenge

- Undergraduate teams will conduct exploratory research within the social media landscape to provide a perspective relevant to a current client market challenge – brand-related value trade-offs at low-level snack categories.
- Teams comprised of two undergraduate students and an academic advisor will analyze social media data to craft a compelling narrative encapsulating the essential aspects of a specific consumer cohort’s perception of brand value and how they make brand-related value trade-offs in purchases across different consumption contexts.
- Teams are encouraged to use AI-supported tools as well as more established social media analytical tools and methodologies to deliver a story-style presentation employing social media data to support the cohort’s model.
- Finalists will work with an Insights professional to deliver a compelling story-style presentation at the Insights Collaborative 2024 and will qualify for scholarships toward a graduate degree at UTA.

The Evolution of the “Value” Mindset

- Economic pressures prompt consumers to adopt new strategies to maintain lifestyles on tighter budgets.
- Recent trends suggest the concept of value has evolved into a more variable (difficult to predict) model.
- For years national brands have managed consumer “value” motives primarily through pricing and packaging strategies, following a general unit price/volume discount model.
- Recent evidence suggests that consumers have incorporated brand into their value calculations, choosing to vary brand across occasions based on elements like event size, attendees, and personal importance.
- National brands tend to hold a flavor advantage across categories, which means brand trade-offs are most evident in unflavored tortilla chips and plain potato chips (so please focus on those categories)

The Exploratory Task

- Specify a Consumer Cohort: Select a consumer cohort –defined by demographics, cultures, mindsets, and/or other factors you deem relevant and useful in a social media exploratory project.
- Construct a Hypothesis: Use the references provided and other relevant resources to identify 2-3 occasions where your cohort steps up/down on brands (e.g., special brands for special occasions).
- Construct a Model: Identify factors you believe influence brand decisions across occasions, create a model of the process, and specify social media content you expect to find to support or challenge your model.
- Gather/Analyze Data: Utilize your preferred tool(s) to gather and analyze social media data relevant to your cohort’s brand-value strategy for plain tortilla chips/potato chips across those two or three occasions.
- Create a Story: Construct a story-style presentation (not a summary of analytic results) using social media evidence to support your decision model. The presentation should be no longer than 3 minutes.
 - In practice, corporations often engage in exploratory research because it has the potential to reveal “blind spots” in their understanding, leading to refinement of their strategy.
 - To reveal “blind spots” in our understanding we often must venture down less-trodden paths to “see” what others see – which is often the origin of innovation.
- Share Your Perspective: Finalists will present at the Insights Collaborative at UTA on March 19th.

Finalist Selection

- Client sessions of this type are most valuable when they include a diverse selection of perspectives, particularly those that may be ineffectively captured or represented in the typical data channels.
 - The Event Team will seek to maximize these elements in the selection of Finalists.
 - Teams are encouraged to select a cohort that has relevance but may not be effectively captured and to present their perspective as a decision process that the audience can follow.
- The most compelling presentations use consumer voices and visuals to bring the decision factors to life in the context of a story covering the factors affecting the decision. The Event Team will consider the clarity and actionability of presentations, including:
 - The clarity of the most important factors in your model
 - The strategic use of evidence to
 - Illustrate the consumer cohort perspective.
 - Bring the decision factors to life.
 - Communicate potential opportunities to a strategic-minded Insights audience.

Student Benefits

- **Exposure to Strategic Insights Industry**
- **Professional Connections**
 - Professionals open to transition and employers seeking available talent are target audiences.
 - We expect up to 130 business contacts (mostly local) for the one-day event, all looking for high-quality, affordable, and employable talent.
 - To increase student and program visibility, we are limiting undergraduate attendance to about 50 seats, including Finalist teams and academic advisors.
- **Participation in the Academic Challenge Task**
 - This task is designed to highlight the team's ability to effectively use social media content to present a strategic perspective that the client may not have considered or seen.
 - The Academic Challenge's emphasis is on strategic and compelling storytelling from the perspective of the target consumer. The task is primarily an opportunity to showcase the value of student insights rather than a competition on technical research prowess.
- **Opportunity for Task Finalists**
 - Finalists (3-6 teams from participating universities) will be paired with a consultant who will assist in the refinement of their final presentation.
 - Consultants will focus on the elements that will make the presentation stand out to strategy-focused audiences.
 - Student finalists will qualify for scholarships to attend graduate school at UTA.

Submission Requirements

- **Stage 1:** All Teams participate.
 - **Deck:** A story-style presentation using social media content to tell your cohort's brand story.
 - **Video:** The video of the presentation will be used to select Finalists and assign consultants.
- **Stage 2:** Finalists
 - **Consultants:** Finalists will be paired with an Insights professional to assist in their presentation.
 - **Deck:** The final deck will be added to the presentation library ahead of the event.

Timeline

- **Stage 1: All Teams**
 - 02.21 – Registration Opens
 - 03.04 – Deck/Video Submissions Due
 - 03.06 – Finalists Selected
- **Stage 2: Finalists**
 - 03.08 – Consultants Assigned
 - 03.17 – Deck Submissions Due
 - 03.19 – Event Presentations

Contact

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Additional Event Information and Background

The Insights Collaborative

Last year we evolved our industry/academic event from a day dedicated to highlighting local research from program graduates to a day dedicated to connecting Insights professionals with emerging talent from undergraduate, graduate, and young professional pools.

The Event Themes

This year the topic is “A Gig Life” with speakers and activities centered on the fluid team concept, which often requires professionals to develop different work styles for different teams. We emphasize the importance of understanding and leveraging your value across teams and situations.

The Academic Challenge

This portion of the event is designed to introduce talented undergraduates to the Insights industry and to introduce the industry to the Gen Z perspective in the context of a typical Insights project. The result is a session in which both parties come away with an appreciation for the industry and the perspectives.