



## **Media Students' Internship planning and practices During and After COVID-19: Fusion of technology perspective**

**Walaa Fouda\*, Federico Triolo, Amira Al Nahdi**

American University in the Emirates, UAE

Emails: [walaa.fouda@ae.ae](mailto:walaa.fouda@ae.ae); [Federico.Triolo@ae.ae](mailto:Federico.Triolo@ae.ae); [ameerah9916@gmail.com](mailto:ameerah9916@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on many areas of the workforce, including internship programs. The education sector in general started integrating technology as a kind of fusion of technology in different ways. The internship course was one of the important educational programs that get affected by the pandemic and there was a deep need for technology fusion to overcome the hard times. This study investigates the effects of COVID-19 on internship programs and provides recommendations for implementing effective strategies in a post-COVID-19 World. To accomplish this, a comprehensive review of relevant literature review has been conducted, including academic journals, governments, and industry reports, as well as employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This study also discussed a case study of the Professional Work Shadow Program, an internship for media students specialized in Integrated marketing communication, Broadcasting, International relations, and public relations. The study findings recommend various marketing strategies, which can help media internship providers and beyond offer effective and sustainable programs to university students.

**Keywords:** Media studies; Marketing research; Internship course; Professional work shadow program; Fusion of technology; Education.

### **1. Introduction**

Internship programs are offered by universities to provide students with practical real-world experiences with the aim of increasing students' skills and competencies (4,6,7,12,17, 19). COVID-19 has accelerated e-internship - computer-mediated projects - but the literature on this topic is limited. The existing literature primarily revolves around higher education models and focuses on the experiences of students (23). Therefore, the understanding of an effective transition from internships during and after COVID-19 is overlooked and critical for the whole achievement of the current internship programs. Specifically, this study emphasizes "the during and after" COVID-19 internship of media students specialized in Media from different specializations such as broadcasting, Integrated Marketing communications, international relations, and public relations.

During COVID-19, media students in different specializations had to familiarize themselves with the new system of learning, however, the internship students faced the obstacle of finding an internship opportunity and performing in a professional way in their internship place. The fusion of technology was the only method that helped them to overcome this problem.

To address and answer its research question, this research relies on the case study of the Professional Work Shadow Program, which was launched by the Sharjah Government Media Bureau on April 5, 2019; and it develops marketing recommendations with the aim of developing an understanding of how the Professional Work Shadow Program and beyond can be promoted, distributed, and better positioned in the market. Different analyses are performed to help create an outline strategy that can be implemented by the Professional Work Shadow Program and beyond to further increase the awareness of the program and its recognition.

The Professional Work Shadow Program presents a scarce level of awareness about its recognition as one of the important training programs in the region, and its role in highlighting the importance of the professional learning experiences that significantly reflect the development of the trainee's personal and professional skills. Addressing

this problem provides bachelor students in The Professional Work Shadow Program much-needed awareness to help them adjust their expectations and beliefs and motivate them to seize these opportunities to further enhance their skills and career abilities.

Therefore, the purpose of this study aims to offer the strategies and tools that develop the program's level of awareness and aware bachelor students of the positive factors of internship programs. Particularly, it focuses on the role that current internship programs have in providing beneficial opportunities to the participants, thus that they can apply their knowledge learned in universities and educational institutions with the guidance of media cadres to develop their abilities and support their future career aspirations.

## **2. Related Work**

### **2.1 An overview of the target audience**

A student's transition from student life into professional life is not always simple. Students often must face many challenges after entering the workplace. It is necessary to adapt their knowledge to the new professional environment through the planning and implementation of their conceptual learning. Internships provide a way to connect theory and practice by participating in supervised, scheduled tasks and activities. Internships not only develop students' skills but also polish their professional development (2,23).

Bachelor students must take part in internships to receive a quality education, prepare for the workforce, and develop skills relevant to their field of work to reach and achieve their goals, as classroom learning is rarely enough to prepare them for employment. Academic institutions, businesses, and students believe that internships enhance students' academic work (3). Research shows that internships prepare youth for the world of work by teaching them collaboration skills, understanding the perspective of others, and coordinating strategies (5).

The job market is extremely competitive today and earning a diploma from a top school no longer guarantees employment. Companies regularly hire experienced professionals for entry-level positions, and qualified internship programs can provide students with that specialized experience (9). Students should be careful when selecting host organizations. Not all internships are qualified and appropriate to fill the needs and expectations. Nevertheless, bachelor students should have realistic expectations of what they will do in their temporary positions, and the interview process provides a way to obtain that information (9). Internships are a great way to get to know a particular career field first-hand, and college internships offer students a variety of benefits, both to improve their performance while studying and to increase their chances of finding a job after graduation. Benefits can include academic achievements, salaries, benefits, skill development, work experience, networking, and resume building (22). Internships can help college students develop skills that can improve course performance, such as better time management, communication skills, and self-discipline (11).

In the digital age, communications are empowered, and consumers are better informed and connected. They are no longer needed to rely on information that is provided by marketers, and they can easily connect and ask other consumers about a product or service (1). Social media provides businesses with the possible opportunity to achieve their goals, for instance through expanding customer engagement and increasing brand awareness. The use of social media and the fusion of technology in different aspects became a significant element of marketing promotion and has proved very sufficient and effective in causing traffic, engaging consumers, branding, obtaining feedback, and improving customer relationship management (14,20).

### **2.2 Internship programs for Media students:**

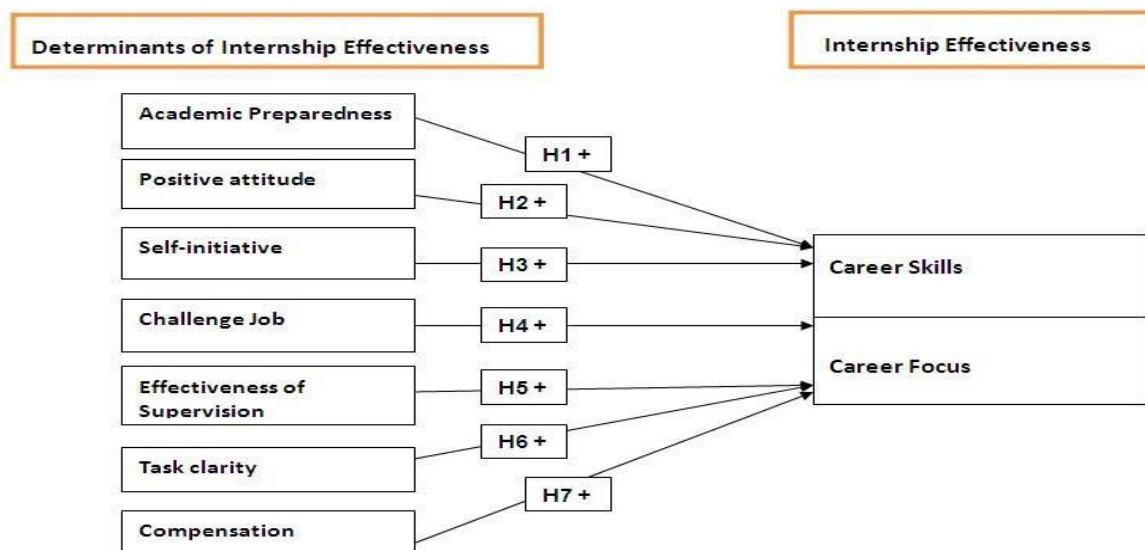
The internship program/course in any media and mass communication curriculum is a three-way partnership between an institution of higher education, an employment (internship) site, and a student intern. Internships allow students to apply classroom learning to a practical setting while engaging actively in a professional capacity.

At the beginning of an internship, students are likely to be confronted with several challenges until they become familiar with various required tasks. This hands-on learning opportunity allows students to collaborate closely with a college faculty advisor and an intern employer, thus promoting partnerships between the college and the community.

Media and mass communication studies including Broadcasting, Public relations, Political communication, and integrated marketing communication have a special nature in relation to the internship opportunities in different media organizations. Therefore, many media institutions have created special programs to accommodate media internship course requirements integrating the new technology that enhances students' communication skills.

The internship course should help media students to build their careers and enhance their practical skills. Media career in general needs different skills starting from academic skills including critical thinking and problem-solving, analytical skills, and computer applications skills. Also, communication skills such as oral presentation skills and written skills. In addition to the interpersonal skills to build teamwork and leadership.

The following model has been examined by (21) in a study on the University of Hong Kong students.



The study indicates that academic preparedness and the students' positive attitude in addition to the positive mentality that should be built by the internship company affect the student's performance in general.

### 3. Case study

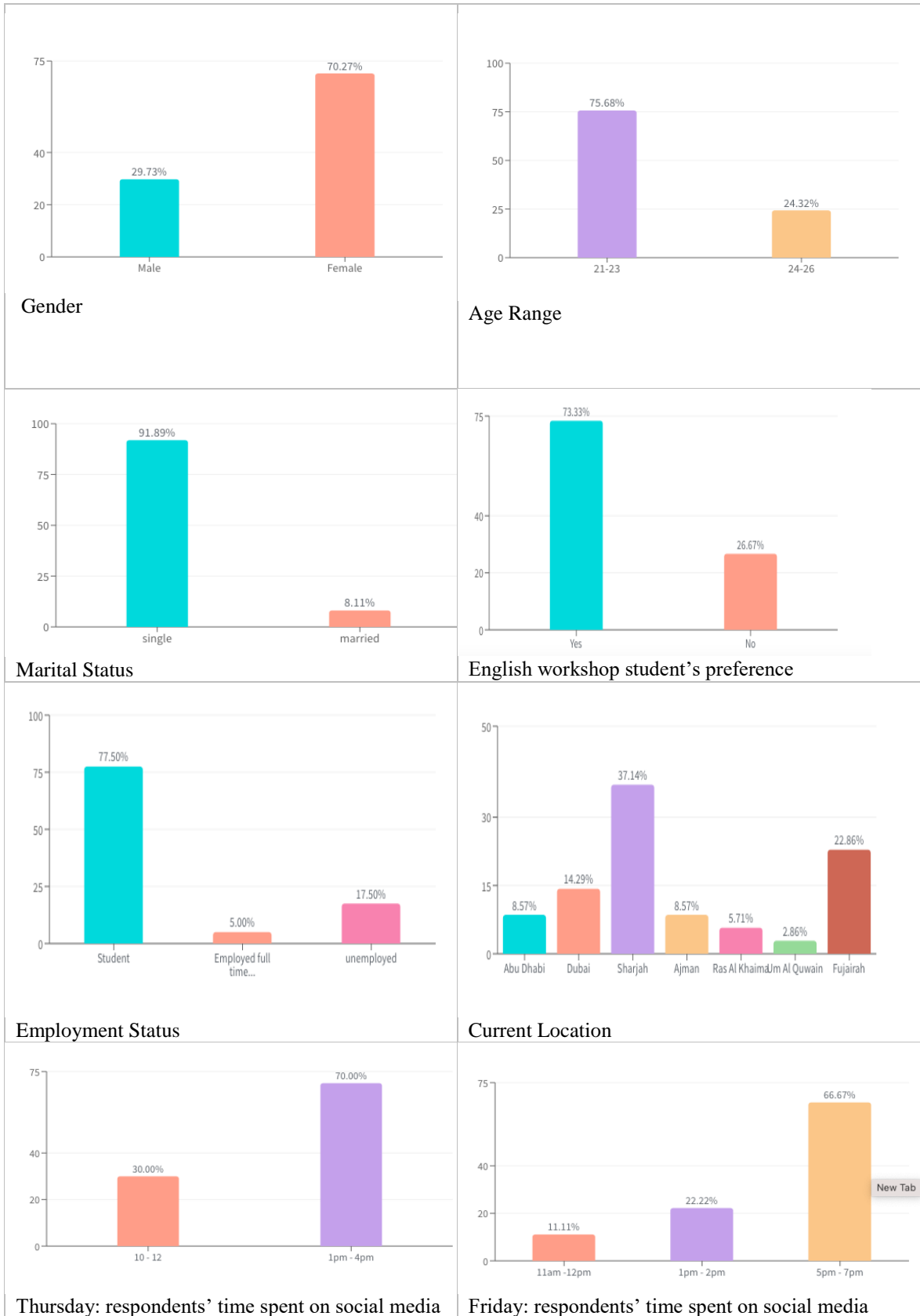
The Professional Work Shadow Program aims to create qualified individuals from various colleges/universities through planned goals of practical training within a specific period that is based on observation and application, to be qualified to apply their knowledge in the field of media and gain experience from the expertise of the media office cadres. Sharjah Government Media Bureau (SGMB) was established under the direction and patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, UAE Supreme Council Member and Ruler of Sharjah. The office is considered the main responsible representative space of media landscapes and communication activities in Sharjah. SGMB's vision is to maintain an environment that allows a continuous advancement of meaningful dialogue by all media stakeholders in Sharjah. Their mission is to develop an integrated system that delivers media messages professionally, ensure social media and government communication is in line with international standards, and enable a balanced frame of Sharjah in the local, regional, and international media by supporting their profound knowledge of the Emirate's media and government sector (18).

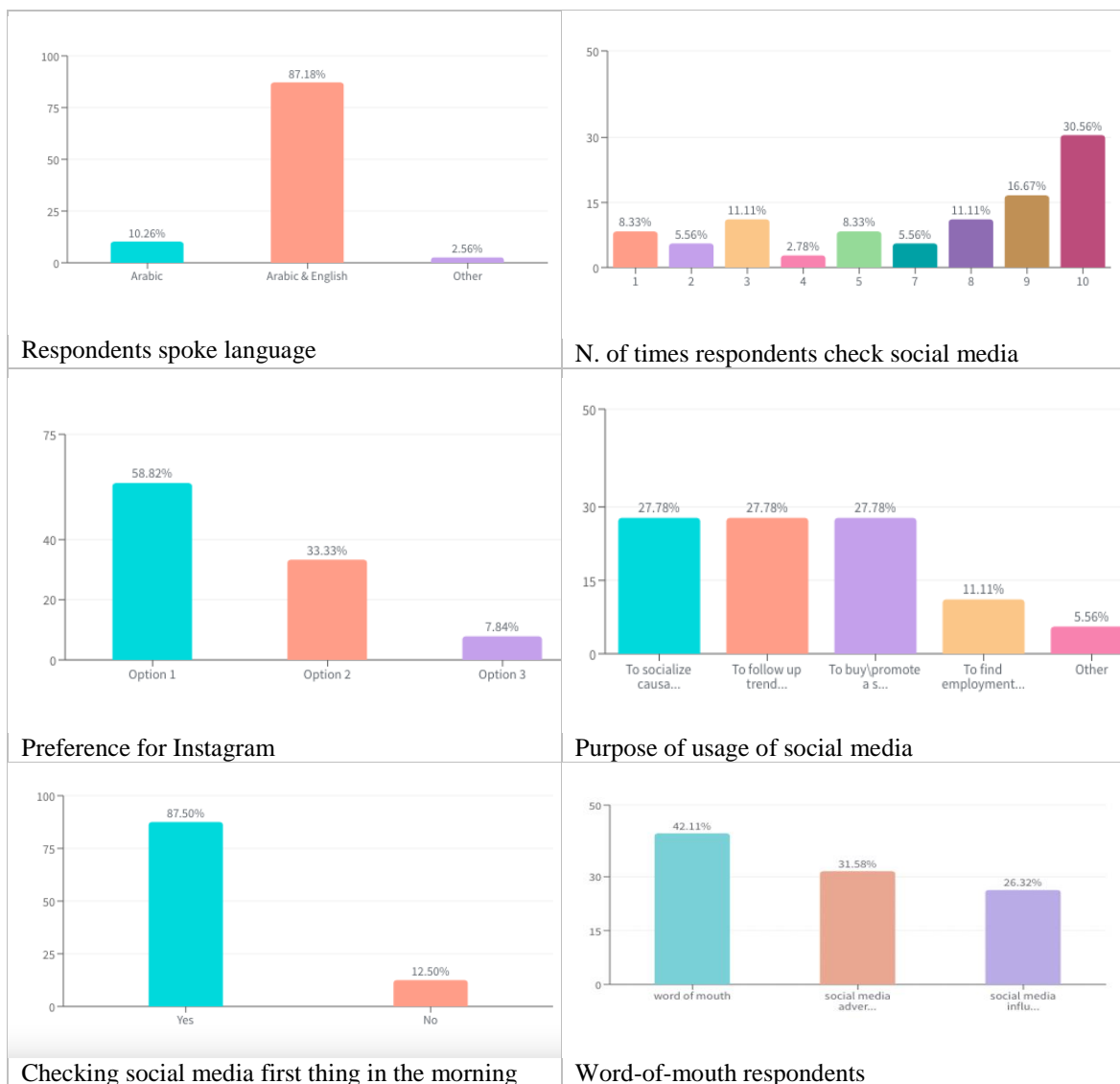
### 4. Methods

This study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The mixed-methods design is significant to obtain both statistical results and qualitative methods to explain the results in greater depth. Primary and secondary market research was conducted to gather further information and details pertaining to the internship context.

Primary market research was conducted through a survey distributed to the target audience - bachelor media students - with a structured questionnaire and random sampling technique to best assess the demographics and psychographic characteristics of the target audience. Furthermore, an additional survey was created and distributed to the previous internship participants in order to gain their insights and feedback. Interviews with supervisors of the program and current and previous participants took place to evaluate the personal and professional expectations together with the challenges faced by the bachelor students. Secondary market research was conducted by collecting data from previous research and various websites to enhance the validity of the findings. Therefore, data collection employed both primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from students and participants; whereas surveys were distributed and interviews (e.g., online - on the phone - face to face) were conducted. Secondary data has been collected from research articles, websites, and journals. Below are graphs of data characteristics.

### Tables for respondents





### 5. Observation & Interviews

Primary observation data has been conducted from current and previous participants during an event organized by Sharjah Government Media Bureau for The Professional Work Shadow Program in The International Government Communication Forum. The attendees of the Professional Work Shadow Program session ‘Share Your Experience’ shared their thoughts, opinions, feelings, and experiences. At the end of the session, we had interviews with four participants, and we got to know more about their personal experiences.

**Participant A:** mentioned that the program was a turning point in her professional and personal life, as it positively developed her skills and made her more confident in public speaking and teamwork.

**Participant B:** mentioned that he was stressed about the idea of an online internship training program, as he thought it won’t be affected enough, but he changed his opinion after he heard many positive reviews on social media about the program.

**Participant C:** mentioned that The Professional Work Shadow Program played a role in supervising her to the department that fits her and gave her the opportunity to try and implement different activities to find what makes her comfortable and related.

**Participant D:** a media consultant from an educational institution in Sharjah, mentioned that being part of the success of this program is a success for us as well. He emphasizes the importance of educational institutions encouraging their students to participate in The Professional Work Shadow Program and motivating them to enroll in it. Lastly, he mentioned that The Professional Work Shadow Program was successfully efficient in fulfilling the gap the media suffers in the last periods.

Interviews that were conducted with the trainees suggest that online training programs are mostly viewed among bachelor students as a period that needs to be completed to fulfill the university\college requirements, as

most of them and not all believe that many challenges will face them, and the internships hours may not be enough and sufficient to efficiently develop their skills and qualify them.

## **6. Marketing Mix**

The “4Ps of the marketing mix” is a set of tactical marketing components that a company implements in order to accomplish and produce the expected thought and response in the target group (10). We now discuss the 4ps including product, price, place, and promotion of The Professional Work Shadow Program.

### **Product**

The program continues to innovate its service mix to capture more of the professional training market. The program is working on modifying service and product lines, the new product line is carefully designed to meet the needs and satisfy the wants of the targeted audience. with the aim of expanding its market reach and increasing its recognition. The following are the main categories of the Professional Work Shadow Program: internship training program, which offers online workshops and lectures, workshops by media cadre in SGMO, Workshops by media consultants and influencers, certificates for the interns, participants, and volunteers, workshops by the participation of educational institutions such as instructors and teachers. The program falls within a specific time plan in which students benefit from the expertise of the media office. There are around 89 sponsors and participants from different institutions in the country.

### **Place**

The Professional Work Shadow Program offers its training program online. The following are the main places that the program uses to reach its target audience. It is in the Sharjah government media office. The program used to conduct the training program at SGMB in 2019, but with the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program shifted its process of delivering the training content virtually till days. The strategic change reflects the office’s ability to shift to deliver effective content and a sufficient presence to all the participants. However, this part of the job shadow program indicated how capable the office adapts to changes in market conditions, time, and technologies.

### **Promotions**

The Professional Work Shadow Program promotional mix includes word-of-mouth marketing, social media advertisements, public relations, print media, and a website. The Professional Work Shadow Program became widely known through word-of-mouth marketing. The word-of-mouth strategy in the marketing mix usually focuses on recommending and reflecting the satisfied experience and the happy feelings that the consumer experience to encourage other people. The office also promotes the program through social media platforms and through print media. Their use of public relations as a promoting strategy was focusing more on the involvement of educational institutions.

### **Price**

The internship program is a free training program for all target audiences. This price strategy correlates that the program strives to serve a high quality and outstanding level of training to develop satisfactory consumer needs and wants through a high-value service with no cost.

It also suits media students from all universities as the main goal of the internship course is to add to the student's skills and abilities to join the labor market with a high level of practical experience. That should be free and at no cost to the student who will join such programs.

### **Competitors**

The collected data was gathered to gain further information about The Professional Work Shadow Program’s competitors and in order to illustrate the main similarities and differences. Hence, a better understanding of content, service, product, and is significant in positioning The Professional Work Shadow Program uniquely among its competitors. The Professional Work Shadow Program has three close competitors from different emirates present in the UAE.

The first one is United Arab Emirates University, located in Al-Ain, the online workshops include writing an effective CV, developing their personal and professional skills to be prepared for interviews, and understanding the work ethics, and the expectations of the employers.

The second is Dubai Media Inc: based in Dubai and following a hybrid system (online and offline), this training program focus on ‘participating in the future’: they qualify and train students for future workspace.

The third is Tawteen, located in Abu Dhabi and conducted online, this program is organized by the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation. The program is a communication link between students, educational institutions, and private sectors in order to help students get suitable training and summer work opportunities.

## **7. Discussion**

As part of any plan, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were utilized. The mixed-methods design was generally significant in this study to obtain statistical results, while the qualitative methods served to explain the results in greater depth. Primary and secondary market research was conducted to get into details and to understand better. The primary market research was conducted through two surveys during the pandemic and that was conducted and distributed to the target audience with a structured questionnaire and random sampling technique to assess the demographics and psychographic characteristics of the target audience and measure their feedback.

Interviews with supervisors of the program and current and previous participants took place to help to assess the personal and professional expectations and challenges of the bachelor students. The results of both surveys during the pandemic illustrate that bachelor students between 21 to 27 years old are very active on Instagram as their favorite platform, where they spend around two to three hours socializing, following trends, buying or promoting a product or service, as some of them use Instagram to find a job. And with their case as bachelor students who were looking for internship opportunities, Instagram was the main way to figure out the right opportunities for internship. The second survey that was conducted also during the pandemic was for the purpose of measuring their feedback after 4 months of an online internship, the results illustrate that 40% of the interns applied to volunteer in the program for the purpose of improving their professional and personal skills, and around 40 new interns joined the program during the same period.

The second survey was conducted after the pandemic, for the same target audience who are bachelor students, single, and between 21-27. Results illustrate that although online training or working from home was very challenging during the pandemic and caused them to ask and think deeply whether they will really get the right training period that will satisfy their needs, those students believe that even after the pandemic, it is much better to have a hybrid system that allows them to work from home and at the workplace. During the pandemic, the influence of social media influencers took place widely, especially among bachelor students who were struggling in finding internship opportunities and part-time jobs. However, after the pandemic and nowadays the term influencers has been changed to content creators' people who create content that satisfies the needs and wants of the world's viewers of the new and modern social media. It was important to evaluate the perspective of bachelor students toward content creators and the role they play in social media. Results illustrate that in their own perspectives, content creators are those who are in a role of influencing, who critically think and work, who play a crucial role in creating entertaining or educational content for their audience, and they are people who know exactly how the place valuable content in front of an audience's needs and wants. Finally, both surveys indicate that word-of-mouth strategy is likely to be perceived as more credible, powerful, and compelling. And successful businesses are more likely to practice marketing communication tools by attracting and creating messages that engage consumers and build brand loyalty and moderate organic word of mouth more specifically through the real, organic, unpaid presence and powerful significance for powerful reach and impact.

## **8. Recommended Practices**

### **8.1 Word of mouth strategy (WOM)**

Market research shows a clear trend that customer trust in traditional advertising is declining as customers increasingly rely on information from other consumers such as family members, friends, influencers, or even strangers on the Internet (15). Therefore, a word-of-mouth advertising strategy is likely to be perceived as more credible and compelling. Furthermore, previous research has found that an advertisement created by another client is perceived as more trustworthy and convincing than if it was created by an agency.

The power of word of mouth highlights that businesses can practice marketing communication tools by attracting and creating messages that best engage consumers. programs can rely on word-of-mouth marketing and generate their presence on social media platforms as it shows a core significance in the recognition of the program. In the case of The Professional Work Shadow Program, the marketing communication strategy can focus on the interactive word-of-mouth advertising strategy through social media platforms: Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Primary market research indicated that bachelor students are more active on Instagram, and additionally, the conducted surveys and collected data, indicate that the target audience is often using these three social media platforms in reviewing and collecting information about services and different products.

Another WOM strategy can be used in marketing and advertising through social media influencers, as influencers have many unique traits that make them special personalities that the surrounding audience trust and follow. Also, they are seen as experts and have the ability to reach their target audience. However, delivering the message to achieve the desired goal should be through a good and thoughtful selection of influencers who will be a positive and influential weapon in increasing the awareness of the program and its goals. Lastly, campaigns can be created in order to increase the level of awareness about the importance of the professional learning experience and its impact on the individual's personal and professional skills.

### **8.2 Social media engagement**

The Professional Work Shadow program currently bases its promotional and communication methods on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. However, the results of the data that has been collected to understand and measure the uses of social media platforms by the targeted group, indicate that Instagram is the favorite social media platform that is most often used by our target audience. Getting involved with the target audience and making them engaged through efficient content will play a role in accomplishing the program's objectives. It is very important to always learn about each target audience, its (digital) movements, needs, interests, wants, and desires. Unique hashtags have a powerful impact on delivering the message and can be created for each event (13).

### **8.3 Redevelopment of Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter accounts**

Social media accounts need to look visually attractive. The Instagram and Twitter accounts need to be public accounts to generate greater social media engagement and expand the potential target audience reach. A direct and informative statement Bio on Instagram and Twitter can be added to give the viewer a short overview of the page and make it more authentic and relatable. The statement can be as follows: "*The Professional Work Shadow Program is one of the most important training platforms that aim to create a qualified generation who are able to innovate for a successful career path*". On this page, it is beneficial to share the trainee's achievements and creativity. In addition to story highlights, of the different departments with a brief overview of each. Moreover, any kind of social media content that will be posted on the program's social media accounts will include the basic logo of for example the Professional Work Shadow Program.

Overall, social media engagement should be focusing on daily relevant and creative posts, in order to interact more frequently, the posts should be varied and include training videos, inspirational and motivational videos, promotions, and program updates, to create content that attracts consumers and generate digital presence, and this can be achieved professionally by more fusion of technology. The benefit of designing online content is that it is free, time-consuming, and allows the program to manage relationships with consumers in a more efficient way.

### **Creative message**

The Professional Work Shadow Program offers a qualified space that allows students to innovate and break the barriers for a successful career path. It has very different and unique training methods that fit the needs of both the market and the target audience.

The professional work shadow program is now offering a professional training opportunity that offers a certified certificate from Sharjah Government Media Bureau for all those who attend the organized workshops and volunteered to gain more experience. All the workshops, webinars, and events are organized by Sharjah Government Media Bureau with the presence of a group of the most important and most influential, and successful personalities at the professional level.

### **Paid Advertising**

Paid Instagram advertisements should take place twice a week for one month, between 7 pm to 8 pm, this period of time is between the period of time which is 5 pm-10 pm (8), where the target group is most often on their Instagram accounts. The paid advertisements will be launched for announcing important events that will take place within the program.

### **Public relations**

Public relations activities, such as advertising, can help increase business awareness among target buyers. Many companies make conscious use of public relations to obtain free publicity for their products and services. Public relations can be a powerful tool for generating valuable word of mouth, sometimes due to the increased credibility and availability of information provided in editorial articles and interviews with your company's employees (15). Within an integrated marketing communication plan, a public relations program should include a set of famous people in the media industry that will conduct webinars with the goal of increasing awareness of the importance of professional training experience on personal and professional life stages among bachelor students. The webinars and workshops can take place on specific dates that are somehow related to the objectives to ensure they can reach the most possible number of consumers.

### **Influencer endorsement**

Social media influencers are powerful brand ambassadors, as studies show that around 71 percent of UAE residents from 18-40 years old take advice and will be convinced by social media influencers (16). To generate awareness and expand positive 'word-of-mouth advertisement', program providers should rely on local social media influencers to be involved in the process of delivering the message to the targeted audience group. This collaboration can be made with a youth influencer on social media based on the content she or he provides to the followers, which best matches the target category. A webinar can be delivered to the trainees, viewers, and

followers on social networking sites besides social media advertisements on the Instagram and Snapchat accounts of the influencer. Collaborating with a young influencer that shares meaningful content can play a positive role in enabling the program to position itself in the minds of the target audience.

## 9. Conclusion

To conclude, many marketing strategies for internship providers are recommended such as the Professional Work Shadow program to attract and retain media bachelor students of the United Arab Emirates. After applying a professional perspective of fusion of technology in the internship program/course, the various strategies are Word of mouth strategy (WOM), Influencer endorsement, public relations, Paid Advertising, Creative messages, Redevelopment of Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter accounts, and Social media engagement. It is crucial to note that the above recommendations should not work in isolation, but rather be part of an integrated marketing plan. They should work in synergy to provide valuable content for potential students to recognize their value. Therefore, this study offers strategies to develop different programs' awareness and increase awareness among bachelor students about the positive aspects that internship programs hold. Particularly, the study focuses on the role that current internship programs encompass in providing significant opportunities to their participants. Students, in return and in a post-COVID-19 scenario, can showcase the knowledge they learned at universities in physical presence under the guidance of media cadres. Students' critical thinking can be applied in real case scenarios that internships offer, which in turn will be not only beneficial for students and internship programs, but also for the wider community and society.

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