

Co-Creating Authentic Assessment with Industry: A Case Study of Tiktok Shop in Digital Marketing Education

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Abstract

This reflective practice case study examines the co-design and delivery of an authentic, industry-embedded assessment in a level 7 MSc Digital Marketing Management module. The programme leader and TikTok Shop's campaign and strategy manager for beauty developed a live brief, assessment expectations and a rubric informed by genuine campaign data. Students analysed campaign performance metrics and used the 'situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action and control' (SOSTAC: Reed, 2014) framework to diagnose performance and develop evidence-based recommendations. The assessment combined authentic organisational data, access to an industry practitioner, a professionally framed task and external review of anonymised work. The account draws on assessment materials, planning records and practitioner reflection to examine design decisions, implementation and lessons for future practice. Routine module-evaluation comments are excluded because students did not consent to their use in publication; they are neither quoted nor analysed. The case suggests that carefully structured university-industry co-design can strengthen assessment authenticity while preserving academic oversight. It offers transferable design principles rather than empirical claims about student attainment, experience or employability outcomes.

Keywords: authentic assessment, business education, experiential learning, digital marketing

Background context

This reflective practice case study examines the co-design and delivery of an authentic, industry-embedded assessment in a level 7 MSc Digital Marketing Management module. The programme leader and TikTok Shop's campaign and strategy manager for beauty developed a live brief, assessment expectations and a rubric informed by genuine campaign data. Students analysed campaign performance metrics and used the 'situation, objectives, strategy, tactics, action and control' (SOSTAC: Reed, 2014) framework to diagnose performance and develop evidence-based recommendations. The assessment combined authentic organisational data, access to an industry practitioner, a professionally framed task and external review of anonymised work. The account draws on assessment materials, planning records and practitioner reflection to examine design decisions, implementation and lessons for future practice. The case suggests that carefully structured university-industry co-design can strengthen assessment authenticity while preserving academic oversight. It offers transferable design principles rather than empirical claims about student attainment, experience or employability outcomes.

The programme leader collaborated with TikTok Shop's campaign and strategy manager for beauty to co-design and deliver the assessment. With organisational permission, genuine campaign data from TikTok Shop live shopping events in the beauty category were provided for teaching. Students undertook secondary analysis of campaign metrics, interpreted patterns in shop and creator performance and structured their diagnosis and recommendations using SOSTAC. The task differed from a conventional classroom case in four connected ways: it used current organisational data; the brief and expectations were shaped jointly by an academic and practitioner; the practitioner contextualised the task during delivery; and a sample of anonymised submissions was reviewed for professional relevance.

The beauty sector provided a timely context because platform-first consumer engagement is shaped by rapid aesthetic cycles, visual storytelling and creator-led influence. TikTok has intensified these dynamics by reframing product discovery as an algorithmically mediated and performative process, visible in formats such as "Get Ready With Me" (#GRWM), viral 'dupes' and real-time creator reviews. As competition has shifted from traditional retail environments towards the fast-moving logic of the scroll, students needed to examine how data-informed decisions support creator partnerships and demonstrate campaign value. The assessment was designed to mirror aspects of an in-house digital marketing workflow while retaining academic requirements for critical analysis, use of theory and independent judgement.

Literature review

University-industry collaboration (UIC) refers here to structured, reciprocal interaction between a higher education institution and an industry partner involving knowledge exchange, shared resources and aligned objectives (Mathisen and Jørgensen, 2021; Ates *et al.*, 2025). UIC can provide access to contemporary practices, organisational data and emerging technologies, while industry partners gain access to academic expertise and the perspectives of emerging professionals (Fischer, Schaeffer and Vonortas, 2019; Hajrizi and Berisha Shaqiri, 2024; Bu *et al.*, 2025). In curricular contexts, UIC can embed employability through learning outcomes, teaching and assessment, rather than positioning employability as a separate activity (Abelha *et al.*, 2020).

Industry involvement is not inherently educational or reciprocal. A guest lecture, company logo or supplied dataset may add relevance without changing how students learn or how achievement is judged. Partnerships may privilege immediate employer needs over disciplinary critique or rely excessively on one practitioner. Industry-embedded curriculum design therefore requires planned integration of industry knowledge, practices, evidence and participation, with academic staff retaining responsibility for educational coherence, inclusion and standards. Its quality depends on alignment among learning outcomes, activities, assessment criteria and student capability, not simply the presence of an external organisation (Cheng *et al.*, 2022).

Authentic assessment asks students to use knowledge and judgement in tasks that resemble the cognitive demands, constraints and standards of professional or social practice (Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner, 2004; Swaffield, 2011; Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown, 2014). Authenticity may arise from the task, context, social roles, evidence, criteria and feedback. A task is not authentic merely because it uses a real company and it need not reproduce

employment exactly. Selective approximation can preserve space for critique, feedback and equitable participation. Here, authenticity arose from genuine campaign evidence, a current organisational problem, practitioner involvement, professional expectations and academically justified decisions.

Simulation is a constructed representation of a real system, role or situation through which learners practise decisions without participating directly in the original setting. Simulations offer repeatability, safety and control, although simplified assumptions and data may reduce contextual complexity (Chernikova, 2020). This assessment still simulated aspects of professional work: students did not operate a live TikTok Shop account, control budgets or implement their recommendations. However, genuine campaign data and practitioner context moved it beyond a wholly fictional simulation.

Partnership literature also helps define the collaboration. Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014) describe partnership as a reciprocal process in which participants contribute different expertise and share responsibility for educational work. Bovill (2020) warns that co-creation can become tokenistic if influence is narrow or participation is presented as more equal than it is. In this case, 'co-design' refers specifically to collaboration between the programme leader and the TikTok Shop practitioner. Students interpreted and responded to the brief but did not co-design the assessment. This bounded claim avoids overstating participation.

Live industry cases may support the application of disciplinary knowledge to uncertain, practice-based problems and the development of professional judgement (Rohm, Stefl and Ward, 2021). Yet live data do not automatically produce deep learning: students still require conceptual scaffolding, transparent criteria and opportunities to question how platform metrics define success. The distinctive design combined academic-practitioner co-design of the brief and rubric, secondary analysis of genuine metrics, continuing practitioner dialogue and external review of anonymised outputs.

Students organised their analysis through SOSTAC. The framework supports movement from diagnosis to recommendations and monitoring. However, it is a planning heuristic rather than an analytical method: it does not determine metric validity, resolve causal ambiguity or guarantee critical evaluation. At level 7, students therefore needed to interrogate the supplied measures, integrate research and justify the assumptions connecting diagnosis with strategy.

Case design and reflective approach

This paper is a reflective practice case study, not an empirical study of student experience or outcomes. It reconstructs the assessment's design and delivery from the assessment brief, rubric, teaching materials, planning records and the practitioners' professional recollection of the collaboration. Reflection is organised around alignment, authenticity, roles, implementation and future improvement. No systematic thematic analysis, outcome testing or causal evaluation was undertaken.

Routine module evaluation had been collected for quality-enhancement purposes. Students were not asked to consent to publication or research use of their comments. Those responses have therefore been excluded from this paper: no student quotation, paraphrase, theme or

inference is used as evidence. References to student activity describe the designed task or observable assessment process, not students' views of its value.

The design began with scoping discussions between the programme leader and the TikTok Shop campaign and strategy manager. They considered the module's learning outcomes, the cohort's expected level of prior knowledge, the professional capabilities relevant to the task and the feasibility of providing a current marketing problem. Genuine data from TikTok Shop's live shopping beauty campaigns were selected to allow students to interpret performance in a recognisable commercial context. Brand familiarity was treated as a possible entry point to the task, not as evidence of engagement or learning.

The brief and rubric were then co-designed to align academic requirements with selected practices of in-house digital marketing teams. Decisions covered the problem, expected outputs and performance criteria. SOSTAC provided a common planning structure, while the rubric required critical use of theory, analysis of evidence and justified recommendations. Academic responsibility for standards and marking remained with the programme leader. This division of roles prevented professional relevance from displacing level 7 expectations or institutional assessment procedures.

During delivery, the practitioner acted as a client-facing source of context, responding to questions and clarifying platform-specific practices. This dialogue helped retain the live character of the brief, but it also required boundaries so that access to clarification remained fair and practitioner advice did not become a model answer. Following submission, the module leader assessed all work. The practitioner reviewed a sample of anonymised submissions for professional relevance and realism; this review supplemented rather than determined academic judgement.

The collaboration was treated as iterative curriculum development. The academic and practitioner considered which elements of the process were workable, where students needed greater scaffolding and how the brief could be refined for a future cohort. In this paper, these considerations are reported as practitioner reflections on design and implementation, not as findings derived from participants.

Critical reflection on practice

The strongest aspect of the design was the alignment of multiple dimensions of authenticity. Genuine data alone would have produced only contextual realism. Co-design of the brief and rubric connected the task to professional expectations; continuing dialogue created a social dimension; and academically justified recommendations preserved disciplinary challenge. Together, these features made the design more substantial than a one-off guest contribution.

The collaboration also revealed a productive tension between workplace relevance and educational purpose. Professional practice often requires rapid decisions from incomplete evidence, whereas postgraduate assessment must make reasoning visible and subject assumptions to critique. The task therefore did not ask students simply to imitate current TikTok Shop practice. It required them to examine performance measures, draw on research and propose a defensible strategy.

SOSTAC provided useful scaffolding in giving the submissions a recognisable decision-making sequence. However, its accessibility created a risk of formulaic work. A future iteration should state more explicitly that completing each heading is insufficient: students must evaluate data quality, acknowledge causal limits, compare alternatives and show how evidence supports each decision. Additional low-stakes practice in interpreting platform metrics could strengthen this analytical step without reducing the challenge of the summative task.

Practitioner access was valuable to the design but created operational considerations. Expectations about response times, communication channels and the kinds of clarification available should be agreed before teaching begins. Questions and answers should, where appropriate, be shared with the whole cohort to support equitable access. A contingency plan is also needed in case organisational priorities restrict practitioner availability or the supplied data must be withdrawn.

The use of recognisable brands and a prominent platform gave the brief currency, but brand visibility should not be confused with pedagogical value. High-profile cases may encourage novelty or uncritical admiration. Teaching should therefore invite scrutiny of platform governance, the limitations of performance metrics, creator labour, consumer influence and the ethical implications of data-driven marketing. Brand relevance must support rather than substitute for intellectual challenge.

External review of anonymised work added a professional scrutiny without detracting from marking authority. For future delivery, the purpose and scope of this review should be explained clearly to students in advance. Data-sharing arrangements, anonymisation procedures, retention and confidentiality should be documented, especially where authentic organisational data and student work cross institutional boundaries.

The case also prompted reflection on reciprocity. A sustainable partnership should offer value to both parties without positioning students primarily as a talent pipeline or a source of free consultancy. Reciprocal value may include professional learning, curriculum insight and critical dialogue, but it should be agreed transparently and reviewed periodically. Claims about organisational benefit should be made only when supported by appropriately collected evidence.

Five practical principles follow from the case: begin with learning outcomes rather than the partner's profile; define academic and practitioner roles; provide conceptual and data-literacy scaffolding; establish equitable communication and contingency arrangements; and separate routine evaluation from publishable research evidence. These principles may guide similar assessment partnerships while allowing adaptation to disciplinary, institutional and organisational contexts.

Implications for curriculum practice

The case indicates that, if industry is to offer identifiable benefits, it must depend on sustained and bounded participation across the assessment lifecycle. The practitioner contributed to scoping, brief and rubric development, clarification during delivery and review of anonymised outputs. This depth of involvement supported coherence between the professional scenario and the assessment criteria. It also demanded clear governance, workload planning and protection of academic decision-making.

The design reflects the multi-dimensional view of authenticity proposed by Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner (2004). Genuine evidence and a current platform problem supported task and contextual authenticity; practitioner dialogue introduced a professional social role; and the rubric connected academic standards with strategic practice. Consistent with Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown (2014), students were asked to exercise judgement and transfer knowledge rather than reproduce a procedure. These features offer a useful design checklist for other modules.

Curriculum renewal is particularly important in social media marketing, where platforms, formats and commercial practices change rapidly (Crittenden, 2024). University-industry collaboration may help educators maintain currency, while academic critique can question assumptions embedded in current practice. The aim should not be to chase every platform development but to design tasks through which students can apply durable analytical principles to changing contexts.

At programme level, collaboration could be sequenced across modules so that students encounter progressively more complex data, stakeholder expectations and strategic decisions. Earlier activities might develop metric interpretation and ethical critique, followed by later live briefs requiring integrated recommendations. Such progression may create greater coherence than concentrating industry engagement in one summative task (Kumar, 2018; Beachum and Krallman, 2024; Ajjawi *et al.*, 2020). Any expansion would require sustainable partner capacity and consistent arrangements for data governance and accessibility.

Limitations

This is a situated account of one assessment in one postgraduate module. It documents practitioner reasoning and design choices but does not evaluate student perceptions, learning gains, attainment or graduate outcomes. Routine module-evaluation responses were excluded because consent for publication or research use had not been obtained. The paper therefore makes no claim that the assessment caused improved confidence, engagement, employability or employment.

The collaboration also relied substantially on one practitioner and one platform context. Its feasibility and educational value may differ across disciplines, cohorts and organisations. Embedding similar work across a programme could support progression, but it would increase demands on partner capacity, staff time, governance and access to current data.

Future evaluation should be designed prospectively and reviewed through the appropriate institutional ethics and governance processes. With informed consent, it could combine

student and partner perspectives with assessment evidence, comparative cohorts or longitudinal follow-up. Such work would allow claims about experience and outcomes to be examined rather than inferred from the design.

Conclusion

This reflective practice case study shows how an academic and industry practitioner co-designed an authentic digital marketing assessment using genuine TikTok Shop campaign data. Its contribution lies in documenting the design: alignment with learning outcomes, a professionally framed problem, SOSTAC-based scaffolding, bounded practitioner participation and external review that did not replace academic judgement.

The case also highlights safeguards required for responsible partnership. Authenticity should be treated as multidimensional; professional relevance should remain open to academic critique; access to practitioner support should be equitable; and arrangements for data, confidentiality and roles should be explicit. Routine evaluation evidence must not be repurposed for publication without an appropriate ethical basis.

As a reflective account, the paper offers transferable principles rather than empirical evidence of impact. Future iterations may enhance scaffolding, strengthen programme-level progression and build prospective, consent-based evaluation into the design. Carefully bounded university-industry collaboration can enrich assessment practice, but claims about student or organisational outcomes require separately collected and ethically governed evidence.

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