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Professional as a Mother: Empowering Working Mothers Through Social Media

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Author Note

The content herein has been developed through the Bachelor of Arts in Multidisciplinary Studies program at Boise State University.

Abstract

Women in the workforce continue to experience a gendered pay gap, making only around 86% of the salary of their male counterparts (Pew Research, 2022). This is worse still for those women with children, who are less likely to be considered for promotional opportunities and dismissed as not committed to their careers. As a mother, I have been on the receiving end of this discrimination, but I am also lucky enough to understand my rights and value in the workforce. The goal of this capstone project was to improve the outcomes for working mothers by developing an online community to share meaningful and actionable resources and tools through a social media platform. The Professional as a Mother identity was created with a campaign plan, branding and communication guidelines, and original content curated in service of this goal.

Keywords: women empowerment, working mothers, workplace rights, social media

Introduction to your Capstone Project

Working mothers are disproportionately disadvantaged in the workforce, being left with little choice but to abandon their careers and aspirations. Pew Research confirmed that around one third of all working mothers have left their careers since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, citing lack of resources and concerns around their children's development (Fry, 2022). The pressure to walk away from my professional career is something I experienced, following the birth of my son in October of 2021. Working in the Human Resources field, I had knowledge of my rights in the workplace, as it pertains to maternity and postpartum. However, I still experienced feelings of isolation and was discouraged from pursuing new opportunities in my career. This project was born out of a desire to help working mothers find a sense of community, to understand their unique value in the workforce, and to feel empowered to exercise their rights as mothers at work.

There is a wealth of information on the internet as it pertains to the legal protections for mothers in the workforce, and the benefits offered to new parents in the United States. From conversations with other working mothers, I found that this information was not readily available or provided in a format that was accessible to the average, busy woman. Leveraging my knowledge of communications and media content management, I chose to create an Instagram profile to curate and share information and resources with mothers directly. Utilizing social media provided an accessible medium, in a space where a majority of woman were already engaging (McLachlan, 2022).

I began by developing a brand image for this project, creating clear guidelines for the content and visual interest. This ensured a cohesive identity that was approachable and engaging for the women targeted. To best ensure the content created would be aligned with the interests

and values of these stakeholders, I developed audience personas and campaign objectives to use as a reference for content evaluation. Following these guideposts, I utilized my knowledge of digital design and marketing to create and curate original content for this project. Engaging directly with other pages and mothers in the Instagram community to develop a network of potential stakeholders, who I later surveyed to confirm the success of this project.

Elements Coming Together

Innovative Approach

I set out to address the question, how might I raise practical support and awareness for working mothers? I applied an innovative approach to address this problem by creating a social media page with content that was targeted to promote and uplift working mothers. Utilizing integrative learning, I leveraged my skills, knowledge, and personal experiences into one cohesive approach to this problem. Over the last 6 years of college level coursework in media and communications studies, I gained knowledge of the media development process and the steps in creating and implementing a media campaign plan. All this is combined with my professional communication and project management skills gained from working in fast paced, corporate environments, and enables me to bring a new perspective to this project. My approach to this problem was innovative as it takes the research conducted and personal experiences shared by working mothers around the country, and turns it into a tangible, and approachable, resource. My approach broke down the barriers that are set up in traditional resources and provided a place of accessibility and community.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is defined as one's ability to control and handle their emotions in a positive, productive way. My experiences reentering the workforce after becoming a mother

highlighted some significant challenges that are faced by working mothers around the country. New mothers are faced with standards double that of their male counterparts, with expectations to maintain their productivity at work, while also juggling the day-to-day family management. These expectations are draining on women in the workforce, driving up feelings of anxiety, isolation, and depression (Bright Horizons Family Solutions, 2021). With this in mind, I prioritized a human-centered approach to the content shared on the Professional as a Mother page. I focused on sharing realistic, practical advice in a positive and uplifting tone. When receiving feedback from others, I chose to engage with them directly and put their feedback directly into effect. Having someone else recognize and acknowledge your struggles, and to validate your feelings, is undeniably positive for mental health outcomes.

Creative Thinking

The creative framework for Professional as a Mother came from the integrative problem-solving process, in which I aimed to identify a resolution to the problem that was superior other potential solutions. There are a lot of people who want to help make the world a better place, and to improve the working conditions for mothers, but my approach relied on my multidisciplinary knowledge to provide a modern solution. While creating a social media account is not anything revolutionary on its own, leveraging the platform for this purpose was a creative endeavor. And I even dusted off my design skills and relearned digital media software to create new, original content for this project.

Your Innovative Solution

Overall, my approach to this problem was innovative, as it aimed to address the problem through direct connection with the stakeholders, eliminating the reliance on third parties and other investors to distribute information. This allowed me to share resources directly, through an accessible medium, without all the usual barriers, and to concurrently develop a genuine sense of community with the stakeholders. My work is a novel approach, by aiming to empower women with community and knowledge, rather than relying on others to help inform them of their rights. To enhance innovation and improve the outcomes of this work, I chose to approach this work with a more targeted audience and an increased focus on research. If I could have spent more time on this work, I think it would have been beneficial to conduct some more market research and surveying of the stakeholders ahead of project implementation. This may have helped to narrow down a specific audience to target, and in turn, identified opportunities for innovation.

Results

In order to measure the results of this capstone project, I set the goal of seeing a net positive response to the content and community created through Professional as a Mother. I utilized the Instagram Insights functionality to track the reach and engagement with my content, and regularly interacted with other mothers through the Instagram page, to gather direct feedback from stakeholders. In my initial project proposal, I anticipated easily growing my reach by 10 followers each week, but, in action, I found it nearly impossible to meet that standard. And after being informed that my original branding was bordering on the brand of other pages, I started over community building about two weeks after launching the public project page. With these challenges, I am grateful to report that my project still resulted in a successful outcome.

To maximize responses, I created a short, anonymous survey that I shared with the followers of the Professional as a Mother page. This survey asked respondents to rate their

feelings about the content shared and their emotions after engaging with the profile, on a scale from one to five. All respondents rate the content as high quality and beneficial, receiving a five out of five from everyone. And all but one survey contributor indicated a significantly positive emotional response from interacting with the Instagram page.

To gather additional insights into these results, I engaged in direct conversations with some stakeholders who were following along with the digital project. One mom I interviewed explained that she was not aware that she was entitled to additional breaktime at work to express breastmilk as a nursing mom. She shared with me, “I took your advice, and reached out to HR at work. They said it is Ok for me to take additional breaks [to pump during the workday]” (C. Davis, personal communication, November 2022). Another mother expressed her gratitude, writing that she wanted to make sure that even small businesses understand that they are expected to provide these accommodations to new mothers (H. Paige, personal communication, November 2022).

When writing out my initial goals and anticipations for this project, I expressed how this would be success if even one mother benefited from the information shared. While I had hoped to be able to gather more significant responses and statistical data on the impacts, I am satisfied with my results within the time constraints of this project. There was undoubtedly a positive response to this project, and I have hopefully developed a lasting connection with other members of my community. In partnership with another mom working in media, I have even set into action some further opportunities for continuation of this work to further expand the reach and impacts. We are discussing opportunities for communication campaigns in partnership with local chapters of an organization, La Leche League, to partner on a greater outreach campaign to companies on breastfeeding rights in the state.

Conclusion

My capstone project was selected with the goal of improving the lives of working mothers by raising awareness of workplace rights and fostering a digital community. Leveraging my skills and knowledge in an integrative approach to this project, I successfully accomplished this goal by developing a digital persona and brand, Professional as a Mother, on Instagram. While I did face some significant challenges in the implementation of my campaign plan, in terms of increasing the reach of the content, it was overall a success, with all survey respondents citing an improvement in morale. I am confident that if I had additional time and financial resources to dedicate to this project, the impacts would be far wider reaching. If I were to do it all over, my only significant change of plans would be to conduct more research ahead of the project implementation, which would only be possible within a wider timeframe for resolutions. Overall, I feel strongly that my project was impactful on the stakeholders, and there is no doubt that this work is something that I will continue with in my future career.

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