# Virtual Clients: A Simulation for Final Projects in a Social Media Marketing Course

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**Domain:** Curriculum Development & Design
**Challenge Area:** Embedding Transversal Skills and AI literacy
**Status:** Emerging Practice (pilots and experimental practices)
**Implementation Complexity:** Medium

This best practice was implemented in a Master's-level course in Social Media Management at ESCP Business School. As a final project, students develop and pitch a social media strategy for a virtual client created using ChatGPT. The simulation replicates professional client–agency interactions while reducing social risk and enabling repeated practice. Through this activity, students strengthen strategic reasoning, audience analysis, communication quality, teamwork, and responsible use of AI. A structured debrief connects student decisions to theoretical concepts and performance outcomes, while assessment emphasises reflection, coherence, ethical judgment, and evidence-based decision-making.

## Practical Implementation

The practice was applied across five Master's-level classes involving approximately 200 students. Students are introduced to the virtual client scenario at the start of the course, and the project runs throughout the semester.

Each student team interacts with the virtual client twice: first to receive the initial brief and launch the project, and later to present and refine early strategic ideas. During the project period, the instructor adopts a managerial role, providing guidance and supporting team development.

The project concludes with formal pitches, where students present their final social media strategies.

| Impact Indicator | Enablers |
|---|---|
| The impact of this best practice is measured using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.<br><br>Students complete two questionnaires, one at the beginning and one at the end of the activity, to assess changes in motivation, perceptions, and readiness to work with AI-based tools, alongside selected individual learning characteristics.<br><br>In addition, transcripts of student interactions with the virtual client are collected and analysed qualitatively to evaluate the depth, coherence, and strategic quality of student decision-making. Finally, structured debriefing discussions encourage student reflection on learning outcomes and critical engagement with the opportunities and limitations of AI technologies. | • ChatGPT Plus (with limited functionality available via free versions)<br>• Prompt design for virtual client simulation<br>• Instructor facilitation and role-play<br>• Structured debrief and reflective discussion framework |