

When Data Do Not Persuade: Planning–Expression Integration in Bilingual Digital Marketing Tasks

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ABSTRACT

Digital marketing is saturated with metrics yet the availability of data does not guarantee persuasion or execution. This paper reports an artefact-based qualitative study of over twenty bilingual slide decks produced across two one-month task cycles in a vocational undergraduate marketing context. Task 1 asked students to analyse Guangzhou Vocational University of Science and Technology as a product competing in the education market using PEST, Porter's Five Forces (and in some cases an industry life cycle lens) and SWOT. Task 2 required an STP analysis of Victoria's Secret in the China market with optional competitor comparison and recommendations. The decks were coded through a planning–expression integration lens. Planning competence was operationalised as decision framing, prioritisation and trade-offs, strategic coherence and action design. Expression competence was operationalised as argument structure, evidence transparency and warranting, functional bilingualism and multimodal clarity. Students frequently included metric-like statements such as TGI values, platform attention indicators and macro figures. However, data often did not persuade because claims were weakly sourced, weakly defined or weakly linked to conclusions through explicit warrants. These evidence–argument gaps then disrupted integration at later checkpoints, including unclear decision statements, framework stacking without prioritisation, stakeholder and scope drift, segmentation without targeting criteria, competitor lists without a stable competitive frame and recommendations that remained non-operational. The paper proposes low-burden task rules and rubric gates that make evidence work visible, strengthen decision statements and improve executability in bilingual digital marketing tasks.

KEYWORDS

Bilingual marketing education; Digital marketing tasks; Artifact-based qualitative research; Evidence warranting; Planning–expression integration

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital marketing is often presented as data-driven, measurable and performance-oriented. In practice, teams still succeed or fail on a familiar question: whether they can turn information into decisions that others accept and act on. In teaching contexts, the same challenge appears in a compressed form. Students learn established frameworks such as PEST, Porter's Five Forces, SWOT and STP and they increasingly present their reasoning through slide decks that resemble workplace briefings. These decks often contain numerous numbers, platform indicators and industry facts. Yet instructors and peers still report that the argument feels unconvincing or that recommendations remain too general to implement. In short, data are present but persuasion does not follow.

This paper treats that gap as a planning–expression integration problem. Planning competence concerns what strategy is being produced: how a decision is framed, how drivers are prioritised, how

trade-offs are acknowledged and how a coherent action logic is formed. Expression competence concerns how strategy is communicated: how claims are structured, how evidence is sourced and linked through warrants, how bilingual resources serve rhetorical functions and how multimodal design makes reasoning visible. Integration is achieved when planning outputs are expressed as defensible claims and when expression reliably carries those claims to an audience as credible and actionable decisions.

The study examines two bilingual task types implemented over two one-month cycles within a marketing syllabus that emphasised metric-informed reasoning and workplace-style strategic communication. Task 1 frames Guangzhou Vocational University of Science and Technology as a 'product' competing in the education market and requires macro scanning (PEST), competition diagnosis (Porter's Five Forces and in some cases an industry life cycle lens) and synthesis (SWOT). Task 2 requires an STP analysis of Victoria's Secret in the China market, allows competitor reference and requires recommendations. Together, the tasks create a contrast between environment or industry diagnosis and consumer-channel reasoning that often draws on quantitative indicators.

Three research questions guide the analysis:

RQ1: How do students use data and metrics to support strategic claims in bilingual digital marketing tasks?

RQ2: Where does planning-expression integration break down when data do not persuade and what mechanisms explain these breakdowns?

RQ3: How do breakdown patterns differ between macro or industry diagnosis decks and brand STP decks?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Framework-based analysis is central to marketing and strategy education. Tools such as PEST, Five Forces and SWOT are designed to support selective diagnosis and synthesis rather than exhaustive description [1-3]. STP is commonly taught as a decision pathway from segmentation to targeting and positioning and it is expected to guide both action and messaging [4, 5]. Positioning scholarship emphasises that differentiation must be defined within a competitive frame and then communicated consistently across touchpoints [6-8]. These perspectives imply a practical standard for student work: framework outputs should become defended choices and coherent communication.

A second body of work clarifies why evidence often fails to persuade. Toulmin's argument model distinguishes claims, evidence and warrants and shows that evidence does not support a conclusion unless the reasoning link is made explicit [9]. In slide-based communication, the problem is amplified by multimodality. Visuals, layout and text can strengthen an argument when they are labelled, sourced and interpreted through clear captions but they can weaken an argument when they are decorative or disconnected from claims [10-12]. Cognitive load theory and multimedia learning research indicates that dense slides and weak signalling increase processing burden and make it harder for audiences to follow inferential chains [13, 14]. Slideware critique similarly argues that listing can replace reasoning unless narrative closure is enforced [15].

A third line of research supports artefact-based qualitative analysis of student work. Artefacts such as slide decks can be analysed as traces of enacted disciplinary thinking under authentic constraints. Thematic analysis and systematic coding support cross-artefact pattern identification [16, 17]. Qualitative methodology literature highlights the value of clearly specified coding procedures, analytic memos and documented decision trails for enhancing the trustworthiness of findings [18], [19]. From an instructional design perspective, constructive alignment and formative feedback research suggests that competence integration improves when assessment criteria make decision quality and communication quality visible and actionable [20, 21]. For bilingual and workplace-

oriented tasks, ESP and genre-based perspectives stress audience, purpose and rhetorical function rather than surface bilingual labelling alone [22, 23]. Finally, digital marketing scholarship highlights the rising influence of platform metrics and channel logic which raises the standard for evidence transparency, relevance and actionable interpretation in marketing reasoning [24-28].

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Context and Task Design

This study was situated in a bilingual, marketing-related course at a vocational undergraduate institution. Two task cycles were implemented, each running for approximately one month. In each cycle, students produced a bilingual slide deck as the principal assessed output.

Task 1: Education market environment analysis. Students analysed Guangzhou Vocational University of Science and Technology as a ‘product’ competing in the education market. The task required an integrated use of PEST, Porter’s Five Forces (with an industry life cycle perspective used by some groups) and SWOT to generate a coherent strategic account.

Task 2: STP analysis for a brand in China. Students analysed Victoria’s Secret in the China market using the STP framework. Competitor comparisons were permitted and students were required to provide recommendations. Decks typically included segment descriptions, channel or platform considerations and content strategy proposals.

3.2. Data Corpus and Artifact-Based Approach

The corpus comprised over twenty bilingual slide decks and the distribution across the two tasks was broadly balanced. While deck length varied, most followed a multi-section structure consistent with business presentation conventions. Many decks included quantitative statements. In Task 2, these commonly appeared as TGI values, platform attention indicators, follower growth claims or reported conversion lifts. In Task 1, quantitative statements typically comprised macro-level indicators such as GDP figures, examination cohort counts, education participation ratios or other proxies for market size. For analytic purposes, these quantitative statements were treated as evidence practices (how ‘data’ were sourced, defined and mobilised) rather than as externally verified facts.

3.3. Analytic Lens and Coding Scheme

Analysis employed a planning–expression integration lens, with particular attention to how evidence moves from data to claims and from claims to decisions.

3.3.1. Planning competence (strategy formation).

Decision framing: whether the deck states a concrete decision and explicit success criteria

Prioritisation and trade-offs: whether key drivers are ranked and trade-offs are articulated

Strategic coherence: whether diagnosis is translated into judgements and then into recommendations

Action design: whether recommendations specify channel, frequency, ownership, timeline and KPIs

3.3.2. Expression competence (strategy communication).

Argument structure: whether claims are supported by evidence and closed with implications rather than remaining descriptive

Evidence transparency: whether sources, dates and metric definitions are stated

Warranting: whether explicit ‘because/therefore’ reasoning links evidence to claims

Functional bilingualism: whether Chinese and English serve differentiated rhetorical functions

Multimodal clarity: whether slide design supports readability and makes the inferential chain visible
Integration was evaluated by the extent to which evidence supported a defensible decision and whether that decision was expressed as an actionable recommendation set.

3.4. Procedure and Trustworthiness

Decks were analysed iteratively and coded at the level of individual slides or coherent slide clusters. Codes were refined through constant comparison across decks and across task types. Themes were developed and reviewed using established thematic analysis procedures [17]. Trustworthiness was strengthened by using explicit code definitions, maintaining analytic memos and actively seeking deviant cases that did not fit the dominant patterns in the corpus.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Across both tasks, the failure of data to persuade is best understood as an integration failure. Evidence does not simply sit in a deck. It must be selected, defined and interpreted so that it can travel across checkpoints: evidence should support a claim, the claim should support a decision, the decision should support prioritisation and trade-offs and the resulting recommendations should be executable. The findings below describe where this chain frequently breaks and how planning and expression interact at each checkpoint.

4.1. Evidence and Warranting

The central finding is that data frequently fails to persuade because it is weakly anchored and weakly interpreted. Many decks contain abundant metric-like statements yet evidence transparency is limited and warranting is missing.

Transparency problems appear when numbers are presented without clear sources, dates, definitions or time windows. In Task 2, students often include TGI-style values, platform attention indicators and claims about follower growth or conversion lifts. Such material can raise the perceived professionalism of a deck but without traceable sourcing conventions it cannot reliably strengthen credibility. In Task 1, macro indicators and market-size proxies are often used in a similar way. Evidence appears authoritative but the reader cannot evaluate its reliability, currency or comparability.

Warranting problems appear when a metric is placed next to a claim without an explicit reasoning link explaining why that metric supports the conclusion. In STP decks, attention metrics are sometimes treated as direct proof of positioning outcomes, as if high views automatically imply brand preference or willingness to pay. In market-environment decks, macro indicators are sometimes treated as direct justification for competitive conclusions, as if one indicator automatically implies a strategic move. Under Toulmin's model, the missing warrant leaves the argument structurally incomplete [9]. This is a direct integration problem: planning sets out what needs to be justified but expression does not show how the evidence justifies it.

When evidence does not persuade, later integration checkpoints become unstable. Prioritisation becomes arbitrary, competitor comparisons become impressionistic and recommendations drift towards generic statements because the deck cannot defend a specific path with credible reasoning.

4.2. Decision Framing

A second mechanism-level issue is that many decks do not state a concrete decision even when they present large amounts of information. In Task 1, students may report macro context and market-size proxies then transition into SWOT without articulating a decision such as the institution's primary differentiation move, recruitment focus or capability investment priority. In Task 2, students may

present multiple segments and platform metrics then offer recommendations without stating the core positioning choice.

Decision framing is the bridge between planning and expression. Planning requires a decision because strategy is a choice under constraints. Expression requires a decision because persuasion needs a thesis statement that tells the audience what is being argued. When the decision is not stated, evidence selection becomes unfocused and slide structure tends to drift into descriptive reporting.

4.3. Prioritisation and Trade-offs

Framework stacking without prioritisation is widespread, particularly in Task 1. Students often populate PEST, Five Forces and SWOT with many plausible points yet treat them as equal-weight items. The consequence is an integration failure: without ranked drivers there is no argumentative spine and the audience cannot see what matters most.

The absence of trade-offs is especially revealing. Trade-offs make constraints explicit and demonstrate that strategy involves choosing one path at the expense of another. Many decks describe competition, substitutes and opportunities yet do not state what the institution or brand should stop doing, de-emphasise or accept as cost. Without trade-offs, recommendations become generic because they do not reflect a committed choice.

Task 2 shows a comparable pattern. Students may list multiple segments by age, city tier, income or psychographics but stop short of applying targeting criteria and making trade-offs. When targeting is not framed as a choice, positioning becomes a set of adjectives rather than a defended strategy.

4.4. Stakeholders and Scope

In Task 1, stakeholder definition and scope drift often undermines Five Forces and SWOT reasoning. Decks may shift between industry-level claims, institution-level positioning and programme-level differentiation without explicitly declaring the unit of competition. The implied ‘customer’ can shift between students, parents, employers and regulators. When the strategic object changes, the meaning of buyers, suppliers and substitutes changes and planning coherence weakens.

Scope drift also weakens expression because the audience stance becomes unstable. A persuasive deck implicitly answers who the decision-maker is and what decision they control. If the deck alternates between multiple stakeholder perspectives without signalling, the argument becomes harder to follow and recommendations become harder to evaluate.

4.5. Segment Logic and Positioning

In Task 2, segmentation is often treated as classification rather than selection. Students may describe multiple segments and attach metric-like statements yet explicit targeting criteria are frequently absent. Without criteria such as accessibility, willingness to pay, competitive intensity and fit, the choice of a target segment remains under-justified. Positioning statements then become replaceable and the deck relies on descriptors rather than defended strategic claims.

If data does not support a targeting decision, it cannot support positioning. Integration requires a chain from segment evidence to targeting criteria to positioning statement and then to channel and content implications.

4.6. Competitive Framing

Competitors are often listed but the competitive frame is not specified. A stable competitive frame requires a rule of comparison such as segment overlap, price band, channel overlap or usage occasion.

Without such a frame, competitor references become impressionistic and differentiation claims cannot be tested.

Some decks attempt perceptual maps or two-axis comparisons. These can strengthen persuasion when they are tied to explicit criteria and followed by a decision implication. When the map is not interpreted and when it lacks definitions, it becomes illustrative rather than evidential.

4.7. Actionability and Metrics

The final integration checkpoint is executability. Many decks end with directionally sensible suggestions but not with an execution package. Executable recommendations specify action, channel, frequency, owner, timeline, KPIs and at least one assumption or risk. When these elements are missing, recommendations remain non-operational.

Evidence weakness contributes directly to this problem. If metrics are not persuasive, they cannot support KPI selection, timeline design or success criteria. Conversely, when evidence is transparent and warrants are explicit, actionability improves because recommendations can be tied to measurable outcomes and monitored over time.

A related presentation-level issue is that English is often used mainly for labels rather than for decision-facing moves such as the executive summary and recommendation package. Dense text, unlabelled visuals and missing implication lines can further obscure the claim–evidence–warrant chain, making data harder to audit and less persuasive.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

The findings suggest that improving student performance in bilingual digital marketing tasks is less a matter of introducing additional frameworks or increasing the volume of metrics and more a matter of establishing routines that make evidence persuasive and that translate analysis into defended decisions and executable plans. In particular, teaching and assessment should foreground the claim–evidence–warrant chain and treat it as a non-negotiable standard for slide-based strategic communication.

One practical intervention is to institutionalise an “evidence card” requirement for each major claim. Rather than allowing metrics to appear as isolated numbers, students can be required to specify the claim, the supporting evidence, the source and date, the definition of the metric and a one-sentence warrant beginning with “This supports the claim because...”. This device shifts assessment from the presence of data to the quality of reasoning and it helps students make explicit the inferential step that often remains implicit.

A second intervention is to make decision framing and prioritisation explicit checkpoints. Early in the deck, students can be required to include a one-slide decision statement specifying the recommended move, the target audience, the rationale and a success indicator within a defined time window. Following the diagnostic frameworks, students can be required to present a ranked Top-3 set of drivers, articulate at least one trade-off and state a clear implication. For Task 1, this can be strengthened by requiring a stakeholder map and a unit-of-competition declaration before applying Five Forces so that the analytical object and audience remain stable throughout the deck. For STP tasks, a parallel requirement is to state explicit targeting criteria and trade-offs before presenting positioning claims, ensuring that segmentation leads to a defensible choice rather than a descriptive taxonomy.

Finally, assessment criteria should enforce executability. Recommendations should be evaluated as implementation packages that specify the action, channel, cadence, owner, timeline and KPIs, together with at least one risk or assumption. A related rule is to require a stable competitive frame whenever competitors are named, such as an explicit basis of comparison (segment overlap, price

band, channel overlap or usage occasion). Collectively, these measures align with constructive alignment and formative feedback principles because they convert quality expectations into visible and assessable criteria and they provide students with clear revision targets [20], [21].

6. LIMITATIONS

This study relies on slide decks as primary artefacts. Artefact analysis captures expressed reasoning and communication choices but it cannot fully reveal behind-the-scenes decision processes or how students selected evidence. Many quantitative statements in decks functioned as rhetorical resources rather than verifiable facts so the analysis treats them as evidence practices rather than external truths. Future work could triangulate artefacts with short reflective notes explaining decision framing, data sourcing and warranting choices.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper explains why data often does not persuade in bilingual digital marketing tasks. Students can populate frameworks and include metric-like statements yet evidence frequently lacks transparency and warrants. These evidence–argument gaps then disrupt planning–expression integration at later checkpoints: decisions are not stated, drivers are not prioritised, stakeholders and scope drift, segments are described without targeting logic, competitive frames remain unstable and recommendations remain non-operational. The findings suggest that instruction should focus less on adding analytic tools and more on ensuring that evidence functions as evidence. Low-burden gates such as decision statements, evidence cards, warrant sentences and executability requirements can strengthen integration and make bilingual digital marketing tasks more persuasive and more implementable.

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