

Social Media and Higher Education Institute Recruitment

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Abstract—

Communication medium has changed dramatically in the past decade after the emergence of social media. . Not only it became top priority for business houses now a day but other organizations including education institutes are using social media to connect with students. With approximately 462 million internet users and over 241 million active Facebook users; Internet penetration, Smartphone's, youth exposure are major factors which are responsible for high growth rate of internet and social website users. Decision makers are consistently trying to identify ways through which firms can make use of social media applications such as Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter etc. It is a place where people discuss politics, products, cricket, music & movies, fashion, science & Technology and many other issues. This new media has led to a paradigm shift in marketing practices of many companies from a traditional brand or product-driven approach to a contemporary customer-driven approach. Social Media and its technology are consumer-driven as it can directly communicate with consumers for their product and services. Moreover, this new form of media is often perceived more trustworthy source rather than sponsored content transmitted thru the traditional media of the promotion mix. Though organizations cannot control the direction of information disseminated through social media yet social media is being widely used by almost all the companies, in spite of their size or structure. Consumers get instant response and feel more attached with the organization.

Considering all these benefits educational institutes and universities are now using social media to reach its perspective clients i.e. students, in order to improve recruitments. Social media sites are generally accessed by youth of specific demographic profile. There is big difference in how and why people use social networking sites. In addition, how much is the involvement and continuation of traditional marketing practices required in social media marketing.

Unfortunately, universities/institutes using these technologies often fail to understand the unique opportunities and challenges that accompany the adoption of social media. In this paper, an effort has been made on conceptual approach in identifying issues and challenges in identifying role of social media in higher education and to identify factors that affect the selection of higher educational institutes and role of social media in reaching to the perspective students. The data will be analyzed using statistical techniques like factor or confirmatory factor analysis with reliability and validation checks.

Keywords— Social media, higher education, factor analysis, reliability, validity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media with quickness and ease to access has given people more power to communicate with peers [1]. People like to connect and share their experiences with people having common interests and desires. People also like to use social media for word-of-mouths communication when they are attached with any product or service. In this way, higher education institute's admission departments have found a new way of recruiting students in order meeting the financial goals of their institutions. Social media is emerging as a tool to reach perspective students in meeting enrolment goals of the institutes. Earlier, the student recruitment process was using strategies such as college fetes, mailings, forms and media advertising. In recent years, social media emergence has played an important role in formulating strategies for admissions and recruitment process.

Research studies have shown that social media is now commonly used among prospective college students during the college-choice process. In a survey conducted in 2013 on 11,000 high school seniors entering college, 72.8% searched for colleges using social media and 75% of them used social media as a source of information in deciding college to get enrol. Among those surveyed, with reported usage rate of approximately 90%, Facebook was most popular [2]. According to the another study, 80 percent of the students spend significant amount of time on SNS regularly and 20 percent of the students do not spend any time on SNS [3]. Both of the studies show high usage percentage of social media sites by college students and also use these sites in selection of institutes. These facts offer a scope and potential for admission offices to explore and tap this phenomenon to approach prospective students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media technology has emerged as communication phenomenon that has changed the way people communicate with each another. Social Media relates to a self-generated, authentic conversation between people about a particular subject of mutual interest, built on thoughts & experience of participants [4]. The idea behind online social media was developed in 2002 with the introduction of Friendster, which provided a platform for users to form common bonds with other users & to encourage communication. Since then an innumerable list of such platform were introduced and dominant among them been Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, Wikipedia, YouTube etc. Though each offers a unique niche for its registered members, yet all has the common intention to develop social networks among users [5].

The year of 2006 was significant and breakthrough year for social media. At that point, then popular early applications such as Wikipedia & MySpace registered a significant no of users and now popular Facebook & YouTube had been introduced. Earlier studies also emphasizes that individuals can socially capitalize through social media and may take any form such as financial loans, employment opportunities or finding friend or life partner etc [6]. Social media also offers business opportunity and offer a business model free of cost. The internet and social media in particular has traditionally being free for the end users. The social media provided two way communications in digital environment to create and maintain a community of relationships. The last decade has revolutionized the way people communicate. The success in social media lies in to gather significant number of users & to make the content interesting and lively [7].

Although there are number of social media channels working worldwide but not all these had tasted the same success rate. In India too, there is primarily dominance of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube (based on no. of registered users) [7], hence this research work primarily considers services & opportunities offered by these channels.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA AND RECRUITMENT

The notion that all products & services need to have the benefit of their presence communicated to the marketplace in order to generate revenue for the creator & the role of marketing in development of business is there. The way it is being executed is radically changed due to contributions made by satellite communication & hi-tech scientific devices. The services offered by traditional media such as television, newspaper, radio & magazines are uni-directional in nature whereas social media offer a platform that allows consumers to communicate back to the marketer [8].

Social media offers an invaluable opportunity to reach sections of the target audience, particularly the youth. Social media networking is an Internet phenomenon. There are approximately 462 million (Jan 2017) Internet users in India of which 240 million are using Facebook [9, 10]. India has the second highest internet user after China.

This popularity and use of social media has become an important avenue for admissions department. The popularity of social media put concern that has financial repercussions for higher education institutions in the college-choice process and the viability of social media as an admissions tool. The mishandling of social media for the said purpose would be a significant for institutional funding and efforts. However, despite the abundance of available data regarding the popularity of social media in this context, there is little research on social media's role and value as an interactive bridge between admissions offices and prospective students.

A. Issues in Use of Social Media

Despite numerous advantages of Marketing over social media, not all the campaigns over social media could get the desired success rate. The primary disadvantage of social networking is that most people do not

know how to network effectively. Active social media penetration in India is just 14% (Jan 2017), which is well below the global average of 37% [102]. Research reports also find that there is a drop in penetration across mature markets [11]. Social networking sites are the source of almost inexhaustible views of clients and situations, and the challenge is to control this information in an appropriate manner and in a meaningful way to bring real benefits for them [12]. Social networks can help spread good news fast; it can also spread bad news just as quickly. Moreover, if customers want to vent their anger on any product or service, they can use social network account [18]. Conversations through social media cannot be directly controlled by administrators but ignoring the realities of the impact of information transmitted through these forums on consumer behavior is tantamount.

Due to the viral nature of the internet, a single mistake in some cases has shown to result in devastating consequences for organizations. For social media marketing to be beneficial for both the consumer and the organizations, it should be innovative.

There are other issues such as cyber crimes, viruses, site hacking etc. related with internet platform. As per survey reports 72 percent of Indian businesses have been exposed to malware, spam and phishing in the year of 2013 and of these, nearly 37 percent have also lost critical information and revenue due to these incidents. 40% of social networking users have been sent malware such as worms via social networking two thirds of the respondents say they have been spammed via social networking sites. 43% have been on the receiving end of phishing attacks [13].

IV. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH PLAN

India is presently second most online connected country in the world. In the present scenario higher education institutes such as colleges and Universities are finding it tough to enrol and recruit students. Worldwide studies show the growing perspective of use of social media by students in making choice for selection of higher education institutes. Most of the studies has been conducted in the United States and other developed countries such as Canada, Australia and other European nations wherein it was found the use of Social Media Tools to engage students in education, recruitment activities etc. Indian higher education institutes are also making their presence felt over social media. But a very little work has been done in India on role of social media. Despite the widespread use of SMT, there is little known about the benefits of its use in higher educational institutes and for specific purposes (e.g., marketing, recruitment, student engagement etc.). It is also need to examine how higher education institutions are incorporating the use of SMT and in particular, to what extent they are using it to connect with students for their admission and selection of institute. There is also little research on role of social media's in reaching perspective students by admissions offices. There is also lack of empirical literature on use of social media as a recruitment tool. Most of the available literature only describes how social media has been used by admissions offices without empirically studying the processes and outcomes in such initiatives. Many studies found that majority of the perspective students are using Facebook and almost all college admissions offices are making their presence felt over Facebook. Therefore, the use of Facebook in student recruitment is an area that needs further investigation. That isn't to say that universities aren't using other sites. YouTube is particularly popular among universities and a search of the site retrieves a seemingly endless list of groups affiliated with various universities. However, there is little evidence in the literature that universities are systematically using YouTube as a recruitment tool. Similarly, there is no literature that discusses the use of Google+ in college admissions, though the small user base of that service makes it unlikely that it would be useful for recruiting college students in present scenario. Such SMTs can also be used in further research attempts.

It is proposed to follow a qualitative approach to examine the process of using social media to interact with prospective students (such as enrolment figures, choice of media etc.). It would help in gathering the insights from users (i.e. perspective students) regarding the usefulness of social media in the admissions process. Such qualitative data can make way for an assessment of social media initiatives that can be influenced by confounding variables. Various channel preferences of the perspective students can be analysed to have an idea about their surfing patterns. Variables like campus recruitment, information dissemination and education assistance can be explored and their relationship with family profile of respondents can be studied.

This study can fill gaps in the literature by providing the qualitative, empirical study of social networking sites in this context and it can also provide admission offices with new avenues in the use of social media in the student recruitment process.

V. FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The internet has also become the most common tool that consumers use to find information on products and services consumers intend to buy. Nowadays, for any more or less important purchase, consumers learn about the brand, product or service, and compare it with the equivalent of competing brands before purchasing it. Besides opinions of friends and family, people use the internet as first source of information when making a major purchase decision. Whether they like it or not, people are holding conversations on the internet about the products and services they have used, sharing both good and bad experiences and feedbacks.

Social media has helped organizations to create their own communities of fans, customers or prospects and it is a good way to get consumers to talk about themselves. These conversations are interactive, two-way and not controlled as well, reflecting true image of organization, brand, product or service.

Due to this very nature of social media, Universities and higher educational institutes are also making their presence on social media to reach prospective students and students are also using social media tools in searching for institutes for admission. Many studies highlight the use of social media in selection of institute by students and Facebook is mostly used tool for such type of selections. However lack of research on impact of social media tools and other factors affecting the choice of institute need to be explored. This study will help higher education institutes to be more effective in reaching prospective students and strategize their campaign over social media.

It is also found that marketing on social networking sites is not a substitute for traditional marketing rather it should be treated as an additional channel with unique characteristics that can complement other marketing activities.

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