Omar SALEM
Doctoral school of Management and Business, University of Debrecen, Hungary

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Review
Article

Keywords
Marketing;
Social media;
Higher education institutions;
Universities;

JEL Classification
M31

Abstract

The purpose of the study is to analyze social media marketing in higher education institutions and determine the tools and strategies that are used by universities to promote their brands and how social media marketing affects strengthening the competitive advantage of higher education institutions. The researcher followed a systematic review process that aims to summarize, identify, and evaluate all related researches about social media marketing in higher education institutions. As the study indicates, Social media platforms are the most important channels to promote advertising campaigns and communicate with current and prospective students.

INTRODUCTION

The enormous growth of technological instruments has shifted the concerns of enterprises from traditional methods to technological ways, Higher education institutions are one of the sectors influenced by the technological revolution.

The effect of social media networks on daily life has become exceptionally crucial. Hence, using platforms of social media is significantly vital for the business sector as a whole for attracting customers' purposes (Jayasuriya, Azam, Khatibi, Atan, & Dharmaratne, 2018). From the client's point of view, the more trusted sources for them are social media networks compared with traditional tools such as radio, newspapers, and televisions (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schafer, 2012). As a result, according to the report of Digital, social and mobiles (2019), the number of 3.484 billion people are active social media users worldwide; it indicates that almost 45% of the population around the world use social media platforms profusely (We Are Social, 2019). Therefore, Social media networks could work as an efficient supporter to strengthen the relationships between customers and institutions. The most preferable way is to attract followers by forming pages and groups on social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeflang, 2012).

Social media networks have changed the interaction path between the customers and the institutions as every person has a platform to engage with others and give feedback easily because the access is better to goods and services information and the final decision of purchase (Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012). So in the knowledge era, Public and Private higher education institutions are increasingly dealing with social networks like Twitter and Facebook in order to affect communication with potential clients. In addition, admission offices and marketing departments of universities are based on social media platforms to engage with potential students by setting promotions campaigns (Merrill, 2011).

The aim of this research is to analyze the social media marketing in higher education institutions by applying a systematic literature review of the field. Also, the paper focuses on determining the tools and strategies used by universities to promote their brands and how social media marketing affects strengthening the competitive advantage of higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to develop public or semi-public profiles, communicate with a list of users with whom they share a connection, and view those connections and those made by others in the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). Besides, Safko & Brake (2009) defined social media as practices, activities, and behaviors among societies of people who collect online to participate in information, opinions, and knowledge using conversational media (Çiçek & Erdogmus, 2012).

Over the previous short period, social media networks have been used for public and private business purposes in two main methods. The first and most famous way is to engage and communicate with parties in an external environment like vendors, students (customers) and other parties, to achieve this goal, business institutions support pages and groups of social media on common platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Youtube. The second method is not common, as the first method, it is internal communication and engagement within the corporations (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

During the past years, social media networks have grasped the attention of universities, and previous studies have described that a large number of public and private universities and colleges are using significantly social media platforms (Merrill, 2011; Jan, & Ammari, 2016; Hossain, & Sakib, 2016; Nazeer, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The researcher followed a systematic review process that aims to summarize, identify and evaluate all related researches about social media marketing in higher education institutions. The study gave significant attention to the strategies used by higher education institutions according to the literature review.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

As for the higher education institutions sector, it is considered one of the most important sectors in developed countries because of its great contributions to the development process.

The researcher used the systematic review analysis to summarize, identify and assess researches related to this research.

Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, and Witty (2010) studied a comparison between faculty members and students and to what extent each part uses the Facebook platform, the results indicate that students are more likely to use Facebook than members of the faculty. On the other hand, the

members of the faculty prefer using some traditional instruments, such as email. It can be observed that the faculty members don't use Facebook enough, therefore it leads to less engagement with students on social media networks. According to the study of Vrontis Nemar, Ouwaida, and Shams (2018), they found that international students still prefer to engage with traditional resources in the search stage to find information, apart from social media platforms and other electronic ways.

TYPE OF CONTENT

According to Hossain and Sakib (2016), the type of the content of social media is relevant to the brand, then they have a high positive effect on the university brand loyalty of students. Moreover, popular content seems to be an effective type of brand loyalty of university students. Also, the study of Demirer (2017) focused on the analysis of the content of Facebook posts, the results showed that the best universities in Turkey are based on content which includes text, pictures, and link content type. Furthermore, the content agility, content type, content context, type of posting, and daily posts significantly influence the number of shares, comments, and likes that are brand posts' popularity indicators. Peruta and Shields (2018) research supports the previous statement by describing the formats and topics of 5932 Facebook posts from top United States' higher education institutions. Pringle and Fritz (2019) revealed that all types of content shared on social media platforms, if the brand promises were not as expected, would be used against the institution. Chauhan and Pillai (2013) described that the content agility and content type have a significant effect on comments and likes figures which are considered as manifest variables for the engagement of customers. On the other hand, the interaction of two-way indicated that content context and content type have a positive influence on likes and comments numbers. Social Media Platforms used by Higher education institutions

The study of Merrill (2011) and Calitz and Cullen (2012) described the crucial role of social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, Linked In and Youtube, especially Facebook as the preferred communication tool (together with Twitter) by two-third of all respondents. In addition, the Youtube platform plays an important role in outreaching the respondents by just under having them. These results lead to the facts that the essential networks to set promotional campaigns are Facebook and Twitter, and also Youtube for those who prefer watching videos. Paladan (2018) analyzed the common social media networks utilized by the top 25 universities and college in Africa and Asia, and found that the famous social media platforms are used by the top higher education institutions in Asia and Africa, such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, and Linked In. Besides, the aim of using networks of social media for colleges and universities is to promote their undergraduate and postgraduate programs and provide information about all scientific events and other. Nevzat, Amca, Tanova, and Amca (2016) stated in their research entitled "role of social media community in strengthening trust and loyalty for a university" that to perceive the strength of the community of Facebook, it must be related to the identification with the brand and the community of higher education institution which could affect loyalty and trust of the community. Using social media platforms is a significantly positive impact on developing a brand, loyalty, identity, and trust of university and students.

Clark, Fine, and Scheuer (2017) argued in their research about how the engagement of social media influences the quality of the relationship between the university and one of its key stakeholder groups, students. Besides, researchers noticed that the quality of the relationship between university and students is clearly high in the case of students that are following the university on platforms of social media. Study of Rutter, Roper, and Lettice (2016) and of Zickar, Ron, and Arnold (2018) confirmed the positive role of social media networks on the recruitment performance. A study applied in Poland universities by Buchnowska and Wozniak (2013) aimed to explore the factors pinpointing the necessity of undertaking by higher education institutions of attempts to communicate with the external environment by using networks of social media. The study had revealed that Polish universities acknowledge the significance of taking advantage of social media in developing relations with internal and external communities. The study of Linvill, McGee, and Hicks (2012) concentrates on Twitter using the content analysis method of 113 Colleges and Universities; it revealed that the higher education institutions consider the Twitter platform as institutional news feed to the public.

Brech, Messer, Schee, Rauschnabel, and Ivens (2017), in their study, revealed that the reputation and size of University are directly the big players in attracting fans to the Facebook brand page; it means more fans on Facebook pages in case the reputation of University is high.

The exposure to advertisements in Social media platforms affect the attitude and behavior of users, a study revealed that men are more affected than women (Nazeer, 2017). Constantinides and Stagno (2012) illustrated that social media is a factor affecting students' choice within several factors affecting students' choice as well. Rinaldo, Laverie, Tapp, and Humphrey (2013) and Kimmons, Veletsianos, and Woodward (2016) emphasized the

importance of Twitter in the relationship between the student and the professor, particularly to gain benefit.

OTHER INFLUENCERS

The websites of the higher education institutions have a positive effect on the decision making of students, then significantly influence students' choice of a specific university (Jan & Ammari, 2016(.

In the new digital era, the higher education institutions focus more on using social media platforms for marketing and promotion purposes, using their official websites is not as effective as social media, the percentage indicates that in Romania twelve Universities have no websites, and three have a website but it is not active (Alexa, Alexa, & Stoica, 2012). There are no many studies illustrating the role of the University's website, and it is possible to consider that the importance of website content is not the same as of social media networks.

Greenwood (2012) showed the integration between the website of a University and its social media networks, he described that this integration and cooperation is crucial, particularly regarding Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.

Another discovered factor affecting social media marketing is the role of Alumni; prospective students tend to look at the reviews of alumni about the University, these reviews are considered as a factor affecting students' choice (Galan, Lawley, & Clements, 2015). Moreover, social media platforms are mostly new trends, they seem to like youth media, so large proportions of youth males and females are spending lots of hours chatting and displaying on social media networks, therefore they are highly expected to be exposed to the advertisements of higher education institutions (Mazurek, Korzyński, & Górska, 2019; Lawson, Kleinholz, & Bodle, 2011).

Discussion

The accelerated growth of businesses in terms of the global economy and globalization has led the world to be more competitive. The Education sector, particularly higher education institutions, is one of the sides that got affected by this growth. This paper illustrated the impact of social media networks on higher education institutions regarding how Universities use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and their websites.

It is possible to observe that using social media platforms is the most crucial instrument to attract prospective students as well as communicate with and keep current students. Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube are common platforms used by Universities to communicate with students and to promote their programs; studies such as Merrill (2011), Calitz and Cullen (2012), Paladan (2018), Nevzat et al. (2016), Clark et al. (2017), Rutter et al. (2016), and Buchnowska and Wozniak (2013) described the importance of social media in engagement with students, so that they can be considered as channels.

On the other hand, as for the type of content, social media allows Universities to write varied content, this content may be in the forms of posts, images, twits (Twitter); each content type has its own reachable strategy set by a specific network. The studies of Hossain and Sakib (2016), Demirer (2017), Peruta and Shields (2018), and Chauhan and Pillai (2013) approved that the content type affects the student's convictions about the offers and services of higher education institutions.

Another point is that the Universities' websites are considered also as an instrument to show their content (programs and offers) to prospective and current students; however, they represent a traditional way, whose impact is not the same as social media platforms' effect. In addition, Alumni are an effective factor influencing students' choice. Galan et al. (2015) indicated that the reviews of alumni are an important joint point.

CONCLUSIONS

Because of the technological changes that happened in the previous years, social media has been becoming one of the best instruments and strategies for marketing businesses. This paper emphasizes the importance of social media platforms in terms of engaging with current students and prospective students; communicating with students through social media networks enhances the relationships between university and students. It is possible to say that students feel their value when university communicates them through social media that reflects the good image to prospective students. On the other hand, using the websites of the Universities is not as effective as social media; they are considered a traditional way, but they could be linked with social media networks. Moreover, it is important to mention that Alumni play an important role in the process of attracting new students.

Limitations of the paper: the paper describes how higher education institutions use social media and which benefits could be gained. However, it did not take into consideration the differences of behaviors in different regions where the universities are located.

REFERENCES

[1] Alexa, E., Alexa, M., & Stoica, C. (2012). The Use of Online Marketing and Social Media in Higher Education Institutions in Romania. Journal of Marketing Research & Case Studies, 1-9.

[2] Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2008). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 210-230.

[3] Brech, F., Messer, U., Schee, B., Rauschnabel, Ph., & Ivens, B. (2017). Engaging fans and the community in social media: interaction with institutions of higher education on Facebook. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 27(1), 112-130.

[4] Bruhn, M., Schoenmueller, V., & Schafer, D. (2012). Are social media replacing traditional media in terms of brand equity creation? Management Research Review, 35(9), 770-790.

[5] Buchnowska, D., & Woźniak, M. (2013). The role and use of social media by universities - ranking of universities in social media. Problemy konwergencji mediów, 319-330.

[6] Calitz, A., & Cullen, M. (2012). The Use of Social Media in Business School Marketing. International Business Conference (IBC) 2012.

[7] Chauhan, K., & Pillai, A. (2013). Role of content strategy in social media brand communities: a case of higher education institutes in India. Journal of Product & Brand Management, 22(1), 40-51.

[8] Çiçek, M., & Erdogmus, I. (2012). The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty. Social and Behavioral Sciences, (58), 1353-1360.

[9] Clark, M., Fine, M., & Scheuer, C. (2017). Relationship quality in higher education marketing: the role of social media engagement. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 27(1), 40-58.

[10] Constantinides, E., & Stagno, M. (2012). Higher Education Marketing: A Study on the Impact of Social Media on Study Selection and University Choice. The International Journal of Technology and Education Marketing (IJTEM), 2(1), 41-58.

[11] De Vries, L., Gensler, S., & Leeflang, P. (2012). Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26, 83-91.

[12] Demirer, D. (2017). The Role of Content Strategy in Social Media on Brand Post's Popularity: a Case of Higher Education Institutions in Turkey. European Journal of Social Sciences Education and Research, 11(2), 134-143

[13] Galan, M., Lawley, M., & Clements, M. (2015). Social media's use in postgraduate students' decision-making journey: an exploratory study. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 25(2), 287-312.

[14] Greenwood, G. (2012). Examining the Presence of Social Media on University Web Sites. Journal of college admission, 25-28.

[15] Hossain, S., & Sakib, M. D. (2016). The Impact of Social Media Marketing on University Students' Brand Loyalty. International Journal of Marketing and Business Communication, 5(3), 1-7.

[16] Jan, M., & Ammari, D. (2016). Advertising online by educational institutions and students' reaction: a study of Malaysian Universities. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 26(2), 168-180.

[17] Jayasuriya, N., Azam, F., Khatibi, A., Atan, H., & Dharmaratne, I. (2018). The Role of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity-A Literature Review. Global Journal of Management and Business Research, 18(5), 31-39.

[18] Kimmons, R., Veletsianos, G., & Woodward, S. (2016). Institutional uses of Twitter in U.S. Higher Education. Innovative Higher Education, 42, 97-111.

[19] Lawson, T., Kleinholz, Sh., and Bodle, J. (2011). Using Facebook to Connect Alumni, Current Students, and Faculty: A How-to Guide. Teaching of Psychology, 38(4), 265-268.

[20] Leonardi, P. M., Huysman, M., & Steinfield, C. (2013) Enterprise Social Media: Definition, History, and Prospects for the Study of Social Technologies in Organizations. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 19(1), 1-19.

[21] Linvill, D., McGee, S., & Hicks, L. (2012). Colleges' and universities' use of Twitter: A content analysis. Public Relations Review, 38, 636-638.

[22] Mazurek, G., Korzyński, P., & Górska, A. (2019). Social Media in the Marketing of Higher Education Institutions in Poland: Preliminary Empirical Studies. Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review, 7(1)117-133.

[23] Merrill, N. (2011). Social media for social research: applications for higher education communication. Higher Education Administration with Social Media (Cutting-Edge Technologies in Higher Education), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2,25-48.

[24] Nazeer, J. (2017). Impact of Social Media Advertisements on University Students. Arts and Social Sciences Journal, 8(4), 1-6.

[25] Nevzat, R., Amca, Y., Tanova, C., & Amca, H. (2016). Role of social media community in

strengthening trust and loyalty for a university". Computers in Human Behavior, 65, 550-559.

[26] Paladan, N. (2018). Higher Education Institutions Embracing Digital & Social Media Marketing: A Case of Top 25 Universities in Asia & Africa. AIMI Journals (Marketing and Branding Research), 5, 159-167.

[27] Peruta, A., & Shields, A. (2018). Marketing your university on social media: a content analysis of Facebook post types and formats. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 28(3), 1-17.

[28] Pringle, J., & Fritz, S. (2019). The university brand and social media: using data analytics to assess brand authenticity. Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, 29(1), 19-44.

[29] Rinaldo, Sh., Laverie, D., Tapp, S., & Humphrey, W. (2013). The Benefits of Social Media in Marketing Education: Evaluating Twitter as a Form of Cognitive Flexibility Hypertext. Journal for Advancement of Marketing Education, 21(1), 16-26.

[30] Roblyer, M., McDaniel, M., Webb, M., Herman, J., & Witty, J. (2010). Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites. Internet and Higher Education, 13, 134-140.

[31] Rutter, R., Roper, S., & Lettice, F. (2016). Social media interaction, the university brand and recruitment performance. Journal of Business Research, 69(8), 3096-3104.

[32] Safko, L., & Brake, D. K. (2009). The Social Media Bible. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

[33] Vrontis, D., Nemar, S., Ouwaida, A., & Shams, S. (2018). The impact of social media on international student recruitment: the case of Lebanon. Journal of International Education in Business, 11(1), 79-103.

[34] Wang, X., Yu, Ch., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social Media Peer Communication and Impacts on Purchase Intentions: A Consumer Socialization Framework. Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26, 198-208.

[35] We Are Social (2019). Digital Yearbook https://wearesocial.com/blog/2019/01/digital-2019-global-internet-use-accelerates, Retrieved Jan 30, 2019.

[36] Zickar, M., Ron, T., & Arnold, Ch. (2018). Using Facebook Pages to Connect With Students, Faculty, Alumni, and Friends: An Empirical Analysis. Teaching of Psychology, 45(4), 358-362.