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- Garg, Sambhav (2011): "Business Ethics" Paper presented at the Annual International Conference for the All India Management Association, New Delhi, India, 19-22 June.

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- Kumar S. (2011): "Customer Value: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Customers," Thesis, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra.

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SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY ON KARUNYA UNIVERSITY'S SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Social Media is entering college campuses not just as a networking tool for student but also as a marketing and academic tool for college administrators. (Himmelsbach, 2009). The ever growing technology of internet connectivity and the nature of the targeted audiences make sure that this move by the universities has a greater outcome than any other marketing medium. But as adoption of this technology by colleges has been slow and given the lack of generality in practice when it comes to social media, educational sector lags behind in reaping the benefits of adopting efficient social media marketing. In addition to marketing to prospects, colleges also need to connect positively with the students and alumni of their institution. Except for a few good social media successes across the globe, universities and colleges seem to be having lacklustre performances. In this light, this paper will assess the possibilities that Social Media offers Universities through the example of Karunya University and its social media promotion. The paper will also contain suggestions on how Karunya can carry out better Higher education marketing through social media.

KEYWORDS

Social Media Marketing, Higher Education Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education market is changing with new educational institutions on the rise and competition among existing deep rooted universities and colleges growing. The 656 recognized universities in the country (University Grants Commission, 2013) have to constantly compete to recruit new students into their various programs every year. With this in mind it is no more enough to rely on public knowledge about the college nor on some form of traditional advertisement, be it print, outdoors or any other traditional form of marketing a college or university to get a positive word out to the general public and thus generate enough prospects for successful commencement of next academic year. Added to this, well established colleges and universities such as Karunya University (the private institution under study for this paper) which have years behind them and a strong backing in the form of infrastructure, curriculum and Academicians face the challenge of marketing to their target audiences who extend beyond larger geographical boundaries. This translates into much effort that is to be enlisted in overcoming boundaries and covering vast audiences who have varying perspectives and needs when it comes to forming a consideration pool of prospective universities of their choice.

In light of this, the latest technology as always comes in to save the day in the form of social media. There are live examples of how recruitment of students for various programs have been positively enhanced to provide better experience for the students while providing better returns on investment for the institutions. (Nora Ganim Barnes & Mattson, 2008)

This paper is designed to provide a framework for promotion of Universities (Karunya University in particular) to the target audiences who include students, alumni and prospects through various content such as videos, photos, written content, etc. propagated through social media sites.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Harnessing a powerful tool such as the social media by educational institutions has been very slow. (Silverman, 2012) This is especially so in the case of Indian Institutions. As a part of India's Educational institution fraternity, Karunya University has kept in step with the rest in adopting social media as part of maintaining an online presence. It is though not reached its full potential and its social media plans need to match the growth the university has seen in recent years. The problem is for Karunya University to understand the scope of social media that can aid in its quest to increase potential for better relations with parents, alumni, enrolled students and potential enrollers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is limited to Karunya university's promotional ambitions that target prospects, students and alumni. The study was conducted with participants from and within India. The scope of the study can extend to a suggestion to other similar institutions with similar functioning and target audiences.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the primary objectives that this study is designed to fulfill

1. To assess the marketing potential that social media offers Karunya University.
2. To assess marketing measures already employed by Karunya University through social media.

By delivering upon the above mentioned objectives, we aim to accomplish the following secondary objective

1. bring out measures that can contribute successfully to Karunya University's social media campaigns.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is limited to Karunya university's promotional ambitions that target students, alumni and prospects of Karunya University. A key member of the target audience namely parents are not brought under this study though they are the major decision makers in the process of student enrollment. Also the discussions in this paper are suggestions only. The result of implementation of these suggestions and the success of such an implementation will be subject to content posted and various other factors that affect social media content reach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

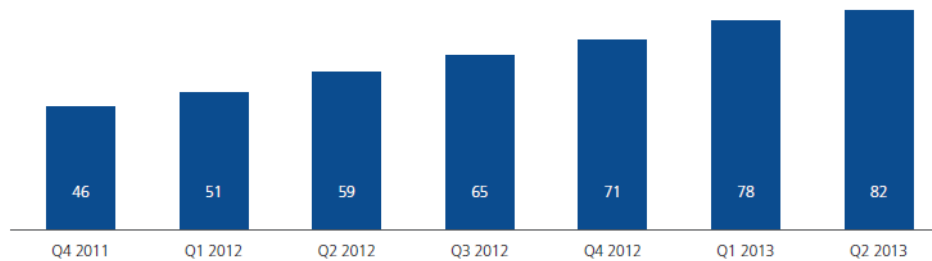
There have been similar studies across the globe about the usage of social media marketing for higher educational institutions. One such is a Senior Honours Thesis titled 'The effectiveness of social Media marketing in Higher Education: State University of New York, the College of Brockport' by Megan Mahaney. In this thesis, Mahaney talks about how the college at Brockport planned its marketing strategy and implemented it. She analyses the impact of the strategy. The thesis shows how the Brockport differentiated itself from the other colleges in the area through its Social media marketing practices. By analysing the implemented social media campaign plans, the following deduction is mentioned in the thesis.

The number of social media followers has shown an increasing trend over the past several years. College Communications launched their Facebook page on December 3rd, 2010 with zero fans. From February 2012 to April 2012, the number of Facebook fans increased from 903 to 1,204, an increase of 300 fans in just

two months. The number of Twitter followers has nearly doubled from 770 in September 2011 to 1,483 in April 2012, demonstrating the growth that College Communications has taken in delivering content via this platform. (Mahaney, 2012)

For the year 2014, Deloitte predicts that social media would be favoured for targeted advertising as its adoption increases owing to surge in mobile usage, higher penetration of Smartphone and a young population. (Social Media: The urge to connect, 2014) All three factors are especially true in the case of India. Facebook India has an ever increasing user base that has increased 54 percent year on year between 2011 and 2012. The lure of social media is heightened due to a high user engagement rate.

FIG. 1: FACEBOOK INDIA ACTIVE MONTHLY USER BASE (in millions)



Source: Deloitte

India is a rather young country with a median age of 24, and 31 percent of population its population is in the 0-14 age group. This population is highly active over social media websites. They form the chunk of their users. They also serve as target audiences for educational institutions. This presents a significant opportunity for these institutions with a platform to attract additional prospects into their recruitment pool.

Some of published literature that provides input of this research include

1. Davis, Deil-Amen, Rios-Aguilar, Gonzalez Canche (2012)-This paper provides a review of existing literature on the use of social media technology in higher education in the United States. For instance, the paper reviews how some admissions offices have begun to use student blogs to showcase current student experiences as a recruitment tool for prospective students (Harris, 2008; Mattson & Barnes, 2009; Rudolph, 2007; Tucciarone, 2009; Wandel, 2008; Violino, 2009). According to this report, institutions hire current students or student volunteers as virtual ambassadors to share their day-to-day lives and answer questions in efforts to introduce and personalize the student experience on campus for potential students.
2. S.B.Thorat, S.B.Kishor and Bharat Meghe(2013)-The authors believes that the social media surely will be the better for marketing of education in India through an investigation of the suitability of 8 P's framework of Marketing to the social media to support such a choice. The authors feel that the use of latest technologies especially social media, in marketing is always desired because of the greater impact on target market that it provides as compared to traditional marketing strategies.
3. Nora Ganim Barn, Eric Mattson(2008)-This study is one of the first statistically significant, longitudinal studies on the usage of social media by college admissions offices. By compared the adoption of social media between 2007 and 2008 by the admissions offices of all the four-year accredited institutions in the United States, the researchers concluded that the perceived importance of social media to the school does translate into monitoring behaviour and that they are gathering critical strategic information by listening to what is being said about their institutions and their competitors in the social media world.
4. Sisira Neti (2011)-This paper provides insight into best social media tools that can be employed to recruit new students into college programs. It also highlights possible areas of concern and divulges information into best practices adopted by the world's and America's top universities. Some of the areas of concern listed are loss of control and time and commitment spent. The paper talks about colleges' loss of control over negative commentary in engagement over social media especially in the comments section of the blog or post. The paper talks about enlisting positive tools that can be resourceful in tactically handling such negative commentary and provide a solution to clear misunderstanding. The paper shares success stories of prominent colleges including Ohio State University. The paper however cautions against over divulgence into social media based promotions without strengthening the official website first.
5. Rahul Chodada (2013)-In this paper titled "Social Media in International Student Recruitment", the author talks about how the students are the centre of activity for higher education institutions, and how an effective communication with prospective students will certainly contribute to resource efficiency. He asserts that the process of decision making for these prospects involves higher utilisation of resources (time and money) and that the process becomes even more complex for prospective international students, who are unlikely to visit a campus before deciding whether to attend. From the students' perspective, social media provides a communication platform built on honest opinions and experiences of students and alumni. The paper also talks about how in this context, social media can present an ideal opportunity where a balance between institutional control of the communication and admissions process and adaption to the changing engagement patterns of prospective students can be maintained.

Apart from the above mentioned papers, other articles and websites also provide suggestions on techniques that can be employed in creating a successful social media presence for the university. For example, in a post named Social Media and Higher Education – Tips for Success and Who's Doing It Right, the author Clayton Dean talks about the social media strategy. He gives the following outline that any university must have for social media

- 1) Overview
 - a) Target Market [define who the target audience is, and any segments of that audience]
 - b) Marketing Goals [increased program awareness? lead flow? website traffic?]
 - c) Current Use of Social Media
- 2) Strategy
 - a) SWOT Analysis
 - b) Social Media Goals
 - c) Social Media Strategies
- 3) Tactics
 - a) Overview of Tactics
 - b) Description of Tactics
- 4) Measurement
 - a) Key Performance Indicators [what are the metrics that will define success or failure]
 - b) Measurement Tools, Metrics
 - c) Analysis Approach
 - d) Communication Process [how often? who will results be communicated to?]
- 5) Implementation
 - a) Resource requirements

- b) Financial considerations
 - c) Timing considerations
 - d) Risks + mitigation
- 6) Conclusion
- a) Summary
 - b) Next steps (Dean, 2013)

These above steps though generic can be put to use by Karunya University and its social media team in increasing its online performance. One of the key points to note is that it is not just important to have a social strategy that governs implementation but to actually have a social media strategy that will also govern measurement of such an implementation. Measurement can be through many ways. Measurement can be done through the use of social media metrics that are inbuilt into the social media sites e.g. Facebook Insights or it can be through tools like Hootsuite, Followerwonk, etc. Measurement can be done on various KPIs. KPIs are Key Performance Indicators. They give a picture of if and how the KPIs are working. These can include various metrics which are quite generic but varied when it comes to purpose of the social media campaign and its target audience. Before analysing the KPIs it is important to understand that the social media is part of the discovery phase of marketing higher education. Hence, it is not accurate to measure the performance of the campaign with number of admissions generated, but with metrics that include,

1. The number of leads generated- how many people have visited your landing page from these social media channels?
2. Fan (follower) count-Number of page likes or followers or subscribers on these channels
3. The content reach- How far has the content reach on the social graph
4. Favour generated- How many likes, mentions, shares, retweets or favorites have your content generated.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The nature of the problem stated necessitated collection of both primary and secondary data. For collection of primary data the target population was identified as current, former and potentially future students of Karunya University. The target population was subdivided into two populations, one of which contained fifty students and alumni of Karunya University and another contained fifty students of colleges and schools who could be potentially future students of Karunya University. Since the recipients of the questionnaire were in geographically different locations, the questionnaire was designed using Google Forms to be answered online. The recipients were sent url links which directed them to the questionnaires and were asked to fill them. The questions were designed to be easy to understand and to answer with more freedom. Secondary data included literature that explains social media marketing and its impact on higher education.

FINDINGS

The inferences mentioned above drawn from the survey conducted among the sample population, leads us to the following findings
Among Karunians,

- Facebook and YouTube membership is high with 98% of the respondents using Facebook.
- Daily activity is highest on Facebook and YouTube. Twitter and Google+ activities are less frequent than YouTube. With very less activity in LinkedIn, LinkedIn, Flickr and Instagram are found to be the least used networking sites
- Consumer opinions seem to be influenced though content found on social media for half of the Karunyan population
- It is important to note that 18% of the Karunians claim that they have never seen content by Karunya online.
- Among those who did claim to see content posted by Karunya, Facebook is most claimed source followed by YouTube.
- While content engagement was satisfactory for most Karunians the motivational effect of the content was denied by many.
- A huge majority felt that Karunya should use social media to promote itself.
- Majority supported online marketing over offline marketing.
- When asked about their participation, response for online events was welcoming while response for offline events was lukewarm. However when asked if they would share content about Karunya online enthusiastic response was got.

Among the Prospects,

- Facebook and YouTube had higher memberships and higher usage frequencies.
- Usage of twitter and Google+ was also considerably frequent.
- 40% of the respondents feel that they would be influenced in their decisions about prospective colleges based on content they found on social media sites. An equal majority neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Majority of the students felt that the content provided by the universities do not reflect the true scenario inside the college.
- A higher percent of people did not come across Karunya University's social media content and only a few people among those who did come across the content found the content to be engaging and even fewer people felt it motivated them in favor of choosing the university
- Among those who came across content, all cited Facebook as their source, YouTube was also mentioned.
- Photos, Videos and campus notifications were named engaging.
- There is an overwhelming support among prospects for Karunya University regarding its usage of social media to promote itself in the future
- Among content that they would wish to see Karunya University promote in the future, photos were highly favoured.
- When asked if content posted by Karunya University will make them favour Karunya University majority of the prospects agreed and also said that their opinion would change if the content comes from the students.

SUGGESTIONS

From the above findings we see that Facebook and YouTube are undeniably the best platforms to promote the university while Twitter must also be used since prospects seem to be fairly active in this social media site as well.

Apart from the content generated to attract prospects, universities need to include content that is aimed at their other target audience segments including alumni and students. It is vital to create a spirit of pride within its alumni and student groups because it not only allows for much collaboration with the students over social medias but also can pave way for student generated content that speaks in favour of the university which will be more helpful to accomplish the social media goals of the university because of the authenticity value attached to such a content. (Bednar, 2013) Universities need to understand the value of these contents and take effective measures to ensure that the students voluntarily become brand ambassadors of the institution. Moreover such an act ensures that the prospects engage in a two way communication with the students and alumni to know more about the university. Although this may mean that negative content is sometimes generated, it is important to refrain from policing too much since some level of negative content increases the authenticity and allows for loyalists to respond and create a vibrant conversation. The best method of handling such negative activity is to respond immediately to complaints and negativity and keep the situation under control. Universities must let the students be honest which would ensure that they stay engaged with them.

Another important area that the universities need to focus on is the need for centralising engagement. This calls for a person to be the "hub" and an organizational structure that works like a wheel. (Social Media Marketing in Education, 2011) This person has to set rules, act as a guide to the social media team and monitor the activities. The spokes of the wheel of the organisational structure are the social media ambassadors in all the specialized areas of the

institution. They will be authorized to engage and post in the online communities as content creators and content managers. Generating activity on social media sites require internal activity before external engagement takes place.

CONCLUSION

Study of previous literature shows high promise of efficient return on investment for educational institutions investing in social media. Also best practices highlighted in these papers have shown just how promising these returns seem. By adopting the suggestions made in this paper, and by investing time and expertise into social media campaigns Karunya University can gain immensely.

However, it is to be noted that the returns are not immediate and sometimes not visible. But with effective and efficient planning and implementation social media campaigns will be the best medium for establishing a brand identity for the institution. Further research could follow implementation of the given suggestions and the live measurement of the returns that such an implementation which in turn could be used to define new and better methods of Karunya University promotion through social media.

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