Adoption of Social Media Marketing Strategies for Higher Education Institutions

Recent evolutions in information technology and new tools for communication have increasingly enabled one-to-many and many-to-one communication using new platforms known as social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn (Kane et al 2014).

These new ways of communicating are allowing businesses to create more intimate and responsive public interactions with an audience that includes current and potential future customers.

They in turn also enable these wider audiences to communicate directly with businesses and with each other in a very public way, and social media-savvy businesses have been increasingly recognising the power of this new medium within their marketing strategies.

This paper proposes that the emergence of social media therefore has a significant and fundamental role as a marketing tool in academia, and to be used to increase brand awareness and attract and retain students.

In recent decades there has been a significant increase in the demand for Higher Education, and the education sector has experienced fundamental shifts to cater for this growth in demand for university places across the world. Subsequently, marketing and branding of universities has gained greater significance (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown 2001) when offering distinction amongst education providers (Kotler & Fox 1995; Bennett & Ali-Choudhury 2009).

Many Universities are already beginning to utilise social media in the marketing of their facilities, courses and the opportunities provided by studying at their establishments (Constantinides & Zinck Stango 2011),

The numbers are impressive, with 1.15B daily Facebook users, 500M daily Twitter users, 500M using Google+ every day (Berstein 2013). Thus the impact of social media on marketing strategies is significant importance to both non-academic and academic organisations as cultural shifts continue to evolve in line with increasing use of social media on a daily basis by the majority of internet users.

Any academic institution that does not recognise and act accordingly to this shift will not be in a position to maximize the capabilities available and compete.

‘Social proof’ in the context of social media discussions are becoming a first line of enquiry for many potential customers where, in the context of academia for example, current and future students may discuss in a public forum their experiences and aspirations. Any University that fails to become part of this dialogue is failing to communicate with its target market and, in the longer term, to attract and recruit new students in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Universities that are involved in social media conversations in a responsive and instant way are thereby increasing trust and creating communities of current and potential customers.

However, as the culture of social media usage continues to evolve, so too must the culture within organisations as to their usage of it. They must be ready to react in a far more
immediate way, as this becomes the ‘new normal’ in terms of speed of interaction. Immediacy is the currency of social media, as organisations interface and communicate with, their potential market.

Additional consideration around the creation of a set of organisational social media standards, policies and governance also becomes necessary, as a mechanism to safeguard organisations and individuals against any potential brand and legal implications.

This study aims to examine the application of social media marketing strategies to higher education institutions.
References:


