Article

How Social Media Marketing Affecting Brand Equity and Student Engagement in Higher Education Marketing

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Abstract: The utilization of social media enables interpersonal communication and user engagement, thereby altering conventional hierarchical communication methods and introducing an unpredictable element into the decision-making process of consumers. Social media marketing is an essential component for organizations seeking to maintain competitiveness, despite being viewed as a part of online marketing. The efficacy of social media promotion is contingent upon the existence of novel products, the market responsiveness of organizations, and the establishment of robust online platforms. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have become essential instruments for marketers. These platforms are extraordinarily valuable for the promotion of brands and services because they facilitate interactive communication. Social networking sites play a crucial role in the dissemination of information about higher education institutions, serving as effective mechanisms for attracting potential students. The influence of the material disseminated on these online platforms on the cognitive processes of potential students in making decisions is yet to be established. The crucial non-financial advantage of institutions' utilization of social media platforms is the recognition of user engagement. A comprehensive understanding of user involvement across diverse platforms can augment our comprehension of its impact on brand perception. The visual-centric attributes, along with elevated engagement rates among a diverse, young, and international population, have made Instagram a powerful platform for institutions of higher education. The article emphasizes the significance of brand equity within the marketing approach of higher education establishments. The concept of brand equity is subject to the influence of various factors, including but not limited to brand personality, social credibility, and market position. Ensuring the provision of superior amenities and services is imperative for academic institutions. However, the establishment of a proficient communication mechanism is equally vital for enhancing the university's brand positioning and managing the value of its brand efficiently. The notion of 'brand soul' serves as the foundation for this, denoting how the academic institution's faculty and staff personify the brand.

Keywords: social media; brand equity; engagement; higher education

1. Introduction

The education sector has witnessed an expansion in its market owing to the sustained and favorable economic growth that Indonesia has been experiencing in recent times. As the financial status of families improves, education is progressively perceived as a valuable and advantageous long-term investment for their offspring. Annual increments of approximately 5 – 10% are anticipated for school and higher education fees,

subject to variation based on the market segment that each tertiary institution aims to serve. As a medium for social engagement, communication, and commerce, social media is growing in importance.

An increasing number of enterprises spanning various industries are integrating, or intending to integrate, social media platforms into their promotionaarl tactics. Institutions of higher education are demonstrating a heightened interest in the capabilities of social media as a promotional instrument. Significantly, it presents the possibility of establishing a connection with and attracting potential students. A key area of investigation is to comprehend how social media can impact students' decisions and facilitate the process of choosing a specific university.

The term "social media" refers to a diverse range of modern internet applications that have garnered significant attention and commercial interest. The discourse revolves around essential themes such as the influence of social media on human conduct [1], its capacity as an educational medium, and its efficacy as a promotional instrument [2]. The notion of employing social media as a promotional instrument in the realm of higher education is an attractive prospect, owing to the triumphant precedents in the corporate domain with regards to social media marketing and the extensive acceptance of social media among the younger populace [3].

Research has indicated that the utilization of marketing strategies by higher education institutions can be an effective means of attracting prospective students, as evidenced by studies that have specifically examined the decision-making process involved in selecting a university [4].

Marketing communications is a prominent research area that focuses on the disparities between the information that potential students desire and the information that universities disseminate through their traditional communication channels. This topic has been extensively explored by Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka [5]. The observed discrepancies indicate that there is room for improvement in the realm of marketing communications for higher education.

Social media platforms have brought about a notable transformation in human interactions through their capacity to reshape online communication in contemporary times. Social media platforms have become powerful tools for enabling communication and engagement among diverse social groups, entities, and enterprises [6].

In Indonesia, more than 1.5 million students graduate from secondary school each year and are given the opportunity to continue their education. This bodes well for the educational landscape of the country in the future. Indonesia boasts a vast number of high schools and vocational institutes, exceeding $24,000$ in total. These educational institutions are equipped to administer entrance examinations to a substantial number of candidates annually, with each campus having the capacity to accommodate anywhere from $3,000$ to $10,000$ applicants. As per Dikti's report in 2017, approximately $500,000$ students participate in the SNMPTN on an annual basis.

Private higher education institutions have the capacity to organize promotional exhibitions at schools, with a frequency of 100 to 250 exhibitions per year. The associated costs per exhibition are estimated to range between Rp. 1.5 and Rp. 5 million. Private institutions allocate an annual advertising budget ranging from Rp. 500 million to Rp. 8 billion, resulting in a projected total of more than Rp. 1 trillion in marketing expenditures across Indonesian campuses aimed at attracting prospective students.

Changes in societal trends have had an impact on the way in which higher education institutions, functioning as a service sector [7], establish relationships with their stakeholders [8]. The driving force behind this change originates from the necessity to compete for human resources, academic experts, and monetary funds [9], in addition to the requirement to establish a unified organizational identity [10]. The prevailing body of literature in this field primarily focuses on investigating the manners in which these platforms enable the recruitment of students [11], enhance student loyalty [12], and promote university brand recognition. Numerous academic inquiries have delved into the effectiveness of social networks as an educational instrument [13].

2. Literature Review

The category of online interactive applications known as social media is a rapidly expanding phenomenon, albeit one that is relatively recent in origin. The applications rely on content generated by users instead of

suppliers, thereby facilitating peer-to-peer communication and user involvement. In their study, Constantinides and Fountain [14] delineated social media applications, including blogs, online communities, social networks, online bulletin boards, and content aggregators, as constituents of Web 2.0. This classification was made in conjunction with the social effects and enabling technologies.

Prior studies pertaining to social media content categories in higher education marketing have demonstrated that individuals who follow universities on social media exhibit a favorable disposition towards such content. The content in question pertains to a range of subjects, including athletics, university-related news, school pride, and admissions. Social media provides the capability to promptly evaluate and monitor the efficacy of posts and campaigns. Every social media platform provides an analytics tool to assist with social media analysis.

Managers possess knowledge of the immediate impact of their social media content, encompassing metrics such as views, engagement, and conversions. Apart from monitoring data on their own web pages, social media listening can be utilized to track public data related to the school's brand. Social media listening refers to the practice of identifying and evaluating online conversations about a company, individual, product, or brand. Individuals can acquire valuable perspectives regarding attitudes and actions pertaining to the institution's brand identity.

Individuals could explore novel forms of content with the aim of attracting their audience, as well as engage in direct communication by responding to comments or participating in discussions. In contrast to conventional marketing channels employed by higher education institutions, social media presents numerous inherent benefits.

Participating in organic social media posting, which refers to unpaid content creation and sharing on social media platforms, can be a cost-effective strategy when integrated into a broader marketing and communication plan. This contrasts with traditional marketing methods such as printing and shipping brochures or incurring server costs for website hosting, which require fees for account or page creation, brand identity element uploading, and content posting. Moreover, the functionalities provided by these platforms can facilitate the process of generating and publishing content with relative ease. Furthermore, the university demographic can easily access social media.

Web 2.0 is widely regarded as the contemporary phase of the Internet's development. The utilization of social media has been extensively embraced by the general populace and has emerged as a significant determinant of purchasing behavior. The proliferation of user-generated content and peer-to-peer communication has bestowed significant power upon modern-day consumers, leading to a decline in their reliance on push marketing and conventional modes of marketing communication.

It is imperative for organizations that are keen on incorporating a social media program into their marketing strategy to acknowledge that social media is transforming the decision-making process in customers' purchasing behavior by introducing an uncontrollable factor [14]. It has been observed that marketers have recognized the rising significance of social media, which has led to greater market transparency and a decrease in their conventional market influence and authority over media and communication procedures.

2.1. Social Networking Sites

Boyd and Ellison define social networking sites as web-based services that enable users to create a profile that is either public or semi-public within a restricted environment, articulate a list of other people with whom they share an affiliation, and browse and interact with their list of connections [15].

The interrelationships established by an individual and those formed by other entities within the system social networking applications facilitate user connectivity through the creation of personal information profiles, the invitation of friends and colleagues to access said profiles, and the exchange of e-mails and instant messages among users. According to Kaplan and Haenlein, personal profiles have the potential to incorporate various forms of media, such as photos, videos, audio files, and blogs [16]. According to Murray and Waller's assertion, social networking sites function as virtual communities that facilitate connections and interactions among individuals with shared interests or simply for socializing purposes [17].

The structural features of social networking sites were identified by Kietzmann et al. as consisting of seven blocks. The attributes collectively constitute a structure resembling that of a honeycomb, comprising seven

fundamental components, namely identity, conversations, sharing, existence, relationships, reputation, and group participation [18]. These elements significantly influence and propel users' conduct.

In recent decades, social media has become a significant factor that impacts various facets of consumer behavior, such as awareness, information acquisition, views, beliefs, purchasing behavior, and after-the-sale conversation and evaluation [19]. As per the authors, social media covers a diverse array of digital platforms, including but not limited to online forums for word-of-mouth communication, discussion boards and online chat rooms sponsored by companies, email exchanges between consumers, websites and forums for rating consumer products or services, web conversation panels and discussion boards, moblogs featuring digital media such as audio, images, movies, or photographs, as well as social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Today's students are unfamiliar with the world's pre-Internet appearance. The integration of social media platforms is imperative in higher education as it enables universities to uphold their affiliations with their student body. Numerous universities maintain profiles on various social media platforms to promote faculty-student engagement, facilitate resource sharing, and enable the expression of the "learner's voice." The literature emphasizes that communal areas and inter-group interactions are significant factors that stimulate the youth and, thus, should enhance their perseverance and eagerness to acquire knowledge [20]. Facebook has emerged as the primary platform for students, exerting an impact on their levels of life satisfaction, social trust, civic participation, and political engagement. In their study, Park et al. utilized factor analysis as a means of identifying the primary motivators that prompt students to engage with and utilize Facebook groups. The factors that emerged from this analysis included socialization, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information retrieval [21]. Cheung et al. assert that students utilize Facebook as a means of immediate communication and social connection with their peers [22]. Additionally, their engagement in groups on the platform has a notable impact on their utilization patterns. Nonetheless, it is emphasized that the membership of multiple groups can potentially obscure an individual's social identity associated with a particular group. DeAndrea et al emphasize the significance of social media in enhancing college students' adaptation, particularly during the pre-enrollment and first semester phases [23]. In their study, Nkhoma et al propose a theoretical framework for understanding student motivation in the context of learning. This framework is grounded in four key features of the social media platform Facebook, including interaction, communication, social relationships, and participation in groups and communities [24]. The authors emphasize the potential advantages that universities can gain from incorporating these features into their teaching practices.

Social networking platforms and social media present several benefits in terms of usage, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness from a marketing perspective. These days, an increasing number of individuals can conveniently access them through various platforms at any time of the day. Moreover, their viral nature allows them to yield amplified outcomes while requiring fewer financial resources. Social networking sites are considered to be one of the most valuable mediums for marketers due to their ability to facilitate interactive communication [25]. The significance of promotional efforts as a crucial factor in achieving accomplishments in the education sector [26]. The proposition posits that social networking sites may serve as a viable mechanism for disseminating information and enticing prospective students by furnishing details pertaining to the organization, the enrollment process, and the various events and undertakings that transpire within the university. Considering this prospect, numerous educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities, have resorted to leveraging social media platforms as a means of effective communication with their present academic community. This approach also facilitates outreach to alumni and, notably, serves as a valuable educational marketing tool for attracting potential students.

In their literature review, Nyangau and Bado examined the utilization of social media promotion in colleges and universities and observed that the impact of content posted on official higher education social media accounts on the decision-making process of potential students remains uncertain [27]. Prospective students have been observed to seek advice and consultation through university social media channels prior to deciding regarding their academic pursuits. Facebook (FB) serves as the primary social networking site (SNS) utilized by universities to disseminate information regarding campus events and activities. However, Twitter is more

commonly employed to facilitate online discussions and respond to inquiries.

2.2. Social Engagement

Assessing the advantages yielded by the tactics employed by higher education institutions on social media platforms poses a significant obstacle for scholars and marketing experts. Engagement, or how a follower as well as a user relates to and engages with a university, represents one of the non-monetary benefits of its existence on social media platforms. The social networks analytics tools quantify the degrees of engagement by analyzing various forms of follower interaction, such as likes, shares, and comments [28–30].

The interactions are regarded as instances of engagement, as posited by Barger and Labrecque and Gummerus et al. Such interactions enable us to measure and compare engagement across various social networks. may observe variations in the features available to users across different platforms [31,32]. One may discuss the phenomenon of retweets and responses on Twitter, as well as comments and likes on Facebook and Instagram, as noted by Hoffman and Fodor [29].

Current scholarly investigations have centered on assessing behavioral engagement within social networks, exposing a deficiency in the available literature across various platforms. The application of enhance across multiple platforms enhances our comprehension of the impact of user engagement on brand perception. Malthouse and Calder additionally stated it is imperative to acknowledge that comprehending user engagement necessitates an understanding of the user's experience, which is also contingent upon the context [33]. Consequently, the examination of user behavior and participation across various platforms is crucial for gaining a deeper comprehension of the concept of engagement.

According to Statista's 2019 report, Instagram has emerged as the fastest-expanding social network globally, with a staggering count of more than one billion active monthly users. It is noteworthy that only Facebook and YouTube surpass Instagram in terms of active user bases. In the context of higher education institutions, the utilization of visual content on Instagram has proven to be a crucial factor in establishing meaningful connections and fostering dialogues with users. This has consequently positioned Instagram as a pertinent channel for facilitating communication between said institutions and their target audience [34].

In contemporary times, various higher education institutions, irrespective of their public or private nature, have established a virtual presence and opted for Instagram as a highly effective tool to proliferate and advertise their respective brands. The authors Berman and Robinson et al. have noted that individuals utilize their prominence on social media platforms not only to advertise their educational programs and enhance the reputation of their institution but also to foster a more personalized connection with their clientele [6, 35]. Instagram's visual-centric features render it a more inclusive social media platform compared to other sites, thereby serving as a valuable tool for drawing in a diverse audience, including international students.

Instagram's demographic consists of a youthful and diverse international population that exhibits a high degree of engagement with online brands. This renders the platform particularly advantageous for educational institutions that aim to enhance their online presence. Apart from sustaining a consistent presence on Instagram, utilizing it as an advertising platform can prove to be a productive approach to targeting this esteemed demographic [36]. The primary determinants of Instagram post engagement, as measured by likes and comments, are the semantic qualities of the captions and the visual characteristics of the accompanying photographs [37].

2.3. Brand Equity

The university market is characterized by a significant dearth of empirical research that concentrates on the factors that determine brand equity [38]. The present study employs an empirical framework formulated by Mourad et al. and validated in the context of the higher education sector. The framework utilized in this study was created through the amalgamation of Aaker's [39] and Keller's [40] models. It aims to synthesize the characteristics of higher education services that determine brand equity (BE) with the perceived multiple dimensions of brand equity, namely brand awareness and brand image.

The dissemination of marketing information pertaining to a service leads to the establishment of brand

awareness and recognition, which in turn contributes to the development of brand knowledge and ultimately brand equity [40]. Kotler and Fox express concern regarding the insufficient marketing orientation exhibited by numerous educational institutions, whose primary emphasis is on enhancing the caliber of their services and amenities [41]. Developing an appropriate communication tool is crucial for improving the position of the university brand and effectively managing its brand equity [42, 43]. Additionally, scholarly literature has demonstrated that brand equity in higher education is significantly influenced by word of mouth and prior experiences.

The scholarly discourse surrounding brand equity indicates that the brand image is influenced by various factors such as brand personality, social reputation, and market position [39]. Brand positioning strategy, promotion, and brand identity are crucial factors in establishing brand equity [44]. Furthermore, the notion of 'brand soul' was introduced, which embodies the way the university's faculty and employees perceive and embody the university's brand. The perception of risk reduction and the enhancement of brand equity are significantly influenced by the general image and reputation of universities [40,45,46] as well as their rankings [40,47].

3. Methodology

The present work constitutes a research study in the field of literature review. The author conducts a comprehensive review and analysis of numerous articles pertaining to the topics of social media, brand equity, and engagement as they relate to marketing in the realm of higher education.

4. Analysis, Finding, and Discussion

Based on the literature's findings, several intriguing observations can be made. First, social media has emerged as a crucial communication instrument, thereby transforming consumer decision-making processes and marketing strategies. Social media has evolved into an extension of online marketing, necessitating new strategies for reaching and communicating with prospective customers.

The effectiveness of social media marketing is contingent upon the quality of the products, the organization's market knowledge, and the quality of their websites. Social networking sites are crucial for interactive communication, assisting marketers in disseminating information and attracting prospective consumers.

In the context of higher education institutions, social media has proven to be an effective instrument for communicating with current and prospective students and promoting institutional brands and events. However, the effect of content posted on social media accounts for higher education on the decision-making processes of prospective students remains unknown. Third, one of the benefits of an institution's presence on social media platforms is engagement with followers. It is essential for comprehending user experience and brand perception to measure and compare engagement across various social networks. Instagram has emerged as an effective instrument for higher education institutions to communicate with a diverse audience, including international students, due to its visual-centric features. The platform's high level of user engagement makes it advantageous for institutions seeking to improve their online visibility. Marketing for higher education institutions relies heavily on brand equity. Developing an appropriate communication tool is essential for effectively administering university brand equity. Several factors, including brand personality, social reputation, and market position, influence brand image. Brand soul, which is the faculty and staff's perception and embodiment of the university's brand, has a significant impact on brand equity. Moreover, social media platforms contribute significantly to the development of brand equity for higher education institutions. The dissemination of pertinent marketing information about an institution can foster brand awareness and recognition, leading to the development of brand knowledge. To effectively manage their brand equity, however, educational institutions must demonstrate a more robust marketing orientation.

In addition, monitoring and analyzing various forms of follower interaction can provide insight into the levels of social engagement. This knowledge is essential for molding the user experience and enhancing the institution's brand image. Different social media platforms offer distinct metrics for measuring user engagement;

therefore, for a comprehensive comprehension of engagement, it is essential to comprehend user behavior and participation across all platforms. Moreover, Instagram has emerged as a crucial instrument for higher education institutions to establish meaningful connections and cultivate conversations with users. Its visual-centric characteristics make it inclusive and alluring to a diverse audience, and as a result, it is a valuable tool for recruiting international students. In addition to maintaining a consistent presence, utilizing Instagram as a platform for advertising can also be an effective method for targeting this demographic.

According to the literature, word-of-mouth and previous interactions substantially impact brand equity in higher education. Important roles in establishing brand equity are played by elements such as brand positioning strategy, promotion, and brand identity. The perception of universities, their general image and reputation, as well as their rankings, have a substantial impact on risk reduction and brand equity enhancement. Therefore, it is evident that social media is not only a communication instrument for higher education institutions but also a strategic marketing and brand development platform.

4.1. The Future of Progress

In the future, social media will play an even larger role in marketing for higher education, particularly in terms of developing involvement and brand equity. Educational institutions will have more opportunities to interact with their target demographic and cultivate a sense of community, thereby increasing engagement, as social media platforms continue to evolve and introduce new features.

For instance, live streaming capabilities might allow institutions to host virtual open days, Q&A sessions with faculty, and behind-the-scenes excursions, bringing the campus experience directly to prospective students. Similarly, the increasing prominence of transitory content such as Instagram Stories or Snapchat could be utilized to share opportune updates or highlight student accomplishments.

Marketers are compelled to explore novel approaches to target prospective clients and establish effective communication channels with them [48 – 50]. Social media marketing, at present, should be regarded as an extension of online marketing and is unlikely to supplant other marketing methods. The effectiveness of this marketing approach is contingent upon robust underpinnings, namely, the presence of innovative and superior products, organizations that are attuned to the market. It is also seen as an extension of online marketing and is unlikely to supplant other marketing methods.

Institutions will be able to better comprehend their audience and customize their content, accordingly, resulting in more effective engagement strategies because of advancements in analytics and data monitoring capabilities. With this information, institutions could create personalized marketing campaigns that target prospective students based on their interests, behavior, and engagement with the institution's social media content.

Social media will continue to function as an important vehicle for higher education institutions to communicate their unique value proposition, strengthen their brand identity, and create a positive reputation. As social media becomes more intertwined with daily life, it will become increasingly important for organizations to maintain an engaged and active presence on these networks to remain top-of-mind with their audience.

In addition, the rise of social commerce could open new opportunities for colleges and universities to monetize their social media presence, including the possibility of selling branded merchandise directly through their profiles on social media.

Nonetheless, as the role of social media in marketing for higher education expands, institutions will face obstacles such as concerns about data security, the potential for negative exposure, and the need for regular material creation. Despite these potential obstacles, the future of social media in marketing for higher education appears promising, with numerous opportunities for engagement as well as brand equity building.

5. Conclusion

Social media marketing has become a relatively new discipline that is attracting an increasing amount of interest from field marketers and academics. Already, institutions of higher education are trying things in social media marketing. However, the number of research studies on social media marketing or its effectiveness

remains low, and little is known about social media's suitability as marketing instruments for higher education.

This study assists marketers in comprehending the market framework and the behavior of prospective students to develop successful online marketing strategies for colleges and universities. The significance of social media and in particular, social networks in putting prospective students in contact with these individuals when they are seeking academic advice and information is a topic worthy of further study. Considering the widespread use and significance of social networks among young people, it is reasonable to presume that a portion of the feedback from family, friends, and acquaintances is transmitted via these channels. It is also common knowledge that social networks have been excellent tools for viral marketing and word-of-mouth advertising.

5.1. Limitations

Therefore, marketing strategies for higher education institutions must be holistic and incorporate all three factors. Colleges and universities can create a more alluring image and attract a greater number of potential students by enhancing their social media marketing and effectively utilizing all digital marketing channels.

The absence of research in the field of college and university marketing has created a research void that must be filled, such as the absence of studies regarding the efficacy of various marketing strategies. Various marketing strategies are utilized by higher education institutions to allure prospective students. However, studies into the efficacy of these strategies are lacking. This research void must be filled for colleges and universities to better comprehend the decision-making procedures of prospective students and devise effective marketing strategies for attracting them.

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