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SOCIAL MEDIA AND HIGHER EDUCATION: STUDENTS PREFERENCES TOWARDS CHOICE OF INSTITUTE

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ABSTRACT

Any organization having public and social constituency and has multiple stakeholders, needs public relations. Social media sites provide a distinctive technology to communicate which creates more opportunities and relationship building between various stakeholders of institution and public. The technology transformation is changing the ways students collaborate, communicate and learn. The first ways, prospective students interact with higher education institute is through social networking sites. Students are also drifting away from conventional communication mode and believing more in social media communication. Social media offers immense opportunity to higher education institutes to expand and reach students in compliment to existing methods. Higher Educational institutes are also using social media as it offers direct contact with students. They are using social media to communicate many types of contents to engage students. From the aforesaid discussions we can apprise that social media use is extensive by higher education institutes and students. Institutes and students are using social media for various purposes like marketing and student recruitment, student support, alumni communication, information dissemination about college, student learning for improved academic outcomes, building students' communities and involving students in campus life, enhancing students' social life and strengthening student to student interaction etc. Despite abundance of studies on popularity and use of social media there is little research on role and value of social media. This void in research may be due to the complexity to measure and assess the role of social media due to anonymity of users. Unless the student explicitly tells the role of social has influenced his/her decision. It is also difficult to measure the strength of causality between social media and quantitative outcomes. In present study, it was tried to study the relationship between demographic profile of students and their preference in joining social media page of higer education institute (HEI) and preference for a course and institute using chi-square ($\chi2$) test of independence. The results showed that invites from friends and peer groups make students join social media page of institute or course. The reason for joining the social media page is for information purposes. Students make their own decision in selection of choice of course and institute and placements prospects strengthen their decision in making selection. The results of the study will help higher education institutes to reach prospective students in developing an engaging and effective social media presence and make them enroll the institute and course.

INTRODUCTION

The social media use in India has been on rise since the past decade. It is popularity in all age groups and among youth it's taken with huge enthusiasm. Social media offers several opportunities like easy access to information, ability to express, create social groups, pictures and videos sharing, learning opportunities, seeking and maintaining relatives and friends etc. Social media allows users to create and share content, build relationships, and allow collaboration and communication regardless of location barriers. The rapid spread of online social networking is changing the very essence of organizational communication. Social networking and social media are used by business houses, corporate, institutions for reaching to prospective clients and building relations. Due to popularity of social media, public expect their favourite brands & organizations should be

on social media so that they can connect, interact and get latest updates. Compared to people in other age segments, college students are keen in working in advanced technology in each area. The technology transformation is changing the ways students collaborate, communicate and learn. The first ways, prospective students interact with higher education institute is through social networking sites. Colleges and universities have also taken a keen interest in this trend. Social media offers immense opportunity to higher education institutes to expand and reach students in compliment to existing methods. Higher Educational institutes are also using social media as it offers direct contact with students. They are using social media to communicate many types of contents to engage students. Higher education institutes are now found using social media for various purposes like student recruitment and marketing, student support, education and alumni communication etc. Social media also allow institute's administrators, teachers & staff etc. to get real time

feedback from students, alumni etc. The ubiquity and unusually high level of 'social me' as well makes it perfect in higher education institutions for administrators, executives, learners and teachers as well. Many scholars in their research studies had favored for the purposeful mixing of social media. Students, who aspire to pursue studies in foreign locations, social media sites offer useful and handy information to such students about study programs at the very comfort of their place. Students can also ask other students in foreign universities about studying abroad, cost of living and other related queries. The first research on use of social media found that higher education institutes outstripped the more conventional fortune 500 corporations as well as the fast-growing Inc. 500 companies in using social media to connect with the customers (i.e., students). While 32% of colleges and universities were found using social media tools, only 8% of Fortune 500 companies' and 19% of Inc. 500, used social media tool.[1] We can say that there is high usage and expectations about uses of social media in higher education institutes with students & institutes both see benefits in the use of social media. This calls for research in the field of use of social media by higher education institutes. Institutes and students are using social media for various purposes like marketing and student recruitment, student support, alumni communication, information dissemination about college, student learning for improved academic outcomes, building students' communities and involving students in campus life, enhancing students' social life and strengthening student to student interaction etc. Social media also allow institute's administrators, teachers & staff to get real time feedback from students, alumni etc. Many of the studies are conducted on the usage pattern and applications of social media. Many studies are conducted on marketing dimensions of social media. Studies are also conducted on uses of social media in higher education sector where nearly all of the studies focused on applications of social media in higher education and also necessitate of more research in this area to make use of social media more effective. Despite abundance of studies on popularity and use of social media there is little research on role and value of social media. This void in research may be due to the complexity to measure and assess the role of social media due to anonymity of users. Unless the student explicitly tells the role of social media has influenced his/her decision. It is also difficult to measure the strength of causality between social media and quantitative outcomes. Existing research studies also lack in quantitative analysis. This scenario calls for more empirical studies. Professionals also seek parameters that support the uses of social media in higher education. In present study, it was tried to study the relationship between demographic profile of students and their preference in choice of institute and course.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In present world, success of an organization is accredited by the efficient use of social media sites. Higher education institutions also had been adopters of this global phenomenon and provide valuable insights about the institute and to reach prospective students. People are using the internet for many purposes like searching information, sharing information, issues discussion and making inquiries etc. These activities are now a day is being performed online via social media or Web 2.0, which is now a latest mode of communication.[2] Through social media, organizations can make direct contact at the appropriate time with customers more efficiently at relatively lower costs than conventional communication systems.[3] In a study of marketing opportunities with social networks have found that online social media sites far-fetched influence on marketing practices of companies as social media can be very valuable for organizations if carefully integrated in the marketing mix. For people of different backgrounds and perspectives to connect, social networks are popular places.[4] As part of their interaction and recruiting approaches, higher education institutions are striving to attract students and are also interested in the potential of social media through recognizing how prospective students use social media in daily lives for information searching.[5] Social media marketing help business to understand the power of social media channels and their use for businesses. Use of social media is advantageous for increased brand exposure, image

management, leads generation, word-of-mouth publicity, augmented targeted traffic through search engine optimization, developing public relations, facilities the recruiting process and collecting market insights of target audiences and competition.[6] Social media has become need of the hour in present century and organizations need to have a well-drawn plan for social media campaign strategy and without it, they have little chance and would find it difficult to establish themselves in the rapidly changing digital environment.[7] Social media is a web 2.0 applications where we can collaborate, make one to one contact, engage with others and create content our self. As part of the marketing toolkit, and curiosity of higher education institutions in social media is increasing and the role of social media to influence prospective students in choosing course & university needs to be known.[8] The scope of social media in influencing customer's purchase pronouncements was examined in a descriptive research study with close ended questions from 100 internet users in the city of Udaipur through convenience sampling. Statistical tools such as frequency count, χ^2 test and mean were applied to analyze the data collected. Research results mentioned that social media can significantly influence the perception of customers buying process and importance of social networking sites can't be ignored.[9] Social networking sites are changing the conventional way of institutional communication and higher education institutes are increasingly using facebook as a way to connect.[10] An analyze of perception of customers towards marketing practices on social media sites and role of diverse factors of social media marketing that influence consumers decisions in influencing their decisions for purchase of products found that marketer can use medium of social media for positioning their product and services in the mind of customer.[11] Use of social media for promotional activities in education sector found to be advantageous for promoting education sector by reaching and converting potential customers, branding, creating awareness and connecting to potential customers in cost efficient manner.[12] Twitter has been well adopted by present-day educational institutions and used extensively for its concise method of messaging.[13] In a systematic review to explore the nature of the promotion mix activities of various educational institutions found that the higher education marketing research sector is still at a fairly innovative level, with much work still to be done from both issue detection and a strategic perspective.[14] From the appraisal of aforesaid literature, we can summarize that social media is being used for sharing information, making enquiries, communication, valuable, building brand loyalty and product positioning. For these reasons social media is being used by higher education institutes.

Objective of the study: To study the association between demographic profile of higher education students and their preference for joining social media page of higher education institute and preference for choosing a course or institute.

Scope of the study: The study focused on uses of social media by higher education students. The study required a field survey in selected universities of north India. The data was collected from students from different courses enrolled in universities. The respondents were randomly selected and were approached through online (Google forms) or physical questionnaire. The respondents were administered a structured questionnaire which was developed on the basis of identified attributes through literature review, brainstorming, expert opinion and pilot study. Two statements related to students joining social media page of HEI and three statements related to preference towards a course or institute.

Sampling Plan

Population of the study: The population under study consists of all respondents (sampling unit) who were registered in a course in the university.

Sampling Unit: Each student registered with the university is sampling unit for the study.

Sampling Technique: Cluster convenience sampling method has been used to select the sampling units. Clusters are based on course

and university of the student. Since subject population was readily available, we adopted convenience sampling method for data collection.

Sample Size: The sample size of the 430 respondents is constituted for the study.

Data Analysis

After finalizing the questionnaire and data collection, the data has been classified, tabulated and subjected to the statistical computations. To understand the student's choice of course and university using social media sites, it required the study of association between demographic profile of students and factors influencing choice of course and institute of students.

in our case is simple random sampling and variables for relationship i.e. demographic profile and factors influencing choice of course and institute are categorical in nature. The frequency distribution of demographic profile of students has been represented in following Table 1. Data was also collected related to students' preference towards a course and institute and students' choice of joining social media sites of institutes. The resulting frequency distribution has been represented in following Table 2.

Hypothesis

To test and to evaluate two mutually exclusive statements about a population we had formulated hypotheses and test statistically significant.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Students

Demographic Profile of Students		No of Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
Course	Engineering	104	24.19
	Commerce & Management	114	26.51
	Arts	102	23.72
	Sciences	110	25.58
Gender	Male	205	47.67
	Female	225	52.33
Age Group	Less than 22 years	260	60.47
	More than 22 year	170	39.53
Residential status	Urban	315	73.26
	Rural	115	26.74
Annual Family Income	Up to 2.5 Lakhs	175	40.70
	2.51 -5 Lakhs	121	28.14
	5.1-10 Lakhs	81	18.84
	More than 10 Lakhs	53	12.33
Parents Education	Up to Secondary	185	43.02
	Graduate	131	30.47
	Post Graduate	114	26.51
Family Size	Up to 4 members	234	54.42
	More than 4 members	196	45.58
Primary family Occupation	Service	195	45.35
	Agriculture	86	20.00
	Business	149	34.65

(Source: Author's calculations)

Table 2. Students Preference towards use of Social Media

Preference towards choice of University/Course		No of respondents	
		Freq	%age
Factor led to join social media platform of university	Invite from university	98	22.79
	Invite from fellow students	121	28.14
	Invite from friends/peer groups	211	49.07
Total		430	100
Purpose to join university social media platform	Admissions	72	16.74
	Research & Studies	80	18.60
	Getting information	239	55.58
	Personal or other uses	39	9.07
Total		430	100
Factor influenced choice of university	Friends & Family	115	26.74
	Ads or counselling	149	34.65
	Own decision	166	38.60
Total		430	100
Factor influenced choice of course	Friends & Family	92	21.40
	Ads or counselling	96	22.33
	Own decision	242	56.28
Total		430	100
Strengthen decision for university/course	Faculty profile	89	20.70
	Infrastructure & amenities	61	14.19
	University location/city	83	19.30
	Placements	134	31.16
	University ranking	63	14.65
Total		430	100

To test and to evaluate two mutually exclusive statements about a population we used chi-square ($\chi2$) test of independence and formulate hypotheses to test statistically significant relationship. The data was tested for suitability before applying the test. The sampling

H_1: There is no significant relationship between family profile of students and choice of course/university.
H_2: There is no significant relationship between family profile of students and joining social media page of higher education institute.

The hypotheses formulated above are tested and results are shown in following Table 3 &4.

Table 3. Association of Demographic Profile of students and joining social media page of HEI

Demographics	Factor led to join social media platform of univ	Purpose to join university social media platform
Course	0.020*	0.211
Gender	0.548	0.024*
Age	0.045*	0.652
Residential Status	0.11	0.011*
Annual Family Income	0.326	0.080
Parents Education	0.180	0.017*
Family Size	0.351	0.236
Primary Family Occupation	0.076	0.301

(Source: Author's calculations)
*Significant at 5% level of significance

Table 4. Association of Demographic Profile of students and student's preference for course/institute

Demographics	Factor influenced choice of university	Factor influenced choice of course	Strengthen decision for university /course
Course	0.010	0.060	0.014*
Gender	0.387	0.722	0.364
Age	0.079	0.168	0.315
Residential Status	0.003*	0.001*	0.435
Annual Family Income	0.207	0.862	0.061
Parents Education	0.166	0.104	0.033*
Family Size	0.422	0.801	0.002*
Primary Family Occupation	0.529	0.196	0.624

(Source: Author's calculations)
*Significant at 5% level of significance

RESULTS

From the above results shown in Table 3 & 4, we can say that both the hypothesis were partially rejected and we can say that demographic profile of students has strong association with students joining social media page of HEI and in selection of course and institute.

Findings and Conclusions

We can analyze from above table that the hypothesis are partially rejected and demographic variables has strong association with parameters related to choose the course and institute. We can infer there is relationship between student's demographic profile and using social media for selection of course and institute. The universities can reach these students and make them aware about their social media presence and benefits in using social media.

Implications of the study: The findings of this study will be helpful in developing higher education institutions' engaging and effective social media presences. According to research, students are using social media to choose course and institute. Administrators at institutions of higher education now have a platform to interact with students. The study's findings will aid institutions in developing a framework for policy regarding target-oriented content for a particular class or group of users for a course or university on social media. Study of demographic influence will help the institutes in targeting respondents for admission purposes.

Limitations of the study: The current study is being done on a sample of university students only in the northern part of India. Additional research may broaden or adopt a more varied perspective on sample selection. The sample used for the study is thought to be representative of the general population. The population may be more accurately represented by a big sample. Future research may also adopt a more thorough perspective of a particular university or course to gain in-depth knowledge of a particular field. To increase the generalizability of the results, comparable research can be carried out in different geographical regions.

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