

DETERMINING STUDENTS AND FACULTY AWARENESS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS TOWARDS INSTITUTIONS BRANDING IN SELF-FINANCING ENGINEERING INSTITUTIONS IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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Abstract In recent years, branding has become more popular in higher education institutions. 'Branding Academia' has become global phenomena today as well as a new emerging concept in the higher education institutions context. Internet offers huge opportunities today for institutions to communicate its messages with its stakeholders in this information age.

Online branding is relatively a new concept in marketing discipline even today and also a great way to differentiate as well as stand out in this competitive business environment. Many organizations today prefer online branding towards communicating its brand benefits. In today's digital world, Social media presents wholesome opportunities for higher education institutions for communicating as well as promoting its brand image among its key stakeholders – students and faculty.

The bottom line is that higher education institutions are left with no choice to heavily adopt social networking sites for developing an online connect among its key stakeholders. Hence, the presence of higher education institutions in those online networks is no longer a luxury but has become a reality today.

This study seeks to determine students and faculty awareness of using social media towards institutions branding in self-financing engineering institutions in Tirunelveli District, Tamilnadu, India. The primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire. A total sample of 443 current under-graduate students and 88 faculty members of self-financing engineering institutions are surveyed in this study. The student and faculty samples are selected through proportionate stratified random sampling method. Furthermore, the study results have revealed that the majority of the self-financing engineering institutions are not at all capitalizing the potential benefits of its social media platforms to communicate its brand online. The results of this study will help these institutions to explore a greater potential of social media tools for delivering a consistent brand experience as well as communicating its online brand among its key stakeholders - Students and Faculty.

Keywords Online Branding, Branding Academia, Self-financing Engineering Institutions, Social Media, Social Networking Sites

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector in India has seen a phenomenal growth in recent years due to a sudden rise of many private institutions that offer different professional courses. With an estimate of 234 million in the age group of 15-24 in India, mainly comprises of younger generation, Indian higher education is one of the most promising sector that offers a huge potential in future. There are currently 18.5 million (approx.) students who are enrolled at higher education institutions in India. According to a recent article in "The Diplomat", the private higher education institutions in India account for 59 percent of enrolment in higher education¹.

¹ Shreyasi Singh (2013, October 2). The Diplomat. Challenges and Solutions in Indian Higher Education. Retrieved from The Diplomat website: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/challenges-and-solutions-in-indian-higher-education/>

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The key constituents' of higher education institutions that include:

Figure 1.1: Key constituents of higher education institutions



Source: Secondary Data

As adoption of internet as well as younger generation usage of social networks are growing at a rapid pace, social media is slowly emerging as one of the favourite marketing communication channels in the online world across different industry verticals. Today, more and more young students use online media to a greater extent. Prensky (2001)² defines those current generation students as 'Digital Natives.'

At the same time, if institutions like to be part of the student world which is nothing but the world of social networking has to use those tools for delivering a consistent brand experience. In the current scenario, the traditional approach towards student-faculty interaction and pedagogy are considered to be old-fashioned. So, social media tools offer the greater potential for promoting an institutional brand image online. For example, the social networking sites like Facebook are used in innovative ways that include: place for advertising events, screening of potential teaching assistants and instructor's learning experience.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Internet offers primarily a different form of marketing communication activities than traditional media today (Hoffman and Novak, 1997)³. Moreover, Dayal et al. (2000)⁴ defines that a successful online brand can be built around the consumers' experience.

McNally and Speak (2002, p. 4)⁵ define a higher education brand as "perception or emotion maintained by a buyer or a prospective buyer describing the experience related to doing business with an academic institution with its product and service". Despite being a new concept, Social media in education has slowly becoming an essential component and also a new language of communication in the academic world. So called 'Generation Y (Gen Y)' who are under the age of 30 years below are the major adopters of the existing social media platforms.

Charnigo and Barnett Ellis (2007)⁶ suggests, "by exploring popular new types of internet services such as Facebook instead of quickly dismissing them as irrelevant, we might learn new ways to reach out and communicate better with a larger segment" (p. 31). However, every institutions use social media for different activities and there lacks a standard benchmark of the institutions engagement in social media

as well. Social media is a two-way communication channel that connects people together to find and share information (Solis, 2008)⁷.

Today, more and more young students use online media to a greater extent. Wankel (2009)⁸ also defines "The millennial generations of students are digital natives coming to higher education with extensive experience in social media. Business and other organizations are expecting their recruits to have high proficiency in these technologies, too." Furthermore, younger generations of students are early adopters as compared to faculties towards social media tools adoption (Kalamas, Mitchell and Lester 2009)⁹.

Social media creates an opportunity across all age groups to articulate their thoughts and opinions freely because it is inexpensive, user-friendly and easily accessible without time limits (Diego Heckadon, 2010)¹⁰.

Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter and MySpace have become very popular Web 2.0 platforms (Fuchs, 2011)¹¹. Social networking sites today have gained huge momentum and popularity among college and school-going students in this ever growing internet era.

Kietzmann (2011)¹² rightly says "social media introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities, and individuals".

The use of social media tools in the western universities and institutions has seen some kind of traction in recent years. In the Indian context, Majhi and Maharana (2011)¹³ found that institutions are really shown interest towards adopting social media tools however they lack a suffice knowledge to use them effectively. Researchers' consent that the most impediment of social networks adoption in institutions is due to its privacy issues as well as educators simply ignores the usage of social networking technologies.

According to Sunil Tyagi and Krishna Kumar (2011)¹⁴, the

2 Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. *On the horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.

3 Novak, T. P., & Hoffman, D. L. (1997). Measuring the flow experience among web users. Interval Research Corporation, 31.

4 Dayal, Sandeep, Landesberg, Helene and Zeisser, Michael (2000). Building Digital Brands. *The McKinsey Quarterly* 2, 42-51.

5 McNally, D. and Speak, K. (2002). Be your own brand: A breakthrough formula for standing out from the crowd. San Fransisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

6 Charnigo, L., & Barnett-Ellis, P. (2007). Checking out facebook.com: The impact of a digital trend on academic libraries. *Information Technology and Libraries*, 26(1), 23-35.

7 Solis, B (2008). Marketing Sensei. Introducing the Conversation Prism. Retrieved from Marketing Sensei website: <http://www.mktgsensei.com/AMAE/Internet%20Marketing/Conversation%20Prism.pdf>

8 Wankel, C. (2009). Management education using social media. *Organization Management Journal*, 6(4), 251-262.

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11 Fuchs, C. (2011). Web 2.0, Prosumption, and Surveillance. *Surveillance & Society*, 8(3).

12 Kietzmann, J. H., Hermkens, K., McCarthy, I. P., & Silvestre, B. S. (2011). Social media? Get serious! Understanding the functional building blocks of social media. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 241-251.

13 Majhi, S., & Maharana, B. (2011). Familiarity of Web 2.0 and its application in learning: A case study of two Indian Universities. *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 3(6), 120-129.

14 Tyagi, S., & Kumar, K. (2011). Web 2.0 for teaching, learning and assessment in higher education: a case study of universities in Western

Table 4.1. Students Sampling Method

Region	Population		Proportionate Stratified Sample	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Corporation	900	10%	44	10%
Municipal Corporation	3000	33%	146	33%
Rural	5220	57%	253	57%
Total	9120	100%	443	100%

Source: Secondary Data

level of Web 2.0 awareness among faculties in Western Uttar Pradesh is very small irrespective of its pedagogical promise in higher education institutions in India. Henceforth, there is a lack of evidence among adoption of social media tools in Indian Higher Education Institutions.

However, the real question is, “Can it really be used in education?” Yes, it can be used because using social media in education is no more a fad but has become a necessity in this digital arena. A recent article highlights the potential use of social media in higher education as follows¹⁵:

- To recruit prospective/new students
- To locate an expert in the field of interest
- To share the work of students and faculty with a broader world
- To upload faculty lectures via video blogs, podcasts and web casts
- To enhance the communication between students and faculty
- To connect with corporate and alumni to build a vibrant academic communities
- To incorporate it into the college admission process
- To spread knowledge, learning and awareness via course works/electives
- Social media provides an opportunity to find and reconnect with international alumni

A recent study conducted by University of Massachusetts Dartmouth¹⁶ reveals that 100% of colleges’ surveyed (US) are already using social platform in one or multiple ways. According to a leading industry report, social networking is currently the most popular online activity in India, and also the 7th largest market for it behind the US, China, Germany, Russia, Brazil and the UK. By 2014, approximately 83% of

internet users in India will be active across various social networks¹⁷.

Henceforth, Web 2.0 technologies are more or less embracing the educational sphere in recent years. At the same time, there lies a huge potential for using social media for its day-day activities – information sharing, posting lectures videos online, broadcasting events, promoting students and faculty innovation. An active presence in social media sites will help institutions to nurture a strong online relationships with its former students i.e. Alumni. This is one such example of leveraging social media as a marketing promotional instrument.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To determine the students and faculty awareness of using social media tools towards institutions branding in self-financing engineering institutions in Tirunelveli District.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire. The researcher has chosen students and faculty respondents from self-financing engineering institutions that are located in the selected areas of Tirunelveli District that include corporation, municipal corporation and rural areas using proportionate stratified random sampling method.

A total sample of 443 current under-graduate students and 88 faculty members of self-financing engineering institutions are surveyed in this study. The following tables represent the students and faculty samples of this study:

Table 4.1 represents overall students’ population and respective samples for this study.

Uttar Pradesh (India). *International Journal of Library and Information Science*, 3(11), 230-241.

15 Kumar Snehanu (2013, June 30). EdTech Review. Power of Social media in Education. Retrieved from EdTech Review website: <http://edtechreview.in/e-learning/405-social-media-power-in-education>

16 Barnes, N. G., & Mattson, E. (2010). UMASS. Social media and college admissions: Higher-ed beats business in adoption of new tools for third year. Retrieved from UMASS website: <https://www.umassd.edu/media/umassdartmouth/cmr/studiesandresearch/socialmediaadmissions.pdf>

17 DenisaCaciulan and María González (2013, January 11). OBAN Multilingual. Going Global: How Education can succeed with Social Media. Retrieved from OBAN Multilingual website: <http://www.obanmultilingual.com/blog/going-global-how-education-can-succeed-with-social-media/>

Table 4.2. Faculty Sampling Method

Region	Population		Proportionate Stratified Sample	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Corporation	150	19%	17	19%
Municipal Corporation	255	32%	28	32%
Rural	383	49%	43	49%
Total	788	100%	88	100%

Source: Secondary Data

A total of 88 faculty respondents of self-financing engineering institutions from Tirunelveli district were surveyed in this study. The following table represents faculty samples of this study:

Table 4.2 represents total faculty population and respective samples for this study.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The collected data has been analyzed and interpreted as per the objectives stated above.

5.1 MALE AND FEMALE FACULTY USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

The table 5.1 represents the use of social media tools between students and faculty respondents.

Table 5.1. Male and Female Faculty use of Social Media Tools

Social Media Account	Students	Faculty
Yes	341 (77)	71 (81)
No	102 (23)	17 (19)
Total	443 (100)	88 (100)

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the table 5.1 that 77% and 81% of students and faculty respondents have an account in any one of the existing social media platforms. At the same time, 23% and 19% of them don't have a presence at all.

It is concluded that the majority of students and faculty respondents have a presence in the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

T-TEST ANALYSIS FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND FACULTY

The table 5.2 describes the t-test analysis for use of social media tools between students and faculty respondents.

Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between students and faculty respondents' use of social media tools.

Table 5.2. T-Test Analysis for use of Social Media Tools Between Students and Faculty

Students and Faculty	Use of Social Media tools		
	t-value	p-value	S/NS
	-0.791	0.215	NS

Significance ($p \leq 0.05$); S- significant; NS – Non-significant

Source: Primary Data

It is evident from the table 5.2 that t-test analysis is performed to find the significant difference between students and faculty respondents use of social media tools. The calculated p-value is greater than level of significance; hence it is not significant.

It is concluded that there is no significant difference between students and faculty respondents' use of social media tools.

STUDENTS AND FACULTY PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The table 5.3 shows the students and faculty respondents' presence in different social media platforms.

Table 5.3. Students and Faculty Presence in Social Media

Social Media Presence	Students	Faculty
Facebook	306 (71)	58 (50)
Twitter	79 (19)	7 (5)

LinkedIn	17	(4)	46	(39)
Google+	13	(3)	3	(3)
Orkut	13	(3)	3	(3)
Total	428	(100)	117	(100)

Source: Primary Data. Values in brackets are percentage

It is found from the table 5.3 that 71% and 50% of students and faculty respondents have their presence in Facebook, 19% and 5% of them in Twitter, 4% and 39% of them in LinkedIn, 3% of them in Google+ and Orkut.

It is concluded that Facebook is one of the most widely used social media platforms among students followed by Twitter. The faculty respondents have a maximum presence in Facebook followed by LinkedIn. Hence, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are frequently used social media platforms by students and faculty respondents in self-financing engineering institutions.

INSTITUTIONS USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

The table 5.4 highlights the awareness of students and faculty respondents towards institutions use of social media tools.

Table 5.4. Institutions use of Social Media Tools

Institutions use of Social Media	Students	Faculty
Yes	92 (21)	24 (27)
No	200 (45)	59 (67)
Not Sure	151 (34)	5 (6)
Total	443 (100)	88 (100)

Source: Primary Data. Values in brackets are percentage

It is evident from the table 5.4 that 21% and 27% of students and faculty respondents are aware, 45% and 67% of them are unaware, 34% and 6% of them are not very sure of institution social media use.

It is concluded that majority of the students and faculty respondents are unaware and not very sure of institutions social media presence overall. Thus, the self-financing engineering institutions are not effectively using social media to communicate its brand online.

INSTITUTIONS PRESENCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The table 5.5 highlights the awareness of students and faculty respondents regarding institutions presence in social media platforms.

Table 5.5. Institutions Presence in Social Media

Institutions Social Media Presence	Students	Faculty
Facebook	70 (63)	19 (48)
Twitter	8 (7)	8 (20)
LinkedIn	1 (1)	8 (20)
Google+	32 (29)	5 (12)
Total	111 (100)	40 (100)

Source: Primary Data. Values in brackets are percentage

It is inferred from the table 5.5 that 63% and 48% of students and faculty respondents are aware of their institutions presence in Facebook, 7% and 20% of them in Twitter, 1% and 20% of them in LinkedIn, 29% and 12% of them in Google+.

It is concluded that the self-financing engineering institutions have more presence in Facebook unlike Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+.

FINDINGS

1. The majority of students and faculty respondents have a presence in the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn
2. There is no significant difference between students and faculty respondents use of social media tools.
3. Facebook is one of the most widely used social media platforms among students followed by Twitter. The faculty respondents have a maximum presence in Facebook followed by LinkedIn. Hence, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are frequently used social media platforms by students and faculty respondents in self-financing engineering institutions.
4. Majority of the students and faculty respondents are unaware and not very sure of institutions social media presence overall. Thus, the self-financing engineering institutions are not effectively using social media to communicate its brand online.
5. The self-financing engineering institutions have more presence in Facebook unlike Twitter, LinkedIn and Google+.

SUGGESTIONS

1. The self-financing engineering institutions should organize capability building programs for faculty and students on social media and its applications to enrich and support brand building efforts of their institutions. In turn, faculty and students should transfer the learning back to institutions for enhancing its presence

and adoption of these new tools to communicate its brand image accordingly.

2. Social media platforms are not at all completely utilized by the self-financing engineering institutions today. It offers a two-way communication and also very costive effective online channels available 24/7. Therefore, the students should play a pivotal role under the guidance of the faculty members to build a strong social media platforms for their respective institutions. The institutions management should also grab this online opportunity to connect, share and collaborate with its alumni, prospective and current students. The onus lies with students and faculty to lead by example by not only creating Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn pages but also have active contribution by students, faculty and other key stakeholders of the institutions. For example, faculty can set up a 'Facebook chat' or 'Tweet Chat' in the emerging technologies in their respective domain and ask experts to comment and follow the chat. At the same time, LinkedIn groups can be created to connect the students and faculty with like-minded professionals in the emerging areas of technologies and also enable them to contribute for the same. This in turn, will improve the institutions online branding efforts to communicate a consistent online brand image in future.

CONCLUSION

In recent years, Tamilnadu has seen a rapid growth of self-financing engineering institutions. Today, Tirunelveli district has more than twenty self-financing engineering colleges that offer courses on different branches of engineering. In ever-growing digital arena, educational institutions are bound not only to adopt but also to follow the best practices for using social media tools to get their messages among its stakeholders – Prospective and current students, faculties, non-academic staffs, corporate and alumni.

No doubt, in the coming years, social media will definitely play a major role in higher education institutions in various forms and also the value of the existing social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and Twitter cannot be underestimated. It also has become both real-time and two-way communication platform for institutions to share experiences, information and knowledge among its stakeholders.

It is highly important in the current scenario to understand how self-financing engineering institutions are responding towards social media adoption. Even today there are number of unanswered questions regarding social media adoption towards communication of institutions brand. Thus, the onus

lies with institutions management to create awareness and educate tutors to apply these tools towards learning as well as building institutional brand overall.

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