

A Study of Digital Channels used by Educational Institutes for Maintaining Brand Reputation

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Abstract:

This study is attempts to evaluate and determine how the educational institutes are focusing on including digital media channels to be in the market; by attaining good reputation and brand name. The objective of this study was to examine the most preferred digital channels used by the educational institutes to maintain their brand reputation. This study was conducted through unstructured sample observation. 50 subjects were randomly selected and were observed for the study in their natural settings. Findings reveal that there is a positive and significant use of digital channels by the educational institutions for maintaining brand reputation. Websites, e-mails and social media platforms are used for providing information, creating alumni forums and showcasing their success stories. The study concluded that educational institutes should adopt more social media platforms and digital first approach. More live streaming and chat bots can give Websites a new dimension for attaining brand reputation.

Keywords: Branding; Brand Reputation; Digital Channels; Digital Marketing

Introduction

Education at any stage serves as the core of our lives. Individual's holistic, spiritual and academic development depends upon education. For an educational institute to build & maintain its image as distinct and profound organization is quite a herculean task. With new emerging studies and courses, it has become very challenging for the institutions to maintain their uniqueness. Every now and then new institutes are cropping up, offering various facilities. Some educational institutes use various marketing strategies, offline as well as online to promote and maintain their brand and reputation.

Traditional marketing trends are not much in prevalence. Institutes are far aggressive in their approach. Digital Marketing and branding techniques have paved their way in. Digital Marketing using digital channels and managing brand reputation to promote products and services, has a wider reach to the audience across the globe. Glossy brochures, pamphlets, campus tours, posters, etc. are some of the traditional styles of marketing strategies, which are still used in educational institutes. What added to the list are the digital content and digital channels to create a buzz. Digital or Social media channels are the new way the students interact with their schools, colleges and universities. Institutes that use social media or digital channels can attract a greater number of student recruitment than the ones not using them. The feedback and reviews on websites work as a word-of-mouth recommendation and convince more students to attend a institution.

Digital channels provide information globally, prospective international students have a virtual campus tours online and experience the university environment while sitting in one's own comfort zone and can decide whether or not go through in the admission formalities of a particular university. Web chats provide counseling sessions to the prospective students and have a better understanding of the institution. (Dan Pastuszak, 2015)

Educational institutions are encountering the problem of increased competition. They are constantly on the look-out for different ways to establish their presence in the market and tell their side of the story to create brand awareness. A brand is a name that distinguishes a company and its products from others. A successful brand gets generated only with years of trust, authenticity, credibility and organic presence. To emerge as a distinct identity, any educational institute needs branding. This helps it to grow into a successful brand name. To have a better branding, traditional branding methods have been replaced by digital channels. These digital channels not only promote business of the institution, but also ensure that it is promoted to the right audience.

Review of Literature

- ***The Social Media Marketing Book- Dan Zarella***

Zarella (2009) states that, millions of people are on social media which means more customers and if your company is not using this opportunity of grabbing the social media, it is a wasted one. New web technologies have made it easier for all to create and distribute their content. Social media comes in major forms. There is a large possibility for a small business to create big names through social media networks. The book discusses about all the major social media networks in detail also social

networking, media sharing rating, reviews, measurements, etc. It is a major insight in the world of social media.

- ***Social Media as a Tool of Marketing and Creating Brand awareness-***

Christina Adhiambo Odhiambo

Odhiambo (2012) opines that, the emerging trends of social media are the main reason of decreasing presence of traditional advertising. Social media is the in thing and has great importance in today's marketing strategies. The present study is designed to find out the effectiveness of social media over traditional media on brand management. Odhiambo (2012) states that, the conclusion of finding of the study as: the social media do has a great impact on brand management and is definitely more effective than traditional media forms. He further states about Online branding that it is important to capture

The attention of potential customers and create image in their minds.

- ***School Performance, Social Networking Effects and Learning of School***

Children: Evidene of Reciprocal Relationships in Abu Dhabi- Masood

Badri, Ali Al Nuaimi, Yang Guang and Asma Al Rashedi

This study is based on school going children and use of social networking and social media by them. Authors (2017) mention that, children have access to social media through internet using many different gadgets like, smart phones, laptops, tablets, etc. Internet has become a learning platform for the students. The result of the study suggests and supports the reciprocal relationships among performance perceived during the study and effects of social networks and learning from it. The study was conducted on a hypothetical social network model, sampling 34,896 children in Abu Dhabi. This study throws light on possible problems of networking and its antecedents.

- ***3 Powerful Channels of Digital Branding for e-Commerce (And How to Use Them) -*** Namraata.B

Namraata (2017) opines that, there are many products which are sold in the e-commerce market, but it is the branding of a product which makes it stand apart from other similar products. It is all about how you portray your product or create a brand name for it. Namraata (2017) has mentioned three major digital channels, which according to her works very well for branding. Twitter as a very powerful media has some features for optimizing the right use of the #hash tags. Tweets with

images have more engagements. Emails are also another very effective media to convey the subscribers about who you are and what you want to sell. Another digital channel is Web push notifications; these are new way to get notified. These notifications work on desktops and mobile browsers. This helps in scheduling and segmentation of audience.

Research Objectives

The research has been conducted to study and evaluate various Digital Channels used by educational institutes for maintaining their brand reputation.

- Determine the various digital channels used by the educational institutions for managing their brand reputation.
- Determine which digital channels are more prevalent in managing brand reputation.
- Determine which social media is a priority for educational institutes for brand promotion.

Following are the tentative assumptions from the study:

- All educational institutes maintain their brand reputation through digital channels including Websites, e-mails, Social media platforms and Search Engine optimization.
- Social Media platforms are the backbone of educational institutes and definitely act as a priority.
- Website is the most essential digital channel used by the educational institutions, but for brand reputation and promotion social media platforms like Face book is preferred.

Role of Digital Channels in creating brand reputation

Digital channels help the educational institutions to understand and make use of social networks (www.saviance.com). "It's your brand that differentiates you from the others and communicates a positive feeling in negative one, of your customers." (Namraata.B, 2017) It is easier to identify and remember a brand, rather than a product. It is very important and effective if your brand has a brand personality. "The goal of creating a brand personality is creating an identity for your customers to interact with the company. It's about turning a company that can often come across as cold and impersonal into something that people can relate to." (Aaron Agius, 2016).

Digital channels serve as a major advantage to the educational institutes as they are cost effective, mostly online social media platforms are affordable as compared to traditional marketing tools or channels provides immediate feedbacks; channels like emails, chat- forum, online- counseling all receive immediate response and feedbacks. Digital channels or branding tools are easily available and accessible. Digital channels help an organization to build and maintain its brand reputation. "If for someone your brand's reputation has been tarnished even the slightest bit you are at risk of losing current and potential customers, but if your reputation remains intact you have the possibility to earn lifelong customers and fans. (Drew Hendricks, 2014)

Effective Digital Channels for managing brand reputation are

- **Website:** Any educational institute is expected to be informative and this information is required not only by students or their parents, but also to the staff and faculty. Best way to achieve this is to have a website for the organization. Website acts as a mirror image of the institution, presenting all the information which the institute wants to impart. A website can offer all the unique attributes of the organization. It is easier for the audience to be informed about the recruitment, placements, courses, management and faculty and other benefits offered by the institute.
- **Emails:** To inform students and parents about the current courses and future plans of the institute. To have personal conversations with staff and faculty, even with the students. Emails serve the best; communication is more intrapersonal between the management and the staff, which can be achieved by emails conveniently. Emails can be composed to compel students to visit the institutional websites. Now a day's emails are more user friendly and mobile friendly.
- **Online Reputability:** Online reputation can be managed through vlogs, videos, interviews of students and faculty, Speeches by celebrities or influencers about the institute, creating and importing information about the educational institutions via blogs, etc. increase the brand reputation, which in turn increases business reputation in a very short time span.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO):** As a website attracts more and more traffic, it has better prospects to be optimized in search engines with a higher ranking. Websites should include relevant keywords or topics to attract more and more traffic.

- **Social Media Platforms:** Most popular tools of brand or reputation management are social media platforms. Social media network helps products and services to be promoted. Two-way communication is the key about the social platforms. Online presence helps in reaching out to a wider audience. Not only reaching but communicating with the audience becomes more accessible.

Analysis and Findings

“Education institutions are trying hard to improve their status and rank. With the large number of available communication and digital channels today, a brand strategy for the establishment of institutions is more important than ever. Branding of education is gaining momentum with increasing number of educational institutions.” (Chaubey & Bangari, 2017)

The rise of digital media channels has a huge impact on branding, marketing and reputation building of educational institutions, primary as well as higher education. Earlier the traditional methods of branding an institution through a logo, a banner and a paid advertisement in print or electronic media served the purpose of branding. Today the educational institutions are not only brand conscious or brand aware, but also digitally branded.

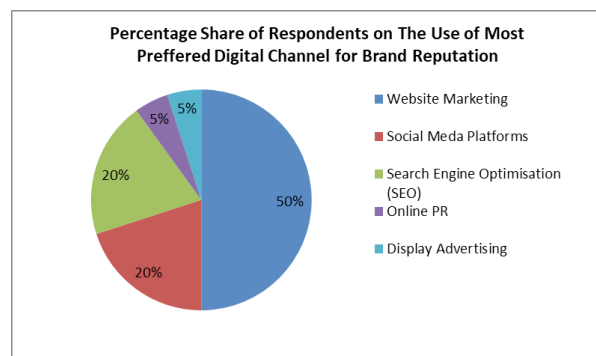


Fig 1.1

The observations from Figure 1.1 reveal that a large number of the samples are digitally equipped. They are indulged in brand marketing and the most preferred digital channel of the educational institutions is Website marketing, followed by Social Media platforms and email marketing. Websites are used as information platforms by any company. Similar to those, educational institutes are using websites to communicate announcements about their admissions, various policies and other performances, to have connections with their alumina, informing about changes in programmes, courses and

publishing notice and circulars. These websites serves as a possible solution to every problem a student, parent or faculty can face. To maintain brand reputations to this most preferred digital channel to maintain brand reputation, educational institutions are making them more student friendly, mobile friendly, flashy, colorful, adding quick links, chat bots, hyperlinks and fully information loaded. This makes it more attractive and attracts more traffic.

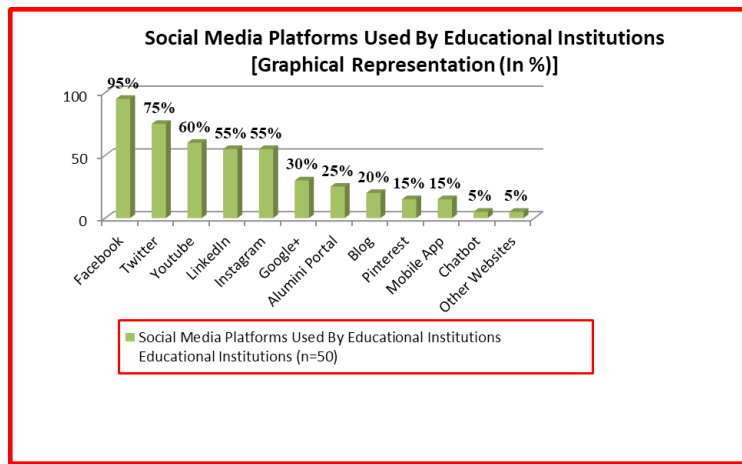


Fig.1.2

“The convergence of information systems and networks, the internet and mobility has brought about a fundamental shift on how people generate and share information. Specifically social media has emerged as a powerful tool in a digitally connected world, touching every aspect of human existence.”(Mbanaso, Dandura, Ezeh, Iwuchukwu, 2015). Findings from the study reveals that almost all the educational institutions (included in the sample) make use of social media marketing for branding and reputation building purposes. They enhance their programmes to increase and improve enrollment of students and grow the student body. Universities and colleges create alumina groups on these platforms and get good connectivity. A well-curated social media appearance helps in sharing their future programmes and innovations with public. The most preferred of all the social media platforms is Face book; face book pages and college groups are the most used and attract a large amount of traffic to the institute’s website. It is easier for the educational institutes to respond immediately to the queries, reviews and feedbacks of the visitors. This prompt reply helps in creating a good reputation. Showing photos and videos of college activities and virtual tours of the university, college or school acts as a brand representation method for these institutes.

Conclusion

Digital branding or reputation management is the path to achieve success for the educational institutes. There cannot be a complete eradication of traditional policy of brand management or reputation management. Digital channels are the perfect medium for the educational institution, to connect, to inform, to recruit, or to engage attention of the students, parents, staff and faculty. Digital channels serve as a big promise towards a secure brand reputation. Educational institutes can take advantage in promoting their reputation online. Digital channels like websites and social media platforms are the most important tools for branding and reputation management. A company should always have a consistent framework to reach out to the public or the audience. This helps in having more visitors, generating more business. Websites are a great medium to tell your audience about your goals, culture, future plans, etc. Educational institutes use websites as showcase window to project their content. Better the content, better the reach and better credibility. All this leads to great business and brand reputation.

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