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Social Media Technology as Public Relation Tool in Higher Education

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Abstract:

In today's changing times where technology has overtaken almost all major functions, the higher education is expected to adorn the social media resources. There are many varied definitions of social media technology in academia and public. Mostly Social Media Technology is referred to as a technology accessed from mobile and web through applications. It allows various users like individuals, organizations to share, generate and engage new or existing content through multiple communications. Emergence of social media i.e., Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Whatsapp, Wikipedia, NetEase, Renren, Youtube, Instagram etc. have not gone unnoticed. These Internet applications depend on digital content which is openly shared which is mostly configured, authored and critiqued by many users. There are a number of factors that limit the use of social media in higher education. The use of social media in higher education brings many opportunities as well as challenges for the institutions and the general users. This study would be focusing on the use of social media in higher education and its many benefits. Secondary data analysis of the research work done in the area of use of social media technology in furthering the public relations and communications in higher education would be studied.

Keywords: Higher Education, Public Relations and Communication, Social Media Technology

1. Social Media Technology- An Introduction

Today's world is all about social media technology and use of digital technology throughout the world. (Selwyn N, 2011) By the end of 2006 Times Magazine declared person of the year award to Social Media Technology. Mass socialization in social media plays the role of harnessing the collective actions of online commuters above the individual users. (Shirky, 2008) Communication on social media is more of an art which involves active listening, further the information has to be shared and learning drawn from it. (Solis, 2008)

Web based and mobile applications together form social media technology. It is an interesting way of sharing existing and new user generated information content in a digital environment using two-way communication mode. User generated content refers to content developed and produced by individual users. It creates virtual social spaces which facilitate interaction. This leads to enhanced appeal for technology and further promoting two-way direct face to face interaction. (Amen, Aguiler, Canche, Davis, 2012) Being social has always been the nature of web. (Halpin and Tuffield, 2010) The young generation of today does not prefer to be passive. (Tapscott and Williams, 2007) They need to be satisfied with independent choice, desire, customization, convenience and control. And producing and designing control along with sharing and distributing of products.

Social media technology provides a unique space to express one's personal identity, it serves as a medium to explore as well as reinforce through the medium of interest groups, user preferences, hobbies and political views. (Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calver, 2009., Currie Lewis West, 2009., Reich, Subhramanyam, Waechter, Espinoza, 2008) Social Media Technology has more to do with connected two-way communication wherein the discovered information is shared. Social media creates facilitation better communication with people. (Le Fever 2008) Many higher education institutes have been using social media technology tools like Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Blogs, Myspace, del.icio.us, etc.

The below mentioned Prism in Graphical shape conveys many types of social media tools available



Figure 1: The Conversation Prism
Source: Solis Brian & JESS3, (2013)

1.1. As Ulbrich et al (2011) Shares

There is a remarkable way the new generation uses web. At the University level there is no match between traditional values on how to develop knowledge and its values, the current values and the traditional values differ with regards to developing knowledge. The new age students learn differently forcing the change in the teaching techniques. There is a prominent change in the teaching techniques, which have been working till date from decades. The Gen Y generation is more used to learning by networking, working together, working on multiple tasks online as they use the web to acquire knowledge.

According to John Seely-Brown and Douglas Thomas (2011) the new culture is that of learning, collectively exploring, innovating through technology. Hosein at al. makes a demarcation between living and learning technologies. Living technologies being the technology used on a leisure basis whereas the learning technology being used for study and learning purpose. He also suggests that in a normal day of a student it is a combination of both. The communication method between people has changed to that of the organizations communicating with its publics. (Cenegy, 2009)

Most of the Social Media Technology sites such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn etc. play an important role in communication compared to communication solely by using of commercials and press releases. (Scott, 2007) There are many Institutes, Universities and colleges using social media technology networking sites for brand awareness and reach to the younger audiences. (Bush, 2007)

Social Media Technology can be best explained as a total web based service for building relationships with its individual users, groups as well as organizations. It has important features of public or semi- public profile with a few limitations, user connections, users connected, created well within the system of the site.

2. Objective of Study

The objective of this research study is to bring to light the importance of social media technology in higher education. Specific focus has been on the various benefits that social media technology has to offer to the new gen Y students. The new generations of students prefer to communicate and build relations through social media and use many social media technology tools available in the market. It has been observed that social media is more of a communication medium for the new generation where the students interact in a free manner, sharing and learning from the information exchange. Secondary data from various research work conducted in this field has been reviewed and analyzed. The numerous opportunities and limitations that social media has to offer are shared. Social media technology and its presence and use are detailed. The new developments in social media technology as a communication medium have been elaborated.

2.1. *Public Relation and Social Media Technology Network*

Social media marketing and public relations play the primary role in accessing along with the sharing of content. There are many non-profit organizations and for profit organizations making successful use of social media networking to disseminate their messages, brand awareness, and increasing traffic to their site. (Nickson, 2009)

Currently newspaper and magazine subscriptions have decreased leading to a much greater use of social media networking, an avenue to convey messages. (Qualman, 2009) Many times it has been observed that the Academic Institutions have two separate accounts one for college/university catering to the twitter account and another for admissions, alumni, athletics etc. (Mansfield, 2009) Web 2.0 and social networking are somewhat similar terms meaning a medium of internet through which interaction, organization and conversation is possible. (Safco and Brake, 2009) The new education system has the capability to out educate and outthrustle the rest of the world. (Obama, 2011)

The actual face of social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook etc. takes place behind the firewalls of the bigger world of the corporate and organizations. There is a link being formed between the networked communities and the customers and partners similar to a nervous system. One of the example is of Edustyle, having many colleges and universities with multiple sites. (Foss, 2008)

2.2. *Typology of web 2.0*

(Dabbagh and Katsantas, 2011) Web 2.0 refers to the efforts by students and faculty leading to web learning or e learning school, e learning pedagogy, eLearning faculty and more. Here 2 .0 characterizes the personalized social network and presence of user generated content, collective wisdom. It also provides with ways for new teaching methods and developing individual skills creatively. New skills are developed here using lots of creativity and are primarily user generated and co constructed knowledge. (Redecker et al, 2010) This new found knowledge is self-motivated and on auto mode in an informal way. (Solomon & Schrum, 2007, Smith. Salaway & Caruso, 2009)

2.3. *Social Media Technology for Higher Education*

A platform where knowledge gets enriched by building networking relationships has come into being in the form of Social media technology. Facebook is a common example where class groups can be formed on Facebook, live question answer sessions on twitter, further Youtube class lectures and supplement lectures can be highly useful for live knowledgeable discussions. Students are advised to have clarity, understanding, sense of recognition and acceptance and if needed to understand from the students in this new campus reality. (Martinez Aleman & Wartman's, 2009)

There is now a new need to develop these new pedagogies 2.0, supporting learner's autonomy. (Lee & McLoughlin, 2010) The desire is more towards stimulation feelings of connectedness, involvement and appreciation evolved from the virtual experiences. (Galloway, 2005)

It is felt that higher education institutions having social media should have a clear focus on the goals that they intend to meet. Goals can range from Enrollment, alumni reach, finding potential donors, extend the Institutions reach. A clear strategy needs to be thought of before embarking on building the social media site. (Mc Donald, 2009) It further needs to be supported and guided with pedagogical interventions. (Cogognini, Pettenati, Edirisingha, 2011) These students have their own understanding and ways to select technologies to learn in a selected environment to their best manipulative advantage. (Conole and Creano, 2007) Social media has been understood rather in a very different and ambiguous manner, which is very much clear from the actual use of social media by students in educational context and in the everyday life. (Selwyn, 2011)

Thus students have the benefit of teacher's guidance and approach I enhancing the positive aspects of social media technology and diminishing the negative effects. (Laura Paulet- Crainiceanu, 2014)

We have a blended learning model by a teacher Laura Paulet-Crainiceanu, 2014)

At the base corner margins, we have an enthusiastic teacher, directing the two types of interactions: like Web 2.0 as well as traditional. He has the benefit of University support financially and otherwise, with cooperation of colleagues in supporting technologies such as web 2.0 for social media interactions. In the University interactions depends on student guidance in filtering knowledge and further assessing student's work.

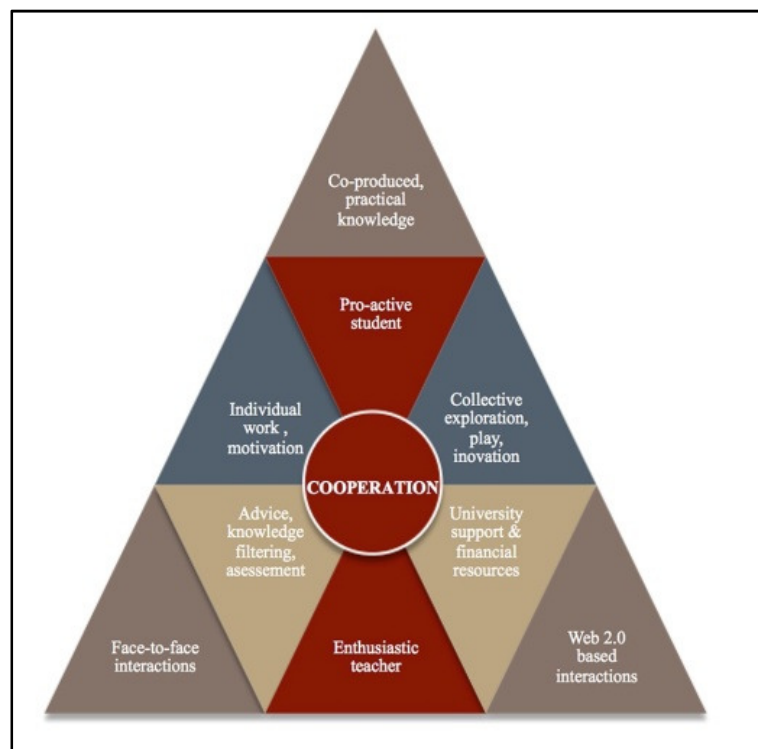


Figure 2: Pyramid of blended learning
Source: Laura Paulet-Crainiceanu (2014)

The proposed Education model has focus on student and teacher alike. It has believed that the web 2.0 experiments can successfully address the faculty-student issues and status. It has been felt that the curricula need to be rethought in order to derive the potential of technology in knowledge building.

(Hosein et al, 2014) has proposed the terms- living and learning technologies. By living technologies, he means the technology used for socializing activity and by learning technology he means where on is able to support and enhance knowledge. Today's needs of reading and writing have got supplemented by innovative, creative, flexible and functionally relevant tasks. Students today have expectations of a rich participatory social media. The 2.0 web based education has the potential to meet up the learning centered curricula. It is equally important that the assessment of the student web 2.0 be done to meet the expectations of the good practice in order to be accepted.

Thus it has been felt that an advance pedagogical driven research be conducted on the teaching and learning in this area.

2.4. Social Media Technology Presence and use

In one of the studies on American Teenagers using internet for social media interaction it has been found that more than 55% of the students online are using social networks for online media profiles. (Noel- Levitz, 2007)

Facebook demographics on discretionary income and higher education are highly used than other competitors such as Myspace. (Qualman, 2007) More than a quarter of the young generation between the age 18-24 frequently visit the Facebook site daily. (Emarketer.com, 2008) Interestingly the younger generation from the age 18-29 has never ever known anything beyond internet. They have a new name, digital natives. (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, Prensky, 2005, Jones et al. 2010, Small & Vorgan, 2009, Prensky, 2001) The user facts are also supporting the younger generation actively using 86% of social media technology compared to only 61% users from age 31-49 and just 47% from ages 50-64. (Madden, 2010) These media connected younger generation is expected to continue in this manner. There has been a higher use of Twitter media by 84%. According to a survey by Pew Internet and American Life Project more than 55% of all online users are effectively in use of online social media. With 48% visiting once a day regularly, mostly 90% of college goings having profiles on Facebook. (Harward, 2011)

2.5. Some Opportunities and Limitations Related with Social Media Technology in Higher Education

With the rising popularity the higher education professionals have some inhibitions and concerns regarding policies on privacy and security of Facebook .(Reed & Young, 2006) Though Facebook has taken conscious security measures in tightening the security of Facebook and giving its users the choice of what they want other connectors to see of their profile.(Facebook, 2007) My Space has the provision of full customization of the individual profile pages background, format and appearance.(Solis, 2008) In an interesting example Dove spent more than two million dollars on an advertisement of 30 second on Super Bowl followed by exclusive sharing of their video "Evolution" on Youtube leading to a large traffic streaming into their website at hardly any cost. (Li & Bernoff, 2008) In an incident related to shootings in Virginia Twitter proved to people assistance in emergency. (Swartzfager, 2007) It also has its contribution in boosting the recruitments via live chat. (Wilburn, 2008)

In the area of higher education, it has many limitations such as time consumed, information in excess being uploaded, very less control and that just anybody has the authority to create an official account. (Reuben, 2008)

Since negativity cannot be removed by not being a part of it and would have to do with changing the perception. (Solis, 2008) In the context of Online advertising it has been observed that online net users while taking decisions take into consideration the posts of users while making decisions. (Juniper Research, 2007) Recruitment efforts can get a great boost by using social networking. (Noel-Lavitz, 2007) Student Blogs have been instrumental in sharing the student experiencing boosting the admission process. (Harris, 2008, Tucciarone, 2009, Rudolph, 2007, Wandel, 2008, Mattson & Barnes, 2009, Violino, 2009) Here students act as Institute virtual ambassadors sharing their experiences, the day to day life and answer questions thus sharing a personalized experience for the benefit of the new students. (Rudolph, 2007)

Social media acts as an opportunity provider to the Alumni of Institutions and creating, connecting with the alumni, gaining their trust, respect and loyalty. (Solis, 2008) We see that Twitter is successful in creating an atmosphere of lively atmosphere where all activities of students such as holidays, home coming, events, program details, reunions etc. are updated minute by minute. Twitter has been found useful in online courses for discussions. (Wilburn, 2008)

The level of engagement and the use of social media technology for academic activities are related since with the higher use of one the others usage increases. (Junco, 2011) It is of importance to note not only the magnitude of student engagement in social media but also the ways of their engagement. Real world engagement has suffered due to the increased level of Facebook for activities which are non communicative such as gaming, sharing and posting photos/videos and chatting with friends. Most of the studies on Media are of the opinion that it serves as a distraction tool for the academic sector.

Today the education is somewhat challenged by the online education sites such as academic earth, International University of people and you tube edu.

Nowdays, as a part of Public relations practice the use of chat session, customer response on email, websites of corporate etc. are common. The idea of Internet as a media communication for public relations is yet to register for few of its practitioners for fear of the latest new technology or not being fully equipped. (Alfonso & de Valbuena Miguel, 2006) Internet has the power to communicate and bring before the whole world whole lot of information. Different aspects of public relations are being revolutionized, explored and shared with the larger and wider audience through internet. (Taylor & Kent, 2006) We see the old and conventional public relation methods being replaced by the new media compelling communication experts to rethink the medium being used to relate to public. (Galloway, 2005) Social Networking has encouraged the college authorities to take a different manner for communicating with their students and faculty. (Alexander, 2007)

Some advantages in higher education:

1. Low cost of connecting with the larger people.
2. Have people know about the college without an intermediary.
3. Communicating and connecting with the students, faculty and staff.

Some Disadvantages in higher education:

1. Excessive time involved in uploading, updating information and replying to queries
2. lack of security as the risk of hacking and information leak is a concern

Many educational organizations are using social media technology in a big way for sharing news, get noticed, increase brand worth. (CASE Survey, 2011) Interestingly many organizations are using it for emergency crisis situations also. More so it has been found effective in controlling and sharing information helping maintain the reputation of the organization. Social Media technology plays many roles in utilizing the information available on social media to the optimum and developing the student research skills. (Mejias, 2006)

Winner (2004) sees the disinterest in politics of technology as steering from a number of factors. Firstly, there is ever increasing separation between the minority who design, develop, make & sell 'new' technology and the mass of us who end up merely purchasing and using it. Second is the long-standing tendency within western thought to view digital technology as tools that are largely separate from human condition and can therefore be used and then discarded without any long term implications. Thirdly, relating to the ways in which digital technology are believed commonly to create 'new' spaces and places in which people can interact and operate separately from their non technologically mediated 'offline' existences. The scale and pace of recent digital innovation-in particular the growth of computing, the Internet and mobile technology have prompted many commentators to position digital technology as key driver of societal development around the world (Castells 2006).

There is enough evidence stating that one's learning enables further self-awareness on outwardly articulation. (Chi,2000) This type of meta-cognition is supported by reflective blogging and self-publishing.

The social media helps interaction and exchange among learners, teaches them connectivity with group.

Thus the social software tool allows the users to solve their own problems, towards a socially constructive approach to e learning. (Dalsgaard, 2006) The learner's community is able to enhance their knowledge by interaction of knowledge by connecting with each other. The pre requisites are free access, in networking without any limitations of boundaries where the information is assumed legitimate. (Siemens, 2006, Keen, 2007)

Many initiatives such as Higher Education Academy supported and funded by Cloudworks and EvidenceNet are furthering Web 2.0 approaches (Downes, 2010) to propagate and encourage educational debate on change indications in support of technology use in education (Conole, Alevizou 2010). New technologies are most challenging, requiring new skills and ways of connecting and thinking. Lankshear and Knobel share an innovative way in which the 'digital literacies' are being used (Knobel and Lankshear, 2006).

Within the higher education courses, formal learning has identified about fifty uses of pedagogical blogs, (Downes, 2010) majorly

used within higher education courses. Advantages, emphasizing the communicative, motivational and participatory attributes and benefits, (Farmer et al, 2008) encouraging a sense of deep pride and responsibility. (Farmer et al, 2008) More than 4,00,000 educational blogs already hosted by edublogs, singlehandedly. These have been very useful to the teachers, further supporting student learning and also acting as a vehicle reflecting own practice since 2004 (Downes, 2004).

Many uses of Twitter are as a broadcasting medium, self-promotion and campaigning, sharing of opinion and commentary dispersal, marketing and public relations, sharing of many ideas. As back channel support in many conferences and events, sourcing of evidence and events from the initial ground level is a good tool for surveying and sharing people opinions. (Conole & Alevizou, 2010)

2.6. New Frontiers

The rate at which the web technology has grown over a few decades it has developed from the static web to a more interactive web where writing, sharing and executing on web is now possible. It can truly be seen as a communicative, intelligent and connected Web. The new Web 5 would be more linked and able to communicate with us as we do with each other. It would primarily be about emotional communication and interaction between human beings and computers. We can see one such emotion mapping example in www.wefelfine.org.

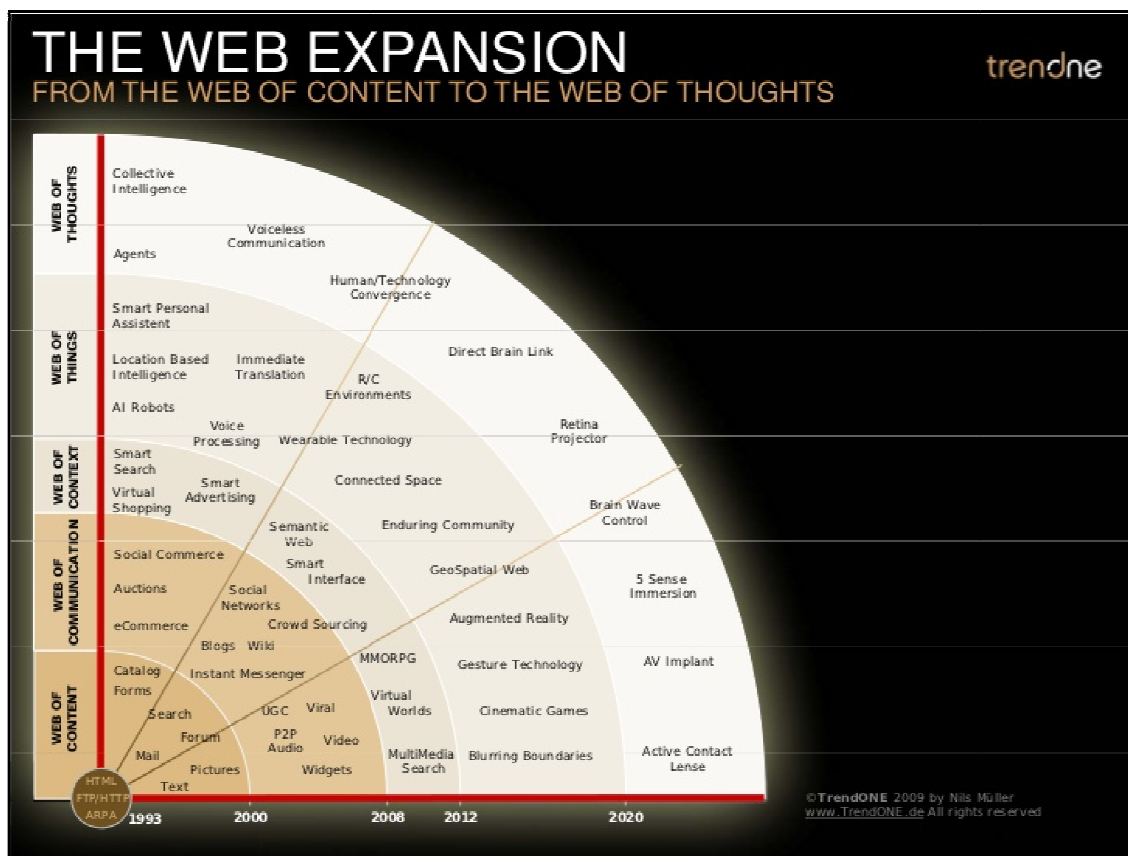


Figure 3: The Web Expansion
Source: Nils Miler 2008

The higher education stands to gain majorly with the coming of the new technology web 5.0. It stands tall with connecting thoughts and things. The new Higher education would be much more about collective intelligence, brain wave control, and Human technology convergence, direct brain link through 5 Sense immersions and AV Implant in Digital aura. Moving to greater heights, the social media technology is expected to be a builder of relations through communication of emotions and feelings. For the higher education can gain in a major way when it would be much easier for the student as well as the teacher to understand each other at a higher level with the aid of web 5.0.

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