

Chapter 14

Fostering Engaged Prospects Through Digital and Social Media: How to Get and Keep Their Attention

Neeti Mathur

National Law University Jodhpur, India

ABSTRACT

In the age of innovation, social media is the ideal platform for academic bodies to reach out to prospective students, currently enrolled students and alumni. This chapter explains role and significance of social media in keeping students engaged. Student as customer concept is in trend which keeps academic institutions under pressure to improve quality. Prospective students expect academic institutions to be transparent in their governance and promote simple and easy to use social media and digital channels for information. The inevitable role of social media for connecting alumni and current student worldwide for networking is explained in this chapter. Social media is an affordable tool for academic institutions to connect to larger student network, but it is important to learn how to use the social media to influence and engage students and alumni of both online and on campus program. The objective of this chapter is to use various examples to help readers understand the concept well to attract prospective students and retain current students.

INTRODUCTION

Age old teaching pedagogy that involved books rather than research and practical training, following what the teacher had to say and not raising a question are more of unbelievable or alien things for today's students of techno savvy nature. Countries with high power distance and our country India where teacher is considered as God found it even more difficult to adopt the change which demanded students to be the customers. Student as customer (SAC) model was adopted largely because students who raised questions became more aware and adept with the concept being taught and brought in more innovative

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ideas and techniques to take the concept to next level. All thanks to social media and digital technology that students' curiosity to learn knew no bounds and spread like wild fire. For every question there was a mentor available online or on social media to answer the query and show the direction.

The alarming trend of disruption in education industry demands academic institutions and universities to come out of the shell, go global and throw behind the age old teaching pedagogy. The well informed students demand quality education, customized as per their requirement delivered to them by world class faculty with best amenities provided by the academic institution (Sander, Stevenson, King, Coates, 2000). The academic institutions on the other hand are expected to keep upbeat with the competition. Ranking of universities and academic institution are listed by agencies and maintaining the position is a tough challenge for institution management. The answer to challenges posed by student as customer concept and competition in attracting and retaining students is- best use of social media and digital platform (Shaw, 2013). Academic institutions do not want to lag behind in the race of getting the best out of social media. So, to keep the enrolled students, alumni, faculty, management and prospective students engaged in academic events and activities, academic institutions keep them informed through digital media. For both online and on campus events and programs digital media is the best and most economic source to reach out to public at large.

Financial crunch, competition with other academic institutions and student involvement in education is a common problem for any academic institution. Especially in the present scenario when everything is transparent. Students are looking for "educational delight". The students are well informed and aware of choosing from options of courses and amenities. They are looking for good experience and networking. Management teams are researching to generate better experience for them by creating on campus and online courses that are tailor made for learners who may be professionals or students. Social media reach can impact large number of audience but one wrong post can lose interest of prospect and can create confusion, distrust or may fail to get the attention of prospective students all together (Donovan, 2011). Many institutes organize alumni meet or may have stronger alumni network but they fail to post appropriately the success stories or profiles of alumni on social media which makes them lose many prospective students. Word of mouth by alumni work wonders on prospective students but one negative experience posted on social media can make the academic institute lose prospective students.

The main reason for high student drop out rates is campus safety and security and lack of privilege for financial aid. When we talk about international students or exchange students federal laws and student visa status restricts students from getting financial aid (Bista and Foster, 2011) leading them to drop out the courses after a semester or two. While student loan is one of the popular means of getting financial aid, Fullbright, Tata, Mahatma Gandhi and other scholarships are available to Indian students for higher studies in India and Abroad. The problem however lies of awareness about such scholarships and in case of student loan the fear of failing to repay because the repayment is dependent upon placement. For such students assurance of placement becomes even more important.

Campus security is a matter of world debate because of some of the incidents across the world. Even teasing, ragging, rape, drugs, abuse, discrimination and shooting are some of the crimes universities all over the world are battling with. The sorry state of affairs is when the victims do not report such cases and end up getting affected psychologically despite having the counselor available at the campus.

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