Social Media in Higher Education: Advantages, Strategies, and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

More than 9 million Cambodian citizens are using social media for various purposes including networking, business, communication, news and entertainment. People are moving away from websites and blogs. Higher education institutes are using social media platforms especially Facebook as their marketing and student recruitment tool.

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INTRODUCTION

Internet and Social Media has become an irreplaceable part of modern life. The birth of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) has made dramatical changes in the internet which also introduced Social Media Platforms. Social media has created a big impact on higher education institutions. It changes the way the way of how people communicate with their stakeholders. It has improved the teacher student interaction as well but it does have some challenges. In Cambodia, Facebook is the most popular social media platform and there are 8.8 million active Facebook users in Cambodia (Ang, 2019).

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Student Recruitment

36% of total social media users in Cambodia are the age group of 18-24 (Facebook users in Cambodia, 2019). These are the potential students for higher education. Facebook is the best way to attract new students and communicate with them. Marketing department for higher education institutes are always finding way to get more visitors in their Facebook page and also Boost different posts. Boosting will help to promote the post or page in a targeted age group (Facebook for Business, n.d.). Many institutes are using the strategy to post at least one topic in social media per day which helps to get more visitors in the page. Recruitment department always can keep in touch with potential students and instantly communicate with them through messaging options. A great example, CamEd Business School, Cambodia's Facebook page has 687,000 followers. Potential Cambodian students frequently communication through CamEd Facebook page.

Get Connected with Students

Facebook is very useful as a tool for negotiating a social and community identity, such as student identity as a university student (Selwyn, 2009). Selwyn has conducted a survey of Facebook posting of 909 undergraduate students in United Kingdom and found that students would use Facebook to share their experience at university including the quality of teaching staff. Study did not show that student will only show the positiveness towards the university.

In Cambodia, social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube are an important part of students' lives and they uses this multiple times a day. It is convenient to use social media to communicate with students because student will prefer to. Social media also enhance the learning opportunity for students when they do group studies and homework. Students use Facebook to chat with friends, learn about each other and share knowledge.

Many teachers of Cambodian higher education institute also prefer to have a social media group to get connected with students where they make announcement and communicate for various purposes. Even though some institutes offer their own platform to connect with students but many lecturers will still prefer to have a separate social media group for better communication.

Facebook is an excellent tool to stay connected with alumni. Alumni always play a very important role to recruit new students for the university. When an alumnus recommends the school to their friend or relatives, they will definitely think about it and most of them will join the school.

Promote School Activities

Universities are often finding difficulties to showcase their achievements. Based on a study by Hootsuite (Kemp, 2019), there are 8.40 Million active social media users in Cambodia which is 51% of total population and majority of them are Facebook users which is 8.30 Million. Facebook is the best tool to promote institutional success stories and activities. Once the stories have been shared in Facebook, people will share them as well therefore it will reach even larger audience.

STRATEGIES TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Develop Facebook Content Guideline (Islam, 2014)

Operation, Objectives & Targets

- Identify the objectives for the social media channel.
- Allocate roles and responsibilities to team members.
- Set the measurable targets and the deadline to achieve them.
- Review performance weekly, research and adopt best practices for social media.

Content

Internal Content: Share content about events and updates regarding the University. The content generally falls into the following categories:

- News Articles, Upcoming Events & live event coverage, Promotion
- Videos
- Student Achievement
- Student/Alumni Profiles
- Picture Galleries
- Courses
- University facts and figures

External Content: External content comes from research conducted and from credible sources. For example:

- Industry news that are relevant to the universities courses (New Technology, Best Practices, New Skills etc.)

Content Schedule: A schedule ensures that there is a consistent update from the account and helps to control and manage the message that is being put out.

For example:

- Tell a great story about student / university achievement then in the next post, show how it was being done.

Best practices for using Facebook Page

It is important to tell the audience that there is a person behind the post. Posts with a personal tone or clever language receive 120% above average engagement (Hershkowitz & Lavrusik, 2013). Share photos, graphics and videos and get viewers' attention. In general, people prefer to look at the graphics or watch videos instead of readings. Photos receive 50% more likes than the simple post without photo / graphic. Facebook live is also an excellent tool, it opens the opportunity for viewers to stay connected in different events which they can watch live from anywhere. Facebook live was launched in August 2015 and Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg had prioritized the development and made it available to all users within two months (Castillo, 2017).

CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTES

Privacy

Nowadays people share daily activities and special moments in social media which is open to public. Studies have shown that users concern about their privacy regarding what they put on social media (Dwyer, Passerini , & Hiltz, 2007). The good news is, Facebook has updated their privacy policies to provide better control to the user so the user can decide which information will be shared. But still there are risks of hackers who may steal information and sometime use the stolen account to do illegal things.

Wasting Time

Social media users have created the habit that, they will visit those sites frequently even though there will be nothing important to see. Especially the smart phone users will look at those sites at almost every time they use the phone for other purposes.

People are spending way too much time to communicate with their friends through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and other social networking sites. This has negative effect on their health. Using social media too frequently can lead the user to feel unhappy and isolated (Barr, 2019) which will create a negative impact in their studies.

Negative Posts and Comments about the Institute

University students like to share their daily activities in social media sites which includes both good and bad things. They will share the experiences in the classroom and campus life. Some negative experiences shared by the students may harm the university's reputation.

CONCLUSION

Overall Social Media platforms brought many advantages in higher education institutes. Institutional marketing through social media platforms are way more affordable than traditional ways. But as human being, it is important for people to communicate and create personal connection with others but because of the convenience of social media, people are communicating through the platform and missing the whole point of how human should communicate.

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