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Process on Selecting a University**

Ria Nicoletti Morphitou and Marlen Demetriou

Athens Institute for Education and Research

8 Valaoritou Street, Kolonaki, 10683 Athens, Greece

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Ria Nicoletti Morphitou, Associate Lecturer, University of Nicosia, Cyprus
Marlen Demetriou, Assistant Professor, University of Nicosia, Cyprus

**The Impact of Social Media on Students' Decision Making
Process on Selecting a University**

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Research: Educational Institutions have been using traditional media to promote their services, which can be categorized as a one-way communication. On the other hand, with the recent technological advancements they can not only communicate effectively with their target market, but they can still use social media to disseminate information and receive feedback. Social media can assist them to establish a two-way flow of information. A vital issue of this research paper is to uncover the process by which potential students use social media and more specifically what the media's role is in the decision making process of choosing a University. In an effort to understand the use of social media in Tertiary Education this research paper consists of extensive literature review and primary data analysis. Key findings extracted by the literature review led to an inductive research approach. Interpretation of the data allowed comparison between the extent of the use of social media by UNIC students and the effective use of social media as a communication tool by the university towards potential students.

Design/ Methodology: The study takes a quantitative approach where a more in-depth view will also be given. For the purpose of this research 300 students have been personally surveyed in an effort to investigate how social media is used and to what extent it influences students' behaviour. The students were selected randomly through the university's data base. Originally 450 students were contacted but only 300 had successfully completed the questionnaire.

Findings: Relating to the behaviour of of students in social media environments, the study indicates that UNIC students are heavy users of social media, but the majority of students are using mainly two types of activities; social interaction and information seeking. The do rely however on information posted on social media for a number of purchasing decisions.

Keywords: Communication, Promotion, Social Media

Introduction

“A social network is a configuration of people connected to one another through interpersonal means such as friendship, common interests, or ideas” (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). Even though the general public has associated social networking with the age of the internet, Coyle and Vaughn (2008) have stressed that social networks existed as long as humans have walked on earth, as they are societal and require relationships with other to survive.

The importance of social media as platforms of social interaction, communication and marketing is growing. Increasing numbers of educational institutions have already integrated or plan to integrate social media applications into their marketing programs as supported by Whitehead (2012). Research demonstrates that Higher education institutions show increased interest in the potential of social media as a marketing tool. It is evident from the literature review that most of the research on social media was done by profit organizations and relatively limited research was done for nonprofit organizations; more specifically for educational institutions in Tertiary Education. University of Nicosia has a university website, and is using social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and a blogs in order to attract potential students.

In an effort to understand the use of social media in Tertiary Education the author has done an extensive literature review and primary data analysis. Key findings extracted by the literature review led to an inductive research approach, therefore two primary research methods were used. Originally a focus group has taken place in an effort to explore the students’ feeling, beliefs and use of social networks. Based on the results of the focus group a personal survey was selected on the basis of securing immediate feedback and believing that the interviewers’ presence will increase the response rate, generate more realistic results, and eliminate interviewer bias. (McDaniel, 2013).

Interpretation of the data allowed comparison between the extent of the use of social media by Unic students and the effective use of social media as a communication tool by the university towards potential students.

Proposed Project Rationale

Educational Institutions have been using traditional media to promote their services, which can be categorized as a one-way communication. On the other hand, with the recent technological advancements they can not only communicate effectively with their target market, but they can still use social media to disseminate information and receive feedback. Social media can assist them to establish a two-way flow of information. Web technologies can offer them the opportunity to gather more information from students, something that can help with targeting and promotional efforts. As a matter of fact social media's hands-on nature demands that strong targeting is utilized so that the university continues to derive value for its investment. Concluding, the author

believes like any other form of communication social media must be utilized based on potential students communication needs.

Aim and Objectives

This paper will analyze and identify the use of Social Media among UNIC students in an effort to examine the impact of the social media on the choice of a higher education program and institution.

More specifically, this paper will:

- Conduct a literature review identifying how and if institutions in Higher Education use social media as a marketing/communication tool
- Investigate theoretical framework on the students' use and habits in terms of social media networks such as Facebook/twitter/MSN etc.
- Analyze the actual social media use of UNIC students
- Analyze the credibility of social media networks among UNIC student community
- Evaluate the medium's ability to motivate potential students to prefer/register in a particular university

Literature Review

Digital Marketing

Digital marketing according to Pride and Ferrell (2012, p.236) "uses all digital media, including the Internet and mobile and interactive channels, to develop communication and exchanges with customers." In the recent past many companies have been making use of digital marketing as a recruitment tool as they seek to further enhance their recruitment efforts. Universities have not been left behind as the competition for students becomes fiercer. In basic terms, to ensure that its recruitment strategy succeeds, an institution must think about the individual to whom it is directing the message (Whitehead, 2012). Universities have come to the realization that today's potential student is technologically astute. This is the generation that continues to access the internet via a wide range of electronic devices including but not limited to smartphones, tablets, game consoles, etc.

There are many reasons as to why universities have turned to digital marketing in their student recruitment efforts. To begin with, digital marketing knows no geographical boundaries. Data from Unesco's institute for statistics according to Caughlan (2011) indicates that international student numbers have been on an upward trend with the U.S. being the biggest destination. To benefit from this trend, many universities are turning to digital marketing. It is also important to note that unlike traditional approaches to marketing, digital marketing is much cheaper. For various reasons, universities according to Thurm (2012) continue to face increasing administrative and other costs and it

is only reasonable that they adopt a more cost effective approach to marketing - hence digital marketing.

As an indicator of how seriously universities are taking digital marketing, University Business (2011) points out that in a survey conducted by AdReady/Stamats, “ninety-five percent of respondents said they’re using social media outlets as part of their marketing efforts.” Out of the four main social media outlets, a vast majority of respondents (ninety-two percent) admitted that they were making use of Facebook as their platform of choice for display advertising. Asked why they were heavily relying on Facebook as opposed to YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter, educational institutions answered that Facebook was where most prospective students spent their time (University Business, 2011). This is an indicator that traditional marketing approaches are fast losing their clout.

Social Media Credibility among Potential University Students

In the words of Whitehead (2012) “web and social media are not only crucial tools in student recruitment, they have forcibly sharpened the accuracy of university branding.” Any attempt to present erroneous info according to the author is likely to be promptly exposed by scores of both potential and existing students out there. For this reason, universities making use of digital marketing in their recruitment efforts are likely to be more careful with the kind of info they post. Given the level of caution universities exercise when posting material on the social media, the latter continues to be regarded a fairly credible source of information especially in regard to university admissions.

Most of today’s students cannot imagine of a world without the internet. Indeed, a vast majority of students are active users of the internet and have a strong presence in the social media. As Nayar (2010) points out, to the youth, social networking has become “a mode of self-representation and display.” In so many ways, the participation of most of today’s students in the social media has been further enhanced by the availability of portable electronic devices that continue to make internet access even more convenient and enjoyable (Michaluk, 2008). Indeed, results of a recent study clearly “show that the vast majority of college-bound high school students use social media” (Levitz, 2012). According to the study, only 5% of students on their way to college do not use social media (Levitz, 2012). In that regard, it would be safe to assume that given the popularity of the social media amongst college-bound students, any information posted via the said platform is seen as being fairly credible and/or accurate. The popularity of social media amongst college-bound students could also mean that any information posted on the platform is regarded as being more credible than info posted via traditional media including but not limited to magazines and newspapers. This is particularly the case given that online platform such as “twitter have turned into powerful channels of information and outstrip the official mass media...in the quality and reliability of the information (Henseler, 2012, p.260).

It should also be noted that it is in this virtual environment that students constantly interact and indeed spend a significant amount of time. A study conducted by Marketing Charts (2010) three years ago showed that the time individuals spend on social networking sites was on the increase. Assuming that this is indeed the case to date, a significant proportion of a college-bound student's time is likely to be spent on social networking sites. In so many ways, it is this level of interaction between potential university students and the said communication platform that makes the latter a credible and reliable source of info. As Metzger and Fianagin (2008) point out, adult and youth information seekers differ on several fronts. This is more so the case when it comes to their information-seeking goals. As the authors in this case further point out, having grown up in an environment where the popularity of social media was significant, the "youth tend to be relatively heavily immersed in digital media" (Metzger and Fianagin, 2008, p.15). In comparison to adults therefore, the authors are of the opinion that the youth regard the social media as a more natural information seeking tool. When it comes to selecting a university, it would only be natural for potential students to rely on a source of information they are well acquainted with. For this reason, any information acquired from the said source is deemed largely credible. It is perhaps with this in mind that universities have stepped up their utilization of social media in their student recruitment efforts. In addition to recruiting students, universities according to McAllister and West (2013) are also utilizing social media tools to build their reputation.

Social Networks in Higher Education

The importance of social media as platforms of social interaction, communication and marketing is growing. The rapid ascent of social media across society is a very clear signal that individuals, groups and institutions are rapidly changing their preferences of how they learn, communicate, collaborate and participate in society. The immediacy of interaction, from the simplest response to a Tweet on Twitter to a very thoroughly researched and presented blog post, underscore how pervasive the foundational elements of Web 2.0 design precepts and principles are influencing daily life worldwide today (O'Reilly, 2006).

For educational institutions this shift in communication channels, patterns and preferences have an immediate effect on a given college or universities' level of credibility with prospective students, and has a direct effect on how trusted they are over the long-term, (Chauhan, Pillai, 2013). Increasing numbers of educational institutions have already integrated or plan to integrate social media applications into their marketing programs as a result of how pervasive this change in communications channels, patterns and preferences is. Research demonstrates that higher education institutions show increased interest in the potential of social media as a marketing tool. Not only are social networks integral to the brand of any college or university today (Ali-Choudhury, Bennett, Savani, 2009), they have become essential for accurately

and clearly communicating the unique value proposition a given college or university can offer students across the spectrum of academic disciplines it provides instruction within (Sotiriadis, Van Zyl, 2013). Social networks such as Facebook and Twitter have attracted many subscribers from all over the world and many organizations are slowly turning towards this particular media with a goal to reach as many people as possible (Bradford & Florin 2003). This shift to social media channels is essential for any college or university to stay relevant and within the contextual frame of reference of students over the long-term as well (Sotiriadis, Van Zyl, 2013). It is particularly important to evaluate the potential of these tools to reach and attract future students and align with how they perceive the most and less trustworthy sources of information. According to Constantinides & Stagno (2011) universities can benefit from identifying the students communication preferred social media channels and habits in an effort to design an effective communication plan for student recruitment purposes.

Implementing a Social Media Strategy

According to Constantinides & Stagno (2011) the use of social media must concentrate on the diversity of students and underscore the freedom they have to excel in their own unique, highly individualized way. One of the most alluring aspects of the experience of attending an institution of higher learning is the intellectual freedom to explore new areas and stay challenged cognitively. Social media strategies need to underscore this unique experience and promise what can be delivered and exceeded in terms of expectations (Hazari, Brown, Rutledge, 2013). From this perspective of personas and the role of individualized student profiles the most valuable aspects of a college or university experience can be made more accurate and clear in all messaging. The factors of branding foundations, the definition of personas and the creation of a unique value proposition based on the actual experiences of attending the college or university are the foundational elements of any successful social media strategy. According to Tomassi and Troy (2007) unique value propositions are critically important to have in place before attempting to define a social media strategy. Just as a product or service needs to be complete and ready to sale before it can be marketed, these core aspects of any social media program for an institution of higher learning must also be in place first as well for the social media strategies to succeed over time. Taken together there is the catalyst of making the entire social media strategy succeed over the long-term.

With these core elements in place the social media strategy itself can be designed and implemented. Social media has become one of the most important means for marketers to reach the college student audience. Studies have shown that college students have higher rates of Internet usage, and higher rates of social media adoption, than the general population (Budden, et al, 2007). The use of social media in marketing to college students has become a specialized field, and it has changed the nature of the interaction between

marketers and students. Yet trust in both the marketer and the message is essential if they are to be successful over time.

Social Media and Two Way Communication

Kaplan & Haelein (2010) note that while the term "social media" is imprecise, it can be applied to a wide range of web applications, ranging from social networking sites to blogs, to collaborative content sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. For marketers, the differences in the way that social media allows them to interact with consumers marks a clear delineation between social media marketing and more traditional marketing forms. Key to understanding this difference is the recognition that social media marketing is a two-way information flow, versus the one-way information flow that is more traditional with media like television, radio or print.

Social media allows students to use media outlets on the Internet as a means of communicating with others, defining social media at least a two-way information flow. Students use social media to interact not just with each other, but with the broader world around them. An example of this could be in the use of social media to champion causes or even organize people for in-person meetings, protests or even marketing events (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009).

Marketers have had to change their relationship with college students entirely as the result of the proliferation of social media. They can still use social media to disseminate information in a one-way flow, but must also engage in two-way flow of information. They have the opportunity to gather more information from students, something that can help with targeting efforts. Indeed, social media's hands-on nature demands that strong targeting is utilized so that the company continues to derive value for its marketing budget.

One of the key challenges for marketers has been learning how to integrate social media with the offline world (Smith & Zook, 2011). Traditionally, marketers seek to create desire in the consumers and then make it as easy as possible for consumers to purchase the product. The higher level of interaction allows for direct communication with consumers via social media, but the offline functions that deliver products directly to the consumer still need to exist. In that respect, there is little distinct about social media marketing, but at the same time it can be difficult for marketers accustomed to keeping customers at arm's length to foster strong, direct relationships via social media while maintaining traditional marketing relationships in other settings.

All told, the biggest change that social media has brought is that marketers must engage in two-way information exchanges with the customers. According to Gibbs (2009) Learning more about customers allows for finer segmentation, with college students emerging as a more specific demographic as distinct from other adults of the same age who are not in college. Marketers are in a better position to fine-tune their offerings to students, and they are learning how to reach a generation of students accustomed to interacting with the world primarily through social media. In the case of educational institutions we do not refer to students as customers, but the communication needs are identical.

Foundational to these shifts in marketing is the advent of Web 2.0 design objectives and strategies. The original concept of Web 2.0 design goals and objectives was defined by O'Reilly (2006) and is shown in Figure 1 in the appendix B. The nature of Web 2.0 design strategies concentrates on having a very high level of communication and collaboration enabled by the design of a given software application or networking system. Web 2.0 is also predicated on a very egalitarian approach to sharing data and knowledge throughout a network. Implicit in the design of this framework is the continual infusion of authenticity and transparency as it relates to the sharing of information and expertise. The Web 2.0 Meme Map or model then defines the working construct of what social networks are modeled on today (O'Reilly, 2006). As the Meme Map is based on a very high level of information sharing and an implied velocity of data sharing across broad geographic distances, authenticity and transparency are its most powerful catalysts of continual cycles of information sharing.

The Web 2.0 Meme Model shows why it is so critically important that the social media strategies strive for authenticity, transparency and trust (Rosen, Phillips, 2011). The powerful aspect of story-telling in marketing is that it underscores the experiential aspects of a brand and serves to reinforce branding values and images while providing trusted references (Schlesinger, 2010). In addition to all of these factors it has also been shown that the human brain learns fastest through the use of stories. This is the most important aspect of any social media campaign: the prospective student doesn't want to hear about buildings and features of the campus, they want to hear about how their life will be so much more interesting, fascinating and they will have the freedom to pursue challenging intellectual goals. One of the most powerful aspects of social media in marketing higher education is the selling of the experience first and how the prospective student will have the opportunity to grow intellectually far more than they had imagined in the past.

Earlier in this literature review the point was made that the most effective social media campaigns are based on personas that accurately reflect the diversity of students and their needs. When the Web 2.0 framework is applied to these personas to define marketing strategies, it becomes clear that each type or segment of student will approach communication and collaboration completely differently (Laroche, Habibi, Richard, 2013). As social media is by nature permeable and easily customized for specific audience and even individual needs, it is incumbent on Leeds Metropolitan University to create digital content in both video and textual form for each of the personas it creates to guide its social media strategies.

These personas are ideally defined by their demographic, socioeconomic and educational aspirations. Social media marketing teams need to further define content of relevance to each of them. This needs to include both video and digital content, including for many the inclusion of smartphone applications as well (Natale, Doran, 2012). As the majority of students today choose to use their smartphone as the primary device they rely on to stay

connected with family, friends and news through the Apple iOS and Google Android operating systems.

Each of these personas will also have significantly different approaches to how they use social media to learn about potential colleges and universities of interest. While the information needs across each of these personas will be significantly different requiring varying video and digital downloadable content, all are galvanized around the need for trust as supported by Natale & Doran (2012). The frequency, amount, context and value of digital video and downloadable content may vary yet all must resonate with trust to succeed. That is the ultimate goal of using social media in the context of academic recruiting. One of the more effective strategies institutions of higher education are relying on is the use of testimonials by and about professors (Moosmayer, 2011). This is one of the most effective approaches for generating word of mouth in a given social media campaign as well (Palmer, Koenig-Lewis, 2011).

Methodology

The main data collection method will be done through quantitative research and more specifically personal surveys with a sample of 300 students. According to Burns (2010) Surveys provide for standardization, ease of administration, ability to tap the “unseen,” suitability to tabulation and statistical analysis and sensitivity to subgroup differences. Personal survey (face to face) was selected instead of a telephone, or online survey since a personable interviewer can do much to improve response rates (Zikmund, 2010). As noted by Burns (2010, p.271) a personal survey is one in which an interviewer reads questions to the respondents and records the answers. Person administered surveys have four unique advantages. They offer feedback in case the respondent does not understand the question, the presence of another human being can help develop some rapport with the respondent early on in the questioning which can facilitate the process, personal interviews can ensure that respondents are selected correctly, and finally personal interviews can adapt to respondent differences. Field work has taken place at public places in the university among university students. The questionnaire was pilot – tested in order to identify any possible errors or problems concerning the questionnaire wording and structure. Convenience non probability sampling has been used because it fast, easy, readily available, and cost effective as described by Burns (2010).

Analysis of Results

The results of this question support once more the extensive use of internet and web technologies by the students as described by Navar (2010). Information published by Marketing Charts (2010) supports the idea that there is a steady increase in internet use by university students the last few years. As demonstrated in this research, more than 90% of the students use the internet to perform

activities such as instant messaging, email and reading the news on a daily basis. More specifically, 96% of the students are using daily the internet for instant messaging, 78% are using the email, 78% for reading the news and 60% to keep in touch with friends and family through various social media. The information given through the survey supports the notion published that, “youth tend to be relatively heavily immersed in digital media” (Metzger and Fianagin, 2008, p.15).

Figure 1. Time/Years Spent on Social Networks

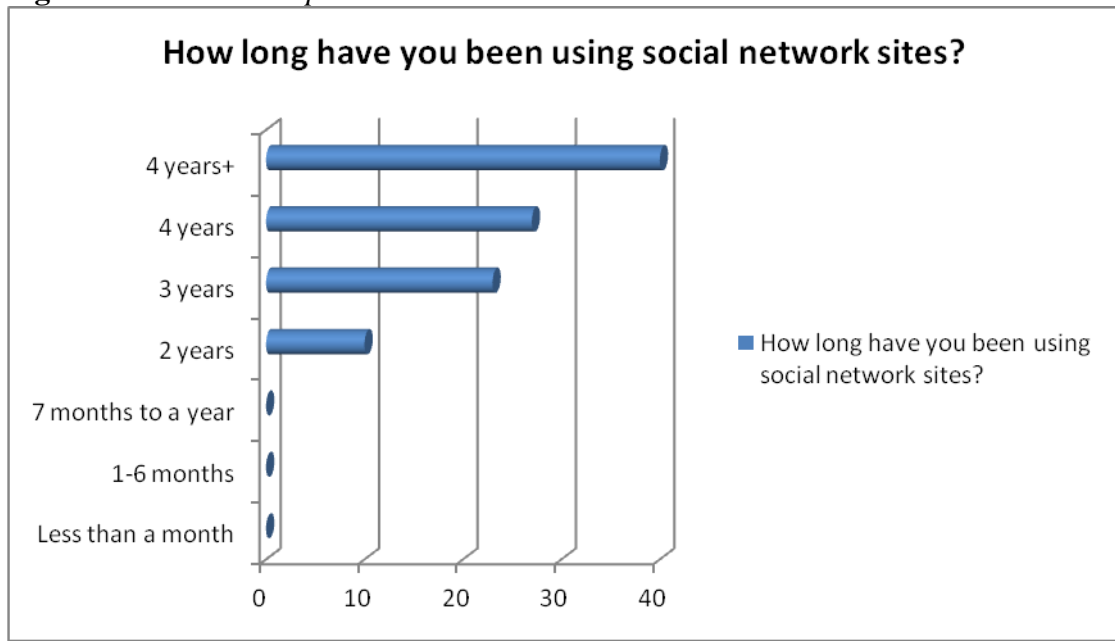
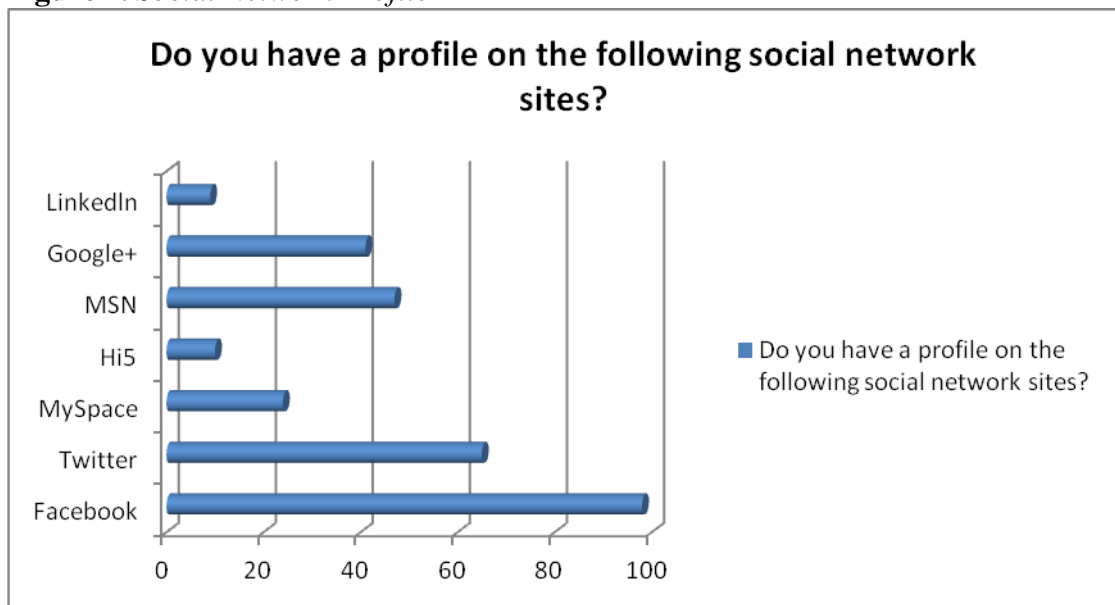


Figure 2. Social Network Profile



As with internet the great majority of students, 40% have been using and have had social network profiles for more than 4 years and 30% of the students

for approximately four years (see Figure 1). Students have profiles in Facebook (98%), Twitter (65%), MSN (45%) and Google+ (40%) (see Figure 2). The results coincide with the statistics published by University Business (2011) which claim that “Facebook was where most prospective students spent their time”. These results indicate that you can reach “almost everyone” on Facebook. The question was a checklist question, and respondents had the choice to give three answers. The results demonstrate that almost every single respondent have checked Facebook together with another social media network. That demonstrates that Facebook is an excellent communication tool for universities either for their existing or future students.

Figure 3. Hours Spent on Social Networking Sites

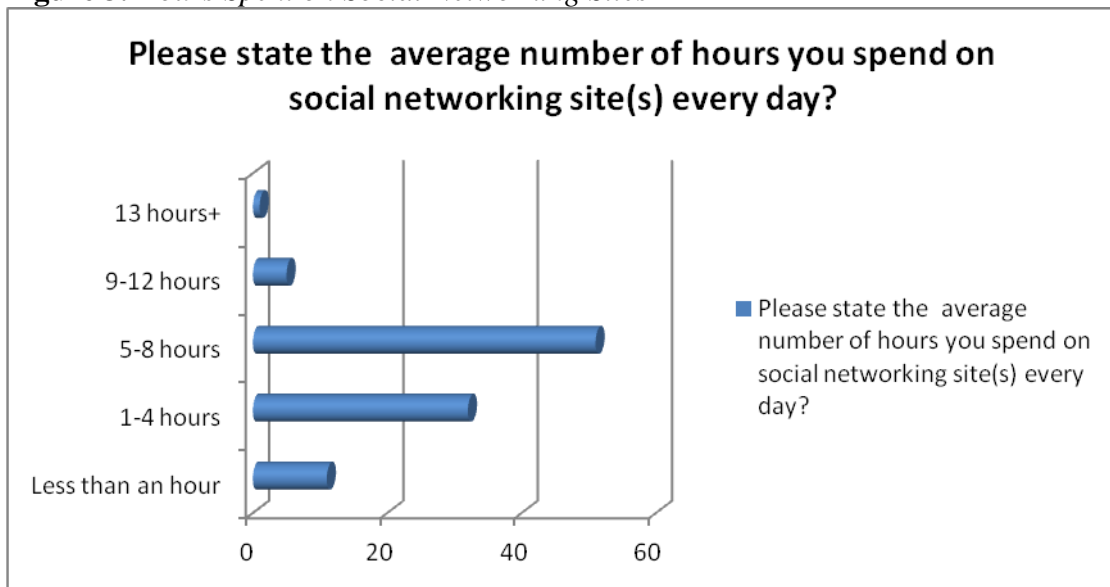
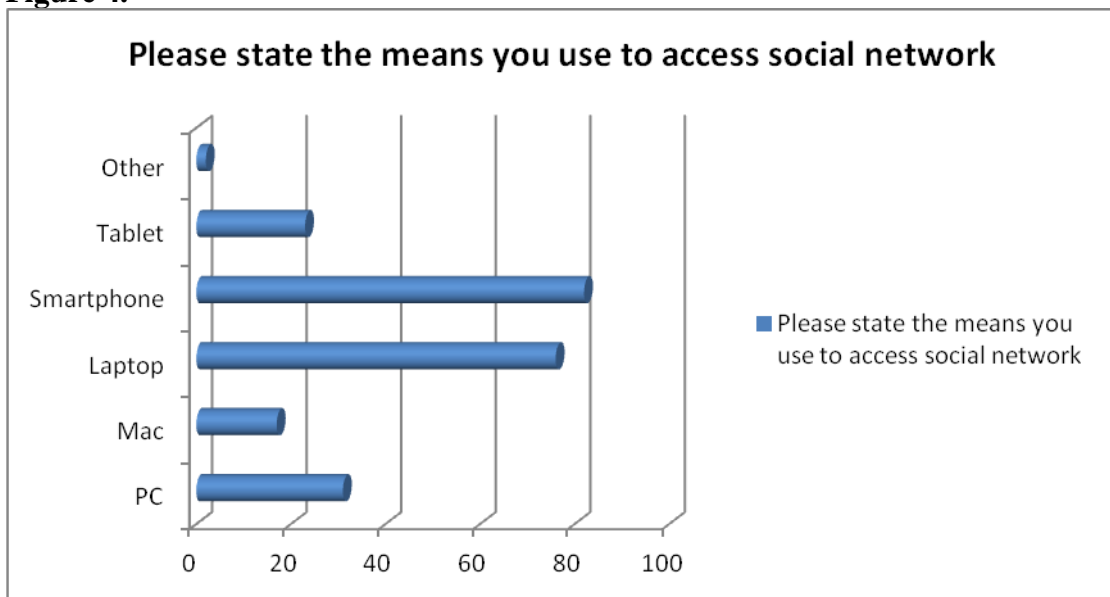
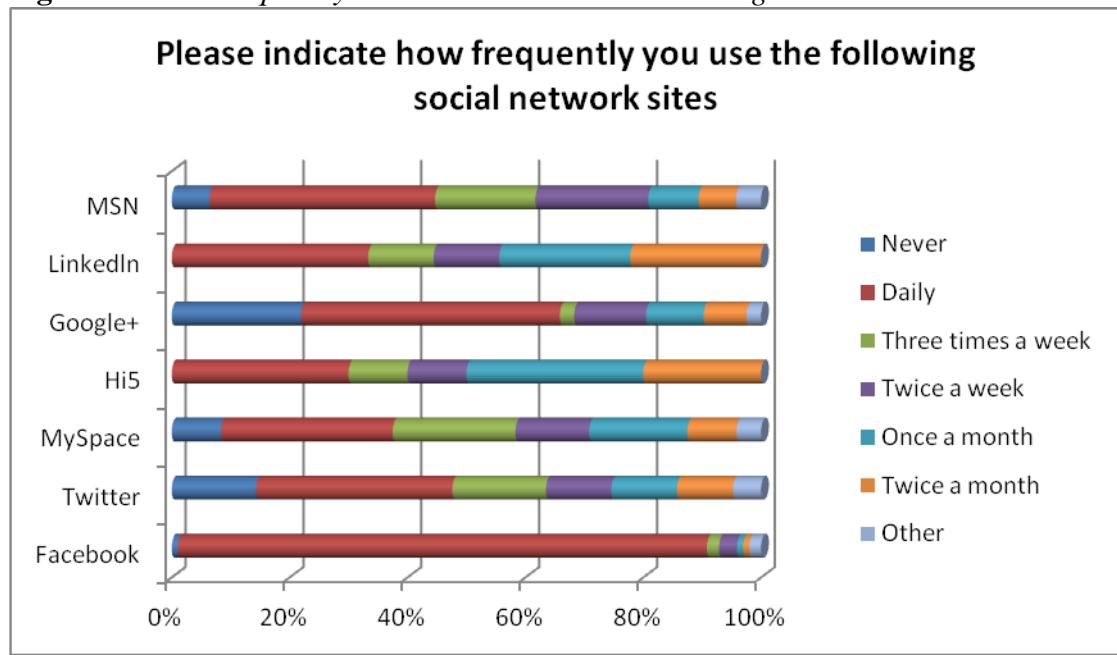


Figure 4.



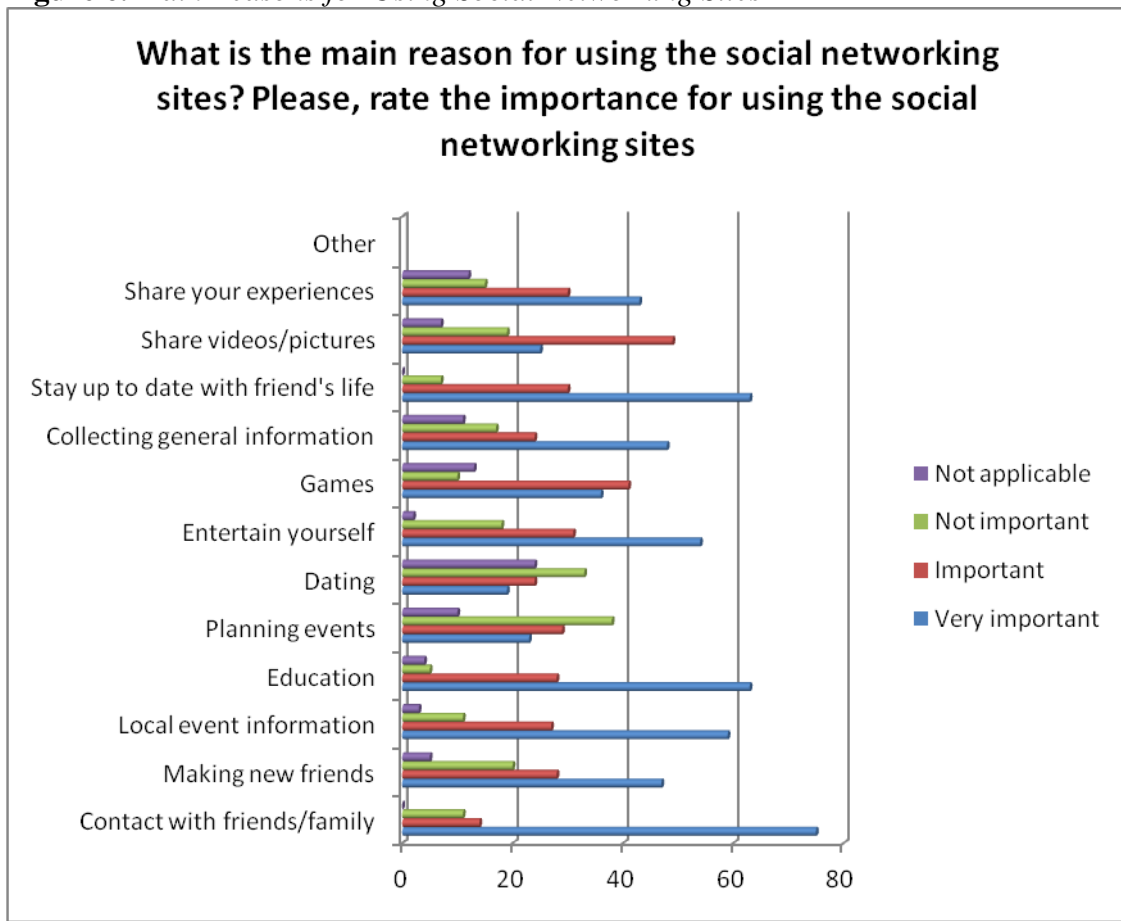
The above charts (Figure 3) indicate that a great number of students (50%) spend on average 5-8 hours per day on social media. The second most popular answer was between one to four hours and it was 30%, and less than an hour 6%. At the same time as seen in Figure 4 students stated that they usually have access to social media through their smart phone (80%) and 75% through their laptop. Less popular answers were through the PC (30%) and Tablet (22%). In our Focus group six out of eight students mentioned that they use their smartphones to have access to their emails and social network sites, and a student has particularly mentioned that “*I am addicted to my smartphone*”.

Figure 5. *How Frequently Students Use Social Networking Sites*



Once more we have seen that students are using the following social networking sites on a daily basis; Facebook, Twitter, MSN, and Google+. Henseler (2012) stated that social networking sites are turning into powerful communication channels. This is demonstrated in the above graph (Figure 5), because we can see that students are using most of the social networks with percentages up to 90% on a daily basis.

Figure 6. Main Reasons for Using Social Networking Sites



As Nayar (2010) points out, to the youth, social networking has become “*a mode of self-representation and display.*” As demonstrated by the responses of the students (Figure 6), they are communicating with friends, family, and colleagues, collect information and even complete their assignments through the use of social media networks. Students have ranked most of the activities performed through social networks as very important. That demonstrates that they rely on social networks both for information and for all kinds of relationships. Social media has become the main channel of communication for university students which reflects the findings of Whitehead (2012).

The aim of this research was to examine the impact of social media as a communication and marketing channel to the choice of university course and institution. Social media marketing is a relatively new communication method which is progressively attracting the attention of both academicians’ and field marketers. Most Higher Education Institutions are already investing heavily in social media marketing as we have previously seen in the literature review. The number of studies however on social media marketing and most importantly its effectiveness is still limited. Constantinides (2011) supports the notion that little is known about the suitability of the social media as a tool for higher education marketing. Whitehead (2012) and University Business (2011)

on the other recognize that there is a significant use of digital marketing in Higher Education. The results of this study demonstrates however that the students of University of Nicosia are generally high users of social media, and that the information received from the university's website and the information received from the various social media **networks** has affected their selection of university which again supports the literature review and more specifically Henseler, (2012) which claims that the information published by social media is consider as credible among college students.

The data analysis shows that UNIC students rank very high the use of social media among a list of **traditional** information channels that influence their choice of study and university. The results of the survey coincide with published statistics that 95.1% of college students maintain a profile on a social media website. An impressive 98% of the respondents stated that they log in at least once a day in their profile. A number of universities have improved the content of the various digital marketing tools since they consider them as public relations and direct marketing tools. The majority of internet users expect to see links with corporate blogs, discussion forums or social networking applications like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Digg or YouTube on the webpages they visit.

Universities and more specifically unic must emphasise innovative applications, blogs, online communities forums, and bulletin boards in order to connect to present and future students. Both in the Focus Group and in the Personal Survey, respondents mentioned that they do not find the university's social media as creative. Unfortunately the university does not provide online visitors with innovative applications, as quoted by the participants in the survey, and they are limiting their attention to Facebook and the university's website. Similar comments we have seen in our focus group analysis where present students felt that the quality of the social media used by UNIC could improve both in terms of creativity and interactivity. Students mentioned that they found the university's Facebook boring and not representative of the real student life in Leeds. They claimed that UNIC can offer a very active and creative student life but that was not portrait in the universitys' social media. Lack of interesting and innovative applications and especially on other forms of social media such as online comminites, forums, bulletin boards and blogs can hardly connect with future students. The University's marketing/communications department must realise the importance of creating attractive social media applications and their impact on connecting to future students. Of course,that needs sufficient allocation of resourses, commitment and and a consistent policy that will keep these applications up to date. Student input is very crucial however since the emphasis should be on creating two way communication through dialog and engagement rather than using social media as a one way advertising platform.

Relating to the behaviour of of students in social media environments, the study indicates that UNIC students are heavy users of social media but the majority of students are using mainly two types of activities; social interaction and information seeking. By analysing the content of the university's social

media through content analysis and comments made in the focus group, the author has observed that the information given through the social media is mainly posting pictures, posting information on events, open days, videos of various events but not posting information that can differentiate the university from competitive ones and seriously motivate a potential student to join the university. The low degree of content contribution through the university's social media, restricts user generated information that could assist future students in selecting their course and university.

As mentioned by Constantinides (2011), there is lack of suitable higher education social media platforms. If that's the case then how will UNIC motivate present and future students to contribute a content that can be at the same time educational, and provide an incentive for future students to join the university? According to Hayes et.al (2009) is to stimulate opinion leaders and brand advocates to provide comments in the university's social networking sites or more importantly publish in their own online social networks.

This study at the same time has provided some important insights into the online behaviour of students. Information from the focus group is that recommendations from family and friends still play a major role in students; choice of university which supports the findings of Constantinides (2011). Taking into consideration that the majority of students (82%) are using social networks for more than 5 hours a day, it is legitimate to assume that some of the input from family and friends could very well be provided through various digital/ social media channels. If that's the case, then social media has even greater impact than the value given by participants in this survey study. Concluding, Constantinides (2011) supports that social networks are excellent platforms for word-of-mouth and viral marketing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Both the literature and the research findings support the notion that UNIC must upgrade its digital marketing tools. Recent literature demonstrated the heavy use of social media networks from university students. It also demonstrates that it is becoming the main method of communication among youth for both academic and personal issues. On the other hand, the research findings of this dissertation supports the theory that university students are using social media on a daily basis, and social media can influence their views and beliefs. More specifically, it can influence their choice of university or course of study. Therefore LMU must upgrade its existing social media networks by becoming more creative, innovating and of course interactive.

Recommendations

Even though Social Media is a relatively new phenomenon, it has a history of an impressive growth in a fast changing environmental and technological

environment. It is advisable for the communication/recruiting officers of LMU to closely monitor the behaviour of present and potential students regarding their social media use. Here below are some recommendations that the author has derived based on the information received from the research:

- Recruitment/Communication officers must approach social media in a proactive way. They should actively and continuously engage with social media in their promotional mix. It is absolutely necessary to understand the online behaviour of potential students, and realise that the students are their partners in the social relationship
- It is advisable for Leeds Metropolitan University to accomplish this challenging goal by concentrating on the stories of its students, including explanations of how they have overcome challenges to attend the university in addition to defining how they attained challenging goals.
- Leeds Metropolitan University must create a highly responsive social media strategy that aligns not just with the needs of students to gain a valuable education, but more importantly, to live the kind of life they always wanted to while attending an institution of higher education.
- As the majority of students today choose to use their smartphone as the primary device they rely on to stay connected with family, friends and news, it is critically important for Leeds Metropolitan University to stay aligned with these expectations and also create a smartphone application on the Apple iOS and Google Android operating systems.

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