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Marketing Education Online: A Case study of New Zealand Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Social Media interaction, an off shoot of web 2.0 environment has caused a paradigm shift in the way we communicate in a society. The modality of the purchase decisions has been radically influenced by this mode of communication. It is only a matter of capitalizing on this opportunity and having the best strategy in the current environment to succeed in changed market environment. Marketers should start focusing on developing high quality marketing strategies conforming to this new environment. This study investigates Social Media Marketing attributes of Higher Education institutions from New Zealand. It uses a customized tool namely *Social Media Marketing Attributes (SMMA) Analysis* to benchmark the practices from the institutions. Very little participation in using Social Media as a communication channels for marketing has been identified. A number of strategies are recommended to align the marketing with the demand and make the best use of this effective medium namely Social Media. The findings of this study have practical implications for the organizations working in this industry; where they can use the findings in developing effective customer centric marketing strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a medium of communication that was developed in the late 20th century. We have experienced the growth of an entire new industry that has changed the social structure, business culture and even individual attitudes because of the wide use of this medium. The communication achieved through this medium has made the world a global village. Physical distance has been conquered by using constant communication through the Internet using websites, emails, Internet phones, and lately the Social Media that provides an opportunity for two way communications between the producer and the consumers. This medium has been recognized as an important medium for marketing by many researchers in their studies (Belch & Belch, 2007; Keegan & Green, 2008) but the growth of marketing by using this particular tool has reached its highest pinnacle with the availability of Social Media through the Internet. Many businesses have started exploring this opportunity and have started playing around with the strategies to utilize this new found opportunity to achieve micro-customization of services for their customers. We have seen businesses cash in using this new found tool and achieve unprecedented communications success (Smith & Zook, 2011, p.31). We also see scepticism from corporations and managers in using this medium as a vehicle for their advertisements (Kelly, 2012). Overall, this medium has caused waves of changes in the marketing world but impacts are still uncertain and require further investigation before this can really be proven as an effective tool for marketing. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm with this medium demands in-depth analysis and exploration and many industries are trying their luck with this bidirectional flow of information. The travel, tourism and hospitality industry that was one of the first to have used this powerful tool certainly set benchmarks for the usage of this tool in marketing. The Education industry being a service oriented industry also has very similar characteristics as the Travel and Tourism industry, where the students are their customers and they opt to make their purchase decision based on the information available (Shanka, Quintal & Taylor, 2006).

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This gives us reason to believe that this medium might prove to be as effective as in the cases of TripAdvisor, Webjet etc. in the travel and tourism industry, where they have successfully incorporated Social Media as a tool for spreading the word and used the personal recommendations as a tool for success in their marketing efforts. This study takes into account the usage of Social Media Marketing in Higher Education institution.

1.1 Research problem statement

The extent of globalization has certainly influenced the nature of business processes in the education industry. With a history of internationalization since the beginning of the education industry; it has been a common practice to seek international education overseas. Many have travelled continents to seek new knowledge and entrepreneurship under the pioneers of technology, innovation and renowned scholars. The availability of technology such as Internet has made it possible for the education providers to offer educational services in an unprecedented way. Today courses are being delivered thousands of miles apart over the Internet and it is possible to follow the learning processes on a regular basis even though the learners and the teachers are geographically distant. This new form of education has not only changed in the supply side the demand i.e. the learners has also evolved and they have started considering many new factors in choosing their education destinations. Brand in the form of referrals from the people they know is a key determining factor in this process (Malmruga, 2008). The fact that the word of mouth has been indicated as a key influencing factor in making purchases in this industry points us towards the media that are now commonly used in carrying out this task. The success and effectiveness of education providers depends on how well their marketing and public relations efforts are implemented and understood.

The importance of marketing as a key for success even in the education industry has been mentioned by Brown (1984) when he developed the model of “Steps in marketing programs”. In his model, the marketing mix of a marketing strategy includes the “four Ps” factors of Product, Price, Promotion and Place in educational programmes. In the case of educational institutions it has always been a struggle to disguise these marketing efforts and putting their services at a much higher level than the commodities. The recent political changes in the world and liberalization of trades has changed this scenario and commodified education as a service (Mohammedbhai, 2002). This redefinition of the services opens up the market for education services to be exported as goods. The variation in cultural, societal, regulatory and economic aspects of the customers (students) of educational institutions makes it a big challenge for the market planners and managers to streamline the marketing efforts and find the right segment for the products they offer, the price they can offer, the channel they can use and develop the right promotional plan targeted towards the right segment of customers. In today’s globalized world it is almost a fruitless exercise to come up with a global marketing plan that fits all the segments scattered all around the world. With a globalized approach in delivering their services the educational institutions need a marketing strategy that will enable them to customize the strategies at a micro level. This calls for development of tool that understand the needs and wants of the customers at an individual level.

The New Zealand Market Development Board recommended opening up the international education market following the shift from ‘aid’ to ‘trade’ approach by Australia in 1987 (Alvey, Duhs&Duhs,1999; Harman, 2004). This has remarkably transformed this sector in New Zealand and introduced a new sector for foreign currency earnings for New Zealand (Martens & Strake, 2008). Tougher competition from other providers in the English-speaking world has made it difficult for New Zealand to keep up its numbers of foreign students in recent years. There has been a declining trend in the majority of the source countries of Foreign Fee Paying students (EducationNZ, 2010). Australia-New Zealand’s direct competitors for Asian students, the UK and Canada, are now improving their visa accessibility for foreign students and have invested heavily in the promotion of their educational services, particularly in the Chinese market. As a result, New Zealand could be losing its comparative advantage in this industry. Major market players in this industry are looking for ways to have paradigm shifts to reach their customers and secure their share of the global education market.

1.2 Research objectives

This research endeavors to identify the practices and expectations of the usage of Social Medium as a channel for marketing Higher Educational institutions. The research looks in to the following objectives to understand the practices of Social Medium in marketing;

- Is there a demand for Social Medium as a preferred medium of marketing communications from the consumers end?
- What is the Higher Educational institution marketers’ opinion about using Social Medium as a channel for marketing?
- What are the current practices prevailing in using Social Medium in marketing Higher Educational institutions?

In considering the above mentioned objectives the research further investigates the trends in other similar industries in using the Social Medium but focuses on the education industry. New Zealand being one of the latest countries to offer international education as global destination makes it an interesting case to study since it had good opportunities to implement a Social Media marketing strategy in formulating their national marketing strategy as a preferred destination choice.

1.3 Significance of the study

Foreign students play a major role in the sustained economic growth and continue to impact positively in creating a multicultural nation in New Zealand (Bedford, 2006). A diverse student population enriches the learning environment and study experiences of the local students. But the choice of destinations now demands a higher degree of resource mobilization as it involves motivating the consumers on a one to one basis since Higher Education is considered as a high involvement choice (Gary, 1991). This study investigates a novel tool that has potential to gain a ripple effect in the market and establish a long term brand value through word of mouth. This is achieved through engaging the potential customers by mobilizing existing ones in creating this ripple. To the best of this researcher's knowledge this is one of the pioneering studies about the medium of Social Medium usage in marketing particularly by the education industry of New Zealand. The findings of this study will establish a benchmark for these highly disorganized industry standards by using this social medium in marketing. This standard might contribute towards the growth in this potential sector to compete in this highly competitive international market. The marketers need evidence that the customers of the Higher Educational institutions have gone through a paradigm shift and trust their peers more than the claims made by reputable institutions. This study provides the opportunity to collect this evidence and recommend possible strategies in this new marketing environment. This study could potentially present an advantage for New Zealand Higher Education organizations to optimize fully their Internet marketing strategy and cash-in to this opportunity as a market leader in utilizing Social Medium as a marketing tool. The findings of this study will be particularly beneficial for universities and other Higher Education institutions as it directly investigates the needs and demands for their potential customers (students). The findings of this study also indirectly influence the policies governing the market development for education industry by the New Zealand government and contribute towards their strategy formulation. The academic world also benefits by recording the application of various Social Media theories and testing various hypotheses through this conceptual framework.

1.4 Research scope and limitations

Due to limitations of time and budget, the study was only focused on a snapshot at a particular time. Any wider impacts through the development of different international factors of decision making (e.g. the world economy, culture, comparative status of the New Zealand institutions by world standards) could not be incorporated in the study.

2. Literature review

The fairly new field of Social Media Networking has created a ripple in the business world and is a subject of considerable interest among the practitioners as well as academicians as discussed in chapter one. This section aims to establish a knowledge gap in this field and propose the focus of this study through a comprehensive review of the current literature about the theories and practices in this field.

2.1 Marketing defined

The definition of Marketing is a highly debated subject among the academicians and the practitioners who actually apply the theories in the field (Hunt, 1976; Dann, 2010; Morgan, 1996). It really is a matter of conceptualizing the contextual aspects that should perhaps define the scope of a marketing effort. Wiebe (1952) for example, asks, "Can social products be marketed?". If marketing is simply a process of accommodating exchanges between two or more parties (Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), 2005) can this be generalized for any business or social transactions? Should marketing be considered solely as a business function or can various other social behavioral theories be applied to understand the processes better and as a result relate this understanding with the phenomenal changes that are being reported by various marketing practitioners due to the availability of Social Media networks among the consumers. Is this a myth? Or are we really experiencing a paradigm shift that is redefining the processes of how we, as consumers, make our decisions of choice and purchase?

2.2 Higher Education in New Zealand

New Zealand: a player in the international education market enjoys a new entrant status among all its competitors. The economic reforms by the David Lange government in mid 1980s transformed the domestic labour market creating demands for "White collared" jobs. The skill requirement variation led more and more students to seek tertiary education resulting in new enrolments in the Higher Educational institutions. Enrolment has risen from roughly 120,000 in 1985 to 431,573 in 2011 (Education counts, 2011). This fourfold increase in the student numbers can be rationalized in two basic influences. One of course, was the increase in domestic demand due to the policy changes but the major contribution towards these additional numbers coming was when New Zealand opened up their market for Higher Education from 1990 as a possible destination. The Higher Educational institutions including the universities, polytechnics and private tertiary educators became good candidates as destinations for international students in a globally competitive market. This new approach of delivering the services in a competitive market transformed the age old universities and their business processes. Suddenly the universities were competing for their share of the market not only internationally but also for the domestic market. Universities and other Higher Education providers had to have a strong marketing team and effective strategies to market their courses in the market.

This has led to a continuous process of innovative marketing strategies resorting towards latest technologies to reach their markets. Recent news reports shows considerable interest in using Social Media by the Higher Education institutes (Scoop, 2013) there are demands from their students. But before these claims can be generalized it is necessary to rationalize the decision through considerable research and practical studies of the return on the investment in this media. Managers certainly will be skeptic in adopting a media without testing it further.

2.3 Social Media as a vehicle for marketing

This section addresses the first research question of this study. Social Media as noted by Google (2013) makes up most of the current web traffic. Facebook followed by YouTube are the top two web sites that attract the most visitors all around the world. And the unprecedented growth of the Internet as reported by Internet World Stats (2013) of 566% over the last twelve years established this medium as one of the most accessed medium the nature of this medium being less resource demanding (cheap), accessibility (24/7 availability), ability to provide interactive communication makes it one of the richest medium for marketing. Many practitioners and market leaders have effectively used Internet to gain considerable profits through better reach and market penetration. Social Media as one of the offsets of this rich media carries all the attractive characteristics and in addition to that it introduces the novelty of interactivity and consumer generated contents to add additional value to the marketing efforts.

The theoretical framework of rationalizing the popularity of this medium has been the focus of many recent researchers (Gaudin, 2010; Contractor, 2009 and Evans, 2008). This research limits its scope of analysis with the context of Higher Educational institutions and attempts to relate the summary of their analyses with the purchase funnel of the students making their decision about destination of their study.

2.4 Student decision making on choice of institution

As a result of the transformation of educational services it is becoming a commercialized product, strongly influenced by the expectations of its consumers. The other key characteristic of educational services is it is inseparable from the service provider. This poses an extra challenge to the marketers as that will force them to bring their consumers to them or take the services to their customers. This is a life changing decision for the customers and considered as a high involvement choice (Gary, 1991; Mazzoral, 1998; Mazzoral and Soutar, 2002). The students are influenced by a complex matrix of factors that includes both intangibles and tangibles. Intangible factors may include the brand of the institution, the quality and relevance of the courses that they offer or even the reputation of the educators involved in those institutions. Lamb et. al. (2008). investigated the decision making process and proposed a few tangible elements that can be used for marketing efforts. He termed them as 'cues' that include physical facilities, staff profiles and their publications that sends the signal to the prospective learners to choose their destination institutions. Lamb et.al. (2008) proposes that these cues can be marketed aggressively to achieve the expected marketing outcome.

The focus on tangibility is perhaps an easy way of pushing the prospective students through the purchase funnel but it will not be prudent to question this strategy's affectivity when thinking about a long term competitive advantage through a well designed marketing strategy. In a high involvement purchase decision perhaps the students might put more emphases on the intangible factors as mentioned earlier. And it is perhaps the referral process through word of mouth that will be given more importance compared to the claims made by the degree offering institutions on their websites. Many researchers have identified this source of information as more credible than the latter one (Crofts, 1999; Perdue, 1993). With the availability of Social Media spreading this word has become much easier than it was in the past. One cannot emphasize more, the power of the post purchase feedbacks in an educational institution's marketing context.

2.5 Theoretical relevance of the Social Media marketing

Psychological Ownership theory

Asatryan and Oh (2008) using the example of the hospitality industry explained the affinity towards feedbacks from a Psychological Ownership Theory perspective. Consumers tend to grow an affinity towards the organizations that they receive service from and take ownership of the feedback that they leave on their sites. This comment shows justification why Social Media users might be inclined to actively spread by word of mouth, their experiences about a school if suitable platforms are provided. And this is perhaps where the greatest possibilities for Higher Educational institutions exist in gaining a long term intangible asset through the branding process from their customers, the students.

Social Exchange theory

The Social Exchange Theory formulated by Emerson (1976) considers the cost benefit analyses as the basis of any social interaction. To get involved in a social behaviour one should have vested interest within an interaction. Both the parties should feel obliged to attain a social interaction through benefits for each. The social interactive environment should be designed in the virtual world in such a way that the parties involved can identify these benefits. For example, the leading Social Media, Facebook, creates its tangible benefits through a sense of personal information sharing within their networks,

LinkedIn creates the same through building professional networks. Any organization attempting to make marketing advantage should carefully consider the inner strategy of benefit design and choose the relevant media to their marketing objective. Social Network Analysis

The traditional social network theory (Wasserman and Faust, 1994) treats the members of a community as nodes of communication and the nature of interaction between these nodes will determine the affectivity of each edge. The mathematical modelling, using this theory, will determine the reach of each of the networks. Social Media reach can be estimated using this theory.

McLuhan's Media Theory

One of the major aspects of interest for the marketers in the Social Media context is the content generated by the users of Social Media. This is important because it is the content created within a context that will have an elaborated impact in the potential market. McLuhan (1995) explained, this generation of contents by dividing the media into two distinctive categories. He explained that 'cool' media requires the viewers to make considerable effort and involvement to understand the context whereas the 'hot' media will require comparatively lesser effort. Perhaps this author's famous quote, "the media is the message" explains this best in apply this theory in a Social Media context. This why the marketers should be very careful in determining the right media for the message they are sending. One might speculate having the right media is more important than the message in it. As the messages being generated by the users will be determined by the Social Media that they are using. A "Like" and a "Comment" on the Facebook will have much elaboration compared to the 140 character limitations on Twitter. An update on class cancellation may be effective on Twitter but this might not be a very effective medium to generate interest about a particular course or service within a Higher Educational institution.

2.6 The framework for study

The above discussion using the relevant theories of Social Media clearly indicates that an existing robust framework is available for creating a basis of an exploratory study about affectivity of Social Media usage and benchmarking a standard for future practices. The discussion summarizes that a Social Media decision, in order to measure its effectiveness can be measured in three distinct areas asking the following questions:

- Firstly, effectiveness will involve whether the players will have sufficient incentive to get involved in these interactions?
- Secondly, whether the reach can be estimated of a particular media that the marketers will be using?
- Finally, whether the message that the marketers are trying to send will fit into the medium that they are trying to use?

The marketing goals will be achieved if a Social Media marketing strategy of a Higher Education institution can push the consumer through the final decision making process, i.e. purchase decision. Due to the ever changing environment of this particular sector it has become very important to understand how to employ this powerful tool, i.e. Social Media on the Internet to motivate the consumers to consume and stay competitive in the global market.

3. Methodology

The framework of this study guides the research for collection and analysis of relevant data. A customized tool was developed (Appendix I) to compare and contrast the Social Media Usage of the New Zealand Higher Education institutions. The tool was named *Social Media Marketing Attributes (SMMA) Analysis tool*. For every institution using Social Media, 1 point was allocated, and for every negative answer, 0 points were allocated. Further categorization of the institutions was carried through allocating points on the depth of involvement of these institutions in using Social Media for their marketing and communication purpose. An overall score for each institution was analysed after totalling the score for each institution. Institutions from the New Zealand tertiary sector were randomly selected from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA, 2012) website. A simple random sampling technique was selected to ensure representation of the entire population. An overall population size was determined by simply identifying the total number of institutions listed on the NZQA website. The total number of enlisted organisations was nineteen hundred and four. The sample size decision in of the study was decided by using the table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The minimum sample size determined for the study was 320. The analysis was carried out on 349 sample institutions from this list.

4. Results

New Zealand has three types of Higher Education institutions: universities, polytechnics and private tertiary educators (PTEs). Out of this population, a sample size of 349 institutions was chosen for this study. All the university websites (8), polytechnics (13) and three hundred and twenty eight private tertiary educators' were investigated in this part of the study. The private tertiary educators were picked up randomly from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) website. The representation in the sample as summarized in the following table 1 is in line with the total population where majority of the population of Higher Education institutes are privately owned followed by a limited number of polytechnics and universities in New Zealand.

Table 1: Sample representations of different types of Higher Education institutes

| Type of the Institutes | Sample representation (n) | Percentage | Mean Score |
|------------------------|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| University | 8 | 2.29 % | 3.375 |
| Polytechnic | 13 | 3.72% | 2.230 |
| PTEs | 328 | 93.98% | 0.948 |
| Overall | 349 | 100% | 1.05 |

Proportionately the types in the sample representation could be summarized as Universities: Polytechnics: PTEs = 2: 4: 94. That also reflects the population characteristics. Different types of organizations clearly demonstrated a varied performance on the scale. Out of a total score of 5; Universities scored the highest (3.375) followed by Polytechnics (2.230) and PTE scoring the least (0.948). This shows that while the universities are much more proactive in using this Medium compared to the other two groups they still can improve their performance by increasing their involvement in this Medium. Overall mean average of only 1.05 out of a total of 5.00 is considered to be a very poor performance and indicates the lack of attention and efforts to use this Medium as a mode of communication.

Further to this analysis the research was interested in categorizing these institutions based on their performance and the nature of participation within the Social Media pages. Since there are many forms of Social Media including Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, MySpace, YouTube etc. the comments recorded were generalized comments made by the surveyors on overall performance. In order to keep the comments unbiased a code book was used by all the surveyors and three surveyors were used for the same sample and results were averaged to make the assumptions as close to reality as possible.

Analysis on the usage and practices of Social Media needed further in depth look rather than just who are using this medium. Following table 2 summarizes the nature of the usage of this medium as a communication and marketing channel. This also gives a snapshot of different categories of usage among the sample that rightly represents the population.

Table 2: Social Media Marketing Attributes (SMMA) analysis of Higher Education institutes from New Zealand

| SMMA Analysis of Higher Education Institutes from New Zealand | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Categories of Usage | Nos using Social Media | Percentage having Social Media |
| Type 1 (Score 5) | 1 | 0.29 |
| Type 2 (Score 4) | 9 | 2.58 |
| Type 3 (Score 3) | 87 | 24.93 |
| Type 4 (Score 2) | 28 | 8.02 |
| Type 5 (Score 1) | 9 | 2.58 |
| Type 6 (Score 0) | 215 | 61.60 |
| Total Counts | 349 | 100 |

Out of the 349 educational institutes surveyed only 134 institutes had some sort of Social Media presence one way or another. This represents only 38.40 % of the total institutes surveyed. Since the researcher could not find any similar surveys in the literature review it could not be compared with a benchmark standard but less than half of the organizations using this easily accessible, readily available medium for marketing communications show some degree of scepticism and to some extent distrust.

Among the 134 institutes who are using this medium only 1 (0.29%) had more than one pages and the marketing department and various other departments are actively posting updates and news to influence user interaction among this channel. This reflects a clearly defined Social Media Strategy that seems to be rare in most of the organizations that have been surveyed. Another type of organization that has been identified in this survey represented a group, which had more than one page/channel on Social Medium. They posted regular updates which were being posted by different departments and they seem to have been running their efforts independently. This shows a lack of overall integrated strategy for Social Media marketing among these organizations. They represented about 2.5 % of the total organizations surveyed. The third category that was identified included organizations that had a single page/channel running on this media and the students were interacting with each other commenting on various events and news that are posted by their institutions. This represented major portion of the sample i.e. 33%. A fourth type of Social Media behaviour was observed in another category where there were initiatives by the institutes of participation in the Social Media though a single page/channel but they are used for intermittent organizational notices but are seldom noticed by the target audience and commented upon. This represented 2.5%

of the samples. A fifth category that had no Social Media activities represented 215 (61.60%) who seem to be the single major portion of the sample. The following table 3 summarizes the results described above;

Table 3: Categorization of the types of Institutions.

| Categories | SMMA Analysis Score Schedule | Representation on the sample | Type Representation |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Category 1 | Actively marketing through posting regularly from the marketing department and has more than one page | 0.29% | 100% University |
| Category 2 | Has more than one page that accommodates learning activities in various courses through discussion | 2.58% | 44% University, 22% Polytechnics and 33% PTE |
| Category 3 | Has a single page only that accommodates interaction between students commenting on the institution | 32.95% | 2% University, 6% Polytechnics and 92% PTE |
| Category 4 | Has a single page providing institutional updates but very little interaction among the students | 2.58% | 100% PTE |
| Category 5 | No Social Media pages | 61.60% | 0.5 % University, 2% Polytechnics 97.5% PTE |

In the above categorization institutions scoring of 3 and 4 in the Social Media performance were grouped together as they demonstrated very little difference in their level of involvement with the Social Media communications. Type of institutions included in each of these categories also gives a distinctive profile which can be correlated with their overall marketing efforts. Majority of the institutions from category 1 and 2 were Universities or Polytechnics having a robust administrative structure and ensured government funding that probably induces them to have a well maintained marketing team and infrastructure to use the latest medium of communications in their communication channels and marketing media. Above results when summarized indicates very little current interest in committing resources towards *Social Media Marketing*. This provides us with an indication of what the higher educational institution marketers thought about this medium as a marketing tool, our second research question. Their lack of interest clearly demonstrates the distrust on this tool.

5. Discussions on findings

Extending the analysis in Table 3, each of these categories can be utilized to establish the types of activities that they are doing and explore a link with the Constantidines’s (2004) model where he proposed that the organizations can influence their consumers’ purchase decision in two basic approaches; through *Active involvement* and *Passive influence* using Social Media.

Table 4: Social Media Marketing Strategy Analysis of the Higher Education institutions from NZ.

(Source : Developed by the author after Constantidines, 2004)

| Category | Activities | Social Media front | Type of involvement |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Category 1 | PR and Direct Marketing; Reaching the new influencers; Personalizing customer experience; Tapping customer creativity; Listening in. | Blogs Twitter Facebook YouTube MySpace | Both Active and Passive |

| | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Category 2 | PR and Direct Marketing; Reaching the new influencers; Personalizing customer experience; Listening in. | Facebook pages YouTube Twitter | Both Passive and somewhat active participation |
| Category 3 | PR and Direct Marketing; Personalizing customer experience; Listening in. | Facebook page | Mostly passive a few active strategy |
| Category 4 | PR and Direct Marketing; Listening in. | Facebook page | Passive and One active strategy |
| Category 5 | X | X | Social Media marketing strategy absent |

Table 4 explains different types of strategies adopted by the Higher Education institutions from New Zealand. This summary indicates that there are still opportunities for this medium in this industry if the demand from the customer end can established through a research. The above section addresses the third research question of this study.

Social Media is a very interactive dynamic medium that provides with a lot of opportunities. At the same time it creates challenges for the marketers to develop conforming marketing strategies. Previous researchers have certainly supported this claim that this conformation needs to be carried out in order to stay competitive in the market (Kreutzer & Hinz, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Affectivity of traditional media and current marketing strategies using unidirectional communications and mass marketing efforts have been questioned as the target audience seem to have lost trust on this medium (Constantinidines & Fountain, 2008). Customers seem to value this new media more through direct involvement and looks at this from a sense of ownership as they also generate the contents within them (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

Although New Zealand Higher Education institutions compete in a global market, the findings from this study questions the current media that they are using and their effectiveness. There have been very few studies carried out in the New Zealand market that enlightening with the choice of medium for marketers in this industry. Khan & Ali (2011) claims that the choices in this market seem to be very unpredictable and often on a make shift basis that lacks overall strategic goals. This research also discovered similar trends where lack of attention towards a strategic choice might have contributed towards the low usage of this medium within the New Zealand Higher Education institutions. The greatest challenge that using interactive Social Media creates is establishing the context where the target audience are motivated enough to involve themselves in the discussion. Without their participation this medium perhaps is left with a dead effort. This is perhaps why we see, almost 36% of the samples from categories 3 and 4, although they were involved in Social Media marketing in one way or another, were failing to create the so called “Buzz” that is targeted in using this medium for marketing purposes.

The following Figure 5-A discuss a process model development based on the Grönroos (2004) framework to work out a value creation process within these Higher Education institutions.

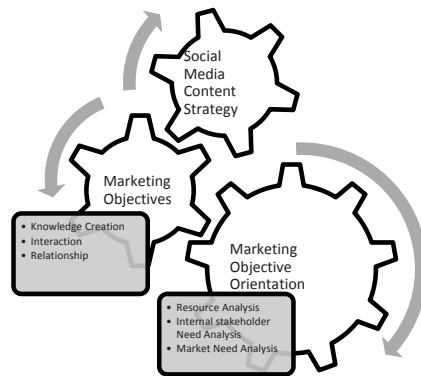


Figure 5-A: Conceptual framework for building Social Media Content strategy for Higher Education Institutions from NZ. Source: (Developed by the author based on Grönroos (2004).

Grönroos (2004) describes three major elements in an effective Social Media strategy: Knowledge Creation, Interaction, and Relationship. The participants could find themselves involved in all these three aspects in order to take part in the Social Media interaction and start adding value to the marketing efforts of the institutions. These objectives are very contextual and need to be customized based on the institutions' internal stakeholder (shareholders, teachers and administrators) needs, market (students) needs. As well they are based on actual resource analysis where a practical analysis was carried out to establish the market readiness for a dynamic medium such as Social Media. If all these relationships are assessed in creating the marketing communications objectives the stakeholder participation should ensure the constant conformation of the Social Media contents which will help the choice of the right platform for the organization to communicate constantly with the prospective customers.

6. Conclusion

The study gives a snapshot of the supply side of the information for Higher Education institutions' Social Media strategy for New Zealand. In answer to the research questions set forth, we can conclude that there is a clear demand from the consumer end for this medium to be used as a marketing channel. Higher educational institutions lack confidence on this medium thus the lack of current use. And due to the distrust and lack of commitment the resource mobilization for identifying clear effective strategy in using this medium is evidently absent among the current practices by the higher educational institutions from New Zealand.

Information gathered and analysed in this study will be a valuable resource in understanding the strategy formulation process in these institutions. But in order to establish an overall picture of this media further study is required on the demand side of this medium. The data can be used to triangulate an overall picture of the current state of strategies of Social Media marketing of these institutions. Further studies may include focuses on inter-industry comparison of Social media usage in marketing, a time series analysis of development of this medium as a marketing tool.

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Appendix I: SMMA Analysis Sheet

| Categories | SMMA Analysis Score Schedule | Active/ Not Active (1/0) | Activity Score | Total Score |
|------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Category 1 | Actively marketing through posting regularly from the marketing department and has more than one page | | 4 | |
| Category 2 | Has more than one page that accommodate learning activities in various courses through discussion | | 3 | |
| Category 3 | Has a single page only that accommodate interaction between students commenting on the institution | | 2 | |
| Category 4 | Has a single page providing institutional updates but very little interaction among the students | | 1 | |
| Category 5 | No Social media pages | | 0 | |

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