
TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

Most research on social media has focused on larger companies that have special strategies designed for social media. Our paper focuses on small and medium-sized organizations (SMEs) specifically on those (e.g. academic programs) where the social-media marketing (SMM) is used sporadically. In the work-in-progress we will undertake action research to observe social actions of visitors to the university programs' social-networking sites (SNS) and the determinants of their responses to the published contents. We will combine findings from multiple-case studies, focus groups, and questionnaires to identify behaviour-specific determinants that lead to ‘liking’ social-media content. By doing that, the features of successful social-media content will be revealed with our aim to assist academia in organizing media-specific branding of university programs. Researchers will be actively involved in using social media for promotion of two program(s) at their business school.

Several challenges pertain to branding university programs. First, a specific university program inherently attracts less social-media users and requires a different SMM, including targeting, narration (e.g. content distribution), and budget. Second, it inevitably requires considerable more time to guide a ‘customer’ from the first interaction with a university program to the enrolment in the studies. Our research aims to generate recommendations on increasing the conversion rate, i.e. the rate of users becoming a ‘customer’ – enrolled (or actively-participating) student – after having acknowledged the existence of a program. Third, branding a university program is difficult without a data-supported analytics and due to limited targeting options at SNS. Unlike branding of commodities (e.g. food supplements), to brand a university program, one must attract social-media users that are willing to invest a considerable more time and financial resources into their journey from the first interaction to becoming an enrolled or actively-participating student in a university program. Our purpose is therefore two-fold: to identify the opportunities and challenges of branding a university program on SM, and to generate the guidelines for social-media strategy in SMEs, specifically for university programs. In addition to the purpose, a discussion on tentative research questions will follow. The questions are:

- How to facilitate engagement of potential future students on social-networking sites of university programs?
- What affects engagement of the followers of university programs on social media?
- How and to what extent link the personal branding to program branding (in general: ‘appropriateness’ of content)?