Article

Insights of School Head About Marketing Education Services Through Digital Media

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Abstract

This study mainly focuses on the insights of a private school's head pertaining to the use of digital media in educational marketing. The qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study and in depth phenomenological interview was conducted from a head of a private school. Two themes were extracted from the data: Marketing educational services through digital media and its challenges, and digital media tool for marketing education services. The study revealed that the school head perceived the digital media to be cost-effective marketing strategy that was multidimensional and value-driven, but due to lack of awareness, skills, attitude, and sense of maturity among stakeholders, digital media was ignored and was not much used as a cost-effective marketing tool. Nevertheless, it is proposed that by hiring marketing personnel to promote services professionally, by aligning their strategies according to the demands of their customers, and by inviting customers' voice on digital platforms, digital media can become a cost-effective and a valuable tool for mercerization of education.

Keywords: cost-effective marketing tool, digital media, educational marketing, mainstream media

Introduction

Digital media can be defined as a combination of virtual platforms that enable us to participate in and create content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with other users and public. It also facilitates conversations and interactions online between groups of people. Marketing educational services through digital media has been a recent trend in global market. Educational institutes offer their customers a virtual portal to give and take direct feedback and to also project their new teaching pedagogies and ideas (Mishra, 2011). This strategy involves informing the target audience about education services and retaining and growing current customers to satisfy their needs and wants. Payne, Storebaka, Frow and Knox (1989) discuss digital marketing in terms of social change as there is no doubt that there has been a great change in our social lives due to media since the last two decades.

Publicizing services through digital networks is the need of the 21st century because technology is rapidly growing and people relay on web-based resources rather than grapevine about schools and its services (Mara, Martin, & Caitlin, 2012). Educational Managers must rejuvenate the educational marketing services as Kotler and Stevens (2011) mentioned in their book. They provide pointers to educational manager on how to manage their services, their brands, and their customers. He also coined an acronym CCDVTP to Create, Communicate, and Deliver Value to a Target market at a Profit. Moreover, the author mentioned that each of this type of management is generally changing trends for business and allows the managers to keep their audience aware of the recent development in the organization

(Leng & Zhang, 2001). Recent researches have turned to say that virtual communities are the key features and have been flourishing the World Wide Web(www) because virtual communities have strongly witnessed a stronger operational performance in marketing educational services (Jacques & John, 2010). Thus, this research will attempt to answer the following research question:

Q. What are the insights of a private school's head regarding the use of digital media to market the school's services in Karachi?

Literature Review

According to Davis (1952), the origin of the term marketing came from the Latin word mercatus, which means merchandize or vend. Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2010) explain that marketing relates to an insight or attitude an organization embraces. Marketing is demarcated by Kotler, the father of marketing as a value driven strategy to satisfy customer needs and desires at a good return of investment. This process identifies the desires of the target audience and does the needful to satisfy this desire and in turn gain profit. He further elaborated that marketing is a value-driven strategy by using the term as CCDVTP to a target audience (Leng & Zhang, 2011).

In education sector, education marketing is finding strength in order to target large audiences in a cost effective way through digital media (Bartels, 1974). Likewise, organizations are also targeting their customers through online social platforms. In order to cater to their needs, companies use different indicators, but they are not sure about computing them, thus integration with the system is the most challenging part for any online marketing strategy. In recent years,

the need of digital media marketing has transformed traditional marketing into electronic marketing and marketers are focusing on cost-effective ways to market their product or services, while the accountability of transparency has increased. Lubienski (2007) opines that when marketing education services, institutional effectiveness is always challenging to commercialize such that it may help parents in making reasonable educational choices for their children. Nevertheless, emotional marketing through dominant images and sensational stories make it easier to market education services in competitive environment. Advertising strategies should focus to promote quality education for less privileged students through incentives and rewards rather than attracting the performance of good students.

Marketization of education is based on 3 Cs: caliber of people, capabilities of the whole process, and collateral evidence of the organization (Newman & Jahdi, 2009). Caliber of people deals with the attitude and performativity of stakeholders; capabilities of the whole process highlights the infrastructure, facilities, and value additions of an organization; whereas, collateral evidence of the organization refers to recognition of the organization through its mission, vision, values, policies, curriculum, and brand name (Newman & Jahdi, 2009). It can therefore be comfortably stated that the 3Cs provide intangible benefits with the help of a set of tangible and intangible aids. This is the whole process of marketization of education (Newman & Jahdi, 2009).

Marketing strategies are explored to gain the attention of the target audience as well as to promote a strong image of service or product and retain customers. These strategies are based on the

needs and demands of the customers to influence and attract them. Marketing education services encircle broad spectrum; from launching new program to staff recruitment or for the organization to project its services keeping focused on the market demand (Rizvi, 2011). The research conducted by Sawhney, Verona, and Prandelli (2005) supported the internet as a value-creating platform for different customers. Marketing agencies have been endorsing virtual media for marketing product and services to create value and engage the customers through different interactions and extend social circle through various internet programs.

Maibach (2003) also emphasized that social media marketing is the best platform to promote educational and physical activities, which help event organizers to plan how to use it in an appropriate way. Technology has become equally important and the most powerful tool in the local and global classrooms. Facilitators are practicing tools of web 2.0 (An expended form of social networking) through different softwares, which are directly impacting on student learning and indirectly promoting educational services (Smith, 1998). Digital media platforms have great impact on marketing strategies to make strong relationship with the customers and retain them to provide products and services according to their needs. Farrell (2001) states that in 1980s, schools were under pressure to market their services. They faced difficulties to find out market demands and niche to project their work to the relevant stakeholders. It was challenging for those who wanted to promote their services and thus faced hazards in understanding a customer demands and in aligning them with education policies to follow their mission and vision in postmodern era. Customer relation services and building long-term relationship with stakeholders

based on trust and understanding are the core dimensions of educational marketing. Student decisions are based on marketing channels that how institutions promote their services to attract these students (Fielden, Hilton, & Motes, 2008).

Micheal and Jukka (2012) emphasize that there are several communication channels to promote educational services but social media makes the difference between traditional, mainstream and latest trend of marketing education services. These differences help marketers to compare and contrast the resources of different private schools. As a result organizations are now focusing to promote their services and academic research thus, through quality enhancement they give a high impact to their customers and in turn increase organization revenue. On the other hand, marketing education services through social media needs more maturity and time for effective and healthy communication. More research is required to help organizations use social media for marketing education services effectively (Berry, 1995).

It has been noticed that competition has increased in educational systems by expanding their boundaries to target a large number of audience. For the same reason, new trends have been adopted by educational institutes, such as virtual platforms to communicate with massive audience anywhere and anytime, by exchanging their views and satisfying customer needs (Michael, 1987). Mazzarol (1987) argues that organizational reputation, organizational assets, and joined ventures are significant features to promote educational services, while the rise of social virtual platform has allowed everyone to connect with the world and to promote their products or services. Thus, the impact factor on larger

audience has magnified through digital media. Marketing managers must manage communication with the customers which align with their organization's vision and mission (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

The purpose of this research was to explore the perceptions of a private school's head regarding the use of digital media for marketing education services in urban context of Sindh and hence the following specific objectives were determined:

1. To explore the perceptions regarding the use of digital media in educational marketing.

2. To investigate challenges to market educational services through digital media over mainstream media.

3. To examine ways and strategies school heads use to market school services

Methodology

Qualitative exploratory research design has been used for the study as qualitative research looks into lived experiences of an individual. The phenomenological approach is the best suited approach for this research as the researcher aimed to explore perceptions of the school head through getting an insight into his experiences and allowed the researcher to explore various components of the phenomenon in general.

Participant

One school head from private sector took part in this research. The head had knowledge, skills and attitudes of using digital media and has been advocating educational services of his school since five academic years.

Procedure

The data were collected through phenomenological interview. The interview was recorded with the consent of the respondent. Qualitative data thus achieved were analyzed through manual thematic analysis where the data were first coded and then themes were extracted from it.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the data revealed two major findings of the beliefs and practices of the school head and also highlighted the challenges the school head faced during his work experience:

1. Challenges of marketing educational services through digital media
2. Digital media tool for marketing education services

Henceforth, given is the explanation of the three themes that emerged from the data.

Challenges of marketing educational services through digital media

In educational marketing, the organisation and people must inevitably be engaged by the ways they present themselves (Sidney, 2012). The school head shared alternative ways to promote educational services and added that teachers are one of the most important components for marketing education. He stated that:

"Extrovert teachers promote educational services in a better way as compared to the teachers who are less interactive, but there is not any specific criterion for teachers to take part in marketing education services. Due to lack of communication skills, teachers are reluctant to market their school, but at the same time they realize that their school services should be promoted."

It can be seen in his statement that although there are various tools to promote educational services; nevertheless, the whole organization and its employees are involved in the projection of the services of an institute. It must also be kept in mind that drastic changes have been made in educational marketing in the last two decades in all educational institutions, which are needed to build new capacity of marketing staff in schools. Educational marketing by all members of an organization has been observed beneficial for personal and professional growth (Gronroos, 1994); however, digital media provides the opportunities to everyone to promote product or services. Borgan (2010) is of the view that digital social media is not only used for targeting a large audience, but also expands the magnitude of promotion, gives power, voice to share interest and

passion, and gives many options to use the easiest platforms if one is not techno savvy.

By selecting affordable and suitable media, school heads can promote education services and call for admission every year. Their major challenge is to project their educational services in a minimum budget. Traditional main stream media requires one to pay high taxes to project any services while if your stakeholders have skills to communicate through digital platforms, school heads can use cost-effective marketing strategy by creating their page on Facebook, which is very common in Pakistani context. The major challenge is to adopt such marketing strategies which are accessible for massive audience with high frequency having high impact. According to the school head:

> *"People have old perceptions and they don't believe in change, but I believe that change has to do with society and its dynamics. Since 1989 generation Y and now with generation Z, mankind has gone through a cognitive shift, we just no longer perceive the way we used to and this shift in perception is continuous and endemic."*

It can be seen in school head's narrative that the paradigm shift from communication activity to digital communication platform provides facility to cater to a large target audience. An active blogger, Killeen (2010) brought together both differences by arguing that online platforms provide opportunity to play different roles; as an author and audience at the same time. For this purpose, people use different digital networks and participate without having sound knowledge to post, comment, share, and

express their feelings with interest groups. This indicates that digital media is used for communication activity and online communication tools (Wren, Powera & Gloria, 2012). In Pakistan, educators follow different ways to promote their services, but they need to know the impact of digital media over mainstream media to target specific audience and retain their customers. It is therefore imperative to investigate how educational marketing is done through digital media in various contexts. The head highlighted the working knowledge of digital media between the older generation and the younger one by quoting Dr.Sugata Mitra:

> *"If you give children a computer regardless of their education and language, they will learn how to work and that is an amazing thing about humanity and childhood. Children are amazing"*. He further elaborated, *"To my mind digital media is not difficult for children, but challenging for the teachers."*

It can be concluded that even though digital media is in vogue, yet the previous generation is not at home with its usage. In spite of the fact that digital media is an effective source of marketing we have to ensure if the parents, who are responsible for their children's education are using it effectively or not. Gee (2009) asserts that digital schmoozing is possible if you are digitally literate with different gadgets. People stay connected quickly and easily through different social networks to be aware and make others aware. If they are not savvy with digital devices they might cause falling of the progress of an organization or failing to achieve their goals (Gee, 2009). Net generation is computer savvy so they can easily deal with different gadgets and stay connected on different social networks; thus, they reply fast and can perform many tasks at the same time using practical approaches and acquiring

self-based learning (Gee, 2009). One of the most successful social media is wiki which focuses on contribution instead of worthiness, because its main purpose is to engage participants through digital network to promote their ideas, creativity, products, and services.

Technology is accelerating and making relationship marketing stronger and long lasting. Although relationship marketing is an old idea, it is the root of virtual digital media to spread quality services and enhance recognition and advancement through virtual platforms. While in Pakistan, most stakeholders are not sure about the transparencies of the information they receive, so school heads prefer traditional social media to market education service. The schools do not have specialized staff for marketing education services, and teachers are asked to market by word-of-mouth. Siblings are the main source of promotion and parents want all children to be admitted in the same school due to socio-economic problems. Furthermore, they always believe in word-of-mouth and get a discount in tuition fee if they have more than one child in the same school. The school head further indicated about the challenges faced by school in adopting digital media for marketing educational services:

"The teachers are overwhelmed by the digital media but they are not ready to use the digital media. So the biggest challenge is the teachers, who are able to open up avenues of learning through digital media in children's mind."

Likewise, Tuten and Mark's (2012) research findings show that even though digital media has spread rapidly, educators are still unable to adapt to the digital network for educational purpose. The reason is the time limitation and lack of technical expertise to operate hardware and software. Yet, in countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia, Spain and other such countries, people have been following the new trends to compete with other educational systems by using digital social media. They are enhancing their originality and ingeniousness through expanding their boundaries for all stakeholders and other virtual communities (Tuten & Marks, 2012), by implementing open-boundary policies to target their audience like students, staff, and the funding bodies. There are several implications to adopt these marketing strategies which include alignment of vision, mission, appropriate organizational structures, and marketing strategies with the marketing philosophy communities (Tuten & Marks, 2012). The school head further elaborated and said :

"Internet is not the issue. The issue is privacy and every school should have some kind of limitation. Cost is the major challenge; there is no return on investment, there is no way of knowing that whatever you invest will bring in any return. So you can put money and have open house, create Facebook page, hire professional staff, but there is no guarantee that it would actually generate revenue. So return on investment is a huge problem."

Internet privacy is also a major challenge for school heads, which can hurt the reputation due to two way communication. School heads also need to consider the socio-economic crises of different segments, because not all parents can afford technology to keep in touch through virtual platforms and those who have

technological devices are at times unable to communicate professionally (Livingstone, 2004). The school head was worried about the online security of data. He stated:

> *"Details of the school become too obvious and there is always a danger of competitors and other hacking into your site and spoiling it. It is also possible for a competitor to deliberately put wrong information to deceive the prospective clients."*

Bolton et al (1995) in their research found that generation Y is well acquainted with social media. Oplatka (2002) explored in his study that educators need to reconsider marketing education services to reshape their curriculum and teaching processes. Since the last two decades, school marketing has been based upon customers' satisfaction and market demand. Educational marketing has been observed in those schools which are part of a competitive environment. The need of educational marketing has been recently recognized for educational institutes.

Digital media tool for marketing education services

This study explored that in Pakistan, digital media is gradually making ground in specific schools which have marketing budget and resources. They use Facebook, StumbleUpon, Pinterest, LinkedIn, YouTube, Twitter, WattsApp, which indicate that things are changing. On the other hand, the school head projects his educational services through different ceremonies and events, parent teacher meeting, open house, functions, and special day celebrations, likewise relationship marketing is dominant over traditional marketing (Evert, 2002). The school head emphasized the importance of digital media in Pakistan:

> *"Digital media in Pakistan has changed over the last few years. Pakistan is on the edge of digital media growth. It is not in an ideal place to compare with any other country, but it is still in an ideal position for the next level as the government has passed the permission for 3G and the platforms are now accessible in Pakistan. Digital media will grow exponentially now, the saddest thing about the educationists is that they are normally the last people to adopt the latest move."*

Over the past decade, the use of digital web-based devices has been increased along with unlimited facilities to interact with all over the world. It has been revealed through research that during the political crises in Pakistan democracy, freedom of expression and awareness has been increased among students through social networks on internet (Shaheen, 2008).

Repatriates search for good schools through Google by going through different websites to find suitable schools for their children. This is one of the reasons why most schools have created their page on Facebook to capture the attraction of their target audience, while it has been observed that the amount of communication on their Facebook page is very low which shows that it has been created just to stand in the market, but not to satisfy their customers. It has been revealed that the schools in Pakistan do not follow digital media because marketing experts are hardly available to project their services in a professional way (Shaheen, 2008). Moreover, they do not have sufficient infrastructure to use such resources to market their services. The private educational sector is typically

associated with educational marketing to maintain relationship marketing and design the strategies according to their needs (Hanson & Henry, 1992). Another challenge is to communicate professionally to build a strong relationship with the stakeholders. The private schools need to hire marketing staff. The main purpose of marketing education services is to reach the customers easily and inspire them by using different marketing strategies. Digital media plays a generous role to reach out to the massive target audiences. The research participant realized that their largest stakeholder (students) are highly aware and come from a techno-savvy generation. Marketing paradigm has been shifted from product-centric to customer-oriented and recently it has been shifted to value- driven marketing strategies, where the key concept of marketing is values. The value propositions are functional, emotional, and spiritual. Prior to this, marketing was on one-to-one basis, but now it has been transformed into many-to-many collaboration.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Digital social media, word-of-mouth has become more effective than traditional word of mouth, because in electronic word of mouth, all voices/ comments have been automatically stored and can become viral. It spreads like a virus among massive audiences (Trusove, 2009). In recent years, marketing education services has been prompted all across the world. Rapid growth has been appreciated in marketing education services. School heads need to follow the cost-effective marketing strategy to target different segments according to their need. Marketing personnel are using digital media as the most easy and effective platform to reach customers, where they share their services and create value to satisfy customers, who

remain loyal and disseminate the school's achievements in public that transform into viral marketing to join other platforms to get optimum benefits.

Findings of this study conclude that school head embodies his values by using cost-effective marketing strategy through digital media that would be multidimensional, value-driven, and holistic towards the customers. Thus making them more than customers, that is potential collaborators for his institution. Few suggestions for school heads to promote their educational services are given as under:

1. School heads should hire marketing personnel to promote services professionally.

2. Using the notion of price eleasticity, heads should align their strategies according to the demands of specific segment, especially in terms of the price they pay. That is called price elasticity of demand. Price elasticity depends on the socio-economic factor of that segment and their demand. If their demand is inelastic they will get high quality at higher price, while if their demand is elastic they will get it in low price with low quality, but demand will remain high because of their affordability. School heads should adjust school fees keeping in consideration the socio-economic factor of their customer not only to earn profit.

3. School head should invite customers' voice by making them comfortable on digital platforms, implementing their effective suggestions and sharing the effectiveness of their feedback on their organization, take consent in relevant areas, clarify their services, and retain the customers.

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