



The Impacts of Online Communities in the Perspective of Institutional Marketing

Raja Ahmad Iskandar Raja Yaacob^{*1}, Wan Satirah Wan Mohd. Saman²,
Abdul Mutalib Embong¹, Murad Ali¹, Mohd. Nuri Al Amin Endut¹,
Abd Ur Rahman Mohamed Amin¹ and Muhaimin Sulam¹

¹Management and Humanities Department, Universiti Teknologi Petronas, Malaysia

²Faculty of Information Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Selangor,
Puncak Perdana Campus, Shah Alam, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: iskandar_yaacob@petronas.com.my

Abstract. Social web promotes word-of-mouth communication on products and services. The use of social media in marketing for educational institutions is important, considering that education is a public good and marketing its products or services can enhance their good name and proceeds. Social media sites are basically related to collaboration among communities, community formation, and bridging communities. These communities are interlinked, and a member made comments either favorable or unfavorable on diverse shared posts and play an important role for brand image. In an institution of education, the phenomenon of social media marketing is new and has rarely been taken to inspect. The present research is conducted to inquire the influence of online communities on institutional online marketing. The main objective of the current study is to examine the impact of student online communities on university online promotional activities. This study examines the influences of community attachment, community involvement, perceived benefits and perceived cost in order to explore in what way these concepts influence university online marketing or promotional activities. Using social exchange theory as theoretical fireworks and based on the data collected from online communities, this study made evident that community attachment and perceived benefits are the significant factors that positively influence community members to support university online promotional activities. Furthermore, study limitations and future directions are also discussed.

Keywords. Social media; Social media marketing; Universities; Student online communities

MSC. 90Bxx

Received: July 2, 2016

Accepted: November 18, 2016

1. Introduction

The emergence of the internet and particularly of web 2.0 has changed the entire scenario of information sharing landscape from unilateral to multilateral aspect [1]. The appearance of this social software has made it possible for the existence of our second life in the cyberspace [2] and turned to be an important medium of communication of the present age [3]. The World Wide Web has opened infinite opportunities for the people to access, create and share information online [4] and those who have access to the Internet use at least one application of this social software [5]. Social media technologies have transformed all aspects of human life [6] and documentation to be an important tool for any business [7]. Social media includes Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Second Life, and Twitter. It is an important agenda for many businesses and is considerably experimented to make its profitable use [8]. According to [9], higher education is a public good, where institutions serve as a service provider and increase their human capital through promotional activities [10]. Institutions of higher education use this social platform considerably, especially social networking sites to market their services. Students become part of these communities along with their additional communities, which are normally administered by students and related to different interactions and services among students and institutions.

User generated contents (UGC) is collaboratively produced, modified and consumed and closely interconnected with eWOM [11]. These communities are interlinked, and a member made comments are either favorable or unfavorable on varied shared posts [12] because online media offers both positive and negative opportunities for the organization [10] and need community factors to determine the brand popularity through brand post [12]. Preliminary research conducted related to social media marketing is general in nature and comparatively less attention is given to consider the influence of community attachment and community involvement that influence brand post. In order to fill this research gap, a theoretical model that helps to examine the influential role of these characteristics on brand post has to be proposed. For the current research, the overall objective is to inquire the influence of online student communities on university social media marketing activities through their posts.

2. Literature Review

Social media consists of blogs, collaborative projects, content media, social networks and virtual world [8]. The phenomenon of social media marketing (SMM) is referred to the use of this platform (from one to many sites and apps) to promote products and services or in other words to gain attention through these sites. SMM is inexpensive because these applications are free and marketing efforts are mainly focused on producing only contents that appeal to customers and inspire them to share it on their social networks. This persuasion of venture popularizes brand awareness and enhances their customer service [7]. Social media facilitate in two-way communication and provide an opportunity to decrease misconception and intolerance about brands, and to magnify brand value through the exchange of ideas and information among their shareholders online [13]. Social media unconditionally permit customers to define, rate and post messages, so that is helpful for others to learn from them. This kind of interaction is further

directed to excellent products and best customer relations [7]. In social media marketing, firms create brand fan pages, where they place their post on the brand. This continuous interaction, customers get to be fans of these brands on fan pages, and ultimately then like, and comment on brand posts. As a result of this, liking and commenting on brand posts lead to brand and eventually post popularity [12].

Social media is a new and important tool of marketing [7] and business organizations need to consume by inquiring its tools and techniques [14]. These sites have significant influences on marketing strategies in organizations [15] and can be substantially adapted the way organizations communicate with their customers [16]. Social media has greatly reshaped traditional marketing from unidirectional to be multidimensional. It is a two-way procedure in engaging a brand and an audience, which is almost debating and commuting thoughts instead of simply giving messages or ideas. Social media appears to be a decent strategic decision for various companies [15]. Social media has come to be a leading agent for higher levels of fan engagement through interaction [17]. It is also an important marketing tool for higher education institutions. Institutions need strategies for their social media marketing to increase their enrolments and revenue. Education is different from the corporation but both have the same primary criterions in handing over their products and services [7]. According to [9], academic institutions function as contributors for educational products and services, where the student's capital is enlarged as a result of the promotional service [10].

Communication is the basic need of human beings to stay together in groups and form a community [18]. Social media sites are basically related to collaboration among communities [19]. According to [20], the socializing characteristics of these web-based technologies are facilitating collaborating, sharing information, community formation, and bridging communities [21]. Community attachment and community involvement are the two increasingly influential factors that affect the level of support in a community [22]. Community attachment is the psychological link among people and specific objects and expresses the point at which the individual has formed a useful psychological relationship that is supported by several attitude properties [23]. Community attachment illustrates the effectiveness of the bond associating consumers with the brand. Attachment is important considering that it should influence behaviors that encourage brand profitableness and customer lifelong value [24], community attachment and community involvement are really essential factors that involve in the level of support [22]. Community involvement in planning is comparatively the latest phenomenon; it is very important in organizing events and will also influence support [25]. The work of [26–30] on community involvement explains the scope to which members are involved in sharing issues throughout their lives with their communities [22].

3. Study Framework

According to [31], theoretical foundations assist in discovering new prospects in the discipline. Google was discovered by following the aged theories of bolometric to find web pages online [31]. Social exchange theory was instituted by George Homans in 1958. According to the author, this theory explains the exchange of activities, that may be (tangible or intangible), more

or less (rewarding or costly), at least between two persons. Social media is subject to users sharing contents and the understanding of reasons, individuals engaged. Social exchange theory principally applies cost-benefit frame and comparability of alternatives to interpret how human beings communicate with each other [31]. Community members determine whether to become relying on the benefits and costs by considering various economic, social, cultural, and career concerns [22]. Social exchange theory is adopted for the current research to analyze support of the online community member for university promotional activities.

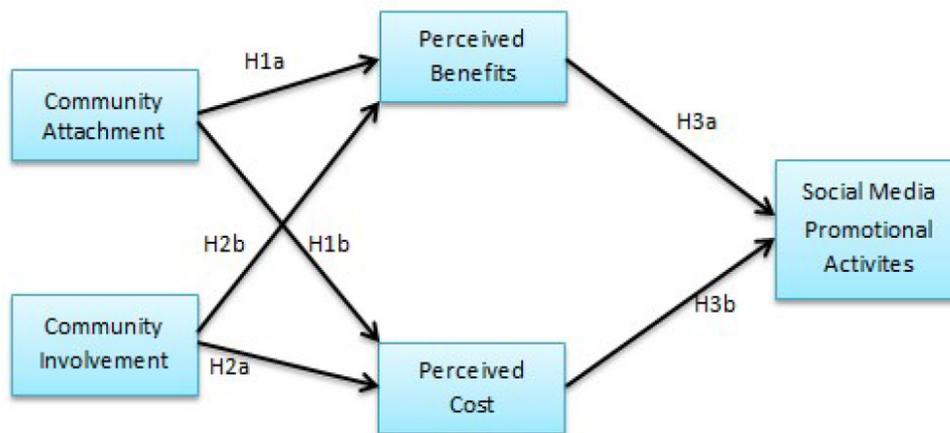


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

4. Research Hypothesis

H1a: Community attachment positively influences perceived benefits to support university's online promotional activities

H1b: Community attachment positively influence perceived cost to support university online promotional activities

H2a: Community involvement positively influences perceived benefits to support university online promotional activities

H2b: Community involvement positively influences perceived cost to support university online promotional activities

H3a: Perceived benefits positively influence university's online promotional activities

H3b: Perceived cost positively influences university's online promotional activities.

5. Research Methodology

Data for the current research were collected through an online survey questionnaire. Survey participants were undergraduate and postgraduate students from University Technology PETRONAS (UTP). The survey was posted on different online student communities such as UTP Market, UTP Lost and Found, UTP Photographer and UTP Postgrad Students. The survey consisted of 23 items. Community attachment was measured five times. Community involvement was measured by four items, perceived benefit was measured by four items, and

perceived cost was measured by three items and finally supports university’s online promotional activities. All these items were adapted from [22]. A five-point Likert scale was used which range from strongly disagree (SDA) to strongly agree (SA), in order to understand student support of the university’s online promotional activities, The data collected through an online survey form and the desired participants were evaluated through SPSS (Version-20).

6. Results and Discussion

The output computed shows that 56.6% of the respondents were male and 43.4% were female. The respondents’ ages were 31.9% to 18-20, 31.2% to 21-23 and 36.9% from the range of 24 and above. The sample consists of 60.2% of undergraduate and 39.8% of postgraduate students. The demographic characteristics as shown in Table 1 below with respect to respondents’ ethnicity, 35.5% were Malays, 17.9 % were Chinese, 13.6 % were Indians, 28.7% were international and 4.3% of them belong to other ethnic groups.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	158	56.6
	Female	121	43.4
Age	18-20	89	31.9
	21-23	87	31.2
	24 & Above	103	36.9
Education	UG	168	60.2
	PG	111	39.8
Ethnicity	Malay	99	35.5
	Chinese	50	17.9
	Indian	38	13.6
	International	80	28.7
	Others	12	4.3

Estimating the values of responses for community attachment (CA), community involvement (CI), perceived benefits (PB), perceived cost (PC) and support university online promotional activities (SUPA) were achieved by calculating their mean score and standard deviation as presented in the Table 2 given below. It was recorded that the mean score with standard deviation for community attachment was 3.26 with a standard deviation of 0.779, community involvement was 3.19 with a standard deviation of 0.660, perceived benefits was 3.41 with a standard deviation of 0.654, perceived cost 3.31 with a standard deviation of 0.737 and finally the support university online promotional activities, where the mean value was 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.644. In order to understand the internal consistency, the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was computed. The outputs generated show that all constructs of the framework in this study have attained an acceptable range of reliability scores as shown in Table 2. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for community attachment with five items where $\alpha = 0.819$,

community involvement comprised of four items where $\alpha = 0.753$, perceived benefits comprised of four items where $\alpha = 0.781$, perceived cost comprised of three items where $\alpha = 0.793$ and support university online promotional activities were comprised of four items where $\alpha = 0.845$.

Table 2. Mean Values, Std. Deviation and Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Mean	S.D	Cronbach's Alpha
Community attachment (CA)	3.26	0.779	0.819
Community involvement (CI)	3.19	0.660	0.753
Perceived benefits (PB)	3.41	0.654	0.781
Perceived cost (PC)	3.31	0.737	0.793
Support university online (SUPA) promotional activities	3.56	0.644	0.845

The relationships among predictors such as (CA, CI, PB, and PC) and dependent variable i.e the support of university online promotional activities (SUPA) were computed through Pearson's correlation coefficients as presented in Table 3. Community attachment indicated a positive correlation with support university online promotional activities ($r = 0.495$; $p .000$), community involvement had a moderate positive correlation with support university online promotional activities ($r = 0.421$; $p .000$), perceived benefits had a strong positive correlation with support university online promotional activities ($r = 0.648$; $p .000$), and perceived cost had a moderate positive correlation with support university online promotional activities ($r = 0.480$; $p .000$).

Table 3. Correlation among the Construct Measures

Variables	CA	CI	PB	PC	SUOPA
Community Attachment	1				
Community Involvement	.621(**)				
Perceived Benefits	.619(**)	.619(**)			
Perceived Cost	.331(**)	.352(**)	.381(**)		
Support university online Promotional activities	.495(**)	.421(**)	.648(**)	.480(**)	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Supporting university online promotional activities has been investigated through multiple regressions to examine the influence of the predictors as shown in Table 5. The R² and adjusted R² examine to report the correlations and variance of the DVs (dependent variables) in relation with the IVs (independent variables). In the first phase, the multiple regressions were computed among CA, CI and PB and PC as models one and two. In model one (CA, CI, and PB), the value of R was .688 which shows a positive and significant correlation between the predictors and dependent variable. The R² value was 0.473, showing that 47.3 % of the variance is produced by this relation. Meanwhile, the value of adjusted R² was 0.469, indicating a total of 46.9% variation in Y (perceived benefits) is described by this relationship (the independent variables). The community attachment was positively and significantly related to perceived benefits ($\beta =$

0.381, $p < 0.05$). Community involvement was positively and significantly related to perceived benefits ($\beta = 0.383$, $p < 0.05$).

In model two (CA, CI, and PC), the value of R was .380 which shows a positive moderate correlation between the predictors and dependent variable. The R2 value was 0.144, showing that 14.4 % of the variance is produced by this relation. Meanwhile, the value of adjusted R2 was 0.138, indicating a total of 13.8% variation in Y (perceived cost) is described by this relationship. The community attachment was positively and significantly related to perceived cost ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.05$). Community involvement was also found positively and significantly related to perceived cost ($\beta = 0.238$, $p < 0.05$). However, these relations were found weaker in explaining the variance as compared to the perceived benefits. In the second phase, the influences of PB and PC on SUPA as model three were computed. According to the output revealed through multiple regressions, the value of R was .681 which shows a positive and significant correlation between the predictors and dependent variable. The R2 value was 0.464, showing that 46.4 % of the variance is produced by this relation. Meanwhile, the value of adjusted R2 was 0.460, indicating a total of 46% variation in Y (support of university online promotional activities) is described by this relationship (the independent variables). The PB was found in significant relation with SUPA ($\beta = 0.541$, $p < 0.05$). The PC was also found in significant relation with SUPA ($\beta = 0.237$, $p < 0.05$), however, less influential than the PB.

Table 4. Regressions Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Beta	t-value	Sig.	Supported?
H1a	CA PB	.381	6.835	.000	Supported
H2a	CI PB	.383	6.858	.000	Supported
H1b	CA PC	.184	2.582	.010	Supported
H2b	CI PC	.238	3.342	.001	Supported
H3a	PB SUPA	.541	10.968	.000	Supported
H3b	PC SUPA	.237	4.814	.000	Supported

According to [26], the trend of collaborative decision-making is a complex phenomenon since this process of decision making is affected by the number of people involved. Furthermore, peoples’ responses are persuaded by the condition of apathy, anger and mistrust, which may lead to an unsatisfactory experience. In the current study, the influences of community attachment and community involvement were measured on perceived benefits and perceived cost. The output from the current run shows that both these predictors positively influence perceived benefits and cost which is similar to the findings of [22] and [28] for PB and contradictory with respect to PC. According to [22], CI has negative relation to PC.

Furthermore, the influences of PB and PC on SUPA were also in similar direction for PB and SUPA and opposite with respect to PC and SUPA [22,28]. According to these studies, perceived benefit is the main predictor that influences event support and was found significant while perceived cost was found negatively related to supporting an event. Finding of the current study is similar with respect to perceived benefits, however, was found to be different to perceived cost.

According to [25], community support factors such as perceived benefits, perceived cost and community attachment are the convincing factors in supporting of an event. The study found that community attachment and perceived benefits are the influential factors and support the results achieved from the current study. Lee et al, described community involvement is the sharing issues with their communities whereas; perceived attachment is kind of relationship among people and objects which are mainly concern with their psychological connection [22].

7. Conclusion

Social media has transformed every aspect of human life. These sites are the prominent tools of marketing and essentially taken by adoption the way organizations communicate with their prospects. Social media has come to be a leading agent for higher levels of fan engagement and also an important marketing tool for higher education because education is a public good. Social media marketing is used to increase their enrolment and revenue. These applications are highly popular among students. Students use these applications by building their online communities for distinctive drives. These communities are interlinked, and students mainly discussed, liked, posted on different promotional activities, that affect both positively and negatively on brand recognitions. The current study was conducted to examine the influence of these online communities on university marketing or promotional activities. The findings from the present study are disclosing that community attachment (CA), community involvement (CI), perceived benefits (PB) and perceived costs (PC) are the highly influential factors that can affect and support university's online promotional activities. This study is limited to a few online communities belonging to a single institution and the results cannot be generalized. In the future, the same model is suggested to be required for large sets of online communities and multiple institutions. It will be more attractive to collect responses by using the longitudinal technique. Furthermore, qualitative analyses are also suggested in getting more in-depth understandings.

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

All the authors contributed significantly in writing this article. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

References

- [1] R. K. Miller, Social media, authentic learning and embedded librarianship: a case study of dietetics students, *Journal of Information Literacy* 6(2) (2012), 97 – 109.
- [2] M. Ali, R. Ahmad, I. Bin, R. Yaacob, M. Nuri and A. B. Endut, Evaluating students information sharing behavior through social media?: a pilot study, *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 9(19) (2015), 94 – 100.

- [3] W. M. Al-rahimi, M. S. Othman and M. A. Musa, Using TAM Model to measure the use of social media for collaborative learning, *5*(2) (2013), 90 – 95.
- [4] T. Correa, I. Bachmann and A. W. Hinsley, *Personality and Social Media Use*, IGI Global (2013).
- [5] K. N. Hampton, L. S. Goulet, L. Rainie and K. Purcell, *Social networking sites and our lives*, Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project (2011).
- [6] A. C. Punnoose, Determinants of intention to use eLearning based on the technology acceptance model, *Journal of Information Technology Education: Research* **11**(1) (2012), 301 – 337.
- [7] M. Mahaney, *The Effectiveness of Social Media Marketing in Higher Education?*, State University of New York, College at Brockport, 2012.
- [8] A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein (2010), Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media, *Business Horizons* **53**(1), 59 – 68.
- [9] P. Gibbs, From the Invisible Handshake: marketing higher education, *Research in Post-Compulsory Education* **7**(3), 325 – 338. 2002.
- [10] C. Kohnke, *Customer value in higher education social media marketing*, University of Twente, 2012.
- [11] A. N. Smith, E. Fischer and C. Yongjian, How Does Brand-related User-generated Content Differ across YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?, *Journal of Interactive Marketing* **26**(2) (2012), 102 – 113.
- [12] L. De Vries, S. Gensler and P. S. H. Leeflang, Popularity of Brand Posts on Brand Fan Pages: An Investigation of the Effects of Social Media Marketing, *Journal of Interactive Marketing* **26**(2) (2012), 83 – 91.
- [13] A. J. Kim and E. Ko, Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand, *Journal of Business Research* **65**(10) (2012), 1480 – 1486.
- [14] A. Ralf, T. K. Jule, G. Bruche, C. Dörrenbächer, F. Nagel and S. Ripsas, Möglichkeiten und Grenzen von Social Media Marketing Editors, *Media* **12**/2010(58), (2010), 24 – 36.
- [15] W. G. Mangold and D. J. Faulds, Social media: The new hybrid element of the promotion mix, *Business Horizons* **52**(4) (2009), 357 – 365.
- [16] Evans and J. McKee, *Social Media Marketing: The next generation of business engagement*, SYBEX,PDF (2010).
- [17] B. Das and Sahoo, Social Networking Sites – A Critical Analysis of Its Impact on Personal and Social Life engagement, *International Journal of Business and Social Sciences* **2**(14), 222 – 228. 2011.
- [18] P. A. Tess, The role of social media in higher education classes (real and virtual) – A literature review, *Computers in Human Behavior* **29**(5) (2013), A60 – A68.
- [19] V. Suter, B. Alexander and P. Kaplan, Social softwares and the future of conferences right now, *EDUCASE Review*, (2005), 47 – 59.
- [20] R. Guy, The Use of Social Media for Academic Practice?: a Review of Literature, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Practice* **1**(2) (2012), 1 – 21.
- [21] T. H. Lee, Influence analysis of community resident support for sustainable tourism development, *Tourism Management* **34** (2013), 37 – 46.
- [22] D. C. Funk and J. D. James, Consumer loyalty: The meaning of attachment in the development of sport team allegiance, *Journal of Sport Management* **20** (2006), 189 – 217.

- [23] C. W. Park and D. MacInnis, Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers, *74*(November) (2010), 1 – 17.
- [24] I. Loots, S. Ellis and E. Slabbert, Community support: the case of a south African arts festival, (2011), 121 – 130.
- [25] D. Gursory, C. Jurowski and M. Uysal, Resident attitudes, a structural modeling approach, *Annals of Tourism Research* **29**(1) (2002), 79 – 105.
- [26] D. Gursory and D. G. Rutherford, Host attitudes towards tourism- an improved structural model, *Annals of Tourism Research* **31**(3) (2004), 495 – 516.
- [27] D. Gursory and K. W. Kendall, Hosting mega events, *Annals of Tourism Research* **33**(3) (2006), 603 – 623.
- [28] B. P. Kaltenborn, Anderson, O. Nellesmann, C. T. Bjerke and C. Thrane, Resident attitude towards mountain second-home tourism development in Norway: The effect of environmental attitude, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* **16**(6) (2008), 664 – 680.
- [29] D. Nicholas, B. Thapa and Y. Ko, Residents perspectives of a world heritage site, the pitons management area, St. Lucia, *Annals of Tourism Research* **36**(3) (2009), 390 – 412.
- [30] D. Vise and M. Malseed, *The glory story: Inside the hottest business, media and technology successes for our time*, Delta, 2006.
- [31] B. Pan and J. C. Crotts, Theoretical Models of Social Media, Marketing Implications, and Future Research Directions, *Social Media in Travel, Tourism and Hospitality: Theory, Practice and Cases* (1965), (2012), 73 – 86.