

Motivation factors of Positive eWOM for Universities through Online Social Networks

Ehsan Hasanjanzadeh¹
e-mail: hehsan2@live.utm.my

Noorminshah A.Iahad²
e-mail: minshah@utm.my

Author(s) Contact Details:

^{1, 2} Faculty of Computer Science and Information Systems, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310, Skudai, Johor, Malaysia

Abstract — Information Technologies changed ways of communications. The recent fast-paced online technology developments and globalization phenomenon force radical changes in the world of online marketing. Such changes are also observable in the higher educational institutions. Electronic-Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) is one of the effective and low-cost marketing strategies that can be used to promote university products and services. eWOM can ingeniously benefit from the applicants of tertiary education who are the Internet users as a medium of advertisement. However, universities' marketing programs face lack of knowledge about the motivational factors for their virtual fans to participate in eWOM. Therefore, the current research aims at identifying the motivation factors for the university virtual fans to participate in positive eWOM. An instrument created based on the literature review. After collecting the data, a factor analysis was done and four positive sharing factors were loaded: positive academic altruism, institutional self-enhancement, rewards and emotional connection. The results of this study not only contributed to the body of knowledge in the area of electronic communication, but also cleared the interdisciplinary link between information technology, marketing and psychology.

Keywords – electronic-Word-Of-Mouth, eWOM, Positive eWOM, University, Online Social Networks

1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of no Internet, competition was not an issue among higher education institutions[1], but the emergence of the Internet and information technologies evolved these organizations. The Internet makes information accessible with a few clicks for the potential higher education students, who are frequent online users. This opportunity has led the institutions towards substituting online for face-to-face communication [2]. With the help of the Internet most of the admission process would happen from distance and some of the potential students may never need to interact directly to the admission staff[3].

Higher education institutions seek effective marketing techniques to attract students who are seeking offers for their next level of education[4]. Undoubtedly, those higher education institutions that invest money and time efficiently in Online Marketing techniques and advertisement grab students' attention to their schools and institutes[2].

Previous research on this area has focused on students' expectations of online information that higher education institutes provide. List of programs offered by faculties, tuition fees, costs of living, and higher institution website have been widely studied[4]. Various online marketing strategies have been also proposed and developed to keep up with the fast growth of online educational technologies and students' demands[1]. Factors that have been discussed in online marketing strategies are as follows: the effect of accreditation of higher education institute in online marketing strategies [5], the degree of concerns that a certain commodity is worth its price [6], using business techniques and informing potential students and creating two-way interactions between customer and administrator, the value and benefit of education and its intangibility features [6], which makes it hard to be advertised. Web2 brings blogs, online social networks, and other social media that have changed effectively the traditional marketing technique, Word-Of-Mouth (WOM), to electronic-Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM). eWOM, would help the higher educational institutes to promote their programs and services. This study will focus on the positive motivation factors for the virtual fans of higher education institute to spread the words in favor of the institute.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Online marketing is going to be a vital part of higher education institutions marketing plans. The fast paced growth of information technologies has changed the lifestyle of young generation, who are the most potential applicants of higher education institutions. This group of users may be the members of virtual social network over the World Wide Web, who shares ideas, feelings, likes and dislikes. Such activities would affect their virtual social network.

This section reviews the changes happened in higher education institutions and their marketing plans. Higher education institutions have to handle a paradigm shift in their governance system, which is forced by globalization and changes in marketing policies [7]. A lot of higher education institutions now consider such changes in their marketing plan to market their programs [8]. Previous studies have discussed the different aspects of marketing for higher education institutions, like their reputation and its crucial role in developing market position[9].

Previous literatures on this area was theoretical-normative and originated on the business side marketing literatures [10]. These approaches hire business literature to the higher education marketing. Some of studies in this area are as follows, higher education marketing by Kotler and Fox, [11], Gibbs and Knapp, [12], applying above-the-line marketing (advertising) and below-the-line activities like public relations by Davies and Scribbins [13] and Keen and Warner [14].

Marketing communications has been an important issue in higher education marketing plans. Recent studies are more focused on the required information, and the common search interests of users. Researchers also focused on the print copywriting and information provided for costumers [15, 16]. During the 90s, students' role was discussed as the customers for university products and/or as the products for the employers [17]. At the same time, other studies tried to recognize university programs as services. They said that such services were different from products, and the marketing approach for these two would not be the same [18]. The marketing approach for services has been selected based on the characteristics of the services. In higher education institutes these approaches are chosen based on students and the nature of the service, and the relationship among customers and administrators [19].

Researches in choosing higher education institutions and consumer behavior studies in the area of higher education are not extensive enough and principally stimulated by the needs of individual higher education institution. The key factors in the students' choice and decision making into higher education institutions have not been widely discussed [20].

Kotler and Fox [11] provided a definition for the education marketing that matches the nature of their services, a communication-based approach, which is "the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with a target market to achieve organizational objectives".

The influence of consumers opinion about services/products on the others consumers are demonstrated in academic studies [21]. Voluntary exchange of values is a key characteristic in higher education marketing. In other words, people would exchange their experience about the educational institutes. This is called Word-Of-Mouth (WOM), which is an effective marketing strategy. WOM have been used to introduce products and services and have roots back into human interactions history. People talk about their ideas and experience of issues related to education to affect other people. With the emergence of the Internet, World Wide Web, and advanced information technologies people would share electronically their ideas, which was previously happened offline, face-to-face, or through prints. The nature of the Internet helps to spread the words in a short time. Making use of this quality, educational institutes can spread the word about their services to the world fast and effectively.

WOM is defined as informal communication, which spreads words among people about brands, organizations, products and services [22]. The WOM is an important marketing strategy; because the trustworthiness of the source of information in WOM would be persuasive for the receiver of the message [23, 24]. WOM has been the subject of many studies during last decades till now [25-27]. The increasing number of literatures on this issue shows researchers and business partners' interest in this subject in 21st century [28, 29]. The rapid changes in information technologies and specially the Internet have changed the face of online marketing and related research from WOM to eWOM [24, 30, 31]. Despite of huge interest in eWOM, a lot of areas left intact.

Table I represents a review of previous literatures about positive sharing motivation factors. Helping other people without anticipating anything in return is considered as a motivation factor to pass a message [32-34]. This genuine desire to help other people is called 'Altruism' in positive form. Involving in the product or service because of a personal interest or excitement also considered as a motivation factor to spread the WOM [25, 31, 33]. Involving in products and services may happen by using them and also may coming from excitement to be the owner of them. Involving may also come from interest in a message about products or services. Gaining attention by sharing ideas and recommendations and also becoming an intelligent shopper would satisfy some feelings, which finally motivate people to spread the word among others. Gaining self-enhancement by sharing the words is a motivation factor of WOM [25, 32-34]. Helping the company or organization by spreading the positive words is considered as a motivation factor [32, 33] in the literature. Economic incentive is a motivation factor to participating in WOM [32]. Rewards and gifts may motivate people to talk about the products and services and spread the words. Emotional connection is considered as a motivation factor to talk about products or services [35, 36]. People talk about things that emotionally affected them and think about them unconsciously.

The virtual fans on Facebook and the Universities Facebook pages are the two parties in this research. Universities seek economic leverage by different kind of available means on Facebook as a virtual community and their virtual fans in it. Economy and Emotion are possible connectors between these two parties: higher education institutions and virtual fans. Balasubramanian and Mahajan [37] proposed a conceptual framework to support the economic leverage of businesses in virtual communities. This study used the Balasubramanian et al, [37] economical conceptual framework and attractiveness concept to discover universities' virtual fans' motivation factors to share positive materials over the O.S.N (Facebook).

Focus related utility and approval utility [37] were used to find the motivation factors to share positive words over the online social networks. Focus-related utility is received by members of a virtual community when their contribution in the community adds value to it. In the context of online social networks sharing a digital material in any digital format and also reviewing and commenting on the digital materials in the community adds value to the community. Altruism and helping the companies [32-34] are the possible factors that satisfy focus-related utility. Approval utility is gained when other members use and approve the material sent by a member and this person would feel a sense of pleasure and satisfaction. In the context of online social networks this utility would be satisfied by "Like" (e.g. "Like" button in Facebook) or send a "thank you message" for the sharing materials on the virtual communities. Self-enhancement, product-involvement and rewards are

possible motivation factors to satisfy approval utility [33, 34]. Attractiveness concept is satisfied when people are emotionally connected to the digital materials in the virtual community and spread it to their online social network. Emotional connection is satisfying the attractiveness concept. Emotions are primitive and fast. They ignite by the unconsciousness senses and control a wide range of human interaction with the environment from very serious situations (like acting against a sudden physical threat) to very common daily decisions (e.g. selecting food for lunch) [38].

TABLE 1: Literature Review of Positive Sharing Motivation Factors

	Dichter (1966)	Engel, Balckwell & Miniard (1995)	Sundaram, Mitraand Webster (1998)	Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, Gremler (2004)	Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & Van Wijk (2007)	Durkin, McKenna, & Cummins, (2012)
Altruism, Concern for other		X	X	X		
Product and Services Involvement	X	X	X			
Self-Enhancement and Involvement	X	X	X	X		
Helping the company/ organization			X	X		
Rewards and Economic Incentive				X		
Emotional Connection					X	X

3. METHODOLOGY

The six motives for spreading positive eWOM by virtual fans of universities were examined using a questionnaire in 3 public universities in Malaysia. Initially 553 questionnaires distributed among all people who were the virtual fans of the university on Facebook, whom previously experienced higher education. Totally, 468 were received back, of which 25 questionnaires were considered invalid, because they were not completed appropriately or more than one item was selected in Likert scale questions. The sample selected randomly in the university campus and asked whether they are already the virtual fans of the university. If the answer was yes, they were asked to fill the questionnaire and send it back to the researchers.

The researchers did not find any standard established scale for the universities' virtual fans motivators to participate in electronic Word-Of-Mouth in Online Social Network. Therefore, items were collected from different literatures within other areas of WOM and eWOM to design an instrument for this research. The different parts of the instrument designed to fit the research needs. The generated instrument was sent to experts and users to be evaluated. Finally, a 28-item questionnaire was developed to assess positive motivation factors. Each item in the questionnaire had four-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) asking the virtual fans to show their level of agreement or disagreement with each item. In this measure, higher score showed the weight of motives among others.

4. FINDINGS

A. Descriptive Analysis

Based on the data in TABLE II, the majority of respondents were Females with 58.6 per cent of all respondents and 65.6 per cent of the respondents were undergraduates. A remarkable percentage of the respondents, about 80 per cent, were younger than 27 years old. Also, Malay race covered 54.3 per cent of all sample population. From a sample of 443, the majority were Malay in terms of ethnic, female in terms of gender, and in the third decade of their life (between 20 to 30 years old). The respondents were virtual fans of universities in an online social network (Facebook).

TABLE 2: Demographics of Respondents

		n	Percentage
Gender	Male	183	41.4
	Female	259	58.6
Educational level	PhD	40	9.0
	Master	112	25.3
	Undergraduate	290	65.6
Age	17 – 21 years	129	29.2
	22 – 26 years	226	51.1
	27 – 31 years	61	13.8
	More than 31 years	26	5.9
Ethnic	Malay	240	54.3
	Chinese	101	22.9
	Indian	9	2.0
	Others	92	20.8

In terms of ethnic groups, Chinese covered 22.9 per cent coming after Malay respondents. Other group was people from other countries with 20.8 per cent of respondents that followed by Indian race with 2 per cent of the respondents. In terms of educational level Master level respondents with 25.3 per cent coming after undergraduate level; and PhD level cover only 9 per cent of the respondents. Male respondents were 41.4 per cent of all respondents.

B. Factor analysis

Factor analysis was used to find unobserved variables among observed variables of interest. This method finds whether the observed variables are linearly related to smaller number of unobserved variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was calculated to quantify the degree of intercorrelations among the variables. A value of 0.931 for the KMO index was reported as shown in TABLE III. A near to one KMO value was achieved which means the factor analysis was appropriate[39].

TABLE 3: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

KMO	
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.931

To find the dimensionality of positive sharing among virtual fans of universities in online social network, a factor analysis was applied on the Instrument by the principal component extraction technique. Table 4 presents the factor analysis results in term of items, rotated factor loading matrices. Four positive sharing factors were loaded as: 1) Positive Academic Altruism, 2) Institutional Self-enhancement, 3) Rewards and 4) Emotional connection. More than 60% of the variance was accounted for the four loaded factors.

TABLE 4: Principal Component Analysis of The Instrument (Positive Sharing)

	Factor Loadings			
	1	2	3	4
I share something within my online social network because...				
... it may help them to find better services/opportunities/products.	.558			
... it would aware them about the benefits of services/opportunities/products.	.593			
... it is fun to exchange information about services/opportunities/products.	.518			
... I like to share my great experiences about the services/opportunities/products.	.564			
... I would let them know my good feelings about the Services/opportunities/products.	.495			
... it makes me feel needed. (other people need my help)		.527		
... it would show my smartness to select the best services/opportunities/products.		.661		
... it is prestigious to have that kind of services/opportunities/products.		.493		
... my network friends/members would admire me.		.719		
... my self-esteem will increase.		.728		
... I am an expert in that area.		.550		
... I need my friends' approval to feel good.		.638		
...the University gain more success and admire me.		.602		
...the University would offer me a job position.		.518		
... I will receive rewards, if I have more referrals to use or subscribe the services/opportunities/products.			.630	
... I will get rewards for sharing something about the services/opportunities/products.			.673	
... I am a part of marketing plan for the services/opportunities/products.			.691	
... I would have a chance to win a gift if I share the information about the services/opportunities/products.			.750	
... everyone around me is talking about it.				.463
... the information about the services/opportunities/products has affected me emotionally.				.587
... it was a wonderful clip, picture, etc. that make me happy, sad, angry, etc.				.610
... the information about the services/opportunities/products reminds deep feelings about my past-time.				.575

5. CONCLUSION

Four positive sharing Motivation Factors for the university virtual fans in online social networks are found: Positive Academic Altruism, Institutional Self-enhancement, Rewards and Emotional connection. Altruism in positive form was considered a motivation factor for people to spread the positive words about products and services [32-34]. Product and service involvement was also considered by [25], [34] and [33] as another motivation factor in spreading WOM. This study showed that the mentioned motivation factors were closely related when it came to virtual fans of universities in online social networks. "Academic Altruism" best described these features among the virtual fans of universities. This research found out, the virtual fans of universities with higher education experience involve themselves into academic services of universities and share these kinds of academic products and services to others in terms of humanity and help others.

Self-enhancement and involvement in products and services is other motivation factor to propagate positive WOM among the society [25, 32-34]. [33] and [32] believe that helping the company and organization motivate people to participate in the WOM communication. This study showed, helping the company, self-enhancement and involvement were tightly related among the universities virtual fans in online social networks. These features are defined as "Institutional Self-Enhancement". The honor of university and its reputation would enhance its community; the virtual fans show that they help the institution they are involved. They would develop in all aspects when the university have well-deserved reputation. Such qualities would persuade virtual fans to help the institution they are involved. Reward and economic incentive were important factors to motivate people to talk about the products and services and spread positive words [32, 40]. The virtual fans of universities in online social networks showed concern about rewards and economic incentives. This factor would motivate the virtual fans to talk about the related products and services. Many of human kind reactions are governed by emotions. These reactions are produced fast and unconsciously [41]. This study found that when the virtual fans of university were emotionally involved in the community, they would spread the words to their online networks of friends. Therefore, it is wise for universities to set motivation factors in their online fan pages to benefit from the potentials of their virtual fans in eWOM.

Education is intangible; it is not a physical entity to be defined for advertising per se [42]. Moreover, business techniques for marketing are not well-suited for higher education marketing. Education marketing approaches cannot be the same as physical products [42]. The same approach may consider in eWOM marketing in online social networks. This study proposed two new motivational factors to persuade virtual fans of universities to participate in positive eWOM. These new factors were: Positive Academic Altruism and Institutional Self-Enhancement.

For the future studies, it is recommended to study the motivation factors for sharing negative eWOM in online social networks. The study on motivational factors for sharing negative eWOM would help universities to eliminate factors that may motivate virtual fans to share negative eWOM. This research was done with some limitations that future studies may work on them. The virtual fans of Malaysian universities were studied in this research. For the future studies it is recommended to study on virtual fans of universities in other countries with different ethnic backgrounds. Future studies may also refine the instrument used to improve the findings of research in this area.

REFERENCES

- [1] R. Wilson, "For-profit colleges change higher education's landscape," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, vol. 56, p. 1, 2010.
- [2] J. C. McCoy, "A Comparison of Internet Marketing Methods Utilized by Higher Education Institutions," *ProQuest LLC*, 2011.
- [3] A. D. Bell, *et al.*, "College knowledge of 9th and 11th grade students: Variation by school and state context," *The Journal of Higher Education*, vol. 80, pp. 663-685, 2009.
- [4] Noel-Levitz, "Scrolling toward enrollment, web site content and the e-expectations of college-bound seniors.," *E-Expectations Report*, 2010.
- [5] L. H. Insights, "Marketing spending at colleges and universities," ed, 2010.
- [6] E. J. Anctil, "Market Driven versus Mission Driven," *ASHE Higher Education Report*, vol. 34, pp. 1-121, 2008.
- [7] B. Jongbloed, "Marketisation in higher education, Clark's triangle and the essential ingredients of markets," *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 57, pp. 110-135, 2003.
- [8] P. Gibbs, "From the invisible hand to the invisible handshake: marketing higher education," *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, vol. 7, pp. 325-338, 2002.
- [9] N. Nguyen and G. LeBlanc, "Image and reputation of higher education institutions in students' retention decisions," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 15, pp. 303-311, 2001.
- [10] I. Oplatka and J. Hemsley-Brown, "The research on school marketing: Current issues and future directions," *Journal of Educational Administration*, vol. 42, pp. 375-400, 2004.
- [11] P. Kotler and K. Fox, "Strategic Marketing for Educational Institutions Prentice Hall," *Engelwood Cliffs, NJ*, 1985.

- [12] P. Gibbs and M. Knapp, *Marketing Higher and Further Education: An Educator's Guide to Promoting Courses*. London: Kogan Page, 2001.
- [13] P. Davies, *et al.*, *Marketing Further and Higher Education: A Handbook*. Longman for FEU & FESC, 1985.
- [14] C. N. Keen and D. Warner, *Visual & Corporate Identity: A Study of Identity Programmes in the College, Polytechnic and University Environment*. Higher Education Informatin Services Trust, 1989.
- [15] K. Mortimer, "Recruiting overseas undergraduate students: are their information requirements being satisfied?," *Higher Education Quarterly*, vol. 51, pp. 225-238, 1997.
- [16] T. Gatfield, *et al.*, "Measuring communication impact for university advertising materials," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, vol. 4, pp. 73-79, 1999.
- [17] T. Conway, *et al.*, "Strategic planning in higher education: Who are the customers," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 8, pp. 29-36, 1994.
- [18] J. Nicholls, *et al.*, "Marketing higher education: the MBA experience," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 9, pp. 31-38, 1995.
- [19] T. Mazzarol, "Critical success factors for international education marketing," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 12, pp. 163-175, 1998.
- [20] N. H. Foskett and J. V. Hemsley-Brown, *Choosing Futures: Young People's Decision-Making in Education, Training and Career*. RoutledgeFalmer, 2001.
- [21] J. E. Phelps, *et al.*, "Viral marketing or electronic word-of-mouth advertising: Examining consumer responses and motivations to pass along email," *Journal of Advertising Research*, vol. 44, pp. 333-348, 2004.
- [22] E. W. Anderson, "Customer satisfaction and word of mouth," *Journal of Service Research*, vol. 1, pp. 5-17, 1998.
- [23] F. A. Buttle, "Word of mouth: understanding and managing referral marketing," *Journal of strategic marketing*, vol. 6, pp. 241-254, 1998.
- [24] D. Godes and D. Mayzlin, "Using Online Conversations to Study Word of Mouth Communication," *Marketing Science*, vol. 23, pp. 04-023, 2004.
- [25] E. Dichter, "{How word-of-mouth advertising works}," *Harvard business review*, vol. 44, pp. 147-160, 1966.
- [26] W. H. Whyte Jr, "The web of word of mouth," *Fortune*, vol. 50, pp. 140-143, 1954.
- [27] M. Trusov, *et al.*, "Effects of word-of-mouth versus traditional marketing: Findings from an internet social networking site," *Robert H. Smith School Research Paper No. RHS*, pp. 06-065, 2008.
- [28] R. Dye, "The buzz on buzz," *Harvard business review*, vol. 78, pp. 139-146, 2000.
- [29] D. Godes and D. Mayzlin, "Firm-created word-of-mouth communication: Evidence from a field test," *Marketing Science*, vol. 28, pp. 721-739, 2009.
- [30] J. Brown, *et al.*, "Word of mouth communication within online communities: Conceptualizing the online social network," *Journal of interactive marketing*, vol. 21, pp. 2-20, 2007.
- [31] C. Dellarocas, "The digitization of word of mouth: Promise and challenges of online feedback mechanisms," *Management science*, vol. 49, pp. 1407-1424, 2003.
- [32] T. Hennig-Thurau, *et al.*, "Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: What motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet?," *Journal of interactive marketing*, vol. 18, pp. 38-52, 2004.
- [33] D. S. Sundaram, *et al.*, "Word-of-mouth communications: A motivational analysis," *Advances in consumer research*, vol. 25, pp. 527-531, 1998.
- [34] J. F. Engel, *et al.*, "Consumer behavior ", ed: Chicago: The Dryden Press, 1993.
- [35] A. Dobeles, *et al.*, "Why pass on viral messages? Because they connect emotionally," *Business Horizons*, vol. 50, pp. 291-304, 2007.
- [36] M. Durkin, *et al.*, "Emotional connections in higher education marketing," *International Journal of Educational Management*, vol. 26, pp. 153-161, 2012.
- [37] S. Balasubramanian and V. Mahajan, "The economic leverage of the virtual community," *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, vol. 5, pp. 103-138, 2001.
- [38] G. Franzen and M. Bouwman, *The Mental World of Brands: Mind, memory and brand success*. World Advertising Research Centre, 2001.
- [39] A. Rasli, *Data Analysis and Interpretation-A Handbook for Postgraduate Social Scientists (+ CD)*: Penerbit UTM, 2006.
- [40] S. Balasubramanian and V. Mahajan, "The economic leverage of the virtual community," *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, vol. 5, pp. 103-138, 2001.
- [41] G. Franzen and M. Bouwman, "The Mental World of Brands: Mind," *Memory and Brand Success, World Advertising Research Centre, Henley-on-Thames*, 2001.
- [42] E. Ancil, "Marketing and advertising higher education," *ASHE Higher Education Report*, vol. 34, pp. 19-30, 2008.