Evaluation of Social Media Role as an Information Source in Decision-Making Process of Higher Education Institution's (HEIs) Selection

Andriani Kusumawati
Department of Business Administration
Brawijaya University
Malang, Indonesia
andriani_kusuma@ub.ac.id

Abstract—**The purposes of this research are to describe the population of prospective students in Indonesia by identifying market segments based on the use of social media as their information source to make decision in choosing a state university and to explain the relationship between the factors that influence the choice to use media and social media. The research method used in this research is qualitative with qualitative observations and questionnaires. The results of this study indicate that the use of social media among students is increasingly important, especially to search for university and selection. The reason for the popularity of this media is because it can provide information from three different sources: direct information from universities, trusted information from social networks or reference groups and real time information from university sites. The conclusion of this study is that social media serves as a source of information and has an impact on student choice university. These sources include information directly from the university and also social media is more important in the stage to find information and to evaluate alternatives because the search for information is a key element of the consumer decision-making model.**

Keywords—social media; university; decision; university student

I. INTRODUCTION

A research topic about evaluating the role of social media as a source of information in the process of decision making for higher education is important since social media is an increasingly important context in life. The importance of social media for higher education is the nature of students when they enter universities. In a practical sense, the quality of social media applications that are highly related, collective and creative are seen so far encouraging to be more flexible, smooth and accelerated. Therefore, social media is associated with the increasing tendency of young people to do multitasking, depend on 'digital juggling' daily activities and commitments [1]. Even more subtle, this technology is also associated with enhanced social autonomy, young people nowadays are usually have greater control over the nature and shape of what they do, and also where, when and how they do it. Therefore, social media users are described as having an enhanced capacity to organize and provide themselves.

As Tapscott and Williams stated that young people are dissatisfied to be passive consumers, and increasingly satisfy their desire to choose, comfort, adjust and control by designing, producing, and distributing the product itself [2]. In addition, previous research on university recruitment has demonstrated marketing potential when used by higher education institutions as a tool for student recruitment [3-5].

The main theme of research in this field is marketing communication, where the gap between information desired by potential students and information provided by the university is in traditional forms of communication that has been identified. This gap shows space for improvement in the field of marketing communication for higher education. Engaging with social media as a marketing tool for higher education is an attractive proposition, because of positive business experience regarding the effects of social media marketing and the high rate of social media adoption by the younger generation [6].

The improved communication, customer involvement and brand loyalty improvement have been identified as a result of this form of marketing. It makes sense to assume that the involvement of social media applications as part of university marketing can contribute to increase student numbers and helping prospective students to make better decisions regarding their study and university choice. This statement assumes that the involvement of social media applications is part of the university marketing that can contribute to increase the number of students and helps prospective students make better decisions regarding their study and university choices. However, there just a slight information about how students use their social media and what impact social media has on prospective student decision-making processes regarding their choice of study and university.

In Indonesia there are several initiatives by higher education institutions to be involved in marketing through social media even though there are so few. Therefore, research about information sources that used by prospective students and their role in decision making to choose a university is very small. Furthermore, the decision-making process of prospective students using these sources of information will also be studied in depth. In particular, this research helps management

recruitment of students at state universities to provide the source of information needed by prospective customers so that it makes it easier in decision making.

The aim of this research is to provide information about the student market in the future and the use of social media as a source of information that influences decisions to choose a higher education. Such knowledge is important for the development or improvement of social media-based marketing strategies that complement traditional recruitment strategies, to overcome existing communication problems and increase the effectiveness of student recruitment. This exploration study is based on surveys that try to develop research methodologies that can be easily duplicated in other national markets.

II. METHOD

This research used qualitative research methods. Data was collected through observation and qualitative questionnaire. Data analysis was performed by using thematic analysis tools based on deductive themes on the results of the research found. The stages of data analysis are:

- Data about information needed in this research were obtained from the activities of focused group discussion that conducted in order to get descriptive explanations about sources of information and student decision-making processes in choosing a university.

- Data obtained will be presented through a qualitative approach, in order to sharpen, classify and organize data that is not needed, so that the researcher have no difficulty to analyze data with too broad information, presenting these data through tables, diagrams and narrative descriptions so that it can answer existing problems as a result of research, and draw conclusions from the results of research that will provide an overview and can be used as a guide in providing solutions to existing problems based on past problem solving experience.

III. RESULTS

A. The Overview of Prospective Student Populations in Indonesia by Identifying Market Segments Based on the Use of Social Media

The result indicates that the overall age of participants is 18 years and over. the majority of participants were 19 years old (65%), which was in accordance with the general age of the student population who were in their first year at university. Regarding to the gender of the participants, it showed that out of 48 participants, most or 37 people (77%) were women and the rest (23%) were man. Female students are more likely to participate in this research, because in general the college participants are mostly female students, many female students are enrolled in economic and business study programs in five state universities in Indonesia, and there are more female students registered at state universities in Indonesia. the number of male students according to comparative ratio data between male and female students at state universities issued by DIKTI. When clarified by the city where the respondent

came from, it was found that the largest proportion of respondents in Sumatra came from other parts of the city where the university was located or around 17 people (71%). About 29 percent or 7 participants in Sumatra came from the city where the university was.

Likewise in Java, most of the 14 participants came from other city where the university located (58%), the rest 42% came from the city where the university was located. Based on the results of the study, social media is used to find universities which is useful for them, from 48 participants most of them responded if they used Facebook and Twitter, while Pinterest and Tumblr were the lowest citruses to see. The majority of participants indicated that they saw the site at least once a week. Interestingly, Google+ is increasingly popular among students especially invited to participate in the Google+ platform when they are looking for a particular university. Most students see these sites reporting that they follow (like) or like universities that are considered to be chosen through social media platforms. Social media provides useful information for students. More than half of the 48 participants in this study responded that they found valuable information from social media sites during their college search process. Information about student life is used as valuable information by participants and followed by university information is considered the next valuable. And, photos are valuable information, and the rest of the information relating to activities or activities on campus is also valuable for prospective students.

Based on respondents' opinions, unrelated information is information that does not change and can be found on print media or websites. This information includes special categories including tuition, scholarships, admission time dates, and career services. While student participants identify that information is less valuable in the list, it is still used as an important value for large populations.

B. The Role of Social Media as a Source of Information Used by Prospective Students on Decision Making to Choose a University

The results shows that in the information seeking process, students reveal that social media is used by them to see how the university fits in with their needs. Some students look for comments or other testimonials before making a choice to encourage them to make the right decision and not make the wrong decision. It seems that students regard social media as a valuable tool for choosing universities and students highlight that social media is a useful tool for forming decisions about university choice. However, most students claim that social media can provide several benefits but they are still looking for other trusted sources such as official university sites or offline media such as advertising comments, brochures and other people through word of mouth communication.

The usefulness of social media for students' decision-making processes becomes clear along with the increasing media attractiveness among thousands of prospective students. Recognizing the potential of social media and the behavior of students to choose education, universities begin to promote their institutions online, communicate with milenials and other

goals, especially the recruitment of students. Roblyer et al. emphasize that universities also use social media for university marketing campaigns [7]. Students show that information about higher education delivered to prospective students is accepted through many channels. Generally they use more than one source of information. Information from parents, siblings, and students themselves is a source of information that is also used by students to find out about the university. University websites are also visited which act as sources of information.

According to students, browsing through the web is the easiest way for them to be accessed from anywhere and anytime. Publications issued by universities (university prospectuses and university brochures) and personal contact are the types of information sources that students rely on. However, not all participants are involved in extensive university search activities such as visiting several campuses. Mass media such as newspapers, television and radio are not used by students to investigate the selected universities.

Regarding with the use of information sources, the use of social media can benefit universities and students by improving relations between students. Efforts must be made by universities by developing their marketing activities, promoting their programs and events through social media that is well known among the target market. This method can be adapted to traditional recruitment methods such as campus visits, fair universities, university brochures as part of the promotion mix. therefore, the right and reliable source of information can give direction to students to determine the right choice of university to study.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Discussion

Social media is an online interactive applications that relatively new but are developing properly. This application is based on user-made content rather than supplier-made that allows peer-to-peer communication and user participation [8,9]. It seen as the current stage of internet evolution, social media has been widely adopted by the public and has become an important factor on its influence on purchasing behavior. User-generated content and peer-to-peer communication have empowered contemporary consumers and reduced their trust in push marketing and traditional forms of marketing communication [10-14].

This research provides evidence that more organizations are involved with social media as part of their marketing strategy [15,16]. Organizations that want to integrate social media programs into their marketing strategies must realize that social media changes customer decision-making processes [17]. The literature on the choice of universities argues that students' decisions to continue their education at tertiary level are influenced by several factors. In the service sector such as higher education institutions that are associated with higher levels of risk is considered, information seeking is a key element of consumer decision models [18,19].

Regarding with communication networks, Gomes and Murphy's research emphasize that trusted information is a major issue related to online registration [20]. Social

networking sites can also provide a reliable source of information in recruitment in higher education because they provide information from three different sources compared to only one source. Other sources include reliable information from social networks or reference groups (friends, colleagues, current students or alumni) and online information from the university's website.

B. Conclusion

This research concluded that social media serves as a source of information and has an impact on the choice of university students. These sources include information directly from the university, trusted information from social networks or reference groups (friends, colleagues, students, or current alumni) and real-time information from the university's website. During the process of searching for their college information, there is valuable information about student life, photographs, school information and the rest of the information related to campus activities. In addition, there is also information that is less valuable than the opinions of participants, such as information that does not change and can be found in printed material or websites that include special categories such as tuition, scholarships, date of admission and career services. Social media turned out to be more important in the stage of finding information and alternative evaluations. However, it is important to note that people who are involved in choosing universities through the use of social media, the most influential in the decision-making process of choosing universities through social media, are interacting with students who are currently registered. And the impact of social media on the choice of university students includes being able to feel social life, knowledge of universities, feel the reputation of the university and others. So that this information search is a key element of the consumer decision-making model.

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