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***Research paper***

# Use of Social Media Sites by Malaysian Universities and its Impact on University Ranking

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## Abstract

Social Media is not just for photo sharing and status update, it can also be used by students for university selection. In the current era of high competition among higher educational institutes, many universities are focusing on online marketing. Most of the students are using social media sites to select their university which shows the importance of online presence for the universities. It is very much important for the universities to decide their marketing strategy to attract more and more international students. Good promotional marketing activities through social media, social networking sites by universities is associated with the ranking of the university. In this article we review the importance of social media marketing through social networking sites like Facebook and the capability of Malaysian universities to use social networking sites and its impact on university ranking and its Facebook engagement rank.

***Keywords***: *Social Media, Social Networking Sites, Malaysian Universities Ranking*

## 1. Introduction

Higher education is an important sector of the economy because it contributes to knowledge and research. The importance of online marketing for higher education institutions becomes a necessity of the time. It is a fact that social media marketing is important for higher education institutions because when students searching for university information, social networking sites such as university Facebook pages is the most popular online activity [1]. This shows that the online presence of an institution is very much important for prospective students. It is very crucial for the universities to take advantage of their social networking sites (SNSs) to remain in competition. Social networking through university Facebook provides a forum to parents and students to know about universities and it also encourages the enrollment process of institutions.

Higher education institutions must develop an advertising plan as their marketing strategy to enhance their recruitment process. To establish successful online presence, university should support both traditional and online marketing strategies. Website performance (Web 1.0; web presence) and Web 2.0 (Social Media Marketing) is an important determinant of online achievement. Web 1.0 is the first step of marketing strategy and Web 2.0 is the next developed stage of marketing. Some authors use Web 2.0 interchangeably with Social media. To effectively use social media as marketing strategy, university Facebook must be in a position to satisfy the expectations of the online students; it means university Facebook should be well designed. This is because university's online presence reflects university's ranking, quality and image. Using social media as a marketing strategy is not only the process rather it is the final step to improve the service of the university and its online marketing [2].

In order to develop an effective social networking; essentials tools are required like web content management software (CMS) with rich media features, a blogging system and web-based chat etc. These tools help higher education institutions in the development and management of social networking features which puts a positive impact on the enrollment of students [3-4]. Social media like Facebook or Twitter are considered both social media and social networking. These sites are whole package platforms as social media is a tool and social networking is a way to engage the public. Users spend almost two hours daily on social networking sites. The most popular social networking sites (SNS) are Facebook, Tweeter, Instagram, WeChat [5]. Social media marketing could be define as ''the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software is to create, communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders" [6- 7]. The popularity of SNSs can be seen from that from four out of five internet users has the SNSs account worldwide. Malaysia is very much part of this growing trend by having the highest internet literacy rate. As Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is interested to attract more and more international students for this it has set different online marketing strategies to promote Malaysian Higher Education [8-9]. According to the statistics, in Malaysia 77% of daily users of internet are from age group 16 – 24 years, followed by 66.6% from the age of 35–44 years. This information identifies the importance of online marketing. There are many research studies which show the impact of online marketing feature like social media, websites on student's decision about their choice of university [10].

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The main objective of this paper is to understand the importance of online marketing for the higher education institutions and to review the usage of social media sites by Malaysian universities and its impact on their university ranking. University Facebook page is the most important thing for the online existence of higher education institutions. The main objective of university Facebook page is to provide sufficient information to the students through different videos, photos, student reviews. The information that students struggle to find online during their search for universities is about course information, scholarships, student visas and online admissions. From the literature it is proved that university Facebook pages and university rankings are very important to build institution reputation. Students use universities rankings to decide about their universities. Online presence of universities shows the ability of a university to attract more and more students. Previous studies show that there is a positive relationship between online presence of university and the number of international students they enroll.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Social Media

Different authors have defined social media in different words. Such as according to [11] social media is about practices, behaviors, and activities among people who use online technology to communicate and share knowledge, ideas, and information using conversational media.
[12] state that social media is build on the technological advancment of Web 2.0 that is based on different online applications of internet. This is further highlighted by [13] who similarly emphasised that social media is emerged through Web 2.0 developments and conceptualized it as the second stage of internet development. [14] states that content of social media is generated by users themselves and it comprises of different public service applications such as virtual worlds, social networking sites, customer review sites, video sharing platforms, and many others. It allows the user to make networks with others, review, edit, or share the information with each others. [15] emphasize that social media is a absolutely a new set of tools, and new technology that allow people and business organizations to communicate and interect with customers and prospects more efficiently as well as to build relationships. It has changed the marketing world and capture the working of direct mail, radio, prints advertising, billboards, and the telephone that they did up until now. It is evident that social media is now more effective and more efficient [16]. According to [17] social media is a prevalent slogan as well as a technological concept which brought universal changes in business-to-customer communication, business-to-business communication, and customer-to-customer communication. [18] argue that social media is emerged in recent years and there is not a universally accepted definition for it.

The popularity of social media has reached to its height at a global level in recent years. For example, the users of Facebook have crosed one billion users because it has improved its proliferation of information by making it easily available and sharing on internet [19]. According to [20] there are different forms of social media such as social networks (Facebook, Twitter), microblogging tools (Twitter),photo sharing sites (Photobucket, Flickr), rating/review websites (TripAdvisor), video sharing and creating site (Ustream, YouTube), online communities, social tagging (Digg), public internet forums, moblogs/blogs, podcasting, tagging sites, wikis, news readers (Google Reader), and individual websites.

Today, social media becomes an attractive area of research. There are number of studies on impact of Social Media on consumer behavior [21-22]. Social Media provides a platform for business promotional activities to communicate with the target audience [23- 24-25-26]. Through Social Media marketing campaign different marketing goals can be achieved like awareness, knowledge, online shopping, perception etc. A lot of researches have supported the promotional activities through Social Media platform that is [27-28- 29-30]. [31] are of the view that positive attitude of customers depends on how effectively Social Media promotional activities have been addressed.

### 2.2 Social Networking Sites

Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and others can be described as web-based medium where the individuals create a public or semi-public profile for social interaction and content sharing. Social networking sites (SNSs) one of the types of social media has become the leading event in the online world. Every month 50 to 70 million active users linked to Facebook and Twitter, famous sites of social networking. Today, social networking sites have become part of daily life. Social networking sites provide opportunities to every internet user to represent and express them on their own Facebook page. It has become a culture now to use SNSs to update status, upload videos and photos. SNSs are becoming the part of the routine life which is not only adopted by adults but also by teenagers [32]. Although social networking sites are popular in business and social interaction but the response in the academic world is also positive but bit slower as the use of SNSs are more effective in promoting commercial items [33]. An interesting fact about Facebook is that every individual user spend almost 20 minutes daily and open their account once in a day. In 2008, Facebook has become the fastest growing social networking site with a growth rate of 150% from June, 2007 to June, 2008 [34].

There are many reasons why people use internet and in different ways. Internet use is specific to culture and need of information. Some people use internet for social purpose, some for leisure and some people use internet for academic purpose. By some studies, it is found that age is the significant factor in using social media sites; young people use more social networking sites than old generation [35].

### 2.3 Use of Social Networking Sites to increase University Ranking

The ranking of a higher education institution can be accelerated through its marketing campaign on Social Media [36] Positive response of students on social media platforms is the return on investment from the promotional marketing campaign by universities [37]. Basic purpose of using Social Media as a marketing tool by universities is to increase the level of knowledge, enhance the relationships both external and internal, and helps the students in the decision-making process [38]. Universities should pay further attention to formulate their future marketing policy by observing the innovation in Social Media and the reaction of students towards the new technology [7].
To make online marketing successful, social networking sites play an important role. In order to evaluate the performance of university websites and university Facebook pages users' involvement is very much important. Internet user's involvement makes social networking successful [5].
The innovation in online marketing can be seen from the research which shows 68.5% of the articles have been published on online marketing in the last 8 years [39]. In academic literature the importance of online marketing in higher education can be seen since 80s. Marketing in higher education can be influenced by the variables like teacher-student collaboration, University's image and trust. Due to globalization and increased competition both at national and international level; major challenge which higher education institutions have to face is to approach and remain in the international market [40]. Emergence of social media marketing leads higher education institutions to provide educational services

in an extraordinary way [41-42] Basically, online marketing aims to enhance traditional marketing features by applying new ways of communicating with the international students which benefits both students and institutions [4].

Social media marketing allows universities to make their own Facebook pages, Twitter account and online forums to attract more and more students with low cost and widespread advertisement opportunity [43]. Students can also share their views and ideas on university student blogs [10]. In the study of [20], he found a positive relationship between the number of students who visited the university page and their liking to apply for the same university. According to [44] the number of students to any university will be increased as early as the advertisement about the university reaches maximum number of students.

In recent years traditional print and broadcast media has lost their audiences as these marketing methods have faced major challenges [45]. Today, social media tools make it possible to communicate directly with almost any kind of audience. Many organizations and educational institutions have realized that to remain in competition and to reach your target audience as early as possible it is necessary to get benefit from Social Media marketing activities. Social Media provides more innovative and cost effective methods of communications with student's then traditional marketing. A large number of benefits are attached with Social Media marketing for an organization like it enhances the student's knowledge, engage students by communicating with them, provide them the required information and get the feedback immediately [46,33]. Social media is used by many universities as a promotional tool to get maximum advantages. For examples Harvard University, the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and the first corporation chartered in the country and it was the place where Facebook originally started out. They are poiner to develop a strategy to interact with their target audiences by using the Facebook, Twitter,YouTube, and Blogs as a part of their social media strategy. The other example is The University of California, Berkeley which has one of the most famous channels and number of subscribers on YouTube in higher education.

### 2.4 Use of Social Media Sites by Malaysian Universities

In today's competitive environment, social media marketing is very much important for the universities to remain in competition. Nowadays, students only convinced by "what they see is what they get". Social media has changed the way of marketing used by the many industries to run their business, including universities [47]. Now a days, Facebook is the world's most predominant social network. All international universities should enhance their social media marketing strategy so as to attract more international students. According to [48] the total number of social media users' in 2016 is approximately 2.34 billion and it is forcasted to reach 2.95 billion in 2020.

So many universities are now working on their social media marketing to improve their world ranking and attract more and more students. This idea is also followed by MOHE Malaysia to promote Malaysian higher education institutes globally to achieve international recognition [49]. The MOHE Malaysia's aim is to transform Malaysia into a Center of Excellence for Higher Education. Accordingly, its first objective is to enhance the ranking of its universities to achieve the goal to list at least three Malaysian universities among the best 100 universities in the world. In addition, increasing the internationa students in the higher education institutes of the country is another objective, which can be acheived by fascinating foreign students. [50]. Social media is considered as the best tool to attract large number of international students. The young generation of 21$^{st}$ century spend most of their time at social media and they are more comfortable to search about the ranking and reputation of any educational institute through internet. They reads the blogs and comments of other students about the educational institute and make their mind that this institute is according to their choice or not. Through these social media sites they become able to find out all the strengths and weakness of that particular institute.

In 2010, Malaysia is ranked the ninth country in the world and the second in the Asia Pacific region in terms of Facebook users. Today, to communicate with the student's university prospectus and university websites are less effective; for this social media helps the organizations to communicate with the students. Malaysia social networking activity has exhibited high level of engagement. Many Malaysian universities like Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), University of Malaya (UM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) are using social media marketing tool to reach the target audience. According to [34] those institutions will be successful that can do strategic marketing planning that attract students towards the institution. Malaysia is becoming an active player and stands in 11$^{th}$ position in the world in promoting international higher education. To make social media marketing successful, institutions must know what kind of information student's wants to know and how they can get such information.

Social media will be effective and beneficial for the university if the student gets all the information in a click rather than follow the traditional method of collecting information regarding university. Universities use social media for two main purposes first to guide students in each step of their journey at the university. Secondly, universities build relationship with students through social media. Social media provides a bridge between universities and students. University social media provide a direct view of university life and provide a platform to answer all the queries of students about university. Universities can also provide online learning programs for students through you tube. Many universities have their virtual channels linked to their official websites. Many universities use Facebook as discussion forums for students and staff. By showcasing diverse university life and students positive tweets on social media will help in creating a brand image of the university and will be favorable in increasing university ranking. Social media also helps graduate students to stay connected with the university. After graduation, LinkedIn and Facebook are the best medium to establish a paltform to stay connected with each other for better and long-term relations with universities and international students. LinkedIn will also assist potential students get a clear image of the university through the alumni who are currently on the market, working. The use of YouTube is also very important; universities can record and upload videos of graduate students who talk about their positive experiences at the university [51-52].

### 2.5 Malaysian Universities Facebook Engagement Ranking

Criteria for evaluating university Facebook pages depends upon following factors

**Micro Factors**

- Repute of the university ans its size
- Online presence of the university, web popularity and distance education adoption rate
- The University's level of adoption and use of Facebook as an additional channel to the institutional website

**Macro Factors**

- The Country's Tertiary Education size
- The Country's level of Internet usage and connection speeds
- The Country's level of adoption and use of Facebook as a social media platform

On the above information, Table 1 shows the Malaysian Universities Facebook engagement ranking.

**Table 1:** Facebook Engagement Ranking (May 2017)

| University Facebook Pages | Total Pages Like | Total Number of Posts | Total Engagement |
|---|---|---|---|
| Univesti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) | 230,905 | 212 | 22,011 |
| Universiti Sains Malaysia | 40,699 | 162 | 15,078 |
| Universiti Putra Malaysia | 106,747 | 153 | 11,533 |
| Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris | 74,224 | 113 | 11,162 |
| UMT – Universiti Malaysia Terengganu | 53,028 | 811 | 10,891 |
| Universiti Malaysia Sabah | 58,366 | 109 | 8,266 |
| Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka – UTeM | 85,159 | 35 | 7,823 |
| Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia – USIM | 33,919 | 147 | 7,097 |
| Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) | 66,073 | 105 | 5,789 |
| Universiti Utara Malaysia | 33,090 | 974 | 3,982 |
| Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia – UKM | 85,497 | 520 | 3,751 |
| Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin | 20,195 | 78 | 3,359 |
| Universiti Teknologi MARA | 34,165 | 737 | 2,825 |
| UMP Malaysia | 42,912 | 168 | 2,637 |
| Universiti Malaysia Kelantan | 17,939 | 184 | 2,061 |
| Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia UTHM | 46,767 | 197 | 1,320 |

Source: Malaysian University Websites.

## 3. Conclusion

Use of social media by HEIs is important research topic because young generations and potential students give high attention to this area. Facebook, Twitter,YouTube, and other social media tools are playing an important role in people's everyday life, businesses, and educations. This paper helps us to understand the importance of social media sites for the universities and its impact on university ranking. This is a descriptive paper. This paper gives the importance of online marketing for higher education institutions. It becomes very easy for the organizations to spread their institutions information to every individual as people take social media as an important part of their daily life. Malaysian universities also know the importance of online presence. In this study, Facebook engagement ranking of Malaysian universities have been provided to know the importance of Facebook as a marketing tool for universities.

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