

“Digital Darwinism and Branding” In Context to Educational Institutions – A Conceptual View

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ABSTRACT: In today’s competitive world, the phenomenon of competition is extremely determined by technological developments. Technology has already made business global. Any new changes or developments with regard to products or processes are inherent with technological component. No doubt even educational organizations are shifting from manual record maintenance practice to software or online based practice, which is facilitating and simplifying various processes carried out on a day to day basis. The transition phase from traditional to modern digital methods of carrying out various processes is considered to be difficult due to various shortfalls such as computer skills of system users, quantum of data, cost factors etc. These shortfalls might lead to a situation termed as Digital Darwinism, a scenario where technology and society are changing faster than organizations can adapt. This makes way for a new business models, raising an alarm of “adapt or die.” In view of this concept, this paper emphasizes on how digitalization of technology is influencing the internal and external functions of educational institutions. The thought of how the teachers, students, parents and recruiters would adapt and benefit from the digitalization of various processes that are carried out on a day to day basis. The view points based on past research are compiled from various literatures to administer this paper. The educational institutions should function as forward- looking bodies by adapting the innovations and create a competitive edge over the other players, for which the institutions should move forward to adapt to the changes to enjoy better brand equity and also cater to the changing requirements of the society.

KEYWORDS -Digital Darwinism, Technology, Education, Branding

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I. INTRODUCTION

In today’s education sector, we can notice variety of new trends that have evolved within higher education in terms of marketing, teaching methodology, branding, and recruitment. But, it is very essential to understand to what extent these changing trends are resulting in growth and development of educational institutions. Due to increasing competition in the education sector, the focus is shifted from traditional restrictive knowledge sharing to open source knowledge that is of continuous up-gradation mode. Many institutions and universities have been striving very hard to build strong institutional brands. Perhaps the largest area of innovation and transition element in educational institution marketing and branding is entry into the digital space. Digital or on-line based course delivery, are the practices observed currently in most of the educational institutions. Adaptive learning technology is one of the effective innovation gaining significance, and many new technologies are currently under development by various reputed companies which are into developing education solutions. The most crucial medium for external communication and on-line marketing is an effective and intuitive website of the University or Institution, which communicates the ultimate brand statement for an institution. Educational Institutions are reaching out to newer branding and marketing strategies in recent years with the changing market trends. One very significant strategy followed by institutions in the present days is making use of online space as platforms for communication and external engagement. Educational Institutions are also making effective use of social media and various digital platforms like Twitter and Facebook to market their programs. As change is obvious and adapting to the changes to sustain in the competitive environment, this paper emphasizes on the digitalization and its impact on educational institutions as well as the lay backs arising due to non- digitalizing and up- gradation of processes and systems.

II. STUDENT TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Interactive based teaching and learning is encouraged widely in educational institutions today. Varied and unique pedagogy is incorporated into the education system to make classroom environment more practical. Integrating digital technologies into the curriculum is an emerging trend in most of the areas of education. The

chalk and talk technique of teaching was already taken over through evolutions like OHP, PowerPoint presentations, Audio and Video based teaching. Now the trend of learning has shifted to Simulations, Online classes, App based learning etc. The students are able to access to learning material at any point of time even off-campus, using their smartphones or laptops backed up by internet. As the current generations of students are open to novelty in most of the cases in their life and living in digital world, they would be very much connected to the curriculum and requirements of the University they are studying in. Such possibilities afforded by new technologies encourage students to enter into a participatory interaction that extends far past the classroom walls. This extension between the classroom and real world not only provides students but also teachers an array of opportunities in bridging the gap between knowledge learned inside the classroom with what is learned outside.

In discussing the shifting climate of teaching in the 21st century, Sewell & Denton (2011) discussed myriad multimodal activities and lessons they incorporated into their secondary language arts classrooms. Film clips were used as bridges to canonical texts to help students understand literary devices and themes, and students' traditional research assignments were created in a multimodal format. Interestingly, Sewell & Denton found that when such multimodal projects were incorporated into their lessons, students' test scores improved drastically. Sewell & Denton (2011) claimed that incorporating digital media into the classroom facilitated a means of administering instruction to relevant and real-world examples for students, which in return produced more interesting and thought provoking work from the student. Borsheim, Merritt, & Reed (2008) also inspected their classroom practices with novel teaching technologies. They contended that "even though the shift is clearly technological in nature, to prepare students for complete participation in practical environments, it must also be pedagogical". The facilitators are able to administer quiz, online tests and also interact with the students with respect to the course information even during off-campus. Merritt also addressed how virtual learning platforms could help teachers transform professionally. Boling (2008) found that technologies were indiscriminately used by the teachers. New technologies are used in classroom spaces without streamlining traditional teaching practices to effectively utilize the technologies. The biggest hurdle, according to Boling, was trying to get teachers to think differently about technology use and learning with technology. Similar to Boling's findings, McVee et al. (2008) claimed that many facilitators were not trained, or unwilling to use digital technologies in the process of educating, due to their apparent lack of proficiency in the digital technologies.

It is significant to mark that the literatures clearly stresses on the importance of facilitators becoming well versed with new technologies in order to connect better to the present day students. First and foremost, the teachers should inhabit the practice of using such innovative tools for teaching by which the students will automatically adapt themselves to the same. Hence there is a need to understand through research teacher and student perspectives on sudden shifts in technology and its implementation in education field.

III. PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

It is always said that holistic involvement of Student, Teacher and Parent is essential for the overall development of a student. It is very essential for the educators to connect and collaborate with students, parents and each other. In many cases, once the student gets promoted from Higher Secondary education, he or she would be capable of self- decision making with regard to their career choices. The involvement of the parents would be minimal. Sometimes, the students may not get right guidance and may tend to choose careers which may not suit to their capabilities and interests. A student would require continuous monitoring at different stages of their career progress, for which both the parent and the teacher should take the responsibility of it. With the change in various demographic factors, many parents may be staying away from their wards due to job, business, international assignments and many other reasons. Another very important factor that makes parents disconnected from their wards career progress is literacy. In most of the developing and underdeveloped countries, the literacy rate is still not 100%. Due to lack of awareness or time, parents may not be in a position to understand or guide their wards with respect to their career. This is where the role of educational institutions would come into picture.

In earlier days of education system, there was no sophisticated communication technologies like what we are able to use and experience today. Technologies like recording of students' attendance digitally, on-line fee payment, on-line result declaration and many other processes are employed by the educational institutions today. Parents' have been facilitated with real time access to the students attendance status on a daily basis, pay their wards tuition fee on-line and also access the results without visiting the institution. Today's schools and colleges are enhancing the connectivity between the institution and the parents in various ways. All the activities related information, achievements, circulars to parents etc., are communicated to parents through digital mode in real time. Many educational institutions are making a provision for Parents Login on their websites, through which the parents can access to all the above mentioned information. Digital technology is facilitating parents with a continuous student progress monitoring and communication with teachers. Notifications based on real-time keep parents informed about scores, grades, attendance and important announcements. By these means, the

parents are also involved indirectly in monitoring their wards career progress and development. Not all the institutions have initiated and practicing such kind of digital communication methods either due to cost constraints, lack of computer skills in their employees or the management would have not realized the importance of employing such innovative systems. Integrating technology can facilitate educational institutions communicate to the parent community in real time (Ramirez, 2001). The Parents communities reported that, the videos supplemented communication with facilitators and know their wards curriculum and progress (Alberto et al., 1995).

Internet technology is considered to be a very effective medium used by educational institutions to interact with the parent community. To convey information related to various activities in campus, websites are used. Teachers have to be trained to use the institution’s Web site in updating information and facilitate easy access to assignments, reference resources, test schedules, events etc., by the parents. Salend et al., (2004) claimed that adapting of Internet can facilitate in collaborating and act as interactive tool for ensuring the parents’ involvement in the student assignment completion. Digital technology also caters teachers with communication facility even after the working hours of the institution (Brewer and Kallick, 1996). Ultimately, student learning blueprint and progress may be accessed online, by the parents. Hartman & Chesley (1998) stated that educational Institutions can provide guidelines as and when required to support parents in monitoring their ward’s progress in a constructive way. Instructors must never imagine that every student is equipped with access to internet and technology at their home (Ramirez, 2001). They must probe parents concerning use of computers and internet at their home.

Additionally, quite a few instructors and parents continue to be uncomfortable with trying to adapt to usage of digital technology. Consequently, Ramirez rationalized that paper-based conversation must still have a vital place in the complete conversation platforms of the academic institutions, regardless of substantial usage of technology. However, in the long run, the educational institutions can initiate to train their teachers and parents to adapt digital technology in their daily functions wherever relevant. With the advent of apps in teaching, parents are concerned about digital usage in learning. A study on their perspective can bring in new prospects in digital world.

IV. RECRUITERS’ PERSPECTIVE

The educational institutes’ website should be set perfect. The website content designers should make sure, what the prospective information seekers are looking for. Apart from students and parents as viewers of the institutional website, there are other viewers such as alumni, corporate recruiters and quality assessing institutions. The websites are becoming a single point of access to various category of information. Web-sites specifically are getting to be a significant source of organization information, with the numerous prospective employers visiting an institution’s website before they pay a visit to a campus. This places considerable accountability on the IT division to make sure the organization website is available, the information relevancy as well as effective at fulfilling the recruiters’ and other website visitors’ needs to obtain information swiftly and conveniently.

Analysts recommend that potential employers depend strongly on information provided on an institution’s website to obtain the overview regarding the institution as well as its credentials, impacting on their over-all decision when deciding on an institution for a recruitment drive. The website should focus on program specific objectives, pedagogy and outcomes, so that the recruiters will be able to assess the suitability of the students to the nature of job. Information related to hands on experience through various add on initiatives taken by the institution such as internships, projects and research activities should also be made available on the institution website. IT divisions need to ensure that their system is versatile enough to sustain technological variances to ensure that present as well as potential employers experience a sense of conversation, engagement, and community. Recruitment endeavors should align with trends in technology as well as strengthen technology in an effort to become part of the digital community that potential employers participate in on a regular basis. The prosperous performance of a student placement approach can arise from effective collaboration between the IT division as well as the placement office personnel in support of institutional aims. Since most of the business is digitalized, the recruiters will definitely want to hire digital savvy candidates. Therefore there is a need to study recruiters’ perspective of usage of digital learning.

V. BRANDING OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Branding is considered to be the pulse of any organization. It creates awareness and increase familiarity among the prospective customers. Traditionally, most organizations used to focus only on product branding and not the organization branding as a whole. Today, we can see more organizations emphasizing on Corporate Branding as their branding strategy. A study by Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony also emphasizes that organizations are keen on corporate branding than on service product branding. Corporate branding considers holistic views of the stakeholders towards the organization. Since this approach is suitable to all categories of

organizations, branding of educational institutions can also be included. Researchers have stated that most managements’ of educational institutions are familiar of the essentiality for “branding” which focuses on marketing of their education institutions (Hanson, 1996). Branding of educational institutions is essential to attract the prospective students and also recruiters (Hemsley-Brown, J. and Oplatka, I. 2006). The educational institutions have traditionally carried out research focusing on promoting of education and learning solutions , represented by several reports about how to brand education at the school as well as university level , which include articles and reviews by Arenson (2004), Reader (2003) amongst others . The final results of these researches’ outline how academic institutions will distinguish themselves from others by deploying branding approaches. But then, there exists a gap in understanding on how digitalization may be used logically by academic institutions in area of branding. In addressing this gap, the discussion and outcome of this research paper can provide valuable ideas to the philosophy as well as practice in branding of academic institutions. Besides the theoretical contribution, organizational implications can also be further studied.

VI. CORPORATE BRANDING

The very idea of “corporate branding” emerged since brands advanced from a title provided to merchandise to brands indicating associations established between the organization and its buyers (Dall’Olmo Riley, F. and L. de Chernatony, 2000), reflecting a holistic strategy concerning services. Corporate branding is unique from product branding as corporate brand entails associations and conversations with individuals, associations, reputation, and advantages of products and services. Corporate brands communicate about the organization holistically rather than just what the organization does (Keller and Richey, 2006). The corporate brand emphasizes on relationship built on trust and promises. Boyd, Leonard and White (1994) claimed that with respect to specialist service organizations, where it is challenging to depend on specific products, or even make a priori generalizations about the organization, the corporate brand names tend to be more suitable. Furthermore, under the challenges of transparency, augmented costs as well as the needs to enhanced differentiation, Hulberg (2006) articulates the requirements for corporate branding. This appears to be significantly appropriate to education programs where the associations as well as values of academic institutions are essential to the decision making procedure. In such a framework, the corporate branding could be referred to as institutional branding.

VII. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper emphasizes on academic institutions and their implementation of digitalization as one of the institutional branding strategies. The initial stage is to move with a structured approach to assess the digital maturity in understanding of technology and what digital engagement means to the educational institutions. This is possible through continuous engagement with students, parents, recruiters and consultants. While educational institutions tend to be aware of the need to achieve collaborative and cross channel engagement with prospective students, they are less cognizant that this need applies equally to their stakeholders and recruiters as well. Based on the understanding the future research can be carried on impact of changing technologies on holistic development of educational institutions or digitalization as a collaborative interaction and institutional branding. This paper can be further extended to answer the following research questions as, to what extent educational institutions are using digital services, what is the perspective of student - teacher - parent on these services, how management is using this as a tool to promote, differentiate and brand their institutions respectively.

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