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Colleges and universities can no longer be characterized as education institutions only, as they are increasingly facing the same challenges as traditional businesses (Anctil, 2008). More specifically, students now want to be seen as customers and thus expect more value from institutions where they choose to matriculate (Halbesleben, Becker & Buckley, 2003; Woddall, Hiller & Resnick, 2012). Offering education as a commodity no longer suffices and institutions that want to remain competitive should engage with stakeholders to create meaningful experiences, which are part of the institutions' offer (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Many colleges and universities show increased interest in the potential of social media as way to engage with their stakeholders (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011). This article looks at what customers' expectations on internet are and how higher education professionals can address them to offer effective customer service via social media.

Introduction

Higher education is going through colossal changes in the United States and beyond. Institutions are now forced to "reframe themselves as both education and business institutions" (Anctil, 2008). Students are starting to display customer-like behaviors and are thus expecting more value from the institution where they choose to matriculate (Halbesleben, Becker & Buckley, 2003; Woddall, Hiller & Resnick, 2012). Many organizations in other fields are embracing customer-focused strategies not only to offer commodities, but also to push the limits of customer engagement in order to stage experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). One of the ways du jour to create stronger connections throughout customers' experiences is to leverage social media for customer service. "With the worldwide explosion of social media usage, businesses are feeling extreme pressure to engage where their customers are paying attention" (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

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As social media is now ubiquitous (nearly three quarters of the population uses it) (Pew Research Center, 2013), it is becoming vital for institutions not only to be active on social media but also to build distinct customer service strategies, carefully adapted for this new media. In fact, many colleges and universities show increased interest in the potential of social media as a marketing tool, especially to help prospective students make better-informed decisions (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011).

This article aims to provide meaningful insights that will enable higher education and student affairs professionals to effectively leverage social media to engage with students and other stakeholders by focusing on their expectations of (customer) service.

Student Satisfaction through Online Customer Service

Student affairs professionals can use social media to connect with students and other stakeholders in order to maximize perceived quality and satisfaction. Actually, customer service provided by organizations is known to have a direct impact on customer satisfaction in most industries (Lightner, 2004). In addition, customer satisfaction was proven to affect customer retention and business profitability (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000). As noted before, higher education institutions are starting to face challenges that are of concern to traditional businesses, such as dealing with higher expectations from students and needing to focus on student satisfaction to maximize retention and profitability. Hence, it is becoming more important for higher education professionals to manage interactions with students, like it is for their counterparts in traditional businesses (Athiyaman, 1997). However, this is also becoming an increasingly complex endeavor as these interactions now take place through a plethora of new media, including social media. Social media is inherently different from other online means of communications such as websites, emails and chat, which means it requires a different approach. Succinctly, social media interactions are public, restricted in length or content, and tend to be customer-led (Heller Baird & Parasnis, 2011; Nambisan & Nambisan, 2008; Shankar & Malthouse, 2009).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) thoroughly studied service perception and built an instrument, named the SERVQUAL, for the then-emerging brick-and-mortar service industry. The SERVQUAL has since played a vital role in the creation of virtually any customer service policy. It revealed what factors could significantly influence the overall satisfaction of customers. These findings were subsequently combined in five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1988). As a result, these five key dimensions are important to consider when creating service standards for any traditional organization.

Arambewela and Hall (2006) worked with the SERVQUAL and empirically demon-strated that meeting students' expectations in terms of service could significantly increase their level of satisfaction and experience. In recent years, many studies showed how the SERVQUAL could be adapted to the internet. Table 1 amalgam-ates online determinants (e-determinants) that were identified in previous studies.

Implications for Student Affairs and Student Culture

Higher education and student affairs professionals should use these e-determinants as a starting point to build successful customer service policies and strategies on their social media channels. Leading institutions have already implemented inge-nious strategies based on these e-determinants. Below are some real examples of how institutions can adapt their practices on social media to make sure they meet known expectations of their students and other stakeholders.

Table 1
The E-Service Determinants of Customer Satisfaction

E-Service Determi-nants of Customers' Satisfaction	Definitions	Supporting Authors
Trust, reliability, secu-rity or safety	Customers' willingness to accept vulnerability in an online environ-ment based on their positive expectations regarding future online behaviors.	Field, Heim, and Sinha (2004) Kuo (2003) Lee and Lin (2005) Rowley (2006) Rust and Kannan (2003) Santos (2003) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Yang and Fang (2004) Zeithaml (2002)
Customer support or customer service	The assumption that the organization will show empathy and provide appropriate support.	Field, Heim, and Sinha (2004) Rowley (2006) Santos (2003) Yang and Fang (2004)

Responsiveness and usefulness	How often an organization voluntarily provides services that are important to its online customers.	Kuo (2003) Lee and Lin (2005) Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue (2007) Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) Rowley (2006) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Yang and Fang (2004) Zeithaml (2002)
Web design and content (information)	The appeal that user interface design presents to customers as well as the quality of the content available.	Dabholkar (1996) Field, Heim, and Sinha (2004) Kuo (2003) Lee & Lin (2005) Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) Rowley (2006) Santos (2003) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Yang and Fang (2004) Zeithalm, Parasuraman, and Malhotra (2000)
Personalization	The ability to offer individualized services as an added value to the core offer.	Kuo (2003) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Rowley (2006) Rust and Kannan (2003) Walsh and Godfrey (2000)

Accessibility, delivery and ease to use	The ability to easily access and use services.	Dabholkar (1996) Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue (2007) Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) Rowley (2006) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Yang and Fang (2004) Zeithaml (2002)
Self-service	The ability to offer information and services that can be used without additional help from the organization.	Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, and Bitner (2000) Rust and Kannan (2003)
Communication and advertising or complementary relationship	Sharing information about other products or services based on the customers' interests and developing a relationship that goes beyond the business transaction.	Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue (2007) Rowley (2006) Santos (2003) Surjadaja, Ghosh, and Antony (2003) Zeithaml (2002)
Entertainment	Providing consumers with entertainment content or opportunities.	Loiacono, Watson, and Goodhue (2007)

Trust, Reliability, Security or Safety

Online and offline posts on social media can encourage actions from readers. As a result, posts can persuade readers to visit a link or to complete an action not requiring internet access. When the institution provides a link, it induces risk, such as getting viruses or accessing unsafe websites. A way to increase the perceived safety is to avoid using shortened links that dissimulate the destination website (Mishra, 2009).

When institutions encourage students and stakeholders, such as prospective students, to carry out actions, videos or other content can attest to the veracity of the post that can be used to maximize trust. For example, when the Telfer School of

Management (2013) posts about information sessions for its graduate programs, it often adds pictures of previous sessions or of students using the facilities to give an idea of how the events take place.

Customer Support or Customer Service

In order to meet the expectations of social media users, student affairs professionals can create channels that are purely devoted to customer service, like the University of Ottawa (2013) did with their "uOttawa Direct" Twitter account. The University of Ottawa also displays superior empathy by using employees as the face of their various accounts and by apposing the initials of the employee writing the post at the end of each entry. These practices show commitment of the institution for customer support through social media and could be adopted by other institutions.

Responsiveness and Usefulness

Because social media channels enable institutions to offer customer service, it is paramount that they monitor their channels on a regular basis to ensure answers to important questions are delivered in a timely fashion. Institutions should have someone specifically in charge of monitoring social media, and let followers/ fans know how often the page is updated in the description and how soon they can expect to get a response. Athabasca University (2013) lists service standards in person, via the Web, email and over the phone for each of its departments, administrative units, and services. Unfortunately, it fails to indicate service standards for social media. Doing so would be a great way to promote social media responsiveness on campus.

Higher education professionals can also look for comments that may have not been directed to them in particular, but that still need to be addressed. For instance, the University of Vermont should track all tweets including "#UVMProblems." This would allow more effective use of social media and allow for better response rates.

Web Design and Content (Information)

Social media does not usually offer many opportunities to change the appearance of the pages viewed, as they are mostly standardized. The profile pages sometimes leave at least some flexibility, but most students will most likely not primarily visit these pages, as they may only look at the information on their news feed or through other curator software of devices. Nevertheless, many institutions, such as Queen's University (2013), have put a lot of effort to design an appealing Twitter main page and University of Poiters (2013) uses different header pictures to promote timely events on their Facebook page.

Institutions have the ability to choose the name of their accounts and to insert a short description about them. Brown University (2013) lists the hashtags it most commonly uses to indicate what some of the institution's priorities are on its Twitter profile. It also provides useful information to users who are interested in joining conversations that matter most to the institution.

Personalization

In order to meet the expectations of social media users in terms of personalization, colleges and universities can create multiple accounts that are specifically targeted to different populations. This allows transmitting only the most relevant information to followers and fans of the institutions. Many schools, departments, or programs have their own channels where they can share posts from their parent institution if deemed appropriate. For example, Harvard has a Twitter account dedicated to its professional development programs (Harvard University, 2013). The Telfer School of Management (2013) created two Twitter accounts, one in French and one in English, as it is officially bilingual. This way, followers only see the tweets in the language of their choice.

Accessibility, Delivery and Ease to Use

Social media users are looking for content that is easily accessible. Consequently, it is crucial for institutions to list all their official social media accounts on one page to ensure students know where to look for appropriate information and understand which media to use to interact with the institution. The University of Ottawa (2013) has put together a comprehensive list of all accounts around campus.

Using hashtags is also a good way to make information more accessible by organizing it in different topics. For instance, Ontarian universities used "#OUF2013" in September 2013 when they tweeted about the Ontario University Fair in Toronto (Ontario Universities' Application Centre, 2013). This way their students and prospective students could easily follow the different conversations taking place around studying in Ontario on that day, even if they were not able to attend the event in person.

Self-service

Opportunities to offer self-service solutions through social media are limited by the standardized nature of social media platforms. However, institutions can promote links to web pages that enable self-service. For instance, the Twitter account for recruitment in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration program at the University of Vermont (2013a) provides direct links to the Graduate College application page.

Université de Sherbrooke (2013) created sub-pages on its main Facebook page that provide information and steps about programs and admission. Most of the information is available without using the main university website and is very action-focused to facilitate users' transactions with the institution.

Communications and Advertising or Complementary Relationship

In order to encourage complementary relationships, to communicate and advertise courses and opportunities, the University of Strathclyde Alumni Association (2013) created a Facebook page to keep in touch with alumni. Through this page, it promotes continuing education opportunities, news, alumni discounts, and alumni events around the world. They post pictures of "Barony," the association's mascot, with alumni in events and encourage interactions between alumni.

Entertainment

The University of Vermont (2013b) has an online page, (uvm.edu/bored) solely devoted to entertainment opportunities on campus. It also manages social media accounts to support its activities. Its Facebook page provides fans with information on things to do on campus and often posts pictures of interesting or activities in the university community. This practice meets students' expectations in terms of having access to entertainment-related content or opportunities and it should be incorporated by other institutions.

Conclusion

In recent years, researchers have demonstrated that higher education should be treated as a traditional business in many regards, including its relationships with students, which are often portrayed as customers (Anctil, 2008). This article emphasized the growing similarities between postsecondary institutions and traditional organizations and explored common challenges in terms of customer engagement and the use of social media to provide adapted customer service. It was meant as a practice-oriented paper articulated around theory and concrete examples that can help student affairs professionals further develop effective strategies for using social media as a mean of customer service.

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