

# Ethical Issues in Marketing of Higher Educational Institutes with Social Networking Sites

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## **Abstract**

The world of marketing is moving ahead with virtual world called online social media. Social networking is a marketing method that uses social networks to build one's business presence on the internet. It is one of the most popular methods besides forum marketing that is available to internet users today. Websites like Facebook, Youtube and LinkedIn among others have gone from just social interaction spaces to a supporting marketing program as well. With all this popularity, there are a few ethical issues that a marketer needs to know in order to become successful at social network advertising campaign. In this paper, I am trying to explore the possible ethical issues which can take place while using Social Networking Sites as a marketing tool for higher educational institutes. I have explored the social and networking features that bring together the students and educational institutes in the way which generate lots of interest at both the sides. The primary objective of this study is to understand the ethical use of Social Networking Sites by the higher educational institutes for the purpose of marketing. The secondary objective is to understand how the marketing done through such Social Networking Sites attracts the students towards institutes. Finally, I discuss what I see as the marketing value of Social Networking Sites in certain contexts and suggest a course for future research and development.

## **Keywords:**

Ethics, Marketing, Social Networking Sites

## **Introduction**

Considering that the marketing aims to determine and influence the purchasing behavior and that competition in modern economy is more intense and unprincipled, an important issue that arises is if workers in marketing, as well as professional category may be tempted to behave unethical to achieve their objectives. Marketers today face big challenges as they try to make their marketing messages heard. Practitioner estimates suggest that consumers are exposed daily to thousands of marketing communications. This explosion of marketing communications not only has created unprecedented levels of perceived disorder; it also has led to heightened contempt for corporations by many consumers who actively seek to avoid marketing communications from any source.

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social networks to build one's business presence on internet. It is one of the most popular methods besides forum marketing that is available to internet users today. Websites like Facebook, Youtube and LinkedIn among others have gone from just social interaction spaces to a supporting marketing program as well. With all this popularity, there are a few ethical issues that a marketer needs to know in order to become successful at social network advertising campaign.

### Conceptual Framework

According to American Marketing Association Code of Ethics for Marketing on the Internet,

#### General Responsibilities

Internet marketers must assess the risks and take responsibility for the consequences of their activities. Internet marketers' professional conduct must be guided by:

- Support of professional ethics to avoid harm by protecting the rights of privacy, ownership and access.
- Adherence to all applicable laws and regulations with no use of Internet marketing that would be illegal, if conducted by mail, telephone, fax or other media.
- Awareness of changes in regulations related to Internet marketing. Effective communication to organizational members on risks and policies related to Internet marketing, when appropriate.
- Organizational commitment to ethical Internet practices communicated to employees, customers and relevant stakeholders.

#### Privacy

Information collected from customers should be confidential and used only for expressed purposes. All data, especially confidential customer data, should be safeguarded against unauthorized access. The expressed wishes of others should be respected with regard to the receipt of unsolicited e-mail messages.

#### Ownership

Information obtained from the Internet sources should be properly authorized and documented. Information ownership should be safeguarded and respected. Marketers should respect the integrity and ownership of computer and network systems.

#### Access

Marketers should treat access to accounts, passwords, and other information as confidential, and only examine or disclose content when authorized by a responsible party. The integrity of others' information systems should be respected

with regard to placement of information, advertising or messages.

### Social Networking Sites (SNS): A definition

According to boyd & Ellison (2007) an online social network site is a "web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 1). Other terms used to characterize such services are social digital technologies (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008), participatory media (Bull et al., 2008) and social media (Barnes, 2006). Whereas this term "social network" site seems to reflect the fact that these sites represent existing social bonds, another term commonly used, "social networking" implies that people use these websites in order to forge new networks. For instance, LinkedIn is a social networking site tailored to business people seeking to make contact with those within and outside of their usual network of colleagues and customers. Other sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, have features that support maintaining existing social bonds, such as the ability to join online groups of people who are already in one's offline network (e.g., a high school alumni group, a sports team, etc.), as well as creating new bonds (e.g., the browsing feature, groups feature, etc.). In this paper, I use the term social networking site (SNS) to describe an online Web-based service with the features described above and through which users maintain existing social ties and develop new ties with people outside their network (Jones, Millermaier, Goya-Martinez, & Schuler, 2008).

### Review of Literature

**Marketing Research Association, December 2000:** The fact that the Internet is inexpensive to use and difficult to regulate means that it can be open to misuse by less experienced or less scrupulous organizations, often based outside the research industry. Marketing Research Association (MRA) has issued these Ethical Guidelines to protect the interests both of Internet respondents and of the users of Internet research findings. These Ethical Guidelines include:

- Respondent Cooperation Should Be Voluntary
- Researcher's Identity Should Be Disclosed to Respondents
- Respondents' Rights to Anonymity Should Be Safeguarded
- Privacy Policy Statements Should Be Posted Online
- Data Security Should Be Maintained

- Reliability and Validity of Findings Should Be Disclosed to the Public
- Researchers Interviewing Minors Should Adhere to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act
- Unsolicited Email Should Not Be Sent to Those Requesting Not to Receive Any Further Email

**CMA's (Canadian Marketing Association) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice:** The CMA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (the "Code") is designed to establish and maintain standards for the conduct of marketing in Canada. Members of the Canadian Marketing Association recognize an obligation – to the consumers and businesses they serve, to the integrity of the discipline in which they operate and to each other – to practice to the highest standards of honesty, truth, accuracy, fairness and professionalism. For Online Internet based advertising, The Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) and the CMA Code of Ethics apply to any personal information collected for internet and downloadable app interest-based advertising. Without limiting the scope of obligations, marketers should also be guided by the following principles when using internet and app interest-based advertising:

- **Transparency:** Transparency means (a) openness and providing clear explanatory information about how browsing information is collected and what the information is used for and (b) an easy means to draw consumers' attention to that information; both in a manner consistent with accepted industry best practices.
- **Consent:** Marketers must take the appropriate steps to ensure that the ad networks and online publishers that are used to display interest-based ads on their behalf offer consumers a clear and easy to see, easy to understand and easy to execute means to opt-out from having their online activities over time tracked to support the delivery of interest-based ads.

### 3. Statement of the Problem and Need for Study

Today education has changed the meaning in the mindset of the people in India. Everybody is so particular about choosing the best institute for further higher studies.

Advertising play vital role in projecting any average institute a great institute in the mindset of the people. Newspapers, television, radio, hoardings etc. are flooded with advertisements of various institutes. People do not get exact idea about the authenticity of the institute and how ethical they are in promising different educational services. Social Networking Sites are used by educational institute where they promote their educational services through paid and unpaid advertisements. It becomes so difficult for the user of such sites to evaluate how ethical such institutes are in promoting their services. Because of these kinds of issues emerging on social networking sites, this topic has become very important, which needs an in-depth probing.

### 4. Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to understand the ethical use of Social Networking Sites by the higher educational institutes for the purpose of marketing. The secondary objective is to understand how the marketing done through such Social Networking Sites attracts the students towards institutes.

### 5. Research Methodology

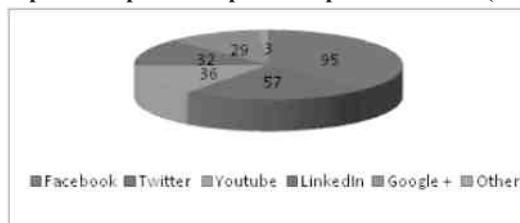
To understand how Social Networking Sites functioned for what purposes and with what results in the lives of urban students (18-21 years old) for the purpose of marketing, I undertook 1 month survey of the Social Networking Sites using practices among students of under graduate colleges in Surat city. I started surveying them on their Internet and technology access, conditions and use, including their use of Social Network Sites. A sample of 200 students from different colleges, gender, locations in Surat are chosen by Convenience Sampling. Secondary data has been used from different studies, research papers, journals and websites and the primary data is collected with the help of Structured Questionnaire with suitable scaling. The study is to be considered as an exploratory one within the qualitative and interpretative domains. Limitations to this approach need to be acknowledged.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

#### Joined Social Networking Sites

It was asked to the respondents to which social networking site they have their personal profile.

**Graph 1. Respondents personal profile on SNS (in %)**



**Analysis:** We can observe from the above graph 1 that 95% of the respondents uses Facebook, 57% uses Twitter, 36% uses Youtube, 32% uses LinkedIn, 29% uses Google + which are the major SNS to be used.

**Interpretation:** From the above analysis, I can say that

Facebook is the most used SNS amongst students' respondents while Google + is yet not so popular amongst them.

### **Connected with Higher Educational Institute through SNS**

**Table 1: Data of respondents connected with any institute through SNS**

Connected with Higher Educational Institute through SNS	Respondents (%)
Yes	79
No	21
Total (N) = 184 students	

**Analysis:** We can observe from the above Table 1 that 79% of respondents are connected with any Higher Educational Institute through SNS while 21% students are not connected to any such institute.

**Interpretation:** From the above analysis, it looks like most

of the respondents are interested to know the activities done by Higher Educational Institute. They want to stay updated with the institute's events and activities.

### **7.3 Factors influencing to stay connected with Higher Educational Institute's profile on SNS**

**Table 2: Data depicting factors which influence respondents to stay connected**

Reasons to stay connected	Respondents (%)
Academic Activities	84
Non-Academic Activities	76
News and Events	63
Other	13
Total (N) = 184 students	
%will not add to 100% due to multiple answers	

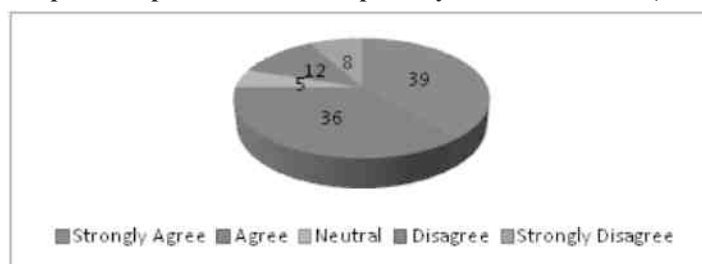
**Analysis:** The above table 2 depicts the respondents' opinion to stay connected with Higher Educational Institute. 84% stay connected to get details of academic activities, 76% for non-academic activities, 63% for news and events and 13% for any other information shared by the institute.

**Interpretation:** Most of the respondents like to stay connected with the institute's profile on SNS to know more about academic and non-academic activities. Many

respondents like to get information about news and events of the institute.

### **7.4 Respondents belief in what institute post on their profile on SNS**

When asked whether respondents believe on the posts updated on institute's profile on SNS, they responded on scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'.

**Graph 2. Respondents' belief in posts by institutes on SNS (in %)**

**Analysis:** The above data depicts that 39% respondents are strongly agree to the content posted by the institutes on their profile on SNS. 36% are agreeing, 12% are disagreeing, 8% are strongly disagreeing and 5% are neutral with those posts.

**Interpretation:** It is easily indicated that most of the respondents believe with what institutes display on their profile. It shows that respondents find easy to develop their

own perception on the basis of the content posted by institutes without any cross-checking of the posts.

### 7.5 Use of personal details by any institute for marketing activity

Respondents were asked if their personal details were used without their consent for further marketing activities.

**Table 3. Personal details of respondents used for marketing activity**

Use of personal details by any institute for marketing	Respondents (%)
Yes	55
No	24
Can't say	21
Total (N) = 172 students	

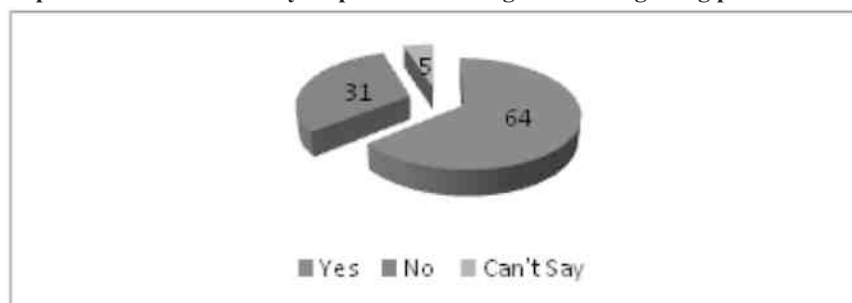
**Analysis:** From the above analysed data, I can say that 55% respondents found their personal details were used by any institute for use in marketing activity. 24% respondents didn't think for the same and 21% of people were not sure about this.

**Interpretation:** More than half of respondents think that their personal data were used by any of the institute to communicate with them for marketing purpose without their

consent. There are many respondents who were not sure for use of their personal details for the same purpose.

### 7.6 Unwanted harassment using personal details from SNS by institute

The question was asked to know whether respondents feel harassment when some of institutes contact them by collecting their personal details from SNS for the marketing activity without their consent.

**Graph 3. Felt harassment by respondents through marketing using personal details**



**Analysis:** The data mentions that 64% respondents feel harassed by institute when they approach them for marketing purpose using their details from SNS. 31% respondents don't feel harassed while 5% respondents were not sure for their answer.

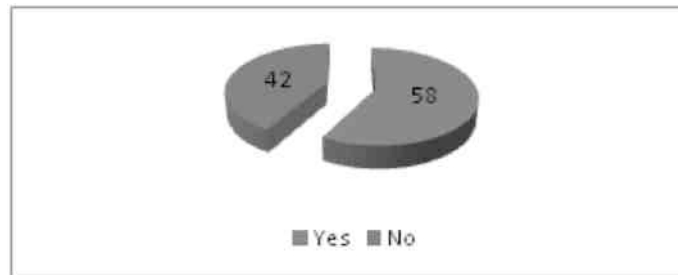
**Interpretation:** It looks unethical when higher educational institutes use data of those students who are connected with

their profile on SNS to approach them for marketing activity without their permission. Most of the respondents felt harassed with such activity.

### 7.7 Disconnected from SNS profile of institute

Due to any harassed marketing activity, it was asked to the respondents if they disconnected with institute's profile only to keep themselves away from using their personal details.

**Graph 4. Felt harassment by respondents through marketing using personal details**



**Analysis:** The analysed data indicates that 58% respondents disconnected from the institute's profile on SNS to avoid further use of their personal details in marketing activities. 42% did not disconnect from the profile.

**Interpretation:** It is threatening for the institutes if they are not taking permission of users before using their personal details.

### Suggestion

Due to the increase in literacy rate in India, people are slowly but steadily becoming techno savvy. Thanks to the low rates of internet and cheap smart phones, the mobility of using social networking sites has been increased drastically. Higher educational institutes need to take care in choosing the ways to use personal details of people who are connected with their profile on SNS for the purpose of marketing. The people are mostly students and they are smart enough to understand the intension of institutes in using their personal details. People are mostly interested in getting academic updates and institutes can use this strategy to engage people on their profile. It is important for the institutes to use *opt-in* and *opt-out* strategy to win the confidence of users. Without users permission if institute will use their personal details, users will disconnect themselves from their profile on SNS and it will take more efforts for institutes to win their trust back.

### Conclusion

With use of viral marketing, ethical considerations play a key role. The prime concern is of unethical use of connected people's personal data. What initially began as value added

details for the connected people of SNS profile, turned into use of their personal data for institute's further marketing activities, without their permission. Thus, people started themselves to disconnect from the profile of such institutes. Another threat that viral marketing poses is a person's right to privacy. As users gradually make an increasing number of business transactions online, the amount of personal information transferred through online mechanisms greatly increases. Though there is legislation being created to protect users' right to privacy online, it is still being fashioned, and in the mean time, users need to take control and protect their own privacy. Furthermore, trust is a major factor at play when it comes to users feeling comfortable connecting online. The positive aspects of viral marketing can also turn into negatives over the time. Effective viral marketing campaigns can sometimes be easily avoided by people because of the threat of unethical practices can be performed by higher educational institutes. Therefore, in certain circumstances, institute's viral marketing strategies do not provide them a sustainable competitive advantage.

### Future Work

The study needs more research in descriptive manner. Though the carried out study was exploratory research, more aspects related to the ethical use of social networking sites for marketing is still to study. The use of *social plug-ins* and various *tools* are always a subject to study the behavioral response of students when used for marketing activity. Also, the time period taken for this research was less and that was one of the limitations of the study. There is still wide scope lying under to carry out more research work with large sample size based on wide geographical area.

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