

Title

Suggesting marketing communication strategies to retain and improve the number of alumni associated with Télécom Paris Alumni

Introduction

Maintaining good relationship and keeping alumni (former students) involved is important for universities to get various benefits such as material or immaterial donations such as volunteer work. The choice of universities by new students depends largely on the reputation and image of the university which the alumni create. Moreover, alumni through their social network can influence the new students' university selection decisions in favor of their alma mater by recruitment of the graduates passing from their university. Besides, they can make investments within institutions to improve the reputation of the institutions.

Johnson and Eckel (1997) found that a strong alumni relationship with their institutions helps in developing leadership and financial support for their institutions. To gain financial support from the alumni it is necessary that the alumni have strong connection not just with the Télécom Paris Alumni (TPA) (association of former engineering master's students) but also with the Télécom Paris. In this regards, it is essential for the institutions to identify what makes alumni to increase their involvement with them. In addition, the alumni involvement with their institutions can be in the form of alumni leaders, alumni board members, and trustees. Besides, as per literature alumni can play a significant role in promoting the institution to potential students, businesses, society, community leaders and government (Gaier, 2005). As per Svoboda and Harantova (2015, p. 669) "Building of good relationships between higher education institutions and their students is essential for their long-term success." This highlights the importance of retaining and increasing the alumni and their involvement with the Télécom Paris and TPA.

However, the problem which is focused in this present study is the difficulty which the universities face to make former students to join and stay involved with their universities. It can be argued that alumni involvement with their universities may depend upon various factors such as; loyalty, satisfaction, reputation, networking and donation. In the proposed study the case study of Télécom Paris (a leading public higher education and engineering institute in France) is used to be conducted. Alumni are one of the major sources of financial support for Télécom Paris and therefore its depends greatly upon them. In view of this, the aim of this study is to evaluate

marketing communication strategies presently used by TPA and suggest marketing communication strategies which can be used by TPA to retain and improve the number of alumni associated with TPA and their involvement with Télécom Paris. Moreover, the relationship between the alumni and their alma mater (Télécom Paris and TPA) is to be analysed statistically to determine whether alumni members of the TPA are presently associated with their former institute and the TPA.

Context of the Research

The context of this research is related with marketing, where a marketing strategy (specially a digital marketing strategy) is to be suggested which can be implemented by the TPA to retain and increase its alumni. The alumni involvement with the institution has various benefits such as fund raising and so identifying and implementing the digital marketing strategy which can help in improving alumni involvement and retentions is of paramount importance for the TPA and Télécom Paris.

Research Topic / Synthesis / Diagnostics

In the past studies the factors impacting the retention and involvement of alumni with their institutes and association bodies are discussed. However limited evidence is found where the marketing strategy (specially the digital marketing strategy) is suggested to be implemented by the institutes and association bodies to increase retention and involvement of alumni. Therefore the research problem of this study is related with identifying the digital marketing strategy which can be implemented by the TPA and Télécom Paris to retain the alumni of TPA and increasing their number and involvement with TPA and Télécom Paris. In view of this, the research question of this study is focused to find out the effectiveness of social media marketing strategy in retaining and increasing the involvement of the former students of TPA and Télécom Paris. In addition to the main research question, this research also focuses to measure the relationship between the alumni and their alma mater. The following alternative and null hypotheses will be statistically tested to measure the relationship between the alumni and their alma mater.

H1: Social media marketing have significant positive relationship with alumni retention

H₀: Social media marketing do not have significant positive relationship with alumni retention

H2: Social media marketing have significant positive relationship with alumni involvement

H₀: Social media marketing do not have significant positive relationship with alumni involvement

Methodology

This study is intended to be completed by employing a mixed research method, using together the qualitative and quantitative research methods. To perform qualitative research it is planned to use some semi-structured interviews over the phone with the management personnel of the Télécom Paris and TPA to collect qualitative data regarding the marketing communication strategies presently used by the TPA and its effectiveness in retaining and attaching their alumni to Télécom Paris. The interviews will be audio recorded to ensure that the collected data is stored. The ethical approval and consent from the participants will be obtained. The qualitative data will be interpreted using thematic analysis and interpretative approach (Bryman & Bell 2015).

However, to conduct quantitative research a survey based on closed ended questionnaire will be conducted online to collect quantitative data from a sample of Télécom Paris alumni regarding the relationship or involvement of the alumni with the TPA and the effectiveness of social media marketing communication strategies in retaining and increasing alumni's involvement. Same survey method was employed by Svoboda and Harantova (2015) to evaluate the marketing efforts by the universities to building good relations between the university and alimini.

Besides, in this research Snowball non-probability sampling technique will be used to reach a sample of Télécom Paris alumni. The probability sampling technique was also used in a similar study conducted by Wairagu (2011). In view of Saunders (2011, p. 240) "Snowball sampling is commonly used when it is difficult to identify members of the desired population" As in this present study the Télécom Paris alumni are difficult to reach therefore it is appropriate to select the snowball sampling technique to reach the research participants. The quantitative data will be analysed statistically using frequency distribution analysis, bar charts, and Pearson's correlation analysis (Field, 2013). Hypotheses will be developed and tested based on the results of Pearson's correlation analysis. The Pearson's correlation analysis will be used to determine the relationship of social media marketing with alumni retention in TPA and involvement with Télécom Paris.

Brief Literature Review

The past studies related with the involvement of alumni with their institutes and the factors (including marketing) influencing alumni to stay connected and involved with their institutes are discussed below. Various studies provide evidence regarding the relationship and involvement of alumni with their institutes (Hartman & Schmidt, 1995). Gaier (2005, p. 270) defined alumni involvement in terms of “alumni giving and/or alumni participating with their alma mater within the last three years”.

Limited number of studies has been found in the literature where the marketing strategy which can increase retention and involvement of alumni are discussed. One of such studies was conducted by Wairagu (2012) using survey method to evaluate which marketing communication tools are used by Universities in Kenya to manage alumni relations and how effective there are in managing the alumni relations. Based on the quantitative data analysis it was found that alumni associations and or alumni officers (which are appointed by the universities) tend to manage the alumni relations. Moreover it was found that various marketing communication tools are used by the universities to manage alumni relations, where online or social media advertising was found to be the most effective marketing tool in managing alumni relations. Two social media platforms namely; Facebook and Twitter were found to be the most effective amongst all the social media marketing tool for alumni contacts developments, reunions, and effectively communicating the news update. However, for alumni fundraising the direct marketing and personal selling were found to be the most effective marketing tools, where alumni officers physically visit and meet the alumni. Whereas, for alumni awards and recognition activities it was found that the event sponsorships and publicity/public relations (for instance; alumni talk and campus tours) are the most effective marketing tools.

Another study regarding the marketing efforts by universities to improve alumni satisfaction with the university and its image while building good relations between the university and alimini was conducted by Svoboda and Harantova (2015). Based on alumni perspective it was found that the institutions must ensure that their alumni are satisfied to retain them and to promote the university. It is because only satisfied alumni tend to do promotion for the university through positive word of mouth. Gaier (2005) also analysed the satisfaction of alumni with their institutes and its respective impact on their involvement and participation with the institutes. Based on the results of correlation the alumni satisfaction was found to be positively related with the alumni

involvement with their institutes. More satisfied alumni tend to have high involvement and participation with the institutes.

Elizabeth (2002) found that mentoring programs enable alumni to stay connected with their institutes. Guevara and Stewart (2011) conducted a survey based research to find the perceptions of alumni regarding satisfaction with course. It was found that alumni satisfaction with course is impacted by the career relevance. The strategic importance of alumni network was evaluated by Ventolini and Mercier (2017). The alumni network with strong connection amongst its alumni community and members was found to have positive relationship with the resource acquisition and reputation of their institutions.

A recent study was conducted in Bucharest University by Petrariu (2019) to identify the motivating factors which influence alumni to stay connected and involved with their alumni association. It was found that effective communication, transparency, and networking influence alumni to stay connected and involved with their alumni association. Moreover, other benefits of staying connected with the alumni association were identified such as; growth of connections with business world, and development of the alumni association as a economic and financial think-tank.

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