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Recruit, Retain, Report: UK Universities' Strategic Communication with Stakeholders on Twitter

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Abstract

Like many other organisations, universities are using social media to engage with their stakeholders as they have varying interests and commitments. The chapter focuses on strategic communication and stakeholder engagement by UK universities on Twitter. It presents a descriptive study about their engagement on Twitter in terms of their followers, number of tweets, et cetera. In addition, it analyses the tweets' content to identify British universities' communication strategies. Hence, the results revealed a thematic model in the form of an interrelated conceptual theory that comprises three strands of communication: (i) recruiting prospective students, (ii) retaining present students and staff, and (iii) reporting activities and media coverage. This contribution presents implications for university marketing communications managers who are involved in student recruitment and/or in managing relationships with stakeholders.

Keywords: Social Media, Stakeholder, University, Communication, Twitter

Introduction

Social media is changing how organisations are communicating with their stakeholders. An organisation's effective and coordinated communication is essential for positive image perception among its different stakeholders (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). The rapid growth of Web 2.0 technologies has drastically changed the attitudes and habits of end-users when using the internet (Selwyn, 2012). This digital revolution is taking up more and more space in several areas of everyday life. Social media has become a dynamic and convivial space, enabling conversations between online users, groups or virtual communities (Camilleri, 2017), which has led to the development of many-to-many relationships.

Like many other organisations, universities are using social media to engage with their stakeholders as they have varying interests and commitments. Universities are recipients of public funding, and they must account for their activities and achievements to government and the broader society (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). Universities are expected to reach out to prospective students seeking admission (Mogaji, 2016; Mogaji & Yoon, 2019) and present the impact and broader benefits arising from their public funding (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010). Universities are known to have a particularly complex stakeholder environment (Chapleo & Simms, 2010). Thus, identifying the stakeholder environment and management for effective communication is essential to elicit stakeholder engagement (Payne & Calton, 2017).

The evolving social aim of the university has led to the emergence of new classes of university stakeholders (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010); some of these are governing entities, administrators, employees, clientele, suppliers, competitors, donors, communities, government regulators, non-governmental regulators, financial intermediaries and joint venture partners (Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2010; Burrows, 1999).

Recognising this growing list of stakeholders and opportunities for engagement (Chapleo & Simms, 2010), this contribution explores universities' strategic communication with stakeholders on social media. It investigates the British universities' usage of Twitter as a social media vehicle for real-time conversation and engagement with stakeholders (Mogaji et al., 2020). This study adopts the stakeholder engagement theory to better understand the strategic corporate communication and stakeholder management of UK universities in this digital age. The research builds on previous work done by Chapleo and Simms (2010). They carried out stakeholder analysis in higher education in the UK context and on Olaleye, Ukpabi and Mogaji's (2020) study about the university's strategic communications via Facebook.

Accordingly, this study answers the following questions: Who are the critical stakeholders of UK universities? What are the communication strategies of UK universities? How do UK universities rank on their stakeholder engagement on Twitter? What are the critical topics that interest UK universities' stakeholders, and how do they respond to these issues on Twitter? The study presents theoretical implications for academic researchers and

students in the subject of corporate communication. It also identifies the managerial implications for university managers who are responsible for marketing communication, student recruitment and public relations.

Literature Review

Stakeholder Engagement Theory

This chapter significantly draws from the stakeholder engagement theory, which posits that organisations engage their stakeholders in decision-making, sharing information and dialoguing for mutual benefits (Desai, 2018). As organisations compete for scarce resources, evidence suggests that there is a good fit between high-flying organisations and those that have robust stakeholder engagement practices (Ghassim & Bogers, 2019, Leonidou et al., 2018). Traditionally, communicating organisational decisions was vested centrally on the public relations or information management department (Ecker-Ehrhardt, 2018). However, the advent of social media has created a platform whereby organisations not only allow but strongly support, employee advocacy. Employee advocacy implies organisational citizenship behaviours demonstrated through giving favourable recommendations (Tsarenko, Leo, & Herman, 2018), and projecting a positive image of the organisation (Yeh, 2014). Within the higher educational institutions, universities both use employees and established communications departments to send information to their different stakeholders on important issues affecting them.

The rapid and unceasing proliferation of Web 2.0 technologies represents a real challenge which is becoming increasingly critical because of the nature of the communication offering of social media in higher education (Camilleri, 2020). There is, however, an emerging and growing literature on the communication benefits of social media in academia. Devi, Das, and Barman (2018) provide an innovative approach to the efficient use of social media in communication and their impact on library users. Furthermore, the work of Zailskaitė-Jakštė and Kuvykaitė (2012) provides information on the attitudes and behaviours that academic institutions must adopt when using social media to achieve the objectives and goals they have set. In a context where technological infrastructures are less developed, research initiated by Sobaih, Moustafa, Ghandforoush, and Khan (2016) provides an answer to the gap existing between the effective use of social media for learning and teaching in developing countries.

For an intelligent education integrating the technological elements that embed communication and exchanges between stakeholders, the findings of Lytras, Visvizi, Daniela, Sarirete, and Ordonez De Pablos (2018) have laid the groundwork for more intelligent communication in education thanks to a maturity model that takes into account research on social media, questions about technology-enhanced learning, as well as the emerging concept of smart education. Concomitantly, research by Zachos, Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, and Anagnostopoulos (2018) draws up a general review on the use of social media tools by the various stakeholders that constitute the university.

The work of Singh and Gill (2015) also constitutes an essential element on the theme studied, in the sense that it assesses the sensitivity and, especially, the level of use of social media according to specific stakeholders: students and researchers from North India. In addition, Han, Ada, Sharman, Gray, and Simha (2014) combine the technology, organisation and environment (TOE) framework along with the theory of channel complementarity to highlight the factors that can contribute to social media adoption by direct stakeholders of the university. This work also contributes to a better social understanding of the links existing between the usual communication channels and social media at the university in an emergency and crisis context. The results also placed particular emphasis on the intention to adopt social media in an emergency context according to two essential factors: the rate of critical incidence on university sites and the number of existing usual notification channels which are deployed on various websites, in addition to social networks.

While there are many channels for universities to communicate with their stakeholders, the role of social media in this evolving and increasingly interconnected nature of the world (Bryson, 2004; Olaleye et al., 2020) cannot be overestimated. Nearly 2.1 billion people in the world have social media accounts, and 7 in 10 internet users are active on social media (Saleh, 2018). Ninety-five per cent of online adults aged 18-34 are most likely to follow a brand via social networking (MarketingSherpa, 2015) and 90% of brands use social media to increase brand awareness (Newberry, 2019). Social media provides brands

with a dynamic new space to reach, interact and engage with consumers (Mogaji et al., 2016; Tafesse & Wien, 2018).

Despite its benefits, engaging with stakeholders on social media presents its limitations and challenges as it is increasingly observable that it presents enormous risks for brands and individuals (Baccarella et al., 2018; Gökerik et al., 2018). Information shared on social media may not be considered confidential; this is often in the public domain. This presents a challenge with regard to communicating with stakeholders where confidentiality is essential. Additionally, these communications happen online, where conversations can be miscommunicated, taken out of context, copied, shared and archived. There are also possibilities of cyberbullying, trolling, online witch hunts, fake news and privacy abuse, which are all examples of the "dark side" of social media (Baccarella et al., 2018). Also, other stakeholders and non-stakeholders can join in the conversation by commenting, retweeting, liking and sharing (Mogaji, 2016). Identifying specific messages and media strategies to engage with stakeholders on social media is, therefore, essential.

With this understanding, this study attempts to develop a theoretically grounded typology of stakeholder communication strategies for universities on social media. This offers more than just the management of stakeholders, but engaging and communicating with the stakeholders by providing relatable content which drives the conversation and offers more insight. Achieving this will help the universities' meet their mandates, fulfil their missions and create public value (Bryson, 2004; Farinloye et al., 2020). The study makes both theoretical and managerial implications. The study extends knowledge on stakeholders' management by explicitly focusing on social media communication; it

presents a typology and creates opportunities for future research direction. Managers will also find these implications relevant as they engage with stakeholders, recognising that each stakeholder has a different expectation and requires a different managerial approach. The following section explores the methodology section, and the results and discussion follow this, and, finally, the concluding section and future research directions.

Methodology

An inductive, generic, qualitative approach

An inductive, generic, qualitative approach is adopted to achieve the aim of this study. This approach 'seeks to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved' (Caelli et al., 2008, p. 3). The qualitative approach provides an in-depth understanding of how universities are engaging with their stakeholders on Twitter. This qualitative study is carried out within a netnographic context. Netnography, an extension of ethnography, is a 'form of ethnographic research, adopting the participant-observational approach and taking online interactions as its fieldwork' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 1). The online community is advancing as a research stream for qualitative scientists, and netnography is one of the recommended approaches for exploring the diverse cultural dispositions of online communities and interpreting the results in a descriptive or analytical format (Kozinets, 2015).

In addition to the qualitative analysis conducted on the data extracted from Twitter, this study also used Microsoft Excel 2016 for descriptive statistics of following, followers, ratio,

number of tweets, months used on Twitter and tweets per month based on two groups and chi-square test. The analysis technique adopted was inferred from the studies of Ukpabi, Olaleye, Mogaji, and Karjaluoto (2018) and Ryan, De Jong, and Wagner (2019).

Data Collection

There are over 130 universities in the UK, and some of these are members of a group as they have the same shared interest (Mogaji, 2016). Among these are Russell Group and MillionPlus.

- Russell Group is headquartered in London and was established in 1994. It is a self-selected association of twenty-four (24) public research universities in the United Kingdom. The group includes many of the UK's oldest and most prestigious universities.
- MillionPlus Group is headquartered in London and was established in 1997. It is an association of twenty-one (21) modern universities in the UK. Members of the group tend to be a younger, more modern group of universities (MillionPlus, 2019) and, while all the member institutions are "new" universities, many have long histories as colleges and polytechnics from before 1992.

The Russell Group and the MillionPlus Group universities have an active Twitter profile. Fifty tweets from each account were extracted between 1st and 31st August 2019. These were tweets from the official Twitter handle and excluded retweets of other accounts' tweets. This is important because a retweet is not always a guarantee of endorsement and could be seen as virtual support that can amplify messages through different accounts. Total collected samples were 2,250 tweets. 1,200 tweets from Russell Groups (50 Tweets

x 24 members) and 1,050 tweets from MillionPlus Group (50 Tweets x 21 members). Data-screening processes were put in place to inspect the extracted tweets (Mogaji et al., 2016). These were then serially numbered and saved as a PDF file for each university. The documents were exported to NVivo 12 for thematic analysis.

In addition, information about the Twitter profile was also collected on 15th December 2019 as an indication of their engagement with stakeholders on Twitter. This information is:

1. The username on Twitter. While some universities had various usernames and profiles, the main one indicated on the contact page of the university website was selected. For example, Newcastle University has @UniofNewcastle - official page for the latest news from Newcastle University and @StudentsNCL - Showcasing life on & around campus & answering your questions. The official page and username were selected.
2. Month and year of joining Twitter. This was rounded to the first of the month as the full date is not provided.
3. If the page was verified or not
4. The number of profiles the university account is following, an indication of those they are engaging with. The number was rounded up to the nearest hundred.

5. The number of accounts following the university profile. This number was considered an indication of those willing to engage with the university. The number was rounded up to the nearest hundred.
6. The ratio of following and followers.
7. The number of tweets since the university joined Twitter, an indication of the quantity and how well they engage with stakeholders
8. How long they have been on Twitter. This was calculated in months
9. The number of tweets per month, based on how long they have been on Twitter (in months) and the number of tweets over those months.

Data Analysis

The extracted tweets were imported into NVivo12, a qualitative thematic analysis tool, and thematically analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. Themes were inductively extracted. The analysis and coding were carried out by the first author. The inductive analysis involves coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This form of thematic analysis is data-driven. The tweets were read over and over again to gain a better understanding of the engagement between the universities and stakeholders. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested that 'Immersion usually involves "repeated reading" of the data and effectively reading the data - searching for meanings, patterns, and so on.'

Codes were generated inductively, as there was no pre-existing coding frame. The tweets were coded for the target audience (stakeholder) and purpose. A short description (often one or two words) was given to each tweet, to gather together all references to a specific topic on consumer behaviour and engagement with ES. At this stage of the analysis, these codes were fluid, changing and emerging. Codes were redefined, new codes were created, and codes were also merged and split to account for new ideas as the coding progressed. Key themes were determined; they were integrated and refined.

Results

This section provides a descriptive analysis of the Twitter accounts of the universities. Findings from the thematic analysis are also subsequently presented. The descriptive statistics show that the Russell group has more followers than the MillionPlus group and the difference between the two groups is 2,341,100, which accounts for 81%. The number of tweets generated in the two groups was small compared with other universities. The two groups have a positive ratio as they have more followers than those they follow. The two groups' presence on Twitter is almost the same, and, similarly, their tweets per month. The ratio of the Russell group is higher than the MillionPlus group's ratio. The Twitter ratio indicates how often they tweet and engage with stakeholders in a month on Twitter.

Within the Russell Group Universities, Cardiff University (@cardiffuni) was the first university to join Twitter, in January 2008, while the University of Manchester (@OfficialUoM) was the last to join Twitter, in November 2013. Among the MillionPlus, the University of Bedfordshire (@uniofbeds) was the first university to join Twitter, in

October 2008, while the University of the West of Scotland was the last to join Twitter when the account was created in October 2010.

The verification status of the universities' profile was also checked as an indication of credibility and assurance for stakeholders who may want to engage and be reassured, and they are engaging with the right university profile. Three universities from the sample had not had their Twitter account verified even though they joined Twitter over ten years ago: two universities from the Russell group – the University of Bristol (@BristolUni) which joined in March 2009, the University of Liverpool (@LivUni) which joined January 2009, and one university from the MillionPlus - Abertay University (@AbertayUni) which joined in February 2009.

As presented in Table 1, averagely, Million Plus universities follow 1,724 accounts (STD: 1328.32). The University of the Highlands and Islands (@ThinkUHI) has followed the highest number of accounts with 4,828 followings, while London Metropolitan University (@LondonMetUni) has the lowest number of followings with 250. On average, the universities have 22,581 followers (STD: 6932.36). Bath Spa University (@BathSpaUni) has the highest number of followers with 34,500 accounts, while University of West London (@UniWestLondon) has the lowest number of followers with 11,800 accounts. The average ratio of follower to following is 23 (STD: 19.69). University of the Highlands and Islands (@ThinkUHI) has the lowest with three, while London Metropolitan University has the highest with 77.

Table 1: Million Plus Universities' Twitter Profile Analysis

s/ n	University	Username	Verifie d	Joined	Followin g	Follower s	Ratio	No of Tweets	Months on Twitter	Tweet /Month
1	Abertay University	@AbertayUni	NO	01/02/2009	1,287	25,200	20	18,800	130	145
2	Anglia Ruskin University	AngliaRuskin	YES	01/04/2009	1424	30,300	21	17,700	128	138
3	Bath Spa University	@BathSpaUni	YES	01/01/2010	531	34,500	65	11,700	119	98
4	University of Bedfordshire	@uniofbeds	YES	01/10/2008	1,003	13,800	14	12,900	134	96
5	University of Bolton	@BoltonUni	YES	01/03/2009	4,500	20,500	5	11,300	129	88

6	Canterbury Christ Church University	@CanterburyCCUni	YES	01/02/2009	1,038	18,800	18	10,800	130	83
7	University of Cumbria	@CumbriaUni	YES	01/02/2010	4,277	16,600	4	20,900	118	177
8	University of East London	@UEL_News	YES	01/07/2009	974	24,200	25	16,000	125	128
9	Edinburgh Napier University	@EdinburghNapier	YES	01/02/2009	1,032	30,600	30	14,900	130	115
10	Glasgow Caledonian University	@CaledonianNew	YES	01/06/2009	1,676	21,100	13	20,600	126	163
11	University of the Highlands and Islands	@ThinkUHI	YES	01/06/2009	4,828	13,400	3	8,000	126	63
12	Leeds Trinity University	@LeedsTrinity	YES	01/03/2009	1,892	15,900	8	20,700	129	160

13	London Metropolitan University	@LondonMetUni	YES	9	250	19,300	77	15,400	131	118
14	London South Bank University	@LSBU	YES	9	2,566	20,200	8	20,100	129	156
15	Middlesex University	@MiddlesexUni	YES	9	739	28,400	38	13,200	127	104
16	Solent University	@solentuni	YES	9	1,338	22,100	17	32,900	121	272
17	Staffordshire University	@StaffsUni	YES	9	1,718	34,400	20	36,400	124	294
18	University of Sunderland	@sunderlanduni	YES	0	447	20,600	46	24,200	117	207
19	University of West London	@UniWestLondon	YES	0	2,700	11,800	4	15,000	119	126

20	The University of the West of Scotland	UniWestScotland	YES	01/10/201	0	902	19,700	22	38,200	110	347
21	The University of Wolverhampton	wlv_uni	YES	01/05/200	9	1,089	32,800	30	21,700	127	171

Table 2: Russell Group Universities Twitter Profile Analysis

s/ n	University	Username	Verifie d	Joined	Followin g	Follower s	Rati o	No of Tweets	Months on Twitter	Tweet/ Month	
1	University of Birmingham	@unibirmingham	Yes	01/12/200	8	1,093	116,700	107	38,500	132	292

2	University of Bristol	@BristolUni	No	01/03/200	9	566	82,100	145	14,600	129	113
3	University of Cambridge	@Cambridge_Uni	Yes	01/04/200	9	1,310	496,900	379	10,600	128	83
4	Cardiff University	@cardiffuni	Yes	01/01/200	8	738	78,300	106	18,000	143	126
5	Durham University	@durham_uni	Yes	01/04/201	1	2,302	46,900	20	7,400	104	71
6	University of Edinburgh	@EdinburghUni	yes	01/03/200	9	359	110,600	308	7,700	129	60
7	University of Exeter	@UniofExeter	Yes	01/07/200	9	898	66,800	74	21,700	125	174
8	University of Glasgow	@UofGlasgow	Yes	01/01/200	9	1,848	98,800	53	19,800	131	151

9	Imperial College London	@imperialcollege	Yes	01/07/2008	3,311	104,600	32	15,100	137	110
10	King's College London	@KingsCollegeLondon	Yes	01/03/2009	1,455	98,200	67	7,900	129	61
11	University of Leeds	UniversityLeeds	Yes	01/04/2009	1,040	101,500	98	11,600	128	91
12	University of Liverpool	@LivUni	No	01/01/2009	796	61,800	78	23,100	131	176
13	London School of Economics & Political Science	@LSEnews	Yes	01/06/2010	1,271	91,600	72	18,000	114	158
14	University of Manchester	@OfficialUoM	Yes	01/11/2013	535	60,900	114	16,700	73	229

15	Newcastle University	@UniofNewcastle	Yes	01/12/200	9	1,438	37,400	26	10,500	120	88
16	University of Nottingham	@UniofNottingha m	yes	01/04/200	9	3,598	84,000	23	41,000	128	320
17	University of Oxford	@UniofOxford	Yes	01/06/200	9	1,197	557,600	466	17,000	126	135
18	Queen Mary, University of London	@QMUL	Yes	01/01/200	9	713	53,400	75	13,200	131	101
19	Queen's University Belfast	@QUBelfast	Yes	01/05/200	9	893	43,500	49	20,600	127	162
20	University of Sheffield	@sheffielduni	Yes	01/01/200	9	4,829	120,400	25	21,200	131	162
21	University of Southampton	@unisouthampto n	Yes	01/03/200	9	1,737	53,800	31	17,000	129	132

22	University College London	@ucl	Yes	01/06/201	1	908	69,100	76	4,000	102	39
23	University of Warwick	@warwickuni	Yes	01/08/200	8	2,395	79,500	33	30,200	136	222
24	University of York	@UniOfYork	Yes	01/03/200	9	626	70,600	113	18,500	129	143

As presented in Table 2, averagely, Russell Group universities follow 1,494 accounts (STD: 1095.32). The University of Sheffield (@sheffielduni) is following the highest number of accounts with 4,829 followings while the University of Edinburgh (@EdinburghUni) has the lowest number of followings with 359. On average, the universities have 116,042 followers (STD: 129088.95). This is more than seven times the average number of followers of the MillionPlus universities. The University of Oxford (@UniofOxford) has the highest number of followers with 557,600 accounts while Newcastle University (@UniofNewcastle) has the lowest number of followers with 37,400 accounts. This is even still higher than the most followed university among the MillionPlus universities. The average ratio of follower to following is 107 (STD: 114.70). Durham University (@durham_uni) has the lowest with 20, while the University of Oxford has the highest with 466.

The study sought to explore how UK universities are engaging with stakeholders on Twitter. It specifically focused on the Russell Group as well as on Million Plus universities. The researchers have also identified their key stakeholders.

University Stakeholders on Social Media

The analysis identified six key stakeholders that universities are engaging with on their social media.

Prospective Students

These are students who are deciding on which university to attend; in some cases, these students have received their results and are considering the different options;

specifically, they are considering clearing or adjustment. The 'prospective students' stakeholder group is not just limited to undergraduate students but also postgraduate students, mature students and students who may be interested in online and short courses provided by the universities.

Prospective Staff

Universities are interested in attracting talents to their community, and they engage with prospective staff who may be interested in working with them. This includes academic staff, Post-Doctoral researchers and even PhD candidates. Universities are making an effort to position themselves as an excellent place to work while engaging with this group of stakeholders.

Present Students

This group can be described as the most significant stakeholder of the university. The group are those students who are presently studying at the university. This includes both undergraduate and postgraduates students, those on campus and also those attending virtual classes. They need to be updated with activities, events and announcements on the campus.

Present Staff

University staff is another stakeholder group which universities engage with on their social media. Often, they share the news about their research activities, courses they are running or activities they are involved in. In most cases, universities will use their staff photographs, and Twitter handle on the story.

Parents

While engaging with prospect students, universities are also making an effort to engage with parents as stakeholders in the decision-making process. Studies have identified the role of the parent in influencing the university choice of the student (Adefulu et al., 2020). Universities are seen to share the information which may appeal to the parent and, therefore, influence their children in considering the university. This information often includes a report about ranking, facilities and features about the city in which the university is located.

Public

This is the last group of stakeholders observed from the analysis. These engagements are often from press releases and media coverage to update the public about the events, activities and achievements of the universities. This can also be considered an effort towards positioning the university and making it appealing to prospective students and staff.

University Engagement on Social Media

Three key themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the selected tweets from the universities. The finding suggests that universities in the UK are using Twitter to engage with their stakeholders to 1) Recruit prospective staff and students; 2) Retain staff and students; and 3) Report activities and events. Selected tweets were included to buttress each theme and sub-themes.

Recruit

Recruiting prospective students is a paramount objective for universities and engaging with them on social media is also essential. Universities make an effort to communicate with prospective students and, more likely, their parents or guardian; these groups are considered stakeholders of the university.

Recruiting Undergraduate Students

The universities use their social media profile to provide relevant information for prospective students. The universities were making an effort to reach out to students waiting for their A-level results, reminding them to choose their university.

If you're fascinated by the way people think or have ever wondered if there is such a thing as a #criminal mind – then studying #psychology is for you. Follow your passion and find your perfect fit. Apply today - Anglia Ruskin University

The universities were going through clearing and adjustment during the data collection, and there were tweets from the universities encouraging prospective students still looking for a place to contact them. There was a positive narrative around clearing, encouraging students to make calls and visit the university's website to choose a course that was still on offer.

*Looking for a place in Clearing or Adjustment? Our hotline is now open.
Call us or visit our website – University of Birmingham*

'There is no shame in going through clearing at all. You're doing exactly what everyone else is doing, you've just got there a different way' – Cardiff University

Universities were also willing to provide support during the clearing process

Our #Clearing phone lines are open until 9 pm tonight. Call our friendly team on 01227 926000 to discuss starting your degree this September. Visit our website for full information about the #clearing process - Canterbury Christ Church University

We're sorry there is a technical problem with our phone lines at the moment. If you're trying to contact us with a clearing enquiry, please email info@uhi.ac.uk with 'Clearing' in the subject line, and we'll call you - University of the Highlands and Islands

Recruiting Postgraduate Students

Recruitment of prospective students is not just limited to undergraduate students; universities are engaging with those who may be considering postgraduate studies; they are invited to explore different postgraduate courses on offer by the university.

'The mind cannot adequately be studied by a single discipline'. Find out about our MSC Philosophy of Mind and Psychology which draws on the strength of both #Philosophy and #Psychology – University of Glasgow

Prospective students are invited for Open Days and taster sessions, allowing them to explore the universities.

Get a feel for life as an Imperial student by joining us for our Undergraduate Open Day. Book your spot now – Imperial College

These stakeholders are reminded about the support available for filling the application form, and they are invited to explore the city and the facilities available to them. Universities reassure the students that they are focussed on delivering an experience that will prepare them for employment or entrepreneurship. They also recognise the capabilities of their lecturers to provide quality teaching and enhance student experiences.

Sunderland has the perfect combination of city and seaside living and is a friendly, diverse and affordable place for you to live and study. Choose Sunderland this September - University of Sunderland

Did you know one of our #Animation lecturers is #BAFTA nominated? - Anglia Ruskin University

Our passionate & experienced tutors are on-hand to support you! That's why our students voted us top 5 in the UK for teaching quality, in The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019 - University of Bolton

Recruiting Other Students

For students who may not be able to attend classes on campus, universities are reaching out with other courses delivered through different means, such as online classes. Prospective students are assured that they can study from the comfort of their home virtually anywhere in the world. They are invited to discover more about online programmes on offer by the university.

We are launching an online course designed to help teachers better understand young people's use of social media and how it influences their health and well-being. Find out more – University of Birmingham

Our latest @FutureLearn course is now available: Invisible Worlds: Understanding the Natural Environment. Explore the connection between life and the Earth's invisible systems and gain new insights into the natural environment. #FLInvisibleWorlds - University of Exeter

Recruiting Staff

Prospective staff are also engaged online to recruit them to the university. They are invited to explore the global opportunities offered by the university. This also includes PhD students.

Achieve your #academic ambitions, work with #worldleading research and #globalopportunities. Apply now. #DUrecruit – Durham University

Applications are now open for the 2019 #Commonwealth PhD Scholarships. Apply before 28^{Aug.} 2019. You can find more details on our website – University of Exeter

Retain

These are communications geared towards stakeholders who are already within the university. This includes the staff and the students. The students are considered the most significant stakeholder in the university. They need to know the events and activities that are going on within the campus. They need to be informed in case of an emergency. Research activities and achievements of staff are shared on social media.

Welcoming New Students

As part of retaining the present students, they are made to feel welcome on campus, and often this is targeted towards those who have received their results, assured of starting their university life in September. They are informed about the support networks available to them.

Congratulations and welcome to our #FutureKings students! We can't wait to meet you in September. You did it! – King's College, London

Congratulations to everyone receiving their #SQA results today🎉. If you're joining us at Bristol, we look forward to welcoming, you – Bristol University

Find friends, meet your course mates and ask those burning questions.

Join the @UoLstudents Facebook Group. #Hello Leeds – University of Leeds.

Present students are also welcomed back to the university, and they are updated about new facilities and arrangements for the new session.

Returning students, it's time to re-enrol! Follow the link in the email that you should have received or click below to enrol so that we can ensure everything is ready for your return - University of Sunderland

At London Met, our students' mental and physical wellbeing is extremely important to us. Did you know that all London Met students are entitled to a free gym membership? Yes, you read that right. The benefits of good physical fitness are endless! #FridayMotivation - London Metropolitan University

Encouraging and Motivating

These students are also further encouraged and motivated as they settle down in the university and success stories of other students are shared to encourage. Support services are also made known to the students.

Final year BEng (Hons) Mechanical and Energy Engineering student QT from China who has won the #IETPrize for outstanding performance in her engineering degree! - University of the Highlands and Islands

We know every new student worry about making friends at university, but you don't have to! Hear from our current student Amber as she shares her experience - Anglia Ruskin University.

Content that has been created by other students is also shared to motivate the present students. These are more like personal experiences with which the current students can resonate. These are experiences of students who are in the same situation and can advise other students on how to deal with different situations

Moving to university can seem like a scary ordeal. Our student Sam has written 7 top tips that will help you get settled into university - University of Bedfordshire

New student VLOG! Ryan shares his top spots to visit and hear live music in Canterbury and the local area - Canterbury Christ Church University.

Job opportunities

Job opportunities that are specifically for present students are also shared on the Twitter profile. These are universities engaging with current students with opportunities they may find relevant.

Do you want to gain valuable skills while working with an amazing team of people? Volunteer at Welcome Week - Imperial College

We're looking for London Met students who are interested in joining the bar and events team at The Rocket Interested? - London Metropolitan University

Staff news

To retain present staff, information about staff activities and achievements are also announced on social media. Information about new members joining the team is also shared on the university profile.

Congratulations to everyone who received a #RAEngResearch Fellowship. Delighted that [new staff] are coming to UofG - University of Glasgow

Events

Universities share information about activities that are relevant for their present students and staff.

Join us & today's most innovative playwrights on 19 Aug. for the James Tait Black Prize for #Drama award ceremony - The University of Edinburgh

We hope all of our students and staff attending Perthshire Pride have a fantastic time tomorrow! Don't forget to tag #ThinkUHI in your posts! - University of the Highlands and Islands

Only two weeks left until registration closes for Commemoration Day 2019! Register now and get ready to celebrate! - Imperial College

Report

These are communications aimed at stakeholders that need to be updated about the progress within the university. These include the general public, parents, alumni and partners who need to know what is going on within the university and how best they can contribute back to the university, The Funders and Research Partners also need to be updated about research activities. These are a group of stakeholders that have an interest in the university, and there are possibilities for engagement on social media.

Achievements

Universities take pride in their achievement; they inform their stakeholders about their ranking, innovations, research grants, commissioning of new facilities or awards.

Fantastic news today as we've climbed 10 places to 64th globally in the Academic Ranking of World Universities - Bristol University

As a @stonewall Top 100 employers, we're proud that all of our HR policies and procedures – including all parental leave - are inclusive of all staff – The University of Manchester

Research Activities

Importantly, universities engage with the public by sharing their research activities and innovation. This information can be in the form of a press release or interviewing the team behind the discovery. Universities take pride in sharing their findings and tell the public about their contribution to society.

#ARU is part of the team behind the latest initiative by the Football Association (FA) and mental health charity @heads_together to use the power of football to raise awareness of #mentalhealth issues – Anglia Ruskin University

The Heliconius butterfly is one of nature's best-known mimics. Researchers have used #AI to measure just how good a mimic it is - Cambridge University

Green turtles are more likely to swallow plastic that resembles their natural diet of sea grass according to new research from @ExeterMarine. - University of Exeter

Alumni

To appeal to prospective students, parents and the general public, the universities showcase the achievements of their alumni; the narrative highlights the value of

university education, showcasing what the individuals have gone on to achieve since graduating.

*K***** applied to UEL late in the year and started on a foundation degree, she is now an award-winning fashion designer and credits her time at UEL as a platform for her success - University of East London*

*Happy World Photo Day! To celebrate we're sharing a former student's favourite portfolio snaps, J*** studied photography in Luton and you could too! - University of Bedfordshire*

Media coverage

Universities also engage with the public by sharing media coverage of their activities. This keeps the university in the news, builds the reputation of the university and makes the public and other stakeholders aware of their activities.

UEL lecturer Dr HM was filmed today for ITV evening news about her report on the rise of antibiotic resistance in public places poses a potential risk - University of East London

Did you catch us on @BBCLN last night? We welcomed news correspondent MD to campus and gave him a little insight into how clearing works here at Sunderland - University of Sunderland

Partnership

As a form of corporate social responsibility, universities showcase their connection and contribution to society. On Twitter, the universities suggest that they are not just about teaching and research, but can also contribute to the community; they are proud to partner with organisations with a shared interest, especially as it will more likely boost their profile and, increase the employment skills of their graduates.

We are delighted to announce that we are the official partners of the

@TheScotsman's Fringe First Awards - The University of Edinburgh

We're proud to partner with @Leadersaward for the

#ifyouwereanengineerwhatwouldyoudo competition at

@Gatwick_Airport - Canterbury Christchurch University

As part of the Institute of Coding project, we are partnering with Digital

Union to provide a series of technical courses and Digital Bootcamps -

University of Sunderland

Activities and Events

Universities host many events which are open to the general public, and these are different from events that are explicitly targeting present staff and students. These public events and activities involve inviting the public to participate and see what the university has to offer. As a stakeholder, the university engages with the public

concerning activities and events. This is also seen as a contribution of the university to society.

What are the moral, ethical and cultural consequences of the quest for the perfect body? Join [Academic Staff] to debate the impact of this impossible pursuit of perfection at his free @BritishSciFest event - University of Birmingham

Calling all crafters! Drop by the @VictoriaGallery for the August Crafternoon taught by amazing wirework artist - University of Liverpool

What a day! Well done to those who gave the Escape Room a try today👍 There's still time to get involved-tomorrow - University of Bedfordshire

Are you or do you know of a mature student who'd like to find out more about applying to #university? We're running a workshop for the local #community to help answer any questions! - London Metropolitan University

Social media norms

Universities also conform to social media norms as they engage with the public and other stakeholders. They engage using popular social media trends like Throwback Thursday and Flashback Friday.

It's #InternationalCatDay & we've got cats in unexpected places all over @EdinburghUni! 1st up, a selection of #cat images from @CRC_EdUni's image gallery. Can you #SpotTheCat? - The University of Edinburgh

#ThrowbackThursday to our #Alumni Awards in 2018 and the fantastic night had by all celebrating our graduates' success. #ARUProud - Anglia Ruskin University

Discussion

The study sought to understand the communication strategies of universities on social media as they engage with their stakeholders. The study aim is to extend knowledge on stakeholders' analysis and management in higher education by exploring their communication strategies on social media, specifically on Twitter. This study recognises six key stakeholders and three strands of engagement. Table 3 below presents the summary of six identified university stakeholders and engagement on social media, and Figure 1 shows the interrelationship.

Table 3: Summary of University Stakeholders and Engagement on Social Media

University Stakeholders on Social Media	University Engagement on Social Media

Prospective Students	Recruit	Recruit Undergraduate Students
		Recruit Postgraduate Students
Prospective Staff		Recruit Other Students
		Recruit Staff
Present Students	Retain	Welcoming New Students
		Encouraging and Motivating
Present Staff		Job Opportunities
		Staff News
Parent	Report	Achievements
Public		Research Activities
		Alumni
		Media coverage
		Partnership
		Social media norms
		Events and Activities

While there are possibilities for overlapping, the universities have specific engagement motivations for each of the stakeholders. Recruiting as a motivation involves engaging with prospective students about to join the university, and highlighting values and features of the university to make it appealing. Also, retaining consists of engaging with present staff and students already at the university while reporting involves engaging with external stakeholders. Figure 1 presents a summary of key findings.



Figure 1: Summary of the key findings and typology

The present study recognises the limitation of social media as a means of strategic communication with stakeholders. Acknowledging that some information may be confidential and not appropriate for sharing on social media where everyone has access to it, some stakeholders, as identified in the literature, were not adequately engaged. Stakeholders include academic and research bodies, including funding councils, regionally focused stakeholders such as local government, community, police and community forums, and government bodies like the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department of Innovation, Universities, and Skills (DIUS) and the Home Office. The Department of Education and Skills' (DfES) (Chapleo & Simms, 2010) engagement on social media is rare. In most cases, it was a retweet of

information for the general public, in the case of police and research funding opportunities from the funding councils.

Although Chapleo and Simms (2010) found local businesses as the second most commonly identified stakeholder group, there was not much communication between the universities and the local businesses on social media. Universities are more likely to engage with prospective students and the general public on their social media profiles. The analysis revealed that these two groups are the most frequently targeted with information. Prospective students are informed about courses that are available at the university, the support available to enhance their learning and other admission information. The general public is informed about the research activities of the university, the latest ranking and staff achievements, perhaps in an attempt to create an outstanding perception about the university.

Reduced engagement with the current students is acknowledged. It is, however, essential to note that there are various profiles on Twitter that are specifically targeting the current students with their content. There are Twitter accounts for the Student Union, sports team, and student societies, which are more likely to be sharing information that is relevant to students. Also, there are accounts for different services in universities such as the library, IT and accommodation. These profiles are student-facing, and their contents are more beneficial to the students.

As previously acknowledged by previous studies, there is an overlap between these stakeholders (Chapleo & Simms, 2010), and, as found in this study, there is an overlap

in communication as well. Some information was found to be relevant to different stakeholders at the same time; more so, the universities share this information from their main account. There are instances where information is appropriate for prospective students (being recruited) and present students (to be retained). Likewise, there were events for both internal and external stakeholders. Effectively managing these communication overlaps is essential so that other stakeholders do not feel they are not receiving value from the engagement.

Following social media norms, universities were using hashtags in their tweets and encouraging others to do so as well. These hashtags were frequently used with prospective students as they confirmed their places in the university and when celebrating an achievement. The University of Nottingham uses #loveNotts; Kings College uses #FutureKings; #GoingtoOxford was used to welcome students to Oxford University. Likewise, the University of Leeds welcomes prospective students with #HelloLeeds while the University of Glasgow uses #TeamUofG. There was evidence of students creating content for the universities, especially during clearing where students are making videos encouraging prospective students considering clearing.

There are theoretical and managerial implications of this study. Firstly, it extends knowledge on social media as an interactive technology that allows brands and stakeholders to engage in free-flowing conversations (Camilleri, 2017; Dwivedi et al., 2019). Secondly, the study contributes to universities' stakeholder analysis and management studies (Chapleo & Simms, 2010; Ndofirepi et al., 2020), the research

moved beyond just listing stakeholders to explicitly focus on their communication strategies and motivations on social media. Thirdly, it presents a typology of communication strategies – recruit, retain, and report, which can inform content, creating a plan for the universities. Lastly, it extends knowledge on how universities are using social media to engage and reach out to their stakeholders.

The study presents implications for university managers responsible for marketing communication, student recruitment and managing relationships with stakeholders. First, managers have a better understanding of their stakeholders who will engage on social media. This informs how best they can target these individuals with relevant content. Second, it presents different content creation strategies which may engage with these stakeholders. Managers need to be strategic in developing campaigns that can appeal to their diverse audience (Camilleri, 2018) as this engagement presents a powerful driver for value creation for the stakeholders (Hinson & Mogaji, 2020; Pucci et al., 2018). This may include information to motivate students, provide job opportunities, media coverage for research and engaging in other social media norms, such as using hashtags. Likewise, the use of the hashtag is encouraged; importantly, it provides an insight into how the stakeholders are engaging with the content.

Thirdly, it is becoming essential for universities (and other organisations) to work towards getting their profiles verified as there are many parody accounts. These parody accounts do not represent the university, and that can confuse the stakeholders willing to engage (Mogaji & Erkan, 2019). Fourth, considering that there are social

media profiles from different faculties, departments and group in the university, it is essential to coordinate and ensure all profiles reflect the value of the university and aligns with its brand guideline (Mogaji, 2019; Vasudeva & Mogaji, 2020). Fifth, as social media presences and postings of employees can be problematic for organisations (O'Connor, Schmidt, & Drouin, 2016), there should be a central control team, developing guidelines to guide employee content, bringing the guidelines to the attention of the employee. Likewise, there should be support for the administrator of the social media profile that will be associated with the university and those who have the intention to develop theirs.

Sixth, with different stakeholders to be engaged with, different messages from different channels and different profiles disseminating information, it is essential to put policies and guidelines in place which provide advice on how to best use social media tools and represent the universities' official positions that govern the use of social media (Hrdinová et al. 2010). Lastly, using the students to co-create content should be encouraged and adopted by other universities. Likewise, the use of the hashtag is encouraged; importantly, it provides an insight into how the stakeholders are engaging with the content.

Conclusion

Stakeholder engagement ever more important in complex systems (Lehtinen et al., 2019) and for Universities, social media is an essential tool for all communicating and

engaging with stakeholders, regardless of status. Their success with them comes from the fact that, despite the level of requirement, which is more and more increasing, diverse, and varied, they always offer functionalities that increasingly meet their expectations. This study, contextualised to universities in the United Kingdom, has analysed their use of social media with the various stakeholders that constitute them. It also revealed the differences between the social media profiles, engagement, and interaction of the Russell Group and the MillionPlus universities and their stakeholders. Motives for the engagement were also thematically identified, with a focus on social media as a communication channel.

While this study has attempted to understand the strategic communication between universities and their stakeholders, there are some limitations which should be acknowledged and considered while interpreting the result. The study only focuses on selected universities in the UK, and that means the result may not be generalisable. Secondly, tweets were collected in August as universities were planning for clearing and adjustments; there is an indication that tweets in a different month might provide a different insight into how universities are engaging with stakeholders. Future studies may want to consider data from different months to confirm the validity of this result further. Lastly, retweets were excluded from the analysis as they were contents from another profile. However, universities were retweeting amplifying messages from another social media handle; further research may want to explore this as well. Future studies can further explore the branded content with regard to the typology and empirically test its effect on stakeholder engagement.

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