NETWORK TECHNOLOGY, MARKETING AND INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN EDUCATON EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Pada masa sekarang, banyak organisasi dan perusahaan terus menerus mencari cara yang inovatif untuk memasarkan produk mereka serta mencari target market baru. Dalam hal ini, siswa merupakan bagian dari masyarakat yang ternyata masih juga belum seluruhnya dimanfaatkan sebagai target market. Berikut empat cara sederhana yang umum dilakukan dalam memasarkan sebuah produk secara efektif kepada mereka antara lain menawarkan mereka secara langsung sebuah produk, membujuk mereka untuk membeli sebuah produk, menentukan target yang tepat sampai kepada memberikan pendekatan yang tepat pada grup tersebut. Bagaimana informasi disampaikan sangatlah cepat berubah dari industrial production model menjadi decentralized production model yang difasilitasi oleh munculnya teknologi network yang murah. Komponen-komponen yang menyertai dari model baru ini meliputi sarana publikasi seperti blog atau twitter, sarana media social seperti Facebook dan masih banyak lagi yang memungkinkan individu untuk menciptakan, berbagi, memanfaatkan serta mengevaluasi sebuah informasi dengan lebih cepat dan dapat diakses dengan cepat juga. Dalam paper ini, penulis akan membahas tiga perubahan utama dalam masyarakat sebagai dampak dari production model, serta bagaimana tiap perubahan tersebut berdampak pada paradigma pemasaran di dunia modern ini. Kedua, penulis juga akan menghubungkan perubahan-perubahan tersebut pada lingkungan sekolah sebagai communication environment yang berakhir pada pemberian rekomendasi kepada sekolah yang tidak hanya untuk direspon, akan

tetapi juga mengambil manfaat akan keberadaan teknologi sebagai bentuk pendidikan kepada siswa. Kedua, penulis akan menghubungkan perubahan terhadap lingkungan komunikasi pada sekolah yang tidak terkait, dengan memberikan beberapa masukan nyata bagi sekolah untuk tidak hanya menjawab, tetapi juga untuk mengambil keuntungan dari teknologi dan memimpin dalam bidang pendidikan.

Key Words: *network technology, marketing, education, experience*

Introduction

The decentralized production model of information brings about three major shifts in our information society. The first is increased individual production and value of these individuals as "trust agents" (Brogen, *Trust Agents,* 2009). Second is more cooperative efforts in information production. And third is a shift of power from major information producers to information aggregators and organizers.

1. Increased Individual Production and Value

With inexpensive networked technology, anyone with access to the Internet can produce information that is available online. The desire to be known and heard has always been human nature. More than ever before, there are now easy ways to satisfy such desire. Blogs, websites and mobile applications such as Yelp and Foursquare make it easy for individuals to voice their opinions. There is almost no barrier to entry. In fact, anyone with poignant thoughts and good web writing skills have the opportunity to become extremely influential experts or "trust agents" in the world of online information (Brogen). This connection between deep human desire and effective tools leads to more information production by the individual. According to Benkler (*The Wealth of Networks,* 2006), the material requirements for effective information production and communication are now owned by numbers of individuals several orders of

magnitude larger than the number of owners of the basic means of information production and exchange a mere two decades ago.

In this environment of greater participation, individual perception of value of the self also increases. As people become more and more connected in virtual environments such as social media sites, the new trend is more and more sharing of personal information. As pointed out in a recent New York Times article on information sharing, people are becoming more relaxed about privacy and recognize that publicizing information about themselves can result in serendipitous conversations or ego gratification. This again speaks to the desire and the perceived increased value of the individual.

Impact I

The changes in the marketing paradigm due to increased production and value of individuals include decreased reaction time, boundary and control in the marketing process. In the past, with limited information from individuals, marketing professionals had more control and time to carry out marketing research, strategy and execution. As individuals present an unprecedented amount of responsiveness, the boundary of the marketing process is now far wider, with more control resting with individual customers rather than predetermined groups. One might argue that the desires for information perhaps outweigh the desire for actual goods or services. In this new paradigm, goods or services may no longer be the main product themselves – information becomes the new focus. This shift profoundly changes the marketing paradigm from product centered to information centered.

As a result, the new information landscape is more complex and noisy, so the challenge is to decide what types of opinion are most representative of potential customers. Marketing professionals need to spend a great deal more time listening to individual opinions to accurately speak to specific desires in order to facilitate exchanges.

2. Increased Cooperative Efforts

The collective power of decentralized information production is illustrated by the production model of Wikipedia. This is a type of conscious collaboration. Cooperation can also take place unconsciously. As a person writes a blog, the tags in their entry will automatically lead to groupings through search engines. For example, a search on boarding schools will result in relevant websites that contain these unconscious collective productions.

Through this process, we now see increasing range and diversity of weaker connections. Technology enhances people's capacity to do more in loose commonality with others, without being constrained to organize their relationship through a price system or in traditional hierarchical models of social and economic organization (Benkler).

Impact 2

Increased cooperative efforts in information production creates new challenges and opportunities for marketing professionals. Actively creating and fostering user or fan groups becomes important in strategy and execution. For businesses or schools, this could mean marketing by creating Facebook fan pages or user groups on websites. In other words, marketing now has a new key component, which is to encourage collective productions of information regarding goods or services. In other words, marketing professionals need to use technology in order to generate a positive buzz about goods or services. This trend is manifested in the increased relevance of word-of-mouth marketing. Tools that aid this shift in marketing paradigm include mobile apps such as Foursaqure, which allows individuals to collectively evaluate an establishment, and Buzzd, which allows groups of people to decide which spots are buzzing with action. In addition to technology firms, firms such as BzzAgent are examples of successful use of word-of-mouth marketing. It formally structures and studies positive buzz by harnessing the power of collective information production, thereby providing companies with the ability activate large-scale discussions, uncover hidden values, and drive measurable results (BzzAgent).

3. *The Power of Information Aggregators or Organizers*

With increased production from individuals and collective groups, the web is expanding in sources of information and complexity. According to the Babel objection, when everyone can speak, no one can be heard (Benkler). To avoid such chaos or cacophony, information aggregators and organizers play key roles in making the web more meaningfully accessible. These players include search engines such as Google, and popular portals such as MSN or Yahoo. A popular blogger even argues that Facebook, with its tremendous user participation, is becoming the doorway to the Internet or even the Internet itself. These players hold tremendous power because they determine how and what information reaches people. They are not just portals to the Internet; in fact, they select the information most people consume. Therefore, in this new age of distributed production, power shifts from major information producers to information aggregators and organizers.

Not ending on the top of search results or not getting listed on popular sites can make information producers irrelevant. In the business of search engine optimization or Internet ads, one could pay for one's relevance. In this case, Benkler correctly predicts that in facing the Babel objection, money reemerges as the distinguishing factor between statements that are heard and those that wallow in obscurity.

Impact 3

In terms of marketing, partnering with and using the services of information aggregators and organizers are key components to successful marketing strategies. Marketing messages not only have to be well crafted, but they also need to be effectively delivered. Therefore, marketing professionals need to actively devote resources in search engine optimization and online ads that are effectively customized to reach target consumers. Gmail ads present good examples: through personalized ads, users consciously or unconsciously receive information predetermined by Google. This fundamentally changes how people connect with

advertisement because relevant information can now reach people in more detailed and nuanced ways.

Implication for Schools

The new landscape of distributed information production affects independent schools in very much similar ways as it does to businesses. As information becomes more available, open and free, schools now have less control of their reputation. Nothing can be hidden, and they can no longer put up boundaries and walls. Reaction time to customer feedback is shorter, and there is greater demand for responsiveness.

All this change creates new challenges for independent schools, many of which are accustomed to insularity in isolation and prestige. No matter how they meet this challenge, over time, the new communications environment will inevitably lead to more porous and transparent schools. In the process, some schools will succeed and some will fail. In the following sections I will analyze these changes in more detail and provide three concrete recommendations in how schools can respond as well as capitalize on new opportunities.

Recommendation 1 – Actively Shape School Culture

Culture is largely formed by shared traditions, beliefs and assumptions. Schools are places of culture. As the communications environment changes, school culture will change as well. Benkler sees the networked information environment as a more attractive cultural production system, which makes culture more transparent and malleable. School culture can change in those ways as well. In response, school leaders use technology to actively promote, shape, or preserve a culture that is positive and in concert with the school's mission.

Actively shaping a school's culture in the new communications environment means relinquishing some control. School websites and school managed social media groups must encourage constituents to produce and contribute information. But while distributing control, schools should actively manage and create a uniform cultural message. For example, if the school's culture is one of

innovative teaching, then its online communication should be directed to focus on the activities that support such a notion. The groups that are created should have this focus as well – conversations, testimonials, and dialogues should be directed to promote or maintain the culture. By structuring what people think and talk about, schools can actively shape their culture.

In addition to taking charge of fostering an appropriate culture, these practices make their practitioners better "readers" of their own culture and more self-reflective and critical of the culture they occupy, thereby enabling them to become more self-reflective participants in conversations within that culture (Benkler). Eventually everyone is a participant, so the challenge is to get the participants to think in similar ways. This concept is further discussed in the next recommendation.

Recommendation 2 – Create Positive Spin and Become Trust Agents

The new communications environment creates both challenges and opportunities for schools. One challenge that comes with decreased control is the spread of negative information or rumors online. For example, websites such as DC Urban Moms and Dads provide a forum where parents or potential customers can discuss schools anonymously. This becomes a place where complaints and rumors can run wild. In response to this challenge, schools should assign personnel or committees to monitor information online. They should then analyze the information and come up with appropriate responses. Schools can actively manage its communications environment by creating positive spins that drowns out negative voices. Alignment and cohesion are keys to success in creating such positive spins. Online communications plans need to be formed to accomplish this objective. It is very important to educate constituents and stick to the plan in maintaining the discipline of creating cohesive messages. If the school has an active and involved online community of users who enjoy supporting the school, then enough positive spin can drown out the negative ones. In addition, the community will self-police inaccurate or extreme statements. Similar to word-of-mouth marketing, the school community is its best promoter.

This new communications environment requires new leadership skills, especially skills in crafting messages that attract readers and followers. I believe that school leaders should blog, especially the head of school, who often possess a great deal of credibility. This is another way to proactively build a positive spin and become a "trust agent." Not many leaders do this today or do it well. For a successful example, one can learn from the blog of The Think Global School, where administrators promote interesting and engaging ideas about global education and technology. This blog also demonstrates the opportunity where marketing advances the mission.

While this proactive approach creates opportunities, it also comes with some risks. For example, a head of school's blog post can be "flamed" by an outspoken naysayer. However, this situation can be still be seen as an opportunity – being "flamed" could be the best thing that ever happens – it can promote awareness and spark interesting dialogues (Neustadt).

Recommendation 3 – Use Technology to Enhance Learning

Network technology should be used to enhance the learning experience of students in independent schools. Even though current students are all digital natives, they still need to be taught the skills, attitude and knowledge to use technology effectively and appropriately. What they need is beyond digital literacy – they need to perform their own information production. Examples of this type of production are student blogs and online portfolio. In creating blogs, they will learn communications skills that are required in this new environment. In other words, schools need to teach the writing of clear and concise messages rather than essays that few will ever read. Another key benefit of this technology use is the promotion of sharing and positive peer effect. Some work should be accessible to peers for evaluation and feedback. Comments can be made online in response to work in progress – this not only provides formative advice, but it also teaches students constructive feedback and critical thinking.

Collaboration is another key area in which network technology improve student learning. Tools such as Wikispaces or Google Doc should be used for

students to work collaboratively. And with video conferencing technologies, they can learn with students outside of the school community. Remote collaborations and teamwork are skills needed in today's market place, and independent schools should teach these skills. No matter what fields students choose, they need to possess the critical skills mentioned. Ultimately school need to empower students to be leaders and "trust agents" of the future.

While taking advantage of technology, schools also need to be keenly aware of the risks presented in the use of network technology. Plagiarism, privacy, and cyber bullying are key issues to address. Positive and generative use of technology should be a part of the curriculum across subjects. Responsible digital citizenship needs to be a major objective in what schools teach.

Conclusion

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Schools and school leaders need to think of the impacts from the new communications environment as opportunities rather than threats – opportunities to shape culture, to create positive messages, to lead and influence society for the better, and to educate students and prepare them for the future. By embracing these changes in thoughtful and responsive ways, schools can ensure their future sustainability and relevance in serving their students and missions.

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