Student feedback on Facebook could be ‘very useful’ for regulators

Study reveals feedback on social media sites closely correlate to measures of quality such as England's TEF

April 26, 2018

By Chris Havergal (/content/chris-havergal-0)

Twitter: @CHavergalTHE (http://www.twitter.com/CHavergalTHE)
Students have a fondness for sharing their views about their universities online, whether they are sounding off or singing its praises. And a new study suggests that, far from being meaningless chatter, this feedback offers a remarkably accurate guide to an institution's performance.

The research, presented at the annual conference of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency this week, even suggests that monitoring students' online feedback could form an important part of higher education's regulatory regime.
Alex Griffiths, a research officer at LSE's Centre for Analysis of Risk and Regulation, collected more than 200,000 anonymised student ratings that score UK higher education providers on a one-to-five scale from three data sources: Facebook, Whatuni and StudentCrowd.

Not only did these reveal a relatively positive view of institutions’ performance – the average score on the platforms was 4.33, 4.11 and 4.08 respectively – the creation of an overall “collective judgement” score revealed that the ratings were closely correlated with established measures of quality in the sector.

For example, the average rating for English providers that met requirements in their annual provider review, formerly operated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, was 4.19; while the mean for institutions that needed an action plan to pass was 4.05.

Meanwhile, the average score for institutions that secured a “gold” rating in the teaching excellence framework was 4.32; while for “silver” providers it was 4.17, and for “bronze” campuses it was 4.13.

Dr Griffiths also found a correlation between the ratings and providers’ overall satisfaction scores in the National Student Survey.

He suggested that unsolicited online feedback could play an important role in sector regulation in an era when there is strong demand for student-focused and timely information on sector performance, but there is little appetite for new, burdensome data collections.

Dr Griffiths, whose previous research (http://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/early/2017/09/25/bmjqs-2017-006847) has revealed how social media feedback could predict the results of UK hospitals’ Care Quality Commission ratings, was even able to calculate month-by-month averages of student ratings. These revealed that students are most satisfied with their universities over the summer and in the first weeks of term, before slumping around Christmas, rising through January and February, and then hitting their lowest point during March and April, coinciding with institutions’ examination and assessment periods.

Dr Griffiths told Times Higher Education that his findings reflected the theory of the “wisdom of crowds” which states that, even if the majority of people in a group are not especially well-informed or rational, large groups can be remarkably insightful under the right circumstances.
He argued that online feedback could be a “very useful guide” for a regulator, or for a university seeking to improve its performance.

“We would never suggest that this gets used in isolation by a regulator to take action, but it could be one part of their toolbox,” Dr Griffiths said. “It can certainly throw up suggestions of where there might be concerns.

“What is advantageous is that this data is available on a daily basis, so you don’t have to wait for a whole year for data.”

Will Naylor, the QAA’s director of colleges and alternative providers, said that, while online data were “unlikely to supersede the need for formal measures” of standards, “they may give universities and colleges more opportunities for organisational learning and improving the student experience”.

But Mr Naylor added: “First we need to do more work, including to assess whether students would accept the use of feedback data for this purpose.”

cris.havergal@timeshighereducation.com

Read more about: Teaching and learning

RELATED ARTICLES

Are researchers wreaking revenge on Rate My Professors? July 19, 2017

Academics blame ‘vindictive’ students for poor course evaluations August 14, 2016

Growing evidence of anti-female bias in student surveys August 14, 2016
FEATURED JOBS

Phd Fellowship at the Department of Computer Science
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/79848/?trackid=10)
NORWEGIAN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY -NTNU

Senior Lecturer in Marketing
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/79817/?trackid=10)
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

Subject Manager (Studies in Language and Literature / Language Acquisition)
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/79823/?trackid=10)
INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE

Lecturer in Design History and Theory
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/79803/?trackid=10)
YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Lecturer in Business and Economics
(//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listing/79816/?trackid=10)
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

See all jobs (//www.timeshighereducation.com/unijobs/listings/)
Student feedback on Facebook could be 'very useful' for regulators

Teaching Masterclass

Feedback shows HEA teaching masterclass makes a difference in China

Promoted by Teaching Masterclass

Three years on campus 'should not be norm' in England, says minister

April 24, 2018
| --- | --- |
Student feedback on Facebook could be ‘very useful’ for regulators | Times Higher Education (THE)

26/04/2018

USS strike: why I won’t join the pensions strike (/blog/uss-strike-why-i-wont-join-pensions-strike)
Qualified actuary and academic Nick Foster says the case for university pension reform cannot be ignored despite a brilliant anti-cuts PR campaign

V-c under fire for claiming Open University academics... (/news/v-c-under-fire-claiming-open-university-academics-dont-teach)
Peter Horrocks’ comments about development of learning materials branded ‘an attack on OU staff and the institution itself’

PJ Thum’s treatment will dampen Singaporean... (/opinion/pj-thums-treatment-will-dampen-singaporean-academics-willingness-speak-out)
Politicians’ disparagement of historian’s research signals that alternative interpretations of the city state’s past will not be tolerated, says Linda Lim
Open University v-c Peter Horrocks announces resignation
(/news/open-university-v-c-peter-horrocks-announces-resignation)

Vice-chancellor stands down after union members passed no confidence vote

Clothes do not make the woman: what female academics wear...

Women and their clothing are scrutinised more closely because men are seen as the norm in academia. Emma Rees considers the codes at play in what is supposedly a radical space
Better recognition of the wider social benefits of both teaching and research would help universities regain public goodwill, says @nick_petford timeshighereducation.com/opinion/value-

Value for money is not only about individuals
Better recognition of the wider social benefits of both teaching and research…
timeshighereducation.com
Earth Sciences at UJ

*South Africa: The most valuable piece of minerals real estate in the world.*

We are sitting on the world's...

Promoted by University of Johannesburg

---

**YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE**

Moocs are a solution in search of a problem

*April 26, 2018*
Academic fraud a ‘real challenge’ to UK’s quality assurance
(/news/academic-fraud-real-challenge-uks-quality-assurance)
April 25, 2018

Three years on campus ‘should not be norm’ in England, says minister
(/news/three-years-campus-should-not-be-norm-england-says-minister)
April 24, 2018

UK’s elite universities ‘still have social justice problem’
(/news/uks-elite-universities-still-have-social-justice-problem)
April 23, 2018

Contact Us (/contact-us)
About Us (/about-us)
Write for the THE (/news/writing-for-times-higher-education/418274.article)
Terms & Conditions (https://www.tes.com/terms/terms-and-conditions)