



Consumer Decision Making and Marketing Techniques : New Insights into Higher Education in the Digital Era

^{1*}Widyatmoko Widyatmoko, ²Tri Esti Rahayuningtyas, ³Aji Prasajo

^{1,2} Department of Management, Dian Nuswantoro University, Kediri, Indonesia

³ Department of Management, Nusantara PGRI University, Kediri, Indonesia

Author's correspondence : widyatmoko@dsn.dinus.ac.id

Abstract. This study aims to examine consumer decision-making regarding marketing techniques in higher education institutions in the digital era. As technology advances and competition among universities intensifies, it is crucial for educational institutions to understand the factors influencing prospective students' decisions in choosing a university. The research employs a quantitative approach through surveys involving prospective students from various universities, as well as interviews with education marketing professionals. The findings reveal that the use of social media, personalized digital marketing, and alumni testimonials have a significant impact on influencing prospective students' decisions. This study provides new insights into the importance of adaptive, data-driven marketing strategies for attracting prospective students in the digital age. The significance of this research lies in its ability to offer guidance to higher education institutions in designing more effective and relevant marketing techniques that meet the needs of today's consumers.

Keywords : Consumer, Decision, Making, Digital, Era, Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology in recent years has had a significant impact on various sectors, including higher education. In this digital era, universities face the challenge of adjusting their marketing strategies to reach prospective students who are increasingly relying on the internet and technology to gather information. Previously, educational marketing was dominated by traditional methods such as brochures, educational fairs, and direct promotions. However, with technological advancements and the growing use of social media, digital platforms, and search engines, universities must adapt by utilizing digital media to influence prospective students' decisions (Srinivasan et al., 2021).

The aim of this study is to explore how the marketing techniques applied by higher education institutions in the digital era affect prospective students' decision-making. This research seeks to provide insights into the impact of digital-based marketing on how prospective students choose universities, as well as the factors underlying those decisions. Universities that wish to remain competitive must understand this shift in consumer behavior and leverage technology to effectively market their institutions (Chen & Liao, 2022).

This research addresses an important question: how can digital marketing techniques influence prospective students' decisions? Universities that fail to tap into the potential of digital marketing may miss out on significant opportunities to attract prospective students. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the most effective digital marketing methods on digital platforms and how they influence prospective students' perceptions and decisions when

choosing a university (Jiang & Lee, 2023). By understanding the influence of digital marketing, it is hoped that universities can formulate more relevant and efficient marketing strategies.

To achieve this, the research employs a quantitative approach by collecting data through an online survey distributed to prospective students who are considering university choices. The survey is designed to identify the digital marketing techniques that most influence their decisions, such as social media, alumni reviews, and personalized marketing content. In addition, interviews with marketing practitioners at universities were conducted to gain further insights into the challenges faced when implementing digital marketing (Johnson et al., 2023).

The findings of this study reveal that digital marketing has a significant impact on prospective students' decisions. Social media emerged as one of the most influential marketing channels, as it allows universities to build closer relationships with prospective students through relevant and interactive content. Additionally, alumni reviews and personalized marketing content were found to enhance prospective students' trust in universities. The study also highlights that data-driven marketing, which tailors messages to individual preferences, can improve marketing effectiveness and strengthen the appeal of educational institutions (Taylor & Foster, 2022).

This research makes an important contribution to the development of higher education marketing strategies in the digital era. By understanding how prospective students make decisions, universities can design more effective marketing strategies, increase visibility, and strengthen their position in an increasingly competitive educational market. The findings also provide a clear picture of how the use of digital technology can help universities build better relationships with prospective students and increase their engagement in the enrollment process (Smith et al., 2020).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the rapidly evolving digital era, consumer decision-making and marketing techniques in the higher education sector have undergone significant changes. Universities now face new challenges in attracting prospective students, especially amidst the rapid adoption of technology and shifting consumer preferences. This literature review will discuss relevant literature on consumer decision-making in the context of higher education and the application of digital marketing techniques by universities to influence these decisions.

Consumer Decision-Making in the Digital Era

Consumer decision-making has long been a topic of interest in marketing literature. However, in recent years, research on consumer behavior has increasingly been influenced by the role of digital technology. According to Kotler and Keller (2020), digital technology has transformed how consumers search for information, compare alternatives, and ultimately make purchase decisions, including decisions regarding higher education. Schiffman and Kanuk (2018) also highlight the importance of the internet and social media as primary sources of information for modern consumers. In the context of higher education, prospective students now rely heavily on digital platforms to gather information about universities, access reviews, and interact with alumni or current students.

Jung et al. (2019) reveal that the decision to apply to a university is strongly influenced by the university's presence in the digital world and the digital interactions that occur between prospective students and educational institutions. This shift in behavior signals that digital-based marketing has become a crucial element in influencing consumer decisions, particularly in the higher education sector. However, this research also finds that the influence of social media on decision-making is not uniform and highly depends on the individual characteristics of prospective students.

Digital Marketing Techniques in Higher Education

As digital technology has advanced, so too have the marketing techniques used by universities. Kotler et al. (2020) state that digital marketing, which includes the use of social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and content marketing, has become the primary strategy for attracting prospective students. These marketing techniques enable universities to target relevant audiences and interact with them directly through the platforms they use daily.

Hassan and Shiu (2022) add that the use of big data and analytics is also becoming more prevalent in higher education marketing. Data collected from online activities, such as searches on university websites or interactions on social media, allows universities to create more personalized and effective marketing campaigns. Thus, digital marketing techniques are no longer limited to traditional advertising or promotions but also involve creating user experiences that are more connected and relevant to prospective students' needs.

However, despite many universities implementing digital marketing, Nash (2021) argues that many educational institutions still struggle to fully leverage digital technology. Some universities have yet to optimize the available digital channels to effectively reach prospective students, ultimately hindering their success in recruiting new students.

The Link Between Consumer Decision-Making and Digital Marketing

This literature review shows that consumer decision-making in the context of higher education is closely tied to the digital marketing strategies employed by universities. Baker and Hart (2020) argue that effective digital marketing can influence prospective students' perceptions of a university. By providing accurate and easily accessible information through digital channels, universities can build a positive image and convince prospective students to choose them as their educational option.

Ladhari (2020), in his research, concludes that digital marketing based on personal and interactive relationships is more effective in influencing consumer decisions. These interactions can take the form of two-way communication that occurs through social media or instant messaging platforms, where prospective students feel more engaged and valued. Therefore, universities that are able to build closer relationships with prospective students through digital channels are more likely to influence their decision-making.

Challenges in Implementing Digital Marketing in Higher Education

While digital technology offers significant opportunities for universities to enhance their marketing efforts, its implementation is not without challenges. Smith and Brown (2021) note that one of the main challenges in digital marketing for higher education is managing and utilizing data wisely. Universities must be cautious in collecting and using prospective students' personal data to ensure they do not violate privacy rights or compromise information security.

Furthermore, Henderson (2022) reveals that not all prospective students have equal access to digital technology, which may limit the effectiveness of digital marketing. As such, universities must consider the diversity of their audience and not rely solely on digital channels. It is important to also combine traditional marketing methods to reach a broader audience.

3. METHODS

This study uses a quantitative survey design to collect data from prospective students who are currently considering their choices for higher education institutions. This design was chosen because it allows for obtaining views and responses from a large number of participants in a structured and systematic manner.

The population of this study consists of prospective students aged 18-25 who are in the process of selecting a university in Indonesia. A sample of 300 prospective students was selected from various major cities across Indonesia. The sample size was chosen to ensure diversity in the characteristics of the respondents and adequate representation of the target

population. The instrument used in this study is a questionnaire developed using a 5-point Likert scale to measure attitudes and responses to various digital marketing techniques. Data were collected through an online survey distributed via digital platforms such as Google Forms. The researcher utilized social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as websites focused on educational information, to reach relevant prospective students.

The data obtained were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the characteristics of the respondents, as well as to analyze the distribution of responses to each question. Inferential techniques, particularly regression analysis, were used to test the relationship between digital marketing techniques and prospective students' decision-making.

Content validity was tested by involving experts in the fields of educational marketing and quantitative research to assess the relevance and completeness of the items in the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, which was expected to have a value greater than 0.7 to indicate adequate internal consistency.

4. RESULTS

This study aims to analyze the impact of digital marketing techniques on prospective students' decision-making when choosing a university. Based on data collected from 300 respondents, consisting of prospective students in Indonesia, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to evaluate the relationship between digital marketing and consumer decision-making.

Descriptive Statistics

The demographic characteristics of the respondents show that the majority (62%) are students aged 18-20, with nearly half (48%) being female. In terms of location, most respondents (54%) are from major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung. When it comes to how they gather information about universities, the majority (75%) stated that they first search for information about universities via the internet. Additionally, 83% of respondents follow social media accounts of universities they are interested in.

In terms of the digital marketing techniques employed, social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube were identified as the most effective in influencing prospective students' decisions. Seventy percent of respondents selected social media as the most influential marketing channel. Furthermore, 65% of respondents stated that reviews from students or alumni significantly affect their decisions.

Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis was conducted to test the influence of digital marketing techniques on prospective students' decision-making. The hypothesis tested was that the use of social media, digital ads, and data-driven content positively influences prospective students' decisions when choosing a university.

The results of the linear regression analysis revealed that the social media variable ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) and alumni reviews ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive and significant impact on university selection decisions. This suggests that the more prospective students are exposed to information through social media and receive positive reviews from alumni, the more likely they are to choose that university.

However, digital ads and data-driven content did not show a significant effect on prospective students' decision-making (digital ads: $\beta = 0.12$, $p > 0.05$; data-driven content: $\beta = 0.09$, $p > 0.05$). These results contradict the initial hypothesis, which assumed that digital ads and data-driven content would have a larger impact. Nevertheless, these findings provide new insights, indicating that prospective students are more influenced by direct interactions and feedback from other users through social media and personal reviews than by promotional ads.

Additional Analysis

In addition to regression analysis, Pearson's correlation test was used to identify the relationship between the frequency of social media usage and prospective students' decisions to choose a university. The correlation test results revealed a strong and significant relationship between these two variables ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that the more frequently prospective students interact with university content on social media, the greater the impact it has on their decision-making.

Table 1. Regression Analysis Results for Each Digital Marketing Variable

Variable	Regression Coefficient (β)	Significance (p)
Social Media	0.35	< 0.01
Alumni Reviews	0.25	< 0.05
Digital Ads	0.12	> 0.05
Data-Driven Content	0.09	> 0.05

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that digital marketing, specifically social media and alumni reviews, significantly influences prospective students' decision-making in choosing a university. On the other hand, marketing through digital ads and data-driven content did not show a significant impact. These findings provide practical guidance for universities to focus on managing and leveraging social media platforms and alumni feedback to enhance their appeal to prospective students. By utilizing these channels effectively, universities can strengthen their position in the increasingly competitive higher education market.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the impact of digital marketing techniques on prospective students' decision-making when choosing a university in the digital era. With a primary focus on social media and alumni reviews, the research offers new insights into how digital marketing influences university choices. The results indicate that interactions with social media and feedback from alumni have a significant impact on prospective students' decisions, while digital ads and data-driven content did not show the expected influence. These findings highlight the importance of using more personal and interactive marketing channels in shaping prospective students' perceptions.

The main contribution of this study lies in identifying that digital marketing, particularly through social media and alumni reviews, has a greater influence on prospective students' decisions compared to other marketing techniques, such as digital ads or data-driven content. This supports findings from previous studies, which suggest that prospective students are more likely to choose a university based on experiences and recommendations they receive through social and online interactions (Hansen, 2021; Lee, 2022). On the other hand, the finding that digital ads and data-driven marketing have a limited influence contrasts with earlier research that suggested digital ads are highly effective in capturing consumer attention (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

These results suggest that relationship-based marketing, where prospective students can interact directly with institutions via social media, is more effective in building trust and engagement. Alumni reviews, as a more personal and experience-based source of information, appear to play a crucial role in this decision-making process. The explanation for these unexpected findings may lie in the changing consumer behavior in the digital era, which places greater emphasis on social interactions and feedback from individuals with direct experience, rather than on general ads and impersonal promotions (Tan & Wang, 2023).

The managerial implications of these findings are highly relevant for universities aiming to enhance their appeal to prospective students. Universities need to place more focus on using social media to build relationships with prospective students and facilitate direct interactions with alumni. Therefore, managing online reputation and leveraging positive alumni feedback is crucial in improving the institution's image. Universities should also reevaluate their digital marketing strategies and invest in marketing techniques that enable direct engagement with their audience, rather than relying solely on traditional digital ads.

However, there are several limitations in this study that need to be considered. First, the sample used in this study is limited to prospective students from Indonesia, so the findings may not be fully generalizable to a global context. Second, this study only assesses digital marketing factors in the decision-making process, without considering other variables such as tuition fees or the quality of academic programs, which may also influence these decisions. These limitations may affect the external validity of the study's findings.

For future research, it is suggested to explore other factors that may influence prospective students' decision-making, such as academic quality, tuition fees, and scholarship programs. Additionally, further studies could examine how the impact of digital marketing on prospective students' decisions differs across various countries or regions, as well as the role of new technologies like artificial intelligence and data analytics in transforming how universities market themselves to prospective students.

Overall, this study provides significant contributions to understanding the impact of digital marketing in the context of higher education and identifies the most effective marketing channels for influencing prospective students' decisions. By focusing on personalized, interactive methods such as social media and alumni reviews, universities can improve their outreach and engagement with prospective students in the digital age.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has successfully analyzed the impact of digital marketing techniques on prospective students' decision-making when choosing a university in the digital era. The main findings reveal that more personal and interactive digital marketing channels, such as social media and alumni reviews, have a greater influence on prospective students' decisions compared to other marketing techniques like digital ads and data-driven content. This suggests that universities need to focus on building closer relationships with prospective students through digital platforms that enable direct interaction and the sharing of experiences.

However, this study also has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the sample used in this research is limited to prospective students in Indonesia, meaning the results cannot be generalized to a global population. Second, the study focused solely on digital marketing and did not consider other factors that may also influence prospective students' decisions, such as tuition fees or the quality of academic programs. These limitations could affect the external validity of the study's findings and highlight the need for further research with a broader sample and consideration of other relevant variables.

For future research, it is recommended that researchers explore additional factors that influence prospective students' decisions, as well as test the impact of digital marketing techniques in different cultural contexts or countries. Furthermore, future studies could assess how new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and data analytics, could be used to enhance the effectiveness of university marketing. This research provides valuable insights for university administrators in designing more effective marketing strategies in the digital era and encourages further investigation into the role of digital marketing in educational decision-making.

LIMITATION

Although this study has provided valuable insights into the impact of digital marketing techniques on prospective students' decision-making in choosing a university, several limitations should be acknowledged. These limitations may affect the external validity and generalizability of the findings.

First, the sample used in this study is limited to prospective students from Indonesia. This limits the ability to generalize the findings to a global population or even to the context of other countries with different higher education market characteristics. The impact of digital marketing on prospective students' decisions may vary in other countries or regions, depending on cultural factors, levels of technology adoption, and differences in the marketing channels used by universities.

Second, this study focused primarily on digital marketing as a single factor influencing prospective students' decisions, without considering other variables that may also play a role, such as tuition fees, academic quality, or personal factors. These factors could significantly influence decision-making but were not incorporated into the analysis.

Third, the methodological limitations associated with the research design should also be noted. This study employed a survey as the primary data collection method, which could introduce bias if the respondents did not fully represent the broader population of prospective

students. The reliance on self-reported data also raises concerns about social desirability bias or respondents' willingness to provide honest answers.

Fourth, while digital marketing has rapidly evolved in recent years, it is possible that many of the prospective students in the sample have not been fully exposed to newer forms of digital marketing, such as the use of artificial intelligence and data analytics in marketing campaigns. These advanced marketing techniques may be influencing decision-making in ways that were not captured by the current study.

Given these limitations, it is essential for future research to address these gaps by exploring a more diverse sample, including other influencing factors, and incorporating more advanced marketing strategies. Additionally, expanding the scope of research to different cultural and regional contexts will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how digital marketing affects higher education decision-making on a global scale.

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