"An Empirical Study on Digital Marketing Determinants Affecting Students' College Selection"

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate dynamics of digital marketing and its impact on students' decisions when
choosing a college for higher education. Employing a quantitate approach data was collected from a diverse group
of students. The primary factors under scrutiny include online presence, content personalization, social media
engagement, trust-building techniques, and the overall effectiveness of digital advertising campaigns. The study
acknowledges potential limitations, such as self-reporting biases and external influences. This study will provide
higher education institutions with practical insights to enhance their digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: *Digital Promotion, College Choice, Online Presence, social media, Content, Higher Education.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, the landscape of higher education has undergone a significant transformation, driven largely by
advancements in digital technology. As educational institutions strive to attract prospective students, digital
marketing has emerged as a critical tool for enhancing visibility and engagement.

The traditional methods of college promotion, such as brochures and physical campus tours, have been
supplemented, and in some cases replaced, by dynamic and expansive digital strategies. This shift is fueled by the
changing behavior of prospective students who increasingly seek information, engage with content, and make
decisions online (Junco, et al., 2011). The proliferation of internet usage and the ubiquitous presence of social
media platforms have created a virtual arena where colleges and universities vie for the attention and interest of
their target audience (Huertas et al., 2016). Digital marketing enables educational institutions to reach a global
audience, breaking down geographical barriers and expanding their visibility to a diverse pool of prospective
students. This is particularly relevant for Generation Z, who prioritizes instant access to information and
interactive communication (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). As such, understanding the key determinants of effective
digital promotion is imperative for higher education institutions aiming to remain competitive in this evolving
landscape. The decision-making process of prospective students is multifaceted, influenced by a combination of
personal, social, and institutional factors. According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), the selection of a college is
a high-stakes decision with profound implications for an individual's academic and professional future. In the
digital age, where information is abundant and easily accessible, grasping the determinants that sway students'
choices becomes critical for institutions aiming to attract and enroll the right candidates. This study employs a
quantitative approach, integrating quantitative surveys to gather data from a diverse group of prospective students.
Key factors under investigation include online presence, content personalization, social media engagement, trust-
building techniques, and the overall effectiveness of digital advertising campaigns. Through rigorous data
analysis, this research aims to identify patterns, correlations, and the nuanced interactions between these digital
marketing variables and students' perceptions. This empirical study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the

intersection of digital marketing and higher education, offering valuable insights for educators, marketers, and policymakers seeking to navigate the digital landscape and improve the college selection experience for prospective students.

II. Literature Review

The landscape of higher education has been significantly transformed by digital technology, altering how institutions engage with prospective students. Traditional marketing methods such as brochures, physical campus tours, and college fairs have been augmented by digital strategies, including social media campaigns, personalized content and online advertisements. This shift reflects the changing behavior of prospective students, who increasingly rely on digital platforms for information and decision-making (Junco, et al., 2011). Huertas, et al. (2016) emphasized that digital promotion allows higher education institutions to break down geographical barriers and reach a diverse pool of prospective students. Moreover, an effective online presence includes a user-friendly website, active social media profiles, and engaging content that resonates with target audiences (Nguyen et al., 2019). Personalized marketing has become a critical component in engaging prospective students. According to Nguyen et al. (2019), tailored content that addresses the specific interests and needs of students can significantly enhance engagement and conversion rates. This approach aligns with the preferences of Generation Z, who prioritize personalized experiences and instant access to information (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Social media platforms have become powerful tools for higher education marketing. Social media campaigns can build trust and credibility among prospective students. These platforms allow institutions to share success stories, student testimonials, and interactive content, which can positively influence students' perceptions and decisions (Lim, 2020). Building trust with prospective students is crucial for successful digital marketing. Gupta and Dhami (2021) found that online reviews and peer recommendations play a significant role in influencing students' choices. Trust-building techniques such as showcasing alumni success, transparent communication, and responsiveness to inquiries can enhance an institution's credibility and appeal.

According to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2019) indicates that well-executed digital advertising campaigns can significantly boost enrollment rates. Effective campaigns are characterized by clear messaging, targeted reach, and measurable outcomes (Armstrong et al., 2020). The impact of online reviews and peer recommendations on college selection has been extensively documented. Lim (2020) and Gupta and Dhami (2021) highlighted that positive reviews and recommendations from peers can significantly influence students' perceptions and decisions.. According to Zhang et al. (2021), AI-driven marketing strategies can enhance personalization and improve student engagement. Similarly, VR technology offers immersive experiences that can attract prospective students by providing a realistic preview of campus life (Snelson, 2018).

Hypothesis

H1: Online Content is a significant determinant of digital marketing in context to influencing student college choice.

H2: Digital marketing on different social media sites can influence the choice of a college made by a student

H3: Digital marketing strategy implemented using college website affects student choice when enrolling into tertiary institutions.
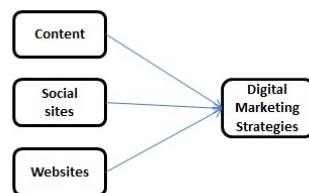
Figure 1 Conceptual Diagram

III. Research Methodology

This exploration is described by being exploratory and descriptive in nature, using cross-sectional data collected through structured questionnaires. The study had 267 full-time students from secondary schools who were seeking further education admission into institutions located within Delhi/NCR. Delhi-NCR has got a wide range of cultural, religious as well as ethnic diversity. The sampling methods employed in this study were snowball

sampling strategy which is a non-probability method The objective of this research was to investigate impact of social media between users' needs or preferences for services offered through different platforms like Facebook Twitter etc. Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree =5. The data were analyzed using SPSS version -26 and AMOS 21

IV Findings

Data screening: Primary data collected for the study were screened for variables considered for research and cases collected. Case screening was done and found no missing value in rows, along with no unengaged responses based on standard deviation. Data was free from outliers. Variable Screening was done and found no missing value in Columns.

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive details of the faculties are reported in Table 1, and it was observed that the majority of the students were females (76.0%) and Male students were 24.0 percent. Table 1 Sample demographics (N=267).

Table 1 Sample demographics (N=267)

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	68	25.0
Female	199	75.0
	267	100.0

Source: Author

Construct reliability & Exploratory factor analysis (E.F.A.)

The Cronbach's alpha for the complete scale was 0.801, which is above 0.70 (George and Mallery, 2003) means a high level of internal consistency for the scale. Exploratory factor analysis (E.F.A.) of complete-scale shows that Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is .814 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, α=.000, which is< .005. Chi-Square = (435) =10405.834, p<.005. The value of communalities ranges in between .672 to .993. 10 components with eigenvalue >1 isolated explaining 81.80% of the total variance.

Measurement Model

The proposed measurement model was tested for two types of invariance tests; metric invariance and configure invariance. Results of the configural invariance test depicted an acceptable model fit with shows computation of degree of freedom, chi-square (99) =139.65, p<.05 , GFI= .93; RMSR= .065; RMSEA = .043; Adjusted GFI= .921; CFI= .938 Parsimony GFI= .781; Parsimony CFI= .757; Parsimony Normed Fit Index = .694 all the values fall within threshold range hence this model was a good fit (Hair et al. 2010, Aggarwal., Dhaliwal & Nobi, 2018). Results also depicted that average variance explained (AVE=Digital Marketing=0.508) composite reliability (CR= Digital Marketing=0.838). The correlation coefficient for all the inter items corresponding to Content, Website, social media and Digital Marketing were <.3 (Hair et al., 2010), suggesting low inter-variable correlation and establishment of discriminant validity. Whereas the regression weights of items were >.5 suggested presence of high interitem correlation; therefore, convergent validity was also established.

Structural Model

Results of the model fit of the structural model also depicted acceptable values with χ2 = 102.362, D.F. = 51, p > 0.001, CMIN/D. F = 2.148 ≤ 3 , GFI = 0.957 ≥ 0.80, CFI = 0.943 ≥ 0.90, RMR = 0.55 ≤ 0.10, AGFI = 0.902 ≥ 0.80 and RMSEA = 0.051 ≤ 0.08 (Aggarwal., Dhaliwal & Nobi, 2018). Linear Regression results in table 2 render the support for H1 as the Content that included E Brochure, Blogs, E-mailer keeps on improving it act as a significant indicator of digital marketing in terms of influencing student choice of the college. But results did not support for H2 which claimed that information on the social media sites is a significant parameter of digital marketing in terms of impacting student to choose college for higher education. The structural model also confirms the H3, which states that the websites also act as significant tool for digital marketing for colleges and impacts the admission of students in higher education.

Table 2 Results

Hypothesis	Std. Beta	t	Sig.
H1	0.393	9.998	0
H2	-0.005	-0.126	0.9
H3	0.281	7.145	0

V. Discussion

Analysis of online presence is a critical determinant influencing students' perceptions of colleges. A comprehensive and engaging online presence, including a user-friendly website and active participation in digital platforms, enhances a college's visibility and accessibility. Research by Huertas, Díaz, and Gutiérrez (2016) emphasizes the significance of a well-crafted online presence in creating a positive first impression and influencing students' perceptions of an institution's credibility and relevance. Junco et al. (2010) highlights the positive impact of social media engagement on student engagement and perceptions. Tailoring content to individual preferences, including virtual tours, faculty interviews, and student testimonials, creates a more engaging and personalized experience. Huertas et al. (2016) discuss the importance of personalized content in providing an authentic and immersive representation of the college, influencing students' perceptions and decisions. Pempek, Yermolayeva, and Calvert (2009) discuss how college students' social networking experiences on platforms like Facebook can serve as powerful channels for peer-to-peer recommendations. The impact of digital advertising on college choices is a critical determinant in the current landscape.

7. Implications

The implications of digital marketing determinants on students' choice of college are profound, shaping how educational institutions are perceived and selected. Digital marketing determinants, such as a strong online presence and effective social media engagement, contribute to increased visibility and reach. Colleges that strategically utilize digital channels can extend their reach to a wider and more diverse audience of potential students. Digital marketing plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and building a positive brand image. Consistent and positive digital messaging contributes to the formation of a strong and favorable brand image, making the college more appealing to its target audience. Digital marketing determinants facilitate improved engagement and interaction between colleges and prospective students. This direct engagement helps build a sense of connection, providing students with valuable insights into campus life, academic offerings, and the overall student experience. When prospective students encounter consistent and trustworthy information online, they are more likely to view the college as reliable and genuine, positively influencing their decision to consider and eventually choose the institution. Ultimately, the effective implementation of digital marketing determinants can contribute to increased application and enrollment rates. By strategically influencing students throughout their decision-making journey, from awareness to application, colleges can convert digital engagement into tangible outcomes, resulting in a higher number of qualified applicants and enrolled students.

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