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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Digital Marketing and Social Media as a Strategy to Increase Brand Awareness: Case Study Increasing the Number of Students on Brand Awareness in Social Media and Digital Marketing Activities in Higher Education X**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research aims to provide knowledge related to post-covid 19 digital marketing strategies to increase the number of students at private universities in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach in data collection. Observing, interviewing, and sorting the required data as well as conducting data validity through data triangulation from experts to confirm the effectiveness of digital marketing activities on social media in increasing brand awareness in the form of interviews to confirm the data obtained. It can be concluded that the university's x strategy in utilizing digital marketing is effective, with an increase of 155% in a period of approximately 1.5 years doing advertisements on social media, Facebook, Instagram, and Google Ads. Promotional strategies for price reductions and tuition installments are the second strategy in marketing activities. Third in this digital marketing communication strategy is the suitability of the target market with copywriting in advertisements and ad creators, namely generation z. These three strategies are strategies for increasing university brand awareness x.

**KEYWORDS**

Digital marketing, social media, brand awareness

**ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 18 July 2023

**PUBLISHED:** 28 July 2023

**DOI:** 10.32996/jbms.2023.5.4.12

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### **1. Introduction**

The increased use of social media has become a significant trend in recent years. This is supported by advances in technology and easier internet accessibility around the world. In recent years, the use of social media has increased significantly across all levels of society, including among parents and entrepreneurs, apart from millennials and Generation Z. People use social media to share opinions, seek information, and share stories (Sampurno et al., 2020). This increase provides a great opportunity for universities to promote their products and services more broadly by optimizing social media platforms to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Based on the InSite Consulting survey from 35 countries shows that 50% of social media users are connected to brands, 42% have conversations on social media about brands, and 36% post content about a brand or company on social media (Gao, Feng). This is what then encourages marketing from universities to carry out digital marketing activities on various social media.

Digital marketing has become an integral part of modern marketing strategies, where companies can reach their audience more effectively through digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, websites and mobile apps. Definition of digital marketing is a marketing technique for a product and service that is carried out using digital media (Rachmadi, 2020). In digital marketing, companies can use various techniques such as SEO, social media marketing, email marketing, content marketing, mobile marketing, and video marketing to achieve their marketing goals, such as increasing brand awareness, generating leads, increasing sales, and developing customer loyalty. By using technology and data analytics, digital marketing also provides valuable insights to help universities understand the behavior and preferences of their audience and optimize their marketing strategies to achieve higher ROI.

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Communication strategies in digital marketing are very important to ensure that the messages and marketing content delivered can be well received by the audience. A communication strategy is a design made to change human behavior on a larger scale through the transfer of new ideas (Liliweri, 2011). In addition, communication strategies from a "psycholinguistic" point of view. It is a plan that is consciously prepared to solve something that is considered a problem by individuals in achieving certain communication goals (Faerch, 1984). Companies must consider factors such as the target audience, the social media platforms used, the type of content that is suitable, and effective communication techniques such as copywriting and visual storytelling. In addition, the communication strategy must prioritize interaction with the audience and answer their requests and problems directly through social media management and customer service. With the right communication strategy, companies can build stronger relationships with their audience and increase the trust and loyalty of prospective students. Strategy is essentially planning and management to achieve goals. While the communication strategy is a combination of communication planning and communication management to achieve a goal. There are three elements in a marketing strategy known as STP, namely Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning. (Sarastuti, 2017)

Brand awareness of a tertiary institution is very important to attract prospective students and improve the reputation of the tertiary institution in the eyes of the public. The level of university brand awareness can be measured by how many people recognize the name of the college, how often the college appears in the media, and how the public perceives the college. Universities can increase brand awareness by conducting marketing campaigns through various media, such as online and offline advertisements, promotional activities, and increasing interaction with prospective students through social media. In addition, improving the quality of education, facilities, and services can also increase university brand awareness because it will create a positive experience for students and improve the image of the college in the eyes of the public. Brand Trust has a significant and positive influence on loyalty (Alexander, 2014)

Private tertiary institutions in Indonesia are currently facing demands to continue to increase the number of students. This is caused by increasingly fierce competition among private universities, especially in terms of admitting new students. To meet this demand, private universities must develop appropriate and effective marketing strategies, including digital marketing, to promote their brand and increase visibility in the eyes of prospective students. In addition, companies can develop study programs that are innovative and in accordance with the needs of the job market to attract prospective students. Universities must also invest in adequate infrastructure and facilities to provide a quality learning experience and meet student expectations. By improving their quality and reputation, private universities can increase their attractiveness and gain the trust of the public.

The Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on college marketing activities. Social restrictions and lockdowns have resulted in the cancellation of educational exhibitions and campus visits, which are usually the main means of promoting higher education to prospective students. In addition, many families and prospective students are experiencing financial difficulties due to the pandemic, so they are more careful in making educational decisions and prefer to postpone or cancel enrollment plans. Therefore, universities must adapt their marketing strategies to pandemic conditions, focusing on digital marketing and technology such as websites, email, social media and video conferencing to promote their brands and establish virtual communication with prospective students. Universities must also adapt their programs and services to the needs and concerns of prospective students, as well as provide financial convenience and flexibility during this pandemic.

Even though digital marketing on social media has great potential, there are a number of challenges that must be faced. One of the main challenges is the emergence of social media algorithms that are increasingly complex and change frequently, making it more difficult for companies to reach their audiences effectively. In addition, competition is getting tougher and forcing companies to spend larger budgets on paid advertising, which does not always guarantee satisfactory results. In addition, the risk of cyberbullying and negative content on social media can harm the image and reputation of universities, so companies must be prepared to face unexpected communication crises. Therefore, universities must develop the right digital marketing strategy with a focus on relevant and interesting content, smart use of SEO techniques, and active efforts to build interaction and trust with their audience on social media.

## **2. Methods**

In this study, researchers analyzed the use of social media in digital marketing activities using qualitative methods with a case study approach. Qualitative research is a research method used to understand and explain phenomena from the point of view of those who experience them. Qualitative research is usually carried out by collecting descriptive data, such as narratives, interviews, observations, and written documents. The goal of qualitative research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study, focusing on the meanings, values, and experiences of the individuals or groups involved in the phenomenon. In qualitative research, researchers are usually directly involved in the process of collecting and analyzing the data and try to minimize their own influence on the interpretation and presentation of the data. The results of qualitative research are often in the form of descriptions, interpretations, and deeper understandings of the phenomenon being studied, which can be used to generate new concepts, theories, and models.

Through this definition, it can be understood that qualitative research prioritizes natural backgrounds and methods and is carried out by people who have an interest in naturalism. Qualitative research also produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from observed people or sources of information by directing a natural and holistic approach (Moleong). Through a case study approach, related to questions that are commonly asked in the case study method, because you want to understand the phenomenon in depth, even explore and elaborate on it, according to Yin (1994: 21), it is not enough if the case study questions only ask "what", (what), but also "how" (how) and "why" (why). The "what" questions are intended to obtain descriptive knowledge, "how" to obtain explanative knowledge, and "why" to obtain explorative knowledge. Yin emphasizes the use of "how" and "why" questions because these two questions are considered very appropriate for obtaining in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. In addition, the form of the question will determine the strategy used to obtain data.

Data collection techniques in this study used interviews with informants. The data analysis used in the following qualitative data is the interactive data analysis technique of Miles and Hubbermans (Miles), namely data analysis in three stages, namely the data is obtained first through a reduction process; the reduced data is then elaborated and classified; then the researcher draws conclusions. The reduction process in question is summarizing and selecting important data according to the objectives and research questions (Uhm). In the next stage, the researcher selects data from the interview results and sorts the data according to the needs of the researcher. The selected data is then presented so that it is easy for researchers to understand and provides a way for researchers to plan further research (Sugiyono, 2017). The next stage is the researcher draws conclusions through relevant data that has been selected by previous researchers.

### **3. Discussion**

College marketing is currently experiencing a change from what used to be done through visits to schools for promotions to be mostly done through digital marketing. In the digital era, prospective students or parents of prospective students tend to seek information about tertiary institutions through the Internet and social media, so digital marketing is becoming increasingly important in promoting tertiary institutions. Digital marketing can be done through various channels, such as online advertising, social media, email marketing, and college websites. Universities can also use digital marketing strategies to reach specific target audiences, for example, through targeted advertising campaigns based on location or the interests of prospective students. By optimizing digital marketing strategies, tertiary institutions can increase brand awareness, expand the reach of promotions, and increase the number of prospective students who are interested in the study programs offered.

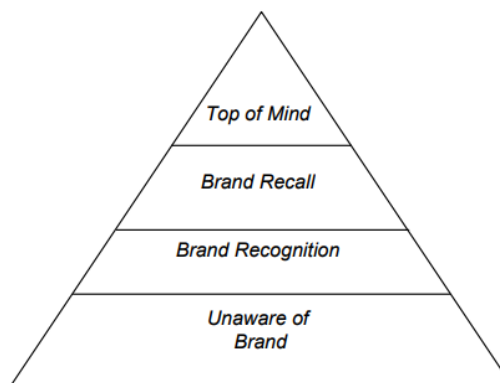
Previously, university x carried out promotions through direct marketing promotions until 2019. After experiencing a pandemic in late 2020, it decided to switch to promotions through social media by implementing digital marketing. The number of student enrollees in 2019 was around 700; in 2020, during the pandemic, it dropped to 400. After this case, the change in promotion was focused on social media. The Covid 19 pandemic case is also the background for changing promotions from offline to online from the direct marketing process to be impossible to do because of the lockdown and schools being closed by the government. With the constraints of this pandemic, marketing and tertiary institutions have devised a strategy to make it easier for prospective students to obtain information related to lectures. From this increased case data, there are several strategies that have become strengths in tertiary institutions. x Strategies for using digital marketing and social media, as well as communication strategies to increase brand awareness.

In 2021, marketing activities were truly purely digital, utilizing advertisements from social media starting from Facebook, Instagram, Google Ads, and SEM (Search Engine Machine) and the addition of Tiktok as social media, which will be the next target of marketing media. The digital marketing strategy carried out by College X first analyzes social media that is effective for use, namely by looking at the target market segmentation for college x; the target for college x is people with medium economic conditions. The second is to form a digital marketing team, where each marketer calls personal marketing in college x holds one task for collaboration. The task of each marketer is to become a social media creator, create photo and video content for social media, manage social media accounts and SEM (Search Engine Machine). The three advertisements are made in an interesting persuasive way, starting from determining generation z creators who are communicative and good looking so that they can easily attract prospective students. The advertisements produced are distributed on social media that have been synchronized with Facebook and Instagram, so when an ad is uploaded, it can be distributed to the two social media accounts at the same time; we will try to focus on TikTok to gain brand awareness. When this advertisement reaches prospective students, this advertisement has a link that is connected directly to WhatsApp marketing, making it easier to access prospective student communications to ask questions. According to (Mor, 2017), advertising campaigns can help create brand recognition, brand knowledge, and brand preference (Fitriana, 2020). In addition, direct message facilities on social media are also used to respond to questions from prospective students. This is done so that a quick response can provide satisfaction for prospective students.

In digital marketing practices, of course, there is an interesting power of copywriting to increase brand awareness. The strategy for communicating the brand in university x is by using installment fee schemes and price discounts. This cost reduction was previously referred to as a development scholarship, but over time, the results of a survey conducted by Inaba Marketing on prospective students showed that discounted prices were preferred over scholarships. Because in the minds of prospective scholarship students, it means that they have to go through a selection process. Not only with the discounted offers given but the communication strategy is also carried out by offering installment times or installments starting from 3x to 16x starting in 2019 until now. This is also one of the main factors in increasing the number of students. In 2021, the odd semester, the algorithm will start reading what targets we expect.

Communication strategy in increasing brand awareness on social media is one of the keys to successful digital marketing in tertiary institutions x. Brand awareness is very important in any business, including the knitting industry, because it not only invites consumers to buy but can make consumers become repeat customers (Oktaviani, 2018). Social media is a platform that has the potential to increase brand awareness because of its wide use and ability to reach very specific prospective students. To increase brand awareness on social media, universities can expand the reach of promotions through official social media accounts, carry out targeted and targeted advertising campaigns, and maximize interaction with followers through various forms of interesting content. In addition, increasing participation in online events or events, such as webinars or live streaming, can help increase brand awareness as it increases brand exposure on social media. In carrying out the brand awareness strategy carried out by universities on social media, it is important to always monitor performance and update the strategy regularly to match the development of trends and consumer behavior on social media.

Aaker explained that customers have the ability to recognize and remember depending on the communication levels of a brand. Therefore, in research related to brand awareness, it is necessary to understand the levels as shown below.



**Figure 1 Pyramid of Brand Awareness**

Source: Aaker

Based on the pyramid image above, Aaker describes that there is a certain definition for each level, namely.

1. Brand Awareness (Unware of Brand)

The lowest level of brand awareness is unaware of a brand or referred to as a situation where consumers are not aware of a certain brand; at this stage, prospective students have a pattern of not being aware of the existence of a brand or college x.

2. Brand Recognition

This second level describes how consumers already know the existence of the brand and acknowledge its existence. This level is considered a crucial level because after knowing it, consumers only have to choose whether to buy the brand or not. At this stage, consumers recognize the brand if given a sign (clue). The pattern of the two prospective students already knows the information about the existence of a college brand x.

3. Brand Recall

The third level is the level which describes that the consumer is no longer in the knowing stage but also remembers the brand even without being given a clue. When someone hears the word cellphone, consumers' minds will remember the Samsung brand. The pattern of the three prospective students can already remember the university brand x.

4. Top of Mind

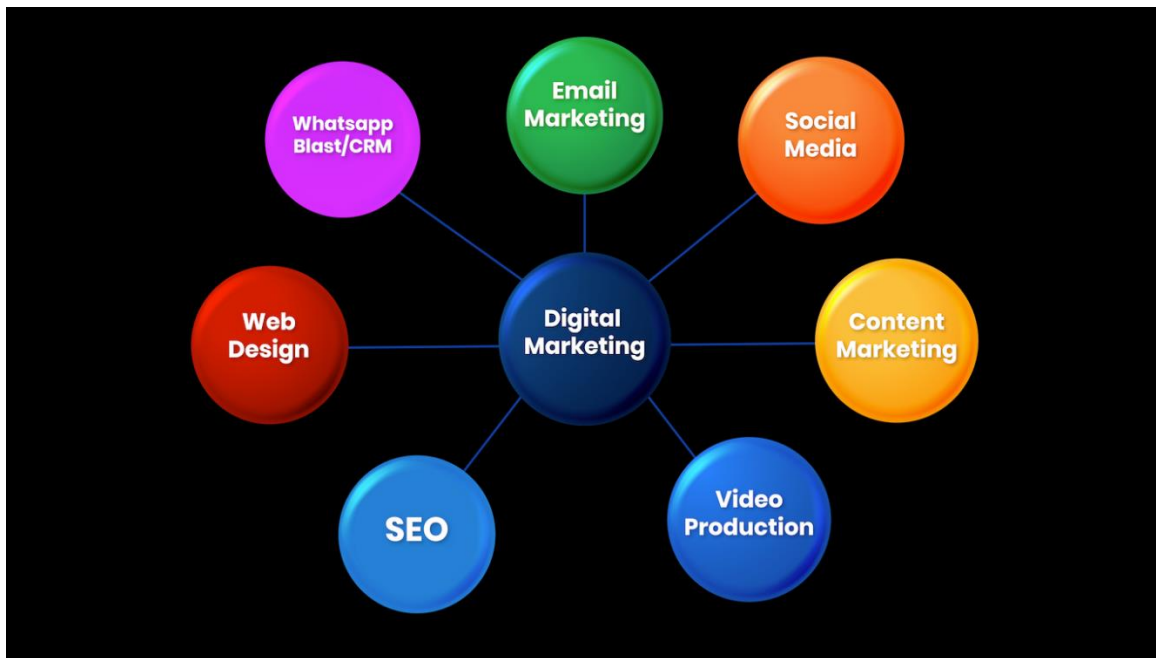
At the top of the pyramid, the top of min indicates that a certain brand has become the consumer's top choice. The first time consumers want to buy something, the brand has appeared in their minds. Consumers are already at the top of mind level when someone asks for advice or asks something about the goods they want to buy; the brand immediately becomes the first choice. This position has indicated that the brand is already dominant in the minds of consumers. The final pattern of potential customers already exists in the minds of prospective students.

From the elaboration of the Aaker model above, brand awareness in practice carried out at tertiary institutions has the same pattern as the pyramid model above. Where the registration process by prospective students is not one process but has an initial pattern, namely not being aware of the existence of the x college, acknowledging the existence of the x college, recalling the x college and finding out eventually becomes the main thought or top of mind. This pattern is a pattern resulting from advertisements on social media where prospective students have seen advertisements for the first time, but the next pattern can be made in a common way, namely opening social media and their websites, asking friends who have already entered college or asking family with this information. Indirectly, the influence of digital marketing is very large in providing information, and also the influence of social information or alumni to support the registration of prospective new students.

The use of digital marketing is implemented starting in 2020 in the even semester without carrying out direct selling promotions; the number of registered students remains stable at 400 to 600. After the algorithm on social media began to be read, the increase in number of students increased in 2021, namely 619 registrants and in 2022, namely 1055 student applicants. When the new scheme, namely going digital, was implemented in the odd 2021 to 2022, the number of students increased. The scheme that is being implemented is still optimizing on social media, Instagram, Facebook and Google Ads. In 2022, the endemic era of promotions has begun to be carried out in combination with direct selling promotions to schools. For approximately 1.5 years, from the end of 2020 to 2021, the process of digital marketing activities at tertiary institutions has increased by 155%. This is a strategy to increase university brand awareness x. According to Sexana, social networking sites are the most popular media. Social media allows members to interact with each other. Interaction occurs not only in text messages but includes photos and videos that other members may find interesting. All posts (publications) are real-time, allowing members to share information as to what is happening (Nasrullah, 2021). The following is a table of the number of college students x:

<b>Admission of new students/year</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Odd Semester	661	473	459	867
Even Semester	104	28	160	188
Total	765	501	619	1055

**Tabel 1 Total Student in the University x**  
Source: University X Marketing Department



**Figure 2 University X Digital Marketing Model**

Source: University X Marketing Department

The digital marketing strategy in the model above is a strategy that has been tested and implemented until 2023 to promote and increase brand awareness in universities x. In digital marketing activities at university x, using collaboration from social media, content marketing, video productions, CEO, web design, whatsapp blast/CRM, and also email marketing. Brand awareness in tertiary institutions can be built by carrying out digital marketing strategies for approximately 1.5 years to build an image on social media that has exceeded the planned student target. Of course, in digital marketing activities, there are also costs that must be incurred in advertising on social media. Users or, in this research, higher education institution x certainly have to prepare costs that will be used for operating activities. In this study, the validity test was carried out, namely data triangulation, by confirming it to experts and also experts.

Digital business actors or practitioners, namely Raine Renaldi., S.IIP., AWP, an expert in digital marketing, said that in digital marketing activities, there is what is known as Funneling and Channeling, usually a company will adjust its strategy based on the results of the STP that was previously made, then prepare materials for funneling with the aim of activity and cost efficiency when carrying out digital marketing activities, the sharper the STP, the more efficient and better the results of digital marketing activities. By funneling, companies can freely evaluate digital marketing strategies based on the conversion results of the content they create. For example, posting short videos and poster photos with writing can get a different response from the target market. After knowing the conversion results, the company will focus on digital marketing content that gets the highest response and overrides methods that don't get a good response. If university x uses one of these strategies, it is only natural that conversions occur, which have a direct effect on the number of applicants because digital marketing is different from offline conversion data is easy to calculate, and responses from the target market can be recorded with likes, comments and so on. From what was conveyed by parak in the field of digital marketing, it provides validity that this digital marketing activity can make it easier to reach the expected market according to the target of tertiary institutions x and in line with what is expected, namely to increase brand awareness indirectly.

#### 4. Conclusions

In this study, it can be concluded that brand awareness in tertiary institutions can be built by utilizing social media and developing digital marketing communication strategies, namely by collaborating on social media activities, SEO, content marketing, product videos, web design, WhatsApp blast/CRM, email marketing, and social media. Planning in developing a strategy is urgently needed, such as compiling messages in advertisements, providing discounted tuition rates, featuring young creators, namely generation z, and also the costs that must be incurred in digital marketing advertising activities. The decision of students to study at tertiary institution x is also supported by the trust factor in tertiary x with information obtained from social media where the brand has become top of mind and also recommendations from college alumni x. It can be concluded that the strategy of tertiary institutions in utilizing digital marketing is effective, with an increase of 155% in a period of approximately 1.5 years doing advertisements on social media, Facebook, Instagram and Google ads as the main ones.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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