S.M.A.R.T Strategies:
A Quick Peek of Prospective Open University Marketing Strategies amid Disrupted Era

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Abstract

The significance of an open university cannot be overstated for individuals seeking equitable and accessible education. Rapid technological advancements have played a pivotal role in making open education feasible, albeit posing challenges to the sustainability of such institutions. In response to this disrupted landscape, universities must adapt, particularly by harnessing the potential of social media. Examining the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), which was historically a prominent segment with a dominant presence of student teachers, reveals a notable transformation. This research aims to address this imperative, focusing on the FKIP at Universitas Terbuka where the number of the students was gradually decreased. Meanwhile the role of distance university is described by the level of enrolment for it is high or not. The study delves into two primary research questions: first, identifying the effective media forms for digital marketing, and second, formulating strategies and digital marketing programs to enhance branding and promote FKIP-UT programs. To address these questions, 131 lecturers, 43 students, and two experts in education and marketing were engaged in a qualitative study, utilizing questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) for data collection. The findings recommend Instagram as the preferable platform for promotion and reveal the integration of the Supervising, Making, Affiliation, Rematching, and Timing (S.M.A.R.T) strategy to meet the evolving demands of the digital era.

Keywords: marketing, social media, SMART, strategy, open university, FKIP

1. Introduction

Long distance learning stands as a viable alternative, championed by open universities, and instigated by governmental efforts to ensure equal educational opportunities for all citizens. As Nyaruwata (2011) outlines, this approach focuses on breaking down barriers of time and place, liberating learners, and providing flexible learning options for both individual and group learners. Delving into the historical roots, the inception of long-distance learning can be traced back to an initiative by the Labor Party under Prime Minister Harold Wilson. The urgency for an Open University (OU) unfolded through dynamic discussions among citizens of the United Kingdom. Reflecting on this in a 1977 lecture to the OU Students' Association, Harold Wilson revealed that he had conceptualized the idea of the OU even before assuming leadership of the Labour Party in February 1963. Recounting a pivotal moment during his

holiday in the Isles of Scilly on Easter Sunday that same year, Wilson drafted the outline for a "University of the Air," marking the seminal birth of the open university concept (Degang, 2021).

Amid the digital revolution, Harold Wilson discerned an opportunity to leverage the positive impact of digital technology to establish a potentially affordable educational channel accessible to lower-income individuals. Utilizing radio and television, the OU orchestrated its teaching-learning process, with specially crafted correspondence materials bearing the heaviness of the teaching load, as highlighted by Collings (1971). This pioneering phenomenon garnered global attention, inspiring the establishment of open universities in various nations. Notably, Indonesia's Open University (Universitas Terbuka) emerged on September 4, 1984, under the protection of Presidential Instruction No. 41. Universitas Terbuka (UT), rooted in Indonesian soil, epitomizes the commitment to open higher education for all, as encapsulated in the slogan.

With 39 regional offices and one international bureau, UT's tagline becomes more than a mere aspiration because it becomes a tangible reality. However, the present-day context diverges significantly from the landscape of 1963 when the Open University was first introduced. UT confronts new challenges in the form of the disrupted era, signalling a paradigm shift over time. The advent of the disrupted era has significantly impacted the landscape of open universities, including the likes of UT. Compounding this shift is the realization that digital learning is no longer the exclusive domain of open universities, with numerous alternative platforms such as edX, Future Learn, and other distance learning avenues catering to individuals from diverse backgrounds. The traditional centralized model of open universities is gradually facing disruption.

Examining the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), which was historically a prominent segment with a dominant presence of student teachers, reveals a notable transformation. In 2015, student teachers constituted a solid 71.83% of the faculty, yet by 2021, this proportion had decreased. Similar challenges are evident in other open universities, exemplified by the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU), which, despite experiencing positive perceptions and high enrolment levels, has encountered turbulence (Dzama, 2013). This scenario has prompted a pressing need for research in Zimbabwe to unravel the mysteries surrounding the current situation and evaluate the effectiveness of the university's adopted marketing strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a pivotal moment for open universities, presenting them with dual trajectories. Firstly, open universities, exemplified by Universitas Terbuka, have gained prominence, especially in countries like Indonesia where traditional universities often lack infrastructure for long-distance learning. UT, with its established expertise in this area, serves as a role model for institutions grappling with the sudden shift to remote education. Secondly, the widespread recognition of the potential and necessity for distance learning has led conventional universities to explore and adopt aspects of the open university model, blurring the distinctive features of open and offline education.

Notably, Circular Letter Number 2 of 2022 from the Ministry of Education in Indonesia outlines the flexibility of implementing distance learning at either the subject level or throughout the curriculum of a study program. While open universities were once the primary providers of distance learning, this letter indicates a broader scope, allowing other universities to conduct remote classes. It's noteworthy that this provision is subject to certain conditions and permissions, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is no specific research confirming the impact of the COVID-19 situation on enrolment in open universities like Universitas Terbuka, the changing landscape is evident. The Open University, which once held exclusive authority in managing and providing distance learning, now faces the prospect of competing in the open market of distance education. Consequently, there is an urgent need to assess and adapt marketing strategies to navigate the uncertainties of this disrupted era. Preparing for potential challenges is paramount, as the once-guaranteed privileges of open universities are gradually evolving in response to the evolving educational landscape.

Having a close look at Universitas Terbuka's marketing strategy, particularly on the FKIP, this research was designed to assess the effort of the university to generate a sustainability of student enrolment from time to time. This research carried two core questions. Firstly, an exploration into the forms of media

employed for effective digital marketing for FKIP is undertaken. This encompasses an analysis of the channels and platforms utilized to reach and engage with the target audience. Secondly, the research delves into the strategies and digital marketing programs that FKIP can employ to fortify its branding and effectively market its programs. This includes an assessment of the methods employed to enhance the visibility, reputation, and appeal of the faculty's offerings. Through these inquiries, the research seeks to shed light on the dynamic landscape of digital marketing within the context of open education, aiming to provide insights that contribute to the sustained success of FKIP amidst the challenges of evolving educational paradigms.

2. Literature Review

Managing the existence, any institution particularly university needs to promote from time to time. The process is necessary to ensure the sustainability of university students' enrolment and it is important since it marks how significant the role in the society is. If the number of students plummets or no students enroll themselves the existence of the university is no more needed. It simply comes from the economic theory, where supplies and demands role in the market process. Smith (1776) describes how buyers and sellers of resources interact which is known as the law of supply and demand. People tend to be more inclined to supply than to demand when prices rise, and the opposite is true when prices fall.

The role of distance university is influenced by whether the demand which is usually described by the level of enrolment for it is high or not. As claimed by Kotler (2005), the success of any higher learning institution is to succeed in having many enrolments who are active and end up with the best grades and knowledge in a current competitive situation no matter what the challenges are facing. However, the enrolment is not solely affected by the image of the university. There are vibrant and various influences that can be considered on the effect of student enrolment in the university. As it is stated by Nuseir and El Refae (2022) in their research several factors, such as the academic reputation, grants and funding, location and proximity, facilities and services, and promotional and marketing channels, drive students' choices for studying at universities in UAE of education. It means marketing matters. However, there are lack of up-to-date studies to elaborate on social media and the marketing strategy, particularly on open universities. That is why this research is composed.

A study of marketing strategy is not hard to find yet when we talk about university marketing or specifically open university marketing in a disrupted era, the challenge arises. It can be understood that many universities are still intact with old-school types of advertisement, yet they need to realize that time is not the same anymore. The rapid spread of social media led to new forms of promotion channels. A study by Constantinides and Stagno (2012) researched identifying the role and importance of social media on the choice of future students for a study and university in comparison with the traditional university marketing channels in the Netherlands. He figured out there are at least three market segments among future students based on their use of social media, the basic social and informational user. It turns out that 95.1% of future students maintain a profile on a social media website 77.5% of them log in at least once per day to their profile and most of them expect to have more engagement in the social media if we are willing to attract them for enrolment.

The study synchronized with the work from Rawat et al (2022) on the important role of social media in university marketing particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The constraint that prevents the university from reaching potential students somehow can be overcome by the existence of social media and it shows social media as the new playground for promoting and marketing. Even though the studies have revealed much insightful information the result still cannot be solely applied to open universities since it has a different learning environment compared to conventional universities. Therefore, this study meets its urgency since it will be focused on open university marketing.

It is undeniable that social media is instrumental for promotion yet a specific role in open university marketing has not yet been unfolded. We found that research on marketing strategy for open universities can be referred to a work from Kidulani (2014) that marks the marketing strategy of the open university in Tanzania. He tried to see the effectiveness of 4ps (pricing, product, people, place) marketing strategies

and it turned out that how, when, where, and what 4ps are needed to be effectively and efficiently applied then it is not easy for the management to put into consideration. However, he did not mention specifically the role of social media which this research will focus on.

Research from Noor et al (2021) also did not capture the area of social media for marketing purposes despite it revealing the perspective of prospective open university students in Malaysia. Their perception is useful for revealing effective market segmentation for open universities, yet it did not include the role of social media in the research. Another research from Budiman et al (2023) seemed to meet the expectation where the research is conducted in an open university and specifically talks about marketing segmentation in an open university where it can be clustered through several approaches such as demographic, geographic, psychographic, and the last behaviour.

The research is useful as a stepping stone to target potential students and strengthen the importance of social media as an instrumental tool for promotion. However, it does go deeper into what forms of media are used for effective digital marketing. The fact that it compared social media and other conventional promotions did not underline which social media works best. It also did not tell us what forms of education and digital marketing programs can be utilized to strengthen branding as well as market the programs offered to the public to attract prospective students like what this research meant. However, since research that meets both criteria, specifically about open universities and discussing social media as the tool of promotion is rarely found, the research from Budiman et al is the most relevant resource we can refer to and this research is made to be the extension of the area of study. According to that information provided, the objective of this research is to give insights that can contribute to the sustained success of FKIP amidst the challenges of evolving educational paradigms.

3.   Research Method

This research can be considered as qualitative research. The main reason why, we chose the research approach due to an intention to go deeper in understanding and describing the type of media used for effective digital marketing to convey education related to FKIP and the study programs offered as well as forms of education and digital marketing programs that can be utilized by FKIP-UT to strengthen branding as well as market the programs offered to the public to attract prospective students. By considering linear research questions that we want to answer, we decided to utilize this approach. According to Creswell (2014), "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem".

For the data-collecting technique, we applied two questionnaires and a focus group discussion. Approaching the data using two types of techniques is useful not only it can help us to find more variative results but also it can be significantly important for triangulating the result finding since each of the data will confirm and strengthen each other. Early on, social scientists borrowed the concept of triangulation to argue for its use in the validation process in assessing the veracity of social science research results (Mertens and Hesse-Biber, 2012). It means that having a triangulation is necessary to ensure the trustworthiness of our research findings. There are at least three alternative ways to take in conducting triangulation according to Creswell (2012). First is corroborating evidence from different individuals (e.g., a principal and a student), types of data (e.g., field notes and interviews), or methods of data collection (e.g., documents and interviews).

The data was extracted from selected participants. All the participants are stakeholders of FKIP who consist of lecturers and staff as well as students from the faculty with a total number of 131 participants. Of the lecturers, around 54.3% are assistant professors 81.7 % have a social humanity background and the rest of them come from science and technology.

Meanwhile, there are at least 43 students who are also included in the research. We also invited experts in educational marketing to become the participants. All of them had to be addressed with a questionnaire to fill out. After that, we visited the selected regional offices since there are 38 regional offices. Some of

that represents interesting data from the questionnaire. From there, we administered FGD to get more information for answering the research questions.

4.   Findings and Discussion

After collecting and analysing the data, we have identified two sets of results that address the research question. As previously mentioned, we employed two distinct methods for data collection, namely a questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Both methods yielded pertinent information relevant to answering the research questions, constituting our findings. The initial finding pertains to the exploration of media forms employed for efficient digital marketing in disseminating education related to FKIP and its offered study programs. The results indicate that social media emerges as the most recommended medium for promotional and marketing activities. Notably, some experts involved in the study advocate for Instagram as the optimal platform for these purposes.

In the context of the second inquiry into the strategies and digital marketing programs that FKIP can employ to enhance branding and promote its programs to attract potential students, the response is diverse. To facilitate easy recall and practical application, the findings can be considered into the abbreviation S.M.A.R.T., representing in Figure 1:

Figure 1. SMART

The initial strategy involves "Supervising," entailing the assignment of media supervisors actively engaging with potential students. The next aspect is "Making," which emphasizes the creation of unique and personalized promotional videos for each study program. Crafting such videos proves beneficial in ensuring clarity for prospective students regarding their specific program needs. Another key strategy is "Affiliating," which suggests the inclusion of influential alumni or notable figures, either local or national, in digital content promotions for added impact. The fourth strategy is termed "Rematching," emphasizes the importance of understanding the types of digital media and their users to effectively target potential students in the digital market. Lastly, "Timing" is crucial, considering the optimal timing for video uploads or launching digital content promotions to enhance the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

By scrutinizing data derived from two sources, we successfully addressed two research questions. The initial inquiry focused on determining the media forms utilized for efficient digital marketing to communicate education related to FKIP and its offered study programs. The questionnaire results revealed that social media emerged as a recognized and effective channel for digital promotion, as illustrated below:

Table 1 (Garamond, font size 10, bold). Questionnaire Result

Statement	StD	D	SD	SA	A	StA
Online marketing mode by utilizing the media social is seen as an effective strategy.	0.8%	0.8%	1.5%	6.9%	55.7%	34.4%

Description: StD=Strongly Disagree), D=Disagree, SD=Slightly Disagree, SA= Slightly Agree, A=Agree, StA= Strongly Agree

As evident from the data, approximately 90.1% of participants expressed agreement or strong agreement with the effectiveness of social media for digital promotion in conveying education related to FKIP and its study programs. Despite recognizing the significant role of social media, the specific forms were not fully disclosed. Subsequent analysis revealed that the UT website also played a crucial role, with over 80% of participants acknowledging its effectiveness, although it may not strictly qualify as social media.

Moreover, participants unanimously agreed on the optimization of various social media platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter. While these findings contributed valuable insights, the initial research question remained partially unanswered.

Notably, open-ended questionnaire responses highlighted mentions of WhatsApp (WAG) and Telegram as potentially useful social media platforms for the faculty, even though they have not been established as such. However, a conclusive response to the first research question emerged during FGD with educational marketing experts, where the consensus pointed towards Instagram as the preferred platform for marketing FKIP. This finding aligns with results obtained from one of the conducted FGDs.

Shifting focus to addressing the second research question, the implementation of the S.M.A.R.T. strategy was considered a sequential and comprehensive approach in marketing processes. Starting with "S" for supervising, both close and open-ended questionnaire responses, along with FGD insights, emphasized the high demand for supervision or a supervisor managing digital tolls for promotion.

Commencing with the first element of the S.M.A.R.T. strategy, "Supervision (S)," the questionnaire outcomes reveal a resounding agreement, with 95.4% of participants expressing agreement or strong agreement that FKIP should formulate an effective marketing strategy, including appointing an individual responsible for the official social media of FKIP. This aligns with expert recommendations advocating the necessity of assigning individuals specifically for managing social media, with a suggested minimum of 5 personnel.

Moving on to the second aspect, "Making (M)," the creation of representative videos for each study program is considered essential. However, the task remains incomplete. Participants emphasized the importance of generating videos or content marketing for each study program, with 95.5% agreeing that every program should propose engaging content tailored to the characteristics of the platform in use. Furthermore, there is strong support, around 95.4%, for the incorporation of influential alumni, and 94.6% favour collaboration with public figures in the content creation process. These findings are corroborated by insights from the FGD.

The next strategy is termed "Rematching," which highlights the significance of comprehending the many forms of digital media and the people who use them in order to successfully reach prospective students in the digital market. Transitioning to the "Affiliation (A)" component, connecting with influential figures is deemed valuable. Around 95.4% of participants believe that affiliating with influential alumni and public figures serves as a significant campaign strategy, acting as social magnets to attract potential students to the university. This substantiates the importance of strategic affiliations highlighted during the FGD.

Lastly, the "Timing (T)" element underscores the significance of choosing the right moments for implementing the marketing strategy. A substantial 96.9% of participants recognize the importance of timing, concurring those certain occasions, such as National Education Day and Teacher's Day, serve as special moments for uploading UT FKIP digital materials. This consensus emphasizes the strategic importance of synchronizing marketing efforts with significant events, contributing to the overall effectiveness of the promotional campaign.

5.   Conclusion

The trajectory of open universities has taken an unexpected turn. UT, as an open university, is not exempt from the trend, and FKIP which once held a dominant position in terms of student numbers, now faces the imperative to calculate and devise an enhanced marketing strategy to address this challenge. In the contemporary landscape, digital marketing and promotion, particularly thorough social media, have gained significant momentum owing to their expensive user base. In response to this trend, the faculty is compelled to seize the opportunity and strategize accordingly. This research serves as an extension of previous studies with a similar focus, identifying the most effective social media for marketing and formulating strategies. The analysis underscores Instagram as the top recommendation, and the S.M.A.R.T. strategy emerges as a synthesized approach derived from participants concerns, perceptions,

and demands. S.M.A.R.T. stands for "Supervision," which focuses on appointing an individual responsible for the official social media of FKIP. The next strategy is "Making" that suggests the creation of representative videos for each study program. The third component is "Affiliation" which shows that connecting with influential figures is deemed valuable. Meanwhile "Rematching" emphasizes how important it is to understand the various digital media platforms and the users of them in order to effectively reach potential students in the digital market. And the last strategy is "Timing" which highlights how important it is to pick the ideal times to put the marketing plan into action.

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