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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Analysis of Social Media Marketing (SMMas) Strategy in Increasing Brand Awareness and Consumer Purchase Intentions

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| **ABSTRACT**

Digital marketing is one of the marketing activity that is currently changing. Social Media Marketing (SMM) is a form of digital marketing favored by marketers, one of which is a marketer from college X. Transformation carried out by marketers solely did not just go with the flow but as a result of the emergence of the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2019. Through the mixed methods research method, the researcher aims to analyze changes in marketing activities from tertiary institution X in increasing brand awareness which aims to encourage consumer buying intentions. Sampling was carried out in two stages: conducting interviews with purposive sampling (marketers and university students X) and distributing questionnaires to students. The study results showed that college marketeer X initially did Business to Business (B2B) marketing and then changed to SMMas (Instagram and Facebook social media). SMMas are also combined with several marketing programs such as student get student, flexible teaching and learning activities, cheap payment schemes, and word changes in the content presented. This change in marketing activity has increased the number of new students from college X by 100% in the odd semester and 20% in the even semester.

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, there has been a high growth in the use of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Whatsapp. The use of various social media platforms is based on the desire to communicate, the desire to obtain information, and become a promotional tool for the brand they have. This indicates that there are great opportunities in digital marketing practices. 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, 2016). This then encourages X College marketing to carry out digital marketing activities on various social media.

At first, College Marketing X only focused on B2B Marketing, or marketing activities that came to other institutions to introduce companies in various regions (Chang, 2014). In 2019, B2B marketing activities had to stop due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic then reduced nearly 90% of face-to-face teaching activities in schools and shifted to online teaching. This phenomenon then became a barrier to marketing activities, so the marketing of Higher Education X then developed a new strategy, namely digital marketing through social media. However, if analyzed, it is not only College X that carries out marketing activities using social media, so marketers must be able to highlight different elements from the others. Therefore, currently, there is a trend for marketers to create an attractive environment for potential customers on social media.

Higher Education X itself has a variety of social media. Initially, the social media used was Facebook, then the marketers of College X further developed its social media, namely websites and Instagram. The x.ac.id website needs elements if potential customers

want to obtain specific information. Having a platform that specializes in communicating about brands can influence consumer perceptions (Langaro). On the x.ac.id website, you can find university profile information, vision, and mission as well as opinions on financial statements; student, which contains student achievements, student activity units, student life, and scholarship information; alums, which contains graduation E-books, tracer studies, and career centers; new student registration, namely a link that directs to the New Student Admissions website; and contact us, which contains the campus address, as well as contact us. There is also an option to obtain study program information that prospective customers want to know.

On Facebook social media, college marketer X tries to create an attractive environment for potential customers. One way to create an attractive environment on social media is to provide up-to-date sources of information for consumers to gain brand exposure, such as syncing social media Facebook with WhatsApp. This synchronization is a form of ability to support direct consumer conversations on social media so that they can immediately connect with companies to be more intimate and foster better relationships, especially with the younger generations. The development of interactive dialogue will also provide an opportunity to reduce misunderstandings about the brand. Not only that, on Facebook social media, consumers can also click on a page that will direct them to the company's website, namely x.ac.id.

Activities like this are often called Social Media Marketing Activities (SMMas). Various studies on SMMas have provided positive empirical evidence on consumer loyalty and commitment if the community is involved in brand development (Hafez, 2021). Using social media for promotion can attract online consumers because SMMas efficiently promotes communication between customers and marketers, thereby driving brand awareness.

However, SMMas are still considered a strategy with limited influence. In the context of SMMas, almost all companies use online marketing strategies such as advertising on social media, conducting Search Engine Machines (SEM), and producing content that can build brand awareness (Wang & Kim, 2017). This is driven by the awareness from companies that sharing brand information and consumer experiences is a new way to market brands. On the other hand, consumers also rely on social media to get acquainted with brands. With each other's needs, it will be easy to develop online communities and create groups without meeting physically (Yadav & Rahman, 2018). Social media has provided facilities that are collaborative, interactive, and able to share content with marketers in order to reach consumers. According to Liu et al. (2021), digital marketing in creating marketing campaigns, whether using social media or not, has several factors, such as reputation, customization, trends, and entertainment which indirectly affect brand awareness and consumer purchase intentions.

Brand awareness acts as a brand strength in the minds of consumers (Azzari & Pelissari, 2020). Brand awareness Keller & Lehmann (2006) divide it into two dimensions: memory and recognition. Brand awareness is often compared to advertising on social media. If there are many types of advertisements in the consumer's mind, awareness will reach several advertisements that appear. So put, the more often they see advertisements for a brand, the greater their awareness of the existence of that brand. Therefore, the ease of brand awareness is the ability of consumers to remember brands as part of a product category (Wu & Ho, 2014). Often digital marketing activities in the use of social media build brand awareness. Apart from that, digital marketing also needs to consider the element of consumer purchase intention.

2. Methods
In this study, researchers used a mixed methods approach, that is, research combining two approaches, including qualitative and quantitative. In choosing the mixed method as a research approach, researchers have considered various things, namely 1) researchers can minimize the limitations of the approach so that research can dissect complex phenomena more flexibly; 2) researchers have access to both quantitative and qualitative data; and 3) provide multiple arguments. This is also supported by Maxwell's (2016) statement that using a mixed-method approach will provide richer insights so that researchers can understand complex phenomena through different perspectives and lenses. Besides that, two different data will provide greater certainty and have implications for broader conclusions. So it can be concluded that by using the mixed method, researchers can get results from various perspectives and provide new avenues for conducting research in the future.

Data collection techniques in this study used interviews with informants. The resource person interviewed was R, a marketeer and a lecturer who has worked for three years at Higher Education X as a data collector on a qualitative approach. Not only that, but the researchers also distributed questionnaires to students of Higher Education X as data collection on a quantitative approach. In this study, researchers used an exploratory sequential research design. According to Achterberg (Dawadi et al., 2021), research with a mixed methods approach starts with a qualitative approach and then proceeds to a quantitative one. This is intended so that the information obtained is more detailed and directed so that quantitative procedures can be developed. In the book Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research, Cresswell and Plano (2011) describe exploratory sequential as a design that directs researchers to collect and analyze qualitative data (text). Quantitative (numeric) data were collected and analyzed in the second stage. These two phases are connected and will complement each other.
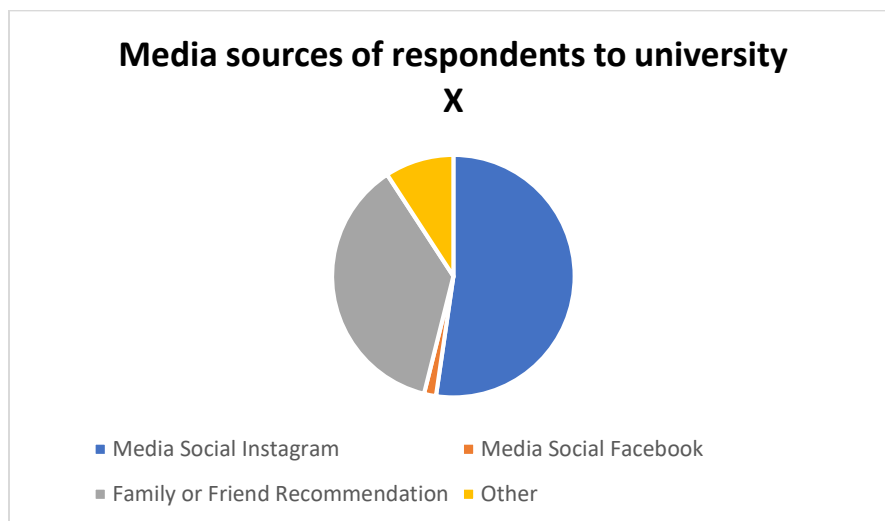
3. Discussion

From the results of interviews with various parties and observations of marketing activities by college X, there have been changes in digital marketing activities carried out by college X. At first; college marketers only carried out B2B marketing activities, better known as Business to Business. B2B is a marketing model that refers to marketing activities to promote products or services at other institutions, namely conducting B2B to high schools in Bandung. Not only carrying out marketing activities in schools, but College X marketers also build long-term partnerships so that collaboration can carry out sustainably. The absence of separation of the marketing and public relations divisions in 2019 indicates the absence of marketing activities towards digital—a statement from R, a marketeer from university x, and shreds of evidence of this.

> "Back in 2019, 2018, and 2017, we used the marketing strategy, still coming to schools but not going digital. So at the end of 2020, the scheme was formed digitally. (First interview, with R, 04 February 2023)

After some time doing B2B marketing, college marketers carried out digital transformation, namely designing marketing towards digital using SMMas. The first social media marketing used and developed were Facebook and Instagram. However, B2B activities still carry. It is just that, in 2020, B2B activities had to stop due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The central government has banned learning activities in schools to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This has resulted in a significant decrease in marketeer activity and has implications for a decrease in the number of new students from various study programs at tertiary X. decreased more than before. This drives marketers to change B2B marketing activities to SMMas and Search Engine machines (SEM). SEM requires a reasonably long Algorithm process, so Marketer R is more focused on SMMas. This was also conveyed by R, as the marketeer of College x.

> "In 2020, we have Corona again; coming to schools is no longer possible. The previous strategy will not work. We are changing to go digital. In 2020 (new students) went down considerably; in 2019, if I am not mistaken, it was in the 700s; in 2020, it became the 400s, quite a drop. Like it or not (marketing activities), we purely use advertising (First interview, with R, 04 February 2023)

SMMas, developed by college marketeer X, is more focused on brand awareness because, during a pandemic, students who wish to continue their education at tertiary institutions have limited information. To ensure students know about College X, marketers try developing SMMas that make it easier and provide consumer convenience. One of them is to direct Instagram social media with Whatsapp. This is done so potential customers can get information directly and respond quickly. Although marketers use SMMas to encourage brand awareness, this is different from the results of the questionnaire given to respondents.

Media sources of respondents to university X

- Media Social Instagram
- Media Social Facebook
- Family or Friend Recommendation
- Other

The pie chart shows that respondents are more familiar with tertiary institution x through recommendations from friends or family at 52.3%, Instagram social media by 36.9%, and the rest fulfilled the 'other' and 'Facebook social media options. If you look at the results above, the digital marketing activities carried out by Higher Education Marketers are not considered 'failed' because the respondents know universities through Instagram social media. The presence of side marketing motivates high brand awareness through recommendations from friends or family. Namely, Student Get Student (SGS). There is not too much literature that

discusses SGS marketing. However, based on the explanation from marketeer R, SGS is marketing that compensates students who successfully recommend others to choose College X.

> "We do have Student get Student, so students who succeed in bringing friends or family get compensation in the form of money. So not only digital marketing but also students get student (Second interview, with R, 04 February 2023)

If you look at the definition of SGS, this marketing activity is very similar to marketing Word of Mouth (WOM). WOM itself is marketing that is considered quite traditional, namely marketing that exchanges product or service information between consumers and potential customers so that potential consumers can change their behavior and attitudes toward products or services to influence buying decisions (Huete-Alcocer, 2017). With personal access to information about a product or service, potential customers will undoubtedly consider the experiences or recommendations of consumers to try these products or services. Even though WOM is seen as marketing with a positive influence, WOM will not be successful if there is no trust between potential consumers and information providers. Additionally, WOM becomes bad marketing when informants give negative reviews about the product or service, influencing potential customers not to choose or try it (Yang, 2017).

According to R, several things were offered during SMMas to potential customers: flexible lectures (which can be done anywhere) and cheap payment schemes. Flexible lectures (Hybrid) are driven by Higher Education X's target market, namely employees and students who want to study but also want to find a side job. Hybrid lectures can be conducted online (with the help of Media Zoom) and offline (face-to-face lectures). Not only that, universities also have two different classes, namely the regular class and the employee class. The regular class is a class that conducts lectures from 07.00 in the morning to the afternoon, while the employee class conducts lectures at 18.30. However, this employee class can be selected according to the student's will.

The development of SMMas is also encouraged by several different offers from other private universities. According to R, in 2019, university X provided a payment scheme with a discount on development costs. This development fee deduction is a scholarship for prospective students who wish to register. It is just that the meaning of 'scholarship' can provide various interpretations for potential customers. Therefore, 'scholarship' was changed to 'fee discount.' R explains this,

> "Actually, the word scholarship is heavy, right? Because people think there must be a test, only selected people. Finally, we changed the scholarship to a 'discount.' A cut mindset means pruning, and that is very influential. Just a word but has a different meaning. (First interview, with R, 04 February 2023)

Besides that, R explained that College X has a middle-low target market. The target market for the middle-low is considered a specific segmentation, such as workers who want to study in college, students who want to continue their education but are limited in costs, and parents who are price sensitive. These factors then encouraged marketers to add installment schemes, initially three installments, into several schemes, namely nine, ten, and twelve installments. The description made by R is also supported by the results of the respondent's questionnaire, as follows.
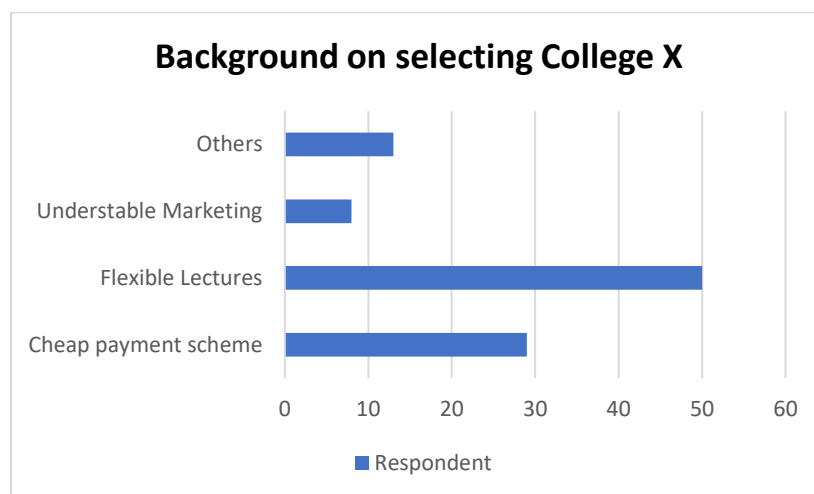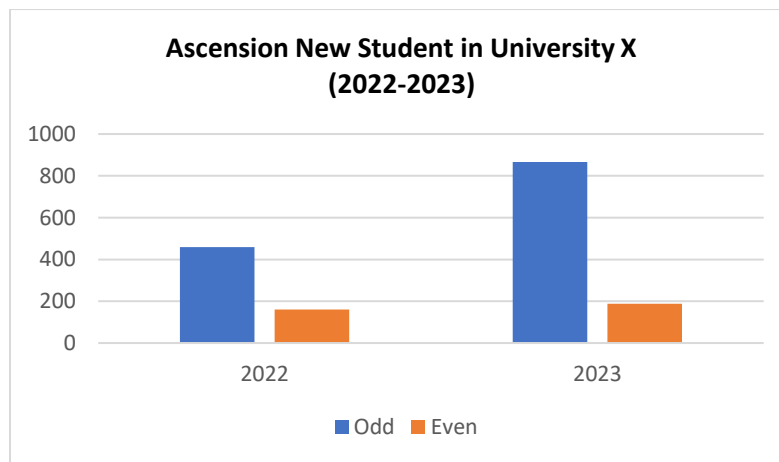

Through the diagram above, it can be seen that students deciding to choose Higher Education X as a place to continue their education is encouraged by flexible lectures (76.9%), inexpensive payment schemes (44.6%) followed by other reasons (20%) and

easy-to-understand marketing (12.3%). Also, with the high number of respondents choosing "flexible lectures," of course, this indicates that the target market determined by the marketer from the start is appropriate.

Based on interviews with respondents, AR said that he chose college X because of the difficulty in dividing his time with work. On the one hand, he wants to continue his education, so he is looking for a college that can provide flexibility in the teaching process. Also, the existence of a system for watching recordings of learning makes it easy for AR to re-watch the teaching and learning process that has passed through recordings.

There is significant growth through changes to the marketing strategy carried out by college marketers X in 2022-2023. This can be seen through the following data,

Ascension New Student in University X (2022-2023)

(Bar chart showing new student numbers for 2022 and 2023, with categories "Odd" and "Even". Y-axis ranges from 0 to 1000. In 2022, Odd ≈ 459 and Even ≈ 160. In 2023, Odd ≈ 867 and Even ≈ 188.)

From the graph above, we can see that there has been an increase in new students at tertiary institution X. In odd 2022, the number of applicants was 459; then it doubled, namely, new students who registered 867 people. The even number also experienced a similar increase, from 160 to 188 people. The low increase in even numbers did occur due to the applicants not being students who were indeed fresh graduates from high schools but were dominated by employees, so this insignificant increase was considered normal.

4. Conclusion

Changes to the digital marketing strategy carried out by college marketers X are often carried out. However, these changes have brought quite significant results. Through strategies to increase brand awareness, marketers have succeeded in increasing purchasing decisions in several ways; namely SMMas, Student Get Student (SGS) or better known as Word-of-Mouth (WOM), cheap payment schemes, and making changes to content—existing ones, such as changing the use of words that are more straightforward and easy to understand.

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