NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY

THE BENEFITS OF USING ONLINE MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

BY

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DECLARATION:

In accordance with Rule G5.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise/dissertation/thesis is my own work and that I have not previously been submitted to another University or for another qualification

…………………………………………..
SIGNATURE

…………03 OCTOBER 2022………..
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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to God, for giving me strength throughout this project.

It is also dedicated to both my grandmothers, whom I lost during the study.

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I would hereby like to thank several people without whom this study would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

Online marketing had increased drastically over the years, which had seen the need for Higher Education Institutions to market their offering online to meet the demands of customers. The benefits of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) marketing online had been dependent on how students engaged with the posts on the institution's social media pages. The primary objective of this study was to assess the benefits that HEIs received from marketing their institutions online to the prospective student. This study looked at how Nelson Mandela University improved the online experiences for students. It reviewed content from different social media platforms.

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1.1   INTRODUCTION

Marketing is defined as a system that makes use of one or more advertising media to generate a measurable response at any time and place with the activity being recorded on a database (Drozdenko and Drake, 2002:4). Marketing plays a critical part in any organisation, and higher education institutions (HEIs) must incorporate it into their strategy to thrive and succeed in the changing market. Schwarzl and Grabowska (2015:188) defined online marketing as a set of actions that should direct internet users to specific web pages in order to buy or order specific products or services. As a result, the primary goal of internet marketing is to establish a digital presence. Bostanshirin (2014:8) referred to online marketing as measures and actions used to promote products and services and establish relationships with clients over the internet. Higher education institutions must identify their target audience, understand their needs, and communicate with them to be deemed effective marketers (Alexa, Alexa and Stoica 2012:2). Consumers are increasingly using social networking sites as a source of information, as a means of amusement and interaction with peers. As a result, social media has become a significant communication tool for businesses (Ferreira and Borbosa, 2017:45). Students make their decision of which university to study at depending on the information made available to them at the time of applying. Constantinides and Stagno (2012:1) highlight that marketing's potential for use by higher education institutions as a student recruitment tool has been demonstrated by researchers. Customer involvement and communication enhance as a result of the positive business experience with the benefits of social media marketing and the high adoption rate of social media by the younger generation (Wang and Kim, 2017:1).

Using social media as a marketing tool has been known to reduce the costs of advertising as compared to traditional marketing. Social media is able to reach a target market that does not have access to traditional marketing tools and customers will have unrestricted access to information without the need for human involvement. This has a significant benefit over other modes of communication in that the amount of information that may be delivered is far more than in any other mode of communication. Consumers can have negative feedback based on their experience with the HEIs such as the quality that was displayed on their online platform versus the level of service quality the consumer has received (Nadaraja and Yazdanifard, 2013:3). Despite online marketing being a tool utilized by institutions, not much is known about the benefits that higher education institutions receive from marketing their institutions

online. This study will investigate the benefits these institutions have received from marketing online by seeking to answer the research question.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In recent years there has been a migration from using traditional marketing tools that are newspaper adverts to online marketing. This has encouraged HEIs to improve their online marketing strategies to attract more students as millenniums spend most of their time online. However, HEIs have not completely been made aware of all the benefits they can receive from online marketing. Mehmood, Janjua, Akram, Laeeque, and Aftab (2021: 3), highlighted those traditional modes of communication and services for marketing reasons are yielding lower returns, it has become critical for marketers to investigate other choices in order to better connect with a generation that is more digitally socially networked. Kusumawati (2019:2) explains that HEIs cannot survive without increasing enrolment. HEIs face difficulty in staying relevant among students who are becoming increasingly reliant on technology as a mode of communication (Collins, and Halverson, 2018:1). The quick rise of web platforms has facilitated behavioural changes linked to activities, habitats, and interactions. Applications or content for online marketing can be designed to engage with the consumer at any time and in any place, to inform, educate, entertain, or provide insights for the HEIs (Tiago, and Yeríssimo 2014: 704).). Therefore, it is important for universities to understand ways to attract students and how to market themselves. HEIs must compete for students in the recruitment markets as higher education moves away from reliance on government funding and toward a competitive market (Pucciarelli, and Kaplan, 2016: 1).

With the widespread dissemination of knowledge, educational institutions now have the opportunity to demonstrate the benefits that students can derive from the services they provide, not just in their own country, but globally. International students may be targeted by global HEIs since they are willing to pay greater tuition prices than domestic students (Camilleri,2019:5). HEIs can provide details on course admissions, stakeholder collaboration, student mobility, and research possibilities (Seres, Pavlicevic, and Tumbas, 2018:4). International students will also need accurate information about tuition and bench costs, as well as study and employment visas and other topics.

In theory, using social media to engage prospective students is a low-cost strategy for institutions to attract and persuade them. Potential students can connect with current students or peers looking for similar information and assistance through social networks or online communities built by schools as part of their online presence (Paladan 2018:4). Kusumawati (2018: 2) since students are members of the millennial age in this technologically advanced period, the largest influence they have on education is intriguing to investigate more, particularly their use of social media to choosing a higher education institution. As a result, a powerful and well-known HEI brand is said to make students' decision-making process much easier and simpler (Mehmood, Aftab, and Mushtaq, 2016: 3).

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Online marketing is an excellent way to make HEIs well-known, as well as make the benefits known to prospective students. When HEIs market their offering, they are competing not just nationally but also internationally. Largely used online advertising spaces are social media, websites, and display advertisements. To gain a large following among prospective students, the HEIs need to attract them by advertising their offered qualifications and the advantages of students attending their institution (Farinloye, Wayne, Mogaji, and Kuika Watat, 2020:1).

With social media marketing becoming more competitive, higher education institutions are investing more in marketing the institution online. Social media is seen as a great promotional strategy and requires less costly tools to connect with prospects compared to traditional marketing strategies (Masele and Rwehikiza, 2021:38). HEIs are required to be transparent because unless the information is expressly safeguarded, every internet user should access and view the information published online. Marketing for higher education institutions should not only be able to generate profits but be able to create and maintain a reputable brand and increase visibility (Muzvondiwa and Marutha, 2021:1).

HEIs have been reluctant and slow in fully utilizing online social media marketing to reach out to prospective students as there are a few previously done studies assessing Africa on the challenges and opportunities faced by HEIs (Yaldés, Y Alpera, and Cerdá Suárez. 2021:5). Kusamawati (2018:1) conducted a study on the student process of a prospective student through universities' digital marketing. There are a few studies done in South Africa although they focus mainly on using the online platform as a form of teaching and learning (Bosch, 2009). This study will investigate the benefits of online marketing for higher education institutions in South

Africa to use as a medium to encourage HEIs to invest and enhance their online marketing strategies.

1.4   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section will specify what research question the study will answer and how the study will answer the research question through the objectives of the study.

1.4.1   PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

This study aims to assess the benefits that higher education institutions receive from marketing their institutions online to prospective students.

1.4.2   SECONDARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To conduct a literature review on the use of online marketing in HEIs.
- To determine the benefits that higher education institutions receive from marketing online.
- To provide higher education institutions with recommendations to improve their online marketing to attract prospective students.

1.4.3   RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the benefits higher education institutions receive from marketing their institutions online?

1.5   SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the topic that the study will be based on. Furthermore, the study was introduced by giving background information that forms the basis of the study. It further provided the problem statement and the identification of the research gap within this field, the research question of the study and the research objectives.

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter one introduced the study by giving a background of online marketing in HEIs, the research objectives detailing how the study will be conducted and the research question that will be answered by the study. Chapter two will explore previously conducted literature on marketing in HEIs throughout the years by various authors across the globe. Definitions will be provided to give a broader understanding of the study.

HEIs have moved from previously marketing their offerings using traditional marketing tools (print advertising, direct mail and radio broadcast) to adapting to meet the changing evolution of using social media to market the institutions online as the students and prospective students use social media as the main form of communication and spend most of their time browsing through social pages. In every student's life, social media plays a vital role in accessing information, providing information, and communicating is frequently made easier and more convenient.

2.2   DEFINITIONS

Marketing can be defined as the identification and analysis of strategies a company can use to better promote and sell its products to prospective customers (Pilik 2020:90). This includes determining the price the item will be sold for, assessing the demand for the product as well as how it will be distributed. While customers' faith in traditional advertising such as newspaper advertising is eroding, word-of-mouth marketing strategies such as "refer a friend" campaigns as well as digital marketing are becoming increasingly popular. Although there is often confusion between sales and marketing, marketing can be distinguished since it focuses on long-term client pleasure. Marketing helps with increasing demand for a product or service and has a significant impact on the customer design of the offering (Baines, Fill, and Rosengren, 2017: 11).

(Arbo and Benneworth, 2007:9) stated that by higher education institutions, they are referring to universities, university colleges, and other post-secondary educational institutions that typically incorporate some form of research and development activities. Along with universities and colleges, higher education institutions offer a range of professional programs that prepare students for careers in the arts, business, music, and law (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018:2).

Driver, Brown,and Peterson (1991:1) defined benefit as a description to a change that is thought to be positive. In online marketing for HEIs benefits can seen by alterations in how people communicate and interact with the content from HEIs.

2.3   BENEFITS OF ONLINE MARKETING

The benefits of marketing online include institutions having a deeper understanding of their customer's needs, gaining insights on how to better promote their products, interactive marketing, and inbound marketing.

Higher education strategic marketing refers to higher education institution's efforts to gain a deeper understanding of their prospective customers' needs in order to design products and services that meet and exceed those demands (Mogaji, Maringe and Hinson, 2020:9). Higher education institutions (HEIs) will need to market themselves successfully in this competitive industry. These institutions compete not just with other public education providers, but also with private education service providers, whose numbers have risen dramatically in recent years as they are not only competitive for domestic prospects but in the aid to attract international students (Wiese, Heerden, Jordan and North, 2009:41). There are numerous marketing strategies that HEIs can use. These are described below.

Online marketing is promoting products to prospective and loyal customers on the internet and other network platforms (Popescu, Bunea, Medințu &Mazilu, 2021:93). Online marketing has progressed from promoting specific items and services to promoting activities, institutions, and processes made possible by digital technologies. Several advantages of marketing online include the ability to contact customers more efficiently, being cost-effective as there will be no papers printed and the information can always be revisited, being able to measure results accurately, and being individualized (Schwarzl and Grabowska, 2015:189).

Interactive marketing is defined as marketing initiatives that are triggered by the actions and preferences of customers. The distinguishing features of interactive marketing are that it can be explained as a two-way communication with mutual influences in social and business ecosystems; second, it focuses on customer responsiveness and often proactive behaviours in value creation and exchange; and third, it involves customer participation and engagement in

controlling and modifying the environment in real-time (Wang, 2021:). Increases in enrolment and application numbers can be used to evaluate marketing performance and graduate success rates over time, indicating that a prospective student has access to accurate information and a comprehensive image of the organization. (Royo-vela and Hunermund 2016:155). There are email addresses and links that can help prospective students contact an institution official if they need advice or clarification on the application process or anything else.

Bezovski (2015:5), defined inbound marketing as a comprehensive, data-driven approach to marketing that draws people to your brand and converts them into long-term consumers. Jamil and Almunawar (2021:4) defined inbound marketing as a type of marketing in which the internet serves as the primary venue for advertising, but customers are only shown relevant and valuable content, and the marketing is not aggressive. Jamil and Almunawar (2021: 3) explained that this method of marketing is about creating a relationship between the institution and the prospective student, this can be achieved by having attractive messages and advertising. This kick starts a two-way conversation between the institution and the prospective and they can get the information they required to decide without struggling with delays. When the HEIs understand and know how to fulfill their customers' needs it becomes easier for them to identify the benefits they receive from investing in online marketing strategies, this chapter will investigate previously done studies on the advantages of online marketing.

2.4   PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION ONLINE MARKETING

The primary purpose of higher education institutions is to deliver one-of-a-kind education and campus experiences to students (customers). The selection process, according to Ballinger (2005: 37), should also be an educational experience for students. This means that higher education institutions must have a marketing and communication strategy in place that will not only convey and enhance the HEI's corporate brand or image but also inform prospective students and other stakeholders about the institution's unique characteristics that will make it the desired university to enroll in (Sjogren and Trautmann,2019:9).

Royo-vela and Hunermund (2016:1) conducted a study on the effects of inbound marketing communications on HEIs brand equity. They stated that a market- and marketing-oriented university focuses on current and potential students, referred to as clients, and tries to meet

their needs or wishes through coordinated marketing activities. Because consumers are becoming more powerful as a result of technological advancements and the internet, this necessitates a major effort in terms of research and development in order to fully comprehend the target demographic. (Buhalis and Law, 2008:4). This study made use of exploratory research to see how higher education institutions might improve their image and awareness by employing new interactive marketing communication methods mediated by students' decision-making processes (Gai, Xu, and Pelton, 2016:4). The study made use of two methodology strategies which were face-to-face interviews and a survey to gather areas such as interactive marketing covered in the questions asked to the participants. With questions ranging from the typical use of social media, information on the steps of the decision-making process the student takes, and the students' mindset on perceived brand awareness (Royo-vela and Hunermund, 2016:12). The results of the study proved that students do have social media accounts with most of the interviewed graduates having Facebook and/or Google. Students can have an impact on the institution they choose to study at by searching for the institute on google, verifying if they have social networking sites, and reviewing the university's ranking before making a final decision.

Mehmood, Aftab and Mushtaq (2016:1) presented a research paper about the role of social media marketing in HEIs admission. The authors of the study perceived HEIs as adopting a more business-like attitude through their operations, blaming this on the government's lack of support for the institutions. HEIs will need to expand their investment in their numerous communication channels and seek assistance from their respective human resources departments. Although an institution's online presence can attract a student it is its academic reputation, the campus faculty quality, safety on campus and the level of job prospects after completion of study (Henard and Roseveare, 2012:2). Hermannsson, Lisenkova, Lecca, Mcgregor, and Swales (2017:4), elaborated that a perceived benefit of education is the low level of unemployment amongst graduates and those still furthering their education. Their methodology made use of qualitative social media research and the information was gathered through interviewing members of the HEIs administrative team responsible for all social media activities of the selected 10 institutions in Pakistan. The questions were open-ended and allowed the sample population to answer to understand their choice of social media tools and how students have adopted them. The results from the study showed that students have been using Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to connect with their stakeholders to convey updates such as announcements, admission details, student achievements and events happening on

campus as part of the content shared on the social media platform adopted by the HEIs. On the questionnaires underneath the benefits section, it has been noted that institutions are able to share information and the students/ prospective students are able to access the information without any inconvenience, they are able to reach and attract the desired audience for their HEIs and the third benefit is that there is no longer a communication gap between the HEIs staff and prospective students should the students require to share their grievances as well as commenting and sharing their views on certain policies or events advertised on the institution's social media channels.

Wiese, Heerden, Jordan, and North (2009:1) published a research paper on a marketing perspective on choice factors considered by South African first-year students in selecting a higher education institution. The research paper aims to investigate the factors affecting the choices prospective students make as well as the available sources of information available to them leading to the decision. A quantitative research design was used namely ex post facto design and making use of a non-probability convenience sample of 1 500 students from six higher education institutions that participated in the study. The findings of the study indicate that the quality of teaching and employment prospects ranked the highest as a choice factor. The word-of-mouth influence of parents, siblings and friends was the least influential factor. Campus visits and open days are the most valuable sources of information for prospective students. Advertisements on television or in printed media are not considered to be particularly valuable sources of information.

With the emergence of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020 most academic activities were integrated with online platforms as part of reducing the spread of the virus (Adedoyin and Soykan,2020:2). This has tested many HEIs to look at the marketing strategies as they had to market their institution solely online and with students unable to access physical classrooms as lockdown restrictions were in place (Rasiah, Kaur, and Guptan, 2020: 50). Universities are spending time and money to rebrand themselves, including revamping logos, creating attractive taglines, and creating appealing advertising campaigns and booklets (Kotler and Keller, 2011:2). There are a few known benefits of marketing the institution online that have been explored in South Africa which makes the institutions have no reference on what they can do to better their chances of perfect brand visibility (Mehmood, Aftab, and Mushtaq, 2016: 3). This study will aim to look at the benefits of online marketing for HEIs other than just creating brand awareness.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter explored the various marketing strategies that HEIs can make use of and previously conducted studies that investigated marketing in HEIs. HEIs are being treated as businesses these days and to get new prospective students they need to invest in marketing themselves and the values that their institutions stand for. This includes the numerous benefits and exposure that they receive from marketing themselves to prospective students which are easy communication without barriers, students will also get to experience the institution through the made available information which will aid in making the final decision on whether to apply and register at the desired HEI. Students and youths of this new generation are becoming technically wise and refer to the internet for the desired information such as the ranking of the HEI and academic performance.

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 investigated literature from previous studies that had been conducted in South Africa and around the globe on marketing benefits in higher education institutions. HEIs rely on advertisements as a way to attract prospective students and in order to do so, they need to transition with the change from using traditional marketing tools to online marketing. The institution's online presence should be convincing in order for the prospective student to want to know more about the institutions and the programs they offer that will meet their needs. Through all the studies conducted it is still vague what other benefits the HEIs received from marketing themselves online other than to expand their institution's image and accessibility to information.

Chapter 3 will investigate the sampled target population the study will focus on, in order to record reliable benefits that will continue to be helpful to previously existing and newly introduced HEIs. The research methodologies employed in this study are described in this chapter. The study makes use of content analysis. The research study will discuss why the research design for the study was chosen, the instrument that is to be used when collecting data, as well as the procedure applied when conducting this study. The data collection methods are discussed in detail. Additionally, ethical considerations were taken during the investigation.

3.2   RESEARCH APPROACH

There are three types of research methods namely: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Lewis (2015:473), defines qualitative as a research method that employs inductive data analysis to learn about participants' perceptions of a problem or topic. A qualitative research approach explores behaviour and reaction of a particular group to a phenomenon that has yet to be explored and little is known about (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi and wright 2010). Quantitative research refers to a set of techniques for investigating social issues using statistical or numerical data (Watson,2016: 3). It entails measurement and assumes that the phenomena under investigation may be measured. Mixed method research entails collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, merging the two forms of data, and using assorted designs that may contain philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks (Creswell,2014:2). This study will follow a qualitative research approach that will use the study of previously done literature and review content from different social media platforms to structure a research

project through the researcher's observation. The social media platforms that will be used to gather information will be the institution's website, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. All social media accounts are included and classified in this social media directory on the university pages. The HEIs social media pages will be monitored together with the content uploaded and the comments and reactions from the followers will be surveyed/observed to look at the satisfaction or inquiry rate. For this study, a qualitative research approach will explore the benefits of online marketing at higher education institutions.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as a design or plan that was created expressly to answer the research question (dulock,1993:1). Marczyk, Dematteo and Festinger (2010:22) refer to research design as various methods for conducting research to solve the topic. The basic objective of every research is to answer the research question or research hypothesis. The goal of selecting and developing a study design is to ensure the research's validity, reliability, and accuracy. Exploratory, descriptive, and casual are the three basic research designs. Exploratory entails looking for and exploring a problem in order to gain a better knowledge of it (Amoah, Ferreira and Potgieter, 2020:74). Jawad, Majeed, and Salim Alrikabi (2021:254) defined descriptive research as research design that describes something. Amoah, Ferreira and Potgieter (2020:74) defined casual research as researcher used to look for evidence of cause-and-effect in relationships. For this study, an exploratory research design will be used. The reason to adopt an exploratory research design is to explore the benefits of online marketing and how they have affected higher education institutions in South Africa.

3.4   DATA COLLECTION

For this study, both primary data and secondary data will be collected and reviewed to formulate and get a better understanding of online marketing in HEIs.

3.4.1   SECONDARY DATA COLLECTION

Kalu, Unachukwu and Ibiam (2019:4) defined secondary data analysis as repurposing previously gathered data for a different purpose than it was collected for. A comprehensive literature search will be conducted in order to identify as many factors as possible that could

influence the success of online marketing of HEIs international and national data searches will be done by the library of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and to date include sabinet databases; isap (national library of South Africa); and sage publications; ebsco: masterfile premier, business source premier, academic source premier; fs articles first; kovsidex; sa cat and fs worldcat; sciencedirect; upecat; google searches; dialog; dissertation abstracts database. Data will be accessed from other international and national libraries by means of the inter-library loan facilities at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. As far as can be ascertained, no similar research study has been previously undertaken in South Africa.

3.4.2   PRIMARY DATA COLLECTION

Schuurman (2020:5), explained primary sources as those that provide information based on first-hand observation or participation in a subject, whereas secondary sources communicate such knowledge indirectly. For primary data collection, no human participants will not be used but data will be obtained from the various online platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and the institution's websites used by institutions to market themselves. The data collected will address the goal of the study which is to identify the benefits the HEIs receive from marketing their institution online. The data to complete the study will be collected from social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn) account used by the institutions to post updates and advertise their institutions. The data will be gathered for four months to ensure that accurate and reliable data is collected. The data will be gathered through existing data the social media platforms. Supervision will be required weekly to assist in the accurate way to record and analyse the data findings. The data collection procedure will be conducted using various online marketing strategies to detect which HEIs utilize the strategies and how the strategies have been beneficial to attracting and retaining student satisfaction.

A)   POPULATION AND SAMPLING

A target population is defined as a population whose information is required to complete a study. The target population will be higher education institutions. Mugo (2002:1) defined a sample as a subset of a statistical population whose characteristics are investigated in order to learn more about the total population group. Acharya, prakash, saxena, and nigam (2013:330) defined a sample as a portion of the population that has been chosen to be representative of the whole. The sampled population will be HEIs in South Africa excluding private institutions and TVET colleges. There is a total of 26 public HEIs.

3.4.3   DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the most important aspect of any study. The data analysis process summarizes the information gathered. It entails the use of analytical and logical reasoning to data in order to identify patterns, correlations, and trends (Research guide: data analysis and reporting findings, 2022:1). Qualitative data analysis is the examination of textual, visual, or auditory material, encompassing a wide range of activities, from confirmation to the investigation (Mihas, 2019:1). Qualitative content analysis is a research method for describing and interpreting textual material through a systematic coding procedure. (Assarroudi, Heshmati nabavi, Armat, Ebadi, and Vaismoradi, 2018:43). The purpose of content analysis is to figure out what a text's underlying meaning is by quantifying the meaning of written language (Renz, Carrington, and Badger, 2018:825). A strategy used to achieve content analysis is reading textual data and highlighting parts of the text that appear to be related to predetermined codes specified by a theory or earlier study findings on first impressions (Assarroudi, Heshmati nabavi, Armat, Ebadi, and Vaismoradi, 2018:46). There are 5 steps to analysing data that will be used, described below.

Step 1: identify and collect data

Data from online platforms including YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, the institution's website, and Instagram will be the social media platforms utilised. The researcher will further make use of articles and past research projects.

Step 2: determine coding categories

The coding categories that will be looked at in this study will be from the research objectives and the inbound, interactive, and online marketing strategies that will be used as a guide to the theme discussed in the study. Four categories will be formulated.

Step 3: code the content

Content from social media platforms will be coded. The information from the social media platforms will be recorded into the different categories identified

Step 4: check validity and reliability

Reliability will be measured by assessing the coded information for consistency, it is important to assess over time to ensure the data is reliable and valid. Criterion validity will be used to which the extent of a measure's result matches those of other valid measures of the same concept. For this study, a triangulation method will be used to establish the reliability and validity of the study. Noble and Heale (2019:1) triangulation is a technique that is used to improve the validity and trustworthiness of study findings by using several data sources to

create a thorough understanding of a phenomenon. Instead of using just one social media platform, the study will look at the different social media platforms that the HEI has accounts on.

Step 5: analyse and present results

The results will be analysed using tables to record the coding categories and the frequency of the information in the content being analysed.

3.5   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Velasquez, Andre, Shanks, t., s.j., and Meyer (2010:1) elaborated that ethics is based on well-founded moral norms that dictate what people should do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, societal advantages, justice, or special qualities. Ethics is recommended and is practiced to firstly, norms foster research goals such as knowledge, truth, and avoiding errors. Secondly, because research frequently requires collaboration and coordination among many people from various fields and organizations, ethical norms encourage characteristics that are critical to collaborative work, such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness (Resnik,2020:1). An ethics clearance form will be signed and submitted to Nelson Mandela University. The study will be low risk because no human participants, no names, or any individual information will be used.

3.6   CONTRIBUTION/ SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisioned that the findings of this study will advance the benefits that HEIs receive as an encouragement for the institutions to invest in marketing their institutions online to prospective students as they learn how to employ online marketing methods to recruit new students. The significance of this study is to provide a literature review on how HEIs have benefits they may receive when using online marketing platforms which will be added as part of the literature on online marketing for HEIs. This will lead to a contribution to literature within the marketing field more specifically within online marketing.

3.7   STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

This chapter gives a brief introduction to the topic that will be discussed in the study and the background of online marketing in HEIs. The problem was identified, and the research objectives of the study were highlighted.

Chapter 2: A literature review on the benefits received by HEIs from marketing their institutions online

The literature review conducted gathers information about marketing and online in HEIs and highlights some of the benefits of using online marketing. This section consists of the introductory paragraph and the definitions section that explains the main words/topics discussed in the research study. The previous research on HEIs online marketing will elaborate on the different strategies employed to market the HEIs.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

This chapter starts with an introductory paragraph that explains what will be discussed throughout the chapter. The secondary data collection highlights where the secondary data used in the study was derived from. The research approach will elaborate on the research approach the study will partake in which is the qualitative research approach that will use the study of previously done literature and review content from different social media platforms to structure a research project through the researcher's observation. The research methodology will explain the research design the study will follow to achieve desired results which is the exploratory research design to gain more insight into a section that has not been explored to the maximum extent. The research methodology section will further explain how the data will be collected, the sample selected and how it will be analysed to get the finding of the study. The significance of the study is to provide results and findings that will better online marketing for HEIs.

Chapter 4: empirical results

The information that will be discussed in this section will be acquired through content analysis, recorded, and analysed to determine the benefits of online marketing for public HEIs in South Africa. The results of the content analysis will be presented to answer the research study's objectives.

Chapter 5: summary, conclusions, and recommendations

This chapter will give a quick overview of the research as well as relevant results and recommendations on online marketing strategies the HEIs are already using and other strategy options they can employ to achieve maximum results.

3.8 PROPOSED RESEARCH TIME FRAME

The study will be carried out for 9 months.

Date	Action
14th of February	The due date for the selection of the area of research.
18th of March	The Study leader and student will decide on a topic for the study.
31st of March	Submission of the Research matrix including the signed learning agreement.
3rd of June	Submission date for the research proposal (chapters 1-3).
4th of October	Submission of the mini treatise to the study leader for examination
24th of October	The final mini-treatise will be submitted for external moderation.

Source: Researcher construction

Table 1: Research time frame

3.9 SUMMARY

This chapter covered the methods for conducting research design and methodology. The research approach used to collect and evaluate the data needed to answer the research questions were covered in the chapter. The chapter starts with a review of the research design, then moved to the review of different research approaches then moves on to the target population and the sample. The chapter then goes on to describe the data collection methods that will be used which are consulting literature and social media platforms, how the collected data will be analysed to give reliable recommendations and the ethical consideration to ensure that all data collection is done ethically and legitimately.

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter three explored the research methodology and approach the study will partake in which is the qualitative research approach through the review of content from social media. The research methodology section will further explain how the data will be collected, the sample selected and how it will be analysed to get the finding of the study. Chapter four will analyse in depth the findings gathered from the social media platforms and how the use of these social media platforms has benefited the HEIs in South Africa. Great details will be provided on how each platform has benefited the institution from its posts to answer the research objectives. The information that will be discussed in this section will be acquired through content analysis, recorded, and analysed to determine the benefits of online marketing for public HEIs in South Africa.

The online platforms used to monitor the higher education institutions' posts are considered under the categories of being accessible to students and catering to the various interests that different students may have. Higher education institutions have gradually moved towards marketing their offerings online and using their online platforms as a medium of communication between the institutions and prospective students. The higher educational institution that will be explored in this study will be Nelson Mandela University.

4.2 NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY ONLINE PLATFORM FOLLOWERS AND SUBSCRIBERS' STATISTICS

Students and prospective students have now shifted to using these online platforms to research and find out about the various offerings of the higher education institutions and videos on other students' experiences either on YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. Nelson Mandela University has a following of 141974 on Facebook, 10 500 subscribers on YouTube, 36 000 followers on LinkedIn, and 28 800 followers on Twitter.

4.3 CODING OF INFORMATION INTO DIFFERENT CATEGORIES

The categories identified in the study have been sourced from observing what a student would want to see or look for when interested in an institution of higher learning's social page and how focusing on those features will benefit the HEI such as being able to provide details on stakeholder collaboration, higher education institution admission and student mobility. The

frequency of these categories is identified by observing how the students engage with the posts on these social media platforms.

THE TABLE BELOW WILL HIGHLIGHT THE FREQUENCY OF CATEGORIES APPEARING ON EACH SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION.

STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION	HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ADMISSION	STUDENT MOBILITY
FACEBOOK		
47.5%	32.5%	20%
INSTAGRAM		
30%	47.5%	22.5%
TWITTER		
60%	25%	15%
LINKEDIN		
35%	47.5%	17.5%
YOUTUBE		
28.75%	31.25%	38.75%

Source: Researchers own construction

Table 2: Categories of social media appearance

4.3.1   STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

To get a fuller understanding of the customers' needs, it is important to follow trends to have a look at what customer interests are. Students these days spend most of their time on social media and look to social media platforms for updates on what is happening around the world as opposed to old-school print media. Stakeholder collaboration is a technique that enables parties with comparable or disparate points of view to converse and look for answers that go beyond their own conceptions of what is feasible (unit, 2000:32). Posts on the institution's social media pages aim to attract students using external individuals that can offer guidance and motivational talks with students with the intent to realize students interests and needs. Likes and shares on these posts are relatively fair with students commenting underneath requiring that the administrator share details on where and when the event will take place and how the reservation of these events can be made.

Posts that focus more on sporting updates have average likes and shares on the sports posts on Facebook with students asking to be informed when tournaments will be taking place, and fellow students provided the details when the Facebook page administrator had not replied. As an effort to grow attention the institute offers several activities that have dedicated social media pages on Instagram and Twitter, with the sole purpose of reaching students interested in such activities. The dedicated pages offer updates on sports with madibaz_sport. The page has 3 090 followers, news for students through the madibaznews page has 1 325 followers, entrepreneurship opportunities on madibaz.entrep has 350 followers and edutainment on the madibazradio page has 2 379 followers with a link to the radio station in the description. The page on Twitter has very few interactions of few likes and retweets no user comments or asking questions underneath the posts.

Nelson Mandela University offers help to train students in defense classes with the help of a trained professional. As a means to prepare them should they encounter a situation wherein they may be required to protect themselves, which is open for both students and staff in the institution. The response to these posts is relatively low with minimal likes and shares on Facebook, there were no likes on Twitter.

On YouTube the training videos have a large number of views with very few likes, there are no posts and likes on LinkedIn pertaining to self-defense. There are no posts on Instagram that relate to the defense classes but does have student wellness programmes that help the student deal with exam seasons with a fair average of likes. On Twitter student wellness has few interactions between the students and the institute by little likes and retweets. Students engage and ask questions more on posts on Facebook about how they can partake in such activities as well as the experience of other individuals, although more likes are seen on Instagram.

4.3.2   HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION ADMISSION

Promoting product offerings encourages the use of digital technologies to enable certain procedures, institutions, and activities. The use of online platforms has benefited the institution in being able to reach potential students effectively. When scrolling through social media, students and prospective students are set to encounter a post or video from the institution. Nelson Mandela University is the largest higher education institution in the Eastern Cape, posts calling for applications are accompanied by catchy images of the beach located in Summerstrand or the nature reserve on campus with links users can click to get detailed information. Facebook has the most engagements with likes as compared to the other social media platforms with comments. Underneath the application post, prospective students are

engaging with the post to ask about the various closing dates of the specific study area and the social page administrator is able to reply to the queries and provide the relevant pathway on how to apply and the application close date. Students that have applied for the upcoming academic year are also engaging with each other and congratulating each other for having been able to secure placement at the HEI. A potential student's access to accurate information and a complete impression of the organization is indicated by increases in enrolment and application numbers, which can be used to measure marketing effectiveness and graduate success rates over time. In 2022 more than 28 000 students registered for their studies, with 10 148 being first-time students at the university an increase as compared to the 8 043 of the previous year.

On Instagram to draw students' attention the images used are of students wearing their graduation regalia or on campus interacting with other students with an average of 100 likes but no comments undeath these posts. On Twitter, admission posts have very few likes and retweets and no comments but have 50 views on the videos attached to the application and admission posts. On YouTube, admission videos have a large number of views as compared to the other platforms but have few likes. Students and prospective students are viewing these videos, but they do not engage with the content posted through comments.

On LinkedIn, postgraduate studies posts have a fair amount of likes with a comment enquiring about the possibility of funding for postgraduate studies. General admission posts have an average of 100 likes, comments about the application close date and the documents required when applying that are asked and responded to by students. Students view the posts but hardly respond or interact with the content shared on the social media platforms regardless of the high number of followers these platforms have.

4.3.3   STUDENT MOBILITY

With the unfortunate occurrence of the covid-19 virus, HEIs have not been able to have their annual open day. The open day is an exhibition of courses prospective students can choose to study and what students can expect when studying at the institute on campus. Instead, Nelson Mandela University has virtual open-day videos available on the institute's YouTube page. This received a large number of views with no comments and a handful of likes per video from the available faculties. Virtual orientation and lecture posts are also not far behind with about 10 to 62 likes and about 4 shares which is a small number compared to the number of followers the HEIs Facebook page has. Student mobility is an opportunity for students to develop valuable skills and expand their horizons by going abroad to study or further their studies in institutions of higher education (Ch'ng, Him and Him, 2022:1).

The institution will advertise itself to attract students that are interested in exploring a new environment. The institutions will have posts with interesting facts such as the university being a walking distance from the beach. The institution's Facebook page has a fair amount of likes and shares, students engage with the posts with inquiries on what studies can be taken that relate to nature the administrator then responds with a link to the relevant courses outline as well. On LinkedIn, the page provides a post on how students can balance postgraduate studies and work has fair likes and three shares with links students can click which leads to a page with advice students can consider. On Instagram, such posts have about 80 likes. Videos on YouTube have approximately 200 000 views and 20 likes, but the comment section has been turned off on these 25-second videos. To help students navigate on campus, the institution has provided an app with a campus map students can download. Posts with such information on Twitter have an average of 3 retweets and 3 likes. Posts on advertising the institutions on Twitter focus more on the features and activities located on campus that have no retweets and about two likes. Based on the videos viewed students active on the institution's media page spend their time viewing the posts but rarely interact with such posts.

Activities on campus, such as joining the choir and choir performances have about 7 likes on Twitter, 1000 views on YouTube with 100 likes and five comments on the beautiful performance. On Instagram, the post of the choir's performances has about 100 likes and 1000 views. On Facebook, the choir performance videos have an average of 3500 views with an average of 200 likes, comments on how one can join the choir, inquisitively on why the choir only performs a specific function and graduations as well as complements although the page administrator did not reply to the posed questions.

4.4   SUMMARY

The information that was discussed in this chapter was acquired through content analysis and was analysed to determine the benefits of online marketing for a public HEI in South Africa. Results of the content analysis are presented to answer the research study's objectives. The chapter elaborated on the interaction of students on the social media platforms the institution has on pages. The findings recorded that students view the content posted although they do not comment or like it in large numbers as compared to the social media users following these pages.

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Chapter four responded to the objectives identified in chapter one, on the benefits the HEI receives from marketing the institution on social media platforms. Data was collected on how the public and prospective students were engaging with the posts. Chapter five will highlight how the objectives were met, provide recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study and the literature studied, and a conclusion as well drawn from the study.

Nelson Mandela University has benefited from the use of social media platforms to promote the institution. This is evident in the increase of students admitted as well as a large following on various social networks.

5.2   ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

This study's main objective was to assess the benefits that Higher Education Institutions receive from marketing their institutions online to prospective students. This objective was achieved by identifying benefits in the literature review and evaluating the benefits of higher education institutions from various social media platforms. The benefits of online marketing for the institute were evident in the admission increase compared to other years and the high number of followers on the social media pages. The second objective was to conduct a literature review on the use of online marketing in HEIs. This objective was achieved by studying the market and noticing that social media platforms are largely used by students for social purposes. In every student's life, social media plays a vital role in accessing information, providing information, and updates. Communication is frequently made easier and more convenient on social media. The third objective is to determine the benefits that Higher Education Institutions receive from marketing online. This objective was achieved by conducting a literature review where the benefits of marketing online were identified as institutions having a deeper understanding of their customer's needs, gaining insights on how to better promote their products, interactive marketing, and inbound marketing. These benefits identified help the institution give the student an exceptional service and experience on the specific social media platform they will use. Observing stakeholder collaboration to motivate and guide the student. higher education institution admission the institute used catchy videos and images that received many views as well as responded to comments made by prospective students with inquiries. Student mobility to have a better understanding of how the institution has benefited from online

marketing when students transition from either a high school or relocating internationally. The final objective is to provide higher education institutions with recommendations to improve their online marketing to attract prospective students. This has been achieved by observing how the students engage with the posts on these social media platforms and how that has benefited the institution. Recommendations made to the institutions are to enable comments on posts, tag the institution on social media posts and encourage the use of hashtags to uncap the full benefits of marketing the institutions online.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study intended to assess how HEI benefits from marketing its offerings online, particularly at the Nelson Mandela University. A literature review conducted showed the benefits include: a deeper understanding of their customer's needs, gaining insights on how to better promote their products, interactive marketing, and inbound marketing. Focusing on stakeholder collaboration, higher education institution admission and student mobility are factors institutions use to assess whether they have benefitted from online marketing.

HEIs have been strategic in benefiting from online marketing by gaining a deeper understanding of their prospective customers' needs. Aiming to identify students' interests and needs, posts on the institution's social media accounts include external speakers who can provide advice and motivational conversations with students. Online marketing is promoting activities, institutions, and processes made possible by digital technologies. Several advantages of marketing online include the ability to contact customers more efficiently. A potential student's access to accurate information and a complete impression of the organization is indicated by increases in enrolment and application numbers. Interactive two-way communication is evident on Facebook which has the most engagement with comments as compared to the other social media platforms. Inbound marketing creates a relationship between the institution and the prospective student. Nelson Mandela University has virtual open-day videos available on its YouTube page. The institutions will have posts with interesting facts such as being a walking distance from the beach, or what students can expect from studying at the institute.

5.4   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

For future research purposes, the researcher must have adequate time to study the content over a period and at various time frames to get more accurate results. This study only focuses on content from Nelson Mandela University which may not apply to other institutions. The qualitative research approach was used to monitor behaviour although human participants were not used which may have affected the results of the study, should participants have been used.

5.5   RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that the Nelson Mandela University is benefiting from marketing themselves online. Researchers can assess the benefits of online marketing for other institutions to gain different perspectives on the various techniques institutions utilize to benefit from online marketing as well as different online platforms. This section provides recommendations for how to evaluate benefits and what criteria to use. HEIs success when marketing online is primarily dependent on students' responses and engagement with the institution. Compared to print media, marketing on online platforms has helped institutions reach a wider audience. Prospective students from all around the world can receive updates at any time and can view them to decide whether they would like to attend the institution. To get more students to engage with content from the institutions, the institution can promote the use of competitions to create awareness of the product offerings and services. Encouraging the use of hashtags underneath content either posted by the institution or students increases the chance of the post being viewed. In this study it has been noted that comments were turned off on some posts which can be a hindrance in communication should students want to question something; they would have to look for other communication channels. The finding in this study can help institutions identify the benefits they receive from marketing online and how the institute can benefit from marketing online. For future studies, researchers may adopt either a quantitative or qualitative approach with human participants as this study was only limited to content analysis. Researchers may also conduct a comparison of how different institutions benefit from online marketing.

5.6 **SUMMARY**

In relation to the research objectives, this chapter detailed the findings of chapter 4. The study's goal was to use benefits identified through literature analysis as well at developing a methodology that will analyse how the institution benefited from marketing online. Recommendations are provided based on the findings of the study on how institutions can benefit from marketing themselves online. HEIs have a common goal to effectively market themselves and increase admission numbers for the academic year. Benefits are a result of knowing their customer's needs, and what their prospective students expect from them as well as having effective communication methods.

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APPENDIX 1

MINI TREATISE DRAFT 1

ORIGINALITY REPORT

4%	4%	1%	4%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	ro.uow.edu.au Internet Source	2%
2	Submitted to Eiffel Corporation Student Paper	1%
3	Submitted to Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Student Paper	1%
4	Submitted to University of Central Lancashire Student Paper	1%

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 1%
Exclude bibliography	On		

APPENDIX 2

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES

ETHICS CLEARANCE FOR TREATISES / DISSERTATIONS / THESES

Instructions:
- Should be completed by study leader and student
- Must be signed off by student, study leader and HoD
- *Please note that by following this Proforma ethics route, the study will NOT be allocated an ethics clearance number*

FACULTY: <u>FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES</u>

SCHOOL / DEPARTMENT : <u>DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT</u>

I, Deliwe AP

the study leader for <u>MUKONDELELI TM</u>

<u>217277020</u>

a candidate for the degree of <u>BACHELOR OF ARTS HONOURS (BUSINESS MANAGEMENT)</u>

with a treatise/dissertation/thesis entitled (full title of treatise/dissertation/thesis):

<u>THE BENEFITS OF USING ONLINE MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA</u>

considered the following ethics criteria *(please tick the appropriate block):*

			YES	NO
1.	1.	Is there any risk of harm, embarrassment of offence, however slight or temporary, to the participant, third parties or to the communities at large?		☒
2.	2.	Is the study based on a research population defined as 'vulnerable' in terms of age, physical characteristics and/or disease status?		☒
1.	2.1	Are subjects/participants/respondents of your study:		
2.1.1		Children under the age of 18?		☒
2.1.2		NMMU staff?		☒
2.1.3		NMMU students?		☒
2.1.4		The elderly/persons over the age of 60?		☒

2.1.5		A sample from an institution (e.g. hospital/school)?		☒
2.1.6		Handicapped (e.g. mentally or physically)?		☒
3.	3.	Does the data that will be collected require consent of an institutional authority for this study? (An institutional authority refers to an organisation that is established by government to protect vulnerable people)		☒
1.	3.1	Are you intending to access participant data from an existing, stored repository (e.g. school, institutional or university records)?		☒
4.	4.	Will the participant's privacy, anonymity or confidentiality be compromised?		☒
1.	4.1	Are you administering a questionnaire/survey that:		☒
a.	4.1.1	Collects sensitive/identifiable data from participants?		☒
b.	4.1.2	Does not guarantee the anonymity of the participant?		☒
c.	4.1.3	Does not guarantee the confidentiality of the participant and the data?		☒
d.	4.1.4	Will offer an incentive to respondents to participate, i.e. a lucky draw or any other prize?		☒
e.	4.1.5	Will create doubt whether sample control measures are in place?		☒
f.	4.1.5	Will be distributed electronically via email (and requesting an email response)? Note: • If your questionnaire **DOES NOT** request respondents' identification, is distributed electronically and you request respondents to return it *manually* (print out and deliver/mail); **AND** respondent anonymity can be guaranteed, your answer will be NO. • If your questionnaire **DOES NOT** request respondents' identification, is *distributed via an email link and works through a web response system (e.g. the university survey system); **AND*** respondent anonymity can be guaranteed, your answer will be NO.		☒
g.	5.	Do you wish to publish an article from this study and submit to an accredited Journal?		☒

*Please note that if **ANY** of the questions above have been answered in the affirmative **(YES)** the student will need to complete the full ethics clearance form (REC-H application) and submit it with the relevant documentation to the Faculty RECH (Ethics) representative.*

and hereby certify that the student has given his/her research ethical consideration and full ethics approval is not required.

17/05/2022

_____   _____

STUDY LEADER(S)   DATE

_____   _____

17/05/2022

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT   DATE

_____   ___16 MAY 2022
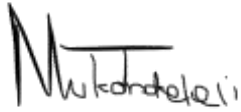
STUDENT   DATE