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The Role of Digital Marketing in Promoting Private Universities in the Covid-19 Pandemic Period: A Phenomenological Approach

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Abstract. This study aims at answering the question of how the experiences of each university in carrying out their marketing activities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, what are the difficulties when they implement digital marketing and how do they get students after doing digital marketing. In this study, the phenomenological approach of the qualitative research design was employed. The data collection was carried out by semi-structured interviews to dig deeper into the experiences of informants consisting of 20 marketing representatives from private universities in the areas of Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi (Jabodetabek). This research shows that digital marketing is an important factor to be able to promote private universities and get students during the Covid 19 pandemic. It is also very important to recruit skilled staff on IT. We can see a very significant difference between campuses that have experts to carry out digital marketing and those that don't. This can also be seen from the percentage of the number of students admitted during the Covid-19 pandemic, where the number of students enrolling in colleges with professional digital marketing did not show a decrease but on the contrary, there was a significant increase in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords. Digital Marketing, Private Universities, Covid-19 Pandemic

1. Introduction

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was felt in the business and economic world. In a relatively short time, business actors were "forced" to rack their brains in determining marketing strategies since the implementation of large-scale social distancing and social restrictions. In today's digital era, interacting with consumers is mostly done through social media, therefore adapting marketing strategies needs to be done immediately. Digital marketing is a new way to make sales without meeting consumers directly. This strategy is carried out by trying to target the emotional aspects of consumers and associate brands. A personalized marketing approach is able to form strong enough bonds and build personal connections with consumers. Meanwhile, from the digital side, business actors are encouraged to optimize their social media, starting from creating interesting content both in terms of visuals and relevant product captions, using the website to introduce more detailed business information, maximizing sales through marketplaces and e-commerce to expand markets, and building emotional engagement to create loyal consumers. The digital era is able to become a crucial point for all human activities that

can support business activities. This is an indicator that can affect the rate of increase in digital marketing costs and sales of smartphones that provide easy service [1].

Consumer behavior changes because there are people who are aware and eventually change their consumption patterns. According to [2] the rate of change in Consumer Behavior when aligned with COVID-19 is caused by: (a) Virus problems and scarcity of medical equipment and logistics, as well as rising prices, (b) Information Search (looking for price information), (c) . Alternative Financing, (d). Purchase of necessities during an outbreak, (e). After-purchase process (isolation). The digital marketing system is not only limited to the business world in the form of goods, but also service products including educational services such as private universities which currently have to compete fiercely for new students.

There are quite a number of researchers who have conducted research related to digital marketing. One of them is [3], who analyzes the influence of social media on sales competition between one seller and another. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of social media on sales competition. The analysis used is only using qualitative descriptive analysis. Meanwhile, this study discusses the use of social media to increase profits and uses qualitative descriptive analysis, income analysis and comparative analysis. Another researcher [4], who conducted research on the Role of Facebook as an Online Business Communication Media (Qualitative Descriptive Study of Facebook's Role as an Online Business Communication Media) This research uses a Qualitative Descriptive approach that aims to show conceptually and directly the relationship between researchers. with the object of researchers about the role of Facebook when used as an online business communication medium. In this research, the writer uses marketing communication theory and technology determinism theory. The third researcher, [5], discussed the use of E-Commerce on agricultural products in Pringsewu. The purpose of this research is to analyze advertising programs (promotions), e-mail marketing, and the level of trust that significantly affects the processing of advertising information by consumers on the Website. Data collection methods are observation, interview (interview), study of literature results. The analysis used is descriptive qualitative analysis. The results showed a problem in the Pringsewu area that many farmers did not know about internet technology as online marketing and sales. This study aims to compare the advantages before and after using an online marketing system. Of the 3 studies above, all three use a qualitative approach.

The similarities of the 3 previous studies above with this study are all the three studies used qualitative approach and social media as the object of their research. But the difference is that from these three studies, none of them examined digital marketing at universities. This study aims to answer the questions of how the experiences of each university in carrying out their marketing activities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, what the difficulties are when they implement digital marketing and how they get students after implementing digital marketing. This research has contributed greatly to the advancement of the marketing world in universities, especially in the field of digital marketing.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Definition of Digital Marketing

Digital technology has changed the face of the business world, including marketing activities. Although digital marketing does not include techniques and practices that fall into the category of internet marketing, ways to reach target consumers who do not need the internet (mobile technology). Technology has changed the way humans speak, communicate, act and make decisions. Technology has become very effective in maximizing the bottom line of an organization. In the new wave era, the economy that is considered is not only economic growth,

interest rates, and inflation, but also digital economy factors. The existence of the digital economy is marked by the increasing number of businesses or trade transactions that use the internet as a medium of communication, collaboration and cooperation between companies or between individuals [6]. Digital marketing is a marketing practice that uses digital distribution channels to reach consumers in a way that is relevant, personal and cost-effective [7].

[8] suggests the types of digital marketing activities, among others: Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Content Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Content Automation, Campaign Marketing, E-Commerce Marketing, Social Media Marketing, Social Media Optimization, E-mail Direct Marketing, Display Advertising, E-books, Optical Disks, Games, and various other forms of digital media.

(1) SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

A process of optimizing a website to "rank" higher on the search engine result pages, it can increase the amount of traffic a website will receive.

(2) Content Marketing

In general, content marketing is understood as a strategic approach to marketing activities, which focuses on creating and distributing content that is valuable, relevant, and consistent, in order to attract and maintain the interest of a predetermined audience, and encourage profitable customer action.

(3) Influencer Marketing

An influencer is someone who can make an impact in society. They can be celebrities, bloggers, YouTubers, or public figures who are considered important in certain communities. Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy in which a company invites an influencer to work together to increase brand awareness and sales according to a specified target market.

(4) Marketing Automation

The goal is to increase revenue and maximize efficiency. Used effectively, marketing teams can tackle repetitive tasks and can focus on more difficult problems. This also avoids the possibility of human error. Examples of marketing automation: Welcome email, Email for Reminder, Birthday or anniversary, feedback and review, launching a new product, Newsletter.

(5) E-mail Marketing

E-mail Marketing can be used to build trust with customers over time to turn them into repeat customers. Email Marketing is also an effective way to provide information to customers about new products or promotions that are being run. In fact, 28% of online shoppers in the United States report that they subscribe to store or product emails to stay informed about the brands they love.

(6) Campaign Marketing

There are at least 2 types of campaigns that can be implemented, namely *print* and *online* campaigns. These two things both aim to improve the image of a brand. The difference between the two is only in the media used, which is print, in the form of banner, flyer, brochure) and online as email, social media, and website. In addition to achieving AIDA targets (Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action), marketing campaigns are also useful for fulfilling marketing funnels such as Brand, Leads, Sales, and Loyalty.

(7) E-Commerce Marketing

According to [9] the definition of E-Commerce is the activity of online shopping using the internet network and the way of transacting is through digital money transfers. Kalakota and Whinston review the meaning of E-Commerce from four perspectives, namely:

- (i) a. From a communication perspective, E-Commerce is a process of sending goods, services, information, or payments via computers or other electronic equipment.
 - (ii) b. From a business process perspective, E-Commerce is an application of technology to automation of business transactions and work flows.
 - (iii) c. From a service perspective, E-Commerce is a tool that fulfills the wishes of companies, management, and consumers to reduce service costs when improving the quality of goods and increasing the speed of delivery services.
 - (iv) d. Online perspective, E-Commerce provides the ability to buy and sell products or goods and information through internet services and other online means
- (8) **Social Media Marketing**
Social media marketing is a marketing process carried out through third parties, namely social media-based websites. There are many social media that can be used for marketing or promotion of a product or service. Social media accounts that are often used for promotions are *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Through this media, companies or brands can carry out structured and targeted promotions. Marketing with social media is not always directly related to buying and selling.

From the description above, it is known that digital marketing activities can be extended to non-internet channels that provide digital media services, such as cell phones (SMS and MMS) [8]. Meanwhile, according to [10] digital marketing is the promotion of a product or brand through one or more forms of electronic media. Digital marketing is often referred to as online marketing, internet marketing, or web marketing and advertising promotion in digital marketing can be done via the internet and mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet PCs in the form of web pages, e-mail sending, video streaming and communication through social media.

[11] states that digital marketing is digital marketing which has almost the same meaning as electronic marketing (e-marketing), both of which describe the management and implementation of marketing using electronic media, so what is meant by digital marketing is the application of digital technology that forms an online channel (channel). online) to the market (websites, e-mail, databases, digital TV and through various other recent innovations including blogs, feeds, podcasts and social networks) which contribute to marketing activities that aim to profit and build and develop relationships with customers besides developing a planned approach to increasing consumer knowledge (of the company, behavior, values and level of brand loyalty to its products), then integrating targeted communications with online services according to the needs of each individual or specific customer. In short, digital marketing is achieving marketing goals through the application of technology and digital media, especially the internet [12].

According to [13] Digital Marketing is the use of the internet and the use of other interactive technologies to create and connect identified dialogues between companies and consumers. Meanwhile, [14] state that the rise of digital marketing via the web, mobile phones, and gaming consoles, offers advertisers unheralded new access to customers and key influences. Digital marketing is a marketing activity including branding that uses various web-based media such as blogs, web sites, e-mail, adwords, or social networks [15].

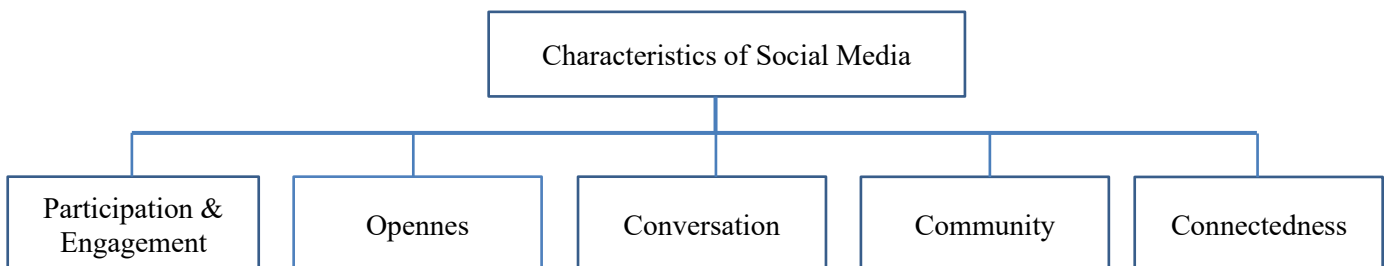
According to [16] digital marketing can help marketing to improve marketing performance and profits. Digital channels offer opportunities for spending efficiency in order to establish relationships with consumers and increase consumer loyalty. [17] suggest that e-marketing is the process of building and maintaining relationships with customers through online activities to facilitate the exchange of ideas, products, and services that provide satisfaction to both

parties. Digital marketing can be defined as a marketing activity including branding that uses various web-based media.

Digital marketing itself is the use of internet technology to achieve marketing targets through channels such as social media, websites / blogs, multimedia advertising such as youtube.com, online / search engine advertising, email marketing, and interactive marketing / apps. [18] also states that "Digital marketing uses the internet and information technology to expand and enhance traditional marketing functions." [19] states that social media mostly has the following characteristics:

- a. Participation and engagement: social media encourages contributions and feedback from all interested people. This blurs the line between the media and the audience.
- b. Openness: Most social media services are open to receiving feedback and participation.
- c. Conversation: When traditional media talks about broadcast communication (content that is transmitted or distributed to an audience), social media talks about better communication, namely using the 2-way communication conversation method.
- d. Community: Social media allows communities to form quickly and be able to communicate effectively. Communities share common interests, such as photography, political issues, or favorite TV shows.
- e. Connectedness: Most types of social media develop because of their connectedness, namely by using links that lead to move to other website sources.

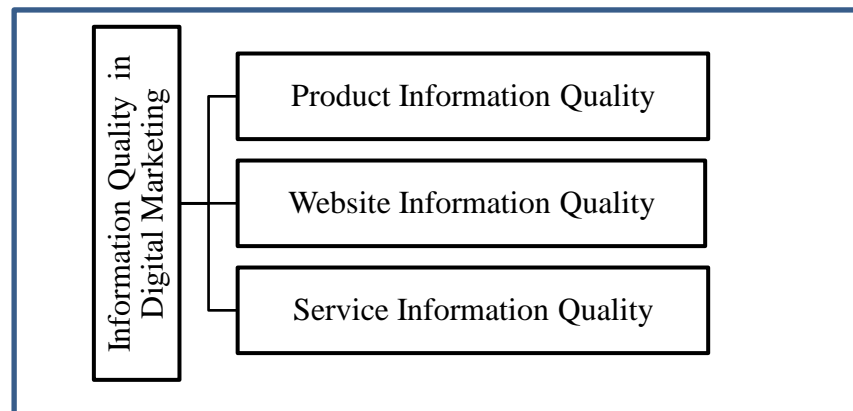
Figure 1
Characteristics of Social Media



Source: Mayfield (2008)

If this can be implemented properly by the brand, it can produce extraordinary results, namely customer loyalty, which according to [20] is a strong commitment from customers to re-subscribe or repurchase preferred products / services consistently in the future. which will come. In digital marketing, information is a very important raw material [21]. Information is said to be valuable if the benefits are more effective than the costs of obtaining it. Therefore the quality of information is a strong determinant of consumer satisfaction with shopping via the internet. There are 3 (three) important information that must be understood by staff in the marketing department as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2
Information Quality in Digital Marketing



Source: Park and Kim (2003)

(1) Product Information Quality

Accurate, precise and useful information affects reliability in online trading Lewis (1999), in [22], state that if the operators of a website provide valuable information to consumers, consumers will begin to trust the information they receive from the website.

(2) Website Information Quality

Website is a company representation in cyberspace in the sense of the word that all physical assets are reduced to a digital collection of information that can be accessed by anyone in the world [21]. The quality of a website in a company engaged in online trading is a factor that can influence customer decisions [23]. A professional website appearance gives customers a sense of comfort, so that customers can be more confident and comfortable in making purchases [24].

There are 3 (three) important aspects related to website quality, namely:

a. Site Design

The design characteristics of a web page can influence online consumer purchasing decisions [25].

b. Site Functionally.

Regarding the various facilities and conveniences available on the website.

c. Features / Benefits

Regarding various aspects of the benefits that can be directly felt by customers who access the related website (related to accuracy and content). The accuracy of the information is related to the reliability of the website content.

(3) Service Information Quality

Information about services that exist in online businesses, information on service quality consists of ordering information, delivery information, and promotions offered [23].

2.2 *University Marketing Strategy*

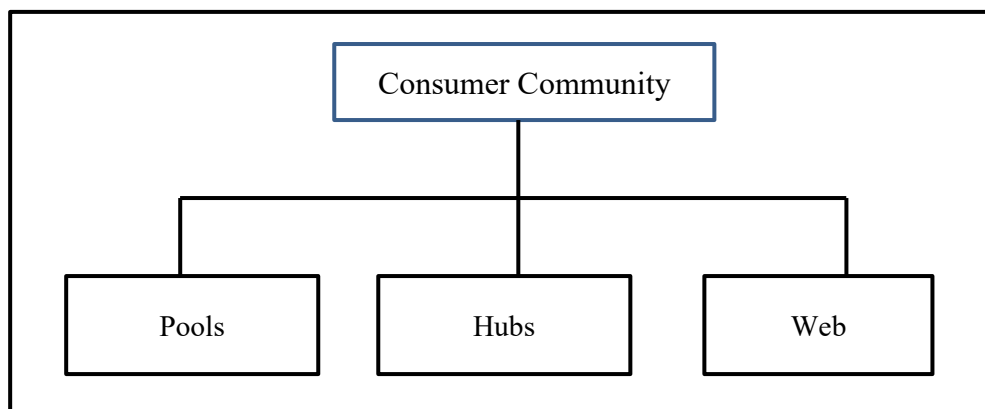
The management of private education in Indonesia is usually in the form of a foundation which is a non-profit organization. For educational service providers, students are customers who directly enjoy the educational services they offer. It is important for higher education service provider organizations to understand what potential customers need and want for higher education services in their view. In the education service business what is visible is the material.

Students or students in an education system are raw materials for industry, so the important question is how the quality of these raw materials [26]. In general, education service providers in Indonesia consist of two types, namely education services provided by the government and the community [27].

[28] explain that digital marketing uses all digital media, including the internet and mobile and interactive channels to develop communication and exchanges with customers. Digital marketing in higher education is also important in connecting with alumni who may be active reinforcers and supporters or may re-engage with certain strategies[29]. In a study conducted by the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth on the university's use of social and digital media as part of outreach and marketing, it showed that 100% of respondents' institutions now use some form of social media but also revealed that there was no reliable data on how effective it was used. these tools in terms of registration or increase in institutional value.

In a study conducted by [30], it was revealed that social media can be a cost-effective recruitment strategy and in 2010 a study of 30 international university admissions staff showed a tendency by institutions to use Facebook (96%) and Twitter (66%).) as their outreach tool. 46% use YouTube and 33% use LinkedIn. Another study by [31] shows that most institutions use social media with 94% using Facebook, 60% of institutions also use Twitter, LinkedIn, and / or YouTube, 96% use social media to communicate with alumni, while only about 57% use it as a marketing tool for student perspectives. According to [32], online marketing efforts are more closely related to university success. Richard Taylor from the University of Leicester stated that “Marketing considerations will now increasingly align with strategic decision making at the university. It was found in a study on the use of social network systems as a marketing tool by universities that there is a significant relationship between those who enter social networks and the likelihood of applying to university [33]. According to Susan Fournier in [34] consumer communities can be formed in three models, namely: *Pools*, *Hubs* and the *Web*.

Figure 3
Consumer Community



Source: Susan Fournier in Kartajaya (2010)

The first model, namely Pools, is a community that is formed naturally because they have the same activities, values, goals and identities and are members of the community because of a strong and clear pooling factor. The second form of community, namely the Hubs type, is a community formed because of the admiration of its members for one individual. Communities like this usually rely on certain individual figures. Meanwhile, the third community model, namely the Web community, is a community formed because of the relationship between

members and one another. Such communities are naturally easy to form on the web through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on.

For Instagram, [35] states that there are five elements that should be present on an Instagram account to attract customer engagement. These elements are: (1) good customer testimonials, (2) team, (3) product, (4) event, (5) documentation.

3 Method

There are several definitions of qualitative research methods put forward by experts. Qualitative research is defined as a methodology that provides tools in understanding the meaning in depth associated with complex phenomena and their processes in social life practices [36]. Furthermore, qualitative method is also defined as a research method in describing phenomena based on the informants' point of view, finding various realities and developing a holistic understanding of a phenomenon in a certain context [37].

From the various definitions above, in general it can be concluded that the purpose of qualitative research is to describe a particular phenomenon. This is confirmed by the opinion of [38] who states that qualitative research or descriptive research aims to describe a phenomenon with various characters that surround it. One approach in qualitative research is the phenomenological approach. There is an interesting statement from Husserl relating to qualitative research and phenomenology. According to him, all qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect to it, but the phenomenological approach cannot be applied to all qualitative research. This means that all qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect in it, but the phenomenological approach cannot be applied to all qualitative research [39]. Apart from some of the points of explanation above, phenomenology as a research method also has several advantages or advantages. First, as a scientific method, phenomenology can describe and describe a phenomenon as it is without manipulating the data in it. From some of these advantages, phenomenological studies also have problems. This problem was expressed by [40] who stated that many contemporary researchers claim to use a phenomenological approach but in fact they rarely associate this method with the principles of the philosophy of phenomenology. That is what phenomenological researchers today should fix.

The phenomenological approach deals with the understanding of how everyday the intersubjective world is in the world of life. Phenomenology aims to interpret actions. Our social and other people as meaningful (interpreted) and can reconstruct meaning derivatives from meaningful actions in individual intersubjective communication in the world of social life [41]. According to Polkinghorne (in [42]), the study of phenomenology describes the meaning of a life experience for some people about a concept or phenomenon. People involved in dealing with a phenomenon explore the conscious structure of human life experience.

Data collection was carried out by in-depth interviews to obtain detailed data about the phenomenon under study. Participants in this study were determined based on purposive sampling. Interviews were conducted with 20 Marketing Representatives from private universities in the cities of Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi). However, the researchers classified the Marketing Representatives into 2 groups, namely ten (10) Marketing Representatives from Top Twenty private universities in Jabodetabek areas, and another 10 Marketing Representatives from private universities excluding Top Twenty of Jabodetabek areas. The purpose of this grouping is to find out how the experiences of each university are in carrying out their marketing activities, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and what the difficulties are when they implement digital marketing and how the student gains they get after doing digital marketing.

There are five main stages in phenomenological data analysis, namely: First, making a list of expressions of participants' answers or responses. Each participant's expression of life experiences is treated equally (horizontalization). Second, the reduction and elimination of these expressions refers to the question: whether these expressions are the essence of the participant's experience and whether the expressions can be grouped to be labeled and themed. Unclear, repetitive and overlapping expressions are reduced and eliminated. Then the meaningful expressions are given labels and themes. Third, create clusters and write themes for expressions that are consistent, don't change and show similarities. The clustering and labeling of these expressions is a core theme of the participants' life experiences. Fourth, validate expressions, and label expressions and themes. If they are not compatible and explicit with the participant's life experiences, these expressions are discarded. Fifth, create Individual Textural Description (ITD). ITD is made by presenting validated expressions according to the themes accompanied by verbatim quotes from interviews and / or participant diaries. Due to the ethical issue, the names of the participants are not mentioned briefly in this paper [43].

4 Result

From the semi structured interviews conducted, the summary results are as follows:

Aspect	Answers from the Marketing Representatives of Top 20 Private Universities in Jabodetabek areas	Answers from the Marketing Representatives out of the Top 20 Private Universities in Jabodetabek areas
Application of Digital Marketing during the Covid 19 pandemic.	Using : (a) SEO (b) Content Marketing (c) Influencer Marketing (d) Marketing Automation (e) E-mail Automation (f) Campaign Marketing (g) E-Commerce Marketing (h) Social Media Marketing: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram Instagram: Pools/Hubs/Web	Using: (a) Social Media Marketing (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) (b) Content Marketing (c) E-Commerce Marketing
Barriers faced when applying the digital marketing	(a) Initially, when making contact with partners in the regions, they experienced difficulties in the internet network. However, after being supported by the university, the internet was no longer a problem. (b) Initially experiencing difficulties in human resources who are experts in the IT field, but over time, experts in the IT field have been recruited and currently each work unit in the digital marketing sphere is run by staff who are competent in their fields.	(a) Human resources in Information Technology are very limited. (b) Human resources have limited competence. (c) Limited human resources in copy writing. (d) Difficulty with internet access (e) Lack of extensive network with provinces outside Java Province
Acceptance of students after the optimizing the Digital Marketing	(a) The number of new students who registered during the Covid-19 pandemic has not decreased. (b) After optimizing digital marketing, an increase in the number of new students reached	(a) The number of new students who register is reduced by 35% -50%, even though they have implemented Digital Marketing.

	25% -35% compared to that before the Covid-19 pandemic.	
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5. Discussion

From the results of the analysis carried out, it is concluded that there are differences in digital marketing applied by universities that are included in the Top Twenty category in the Greater Jakarta area with universities that are not included as Top Twenty. The best universities have implemented digital marketing of at least 8 (eight) types, namely: SEO (Search Engine Optimization), Content Marketing, Influencer Marketing, Marketing Automation, E-mail Automation, Campaign Marketing, E-Commerce Marketing, Social Media Marketing: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Especially for Social Media, these universities have also formed consumer communities by: Pools, Hubs, and the Web (Susan Fournier in [34] as well as with the alumni [29].

"Our consumer community in areas throughout Indonesia is quite a lot. Most of them are web models because the community is formed because of the relationship between members and one another through the Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram platforms. They consist of high school students who before Covid-19, we always visited schools, made presentations as well as discussions and sharing sessions. We also try to maintain good relations with the local community, not only with the students but also with the principal and teachers. We also have a good relationship with the alumni"

From the analysis conducted, it turns out that data is obtained that 92 percent of consumers trust influencers more than advertising or traditional endorsement through celebrities [44], [19].

"Since 10 years ago our marketing team has been active in digital marketing. We have also collaborated with many influencers from various categories, such as micro influencers with followers between 1,000 and 100,000. Micro influencers are usually those who are known as experts in a field, such as an industry expert or beauty expert. Other influencers are Macro Influencers who have followers above 100,000 to 1,000,000. Macro influencers mostly come from bloggers or vloggers, and finally Mega influencers, who are categorized as the highest type of influencer. These types of influencers are those who have more than 1,000,000 followers. Usually comes from artists, YouTubers, or celebrities. These influencers are very supportive of the promotion of our institution. With such a large number of followers, our marketing task has been greatly helped. Consumers do trust influencers more than advertisements or celebrities. "

Meanwhile, through content marketing, which is a marketing strategy to distribute content that is able to attract the right target audience, the best universities have 2 goals, namely to attract new audiences to get to know the campus and all the facilities it has and ultimately encourage them to become customers. However, it is not only that, to produce effective content marketing requires an expert in the field of copy writing. Currently, all universities have websites and digital communication tools, but unfortunately not all universities have human resources who are truly skilled in presenting a text or message so that it can appear in attractive and convincing packaging. Therefore, recruiting the right human resources is needed.

Apart from that, the quality of the website should also be a concern for the university. The website must not only have an attractive appearance but the information on the website must always be updated. The website represents an institution or company and will be read by all people around the world. ([21]. Universities must maintain the quality of their websites. The design must also be attractive [25] and must describe a quality campus life because this is also

one of the aspects that determine the decision-making of prospective students and their parents [23], [24].

In maintaining relationships with the community where the majority are millennial, the university's marketing team must be able to create customer engagement. Customer engagement must be interpreted as a process to maintain and protect consumers so that they continue to have relationships with universities / institutions so that consumers are not only buyers of products, even more than just buyers, namely becoming marketers for institutions / universities [45].

From the analysis conducted, researchers also obtained data that in digital marketing, information is a very important raw material. This information consists of product information quality, web information quality and service information quality [21]. These three informations must be ensured to be of good quality because it reflects the reputation of the institution. Many universities have unattractive websites and even their news is outdated because they haven't been updated for days.

From the results of the analysis of interviews with universities that are not among the best universities in the Jabodetabek area, data is obtained that competent human resources in the IT field are still limited. In this case, the campus has not fully felt the need to recruit IT experts to be able to implement digital marketing. Many of the staff do "learning by doing" or just experimenting without being monitored by IT specialists. This is one of the causes of the ineffectiveness of digital marketing, which in turn has an impact on the decrease in the number of new students enrolling at the university. Therefore, the results are different from higher education institutions that carry out digital marketing with experts in their fields.

5 Conclusion

From the data analysis described above, it can be concluded digital marketing is an important factor to be able to promote private universities and get more students. It is also very important to recruit skilled staff on IT. We can see a very significant difference between campuses that have experts to carry out digital marketing and those that don't. This can also be seen from the percentage of the number of students who were admitted during the corona pandemic, where the number of students enrolled in the best universities did not show a decrease but on the contrary, there was a significant increase in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, the role of IT experts cannot be dismissed. Besides being able to build consumer communities in various provinces, they can also create attractive marketing programs by presenting influencers so that they further encourage the public to choose universities that they believe are the best institutions. For further research, the researchers recommend to conduct a study on digital marketing for higher education with a different approach.

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