Relationship Between Factors of Online Marketing and Student Enrollment Decisions in Higher Education:
An Analysis Using Structural Modeling Techniques

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to identify the relationship between factors of online marketing and enrolment decision in higher education. With an increasing number of higher education institutions, it has become important to attract students for enrollment, and this paper will help them to do so. Through extensive literature review, the gap was identified and impact of online marketing on each step of the college selection process is tested. Data were collected from various colleges from Nepal. The sample size of the data was 800, and data were collected through structured questionnaire. SPSS and AMOS software were used to analyze the data. Factor analysis has been done, and structural equation modeling has been used in the study to show the relationship between the variables. The findings of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between factors of online marketing and enrollment decision in higher education. These findings will be helpful for higher education institutions for increasing the enrollment number.

KEYWORDS

College Choice, E-Mail, Internet, Internet Advertisement, Marketing Strategies, Parent's Expectation, Search Engine Marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Social Media

INTRODUCTION

The role of marketing has changed in today's time as it has reached to a level where everything and everyone is depended on world of internet. Digital technology has changed marketing scenario. Organization of any kind with the help of online marketing tools are coming in direct contact with their customers and are getting all the information that they want (Gielens & Steenkamp, 2019). With the increasing use of internet, students by the means of social media today look for information regarding the universities, study programs, and go through the comments of alumni of the university that interests them (Gray, Shyan Fam, & Llanes, 2003; Shields & Peruta, 2019).

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Dynamic changes that are taking place because of the digital technology has forced higher education institutions to rethink their way of marketing. Students and other stakeholders need for information and communication needs to be fulfilled by the higher education institutions. Online technologies has offered universities the tools and strategies that can be used by them to fulfill these needs (Alexa et al., 2012). In today's scenario, higher education institutions are keen on finding new ways and methods for engaging prospective students, their alumni and other stakeholders by using Twitter (Kowalik, 2011). For higher education institutions online advertising is a brilliant way to give information about their existence and tell about the advantages that one would gain from the institutions (Evans 2009). Selecting a college does not only include students but includes their parent's also. Parents also take part in the decision making process for selecting a college. Parents are involved in various stages of the college selection process. Parents have expectations from their children, which is a major influence for the students to be enrolled in a college. Students also consider their parents for fee their parents can provide them for the college. At each stage of the college selection process parents get involved (Borders et al.,2011). The purchase behavior of people has changed now. The decision making process is influenced by social media (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). A student decision for higher education and the kind of institutions that they want is motivated by the amount of involvement their parents have in this decision (Jun & Colyar's, 2002). Parents or their family member influences school leaving student's decision for being enrolled in a higher education institution initially and later on they gather information from the outside sources (Hossler & Foley, 1995).

The study will identify various factors that affect online marketing of higher education institutions and its relationship with enrolment decision making. The study will also show the effect that online marketing factors will have on enrolment decision. Practically the study is going to present a base for higher education institutions to develop online marketing strategies. It will help the institutions to understand parents and student's role in the enrolment decision-making process and will help to increase the enrolment ratio for higher education institutions.

BACKGROUND

According to Kassandra (2019), to support student's college decision process most of the parents visit the website of the college to collect the information. Parents are an important part of the college selection. Therefore, by sending emails to parents, proper content targeting parents and student's both may increase the chance of choosing a college. According to Shields & Peruta (2018), an understanding of the way and manner a prospective student use social media may be advantageous for the colleges. Mitchall & Jaeger (2018), in their study found that parents who are involved well in the college choice process or planning of college motivates their children in the process of choosing a college, whereas their low involvement with their children planning of their college demotivates their children in the college choice process. According to Joana & Maria (2018), education institutions are investing their money on online marketing activities. With the increase use of social media around the world, it's imperative for universities to be on social media. Being on social media does not mean just having a page of the university there. The university has to be active on it. It has to allow and encourage people to communicate with each other and with the university. One things that is necessary for the universities is to update a proper content on the social networking site with right timing (Peruta & Shields, 2018). For colleges and students social media has become important as it is helping them to communicate well (Berman, 2018). Onyemaechi (2018) conducted a study to see the impact that advertising would have on enrollment rate in LPU-Laguana and found that there is a positive relationship between both. The study has taken 2016- 2017 academic year, compared it with the previous year's enrollment rate, and saw a 7% additional enrollment from that of the previous year. Social media sites like YouTube and Instagram are being used for promotion by different social media influencers. Social media influencer has positive effect on their followers as their followers believe in them and so are willing to opt for the brand that is being advertised by the influencer.

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