The Influence of Promotion in Social Media and Word of Mouth on the Decision on Selection of Study Programs at Private Universities

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Abstract

University competition, especially private universities during the Covid-19 pandemic, was very tight. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is not only on health but has an impact on the economy and also on education. Some parents of students experience economic difficulties, so that several universities have experienced a decline in students and prospective students. The selection of study programs is a new problem for prospective students because many universities are closed and only open student admissions online in the current pandemic era. Higher education is required to be able to implement effective marketing strategies through promotion. This study aimed to see the impact of social media and Word of mouth on selecting study programs at private universities. This research design uses a quantitative research approach with a survey method. The survey was conducted on 215 students from several private universities in Palembang City, Indonesia. The data analysis technique was performed by multiple regression analysis. The results showed a positive and significant influence from social media and Word of mouth on the decision to choose a study program at a private university in Palembang City. The digital era has demanded universities to carry out all their activities online so that social media is an effective means of promoting higher education. Student satisfaction felt during lectures will convey information by Word of mouth and recommend their choice of the study program to others. Private universities that rely on student funding are expected to build communication through social media and Word of mouth.

Keywords
Electoral Decision, Private College, Promotion, Social Media, Word of Mouth.

1. Introduction

The number of educational institutions, both private and public, cannot be denied that there is very tight competition, especially private universities (Gunarto, Hurriyati, Disman, & Wibowo, 2018; Gunarto, Hurriyati, Disman, Wibowo, & Natalisa, 2018; Gunarto, Nugraha, & Gaffar, 2016), for that each university is required to improve the quality of their institutions with the various advantages they have. Many students experience confusion when deciding which private university to choose and what course of study. They are often confused to determine where they want to continue their education and then what study program they will take because it is a decision that we must take very carefully. Decisions taken when continuing this education are long-term decisions that affect future life, such as work, self-satisfaction, and subsequent social activities.

These private universities in Palembang are in the form of Universities, Colleges, Academies, and Polytechnics scattered around the city of Palembang (Gunarto et al., 2018). The development of technology, especially

communication media, is very high. Many social media users have made private university managers use this media a lot as a means of promotion. The data on social media usage that is often used is shown in Figure 1.
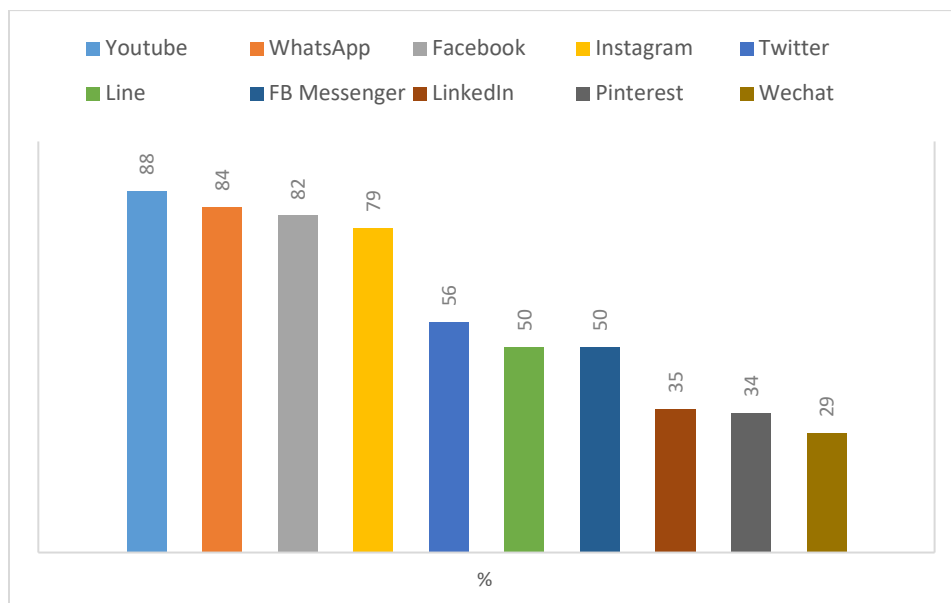
Sumber : HTTPS//: databoks.katadata.co.id

Figure 1. Social media is often used.

The social media that are often used in order of the largest are YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. University administrators have widely used use of social media. Social media is a means of promotion for higher education, and Word of mouth is a promotional medium to attract student candidates. The creation of Word of mouth from students at universities is because the university can create a good reputation (Gunarto & Gaffar, 2016), and alumni get the best job opportunities (Harahap, 2017). Some researchers state that decision making is influenced by social media and Word of mouth (Aji, 2016; Arima et al., 2020; Bhanot, 2012; Constantinides & Stagno, 2011; Galan et al., 2015; Harahap et al., 2018; Laddha et al., 2015; Ranginwala & Towbin, 2017; Ratnasari et al., 2019; Ryu & Park, 2020). This study aims to analyze the effect of promotion through social media and Word of mouth to choose study programs, especially in private universities.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Social Media

According to Kotler and Keller (2007), promotion is the primary marketing element to stimulate purchasing certain products or services more quickly and larger by consumers and traders (Aji, 2016). Further, according to Tjiptono (2008), one of the factors determining the success of a marketing program is providing information on a product, namely promotion (Aji, 2016).

Social media is an online-based communication tool where each user can communicate via the internet because many social media creators are interested in promoting products or services through social media, which others can easily access. Social media is a media facility on the internet that allows users to express themselves, such as communicating, collaborating, sharing information, interacting with other users, and establishing virtual social relationships (Hanafi, 2016). Social media users have been used from various circles, either for direct communication, promotion, or other marketing activities. Marketing activities, especially promotions with social media, have entered the world of education, to be precise, private universities, as a marketing strategy tool for these colleges.

There are several promotion indicators through social media, namely (Unisma et al., 2019): (1) Context. Make news like a direct message to the content of the message; (2) Communication. Share news to hear each other, respond and connect with, feel comfortable, and convey the message well; (3) Collaboration. Work together to make things better; and (4) Connection. How to maintain an established relationship.

2.2. *Word of Mouth*

Word of mouth is a story, comment, or direction from people who have used a product or service based on their own experience if this promotion strongly affects decisions made by other parties. According to Kotler and Keller (2007), Word of mouth provides personal knowledge information by directing individuals or on products or services (Aji, 2016). This form of promotion from Word of mouth is widely expected for other people who want to decide their choice of using a product or service, and this is why promotion with Word of mouth is quite useful.

According to Sernovitz (2009), there are five indicators: speakers, topics, tools, participation, and supervision (Joesyiana, 2018). The explanation of the five indicators is as follows: (1) Speakers are suggestions from those who describe a brand and can be said to be influencers. These speakers are ready like friends, parents, siblings, etc. There must be someone talking. (2) Topic, this part is explained by the speaker. This topic is the same as that offered by a particular brand, such as some exciting offers. Good topics are comfortable, easy to listen to, and natural. All Word of mouth must come from an exciting topic to discuss. (3) The tool is a medium for disseminating speakers and topics. This tool also makes it easier for people to talk about or make interesting company products or services to others. (4) Participation is something that will not be connected if only one party is talking. So that other parties must participate in the conversation so that Word of mouth can be continued. (5) Supervision is an action taken by an organization to see consumer responses, to know positive and negative input from consumers. That way, the organization can evaluate it for the better.

2.3 Decision Making

Making purchasing decisions is based on needs that must be fulfilled (Fakri et al., 2017). Making purchasing decisions, namely sorting out what to buy and what not (Harahap, 2017). The selection that will later decide from several existing alternatives and has passed the search for information data, considerations that are following what is needed and are the same for the goals that will later get what is expected.

In making a decision, you must determine the steps and process of gathering information regarding the decision. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), there are five indicators in making the purchasing decision process (Fakri et al., 2017), namely: (1) Introduction to Problems, where consumers feel there is a problem or need from internal or external parties before the purchase action. (2) At this stage, information search is more enthusiastic about finding information about the products or services they need to fulfill what is needed. (3) Alternative evaluation, here the consumer considers several alternatives with what is needed, the benefits of the product or service, and which one should be more needed from several existing alternatives. (4) Purchasing Decision, at this stage, the consumer has decided from several considerations after evaluating several alternatives and can meet what is needed. (5) Post-Purchase behavior, after a purchase, whether the consumer is delighted with what they have bought, or on the contrary, the consumer experiences unpleasant conflicts.

The indicators used to choose study programs at private tertiary institutions are by going through the steps of problem recognition, information seeking, alternative evaluation, selection decisions, and post-purchase behavior.

3. Method

The research design used is a quantitative approach and survey explanation. A survey was conducted on new students in Palembang City. The number of respondents in this research was 215, obtained from 5 (five) private universities in Palembang City, South Sumatra Province. The sampling technique was carried out through the distribution of google forms because new students of the 2020 class were still studying at home online due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Data analysis was performed using multiple regression analysis models. There are two independent variables and one dependent variable. Social media and word of mouth are independent variables, and the decision to choose study programs is the dependent variable.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of distributing questionnaires to 215 respondents, it is known that 60% of the respondents were women, while 40% were men. The respondents' choice in study programs is also quite diverse, where most of them are management 30%, accounting 26%, informatics engineering 24%, industrial engineering (17%), and others 3%.

To answer the research hypothesis, regression analysis was used with the help of the SPSS program package, and the model summary results were obtained as in Table 1.

Table 1. Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate

0.883	0.779	0.777	37.04224

Based on Table 1. It can be seen that there is a very close relationship between social media and Word of mouth with the decision to choose a study program in private higher education because the correlation value (R) is 0.883. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.779 indicates that the model formed can explain the variation of the existing data by 77.9%. Simultaneous test results are obtained in Table 2.

Table 2. ANOVA test results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F-value	Sig.
1	Regression	1025520.126	2	512760.063	373.697	.000[b]
	Residual	290891.055	212	1372.128		
	Total	1316411.181	214			

a. Dependent Variable: STUDY PROGRAM SELECTION DECISION
b. Predictors: (Constant), WORD OF MOUTH, SOCIAL MEDIA

Table 2 shows that the F-value of 373.697 with a p-value of 0.000 shows that statistically, social media and Word of mouth together have a significant effect on the decision to choose a study program at a private university. Social media and Word of mouth simultaneously have a significant effect. The more promotion through social media and Word of mouth, the more students choose courses at private tertiary institutions. Prospective students generally lack information about tertiary study programs, so an effective promotion will help prospective students receive information well. Even though vulgar marketing on education is not ethical, to ensure the continuity of operations and improve higher education institutions' reputation, it is necessary to pay much money. On the other hand, the primary source of funding for private universities is from students. Through social media, users can carry out two marketing strategies at once, namely by us doing promotions through social media that can make consumers interested, and the second is by using Word of mouth, which without us realizing it when people comment on what we are marketing (Laddha et al., 2015).

See the factors that have a dominant influence on choosing a study program at higher education can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Coefficient of Regression Analysis Model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	32.084	12.244		2.620	.009
	SOCIAL MEDIA	.308	.060	.302	5.096	.000
	WORD OF MOUTH	.629	.061	.614	10.378	.000

Table 3 shows the results of hypothesis testing for each factor. The social media factor obtained a regression coefficient value of 0.308 with a t-value of 5.096 and a p-value of 0.000, which means that there is a positive and significant influence from social media on choosing a study program in college. The more often they do promotions through social media, the higher the decision to choose a study program in higher education. The Word of mouth factor obtained a regression coefficient value of 0.629 with a t-value of 10.378 and a p-value of 0.000, which means that there is a positive and significant influence of Word of mouth on choosing a study program in college. The higher the Word of mouth, the higher the decision to choose a higher education study program. These results indicate that the Word of mouth factor has a dominant influence on choosing a study program in college compared to other factors, where the magnitude of the influence of Word of mouth on the decision to choose a study program in college is 61.4%.

Word of mouth promotion is the most dominant factor for students in determining the choice of study programs in tertiary institutions. The importance of Word of mouth, especially from the students themselves, can have a positive influence (Bruce & Edgington, 2008). Word of mouth is handy because there used to be many manufacturers who spent tens of millions of dollars to promote their products, but now it is effortless and does not even need to spend as before. People always trust what their friends think, by Word of mouth, and that the right message can resonate, expand, influence brand perception, and increase sales. Many marketers spend millions of dollars on complicated advertising that became popular in the last century. Brands can rely on advertising to get their message across to the world, and Word of mouth does not. In essence, this is the average selling impact of a brand message multiplied by the number of word-of-mouth messages. An inductive theoretical model where there is a significant relationship between electronic Word of mouth (e-WOM) and a brand's value at Higher Education Institutions (Carvalho et al., 2020).

The era of social media started about ten years ago. They are starting with LinkedIn, which was launched in 2003, followed by MySpace and Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, and Twitter in 2006. In less than a decade, the population has multiplied and has reached billions of people worldwide. A study shows that 40% of Fortune 500 companies have accounts on social media sites but have not integrated them into their company websites (i.e., Facebook / Twitter icons are hard to find on their web pages). The more universities use social media, it will also increase reputation because one of the higher education rankings uses web-based assessments (Gunarto & Gaffar, 2016). Through social media nowadays, there is also a way to influence purchasing decisions where now luxury brands also use social media (Bhanot, 2012). In addition to Facebook and YouTube, students use blogs in their study searches. The two most common reasons for using social media are finding out about student life and reading reviews from former students. In the decision-making process, social media is widely used at the information-seeking and evaluation stages. Students' use of social media also varies from country to country (Galan et al., 2015). Marketing through social media can enhance the brand experience, because through social media it can increase brand ties to consumers and in the end consumers without realizing it do Word of mouth with their environment (Zollo et al., 2020).

The findings of this study are in line with the statement by Houston et al (2001) that Word of mouth can be seven times more effective than advertisements in magazines and newspapers, four times more effective than personal selling, and also two times more effective than radio advertising on business that the company makes to influence business. customers to switch to using the previous product (Harahap et al., 2018). Word of mouth about the good things of a university will attract the attention of parents and prospective students so that the university's reputation needs to be built by universities (Gunarto and Gaffar, 2016). Effective college promotion through social media will appeal to prospective students. Private universities that rely on funding from students are expected to implement effective marketing strategies through social media and of course build interesting stories, so that stories will emerge from mouth to mouth.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it is concluded that promotion through social media is a fairly effective marketing strategy, and supported by positive Word of mouth will be able to attract prospective students to decide on their selection of a study program for private tertiary institutions in Palembang city. This study did not fully cover all private universities in Palembang, due to limitations due to the covid-19 outbreak. So it is hoped that further researchers can research all universities in the city of Palembang. This research also does not meet all the characteristics of private universities, so that further research can better meet all the characteristics of private and public universities.

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