



A Compatible Marketing Strategy for the Faculty of Distance Education Institution

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Abstract

As a prominent distance education institution, Universitas Terbuka (UT) plays a vital role in enhancing educational equity for Indonesian citizens by offering flexible and cost-effective learning opportunities. However, the exposure of UT, particularly the Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FKIP), requires further enhancement. The phenomenon that occurs must be addressed by choosing a marketing strategy that targets various groups, particularly millennials. The purpose of this study is to investigate the most compatible marketing strategy for the faculty in distance education institutions. In the initial year of this study, two key questions are explored: First, the optimal strategy for UT, specifically FKIP, to market its study program, and second, the most effective approach to diversify and promote UT's study programs. Employing qualitative research, data was collected from 131 respondents and 80 students across four regional offices, supplemented by insights from marketing experts. The findings reveal the necessity for a balanced approach incorporating both conventional and digital marketing strategies. While the conventional strategy emerged as more effective based on the questionnaire and FGD results, the research highlighted the importance of developing a digital marketing strategy aligned with UT's identity as a cyber university.

Keywords: digital, conventional, marketing, strategy

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Introduction

As the 45th state university, Universitas Terbuka (UT) possesses distinctive attributes, being specifically designated by the Indonesian government to facilitate widespread access to higher education through open and distance learning models. This mandate arises from the recognition that numerous individuals encounter barriers to education due to factors such as age, geographical location, field of work, and others. UT addresses these challenges by offering a diverse range of study programs, tailored to accommodate various fields, including those designed for educators actively engaged in teaching. This strategic approach serves the dual purpose of enhancing the educational qualifications of individuals, particularly teachers while allowing them to seamlessly integrate their studies into their existing professional responsibilities.

The Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FKIP) at UT is entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing this unique educational model. Notably, during the 1990s, many educators faced challenges in obtaining a bachelor's degree or diploma, a requirement mandated by the government (source: metadata.co.id). UT, as an Open and Distance Education Institution or Perguruan Tinggi Terbuka dan Jarak Jauh (PTTJJ), focuses on catering to the market demand for elevating the qualifications of teaching professionals through accessible and flexible educational pathways.

Despite holding a strategic position aimed at training prospective teachers and meeting the national demand for educators, UT faces competition from traditional face-to-face teaching universities that share the same authority in teacher candidate training. UT's unique advantage lies in its inclusive design, allowing it to provide training to prospective teachers from remote areas across Indonesia. Despite its expansive reach, the presence of other universities inevitably influences student enrollment at UT. Over time, as the number of graduated teachers has increased, there has been a noticeable decline in faculty-student enrollment.

The existing scenario underscores the imperative for an enhanced marketing strategy. Marketing stands out as one of the top five reasons why students choose to enroll in a particular designated university (Gerungan et al., 2021). Insights from Nuseir & El Refae (2022) indicate that several factors, such as academic reputation, grants and funding, location and proximity, facilities and services, and promotional and marketing channels, drive students' choices for studying at universities in the UAE. However, crafting an adaptive and effective marketing strategy in line with current trends poses a formidable challenge. The vast coverage of UT complicates the formulation of a singular, all-encompassing marketing strategy, given the diverse population within each region. The geographical and socio-cultural diversity inherent in Indonesia necessitates a tailored approach by universities to effectively reach and attract prospective students.

Ong's research in 2013 (Ong, 2013) emphasizes the importance of creating marketing strategies based on specific clusters that represent distinct areas and cater to the preferences of

students residing in those regions. Considering UT's unique circumstance, drawing students from 34 provinces across Indonesia's expansive geographical landscape, there is a critical need for data gathering. This data will serve as a foundation for crafting a customized marketing strategy that addresses the specific needs and demands of UT. The instrumental objective of this research is to fulfill this necessity, facilitating the development of a targeted marketing strategy aligned with the diverse requirements of UT and its prospective student base.

Conducting research in this area encounters a second challenge, mainly the scarcity of existing studies specifically focusing on marketing for a cyber university. Various studies have explored university marketing, such as Constantinides & Stagno's (2012) investigation into the role of social media in university marketing and the future student market segment based on social media usage, and Kortam & Mahrous's (2020) examination of digital marketing features for university branding, these studies predominantly centered around conventional universities or higher educational institutions. The distinct nature of a cyber or open university, such as UT, sets it apart from conventional institutions. The characteristics and public perception of conventional universities may not be directly applicable to cyber universities. Consequently, insights derived from these studies may have limited relevance to understanding and formulating an effective marketing strategy for UT. This research, therefore, endeavors to bridge this gap by specifically addressing the unique challenges and opportunities associated with marketing a digital university, offering insights that are directly to the context of UT.

An additional study in the marketing domain that provides relevant insights is the research conducted by Wulandari et al., (2021). This study focuses on the significance of service quality in influencing students' decisions when choosing the Faculty of Economics and Business of Muhammadiyah University. It differs from the previously mentioned studies in two key aspects. Firstly, it does not concentrate on digital marketing, similar to the prior studies, but it does share a focus on conventional universities. Secondly, it deviates from its methodology, utilizing a quantitative approach designed to test specific hypotheses rather than exploring marketing issues in-depth. The primary objective of this research was to assess the impact of service marketing on students' decision-making through multiple linear regression analysis, aiming to establish causal relationships. However, it did not delve into more complex samples or diverse participant analysis, particularly lacking the depth found in our qualitative research. Therefore, while informative, this study differs from the current research in terms of methodology and the nuanced exploration of marketing issues.

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) in 2013, marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large. The scope of marketing includes diversified subjects, such as consumer behavior, product management, marketing communication, and brand equity (Liu, 2017). Nowadays, the type of marketing that is important for the organization is digital marketing.

Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or internet. Businesses leverage digital channels such as search engines, social media, email, and their websites to connect with current and prospective customers (Desai, 2019). In simple terms, digital marketing is like a lively online advertising world. With just the touch of a finger, you can find and learn about anything. One of the main goals of digital marketing is to reach target customers more efficiently and effectively through existing digital media. With this target, digital marketing is expected to embrace consumers more quickly, precisely, and broadly (source: <https://www.studilmu.com/blogs/details>).

In the context of UT and FKIP, digital marketing is not a strange item. As a pioneer of open and long-distance universities in Indonesia, UT is very familiar with the world. Currently, the digital marketing function at UT is already working with an increasing number of students at UT

who choose to learn fully online. This phenomenon is also in line with BPS data which shows that in the last 3 years, internet users aged 25 years and over have increasingly shown a significant increase, namely 54.115% in 2018, 55.84% in 2019, and 57.07% in 2020 (source: <https://www.bps.go.id>).

The challenge in finding comparable research stems from the unique position of UT as the only open university in Indonesia. Most existing research on marketing strategy tends to focus on various types of universities, leaving UT in a distinct category. This study is posed to fill this gap by collecting extensive data, aiming to discern patterns that can contribute scientifically valuable recommendations for UT and FKIP stakeholders. In this section, we present responses to the initial set of research questions. The primary question investigates the optimal strategy that UT, specifically FKIP, should adopt to effectively market its study programs. The secondary question delves into identifying the most effective means of diversifying and marketing UT's array of study programs. The comprehensive insights gained from these questions will pave the way for the subsequent phase of the study, facilitating a nuanced understanding of UT's marketing landscape and enabling the formulation of strategic recommendations for key stakeholders. The purpose of this research is to investigate the most compatible marketing strategy in the faculty of distance education institutions.

Methodology

The research was carried out using qualitative research methods. According to Creswell (2014), "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". This approach is designed to delve deeply into issues that occur either to an individual or a group. The study aims to explore the phenomenon of the marketing strategy implemented by FKIP, intending to gain insights into the type and most effective strategies for marketing. Given that the research focuses on a specific issue within a group or organization, the qualitative method is considered the most suitable due to its specialization in this area. According to Creswell & Dand avid Creswell (2018), "Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem." This approach is designed to delve deeply into issues that occur either to an individual or a group.

In this study, various data collection techniques were employed, including interviews, observations, documentation studies, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The application of triangulation, which involves using multiple methods to cross-verify and validate findings, enhances the robustness and credibility of the research. Triangulation helps ensure that the results are not reliant on a single method or perspective, adding depth and reliability to the overall study (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). The selection of these methods aligns with the research goals of addressing the two main research questions. Each method serves a specific purpose, and their combination allows for a comprehensive exploration of the marketing strategy phenomenon at FKIP. These methods not only complement each other but also offer flexibility, enabling the researcher to delve deeper or broaden the scope as needed at different stages of the study.

To make sure the instrument is working, an instrumental development procedure was conducted. The first procedure is underlining a clear objective of the research instrument, and it is for obtaining data from the sample. Second, it needs to be able to find various opinions, ideas, and examples of good practice, that are used by the object to be studied. The last is the instrument needs to be able to lead the data to answer the research questions which are first what kind of strategy UT needs to select particularly for FKIP to market its study programs and the second is what the effective way to diversify and market the study program that UT has.

The study recognizes the practical constraints of encompassing the entire FKIP stakeholders' population, comprising 39 regional offices, all staff, and students. Given limitations in time, manpower, and accessibility, a strategic sampling approach is adopted to ensure meaningful data collection. Sampling involves selecting a representative subset to approximate the characteristics of the entire population. The sample in this study consists of FKIP lecturers, administrators, and social media practitioners. To accommodate the diversity within the sample, various data collection methods such as observation, questionnaire, and FGD are employed. The FGD sessions were conducted in four regional offices, engaging 80 students from Lampung, Palembang, Malang, and Surabaya.

The first data collection technique is observation. This method involves tracking existing marketing forms across various social media platforms, specifically focusing on content related to the field of education. Additionally, observations extend to tracing the distribution data of FKIP students in all UT regional offices. This is done to map the potential of UT regional offices where FKIP student positions are still dominant. The offices with a significant number of students were then sampled for further study, aiming to uncover potential marketing strategies.

After gaining insights through observation, the second instrument, a questionnaire, is developed. The questionnaire serves as a data collection tool for the survey method, which is then distributed to the field. The survey, conducted online, involves 131 selected respondents and aims to measure their general opinions regarding FKIP marketing. Based on the survey results, the third method is applied – Focus Group Discussion (FGD). FGD involves inviting internal and external speakers to discuss the forms of digital marketing to be developed. FGD is not only conducted in the preliminary stage but also during trials. Thus, two FGDs with different characteristics are held. The first FGD aims to gather input on digital marketing forms from various speaker perspectives. Meanwhile, the second FGD is conducted to obtain feedback on the digital marketing forms produced by the researchers (Herdiansyah, 2015).

Results and Discussion

One of the data collection techniques employed by the researchers to address the two research questions is a survey. The survey was initiated by polling FKIP employees to gain insights into the strategies that FKIP should employ in marketing its programs to bolster student enrollment. Respondents were provided with a questionnaire sent via email. A total of 131 respondents participated in this study by completing the online questionnaires. Among FKIP employees who participated in the survey, 54.3% held the functional position of lector. In terms of their educational background, a substantial majority (81.7%) had a background in social humanities. This survey serves as a valuable tool to collect quantitative data and gauge the perspective of FKIP employees on marketing strategies.

The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale, where respondents were prompted to select one of the five available options for each of the questions: Strongly Disagree (StD), Disagree, (D), Slightly Disagree (SD), Slightly Agree (SA), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (StA). this scale allowed respondents to express their levels of agreement or disagreement with the statement provided. The subsequent table illustrates the results derived from the questionnaire, showcasing the distribution of responses across the Likert scale.

Table 1. Questionnaire on marketing strategy

No	Statement	StD	D	SD	SA	A	StA
1	Communication with the Ministry of Education and Culture as the regulator (teacher qualifications and its distribution) remains a reference in finding alternative marketing for FKIP, for example, cooperation options	0%	0.8%	0%	6.9%	57.3%	35.1%
2	Ease of accessibility of the latest information through the https://www.fkip.ut.ac.id page to be at the forefront of marketing study programs at FKIP	0.8%	2.3%	3.8%	9.2%	57.3%	26.7%
3	FKIP must design an effective marketing strategy, including creating and determining the person in charge of FKIP's official social media (official)	0%	0.8%	0.8%	3.1%	60.3%	35.1%
4	Digitalization of marketing media is more appropriate to achieve the target	0.8%	0.8%	0%	5.3%	70.2%	22.9%
5	The selection of digital media that is right on target affects the effectiveness of achieving marketing goals.	0%	0%	0.8%	2.3%	60.3%	36.6%
6	The choice of digital media used is not only one type, for example, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter.	0%	0%	0%	0%	51.1%	48.9%

Table 2. Questionnaire on digital content

No	Statement	StD	D	SD	SA	A	StA
1	Content in digital platforms that become alternatives is adjusted to the media used.	0%	0.8%	0%	0%	67.2%	32.1%
2	The attractiveness of digital materials is the main requirement and is universal	0%	0%	0%	2.3%	54.2%	43.5%
3	In principle, the content must meet the requirements of interest for the targeted object	0%	0%	0%	2.3%	49.6%	48.1%
4	Each study program has alternatives to propose interesting content	0%	0%	0.8%	3.8%	57.3%	38.2%

No	Statement	StD	D	SD	SA	A	StA
	according to the characteristics of the platform used						
5	Digital material development involves experienced 'content creators'	0%	0.8%	0.8%	2.3%	43.5%	52.7%
6	There is one piece of material content that is made incidental according to the moment at hand, which is general, such as religious holidays or others.	0%	0%	0%	10.7%	64.9%	24.4%

Table 3. Questionnaire on marketing in media

No	Statement	StD	D	SD	SA	A	StA
1	Marketing by visiting schools is still important	0%	0%	3.23%	1.61%	51.61%	43.55%
2	The use of flyers, banners, billboards, or billboards, becomes an effective means of marketing	0%	0%	4.76%	7.14%	38.10%	50%
3	Marketing through social media (IG, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter) is effective	0%	0%	0%	0%	9.52%	90.48%
4	Digitalization of marketing media is more appropriate for to use	0%	0%	2.38%	2.38%	38.10%	57.14%
5	Digital marketing is more informative and reaches the target wider	0%	0%	0%	4.76%	21.43%	73.81%
6	The use of content on digital platforms to market the study programs at FKIP is an effective way	0%	0%	2.38%	9.52%	35.72%	52.38%
7	Some content must be prepared and contain important information	0%	0%	0%	0%	28.57%	71.43%
8	The attractiveness of digital materials is something that must be considered	0%	0%	0%	0%	40.48%	59.52%

9	Digital material development involves contemporary content creators	0%	0%	4.76%	14.29%	35.71%	45.24%
10	In addition to the material in general, the development of digital materials for each study program is important	0%	0%	0%	4.76%	45.24%	50%

Description:

StD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, SD=Slightly Disagree, SA= Slightly Agree, A= Agree, StA= Strongly Agree

Based on the outcomes of the questionnaire, both from open and closed questions, it is evident that respondents believe the marketing foundation for the FKIP study program should be digital-based. Endorsements are now perceived to be more effective coming from young individuals interested in education and teacher training, as opposed to traditional figures or officials. The respondents also emphasize that combining digital marketing with visits to various organizations and schools proves to be highly effective. Respondents suggest that FKIP should establish a dedicated team of marketing experts, comprising both content creators and media creators. To enhance marketing effectiveness, FKIP is advised to incorporate communication tools such as WAG Blast and Telegram. This multi-faceted approach is seen as crucial for maximizing marketing efforts.

Another finding is the enthusiasm among participants for the faculty to expand its marketing efforts on more contemporary and mainstream social media platforms. An overwhelming majority, up to 90.48% of participants, expressed strong agreement, with the highest result falling under the “strongly agree” parameter in the questionnaire. This indicates a unanimous belief that marketing through various social media channels, including Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, is an effective strategy. However, it is noteworthy that while there is a high level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of digital media marketing, 71.43% of participants also strongly agree that content preparation is crucial and should contain essential information. This underscores the importance of not only expanding into digital media but also ensuring that the content is well-prepared and informative. Successful execution requires a strategic and well-thought-out approach in addition to the choice of platforms.

In continuation with the earlier discussion, while digital marketing emerged as the favored form based on the survey, another significant marketing strategy identified is the conventional form. Conventional marketing encompasses strategies that do not involve digital features, such as social media. Examples of conventional marketing strategies include school visits, the distribution of brochures, flyers, and various advertisement tools. Additionally, it often involves the involvement of influential alumni, such as local leaders, officers, entrepreneurs, and creative professionals. Despite the solid results in the questionnaire highlighting the significant role of digital media, the data from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) presents a more nuanced and complex picture.

It appears that there is considerable variation in perspectives regarding the importance of conventional and digital marketing, with positions interchanging between the two. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted in four regional offices spanning four provinces: Malang, Palembang, Surabaya, and Lampung. Participants included students, and insights were also gathered from marketing experts. This diverse set of viewpoints contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the significance of both conventional and digital marketing strategies. The

dynamics between these two approaches seem to be complex, reflecting the diverse perspectives gathered during the FGD sessions. As we can see from the excerpt below:

Effective way of marketing for study programs at FKIP:

“Informal marketing, namely through short parodies, can use local public figures in every region that comes from successful alumni.”

In contrast to the perspectives from Malang and Palembang, the FGD in Lampung emphasized the effectiveness of digital marketing as a primary promotional tool. Participants in Lampung suggested that digital marketing holds the most impact for promotion to schools, considered the second-best strategy. This diversity in opinions across regions highlights the complexity and varied effectiveness of marketing strategies, underlining the importance of considering local factors and preferences in promotional efforts.

Strategy and marketing of study programs at FKIP that are effective:

Dissemination of information through social media

The effective way that FKIP must do mapping and more easily reach potential candidates' students according to the needs in the field:

UT must carry out socialization directly

From the combination of findings obtained through the questionnaire and FGD, two important results emerge. The first result addresses the question of what kind of strategy UT, particularly FKIP, should adopt to market its study programs. The answer is two-fold: both conventional and digital strategies. Participants in the FGD and survey demonstrated a clear awareness of these strategies, implicitly distinguishing between digital marketing, such as social media involvement, and conventional marketing, like direct marketing through school visits. While participants may not have scientifically classified these strategies as explicitly as this research has done, the FGD did bring up two digital marketing terms or strategies that are conceptually related to the findings of this research. However, it is worth noting that the experts in digital marketing, according to their statements, did not explicitly recognize the variation in marketing strategies (digital or conventional) within UT. This oversight highlights the importance of this research in bringing attention to the diversity of marketing strategies employed by UT, shedding light on aspects that might have been overlooked by digital marketing experts.

Addressing the second research question on the effective way to diversify and market the study program at UT, particularly FKIP, the study reveals a compelling answer. According to the survey results, digital marketing holds a crucial position in effectively targeting prospective students. A significant 70.2% of respondents agree, with an additional 22.9% strongly agreeing, making it the highest-rated response compared to other questionnaire options.

However, the effectiveness of both digital and conventional marketing strategies is intricately interwoven. Two out of three FGD sessions (Palembang and Malang) indicate that conventional marketing strategies, particularly those involving local influencers who are alumni and direct marketing to schools, are perceived as more influential compared to digital marketing. The FGD, involving 80 participants, suggests that within the UT environment, conventional strategies still hold significance. This finding leads to a noteworthy suggestion from digital marketing experts: FKIP should cultivate and leverage both marketing strategies to achieve the goal of increasing student enrollment. The importance of a balanced approach that incorporates

both digital and conventional methods is emphasized to maximize the effectiveness of marketing initiatives.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the most effective strategy for UT, especially FKIP, in marketing its study programs is a combination of digital and conventional methods. Additionally, an effective approach to promote and market study programs offered by FKIP to the public is through informal and service-oriented social media channels. While the survey emphasizes the effectiveness of digital marketing as the most preferred strategy, the FGD results highlight the significance of conventional methods as well. Combining both digital and conventional strategies is identified as a comprehensive and effective approach to reach the target audience and enhance student enrolment.

Certainly, involving the community in FGD is a valuable suggestion for future research. Community input can provide unique perspectives and insights into what strategies might be essential for effectively promoting the existing study programs at FKIP. This approach ensures that the research is more inclusive and considers the diverse needs and preferences of the community. Additionally, expanding the sample size is a practical recommendation. More samples allow for a more comprehensive analysis, enabling researchers to better understand the realities and nuances of the effectiveness of marketing strategies, particularly in the context of an open university like UT. Comparing a larger sample size can contribute to a more robust evaluation of the efficacy of both conventional and digital marketing strategies. Another suggestion is that the study program should create marketing material with millennial ideas and then spread it on a social media platform that is very familiar to the young generation.

Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest

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