A STUDY ON EVOLUTION OF PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES IN MANAGEMENT INSTITUTES: A POST- PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Prof. Navnath Choudhari
Assistant Professor, Sinhgad Institute of Management & Computer Application, Narhe, Pune.

Dr. Anamika Singh,
Director, PIBM, Pune

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a drastic shift in the promotional strategies of management institutes. Traditional marketing approaches such as print media, physical campus visits, and education fairs were replaced or supplemented by digital marketing techniques, including social media engagement, virtual events, search engine optimization (SEO), and personalized email campaigns. This study explores the evolution of these promotional strategies in management education before, during, and after the pandemic. It examines the challenges faced by institutions, the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies, and the impact on student recruitment, engagement, and institutional branding. The findings offer insights into best practices and future trends that will shape the marketing of higher education institutions in the post-pandemic world.

Keywords

Promotional Strategies, Digital Marketing, Higher Education, Student Recruitment, Management Institutes, Post-Pandemic Marketing

Introduction

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted various sectors, including higher education, compelling management institutes to reassess their marketing and promotional strategies. With restrictions on physical interactions and increased reliance on virtual platforms, traditional marketing methods became less effective. This paper investigates how management institutes adapted their promotional strategies to the changing landscape and evaluates the impact of these adaptations on institutional growth and student engagement.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the challenges faced by management institutes in promoting their programs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. To analyze the transition from traditional marketing strategies to digital marketing approaches in management education.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of various digital marketing strategies, including social media, SEO, webinars, and virtual engagement tools, in student recruitment and brand positioning.
4. To assess the impact of post-pandemic promotional strategies on student enrollment, engagement, and institutional reputation.

5. To explore the role of technology-driven innovations in reshaping marketing strategies for management institutes.
6. To identify best practices and future trends in the marketing of higher education institutions in a post-pandemic world.

Research Methodology

This study employs a secondary research approach, utilizing data from academic journals, industry reports, institutional case studies, and online publications. A qualitative analysis of the shift in marketing strategies is conducted to understand their effectiveness and impact on student enrollment and institutional branding.

Literature Review

(Delio I. Castaneda, & Sergio Cuellar 2024) specifies that, between 2015 and 2019, the main focus areas in business education were entrepreneurship, sustainability, international business, globalization, and disaster management. However, in 2020 and 2021, during the pandemic, the key topics shifted to entrepreneurship, management education, business simulations, artificial intelligence, sustainability, and corporate social responsibility. This study is the first to compare research in business education before and during the main pandemic years. The findings show that, despite the challenges, research during the first two years of the pandemic did not fully adapt to meet the changing needs of businesses and organizations.

(Meg Jay, 2020) elaborates that; Business and Management education has had to adjust to the new normal brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Normally, it involves classroom discussions, case studies, data analysis, and personality development to prepare students for placements and internships. But with the pandemic, both students and teachers had to switch to working from home, trying to maintain the same energy and focus. Faculty and staff had to quickly learn new ways to connect with students using tools like Zoom and Webex, which existed before but were not used as seriously. These platforms became essential for lectures and training. At first, people were unsure and scared, like something invisible and dangerous was out there. Even stepping outside felt risky. Both students and faculty felt anxious, but they adapted and continued learning and teaching from the safety of their homes.

(Mahesh Vyas, 2020) signifies that, Students were confused and uncertain about their future during the pandemic. They missed college life, including friends, canteen time, movies, trips, and creative events. Lockdowns stopped regular classes, which shifted to online platforms like Zoom, MS Teams, and Google Meet. Exams and assessments were disrupted, and internships and job placements slowed down. This led to financial challenges for colleges, including a drop in fees, making it harder to manage expenses. Many students in private institutions struggled to pay their fees, and counseling services were affected too. Some colleges avoided hiring new faculty, which affected quality. Major entrance exams for management courses were also postponed, creating more stress for private universities. Faculty faced salary cuts and delays in incentives, and scholarships became harder to access. This could reduce interest in foreign education. Employment was another major concern, as fresh graduates were unsure about leaving their current jobs. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), unemployment in India jumped from 8.4% to 23% in early April 2020, with metro cities seeing rates as high as 30.9%.

(Sahu, 2020) denotes that, the outbreak of COVID-19 has affected people all over the world. As the number of cases grew quickly, it created fear and uncertainty. Students and university staff felt a lot of stress during this time. This pressure has had a negative impact on students' education, as well as their physical and mental health.

(Khandelwal, 2020) represents that, nearly 50% of students in India come from rural areas. Due to the pandemic, colleges, hostels, and other facilities were shut down, so many students returned to their hometowns. While they try to attend online classes, they often face network and connectivity problems. Another big issue is the cost of internet access—many students are not willing or able to afford it. In addition, most students do not own laptops or tablets. Although smartphones are common in India, attending classes on mobile phones has its own limitations, making learning more difficult.

(Danish Khan, 2019) symbolizes that, over the past 100 years, business education has evolved from theory-based learning to case studies and now to simulations. This journey has been challenging but rewarding for universities and institutes. However, the COVID-19 pandemic brought a sudden shift—faculty had to start teaching from home using platforms like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams. These tools, once rarely used, became essential. The pandemic taught everyone the importance of being digitally skilled in today's world. Now, instead of greeting students with a "Good morning," teachers often start classes by asking, "Am I audible?" or "Am I visible?" because they're unsure if the technology is working properly. Since this mode of teaching is still new, many teachers face issues with audio and video quality. In India, poor internet connectivity and bandwidth problems—despite the availability of 4G—make online teaching even more difficult due to low-cost services and high competition among providers.

(Yogesh D Mahajan, 2021) indicates that, the coronavirus pandemic has completely changed how business education is delivered around the world. This paper highlights the challenges faced by institutes while teaching students during this time. Problems like poor internet connectivity, low student participation, new ways of assessments, and final exams were major concerns. To deal with these issues, institutes used ideas from other colleges, industry forums like the Association of Indian Universities, and their own faculty members. Teachers helped by coming up with creative solutions like snap quizzes, free internet support, case study discussions, and simulations. Although the journey has been tough for both students and faculty, these efforts have helped them adapt and continue learning in the new normal.

(Danish Khan, 2019) represents that, faculty face many challenges while teaching online. One major issue is that students are often not willing to interact during digital classes. They feel shy or uncomfortable, mostly because they are used to learning in a classroom with their friends. Now, they are learning alone, without the emotional and social support of classmates. Most students also keep their cameras off, making it hard for teachers to see their expressions or know if they are following the lesson. In a physical classroom, a teacher could understand a student's mood or confusion just by looking at them. But online, it's hard to tell how students are feeling or if they really understand the topic. This becomes even more difficult in large classes with 40– 50 students. Teachers find it challenging to keep students engaged in such a setting. When asked, students often mention problems like poor internet connection, low bandwidth, or issues with charging their

devices as reasons for not participating actively.

Pre-Pandemic Promotional Strategies
Before the onset of COVID-19, management institutes primarily depended on traditional marketing methods to attract prospective students. These included print and television advertisements, campus visits, participation in educational fairs, word-of-mouth marketing, and one-on-one personal counseling sessions. While these approaches were widely used and somewhat effective, they came with their own set of challenges. Institutes faced intense competition, struggled with limited geographical reach, and incurred high marketing costs. Despite the personal touch offered by these methods, their overall scalability and efficiency remained constrained in a rapidly evolving education landscape.

Transition to Digital Marketing during the Pandemic

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated the shift from traditional to digital marketing among management institutes. With physical interactions restricted, institutes swiftly embraced a range of digital strategies to maintain engagement with prospective students. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube became essential tools for building connections and showcasing campus life, achievements, and student testimonials. Virtual events such as online open houses, campus tours, and webinars replaced in-person sessions, offering interactive and informative experiences remotely. To enhance online visibility, many institutes invested in Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay-Per-Click (PPC) advertising, ensuring that their websites ranked higher in search results. Additionally, personalized communication through email and WhatsApp became increasingly important, allowing institutes to offer individualized counseling and maintain regular contact with interested candidates. This digital transformation not only bridged the communication gap during the pandemic but also laid the foundation for more flexible and cost-effective marketing strategies moving forward.

Findings and Discussion
Challenges Faced in Promotional Strategies:
Promotional strategies in business education have faced various challenges across different phases. Before the pandemic, institutes struggled with high marketing costs, limited reach to international students, and minimal use of digital tools. During the pandemic, physical interactions were restricted, marketing budgets were reduced, and there was a sudden reliance on technology-driven methods, which required quick adaptation. In the post-pandemic period, the main challenge is finding the right balance through a hybrid approach that effectively combines both traditional and digital marketing strategies to reach a wider audience and remain competitive.

Effectiveness of Digital Marketing Strategies:

Digital marketing strategies have proven to be highly effective for educational institutes, especially during and after the pandemic. Many institutes observed increased student engagement through interactive tools like virtual campus tours and webinars, which helped bridge the gap caused by the lack of physical interaction. Social media campaigns played a vital role in boosting brand awareness and expanding global reach. Additionally, the use of AI-driven chatbots and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) tools significantly improved the management of student queries, offering quick and personalized responses, thereby enhancing the overall student experience.

Impact on Student Enrollment and Engagement:

Digital outreach led to a noticeable rise in online applications, as more students became aware of programs through targeted digital campaigns. Institutes that utilized influencer marketing and shared alumni testimonials saw greater student interest and interaction, as these strategies built trust and relatability. Additionally, students began to favor hybrid learning and marketing models, appreciating the flexibility and accessibility they offer. This shift marked a significant change in how students engage with educational institutions.

Best Practices and Future Trends:

1. **Hybrid Marketing Approach:** Combining digital engagement with traditional outreach methods.
2. **Personalization Through AI & Data Analytics:** Utilizing predictive analytics for targeted student recruitment.
3. **Increased Focus on Content Marketing:** Blogs, podcasts, and video marketing to enhance visibility.
4. **Virtual Reality (VR) Campus Tours:** Offering immersive experiences for remote students.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a major turning point in the way management institutes approached their marketing and promotional strategies. Traditional methods such as physical events, advertisements, and personal counseling proved inadequate in a world restricted by lockdowns and social distancing. As a result, institutes were compelled to rapidly adopt digital marketing strategies, leveraging tools like social media, webinars, virtual tours, AI-driven chatbots, and CRM systems. These strategies not only helped institutions maintain continuity in student outreach and engagement but also significantly enhanced their brand visibility and reach.

The findings of this study highlight that while digital marketing introduced cost-efficiency, broader outreach, and personalized communication, it also brought challenges like poor internet access, digital fatigue, and lower student interaction, especially in rural areas. Despite these hurdles, institutes that creatively embraced technology witnessed better student engagement, increased online applications, and stronger institutional branding.

As the higher education sector moves into the post-pandemic era, a hybrid approach blending the strengths of both traditional and digital marketing has emerged as the most effective strategy. Personalized outreach using AI, content-rich digital platforms, influencer and alumni engagement, and immersive technologies like virtual campus tours are shaping the future of educational marketing. By learning from the crisis and adopting best practices, management institutes can position themselves more strategically in an increasingly competitive and digital world.

Hence, the evolution of promotional strategies in management institutes has been driven by the necessity to adapt to changing circumstances brought by the pandemic. While digital marketing

has proven to be an effective tool for student recruitment and brand positioning, a balanced hybrid approach integrating both traditional and digital strategies will be essential moving forward. Institutions that embrace technological advancements and data-driven marketing strategies will be better positioned to attract and retain students in an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

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