



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Development of Integrated Digital Marketing Communication Model and Factors Influencing Study Selection in Private Universities

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This study develops an integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) model and identifies factors influencing students' decisions to enroll in private universities. With the rise of digital media in Thailand, private universities face challenges in maintaining student enrollments. This research examines the impact of digital technology, market orientation, branding, integrated digital marketing communication, and marketing performance. Data were collected through surveys and in-depth interviews with marketing officers. The quantitative analysis utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between variables. Findings indicate that digital technology significantly influences DIMC (direct effect size of 0.396, $p < 0.01$), market orientation significantly impacts DIMC (direct effect size of 0.295, $p < 0.01$), and branding has a significant effect on DIMC (direct effect size of 0.230, $p < 0.01$). Additionally, DIMC significantly influences marketing performance (direct effect size of 0.272, $p < 0.01$). The qualitative analysis highlighted the benefits and challenges of using digital technology and social media for university marketing. These results underscore the importance of strategic planning, data-driven decision-making, and consistent branding in enhancing marketing effectiveness and sustaining long-term success in private universities.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Thailand has transitioned into the Thailand 4.0 era, where social media is increasingly leveraged as a crucial tool for policy implementation. Digital media, as a social tool, significantly impacts the daily lives of citizens, with internet usage on the rise primarily due to easy access and widespread network coverage. The median mobile internet speed stands at 37.85 Mbps, while fixed internet speed is at 205.63 Mbps, showing an 18-20% increase from the previous year. On average, Thais spend about 8 hours and 6 minutes online daily, with approximately 5 hours on smartphones and 3 hours on computers or tablets. A significant portion, 64.9%, uses the internet to search for information, 58.1% for news updates, and 54.8% for entertainment, such as watching videos, TV shows, or movies. Social media usage is also substantial, with 52.25 million users, accounting for 72.8% of the population. Among these platforms, Facebook is the most popular, followed by LINE, Facebook Messenger, TikTok, and Instagram, reflecting the platforms' ad reach and user preferences (We Are Social, 2023).

Despite the high internet usage rates, private universities in Thailand have faced a declining trend in student enrollments over the past several years, particularly at the master's and doctoral levels since 2021. The decline is attributed to various factors, including higher tuition fees compared to public universities, lack of distinct marketing activities, and insufficient educational quality in some private

institutions, such as language proficiency, which remains low in international rankings (Taworn P. & Phengsakkoed S., 2019).

In response to these challenges, many private universities have adopted integrated digital marketing communication strategies, focusing on online platforms. For instance, Sripatum University established an Office of Online Education Management in June 2010 to promote e-University initiatives, supporting e-Learning courses across various faculties (Sripatum University, 2023). Similarly, Bangkok University utilizes platforms like Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams, and BUCV to facilitate online learning (Bangkok University, 2020). Other universities have also diversified their online communication channels, such as the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, which operates an official website in three languages (Thai, English, and Chinese) and a Facebook page with over 300,000 followers (University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2024).

The importance of Digital Integrated Marketing Communication (DIMC) lies in its potential to generate significant revenue, exchange knowledge, and build relationships among individuals and organizations. It enhances brand awareness and consumer confidence in purchasing products or services through various social media platforms, such as Facebook, X, YouTube, Instagram, and LINE. According to Kotler (2003), marketing communication involves multiple channels like advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and personal selling to clearly communicate with consumers, thus promoting organizational products and services (Delozier, 1976).

Given the high internet usage among educational groups but a declining trend in new student enrollments in private universities, this research aims to address these issues through the development of an integrated digital marketing communication model and identify factors influencing students' decisions to enroll in private universities. The study seeks to fill the gap in existing literature by examining the causal factors affecting digital marketing communication and enrollment decisions in private higher education institutions.

The research will explore five latent variables: Digital Technology, Market Orientation, Branding, Integrated Digital Marketing Communication (DIMC), and Marketing Performance. The findings are expected to provide significant insights into enhancing digital marketing strategies for private universities, aligning them with the behaviors of prospective students and the broader educational industry. The study will also offer academic benefits, enabling scholars, researchers, and students to integrate and further develop empirical findings for future academic endeavors.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the factors that contribute to integrated digital marketing communication affecting the decision to enroll in private universities.
2. To examine the influence of causal factors in integrated digital marketing communication on the decision to enroll in private universities.
3. To develop a model of causal factors in integrated digital marketing communication that impacts the decision to enroll in private universities

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concepts and theories related to integrated digital marketing communication

Integrated Digital Marketing Communication (DIMC) refers to the coordinated use of various digital marketing tools and platforms to deliver a consistent message and create a seamless experience for the target audience. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2017), DIMC involves aligning marketing messages across different digital channels, such as websites, social media, and email, to maximize reach and impact, ensuring the message is clear and consistent across all platforms. Vollero et al. (2019) emphasize that DIMC facilitates dynamic and interactive engagement with consumers, crucial in the digital marketplace. Similarly, Asha and Verma (2019) highlight the significant role of digital marketing channels in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. Khruanamkham and Joemsittiprasert (2019) note that online marketing and applications are pivotal in understanding

consumer behavior, allowing businesses to tailor their strategies accordingly. Braciničková and Matušínská (2020) discuss the importance of integrating digital marketing with brand management, arguing that DIMC is vital for building a strong brand presence and enhancing brand recognition and loyalty. Chomiak-Orsa and Liszczyk (2020) explain that DIMC encompasses the relationship between communication and marketing, ensuring the marketing message is effectively conveyed and received. Febriyanto and Wright (2020) highlight the use of digital media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, in promoting businesses and engaging with a broader audience. Fong Yee Chan (2020) describes DIMC as the subtle presentation of products or brands in digital media, integrating marketing messages into content in a way that captures the audience's interest without being overtly promotional. In summary, DIMC is essential for businesses to effectively reach and engage with consumers in the digital age by leveraging various digital platforms to deliver a cohesive and impactful marketing message.

Concepts and theories related to digital technology

Digital technology refers to the use of digital tools and techniques to support work, communication, marketing, and problem-solving in today's digital world, enhancing operational efficiency and daily life by enabling more effective work processes, increasing convenience, and fostering better relationships with users and customers (Vollero, Schultz, & Siano, 2019). Characterized by its adaptability and responsiveness to contemporary society and business needs, digital technology ensures high efficiency in various applications (Nandy & Roy, 2022). Key components include social media engagement, usability, and online business perception. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok facilitate broad audience reach and information sharing (Dahiya & Gayatri, 2019). Usability focuses on how effectively users interact with technology to achieve their goals, emphasizing ease of use and accessibility (João Coelho Soares et al., 2020). Online business perception involves understanding customer interactions and preferences to enhance marketing strategies and satisfaction (Francina & Harini, 2018). Digital technology plays a crucial role in marketing and communication by facilitating advertising, promotion, and sales through various digital channels, helping businesses maintain and attract new customers while building brand loyalty. It includes the use of websites, social media, and other online tools to create customer relationships and promote products or services (Mañosca, Poyaoan, & Vitug, 2022). In summary, digital technology is integral to modern business operations and communication, enabling businesses to improve efficiency, convenience, and customer engagement, and effectively achieve their marketing and operational goals.

Concepts and theories related to marketing orientation

Marketing orientation is a business approach that prioritizes understanding and fulfilling the needs and desires of customers, essential for long-term success in a competitive market. It involves three main components: customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination. Customer orientation focuses on understanding and addressing the specific needs of target customers, ensuring superior value and long-term relationships (Chiquan Guo & Yong Wang, 2015; Łukasz Łysik & Karol Łopaciński, 2019). Competitor orientation involves analyzing competitors' strategies to improve one's own offerings, enhancing customer satisfaction and retention. Inter-functional coordination refers to the collaboration of different departments to achieve a unified marketing strategy, crucial for creating a cohesive business environment that can adapt to market changes (Vollero, Schultz, & Siano, 2019). Marketing orientation also emphasizes creating a distinct market presence by developing strong customer relationships and ensuring products stand out from competitors (Rogala, 2021). This approach helps businesses adapt to market dynamics and achieve long-term success by delivering superior value to customers (Huan Chen et al., 2021). In summary, marketing orientation is a strategic approach that involves understanding customer needs, analyzing competitor activities, and coordinating internal functions to create a competitive and customer-centric market approach, ensuring businesses can effectively meet market demands and sustain long-term success.

Concepts and theories about brand equity

Brand equity refers to the value and strength of a brand in the marketplace, derived from consumer perceptions, associations, and loyalty. Key components include brand attributes, benefits, value, and personality. Brand attributes, such as product quality, design, and features, distinguish a brand from competitors and contribute to consumer trust and preference (Keller, 2013; Keller & Parameswaran, 2016; Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Brand benefits are the perceived advantages that align with consumer needs and desires, playing a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and loyalty (Keller, 2013; Keller & Parameswaran, 2016). Brand value represents the overall worth of a brand as perceived by the market, often translating into higher prices and market share. Brand personality involves human traits attributed to a brand, making it relatable and appealing, thus fostering emotional connections and loyalty. In summary, brand equity encompasses these components, collectively influencing consumer perceptions, trust, and loyalty, ultimately determining a brand's success. By focusing on these elements, businesses can enhance their brand equity, ensuring long-term competitiveness and customer loyalty.

Concepts and theories on marketing performance

Marketing performance is a critical metric that evaluates the effectiveness of a company's marketing strategies in achieving business goals, encompassing sales, market share, customer satisfaction, and return on marketing investment. Kotler and Keller (2016) define it as the outcome of planning, executing, and evaluating marketing activities to efficiently achieve business objectives. Keller and Parameswaran (2016) emphasize tracking progress and adjusting strategies to increase sales, brand value, and customer satisfaction. Key components of marketing performance include decision-making, customer loyalty, and business sustainability. Decision-making uses marketing data to inform strategic choices, impacting resource allocation (Kotler & Armstrong, 2017). Customer loyalty measures commitment to a brand and repeat purchases, indicating long-term success (Nguyen & Simmons, 2019). Business sustainability reflects the company's ability to maintain and grow its market position, adapting to changes. Kotler and Armstrong (2017) assert that marketing performance involves achieving goals effectively, measured through sales, profit, market share, customer satisfaction, and return on investment. Nguyen and Simmons (2019) describe it as evaluating digital marketing and organizational performance, influencing brand awareness and trust. Morgan, Vorhies, and Mason (2019) highlight adaptability in responding to market and customer demands, crucial for continuous improvement and aligning strategies with evolving environments. In summary, marketing performance assesses how well strategies contribute to business objectives, focusing on decision-making, customer loyalty, and sustainability to enhance effectiveness and drive long-term success.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology: The research process began with a comprehensive literature review to construct the theoretical framework and identify relevant variables. This review involved analyzing 350 articles, from which 100 were selected as particularly useful. These articles were categorized under various latent variables including integrated digital marketing communication, digital technology, market orientation, branding, and marketing performance.

Quantitative research: A survey was designed based on the literature review, with the questionnaire being crafted to measure variables at different levels. The survey includes questions related to demographic information, digital technology, market orientation, branding, integrated digital marketing communication, and marketing performance. Each section employs a variety of measurement scales, including nominal, ordinal, and interval scales, to ensure comprehensive data collection.

Qualitative research: The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with key informants selected through purposive sampling. These informants, numbering five or until data saturation, were individuals well-versed in digital marketing and education marketing. The interviews were

semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring additional relevant issues that emerged during discussions. The data from these interviews were analyzed using content analysis to identify key themes and insights.

Data analysis: For the quantitative analysis, statistical methods such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were used to test the relationships between variables. Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) provided a summary of the data, while inferential statistics, including Pearson correlation and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), helped in understanding the relationships and validating the constructs.

SEM was employed to evaluate the model fit, with indices such as Chi-Square, CFI, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, and SRMR being used to assess the model's alignment with the empirical data. These indices ensured that the model accurately represented the data collected and met the necessary statistical thresholds.

Ethical considerations: The research adhered to ethical guidelines set by the university and national research standards. The study obtained ethical approval, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, benefits, and their rights, including the right to withdraw without any consequences. Research Instrument

RESULTS

1. The general information of the respondents

The majority of the survey respondents were male, with 283 individuals accounting for 78.6% of the total. Female respondents comprised 77 individuals, making up 21.4%. Most respondents were studying in the Faculty of Business Administration, with 64 individuals representing 17.8%. In terms of social media usage, Instagram was the most popular platform, used by 98 respondents, which is 27.2% of the total. Additionally, a significant portion of respondents, 200 individuals or 55.6%, reported spending more than 3 hours per day on social media platforms.

2. Opinions on digital technology, market orientation, brand equity, integrated digital marketing communication, and marketing performance

- **Digital technology:** Overall, respondents rated their opinion on digital technology highly, with an average score of 3.81. Among the specific aspects, social media engagement (3.81), usability (3.81), and online business perception (3.81) all received equal scores, indicating a uniformly high level of positive feedback across these dimensions.
- **Market orientation:** Respondents' opinions on market orientation were also very positive, with an overall average score of 4.05. The highest ratings within this category were for inter-functional coordination (4.07), followed closely by competitor orientation (4.05) and customer orientation (4.03), showing strong approval in these critical areas of market orientation.
- **Brand equity:** The overall perception of brand equity was rated highly by respondents, with an average score of 3.98. When broken down, brand personality received the highest rating (4.00), followed by brand attributes (3.98), brand value (3.97), and facilities and amenities (3.98), reflecting a well-rounded positive view of brand equity.
- **Integrated digital marketing communication:** The integrated digital marketing communication aspect received an overall high rating of 4.08. The most highly rated sub-component was sales promotion (4.11), followed by personal selling (4.09), advertising (4.08), public relations (4.06), and direct marketing (4.05), indicating a robust positive response to the various facets of digital marketing communication.
- **Marketing performance:** Lastly, respondents' opinions on marketing performance were very favorable, with an overall score of 4.01. The highest ratings were given to brand loyalty (4.05), followed by market sustainability (4.03), and the intention to continue studying at the

institution (3.96), highlighting strong marketing performance in maintaining loyalty and sustainability.

These results indicate a strong positive perception across all surveyed areas, emphasizing the effectiveness and high regard for the digital and marketing strategies employed.

3. Model fit indices for the causal factors model of building project control impacting design quality and construction success

The initial analysis of the model revealed that the fit indices did not meet the predetermined criteria, indicating that the model did not adequately fit the empirical data. To address this, model modifications were undertaken by adjusting parameters to allow for correlated errors. After these adjustments, the overall model fit indices indicated a good fit with the empirical data. The seven key indices all met the acceptance criteria: Chi-Square (χ^2) = 127.254, degrees of freedom (df) = 1.018, p-value = 0.427, RMSEA = 0.007, SRMR = 0.034, CFI = 0.999, GFI = 0.963, and AGFI = 0.950. Specifically, the Chi-Square/df ratio was less than 2, both RMSEA and SRMR were less than 0.05, and CFI, GFI, and AGFI were all greater than 0.95, approaching 1. These results indicate that the structural equation model is well-aligned with the empirical data, demonstrating an acceptable and satisfactory model fit.

4. Hypothesis testing: The hypothesis testing results provide insights into the relationships between digital technology, market orientation, branding, integrated digital marketing communication, and marketing performance.

H1: Digital technology influences integrated digital marketing communication. The results show that digital technology (DT) has a significant direct influence on integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) with a direct effect size of 0.396, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, H1 is accepted.

H2: Market orientation influences integrated digital marketing communication. The analysis indicates that market orientation (MO) significantly impacts integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) with a direct effect size of 0.295, statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Consequently, H2 is accepted.

H3: Branding influences integrated digital marketing communication. Branding (Brand Equity: BE) is found to have a significant direct influence on integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) with a direct effect size of 0.230, statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, H3 is accepted.

H4: Integrated digital marketing communication influences marketing performance. The findings reveal that integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) significantly influences marketing performance (MP) with a direct effect size of 0.272, statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, H4 is accepted.

H5: Digital technology influences marketing performance. Digital technology (DT) significantly affects marketing performance (MP) with a direct effect size of 0.281 and an indirect effect size of 0.108, both statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Hence, H5 is accepted.

H6: Market orientation influences marketing performance. Market orientation (MO) shows a significant impact on marketing performance (MP) with a direct effect size of 0.244 and an indirect effect size of 0.080, statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Thus, H6 is accepted.

H7: Branding influences marketing performance. Branding (Brand Equity: BE) significantly influences marketing performance (MP) with a direct effect size of 0.284 and an indirect effect size of 0.063, statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Consequently, H7 is accepted.

These results collectively underscore the critical roles of digital technology, market orientation, and branding in enhancing both integrated digital marketing communication and overall marketing performance.

5. The qualitative analysis results

In this study, purposive sampling was employed, targeting five marketing officers from large private university admission centers. The criteria for selection included officers responsible for university marketing communications and with at least two years of experience. In-depth interviews were conducted via telephone to gather practical insights and real-world experiences regarding university marketing from the perspective of these officers. The interview guide comprised ten key questions to facilitate comprehensive discussions, with results summarized as follows:

- **Digital technology:** The respondents highlighted that social media platforms enable students to quickly and easily access information about courses, scholarships, admissions, and university events, thereby increasing confidence in their decision to enroll. However, the complexity and potential confusion of information, along with slow responses from the university, were noted as negative impacts.
- **Digital technology:** The university's approach to promoting the use of social media was deemed appropriate by respondents. The universities support the use of these platforms to enhance convenience and speed in providing services such as admissions, inquiries, and other student services, thereby building interest and confidence in the university.
- **Market orientation:** Respondents believed that the university's goals, missions, and educational strategies were appropriately defined. They appreciated the continuous development of curricula to meet student and labor market needs, the emphasis on technology, and the provision of facilities such as co-working spaces, libraries, cafes, and meeting rooms that cater to student needs.
- **Market orientation:** Most students were satisfied with their chosen courses. Even if initial dissatisfaction occurred, students tended to switch departments or courses within the same university rather than leaving, due to the university's ongoing curriculum development and comprehensive facilities.
- **Brand equity:** The image of the university was considered crucial by respondents for influencing student and parent decisions. They emphasized the importance of maintaining a modern and appropriate image, effective communication, and up-to-date courses and facilities that align with the digital age, which collectively enhance the university's appeal.
- **Brand equity:** Students' positive attitudes towards the university were attributed to high-quality services, effective communication, quality curricula, and expert faculty, which matched the marketing messages conveyed prior to their decision to enroll. This alignment created a positive university image among students and parents.
- **Integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC):** Respondents noted that careful planning and meetings before marketing communications were essential to ensure the quality and relevance of the university's media. The use of diverse media and engaging activities were seen as key to attracting attention and creating a positive image.
- **Integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC):** Enhancements in advertising and public relations should focus on diversity and aligning with student needs. The university should plan and execute marketing communications efficiently, using appealing content, humor, and engaging learning experiences. Attractive promotions and discounts were also recommended to boost competitiveness and student attraction.
- **Marketing performance:** Advertising and public relations were deemed effective by respondents. The university should prioritize planning and improving communications to align with the target audience's needs and behaviors. Highlighting the university's expertise and ensuring the quality of facilities and curricula were seen as vital for attracting new students.
- **Marketing performance:** Sustainability in advertising and public relations for student recruitment was viewed as achievable by tailoring content to current trends, using realistic imagery and videos, and continuously evaluating and refining

strategies. Emphasizing the university's reputation, rankings, and familiarity would help in maintaining student attraction over the long term.

These qualitative insights provide valuable perspectives on the practical and strategic aspects of university marketing, underscoring the importance of aligning marketing efforts with student needs, preferences, and technological advancements.

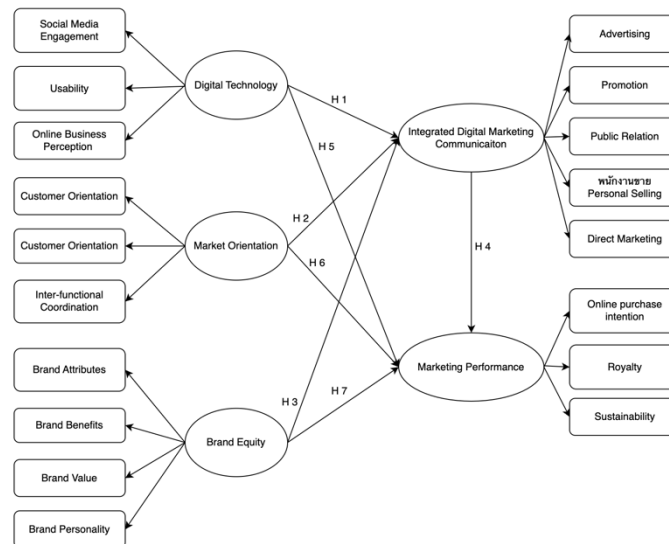


Figure 1: Causal model of factors in integrated digital marketing communication

CONCLUSION

The study on the development of an integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) model and factors influencing the decision to study at private universities revealed significant insights across multiple dimensions. The general respondent profile indicated a male majority, with many students from the Faculty of Business Administration. Social media usage was prevalent, particularly on Instagram, with many respondents spending more than three hours daily on these platforms.

Respondents expressed high satisfaction with digital technology, market orientation, brand equity, integrated digital marketing communication, and marketing performance. Digital technology received uniformly high ratings across aspects like social media engagement, usability, and online business perception. Market orientation was highly rated, especially in inter-functional coordination, competitor orientation, and customer orientation. Brand equity received positive feedback, particularly in brand personality and attributes. Integrated digital marketing communication was well-regarded, with sales promotion and personal selling receiving the highest ratings. Marketing performance was also rated favorably, highlighting brand loyalty and market sustainability.

The model fit indices for the causal factors model initially did not meet the criteria but adjustments led to a good fit with empirical data, demonstrating the model's alignment. Hypothesis testing results confirmed the significant roles of digital technology, market orientation, and branding in enhancing both integrated digital marketing communication and overall marketing performance. All hypotheses were accepted, showing significant direct and indirect influences of these factors on marketing performance.

Qualitative analysis provided deeper insights through in-depth interviews with marketing officers. Respondents highlighted the benefits and challenges of digital technology and social media for university marketing. They emphasized the importance of market orientation, aligning goals and strategies with student needs and market demands. Brand equity was crucial for influencing student decisions, with effective communication and modern facilities enhancing the university's appeal. Integrated digital marketing communication was noted for its role in planning and executing diverse and engaging marketing strategies. Effective advertising and public relations were deemed essential

for attracting and retaining students, with an emphasis on aligning communications with current trends and continuously refining strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the application of integrated digital marketing communication (DIMC) and improve the effectiveness of marketing strategies in private universities:

- **Academic Benefits:** The research provides insights into the causal factors influencing DIMC and their impact on students' enrollment decisions. These findings can enhance marketing clarity and relevance, meeting the needs of students and parents effectively. Incorporating engaging activities and up-to-date content can improve students' perception and satisfaction, increasing their interest and confidence in choosing the university.
- **Business Benefits:** Effective DIMC, as highlighted by marketing officers, can enhance planning and systematic meetings, optimizing advertising and public relations expenditures. Improved communication strategies can lead to higher student satisfaction and increased use of supplementary services such as special courses, activities, and university facilities, thereby boosting overall revenue.
- **Practical Application of Research Findings:** Research outcomes can be used to align marketing plans with student behavior and needs, ensuring accurate and targeted communication. By leveraging research data, universities can update and enhance their marketing materials to be more appealing and modern. The use of realistic images, videos, and diverse media can effectively attract students, build confidence in course quality and facilities, and improve the university's image and enrollment rates.
- **Future Research Directions:** Future studies should expand the sample size to include diverse participants, such as students from various faculties, parents, and educational staff, to obtain more comprehensive data. Exploring additional factors influencing enrollment decisions, such as campus environment, financial support, and post-graduation employment opportunities, can provide deeper insights. Investigating the impact of emerging technologies like AI, big data analytics, and social media platforms on marketing communication can further enhance understanding. Employing in-depth analytical methods such as content analysis, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis can yield more detailed and accurate findings.

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