

INTERNET MARKETING APPROACHES IN PROMOTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS*

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Abstract: *Purpose of this paper is to analyze the perceived importance of Internet marketing in the higher education institutions in Croatia, exploring both the private and public sector. Two sectors of higher education institutions are compared with aim to explore their difference in recognizing the importance of Internet presence. Also, aim of this study was to explore undergoing marketing activities in those institutions. An empirical study on a sample of professors in public and private higher education institutions in Croatia has been conducted. The results of the empirical research confirmed that the differences are present between the two different types of higher education institutions in perception of its importance and usage of Internet marketing activities. Furthermore, paper presents the implications for decision-makers in higher education institutions.*

Key words: *marketing, Internet marketing, higher education institutions, promotion of higher education institutions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Focus on Internet marketing is becoming an imperative with creating an integrated marketing communication of all organizations, including educational organizations. The fact is that target groups in higher education institutions (high school students, seniors, and college students) are the first ones to accept new technologies and implement them in their everyday lives. Target group has the need to make their communications networks thick and multi-layered [1] therefore they turn to online communication. Moreover, the Internet is the most important source of information while choosing a higher education institution [2]. Higher education institutions should follow trends and advertise themselves in a way that reaches their target groups. Although, Internet marketing is being used more and more in the educational sector, the knowledge of using it is not so widely spread [3].

While analyzing Internet marketing authors came to a disagreement in the terminology [4]. Most used terms are Internet, electronic, digital and interactive marketing, and differences between them are not significant enough to consider them as different concepts. The difference in e-marketing [5] entails the process of creating an offer, setting the price, distribution and promotion with an aim of satisfying buyer's needs exclusively on electronic market, and as part of online backup of classical offline marketing strategies. Whereas, e-marketing in a broader sense represents [6] a way to achieve marketing activities of the business subject with an intensive application of both informational and telecommunication (Internet) technology. E-marketing is also defined as marketing side of e-commerce [7], i.e. effort of a business subject to inform, advertise and sell his products and services on the

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Internet. For some authors [8] Internet marketing refers to a web that is used for posting webpages or activities connected with branding. However, the biggest challenge [7] is to come up with a concept that is attractive and interesting enough in order to attract visitors [9]. Primary goal of web pages of educational institutions is making sure that potential students have all the necessary information [3].

From the aforementioned, the purpose of the article is to analyze if teachers think that their higher education institutions (hereinafter HEI) in Croatia differently perceive the importance of Internet marketing and if those differences are visible in promotions conducted online. The research is focused on teachers, because even though they do not create marketing communication, they are one of the key components of 7P elements of marketing mix of HEIs [10] and as such they represent the connection between HEI with students and society as a whole. Their role is to satisfy its users (students) and on the other side to fulfil the aims of management [11]. Teachers communicate with their students and listen to their needs; therefore, their perception is even more important in evaluating communications achievements of HEIs. Moreover, in regards to growth of the private sector of HEIs [12] the goal is to explore the difference in using Internet marketing in public and private HEIs in Croatia, as well as accepting and implementing new technologies in marketing.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

2.1. Characteristics of Internet marketing and higher education institutions web pages

The advantages of using Internet marketing are of the utmost importance [14]. Benefits are connected with interactivity, the possibility of measuring and tracking results [17], better targeting of potential and current clients, and the biggest advantage must be the possibility of two-way communication [15]. The consumer himself decides when to instigate the process of two-way communication. On the other hand, the use of Internet marketing represents a challenge for creators of virtual communications [16] because the need to create content that is more active and visible and which gives the optimal amount of valuable information.

Internet marketing in education encompasses the use of communication tools in the Internet world, as well as use of various tools for promotion of the educational institution on the Internet. The first step in Internet marketing is creating the web pages, which is usually compared with Internet marketing. The importance of web headquarters is that they are the main source of information when choosing a HEI. Furthermore, as much as 61% of information about HEI is collected over the Internet [9], while the rest is divided on brochures (19,5%), high school colleagues (7,8%), and 5% of the information is gathered through various presentations, visits to higher education institutions, word of mouth from high school teachers and parents. Web pages, with other tools of e-marketing are important because they represent the backbone of creating the image of a HEI [18]. When we look at the difference in quality of web pages of public and private HEI, there really aren't any [19]. However, different HEI (public and private) use Internet marketing differently [3]. In general, a large number of HEIs need to introduce improvements in regards of navigating the web pages, usability, adjustability and safety [20].

More and more used tool in Internet marketing are social media. However, research shows a difference in perception of their influence depends if social media is looked from the perspective of a teacher or a student. Also, most teachers believe that social media in HEIs should be exclusively used as a private tool of communication, whereas the students think that such communication is necessary and expected [21].

2.2. Difference between public and private higher education institution

The research which defines the difference between public and private HEIs is different. Differences are perceived [22] scholarship, educational diversity, class size and demographic characteristics of students. A different source [23] also emphasizes the fact that students on private HEIs will have easier access to different information, while on public HEI students who are independent will enjoy the freedom and variety of environment. Authors [24] claim that minimal differences in quality of the educational cycle, depending on whether the student is from public or private HEI, are non-existent by their third year. Furthermore, some authors claim that in quality private HEIs surpass the public ones ([25]-[24], [26]-[24]), but there are also opposing attitudes [27]. Although, private HEIs are more agile and are quicker to respond to business demands, and they give a safer opportunity of employment to their students [24]. Furthermore, certain authors [28]-[30] and [29]-[30] prove that public HEIs invest more in classrooms and libraries, while private HEIs invest in various electronic equipment and computers. In context of this article, a question arises; do private higher education institutions put greater effort in Internet marketing?

2.3. Research hypothesis

Every HEI should analyze their market influence and in accordance adjust their integrated marketing communication, in order to administer contemporary trends in their business and to give the best possible response to their competition. Changes in choosing promotional tools appear as a consequence of the dynamic market environment and contemporary technological achievements. Since potential students mostly rely on web pages as a source of information when choosing a HEI [9], it is clear why educational organizations should go in step with time and implement online marketing in their communications network. Also, since there are differences between the way of functioning public and private HEI [30], it is considered that there are differences in the way they are implementing Internet marketing. Teachers are important participants in the way of implementing Internet marketing, and they in particular represent the connection between students and management of HEI [10]. The importance of teachers in the process of creating the marketing strategy is remarkable [31]. Therefore, it is important to analyze their perception about Internet marketing activities as well as importance of Internet marketing and their institutions, and their perception how their institutions are using Internet marketing in promotion of their HEIs.

Taking into account all previously mentioned, in this article the following hypothesis is represented:

- H1:** Public and private HEIs in Croatia differently perceive the role and importance of Internet marketing in institution promotion.
- H2:** Public and private HEIs in Croatia use Internet marketing activities differently while promoting themselves.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Instruments of research and the procedure

As the main instrument for collecting the primary data in this research is a survey. Research survey was created based on the theoretical part of research. Survey contained questions divided into two basic groups that contain attitudes of teachers towards the importance of Internet marketing in HEIs (1) and questions that encompass the choosing of Internet marketing tools

(2). Questions are composed based on previous research (1) [3] and [18]. Participants expressed their attitudes using 5-point Likert's scale where 1- completely agree and 5 completely disagree. Questions with (2) the possibility of choosing Internet marketing tool are adapted to a list available in [17]. Survey was made on online platform Limesurvey. It was forwarded to teachers of public and private higher education institutions of business content in Croatia, whose email addresses, were publicly available. Statistical methods which were used for processing of data are descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, T-test and χ^2 test. For analysis SPSS programme package for Windows 22 was used.

3.2. Sample

Research was conducted on a sample of 104 participants - teachers of HEIs in Croatia. Teachers were chosen as a pattern because there is different research that imply that either the teachers are resisting to changes brought on by Internet marketing [31], or that the teachers are [32] perceived, by other teachers, parents and students, as being the first in line in using Internet marketing tools. From 104 participants, 82 of them fully completed the survey, while 22 only partially completed the survey. From the total number of valid answers, it is evident that more teachers from public HEIs participated in the survey (69,1%). Teachers from public HEIs were significantly more open in sharing information and supporting the survey. Difference in this two types of institutions lies in multiple facts, from different way of registering, the size of the HEI, demographic characteristics of the students [22], and in the way they communicate because not being forthright in sharing information stems from the characteristics of the private sector [33]-[36] where managers and entrepreneurs in private sector rarely share information.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. Research results connected to role of perception and the importance of Internet marketing in promotion of the higher education institutions

In order to approach the analysis of the hypothesis, firstly we analyzed the attitudes of teachers towards the importance of Internet marketing in promotion of HEI. When looking at the collective level, that encompasses both public and private HEIs, we can conclude that the greatest number of participants (88.46%) believe that being present on the Internet is important for managing a HEI. Using χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 0.674$, $p > 0.05$), we conclude that there is no statistically noticeable difference between the attitudes of participants towards Internet presence and creating Internet marketing depending on if the participants come from a public or a private HEI.

Furthermore, we analyzed the importance of Internet presence. When we analyze the answers in more detail, depending on whether the teachers graded the importance of presence on the Internet and creating marketing activities, in table 1 we can see that there is a difference of the average value, depending on whether the teachers work in private (= 4.59) or public (= 4.23) HEI. The difference was also tested with t-test. The results show that ($t = -2.203$, $p < 0.05$) there is a difference in the perception between the perception of teachers from public and private HEIs, on the importance of being present and Internet marketing promotion of HEIs where they are employed.

Type of HEI	N	Average value	Standard deviation
Public HEI	65	4.23	0.806
Private HEI	29	4.59	0.682

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of teacher's estimate of Internet presence and the importance of Internet marketing activity depending on the type of HEI (private and public)

In the next table (table 2) teachers' individual answers were analyzed in relationship with the role of Internet marketing in education, depending on the type of the HEI, from which we can conclude that teachers from private HEIs put more emphasis on enrolling students while, teachers from public HEIs put more emphasis on providing information. However, the result of χ^2 test imply da there is no statistically important difference in the role of Internet marketing depending on the type of HEI ($\chi^2 = 2.227$, $p > 0.05$).

Type of HEI	Give basic information	Create positive sentiment	Create 'desire' in users	Inspire to enroll	Miscellaneous	Total
Public HEI	11 (16.9%)	6 (9.2%)	20 (30.8%)	26 (40%)	2 (3.1%)	65 (100%)
Private HEI	2 (6.9%)	2 (6.9%)	9 (31%)	15 (51.7%)	1 (3.5%)	29 (100%)
Total	13	8	29	41	3	94

Table 2: Attitudes of teachers towards the role of Internet marketing activities in higher education; comparison of teachers from private and public HEIs

In the analysis, we looked for a connection with everyday use of technology by the teachers and their perception of the importance of Internet marketing. Teachers were asked if they consider contemporary technologies important in everyday life (Internet, mobile apps, and social networks). By analyzing all of the above we can conclude that the most of the participants from the private (= 4.61) and public (= 4.67) sector considers contemporary technology to be very important in everyday life. Additional analysis made with t-test confirmed that the difference is statistically not significant ($p = 0.611$), i.e. the participants answers from both public and private HEIs don't differ.

Based on the aforementioned, we can conclude that the Hypothesis H1: Public and private HEIs u Croatia differently sees the role and importance of Internet marketing in institution promotion, is accepted.

4.2. Research results connected with using Internet marketing activity in promoting higher education institution

In the next analysis we paid attention to ways of using Internet marketing for HEIs promotions. Firstly, we analyzed tools of digital presence that the teachers pointed out that their HEI uses. How teachers point activities their HEI uses in promotion is provided in Table 3.

χ^2 test analysis revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in perception of the teachers both public and private HEIs in regards to web page ($\chi^2 = 0.009$, $p > 0.05$), social networks ($\chi^2 = 0.097$, $p > 0.05$) i metrics (tracking results) ($\chi^2 = 2.211$, $p > 0.05$) as an important tool of digital presence.

Answer	Number	Percentage	Type of HEI	
			Public HEI	Private HEI
Web page	91	87.50%	63	28
Social network	66	63.46%	45	21
Promotion through Internet	53	50.96%	27	26
Content management	31	29.81%	17	14
Metrics (tracking results)	26	25.00%	15	11
Mobile tools	17	16.35%	7	10

Table 3: Digital presence tools on HEIs

When we look at the attitudes of teachers towards mobile applications as significant tools for achieving digital presence, we can conclude that a greater number of participants from private (34.48%), than those from public (10.77%) HEIs are more inclined to think that their HEI uses the tools necessary to achieve Internet presence. We can conclude, from the results of the analysis through χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 7.612$, $p < 0.05$) of the answers provided, that there is a statistically important difference in attitudes of teachers from public and private HEIs. From a more detailed analysis of the promotions as a tool of digital presence, we can see that there is significantly greater percentage of participants of private HEIs that consider these tools to be important (89.66%), moreover the difference between private and public HEIs is even more visible by the results from the χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 18.879$, $p < 0.05$). When we analyze 'content management' as a tool of digital presence a greater percentage of the participants from private HEIs (48.28%) these tools list as important. On the other side, only 26.15% of participants from public HEIs consider it important. Among the answers there is a statistically important difference in χ^2 test ($\chi^2 = 4.440$, $p < 0.05$).

When we analyze the attitudes of participants towards investment into Internet presence and attracting potential students over the Internet, we can conclude that the biggest percentage of participants (42.05%) believes that HEIs where they work, emphasizes Internet presence.

Comparison of the type of HEIs and the activities of attracting potential students through the Internet is shown in Table 4. The difference in response from participants from public and private sector of the effort that HEI put into being present on the Internet ($\chi^2 = 22.590$, $p < 0.05$).

Type of HEI	Doesn't put any effort	Mostly doesn't put any effort	Neither does or doesn't put any effort	Mostly puts in effort	Puts in a lot of effort	Total
Public HEI	2 (3.4%)	16 (27.11%)	16 (27.11%)	23 (38.98%)	2 (3.4%)	59 (100%)
Private HEI	2 (7.14%)	1 (3.58%)	2 (7.14%)	14 (50%)	9 (32.14%)	28 (100%)
Total	4 (4.60%)	17 (19.54%)	18 (20.69%)	37 (42.53%)	11 (12.64%)	87 (100%)

Table 4: Analysis of the type of HEI in regards to efforts put into Internet presence and attracting potential students over the Internet

Respondents also allocated budget for marketing activities for their HEIs and the most respondents said that web page is dominantly used for promotion (78.85% of the budget), followed with investing into advertising on social networks (37.5%), advertising with banners (23.08%), Google Campaigns (16.35%) and smallest amount of promotional budget goes to app develop-

ing (10.58%) and mobile advertising (8.65%). Furthermore, we looked at the type of the higher education institutions and Internet marketing activities which is conducted by HEI (table 5).

Based on χ^2 test there is a statistically significant difference between public and private HEI in using the next Internet marketing activities: Google campaign ($\chi^2 = 20.246$, $p < 0.05$), advertisement via banners-displays ($\chi^2 = 35.266$, $p < 0.05$), social networks advertisement ($\chi^2 = 16.521$, $p < 0.05$), mobile advertisement ($\chi^2 = 15.715$, $p < 0.05$).

Type of HEI	Internet marketing activities		Tools for enrichment of content web headquarters which are used by HEI		Total
	No	Yes	No	Yes	
	Web site maintenance		Blog		
Public HEI	13.84%	86.16%	95.39%	4.61%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	10.35%	89.65%	75.86%	24.14%	29 (100%)
	Google campaign		Newsletter		
Public HEI	93.85%	6.15%	86.15%	13.85%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	55.17%	44.83%	55.17%	44.83%	29 (100%)
	Advertising via banners- display		Web magazines		
Public HEI	92.31%	7.69%	96.92%	3.08%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	34.48%	65.52%	86.21%	13.79%	29 (100%)
	Social networks ads		iPad magazines		
Public HEI	72.31%	27.69%	98.46%	1.54%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	27.59%	72.41%	96.55%	3.45%	29 (100%)
	Mobile advertising		Video		
Public HEI	98.46%	1.54%	81.54%	18.46%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	72.41%	27.9%	44.83%	55.17%	29 (100%)
	Application development		e-manuals		
Public HEI	90.77%	9.23%	64.62%	35.38%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	82.76%	17.24%	72.41%	27.59%	29 (100%)
			Research and presentation		
			72.31%	27.69%	65 (100%)
			58.62%	41.38%	29 (100%)
			Audio podcast (digital audio file)		
			95.39%	4.61%	65 (100%)
			86.21%	13.79%	29 (100%)

Table 5: Relation between the type of HEI and investment into different marketing activities and using tools for enrichment of web headquarters content

Participants from private HEI stated that their HEIs put greater effort into implementing the aforementioned Internet marketing activities, than those from public HEIs. Tools that are used for enrichment of web pages content were also analyzed. While studying the results in Table 5, the most used tools are videos and newsletters as well as research and presentations. Based on χ^2 test it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between public and private HEI while using these tools for enrichment of content in a web pages: blog ($\chi^2 = 8.040$, $p < 0.05$), newsletter ($\chi^2 = 10.737$, $p < 0.05$), video ($\chi^2 = 12.922$, $p < 0.05$). Participants from private HEIs in a greater extent stated that they are familiar with the aforementioned tools for web pages content enrichment when compared to answers given by the participants from public HEIs. With other tools, statistically significant differences were not established between answers given by the public and private HEI, or they are not represented e.g. web magazine and iPad magazine.

Furthermore, the use of tools for Internet promotions was also analyzed. By analyzing each of the mentioned tools for Internet promotion, we can conclude (Table 6) that there is a significant statistical difference between public and private HEIs.

Type of HEI	Internet promotion tools HEI		Total
	No	Yes	
	Display advertising– banner		
Public HEI	84.62%	15.38%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	34.84%	65.16%	29 (100%)
	SEM (Search Engine Marketing)		
Public HEI	89.23%	10.77%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	48.28%	51.27%	29 (100%)
	Contextual Advertising		
Public HEI	89.23%	10.77%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	68.97%	31.03%	29 (100%)
	Native Advertising		
Public HEI	93.85%	6.15%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	65.52%	34.48%	29 (100%)
	Remarketing		
Public HEI	100%	0%	65 (100%)
Private HEI	65.52%	34.48%	29 (100%)

Table 6: Relation between the type of HEI and using tools for Internet promotion

Based on χ^2 analysis it is concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between public and private HEI in using Internet promotion tools: Display advertising – advertising through banners, texts, pictures, video... ($\chi^2 = 23.625$, $p < 0.05$), SEM-a (Search Engine Marketing) – advertising through key words ($\chi^2 = 18.763$, $p < 0.05$), contextual advertising – buying key words on certain web pages and portals ($\chi^2 = 5.831$, $p < 0.05$), native advertising – paid advertisement like they are a part of the platform where they are shown ($\chi^2 = 12.696$, $p < 0.05$), Remarketing – keeps track of user behavior, shows the ad on other web pages ($\chi^2 = 25.082$, $p < 0.05$). Participants from private HEIs stated in a greater extent that they are familiar with the aforementioned tools of Internet promotion, when compared to the answers from participants from public HEIs. Based on previously conducted analysis Hypothesis H2: Public and private HEIs in Croatia use Internet marketing activities differently while promoting HEIs is accepted.

5. CONCLUSION

Marketing principles that are valid in higher education sector don't differ from classic marketing principles of business world [34]. When discussing a particularly competitive market of higher education [35], educational institutions are made to pay attention to changes and react to them with their own marketing activities. Conducted research points out that the private and public sector of higher education differently reacts to change [36]. Furthermore, teachers from private and public HEIs view the role and importance of Internet marketing differently. Conducted research has several implications.

Firstly, web pages of a HEI have different role, depending on the type of the HEI. Teachers from private HEI identified 'enrolment' as the main role of the web page, while the teachers from public HEIs as the main function of web pages pointed out 'providing information'.

Secondly, it was established that public and private HEIs use different channels of Internet marketing in order to inform or attract potential and current students. Differences can be a motivation for change within public education institutions and an implication for making future marketing decisions with more activity towards investment into Internet marketing.

Thirdly, a difference in use of various tools depending on the type of the HEI was established. Furthermore, we came to a conclusion that teachers from private HEI consider that their higher education institution invests significantly more into being present on the Internet and attracting potential students via Internet. Moreover, the teachers from private HEIs state that Internet marketing of a HEI is more important, which corresponds to larger investments that private HEIs make (advertising on social networks, advertising with displays - banners, Google campaigns, app development, mobile advertising). All the aforementioned indicates that public HEI investments with the aim of attracting students have to become more active in Internet marketing in order to be more attractive to potential students.

Limitations of the research conducted are choosing the pattern, since the survey was done with teachers, while other members of higher education are not taken into account. Because of that it is recommended that the future research include other members of higher education such as high school students, university students etc. Furthermore, a limitation was also a small pattern of participants from the area of higher education. A part of the teachers from private HEIs does not have their email address posted on web pages and there is no available email. The limitation is also the focus on HEIs in business. As a recommendation for future research is to include HEIs with different faculties and departments.

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