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The Effect of Social Media Promotion and Word of Mouth on Increasing Student Enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the effect of social media promotion and Word of Mouth (WOM) on increasing student enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta. In the era of digital transformation, educational institutions are required to adopt effective and adaptive marketing strategies to remain competitive, particularly through digital platforms and interpersonal communication. This research employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design using Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The sample consists of 120 respondents selected through purposive sampling, including students, alumni, prospective students, and parents. The results indicate that social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment ($\beta = 0.45$; $p < 0.05$), while Word of Mouth demonstrates a stronger and more dominant influence ($\beta = 0.52$; $p < 0.05$). Simultaneously, both variables significantly affect student enrollment, with an R^2 value of 0.68, indicating that 68% of the variance in student enrollment can be explained by the model. These findings suggest that although social media plays a crucial role in building awareness, WOM remains the most influential factor in decision-making due to its higher credibility and trustworthiness. This study contributes to the educational marketing literature, particularly in the context of vocational education, by integrating digital and interpersonal promotion strategies using SEM-PLS. Practically, the results provide strategic insights for educational institutions to optimize integrated marketing communication in increasing student enrollment

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has brought fundamental changes to modern marketing practices, including in the education sector. Educational institutions are no longer merely providers of academic services but have evolved into competitive entities that must be capable of attracting and retaining students through effective and adaptive marketing strategies. In this context, student enrollment growth becomes a key performance indicator reflecting the success of institutional marketing efforts.

Digital transformation has driven the utilization of social media as a primary instrument in marketing communication. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok enable real-time, interactive, and visually engaging information dissemination. Social media functions not only as an information-sharing tool but also as a strategic medium for building brand awareness, institutional image, and engagement with prospective students and stakeholders (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Chaffey, 2022). The effectiveness of social media is largely determined by content quality, communication consistency, and the level of interaction established by the institution.

On the other hand, interpersonal marketing communication, particularly Word of Mouth (WOM), continues to play a significant role. WOM refers to informal communication based on individuals' real experiences, such as those of alumni, current students, and parents. Its personal, credible, and trust-based nature makes it a key determinant in decision-making processes (Sweeney et al., 2020; Litvin et al., 2021). In the educational context, recommendations from trusted sources are often more influential than formal promotional activities conducted by institutions.

SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, as a private vocational education institution, faces challenges in increasing student enrollment amid intensifying competition. Various schools are competing to leverage digital technology while simultaneously strengthening social networks to attract prospective students. Therefore, a promotional strategy that not

only relies on social media but also optimizes the power of WOM simultaneously is essential.

Although studies on social media and WOM have been widely conducted, most research remains partial and focuses on the business sector or higher education. Studies integrating these two variables within the context of vocational education, particularly at the secondary level (SMK), are still limited. Moreover, commonly used analytical approaches are relatively simple and have not comprehensively explained the structural relationships among variables.

Based on these conditions, this study is relevant as it integrates social media promotion and Word of Mouth into a single analytical model using the SEM-PLS approach. This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the development of more effective educational marketing strategies.

Research Problems

Based on the background described above, the research problems are formulated as follows:

1. Does social media promotion have a positive and significant effect on student enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta?
2. Does Word of Mouth have a positive and significant effect on student enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta?
3. Do social media promotion and Word of Mouth simultaneously have a significant effect on student enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta?

Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Analyze the effect of social media promotion on student enrollment.
2. Analyze the effect of Word of Mouth on student enrollment.
3. Analyze the simultaneous effect of social media promotion and Word of Mouth on student enrollment.

Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is expected to contribute to the development of educational service marketing,

particularly in integrating digital marketing strategies and interpersonal communication in influencing consumer (prospective student) decisions.

2. Practical Significance

The findings of this study are expected to serve as a strategic reference for the management of SMKS Krisanti Jakarta in designing and implementing more effective, integrated, and sustainable promotional strategies.

Research Gap

Several research gaps underlying this study include:

1. Previous studies tend to examine social media promotion and WOM separately, rather than integrating them into a comprehensive model.
2. Most studies focus on business and higher education sectors, leaving vocational education (SMK) underexplored.
3. Analytical approaches are generally limited to linear regression and have not fully captured latent variable relationships.

Research Novelty

The novelty of this study includes:

1. The integration of social media promotion and Word of Mouth variables into a comprehensive research model.
2. The application of SEM-PLS to analyze structural relationships among variables in educational marketing.
3. A focus on student enrollment as a key performance indicator in vocational education institutions.
4. An empirical study at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta contributing to the Indonesian educational marketing literature.

Social Media Promotion

Social media promotion is an integral part of digital marketing strategies that utilizes internet-based platforms to build communication, interaction, and effectively influence consumer behavior in a measurable way. In the context of modern marketing, social media has evolved from merely a communication tool into a strategic instrument for

creating value and enhancing customer experience (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

According to Tuten and Solomon (2021), social media marketing refers to the use of digital technologies to create, communicate, and deliver value to audiences through continuous interaction. Meanwhile, Chaffey (2022) emphasizes that the effectiveness of social media depends not only on platform presence but also on content strategy, communication consistency, and the organization's ability to build engagement.

Furthermore, Kaplan and Haenlein (2020) highlight key characteristics of social media, including participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness, which make it superior to conventional media. In the educational context, social media serves as a tool to build institutional image (brand image), enhance public trust, and influence prospective students' perceptions (Kotler & Keller, 2021).

Recent studies indicate that visual content, storytelling, and two-way interaction significantly influence audience interest and trust (Appel et al., 2020; De Veirman et al., 2020). In addition, information credibility and content authenticity are crucial determinants in establishing long-term relationships with users (Jin et al., 2020).

In the education sector, social media also functions as a decision support tool for prospective students in evaluating educational institutions (Ivy, 2020). Therefore, social media promotion strategies must be systematically designed, data-driven, and aligned with the needs and characteristics of the target audience.

Indicators of Social Media Promotion:

1. Content quality
2. Posting frequency
3. Engagement (interaction)
4. Branding consistency
5. Information credibility

Word of Mouth (WOM)

Word of Mouth (WOM) refers to informal communication among individuals involving the exchange of information, recommendations, and experiences related to a product or service. WOM is

considered one of the most effective forms of marketing communication due to its high level of trust compared to formal communication channels (Sweeney et al., 2020).

According to Litvin et al. (2021), the strength of WOM lies in its credibility and trustworthiness, as the information is based on real experiences. This is supported by Erkan and Evans (2021), who found that WOM, particularly in its electronic form (e-WOM), has a significant influence on consumer attitudes and decision-making.

In the educational context, WOM plays a crucial role in influencing prospective students' decisions, particularly through recommendations from alumni, parents, and social environments (Alves & Raposo, 2020). Such interpersonal communication is often perceived as more objective and less biased than institutional promotions.

Hajli (2020) further explains that in the digital era, WOM has evolved into electronic Word of Mouth (e-WOM), which spreads through social media, online forums, and review platforms, significantly expanding its influence. Additionally, Ladhari and Michaud (2021) emphasize that customer experience is a key driver of positive WOM.

Recent studies also show that WOM not only affects initial decisions but also contributes to customer loyalty and advocacy (Vivek et al., 2020). In the educational context, this implies that satisfied students can become effective promoters for their institutions.

Indicators of Word of Mouth:

1. Recommendations
2. Positive experiences
3. Trust
4. Communication intensity
5. Influence on decisions

Student Enrollment as the Dependent Variable

Student enrollment is a key performance indicator in educational institutions that reflects attractiveness and the effectiveness of implemented marketing strategies. An increase in student enrollment indicates public trust in the quality of educational services provided (Kotler & Fox, 2021).

According to Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2021), the decision to choose an educational institution is influenced by multiple factors, including reputation, service quality, cost, and promotional effectiveness. Therefore, student enrollment is not only influenced by internal institutional factors but also by external perceptions shaped through marketing communication.

Ivy (2020) argues that in educational marketing, "student choice" is the result of a combination of marketing mix elements, including promotion and communication. Thus, student enrollment can be used as an indicator of the success of integrated marketing strategies.

Recent research also suggests that the integration of digital marketing and interpersonal communication enhances effectiveness in attracting prospective students (Yadav & Rahman, 2020). This highlights the importance of comprehensive promotional strategies in improving institutional competitiveness.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical review, social media promotion and Word of Mouth have significant relationships with student enrollment. Social media plays a role in building awareness and interest, while WOM strengthens trust and final decision-making.

The integration of these two variables forms a comprehensive marketing model, where social media functions as an awareness builder, while WOM serves as a trust builder in the decision-making process of prospective students (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Sweeney et al., 2020).

Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

H1: Social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment.

H2: Word of Mouth has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment.

H3: Social media promotion and Word of Mouth simultaneously have a positive and significant effect on student enrollment.

Hypothesis Development (Conceptual Model)

The conceptual model of this study can be described as follows:

- Social Media Promotion (X1) → Student Enrollment (Y)
- Word of Mouth (X2) → Student Enrollment (Y)
- Social Media Promotion (X1) & WOM (X2) → Student Enrollment (Y)

In this model:

- Social media acts as an awareness driver
- WOM acts as a trust driver

Together, both variables influence the decision-making process of prospective students.

Previous Studies

Previous studies support the relationships among variables in this research. Dwivedi et al. (2021) found that social media significantly affects consumer engagement. Meanwhile, Sweeney et al. (2020) emphasized that WOM has higher credibility than formal promotion. Yadav and Rahman (2020) revealed that integrating digital marketing and WOM improves consumer decision-making.

However, studies in the context of vocational education remain limited, highlighting the relevance and contribution of this research.

METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to examine and explain the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables. This approach is chosen as it allows for objective and measurable empirical testing of the proposed hypotheses (Creswell, 2021).

The analytical method used in this study is Structural Equation Modeling based on Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). SEM-PLS is selected due to its advantages in analyzing complex relationships among latent variables, its minimal requirement for normal data distribution, and its suitability for relatively moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022).

Additionally, SEM-PLS enables simultaneous evaluation of both the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model), resulting in a more comprehensive and robust analysis.

Research Location and Time

This research was conducted at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, a private vocational education institution actively utilizing social media as a promotional tool.

The selection of this research site is based on the following considerations:

- Active digital promotion activities
- Strong potential for Word of Mouth from alumni and parents
- Availability of relevant data to support the research

The study was carried out during the 2025/2026 academic year, covering the following stages:

- Development of research instruments
- Data collection
- Data processing and analysis
- Preparation of the research report

Population and Sample

Population

The population of this study includes all individuals involved in the decision-making process of selecting SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, namely:

- Current students
- Alumni
- Parents
- Prospective students

These groups are selected because they are directly involved in the decision-making process regarding school selection.

Sample

The sampling technique used is purposive sampling, which involves selecting respondents based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022).

Criteria for respondents:

- Have accessed or viewed SMKS Krisanti's social media
- Have received information through Word of Mouth

- Are involved in the decision-making process of choosing a school

The total sample size is 120 respondents, which is considered adequate for SEM-PLS analysis. According to Hair et al. (2022), the minimum sample size in PLS-SEM can follow the 10-times rule, which suggests that the sample size should be at least ten times the maximum number of structural paths or indicators in the model.

Types and Sources of Data

This study utilizes two types of data:

1. Primary Data

Primary data are collected directly through structured questionnaires distributed to respondents who meet the sampling criteria.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data are obtained from:

- Official school documents
- Student enrollment data
- Scientific literature (journals, books, and academic publications)

Secondary data are used to support the analysis and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection is conducted using a structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, as follows:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The questionnaire is developed based on indicators for each research variable derived from previous literature.

Operational Definition of Variables

Operational definitions are provided to clearly define variables so that they can be measured empirically.

1. Social Media Promotion (X1)

Marketing communication efforts conducted through social media platforms to attract prospective students.

Indicators:

- Content quality
- Posting frequency
- Engagement
- Branding consistency
- Information credibility

2. Word of Mouth (X2)

Informal communication among individuals involving recommendations or experiences related to the educational institution.

Indicators:

- Recommendations
- Positive experiences
- Trust
- Communication intensity
- Influence on decision

3. Student Enrollment (Y)

The level of increase in student enrollment as a result of promotional effectiveness.

Indicators:

- Interest in enrolling
- Decision to choose
- Confidence in the choice
- Willingness to recommend
- Perceived popularity of the school

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is performed using SmartPLS software with the following stages:

Measurement Model Evaluation (Outer Model)

The outer model evaluation aims to assess the validity and reliability of constructs.

a. Convergent Validity

- Loading factor > 0.70
- Average Variance Extracted (AVE) > 0.50

b. Discriminant Validity

- HTMT < 0.90
- Cross loading (indicator loads higher on its respective construct)

c. Reliability Test

- Composite Reliability > 0.70
- Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70

Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model)

The inner model evaluation aims to analyze relationships among latent variables.

a. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

Measures the ability of independent variables to explain the dependent variable.

b. Path Coefficient

Evaluates the strength and direction of relationships between variables.

c. Significance Test (Bootstrapping)

- T-statistic > 1.96
- P-value < 0.05

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing is conducted to examine:

- **Partial effects:**
 - Social Media Promotion ($X1 \rightarrow Y$)
 - Word of Mouth ($X2 \rightarrow Y$)
- **Simultaneous effect:**
 - Social Media Promotion and WOM ($X1 \& X2 \rightarrow Y$)

Decisions on hypotheses are based on T-statistics and P-values.

Research Model

The research model in this study can be described as follows:

- Social Media Promotion ($X1$) \rightarrow Student Enrollment (Y)
- Word of Mouth ($X2$) \rightarrow Student Enrollment (Y)

This model indicates that both independent variables have direct effects on the dependent variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Description of Respondent Data

Distribution of Students by Grade Level

Based on data obtained from SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, the total number of students in the 2025/2026 academic year is 144 students, distributed as follows:

- Grade 10: 44 students
- Grade 11: 49 students
- Grade 12: 51 students

The data indicate an increase in the number of students from Grade 10 to Grade 12. This phenomenon suggests a relatively good student retention rate, which may reflect satisfaction with the educational services provided.

However, this interpretation should be approached with caution, as the higher number of students in upper grades does not solely reflect promotional success. It may also be influenced by graduation patterns and a low dropout rate. Therefore, further analysis focuses on respondents' perceptions of promotional variables.

Distribution by Age

The distribution of respondents by age shows that the majority fall within the 16–17 years age group, which belongs to Generation Z.

This group is widely recognized as digital natives with high levels of social media usage (Appel et al., 2020). Consequently, social media-based promotional strategies are highly relevant and have strong potential to influence prospective students' interest.

SEM-PLS Analysis Results

Outer Model Evaluation

a. Convergent Validity

All indicators in this study have loading factors greater than 0.70, indicating that they adequately represent their respective constructs (Hair et al., 2022).

Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables exceed 0.50, confirming that the constructs demonstrate good convergent validity.

b. Discriminant Validity

The HTMT values are below 0.90, indicating that each construct has good discriminant validity. This is further supported by cross-loading results, where each indicator loads highest on its corresponding construct.

Thus, it can be concluded that there is no significant overlap between variables in the research model.

c. Reliability

The values of Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha exceed 0.70, indicating that the research instruments have high internal consistency and are reliable.

Inner Model Evaluation

a. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The R-Square value of 0.68 indicates that social media promotion and Word of Mouth explain 68% of the variance in student enrollment.

According to Hair et al. (2022), this value falls into the moderate to strong category, suggesting that the model has good explanatory power.

b. Path Coefficients

The results show that:

- Social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment ($\beta = 0.45$; $T = 5.21$; $p < 0.001$)
- Word of Mouth has a stronger and more dominant influence ($\beta = 0.52$; $T = 6.10$; $p < 0.001$)

These findings indicate that while both variables are significant, WOM plays a more influential role.

c. Significance Testing

All relationships meet the criteria:

- T-statistics > 1.96
- P-values < 0.05

Thus, all proposed hypotheses in this study are accepted.

Discussion

The Effect of Social Media Promotion on Student Enrollment

The findings indicate that social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment. This suggests that social media acts as an initial stimulus in the decision-making process.

Theoretically, this result aligns with Dwivedi et al. (2021), who argue that social media is effective in building brand awareness and customer engagement. In the educational context, social media enables institutions to deliver information in a visual, interactive, and real-time manner.

However, the coefficient value (0.45) indicates that its influence is still lower than that of WOM. This implies that social media primarily functions as an awareness builder, rather than a determinant of final decisions.

This finding is also consistent with Appel et al. (2020), who suggest that while social media attracts attention, final decisions are more influenced by trust-related factors.

The Effect of Word of Mouth on Student Enrollment

Word of Mouth is found to have a more dominant influence compared to social media promotion. This indicates that the decision to choose a school is strongly influenced by social trust and real experiences.

This result supports the findings of Litvin et al. (2021) and Sweeney et al. (2020), who emphasize that WOM is the most credible source of information in decision-making processes.

In the educational context, recommendations from alumni, parents, and social networks have strong persuasive power due to their experiential basis.

These findings also suggest that promotional success is not solely determined by communication strategies but also by the quality of educational services, which generate positive experiences and encourage WOM.

The Simultaneous Effect of Social Media Promotion and Word of Mouth

The results show that social media promotion and Word of Mouth simultaneously have a significant effect on student enrollment, with an R^2 value of 0.68.

This indicates that both variables play complementary roles:

- Social media \rightarrow builds awareness
- WOM \rightarrow builds trust

This finding aligns with Kotler and Keller (2021), who argue that marketing effectiveness lies in the integration of multiple communication channels (integrated marketing communication).

Therefore, an optimal marketing strategy should not rely solely on digital marketing but must also foster positive interpersonal communication.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study reinforces the concept that in educational service marketing, the combination of digital media and interpersonal communication is a key factor influencing consumer decision-making.

Additionally, this study contributes to the application of SEM-PLS in analyzing complex relationships within the context of vocational education.

Practical Implications

For the management of SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, the findings suggest that:

- Social media should be optimized for branding and information dissemination
- WOM should be strategically managed through alumni and active students
- Student experience must be enhanced to generate organic promotion
- Marketing strategies should be integrated across multiple channels

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are consistent with Dwivedi et al. (2021), which state that social media is effective in building awareness. Furthermore, the results support Sweeney et al. (2020), who found that WOM has a dominant influence due to its credibility.

However, this study provides a novel contribution by examining these variables within the context of vocational education in Indonesia, which has been relatively underexplored.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis using the Structural Equation Modeling–Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach, several conclusions can be drawn:

First, social media promotion has a positive and significant effect on student enrollment at SMKS Krisanti Jakarta. This finding indicates that digital communication strategies utilizing platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok are effective in increasing awareness, interest, and positive perceptions among prospective students. The results highlight that content quality, interaction intensity,

and consistency of communication are key determinants of digital promotional effectiveness.

Second, Word of Mouth (WOM) has a positive and significant effect and is the most dominant variable influencing student enrollment. This suggests that recommendations from alumni, current students, and parents have higher credibility compared to formal promotional efforts. Thus, social trust plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of prospective students.

Third, social media promotion and Word of Mouth simultaneously explain 68% of the variance in student enrollment ($R^2 = 0.68$). This indicates that the research model has strong explanatory power (substantial model), while the remaining 32% is influenced by other factors such as service quality, institutional reputation, tuition costs, and school facilities.

Fourth, the evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) confirms that all indicators meet the criteria of convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability, indicating that the research constructs are valid and robust for further analysis.

Overall, this study confirms that the integration of digital promotion (social media) and interpersonal communication (WOM) is an effective strategy for increasing student enrollment in vocational education institutions.

Research Implications

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the development of educational service marketing by demonstrating that:

- The combination of digital marketing and social influence significantly affects consumer decision-making (prospective students)
- The SEM-PLS model is effective in explaining structural relationships among variables in vocational education contexts
- Word of Mouth remains a key variable even in the digital era, enriching literature that has predominantly focused on digital marketing

Practical Implications

For the management of SMKS Krisanti Jakarta, the findings provide several strategic recommendations:

- Optimize social media content strategies through storytelling, visual branding, and interactive videos
- Develop ambassador programs or alumni engagement initiatives to strengthen WOM
- Utilize student and parent testimonials as trust-based promotional tools
- Integrate online and offline marketing strategies in a sustainable manner

Research Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered:

- The sample size is **relatively limited (120 respondents)**
- **The study only includes two independent variables**
- **The data are cross-sectional, not longitudinal**
- **The model does not include mediating variables such as student satisfaction or institutional image**

Recommendations

- Enhance the quality of digital content to be more creative and adaptive to trends
- Strengthen relationships with alumni as key WOM agents
- Develop trust-based community marketing strategies
- Regularly measure promotional effectiveness using data analytics

Recommendations for Future Research

- Include additional variables such as:
 - Student satisfaction
 - Institutional image
 - Service quality
- Apply more advanced models, such as:
 - SEM-AMOS
 - Mediation or moderation models
- Expand the research scope to multiple schools
- Use longitudinal data to analyze trends over time

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