



The Role Of Social Media And Decoy Effect Strategies: Studies On The Process Of Choosing A University For Prospective Students

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Citation: Pratiwi Ramlan, et al (2024), The Role Of Social Media And Decoy Effect Strategies: Studies On The Process Of Choosing A University For Prospective Students, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(5), 5868–5877, Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i5.655

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

The student admission system at the university is experiencing disruptions, it can only be carried out online during the Covid-19 pandemic. The decoy effect strategy is used to attract prospective students, namely a marketing strategy to increase product sales. The purpose of this research is to describe the role of social media and the decoy effect technique in university selection. Qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques using observation, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews involving 101 respondents who were randomly selected. The collected data is processed using Nvivo-12 plus and office excel. Processed data results are presented in tables and frequency graphs to facilitate analysis and discussion. The results show that the role of social media and sharing networks is vital to understanding a university's reputation. At the same time, discussion forums play a supporting role in understanding financial factors. During Covid-19, dominant students experienced a decoy effect in choosing a university, especially a university's reputation and tuition fees. The implication is the importance of the Decoy effect strategy by utilizing social media to meet the target number of students.

Keywords: Social media, decoy effect, universities, prospective students, Covid-19 pandemic

1. Introduction

The system of admitting new students at the university is developing every year. Universities are now using various promotional channels to attract the attention of prospective students (Wut et al., 2022). Prospective students seek information online through university websites, social media, and others (Le et al., 2019), while offline details include committee recommendations and alumni recommendations (Mokarrama et al., 2020). Online and offline practices are described as a combined acceptance system, whereas others consider the process part of a marketing strategy (Apffelstaedt & Mechtenberg, 2021). The growing importance of social media as more than 80% of prospective students (prospects) use social media to research their university choices, making it one of the most popular channels of information for prospective students (Le et al., 2019). In this study, prospective students are understood as information seekers through official university social media and other social media.

It is important for colleges or universities to use social media and set strategies, because prospective students compete yearly to find information and set strategies because each university varies in its new student admission system. To gain entry, prospective students rely on their abilities and seek recommendations for assistance. In 2021, the number of high school graduates was 1,620,127, spread throughout Indonesia

(Statistics, 2021). This number can potentially become prospective new university students starting every September. They are free to determine the university they choose (Wut et al., 2022). This new student admission system involves social relations between prospective students, university management, foundations, alumni, high school teachers, families, and active students (Vincenthio et al., 2021). Social networks are developed between prospective students and various other actors. These actors include prospective students, university management, foundations, alumni, high school teachers, families, and active students. Prospective students seek information, university management and foundations organize strategies to find prospective students, alumni and high school teachers help prospective students make choices, and families and students actively provide information about university choices. This practice has been going on for decades in Indonesia, involving actors who need and support one another. However, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted these activities, and around the beginning of 2020, moves began to limit people's mobility.

The decision-making process for prospective students in choosing a university is usually due to consideration of various factors. Student demographics, student academic achievement, university quality, facilities, costs, and geographical factors have been considered by students when choosing a university (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Demographics are the majority ethnicity and religion, academic achievement is the achievement resulting from competitions, university quality is accreditation, facilities are infrastructure, tuition fees are the overall operational costs per student, and geographical factors are the university's location. Prospective students use these considerations to make sure they choose the right university, and that the university gets the right students. Most of these processes involve complex, contextual, varied, and dynamic strategies, which prospective students and universities develop to meet their expectations (Vincenthio et al., 2021) and respond to new opportunities (Mokarrama et al., 2020) or seek another unusual way. Such as paying abnormal entrance fees, asking officials for recommendations, and looking for management connections within the university environment. The decision-making process by prospective students is closely related to the system of admitting new students between public and private universities. State universities have three pathways: the National Selection Based on Achievement, the National Selection Based on Tests, and the Independent Selection pathway. In contrast to private universities, they only have independent ways, which the government does not regulate, but each private university determines itself. Specifically, this research focuses on autonomous systems developed by private universities.

Social media is one type of facility that is managed to support the student admissions system. Several studies have found that social media is essential for providing information (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022; Leite & Baptista, 2022) to prospective students. Data is also obtained through social networks (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022; Lin, 2022), discussion forums (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022; Mari et al., 2022), and various other sources of information (Leite & (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Mari et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2022). According to the findings of these studies, social media and particular elements of the university application process are directly related. However, they tend to focus less on determining the extent of social media's essential and supporting role in the university selection process. In this research, the decoy effect strategy is also known due to the role of social media. The decoy effect refers to the phenomenon of consumers having different preferences for existing choice alternatives with or without (phantom) decoy options in their choice sets (Yuan & Xiao, 2022). A marketing approach that uses bait objects to influence consumers is known as the decoy effect. (Cui, 2022). Therefore, this research plays a guiding role in the enrollment of new students in tertiary institutions, particularly concerning was the use of social media during the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media is regarded as the most important communication platform for disseminating brand information (Jamil et al., 2022). Brand awareness, brand image, and brand loyalty are all influenced by social media marketing activity (BILGIN, 2018). Universities can improve their commercial performance by launching and implementing market-oriented activities (Ahmed Zebal & Goodwin, 2012). The point is that the easiest and most effective way to build branding and adopt market needs during Covid-19 is to use social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The role of social media in the decision-making process

Social media emerged because of digital network technology (Cammaerts, 2015). Technology is a contested space where interaction dynamics can occur (Hermida, 2015). Social media is a powerful and intense channel for sharing experiences, which can be an essential factor in decision-making (Pop et al., 2022). Social media is increasingly constitutive in organizing social movements and mobilization (Cammaerts, 2015). Social media influences people's beliefs, values, and attitudes, as well as their intentions and behaviour (Lai & To, 2015). Social media has increased the visibility and acceptance of information in contemporary movements (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022).

Therefore, social media has various functions, including helping students to maintain their health during the co-19 pandemic (Mohsen et al., 2022), increasing sales transactions (Jamil et al., 2022; Pop et al., 2022), and sharing of information, social networking, citizen participation, and communication (Lin, 2022). We emphasize three focus functions of social media in the context of this research, namely information sharing, social networks, and discussion forums. First, social media is sharing information in the form of a one-way flow of information (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022; Lin, 2022). Communication via social media from the government to citizens (Ahmad et al., 2021). In real-time, civil society or other organizations broadcast

messages to a large audience (Fromm et al., 2021) and post messages in the form of diplomatic negotiations (Ashbrook & Zalba, 2021). Second, social media is networking, namely, sharing information by forming social networks (Lin, 2022). The flow of information is created through social networks so that individuals or organizations can produce a report (Leite & Baptista, 2022). The open and flexible structure allows each participant to become a network node (Lin, 2022). They can develop long-term relationships by increasing their status as a credible source of information (Leite & Baptista, 2022). Third, social media is a discussion forum, namely Citizen participation and Communication (Lin, 2022). Social media in the context of cooperation (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022) because all members have the same opportunity to share information, usually discussing a topic of concern.

Apart from the supporting role of social media in the decision-making process (Pop et al., 2022), there is also a supporting role for social media, which is used to build awareness (Lin, 2022) and raise awareness (Aljumah et al., 2023; Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022). Social media changes people's beliefs, values, and attitudes, as well as their intentions and behavior (Lai & To, 2015). Social media can support collaborative planning (Lin, 2022). However, online activism has increased and taken on new meaning with the emergence of several social media platforms (Bandopadhyaya & Kenix, 2022). Thus, social media users have the potential to be affected by the decoy effect, the bait technique for bundling, in particular, is an important marketing choice since it might represent customer reference price impact behavior. (Yuan & Xiao, 2022).

2.2. Decision making process and Decoy effect

The decoy effect occurs when the pressure of high time conditions shows a tendency to recognize differences between the right price choices in decision-making but not for round prices ((Gina) Cui et al., 2021). The bait effect is a well-known and exciting decision-making bias often exploited by marketers to steer consumers toward desired purchase outcomes (Jeong et al., 2021). Continuous price feeds play an essential role in comprehensively comparing the two types of experiments (Xu et al., 2021). Using baits can be a compelling incentive to influence people's preferences for best practices in decision-making. Companies build an environment of choice that takes advantage of the bait effect to increase or decrease consumer sales (Apffelstaedt & Mechtenberg, 2021).

The university also offers sales to consumers, namely prospective students. Universities need consumer trust (Vincenthio et al., 2021), and several reasons for prospective students choosing universities are based on the results of previous research. Prospective students choosing a university are influenced by their parents, siblings, and extended family because most depend on their families for financial support (Wut et al., 2022). Total tuition fees and lecture time are the most critical attributes (Vincenthio et al., 2021).

But the presence of digitalization and their social networks provide them with information about universities (Wut et al., 2022). It reveals that electronic word of mouth is the most influential factor in choosing a university, followed by peer influence and the university's reputation (Mohsen et al., 2022; Wut et al., 2022). Recommended factors, tuition fees, and university rankings (Mokarrama et al., 2020). Strong vision, uniqueness, excellence, good interpersonal communication, and scholarship factors (Rosyidah et al., 2020). Thus, social media can change prospective students' attitudes and behavior, so there is a tendency for a decoy effect to occur in making decisions about the choice of study program at the university. The important role of social media in considering access to quality graduates is due to the role of social networking, media sharing networks, and discussion forums.

3. Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. The population is Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University (MSRU) students, totaling 101 students who were randomly selected. Data collection techniques using observation, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews. The survey was carried out by visiting the new student admissions department periodically from January to March 2022. Questionnaires were sent to students through the help of a Google form to be filled in by respondents, and an observation process was also carried out. In-depth interviews were conducted for 45 minutes to 60 minutes with selected students. The discussion starts with casual conversation and then focuses on research.

The survey and interview results were processed using the CAQDAS (Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software) system tool, Software in the Nvivo-12 Plus application. The stages are data collection, reduction, presentation, and conclusion. Data collectors are researchers themselves who have received qualitative research training on using the N-Vivo 12 plus application and interview techniques that focus on research informants. In the conclusion section, the researcher continues to make observations by looking at data reduction results and staying focused on the research objectives to be achieved. Meanwhile, In order to obtain variants of all respondents' responses, the results of the questionnaire data processing are displayed in the form of frequency tables and graphics. Excel and N-Vivo 12 Plus aid in the analysis of variants of respondents' responses by comparing them to data from specified literature studies. Observational data collection to ensure data from the results of the questionnaire, then the results of the questionnaire are strengthened by the data from the interviews. Data validation uses triangulation by ensuring data by three researchers so that the data is confirmed to be valid. Finally, the conclusion is linked to the theoretical framework of the literature study based on substantial data analysis.

4. Results

Prospective students learn about university courses, begin, develop, and maintain their search system by travelling from one website to another within a district, moving between communities within the same province, and exploring foreign universities. They search for information from one university website to another university website so that the choice of the study program is in line with their expectations. The principal capital of prospective students is a high school diploma or equivalent. During this search cycle, prospective students interact with their families and fellow prospective students from the same school and other schools, building networks with universities, alums, foundations, and senior students. They use various types of social media to access other people, such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. Our findings are divided into three sections: first, we characterize the components that operate in social media, specifically social networks, media sharing networks, and discussion forums (section 4.1). Second, we discuss the critical and supportive function of social media in student decision-making systems (section 4.2). Third, we discuss the decoy effect that prospective students encountered during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the significance of social media during that time.

4.1 Social media components in prospective students' social relationships

This section describes our findings about the components of social media that operate in three types of social media—social networking, media sharing networks, and discussion forums—relevant to the social relationships between prospective students and other actors. (A summary description is provided in Table 1).

Table 1: Social media types, interacting actors, and operational social media components

Types of Social Media	Actors	Operational social media components
Social networking	Active student	Diplomacy: Facebook for building relationships online.
	Alumni	Diplomacy: WA Group to build an information network at any time.
Media sharing networks	University Management	Branding: Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Snapchat to share photos and videos about study program and university activities.
	University Foundation	Branding: using youtube to build reputation.
Discussion forums	Family	Communication: WA Group for discussions about educational costs and study programs that have job prospects.
	High School Teachers and Friends	Communication: WA Group for discussions about the study program to be chosen with friends, and discussions regarding where to continue studying.

4.1.1 Social Networking: diplomacy

The interview shows two actors interacting with prospective students through social media. First, students use Facebook social media as a means of diplomacy to influence, convince, and persuade prospective students, as quoted by the following prospective students:

“During the new student admission period via Facebook, I received information from a semester 6 student at the university to continue studying in the same study program as him. He even sent photos and videos of his study program activities to convince and persuade me to be interested.” (CT, MSRU: February 17, 2022)

Second, the in-group relations of university alums. Prospective in-group students are prospective students who are members of the same district. The social media component operating here is diplomacy. Diplomacy is manifested in the form of mutually acceptable agreements, one of the prospective students said:

When I asked one of the alums who received a scholarship at the university, I contacted him via Facebook, and he assured me that the study program at his university was accredited and scholarships were available. He was willing to help me meet with the scholarship administrator because he is also an alumnus of a scholarship recipient. (IR, MSRU: March 1, 2022)

4.1.2. Media sharing networks: Branding

External environmental factors such as increasing competition in higher education, rising tuition fees, and increasing profiles of higher education rankings increase the need for effective branding. The interviews show that two actors interact with prospective students through the media-sharing network. First, university management carries out branding through Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Snapchat. As the results of the interview:

I know "The Digital Entrepreneurship University" is one of the university's branding from Instagram and Youtube. Every day there is information related to the university in the form of photographs and e-papers. I received news that the e-paper is the official information media created by the university's student affairs (management). (CT, MSRU: February 17, 2022).

One day, I opened the Tik Tok and Snapchat applications, and suddenly there was information about the university's vision and mission in a short video. These visions and missions differ from the visions and missions of other universities I have known. These visions focus on "entrepreneurship," so I am interested in learning about it. (IR, MSRU: March 1, 2022)

While I was at the wedding, I sat side by side with one of the university leaders I know are friendly. He explained the lecture process at his university, which used Tik Tok social media. Students present lecture material in the form of short videos uploaded on Tik Tok and then sent to their lecturers as a substitute for the conventional face-to-face lecture process in the classroom. (CT, MSRU: February 17, 2022)

Second, the university foundation, in this case, the Muhammadiyah Association, is a community organization that cares about education, health, and social services. Muhammadiyah builds a reputation by creating a quality brand so that it is easier to promote new student admissions. The Council of higher education, research, and development of the Central Executive of Muhammadiyah conduct public relations training to build branding. The results of interviews with prospective students stated that:

I watch some Muhammadiyah colleges on youtube. I watched the messages conveyed by several universities, for example, which stated, "UMM from Muhammadiyah for the Nation, UMY Young Worldwide, and UMS RAPPANG The Digital Entrepreneurship University." I am increasingly interested in Muhammadiyah universities. (AAN, MSRU: January 7, 2022)

4.1.2. Discussion forums: communication

Apart from functioning to convey information, the WhatsApp (WA) group also serves as a medium for discussion, media for sharing, entertainment media, and media that parents and families can use to monitor children while at school. Results of interviews with prospective new students:

When I had difficulty choosing a university, I shared with the WA family the difficulties I was experiencing. My family suggested choosing a digital business study program at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University. (NQ, MSRU: January 15, 2022)

I want to continue my education after graduating from high school, but my funds are limited. With the WA family, I communicate with families abroad, and they can help pay for my studies as long as I choose an agricultural study program at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University. (CT, MSRU: February 17, 2022)

WhatsApp social media allows prospective students to share information on new student admissions via status. Prospective students share knowledge material about information on new student admissions by using the WhatsApp Story feature or rate on WhatsApp. Prospective students share photos, videos, or website links using status. also used together with high school teachers and friends to discuss study programs and universities to be chosen. As the results of interviews with prospective students are as follows:

I use WA Groups to discuss with teachers and high school friends to share information about plans to continue their education at university. I give suggestions regarding study programs with good prospects. (IR, MSRU: March 1, 2022)

When our teachers ask in the WA Group: where do you want to continue studying after graduating from high school? I answered: I would continue my education at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University by choosing a digital business study program. (NQ, MSRU: January 15, 2022)

3.2. The role of social media in the decision-making process of prospective students

Using the principles of Social Networks, we identified and explained the primary actors who interact with prospective students, as well as the components of social media in their interactions, in the preceding part, media sharing networks, and discussion forums. This section focuses on social media's role in perspective students' decision-making systems. We will also explain the results of their selection. We find that access to graduate quality capital is essential through social media, access to financial capital, on the other hand, plays a supportive function. Table 2 summarizes the general description.

Table 2. Summary of the role of social media in the university selection process

Type of roles	Role classification	The use of social media
Essential roles	Diplomacy and branding to reputation	social networking and media sharing networks
Supporting roles	Discussion to finance	discussion forums

3.2.1 Essential roles: Diplomacy and branding to reputation for university reputation

Social media is vital in accessing the university reputation information for prospective students, namely brochures and published advertisements. They contain various types of flyers and advertisements for prospective students. Social media in the form of social networking can be seen in the relationship between prospective students and active students, where diplomacy is a supporting factor to be more convincing.

Brochures and advertisements containing study program accreditation and university accreditation are explained by a prospective student as follows:

I found information about new student admissions on Facebook social media which consisted of brochures, advertisements, and photos of university activities. In addition to short videos and live broadcasts, students actively create learning content. (SD, MSRU: January 22, 2022)

Social media in the form of social networking is also seen in the relationship between prospective students and university alums, where diplomacy is a significant factor. Social networking also uses the WA Group to build an information network anytime. The results of an interview with one of the prospective students:

I became a member of a university's WA Group and got information about the university's vision and mission from alum posts. The alums even tried to convince me about the quality of their university graduates by setting the example of themselves who had succeeded in becoming an agricultural entrepreneurs and a member of the Regional People's Representative Council. (SA, MSRU: January 5, 2022)

University branding that uses media-sharing networks can be seen in the relationship between prospective students, university management, and university foundations. Branding is a significant factor. Media sharing networks are Instagram, YouTube, Tik Tok, and Snapchat for sharing photos and videos about study programs and university activities. The results of an interview with one of the prospective students:

Every day there is information related to the university in the form of photographs and e-papers. I received news that the e-paper is the official information media created by the student affairs (management) division of the Muhammadiyah University of Sidenreng Rappang. So, I am increasingly convinced that this university has quality graduates. (CT, MSRU: February 17, 2022).

I understand the university's vision and mission of "The Digital Entrepreneurship University" through YouTube media uploaded by the university's Foundation management. I am increasingly convinced that this university has quality graduates. (AAN, MSRU: January 7, 2022)

Family communication, as well as high school teachers and friends, use social media in the form of discussion forums. The most widely used communication media is the WA Group. The critical role of WA Group's social media in accessing quality graduates is evident from the form of discussion forums. The interview is as follows: *After discussing it with my family and friends, I am even more convinced to choose a digital business study program. I also discussed my options with my high school friends and teachers. They all agreed with my study program selected, mainly because it was still new and needed by society. (NQ, MSRU: January 15, 2022)*

3.2.2. Supporting roles: Discussion on finance

We also found that prospective students can gain access to financial capital through social media. Assistance with education costs is accessed through interactions with families and parents. With a family, prospective students can provide some money for daily needs during the study period. This money is also used for tuition fees, boarding costs, and to help with transportation costs to campus. One prospective student explained this as follows:

When I need money, I will ask for it from my family via the WA Group family discussion forum. This assistance [covers] educational expenses and boarding house rental fees. Recently I asked for help to send a payment for my semester one education to my sister, who is abroad. (NQ, MSRU: January 15, 2022)

I usually casually ask for help with transportation costs from my family through the family's WA Group discussion forum. I have a younger sibling who works for a company on the island of Borneo, sending money through the bank for transportation and daily living expenses. (IR, MSRU: March 1, 2022)

However, social media has an impact on access to financial capital not only in terms of education expenditures, but also of transportation costs. Prospective students only use social media as supporting access if they need financial assistance for educational purposes. So that in the context of decision-making, choose a study program at the university only as supporting access.

3.3. Decoy effect for prospective students during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic had shaken the new student admissions system at all universities since at least March 2020, when the government began imposing restrictions on social interactions that required people to work, study and pray from home. Following these rules, the government coined the term "new-normal," in which people are permitted to work outside but must nonetheless follow health precautions like as wearing masks, keeping a safe distance, and often washing their hands. In addition, some universities are implementing requirements to show Covid-free certificates and rapid test results for university admission.

Our survey results identify two contexts of vulnerability in the university admissions system during the pandemic. First, prospective students cannot enter the campus if they do not meet the Covid-19 requirements at the place of registration at the university. Second, prospective students only get information about the student registration system online, primarily via social media. This situation impacts the tendency for a decoy effect to occur for prospective new students in determining the university's study program choice. The results of the questionnaire that we circulated via the Google form, this trend is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

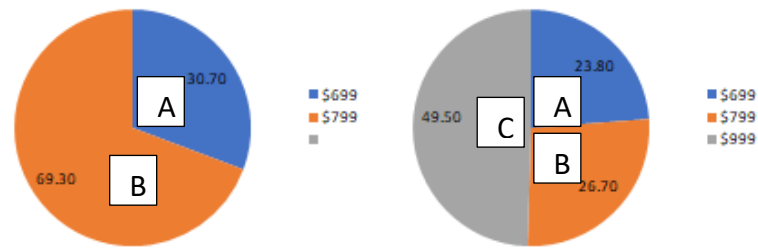


Figure 1. Education costs per year and the decoy effect

Figure 1 shows that two courses are offered for one year of study. Course A = \$699, and course B = \$799. Prospective students are asked to choose one of the two study programs, so prospective students choose A = 30.70% while choosing B = 69.3%. Then the admissions department offers a C course for \$999 tuition. As a result, the same prospective students changed their choices. They chose A = 23.80%, chose B = 26.70%, and chose C = 49.5%. They choose study program C, while study program C is a bait product, namely a lure product given as a choice.

We explored questions about the clarity of the information provided by the new student admissions department. Table 3 shows the completeness of the information included when respondents, as much as 25%, answered very firmly. 40% responded, 28% answered standard, and 7% answered unclearly. When asked about the promotional tools used, 40% thought they were normal, 39% thought they were clear, 14% thought they were obvious, and 6% thought they weren't clear, with even 1% thinking they weren't apparent. Finally, when asked how well they understood the product, 42% said it was clear, 31% said it was very clear, with 9% saying it was not. As a result, the three indicators questioned concerning information completeness, promotional tool clarity, and respondents' level of understanding were assessed to be extremely clear, transparent, and standard.

Table-3. Information listed.

	Very clear	Clear	Standard	Unclear	Very Unclear
Complete	25%	40%	28%	7%	0%
Promotion	14%	39%	40%	6%	1%
Understand	18%	42%	31%	9%	0%

Source: Questionnaire Processed Results.

Respondents chose to know the information conveyed and were satisfied with the study program they chose. When we tried to interview one of the respondents to complete the data and validate it, the respondents' answers were as follows:

I decided to choose the digital business study program at Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang University because I feel that the study program is worth the cost of education and meets current needs. (NQ, MSRU: January 15, 2022)

5. Discussion

Social media is a means of diplomacy to influence, convince and persuade prospective students through social networks. Social media influences the beliefs and behavior of prospective students (Lai & To, 2015) in choosing a university. They form social networks (Cammaerts, 2015), namely individual and organizational networks (Lin, 2022). Prospective students are influenced by other students or influence each other in their networks (Alfano, 2022). Based on interview data, they admit that they were persuaded by their friends to choose a university. Social connections between individuals are available through relationships built on social networks that facilitate trust and social cooperation (Zihnioğlu & Dalkıran, 2022). Social networks, as an organized system of interconnected relationships, have an essential function in establishing social norms that can be used to promote choices (Reyes et al., 2022).

Every individual and organization needs an external environment (Spanou, 2020). The external environment is in the form of opportunities and challenges (Ahmad et al., 2020; André et al., 2018; Kusumasari et al., 2018), therefore the importance of branding and good reputation to build trust (Leite & Baptista, 2022). Based on interview data, universities are comparing themselves with social media. Branding or brands in any social media strategy must serve the organization internally and externally (Yan, 2011). In addition, social media also enhances the university's reputation. Research data shows prospective students know the university's importance from social media. The chosen university's reputation and the selected department's reputation are essential (Vincenthio et al., 2021). In these conditions, social media acts as a media-sharing network (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022) to enhance the university's reputation. Finally, social media has become a sharing network for prospective students to consider when choosing a university.

Prospective students need information input or opinions from others before choosing a university. Research data shows that they experience difficulties making choices, especially financial factors and university study

programs. However, they found a solution after forming a discussion forum via social media. In this condition, social media becomes digital communication (Fyshchuk, 2020) in the form of a discussion forum. They use social media to cooperate (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022), and the results of research interviews show that they work with their families to help each other financially. University students need finances in their educational process (Carneiro et al., 2020). Financial factors in the educational process at universities are decisive (Vincenthio et al., 2021). For example, practicum fees (Nguí & Lay, 2020), textbook costs, teaching materials costs for introductory courses (Brandle, 2022), and so on. Social media in the form of discussion forums helps students with financial matters, especially with their families.

There are two roles of social media in choosing a university: the essential and the supporting roles. First, the critical role of social media is realized through social networks, media sharing networks, and discussion forums, as shown in Table 2. Prospective students get information about the quality of alums (Anthony, 2020). Information about the quality of alums spreads on social media, and prospective students get recommendations about the quality of alums from the communication group. Second, the role of support is manifested through discussion forums. Prospective students have access to financial capital to choose a university because of the role of social media. They receive financial assistance from their families after conducting discussion forums (Wut et al., 2022). There are references to families who have studied at the same university (Yuan & Xiao, 2022).

The importance of social media in the university selection process could be overstated. Social media can change attitudes and intentions toward selecting a university (Lai & To, 2015) so that decisions tend to occur that are not unanimous ((Gina) Cui et al., 2021)—choosing a university because of the helper product, which is a decoy product to influence (Xu et al., 2021) prospective students. As shown in Figure 1, that product helper affects prospective students. Therefore, it is essential for university management to understand the decoy effect strategy to increase or decrease consumers (Apffelstaedt & Mechtenberg, 2021), in this case, prospective students. The essential condition for the positive bait effect to occur is the ability of the bait product to trigger consumer exchange and comparison with the target product (Xu et al., 2021). In Figure 1, the target product is product C; it is hoped that many will choose it compared to product A or product B. The decoy effect strategy is considered successful because prospective students feel happy with their choice. It demonstrates that an inclusion of an alternative in the choice set can alter one's preference among the other choices (Jeong et al., 2021).

Several research results prove that bait products are able to change choices for consumers, especially price considerations and product visualization offered. Bundling decoy approach is an essential marketing choice because it might reflect customer behavior caused by the reference pricing impact (Yuan & Xiao, 2022). Price does not mean that it has to be expensive or cheap, but that is rational according to consumer perceptions (Xu et al., 2021). The most important thing is the product visualization, as shown in Figure 1, the price visualization is not too different but has a different quality, the visualization can have an impact on the decision-making process (Jeong et al., 2021). The point is that the accuracy of prices and the style of presentation of price information has an impact on the decision-making process ((Gina) Cui et al., 2021).

6. Conclusion

The role of social media in the form of social networking, media sharing networks, and discussion forums in choosing a university for prospective students consist of two levels, namely the essential role and the complementary role. This level is determined by the type of benefits accessed through a particular kind of social media. In this case, the part of social networking and media sharing networks is for prospective students to gain access to the university's reputation. At the same time, the discussion forum's role is to access complementary financial capital.

Furthermore, this investigation discovered that the Covid-19 pandemic, information about the new student admission system was mostly conveyed online, so prospective students experienced a decoy effect in determining their choice of the study program. The decoy effect occurs due to changes in the cost of education offered. The decoy effect strategy can attract the attention of prospective students even though it is only through social media. The limitations of this research are the use of a questionnaire with Google form and only using a sample at one university. So we recommend further research at more universities with a larger sample.

Therefore, the decoy effect strategy by using social media greatly influences students' decisions to determine university choices. The decoy effect strategy is able to influence students to change choices according to what the university expects. Prospective students are happy with their choice. Universities should actively use social media in promoting their universities, especially during the admissions period. Social media is very effective in providing information to prospective students to make decisions, because the role of social media and sharing networks is vital to understanding a university's reputation. University leaders can use the decoy effect strategy to influence prospective students to make choices, even if it's through social media.

Acknowledgment

Thank you to the Chancellor of Muhammadiyah University, Sidenreng Rappang, who has assisted in the data collection and processing facilities.

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