



The Use of Social Media Application as a Factor Influencing the Students' Decisions-Making to Enrol at Private Higher Education Institutions using Smart PLS

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Abstract

This study assessed the use of social media application significantly influence the students' decision-making to enrol at private higher education institutions (HEIs) within the Malaysian context. The underpinning theory applied in this study was the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). A quantitative method, stratified sampling technique and systematic sampling technique applied in this study to test the proposed hypotheses based on a sample of 500 first-year students in their first academic semester at 23 selected private HEIs in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. Data analysis was carried out using smartPLS software. The analysis outcome of the focal study had

expounded a significant positive relationship between the use of social media application and students' decision-making as a direct relationship. Thus, analysis of the structural model had further verified that hypotheses h1 of the focal study were accepted. The result shows a significant positive relationship between social media application and students' decision-making indicated by a path coefficient of 0.630, t-value of 24.103, and p-value of 0.000.

Keywords: Students' Decision Making; Social Media Application; Undergraduate; Private Higher Education Institution

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Introduction

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2019), there are 45 active private HEIs in Malaysia. Since the MOE aspires to increase the students' access to higher education as well as their enrolment in the HEIs by 2025 (MOE, 2015), the HEIs in Malaysia, especially private HEIs, play a pivotal role in realizing this target given the transformation of the overall higher education system according to the socioeconomic standards and development goals (Norliza, Aspah, Nor Aina, Normazni, & Mansoureh, 2017). However, the increasingly competitive industry among HEIs has caused significant challenges for the HEIs to recruit new students (Bock, Poole, & Joseph, 2014; Wu & Naidoo, 2016).

Literature review

Higher education institutions selection depends on the students' effort and capability of search and process data in a meaningful way (Kotler, 1975; Budur & Rashid, 2018). Students' selection might be influenced by the university's marketing efforts (Chapman, 1981). The influence of social media application on the students' decision-making to enrol at a private HEI established the highlight of this study.

The promotion and marketing strategies through the social media application have become a necessity today. Selvarajah and Sulaiman (2014) addressed the influence of social media application as a prominent tool and prestige of social interaction as well as the networking between students and the society in the study of the influence of social media on the intention of Gen Z to select a private HEI of their choice in Malaysia. Proboyo and Soedarsono (2015); Budur and Rashid (2018) highlighted adopted marketing efforts by HEI to influence the students' decision.

Hemsley and Oplatka (2015) also reaffirmed that the combination of relatively fixed characteristics of HEI and the adopted marketing strategies to communicate with the prospective

students influences the students' decision-making to enrol at the HEI of their choice based on the review of over 20 years of research. On a similar note, Migin, Mohammad, and Ali, (2015) revealed vital relationships between adopted marketing communication factors and the undergraduates' decision-making to enrol at an HEI.

The use of social media application

The social media application refers to a group of Internet-based applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan, 2015). In recent years, the marketing and recruitment of HEIs have shifted towards implementing digital strategies and tools, which has propelled the strategic use of social media application among HEIs. The use of social media application is a common phenomenon given its unique characteristics (Ying, Ying, Ling, & Seong, 2016). More HEIs use the advantage of social media application for the recruitment of new students (Hanover Research, 2015). Brown, Wohn and Ellison (2016) highlighted the potential benefits of a social media application in facilitating the prospective students to communicate, share experiences, and address any queries.

As a result, HEIs should take advantage of the web-based technology to recruit new students, especially students from Gen-Z. The latter is highly connected to such communication means and digital technologies (Salleh, Mahbob, & Baharudin, 2017). Therefore, social media application is a great opportunity to manage private HEI to reach prospective students to enrol at private HEI (Mohd Farid, Aeshah, Rosni, & Zulkifli, 2019). Hence, well-planned marketing strategies should be implemented to recruit new students.

In view of the above, the following hypothesis was suggested for testing:

h1: There is a significant relationship between social media application and the students' decision-making to enrol at private HEI.

Students' Decision Making (DM)

University selection is an important decision-making process for undergraduate students, which can be viewed as a complex process to pursue (Kotler, 1975; Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The methods by which students decided whether to go for HEI or not already defined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) in their published paper. In general, it is vital to grasp and explore the students' decision-making to enrol at a private HEI to create an effective exchange between the prospective students and private HEIs where the prospective students select a particular private HEI. The private HEI obtains the prospective students as their students (Sia, 2013).

Theory of Reasoned Action

The underpinning theories of this study is the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to assess the influence of the use of social media application. TRA was applied as a model for social

networking behaviour in this study because the theory provided unique advantages over other digital communication means (Peslak, Ceccucci, & Sendall, 2012). Additionally, the theory was also successfully applied in general consumer information technologies (Peslak et al., 2012; Lai, 2017). Moreover, the theory has a solid theoretical establishment compared to numerous other models used in studies on the adoption of technological innovation (Otieno, Liyala, Odongo, & Abeka, 2016).

Proposed research model

Figure 1.1: Research framework model



Figure 1.1 above show the theoretical framework adopted from Selvarajah and Sulaiman (2014).

The use of social media application (as the independent variable) was identified as one of the factors that influence the students' decision-making to enrol at private HEI (as a dependent variable).

Methodology

This study adapted the questionnaire survey approach to address the study's objectives "to determine the relationship between the use of social media application and the students' decision-making to enrol at a private HEI". The related research questions "does the use of social media application significantly influence the students' decision-making to enrol at a private HEI?". In addition, this study adopted the Likert scale to measure the responses. The adopted five-point Likert scale in this study was applied to measure the level of influence of each item according to the endpoints of "not at all influential" to "extremely influential".

The January intake for 23 selected private HEIs in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor recorded 12,139 students. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), based on the population, this study targeted a sample size of 375. With that, this study distributed 500 questionnaires to meet the minimum sample size of 375.

Results

Data analysis was carried out using smartPLS software, and Figure 1.2 shows the output of the structural model consists of the use of social media application as an independent variable and decision making as the dependent variable. These measured items were loaded on their respective constructs. Average variance Extracted (AVE), discriminant validity, reliability and model coefficient were assessed to determine the quality of constructs and items.

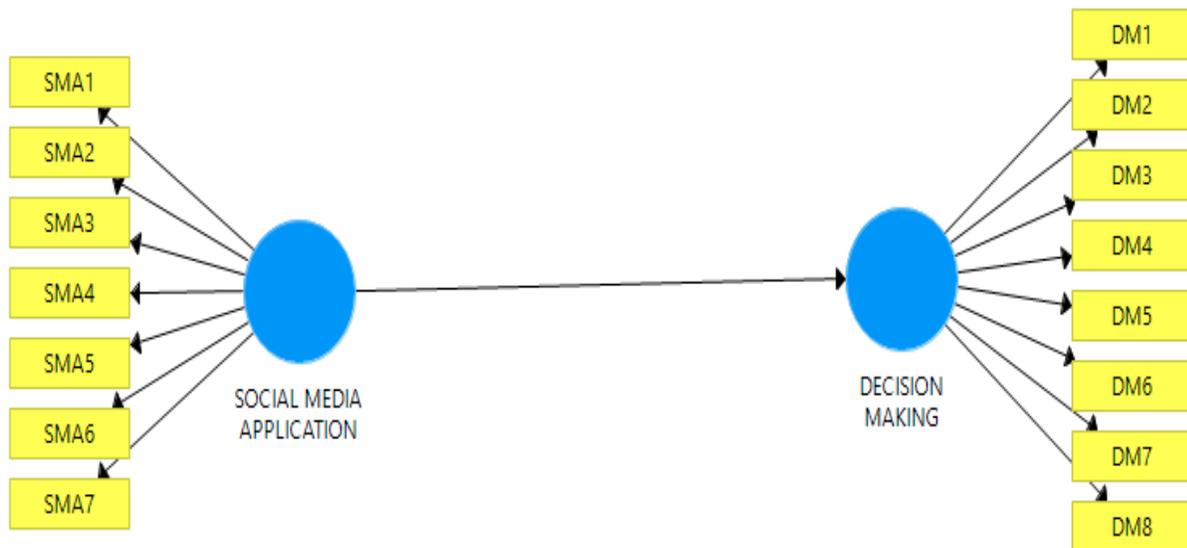


Figure 1.2. Output SmartPLS of Structural Model

According to Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt, (2017) if the Cronbach alpha is less than 0.60, the study data is considered poor. It is acceptable at 0.70, whereas, for Cronbach, alpha over 0.80 is considered to be more reliable. The value of Cronbach's alpha should be 0.70 or above (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 1 below summarized on internal consistency outcome of coefficient alpha generated. All the values were above the cut-off value of coefficient alpha 0.7. Thus, this particular analysis had confirmed that the constructs used in this study are having a good internal consistency, which is 0.821 and 0.893.

Table 1. Internal Consistency

Construct	No. of Predictors (Items)	Cronbach Alpha
SMA (IV)	7	0.893
DM (DV)	8	0.821

Besides internal consistency, evaluation for measurement model can be traced by look at their loading, composite reliability, and AVE. All items loading more than 0.5 indicates the reliability, all-composite reliability greater than 0.7 indicates internal consistency and all AVE exceed 0.5 shows convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2017)

Table 2. Internal Consistency

Latent Variable	Construct	Factor Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Social Media Application	SMA1	0.794	0.915	0.605
	SMA2	0.795		
	SMA3	0.818		
	SMA4	0.795		
	SMA5	0.811		
	SMA6	0.716		
	SMA7	0.710		
Decision Making	DM1	0.612	0.859	0.536
	DM2	0.603		
	DM3	0.609		
	DM4	0.765		
	DM5	0.749		
	DM6	0.712		
	DM7	0.640		
	DM8	0.560		

Table 2 shows all the result pass the threshold value suggested by Hair et al., (2017). Besides, we focus on the AVE for the convergence validity, and it will consider acceptable if the value is between 0.50 to 0.70 or above (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 3. Fornell Larker's Criterion in Establishing Discriminant Validity ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$)

	Social Media Application	Decision Making
Social Media Application	0.778	0.630
Decision Making		0.660

Table 3 show that the *square root of average variance extracted* ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) values of all variables are greater than the correlation between latent variables and other latent variables so that the instruments of each variable are valid discriminant. In compliance with Fornell-Larker's criterion, this study is keen to report that the constructs and items used in this study had confirmed its discriminant validity.

From the PLS model output, structural model testing and hypotheses are performed by looking at the estimated path coefficient values and critical point values (*t*-statistics) significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The result for path coefficients on the relationship between social media application (SMA) and decision making (DM) was β 0.630. The result on *t*-value and *p*-value explicated that SMA has a strong positive relationship on DM where *t*-value = 24.103 and *p*-value = 0.000. Hence, this had confirmed that the relationship of SMA toward DM is significant because the *t*-value more than 1.96 and *p*-value of less than 0.05. Considering the assessment result of the path relationship of the structural model had delineated that SMA has a positive impact on DM. Thus, analysis of the structural model had further verified that hypotheses *h1* of the focal study were accepted.

Conclusion

The findings highlighted a significant positive effect between the use of social media application and students' decision-making. Thus, analysis on the structural model had verified that hypotheses *H1* of the focal study were accepted.

This study theoretically contributed to the existing literature and theory development by revalidating the relationships of the use of social media application and students' decision-making to enrol at private HEIs. Besides that, the private HEIs also re-design their marketing strategies to attract prospective students to enrol at their HEI. To keep up with the technology and business advancement, the private HEIs need to improve their marketing platform via social media application given its advantages as a recruitment platform.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

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