REVOLUTION OF THE MARKETING OF ADULT EDUCATION SERVICES IN THE ERA OF ONLINE LEARNING AND GLOBAL COMPETITION

Olha Yeremenko, Kateryna Onopriienko, Anton Boyko, Anzhela Kuznyetsova

Streszczenie

Globalne przejście na kształcenie online podkreśla kluczową rolę edukacji dorosłych w efektywności organizacyjnej. W obliczu wyzwań demograficznych i zwiększonej konkurencji, instytucje edukacji dorosłych wymagają silnych strategii marketingowych. Obejmuje to organizowanie działań marketingowych, zrozumienie popytu konsumentów i wykorzystanie tradycyjnych strategii online, skierowanych do organizacji edukacyjnych, użytkowników, podmiotów rządowych i promotorów usług.

Niniejszy artykuł podkreśla potrzebę skutecznych działań marketingowych, zrozumienia popytu konsumenckiego oraz wykorzystania tradycyjnych i internetowych strategii w celu dotarcia do organizacji edukacyjnych, użytkowników, podmiotów rządowych i promotorów usług za pośrednictwem marketingu internetowego, mediów społecznościowych, aplikacji mobilnych i technologii immersyjnych w promowaniu edukacji dorosłych.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja dorosłych, nauka online, marketing internetowy, rozwój

REWOLUCJA W MARKETINGU USŁUG EDUKACYJNYCH DLA DOROSŁYCH W ERZE NAUKI ONLINE I GLOBALNEJ KONKURENCJI

Summary

Global shifts to online learning underscore the critical role of adult education in organizational efficiency. Facing demographic challenges and heightened competition, adult education institutions require potent marketing strategies. This encompasses organizing marketing activities, understanding consumer demand, and leveraging traditional strategies online, targeting educational organizations, users, government entities, and service promoters.

This article emphasizes the need for effective marketing activities, understanding consumer demand, and leveraging traditional and online strategies to target educational organizations,

users, government entities, and service promoters through internet marketing, social media, mobile applications, and immersive technologies in promoting adult education.

Keywords: adult education, online learning, Internet marketing, development

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1. Introduction

In the 21st century, as adult education becomes pivotal for societal advancement, Internet marketing emerges as a crucial tool for efficient communication and promotion. Globally, significant shifts have occurred recently, resulting in changes to several industries. Particularly because of a significant shift in the way education is delivered, namely the move from traditional classroom instruction to online learning, adult education has emerged as a vital instrument for ensuring the efficient operation of several enterprises, organizations, and educational establishments. However, in the modern world, adult education institutions require more potent marketing strategies to strengthen their competitive edge and fend off competition, given the demographic crisis's impact on the market for educational services and the ease with which students may now pursue higher education elsewhere.

In the twenty-first century, educational marketing is growing more and more important as adult education becomes a crucial strategy for the advancement of society and technology advance at a breakneck speed. Since it is widely acknowledged that the Internet is currently the most effective tool for marketing, marketing communications, advertising strategies, and the speed at which information can be delivered to a potential student who is considered a consumer, Internet marketing in particular is emerging as a critical innovative tool in promoting educational services.

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The notion of Internet marketing for education encompasses many different aspects, including organizing marketing activities through theory and methodology, studying consumer demand and promoting goods and services, positioning products or services, and advertising. A further definition of internet marketing is the use of all traditional marketing strategies on the Internet, focusing on the four primary components of the marketing mix: promotion, pricing, product, and location of sale. Educational organizations, users of educational services, including people and legal entities, the government, and organizations that promote educational services on the market are the targets of this type of marketing.

In science, the issue of cooperation between "education-internet-marketing" for education is relatively new. This is demonstrated by the scant number of publications (only 562 in 2000–2023) that match the search terms "education and internet and marketing" by article title, abstract, and keywords in the Scopus database (Fig. 1).
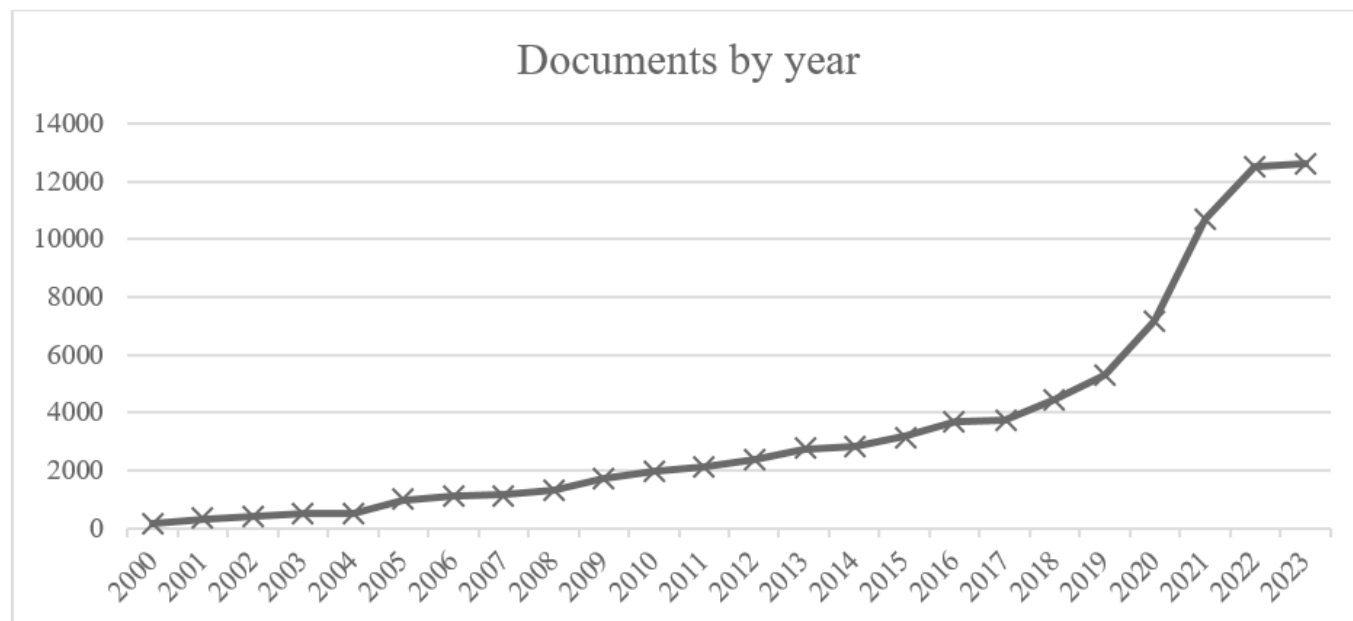
Figure 1.   The dynamic of publishing articles on «education-internet-marketing»
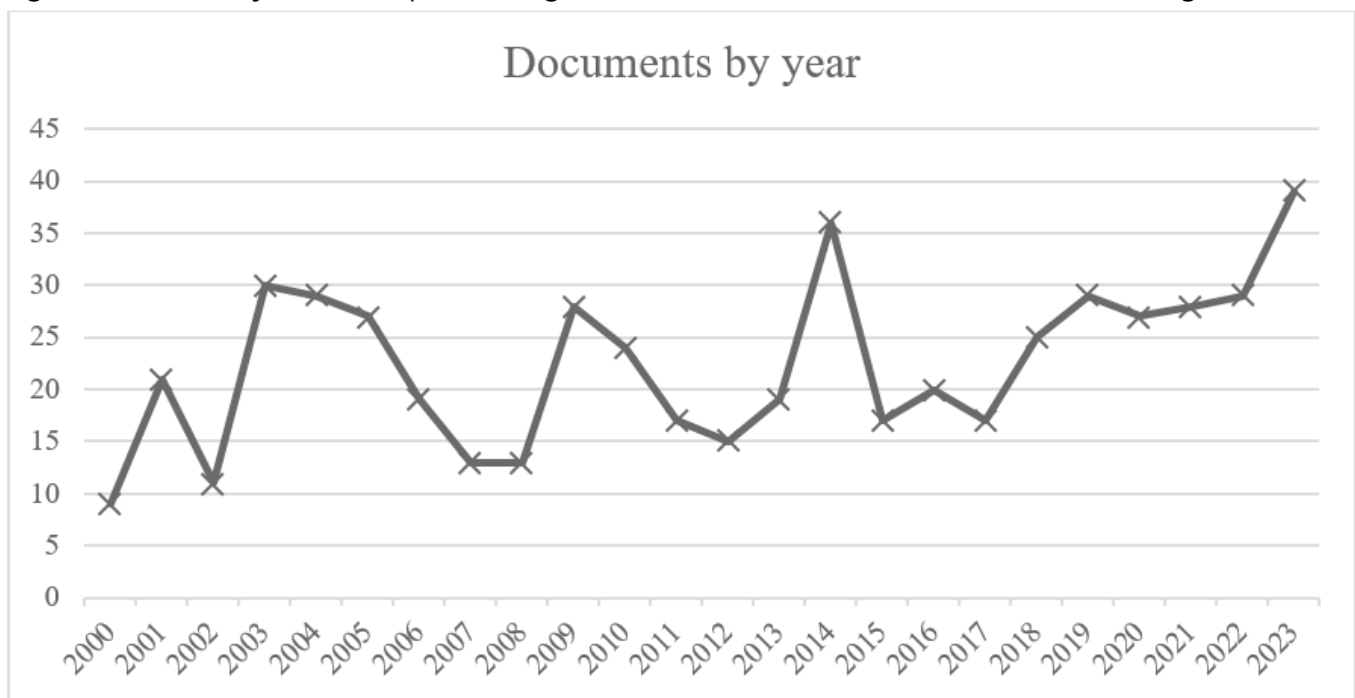
Sources: developed by the authors using Scopus database tools and Excel software

However, a lot of the findings from this multidisciplinary study are not novel. Thus, as a crucial component of the Internet marketing of education, "online education" should be included in a search conducted in the Scopus database using the paper title, abstract, and keywords. A sample of 83,773 retrieved articles covering a 24-year period (2000–2023) was created (Fig. 2).

Figure 2.   The dynamic of publishing articles on «online education»

Sources: developed by the authors using Scopus database tools and Excel software

Simultaneously, in the last 10 years (2013–2023) have seen the publication and indexing of approximately 60% of the papers on «online education» in the Scopus database. For this reason, the "education-internet-marketing" combo for adult marketing is particularly pertinent in the modern day.

The graph typically demonstrates a positive dynamic of articles on this topic being published. However, due to market saturation in 2016–2017, it was steady (emphasis on certain parts of online education, narrow approaches, topic stability, and publishing quality). Additionally, the growth of this trend in the global arena was unaffected by the lack of conflict in Ukraine, the economy's downturn, the economic crisis in Brazil, and other global issues.

However, the trend has reversed and is still favourable since 2017. Using the VOSviewer programme, a bibliometric analysis was performed to visualise the main topics of interdisciplinary research on education-internet-marketing collaboration for adult education. Since a term may only appear five times, 179 different keywords were chosen. The findings of the bibliometric study are displayed in Figure 3.

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Figure 3.   The primary directions of a multidisciplinary study on the „education-internet-marketing" collaboration for adult education based on the results of bibliometric analysis
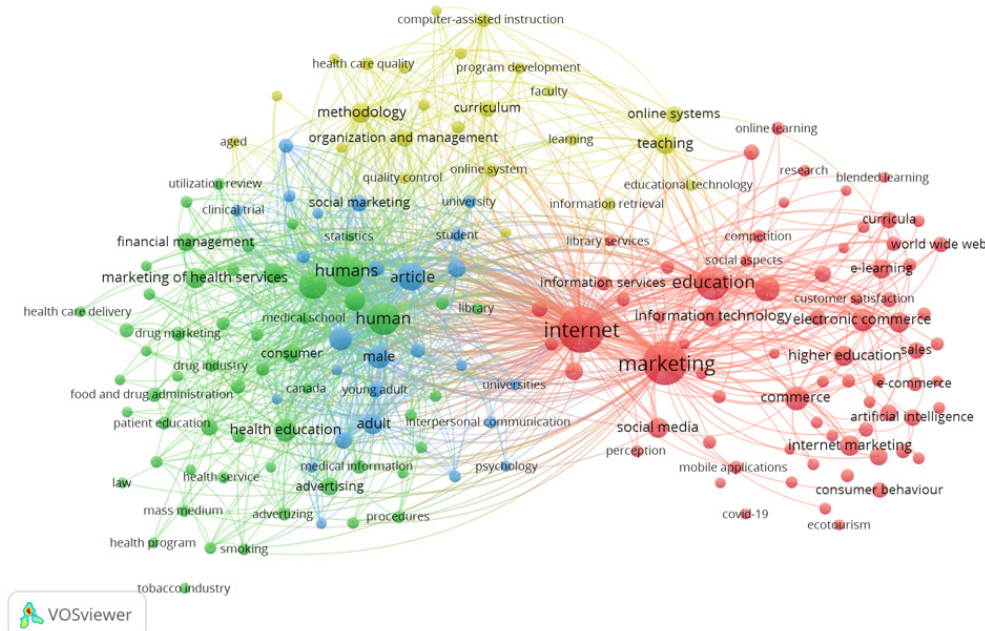
Sources: developed by the authors using VOSviewer software

Figure 4.   The primary directions of a multidisciplinary study on the „online education" competition for adult education based on the results of bibliometric analysis
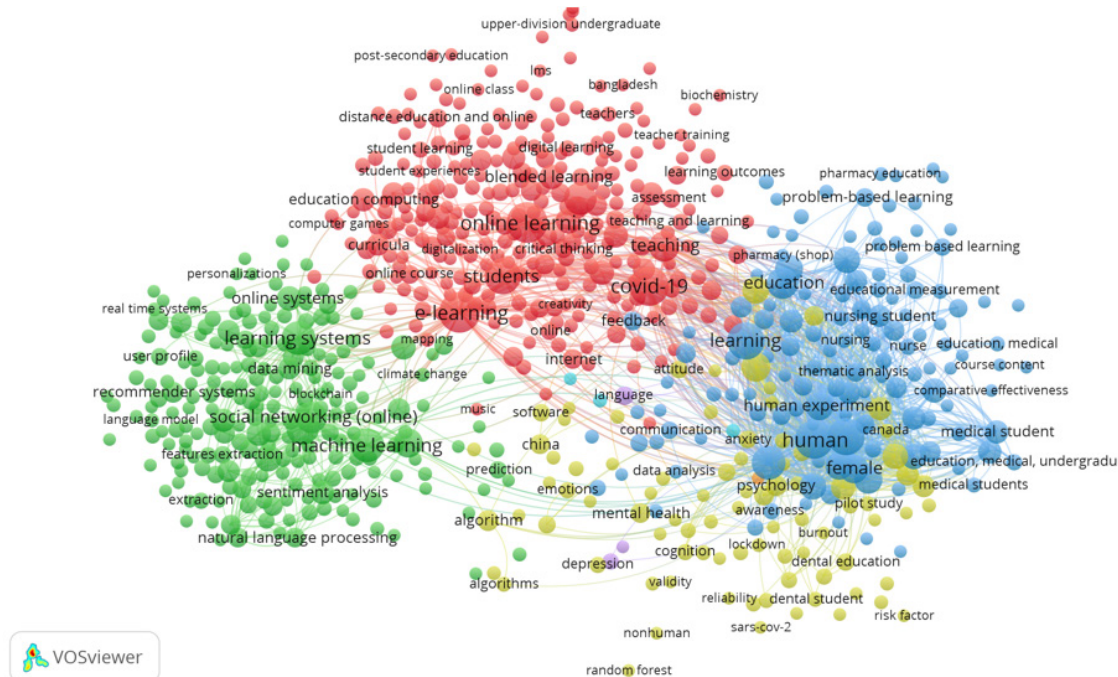
Sources: developed by the authors using VOSviewer software

There are seven clusters of study on «online education» as follows: cluster 1 (red colour, 270 items): cluster 2 (green colour, 214 items): cluster 3 (blue colour, 134 items): cluster 4 (yellow colour, 84 items): cluster 5 (purple colour, 4 items): cluster 6 (light blue colour, 3 items): cluster 7 (orange colour, 1 item).

Adult education marketing had to modify in 2021 as the globe continued to adjust to the worldwide changes brought about by COVID-19. To assist people to learn anytime and anywhere, online programs and other distant learning methods were utilized (Bujang et al., 2020). Adult education institutions have strengthened their position in response to the gradual introduction of various changes in the technological sphere by re-evaluating their approaches, becoming more environment-adaptive, and implementing marketing techniques to satisfy their clients' information and communication needs.

Unleashing the Potential of Internet Marketing in Adult Education

Since the Internet and contemporary technologies in general provide so many options, the adult education industry has seen a major rise in recent years. As per an Orbis analysis, the worldwide e-learning industry is anticipated to surpass $289 billion by 2024, mostly attributable to the increasing count of Internet users and the surge in mobile phone connectivity (UNESCO, 2022).

A website or portal is the major instrument for promoting adult education online, and these days, an educational centre's website serves as the key source of information about the organization, training programs, and other aspects of the program.

Books, software for computers and mobile devices, virtual tours of cultural places, software tutorials for research papers, offline and online courses, and much more are examples of educational material. The proper web tools and marketing plan may help instructional content become viral very quickly.

In 2020–2021, more than 500,000 educational programs were developed by private developers and traditional educational institutions; a large number of them can be found on Google Play and the App Store. It is very challenging to identify new companies in the adult e-learning industry due to the abundance of websites, videos, e-books, and educational programs (Pryima, 2015).

The marriage of lifelong learning and marketing strengthens the reputation of adult education facilities, promotes attendance, and benefits adult learners by assisting them in selecting their place of study with effective marketing.

Traditional marketing techniques are no longer appropriate for reaching adults in today's digital age. If educational institutions wish to reach a large adult audience rapidly, they must leverage internet platforms. As seen in Figure 1, these channels include email, sponsored search, social media, and online content. Additionally, compared to the past, they may be utilized to spread a message far more swiftly than handouts, merchandise, or direct offline promotion.

All of the same internet marketing resources needed to promote a website are also needed to promote an educational program: social media, paid advertisements, and reviews. However, another benefit of apps is that they may be used as additional marketing tools. In addition to keeping users interested with personalized content and push notification reminders if they are not signed in for a predetermined amount of time, they provide the chance to directly pitch customers on extra services. With this extra advantage, there are more chances to keep pupils and motivate them to enrol in future classes.

Figure 5. The top eight Internet marketing channels for adult education
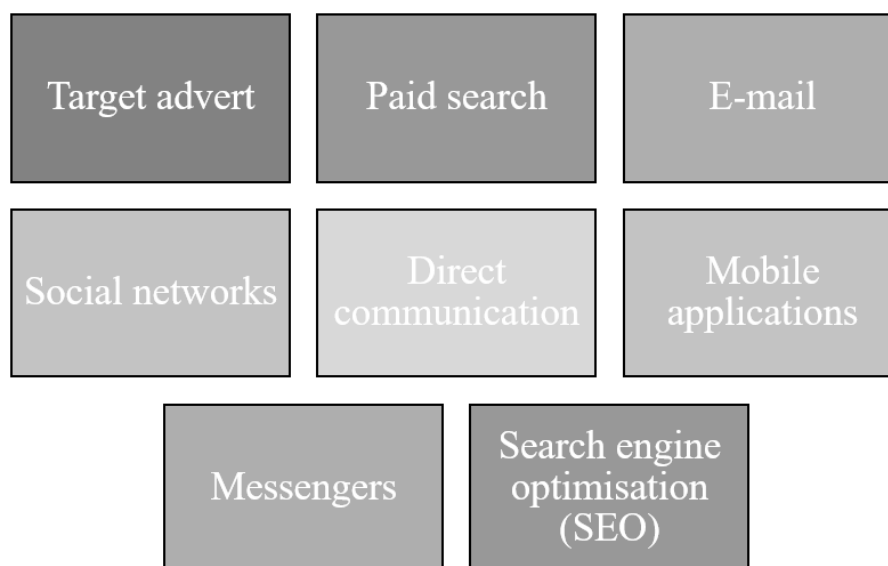
Source: compiled by the authors (Onoprienko, 2024; Nazneen et al., 2020; Polyakov et al., 2019)

Adult education schools should be present on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram in order to interact with prospective students and gain greater insight into their needs and goals. People spend a lot of time on these sites. Social media posts have to be succinct, interesting, and consistent with the institution's desired brand (Ahmmed & Salim, 2019).

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Because of the intense rivalry in the contemporary educational app industry, having a strong product alone is no longer sufficient to stay ahead of the competition. Instead, you must have a carefully considered adult education marketing plan that has been flawlessly implemented. While print advertising, in-person meetings, billboards, flyers, and brochures are still relevant in the digital age, their low return on investment makes them less appealing than contemporary internet marketing distribution methods.

Challenges and Strategies in Adult Education Marketing

The field of education, and adult education specifically, is faced with a distinct set of obstacles. In the digital era, there is intense competition among educational institutions. Unlike other industries, where investing enormous sums of money in a single marketing campaign does not garner much notice, an institution's decision to do so may be misinterpreted by the public.

It should be noted that because Generation Z makes up the majority of the target audience and has very significant distinctions, it is more difficult to build digital ads that would resonate (Aker & Ksoll, 2019). Because of this, it's critical that educational institutions, including online courses, collaborate with a digital advertising firm that specializes in education marketing or at least counts it among its primary areas of competence. Ultimately, being an internet marketer is still a relatively new career that cannot be fully learned in a traditional classroom. The majority of the information possessed by an expert in this field is acquired through adult education, underscoring the necessity of encouraging such learning.

Educational institutions can no longer do web marketing on their own due to technological advancements. As a result, there is a growing number of specialized marketing companies for education. Table 1 illustrates that certain organizations focus only on marketing within the educational services sector, with the majority of these initiatives being US-based initiatives.

Education marketing companies already have a plan for creating a professional educational brand that is suited to the particular requirements and increasing student body of an educational institution looking to build its brand and draw in the suitable students. These companies are excellent at telling real brand stories that appeal to adult learners as well as potential students. By hiring an agency to handle branding, website development, and student engagement initiatives, institutions may gain from these services. Furthermore, Table 1 demonstrates that the top 10 include both small-project and large-institution-collaborating agencies.

Table 1.   Top 10 global marketing agencies in education in 2022

Agency name	Specialisation	Minimum project size	Location
Disruptive Advertising	Institutions of all sizes	5000 USD	Pleasant Grove, Utah, USA
SmartSites	Small and medium-sized businesses	1000 USD	Paramus, New Jersey, USA
Thrive Internet Marketing Agency	Large enterprises, small and medium-sized businesses	1000+ USD	Dallas, Texas, USA
OHO Interactive	Medium and large businesses	75,000 USD	Somerville, Massachusetts
HEM	Institutions of all sizes	5000 USD	Montreal, Canada
Up&Up	Mid-market colleges and universities	100000 USD	Greenville, South Carolina, USA
Simpson Scarborough	Large institutions and universities	Available on request	Alexandria, Virginia, USA
Education Marketing Agency (ED.)	Institutions of all sizes	Available on request	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Sextant Marketing	Institutions of all sizes	Available on request	Tampa, Florida, USA
Elliance	Institutions of all sizes	10000 USD	Homestead, Pennsylvania, USA

Source: compiled by the author on the basis of (Deloitte Insights, 2023)

An estimated 3.2 billion people utilize social media globally at the moment, or around 42% of the total population. Millennials are the biggest users of social media sites including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit, followed by Baby Boomers, Generation Z, and Generation X (Akhondzadeh, 2019). Simply possessing the necessary equipment is insufficient; in order to react quickly to changes in the education industry, you also need to be aware of its future direction. As seen in Figure 6, a variety of trends that may and have been used for adult education internet marketing were taken into consideration during the study.

Figure 6.   Current trends in online marketing of adult education
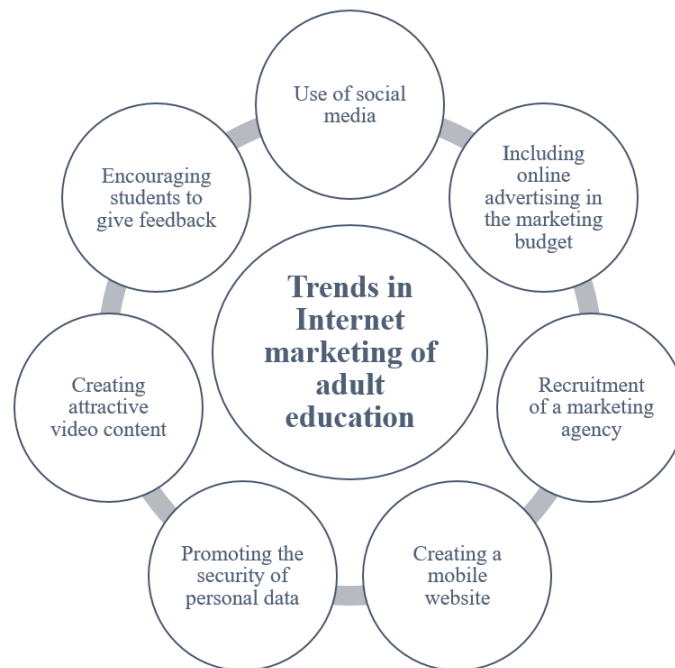
Source: compiled by the author on the basis of (Akhondzadeh, 2019; Polyakov et al., 2019)

Social media platforms have been there from the beginning and have been utilized for every kind of purpose conceivable. One of the numerous uses for which they can now be found is as a tool for lifelong learning marketing. Creating compelling material with your target audience can help you build genuine connections with them, no matter which social media site you choose to utilize.

Having a social media marketing (SMM) manager is helpful for interacting with the intended audience. The target audience's age, gender, education, ambitions, obstacles, and basic values should all be known to the SMM manager. Even if you really have many fewer followers, you may progressively get to the point where one piece of content can instantaneously reach millions of people on social media by growing your following. SMM gives you the ability to precisely observe who is sharing material, which sets it apart from other marketing strategies and gives you valuable data with which to tailor your advertising campaigns.

The potential of internet advertising to effectively promote adult education is one of the reasons behind the projection that worldwide digital advertising spending would surpass $397 billion by 2024. According to the business that produced these numbers, EMarketer, US advertisers will allocate 54.2% of their advertising expenditures to internet advertising. By 2024, this percentage is predicted to rise to 66.8% (Deloitte Insights, 2023).

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Precise targeting based on intentions, interests, and demographics is the greatest benefit that internet advertising has over traditional advertising (targeted advertising). In 2021, search engine, social media, display or banner, and video advertising will be some of the most widely utilized digital advertising platforms. Since each of these channels has advantages and disadvantages of its own, advertising professionals typically advise utilizing a mix of all media.

As of right present, more individuals are using mobile devices to access the internet than are using desktop and laptop computers. With 2.95 billion smartphones expected to be in use worldwide by 2024, any organization hoping to thrive with education marketing has to have a mobile-friendly website with a landing page that is optimized for mobile devices (Deloitte Insights, 2023).

A website must look small on mobile devices, have easy-to-click links and navigation, be responsive, and have a page load time of no more than three seconds, as this is the average time that half of internet users believe a website should take to load.

Online reviews should be a crucial component of any adult education marketing plans, including promoting educational programs or events, since it is now widely known that 90% of customers read them before visiting a business or making a purchase. Since the adult learner is the one who is interested in actual feedback from others, application of the knowledge gained, etc.

Encouraging students to provide feedback online may be achieved by simplifying the review procedure or, even better, by approaching it in an innovative way. As opposed to making students fill out text-based questionnaires, you may, like Preply Inc., add a star rating system and make verbal input entirely optional.

In the event that fewer reviews than you had hoped for are found, you may always use discounts, gift cards, extra points, and other incentives to promote the review process. Frequently, it is enough to just ask nicely for evaluations via emails or other one-on-one correspondence methods.

Harnessing the Power of Video Content in Adult Education Marketing

It's understandable why a growing corpus of research in education marketing contends that video content yields a high return on investment. After all, 55% of adults view internet videos every day, and 78% of adults watch them weekly. When producing interesting video material and posting it online, that's a big audience to aim for (Aliakbari et al., 2019).

Adult education marketers seldom have to spend a lot of time searching for content ideas because instructional material is one of the most popular categories of video content.

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They only need to create amusing films out of already-existing goods or services and post them to popular video-sharing websites like YouTube.

Demo videos, brand or event films, expert interviews, tutorials or how-to guides, explainer videos, animation content, case studies and customer testimonials, live videos, virtual reality movies, and more are just a few examples of the many diverse formats that video content may take.

You must give your viewers the freedom to decide what kind of video content they want to see, and the only way to do this is to keep an eye on key performance indicators like watch time, average view duration, average completion rate, audience retention, repeat views, click-through rates, engagement, subscriber growth, maximum live viewers, etc.

Online adult education marketing can benefit from emphasizing the ease of learning at home and the protection of one's physical and personal data. Websites and applications for distance learning are well-positioned to benefit from and be successful.

The more emphasis placed on creating tools for adult learners to use remote learning, the more chances there are to take full advantage of this circumstance. It is a good idea to build curriculum that include the extra convenience of utilizing a mobile device to attend classes from anywhere.

The Future of Adult Education – Immersive Technologies and Global Connectivity

In 2024, the advantages of a well-thought-out adult education program will further increase. Having an app is another crucial strategy to draw in and keep consumers from around the globe, as more and more individuals are seeking for online learning resources or ways to study.

Studies reveal that an increasing number of buyers are utilizing social media and other internet resources to do preliminary price and product comparisons before committing to a purchase. A departure from traditional marketing is evident in the fact that online marketing for adult education enables you to cultivate connections with both current and prospective students through frequent, inexpensive, and customized contact.

Immersion marketing is a relatively new and exciting branch of consumer behaviour science that deserves to be mentioned in this context. Virtual technology marketers have a great deal of responsibility to uphold ethical standards while replicating effects and refraining from manipulating emotions since these technologies are significant psychological tools for swaying prospective customers. The "empathy effect" in the perception process is what

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gives VR information its emotional impact on a viewer. Psychology expert Edward Bernays explained the basic "consent engineering" technique that forms the basis of propaganda. In order to do this, a convincing environment that modifies the audience's worldview and gives them room to choose to act voluntarily in line with the intentions of the environment's designer or "engineer" is created (Aziz Hussin, 2018). Because of this, the VR environment is well suited for crafting manipulative tales, which is more of a drawback than a benefit of this technology if the VR expert disregards a number of ethical guidelines when producing material.

Technologies like VR, AR, and 3D aid in delivering immersive learning. By creating settings that closely mimic real-life situations, immersive technologies enable students to actively participate in the learning process and gain new skills and information. Learners may enhance new abilities more successfully through this practical experience, which helps with long-term memory retention. Furthermore, experience learning facilitates the rapid development of a learner's skill set and confidence. For instance, PwC research found that compared to a traditional classroom, kids learn four times as quickly in virtual reality (Barcinas & M. Jayne Fleener, 2023).

200 organizations – manufacturers, R&D centres, distributors, service providers, tech developers, government sponsors, industry networks, and trade associations – were polled for the 2019 UK Immersive Economy Report. 87% of respondents to the poll said that immersive technology has improved their organization (Antonyuk et al., 2021).

The additional advantage of instantaneous analytical reporting on learning and growth is provided by technology-based immersive learning technologies. Utilization statistics (training frequency, length, and completion), performance data (tasks finished or questions answered correctly), and engagement levels (tracked by eye movements, head movements, clicks, and other learner interactions) may all be gathered using immersive learning technology. This previously unheard-of volume of real-time data supports both individual growth and the ongoing enhancement of immersive learning programs by offering insight into both aggregate performance and individual success.

3D, AR and VR technologies make the learning process more engaging and interesting. The immersive technology opens up a world of possibilities to make classes more playful and interactive. Imagine a geography lesson where you can explore Niagara Falls right before your eyes. Or a history lecture where you can travel to Ancient Greece. This type of learning is much more enriching than just listening to a lecture. By offering an immersive experience, immersive learning fosters curiosity and sparks interest and motivation in the individual.

The industry for virtual reality was estimated to be worth USD 3.8 billion globally in 2018.

Many predict that by 2025 alone, it will increase to 50–60 billion. Immersion technologies are expected to soon find their way into educational organizations' marketing, as seen by the increasing use of virtual reality and augmented reality technology in brand marketing (Assante et al., 2019).

The desire of contemporary customers to learn about new virtual opportunities is what is driving the need for these technologies. Though games are the primary means of developing immersive gadgets, this industry nevertheless aspires to multifunctionality and the ability to be used in many spheres of human endeavour, including education. Figure 7 displays the market share ratio for immersive technologies.

Figure 7.   The market's growth trends for immersive technologies in 2017–2022, %
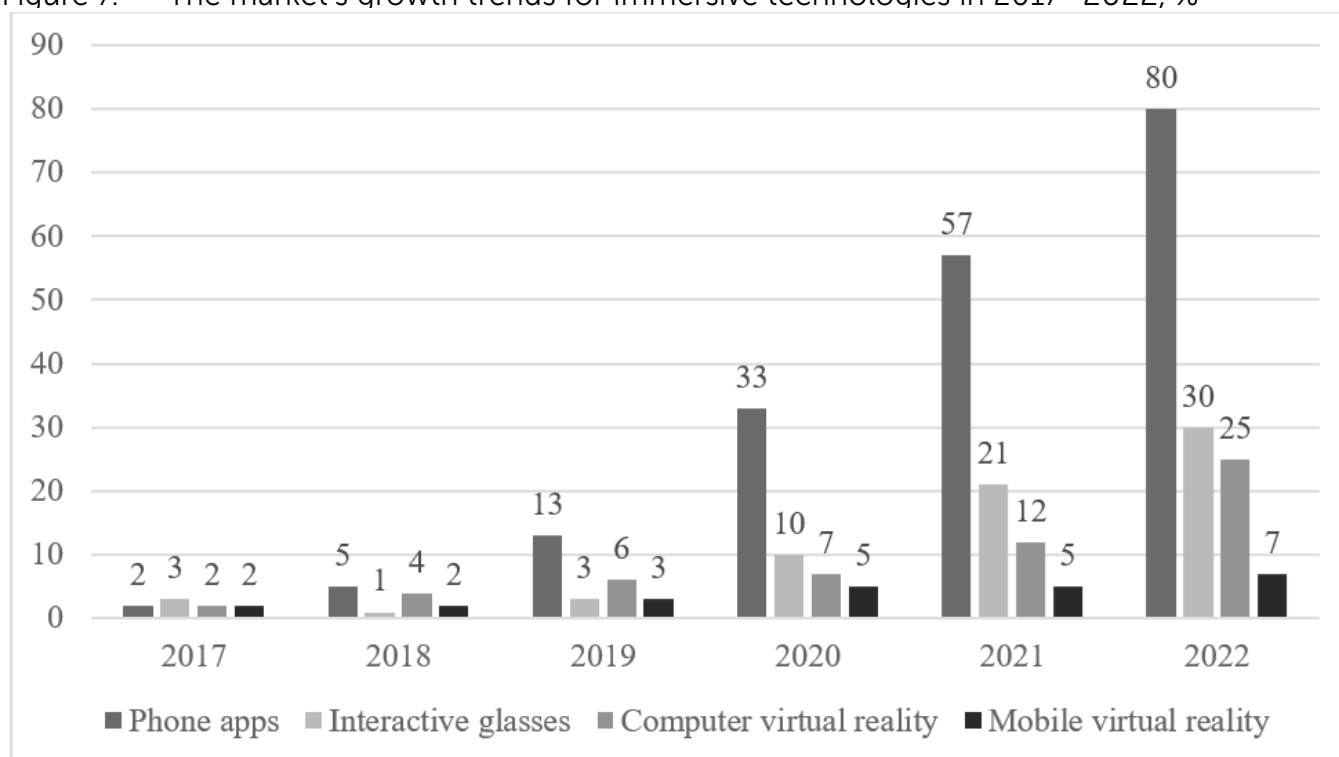
Source: compiled by the authors on the basis of (Polaris Market Research and Consulting, 2022; Deloitte Insights, 2023)

It is important to note that, in terms of marketing, the adult education industry differs significantly from many other industries. These institutions must be regarded as thought leaders and industry specialists since their primary goal is the development of adult learners.

Promoting services to the intended audience of adults who have probably previously received schooling presents another challenge. Students certainly anticipate the day when they will be able to put their newly gained information to use, but this is mostly dependent on textbooks,

classes, training, and tests. The work becomes considerably more challenging since you have to market a service that provides knowledge but does not provide immediate value or satisfaction.

As a result, adult education internet marketing is becoming more and more crucial as it's necessary to encourage lifelong learning, and the Internet offers a lot of options to do so. A current website that has been optimized for mobile devices, social media advertising, and ongoing customer communication are the key trends in adult education Internet marketing, and they will guarantee a rise in demand for adult education services. The newest means of dissemination for adult education promotion are becoming sponsored Internet searches, messenger services, and targeted advertising. Immersion technology will be used as a marketing strategy to promote adult education and increase learning opportunities outside of traditional classroom settings.

2. Summary

In today's world, adult higher education institutions need to improve their marketing strategies in order to strengthen their competitive advantage and fend off competition, given the impact of the demographic crisis on the education market and the ease with which students can pursue higher education elsewhere.

The concept of Internet marketing in education covers many different aspects, including the organisation of marketing activities using theory and methodology, the study of consumer demand and the promotion of goods and services, the positioning of products or services, and advertising.

A further characteristic of Internet marketing is the use of all traditional marketing strategies on the Internet, with a focus on the four main components of the marketing mix: promotion, pricing, product and place of sale.

Bringing lifelong learning and marketing together strengthens the reputation of adult higher education institutions, promotes attendance and benefits adult learners by helping them choose their place of study through effective marketing.

The distinction from traditional marketing can be seen in the fact that online marketing for adult higher education allows for connections with both current and potential students through frequent, inexpensive and customisable contacts.

Immersive technologies are expected to find their way into the marketing of educational organisations in the near future, as evidenced by the growing use of virtual and augmented reality technologies in brand marketing.

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