Marketing Practices of Educational Institutions: An Exploratory Study of Franchise Colleges of Punjab

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Abstract

This study explores the digital marketing practices employed by franchise colleges in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the province of Punjab. The objective of the research is to understand how franchise colleges utilize traditional and digital marketing strategies, examine the role of digital marketing in increasing student enrolment, and assess its perceived impact on college performance. Data was collected through structured interviews with 20 principals of franchise colleges, who were asked about their marketing strategies, challenges, and the effectiveness of digital tools, such as social media platforms. Findings indicate that franchise colleges employ a mix of conventional marketing methods, such as print media and personal visits, along with digital marketing strategies, predominantly on platforms like Facebook. Although there are disparities in digital marketing execution between franchisers and franchisees, it was found that social media has contributed to increased student enrolment over the past three years. The study highlights the role of digital marketing in overcoming challenges such as low awareness and income limitations. The research also identifies key areas for improvement, such as the need for year-round marketing campaigns and stronger engagement with local communities. This study provides insights for franchisers, franchisees, and academics, offering recommendations for enhancing marketing strategies and better leveraging digital tools in the education sector.

Keywords: Marketing Practices, Educational Institutions, Exploratory Study.

Introduction

The last two decades have witnessed the mushrooming growth of franchise networks in the education sector. This development has been witnessed all across Pakistan with special focus in the Punjab province. According to a source, there are 22 franchise education chains with over 3000 branded schools and one million enrolled students across Pakistan. The top three groups have around 700 franchised outlets each. Franchising is a system of business in which one party grants the rights to use its trade name, product, and system to the other party against financial and non-financial considerations for a restricted territory and a period. This system is used for external growth and is in use in all sectors of the business and industry. At the beginning of the 21st century established brands of educational institutions started offering franchising in primary, secondary, and higher secondary education programs. The offer met with an overwhelming response which made franchising a standard practice in the private education sector of the country.

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The practice of franchising in the education sector of Pakistan has not yet received the due attention from the academics for research. There can be a number of areas to study the franchising system in the education sector. For this study the digital marketing practices of franchise colleges will be studied.

Problem Statement

Mushroom growth of franchise network in the education sector is well known as a practice but the marketing practices of franchise colleges are less known. This study aims to explore the marketing practices, with special reference to digital marketing, of franchise colleges.

Study Objectives

- To explore and understand the marketing practices of franchise colleges.
- To explore and understand the digital marketing practices of franchise colleges.
- To explore the perceived contribution of digital marketing to the performances of the franchise colleges.

Scope and Significance of the Study

The study will survey the marketing practices of franchise colleges of the Punjab region of Pakistan with special focus on the use of digital marketing. The exploration will document the marketing and digital marketing practices of franchise colleges for the guidance and policy support by the franchisers.

Literature Review

Desai and Vidyapeeth (2019) stated that digital marketing is not limited to marketing products via the internet, but also includes other digital technologies such as mobile phones and display boards. They elaborated that digital marketing as a practice began in the 1990s, but it has gained significant momentum over the last two decades. According to them, the advent of digital technologies has changed the way people buy and sell, providing more opportunities for digital marketing.

Bala and Verma (2018) highlighted that the Internet has changed consumer behaviour, particularly in terms of shopping. They explained that customers now explore products on digital platforms before making purchasing decisions, prompting businesses to adopt digital marketing strategies. Furthermore, they argued that conducting business on digital platforms is cost-effective for both buyers and sellers.

Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán (2016) outlined several activities included in digital marketing, such as content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization, email marketing, and search engine marketing. De Ruyter, Keeling, and Ngo (2018) described digital marketing as a breakthrough approach that continuously reshapes the opportunities and challenges faced by marketers.

Yasmin et al. (2015) acknowledged the transformative impact of digital marketing and argued that its primary contribution lies in increasing interactivity between brands and consumers.

Sawicki (2016) opined that the Internet has introduced new business models in trading relationships, empowering consumers to negotiate rather than accept prices passively. This digital revolution has also enabled innovative methods of customer outreach.

According to Olson et al. (2021), the digital environment demands more focused and objective business strategies from marketers. Mandal and Joshi (2017) supported this view, emphasizing the individualized attention both given and received in digital marketing.

Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, and Prado-Roman (2019) argued that more focused research is needed in the field of digital marketing.

Longenecker et al. (2013) defined franchising as a business system in which one party grants rights to use its name, symbols, products, and business model to another party in exchange for financial and non-financial considerations, such as royalties and adherence to operating guidelines. They further explained that the franchising system varies in form depending on the rights and territorial limits agreed upon.

Spencer (2013) noted that definitions and forms of franchising vary across disciplines and jurisdictions, depending largely on the franchisor's business model.

Combs et al. (2004) observed that franchising has become increasingly prevalent in business, with agency theory and resource scarcity theory forming its theoretical foundation. Martin (1988) viewed franchising as a vertical form of integration, biased in favor of the franchisor.

Brickley et al. (1991) argued that franchising supports capital expansion across firms of all sizes. While agency theory explains the structure and regulation of franchising, resource scarcity theory justifies the partnership between franchisor and franchisee. In practice, franchising enables faster market expansion while reducing time and resource requirements.

Study Design

Type of Study: The problem statement and the study objectives require to explore the marketing practices of franchise colleges; therefore, exploratory survey design was selected for the study.

Sector of Study: Franchise Colleges

Unit of Analysis: Individual Franchise College

Instrument of Data Collection: After discussions with the marketing experts and some of the representatives of the sample population a structured interview guide was developed. The interview guide consisted of 26 questions in two sections. The first section was to know the demographics of the franchise owner or his representative, the market, and the college as an institution. The second part was to know the marketing practices of the franchise colleges and their perceived effects on the college's performance.

Sampling Design & Data Collection Method: It was decided to collect the data from 100 (hundred) franchise colleges spread across the Punjab province of Pakistan. Initially, Head Offices of three college brands were contacted using personal links to seek population frame. Unfortunately, the population frame and formal consent were not obtained. The researcher used his links and managed to identify 100 franchise colleges of different brands from central Punjab and the south Punjab region. An attempt was made to contact all the 100 identified respondents. All of them were sent digital copies of the interview guide with the request for personal or telephonic interviews. Formal consent from only 27 was obtained over three months. 17 were interviewed in person while 10 were interviewed by telephone, and a response from a total of 27 respondents was secured.

Data Analysis: The interview guide contained two types of questions; questions requiring open responses and questions requiring numerical responses such as age, experience, income, fee, etc. All the 27 interview response forms were first viewed to know the quality and completion of responses. In the initial analysis, it was ascertained that only 20 response forms offered complete information while the 7 response forms had missing information, especially in the second section. Based on this it was decided to include only 20 response forms for the final analysis. The data was entered into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software. After due checking, first, the variables measured on the scale were analysed for descriptive statistics. All other questions

were entered as categorical variables on the nominal scales. For all variables frequency tables were generated and analysed accordingly.
Time Dimension: Cross Sectional, data were collected at a particular point of time.

Results & Findings

Item/Question-wise Data Analysis

Item/question wise analysis of the structured interview guide will be presented below. Responses of every question have been presented in a table and a diagram generated through using SPSS. Description below every table and diagram will present the analysis. Before item wise analysis we present descriptive statistics of those items measured on scale.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.Age of the Respondent	20	30.00	58.00	42.7000	7.62337
2.Experience of the Respondent	20	5.00	27.00	15.3500	5.73333
3.Age of the College	20	2.00	16.00	6.0000	3.97360
4.Number of Students	20	150.00	1350.00	640.1500	331.85813
5.Number of Faculty & Staff	20	12.00	47.00	28.7000	8.59069
6.Average Fee per year	20	27500.00	58000.00	39925.0000	7331.03533
7.Target Income Group	20	50000.00	200000.00	100000.0000	39735.97071
8.Target Age Group	20	15.00	20.00	17.2500	2.22131

Table 1 presents the minimum, maximum, mean values and standard deviation of eight items/variables including age of the respondent, experience of the respondent, age of the college, number of students, number of faculty & staff, average fee per year, target income group and target age group.
in this case every respondent was the principal of the franchise college, the minimum age is 30 years and maximum age is 58 years while the mean age is 42 years which indicates the age maturity of the person leading the college. Minimum experience of a principal is 5 years and maximum is 27 years while mean experience is 15 years, this also shows that the one who is leading understands the working of a college. Age of a college is minimum 2 years and maximum 16 years while mean age is 6 years, this shows that most of the colleges have secured the survival and on the take-off.
Mean enrollment in a college is 640 students with minimum 150 in a college and maximum 1350, this shows that some colleges are struggling while others are growing. Mean number of permanent faculty & staff is 28 which indicates a fair student-teacher-staff ratio. Ratio seems fair because a certain percentage of faculty is engaged on adjunct basis.
Mean fee per student per year is about Rs. 40000/= with minimum Rs. 27500/= and maximum Rs. 58000/=. High standard deviation is because of the regions and income groups different colleges are targeting. Mean per month income of a target group is Rs. 100000/= with minimum of Rs.50000 and maximum of Rs. 200000/=. Mean age of target student body is 17 years with minimum of 15 years and maximum of 20 years. This is a typical age range for college programs.

It is pertinent to mention that colleges are offering higher secondary or higher secondary and 14 years equivalent university programs.

Age of Franchisee/Principal

Table 2: Age of the Respondent (Mean Age 43)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30.00	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	35.00	1	5.0	5.0	15.0
	37.00	2	10.0	10.0	25.0
	38.00	3	15.0	15.0	40.0
	40.00	1	5.0	5.0	45.0
	43.00	1	5.0	5.0	50.0
	44.00	1	5.0	5.0	55.0
	45.00	2	10.0	10.0	65.0
	46.00	2	10.0	10.0	75.0
	47.00	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
	49.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	53.00	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
	55.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	58.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows that eight principals are in their thirties, nine are in forties and three are in fifties, while mean age is forty-three. As already stated above this shows that colleges are run by the people of mature age.

Gender

Table 3: Gender of the Respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3 shows that all the principals of colleges are male. Although colleges have separate boys' and girls' wings managed by male and female vice principals yet it is preferred to have male member as the principal. Given the cultural situation and other requirements this also seems necessary.

Qualification

Table 4: Qualification of the Respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	16 Year Business Qualification	4	20.0	20.0	20.0
	16 Years Non Business Qualifications	10	50.0	50.0	70.0
	18 Years Business Qualification	4	20.0	20.0	90.0
	18 Years Non Business Qualification	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	PHD	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the qualifications of the principals, from the responses received qualifications have been divided into five categories; 16 Year Business Qualification, 16 Years Non-Business Qualifications, 18 Years Business Qualification, 18 Years Non-Business Qualification and PHD. Almost half of the principals have 16 years and half have the 18 years qualification while the same is true for the domain of studies. One principal had PhD. This shows that all principals meet the requirement of minimum qualification to run a college offering education till 14 years.

Experience

Table 5: Experience of the Respondent (Mean 15 years)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	5.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	8.00	1	5.0	5.0	10.0
	9.00	1	5.0	5.0	15.0
	10.00	2	10.0	10.0	25.0
	11.00	1	5.0	5.0	30.0
	12.00	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
	13.00	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
	15.00	3	15.0	15.0	55.0
	16.00	1	5.0	5.0	60.0
	18.00	2	10.0	10.0	70.0
	20.00	4	20.0	20.0	90.0
	25.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	27.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 shows that only three principals have less than ten years of experience while others have ten or more years' experience. The mean of experience is fifteen years. This certainly shows that the colleges are led by those persons who know how a college works.

Age of the college

Table 6: Age of the College (Mean Age 6 Years)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2.00	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
	3.00	5	25.0	25.0	35.0
	4.00	5	25.0	25.0	60.0
	6.00	1	5.0	5.0	65.0
	8.00	2	10.0	10.0	75.0
	9.00	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
	11.00	2	10.0	10.0	90.0
	12.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	16.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 shows that the newest college is two years old while the oldest is 16 years old. The mean age of a college is six years. This shows that most of the colleges have assured their survival while only a few are struggling.

Programs Offered

Table 7: Programs Offered

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Higher Secondary Program	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	University Programs	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
	Both	13	65.0	65.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that most of the colleges are offering both higher secondary and university programs while six colleges are offering only higher secondary programs. Higher secondary programs include definition combinations of K11&12 education level while university programs mostly included Associate Degree Programs of 14 years or BS level 16 years programs. For higher secondary programs colleges are affiliated with the relevant Board of Intermediate & Secondary Education (BISE) while for university programs affiliation is obtained from the nearest relevant university.

Affiliating Board

Table 8: Affiliating Board / University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	BISE Lahore	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	BISE Multan	4	20.0	20.0	25.0
	BISE Bahawalpur	2	10.0	10.0	35.0
	BISE Gujranwala	8	40.0	40.0	75.0
	TEVTA	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
	BISE DG Khan	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	BISE Sargodha	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
	BISE Sahiwal	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	BISE Faisalabad	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 shows the affiliation of colleges with different BISEs. Colleges in the study cover almost all the regions of the central Punjab and the south Punjab. Every college is bound to follow the schedule and framework of the affiliating board.

Region/City

Table 9: Region City

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Central Punjab	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
	South Punjab	8	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 complements the description of Table 7 that colleges in the study are situated in the regions of the central Punjab and the south Punjab of the Punjab province of the country Pakistan. This is pertinent to mention that the central Punjab region is more densely populated and affluent than the south Punjab region.

Number of Students

Table 10: Number of Students (Mean Number 640)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	150.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	178.00	1	5.0	5.0	10.0
	265.00	1	5.0	5.0	15.0
	330.00	1	5.0	5.0	20.0
	375.00	1	5.0	5.0	25.0
	380.00	1	5.0	5.0	30.0
	400.00	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
	545.00	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
	565.00	1	5.0	5.0	45.0
	600.00	2	10.0	10.0	55.0
	645.00	1	5.0	5.0	60.0
	713.00	1	5.0	5.0	65.0
	800.00	2	10.0	10.0	75.0
	900.00	1	5.0	5.0	80.0
	1000.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	1077.00	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
	1130.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	1350.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

The table 10 shows that minimum number of students in a college is 150 while maximum number in a college is 1350. Mean number is 640 students per college. This dispersion is explained by the different ages and regions of the colleges.

Building and Facilities

Table 11: Building and Facilities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Purpose Built	17	85.0	85.0	85.0
	Non Purpose Built	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 shows that seventeen colleges have purpose-built campus while three are offering non-purpose-built facilities. These are both franchise colleges of different groups and also affiliated different with BISEs therefore these are bound to follow a building layout and requirements. On the marketing side a purpose-built campus does offer advantage over a non-purpose-built campus.

Faculty/Staff Number

Table 12: Number of Faculty & Staff (28)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	12.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	17.00	1	5.0	5.0	10.0
	20.00	2	10.0	10.0	20.0
	22.00	1	5.0	5.0	25.0
	24.00	1	5.0	5.0	30.0
	25.00	1	5.0	5.0	35.0
	26.00	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
	27.00	1	5.0	5.0	45.0
	28.00	1	5.0	5.0	50.0
	29.00	1	5.0	5.0	55.0
	30.00	3	15.0	15.0	70.0
	35.00	2	10.0	10.0	80.0
	37.00	1	5.0	5.0	85.0
	40.00	2	10.0	10.0	95.0
	47.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 shows the total number of faculty & staff in a college. In a college minimum faculty & staff strength is twelve and maximum is forty-seven, while mean number is 28. Findings become interesting when we look at mean student strength as given in Table 10 which is 640. Mean student number justifies the mean faculty and staff number, this actually becomes Almost 1 to 22. Moreover, in the colleges adjunct faculty is also engaged as per the need.

Average Fees

Table 13: Average Fee Per Year (Rs. 39925/=)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	27500.00	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	30000.00	2	10.0	10.0	15.0
	35000.00	4	20.0	20.0	35.0
	38000.00	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
	39000.00	1	5.0	5.0	45.0
	40000.00	4	20.0	20.0	65.0
	45000.00	4	20.0	20.0	85.0
	46000.00	1	5.0	5.0	90.0
	50000.00	1	5.0	5.0	95.0
	58000.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 13 shows that minimum per year average fee of a student in a college is Rs. 27500/= and maximum fee is Rs. 58000/= while average annual fee per year per student is Rs. 40000/=. Table and diagram clearly show that about half of the colleges have per year per student fee average less than the mean while other half colleges have more. A more careful look at the data through cross tabulation shows that variation in fee is explained by three variables; brand of the franchise, region and the income group targeted.

Number of competitors in the area

Table 14: Number of Competitors In The Area

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Tier 1 College Brand	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Tier 2 College Brand	2	10.0	10.0	15.0
	Multiple Colleges	14	70.0	70.0	85.0
	No Competition	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 14 shows the level of competition faced by each college. Most of the colleges have reported that they were facing competition from the multiple colleges including tier 1 and 2 brand colleges. Only three colleges reported to have no competition in the area. Competition is mainly price sensitive and does affect the fee charged by a college.

Which Income group do you target?

Table 15: Target Income Group (Mean Rs 100000/= per month)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	50000.00	5	25.0	25.0	25.0
	100000.00	11	55.0	55.0	80.0
	150000.00	3	15.0	15.0	95.0
	200000.00	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 15 shows that average monthly income of the target market of a college is Rs. 100000/=, and most of the colleges are targeting the market having monthly income equal or less than the mean monthly income while only four colleges are targeting the market having more than the mean monthly income. Interestingly the mean income of the target group is almost double of the monthly per capita income of the country (1474 $ Per Annum). Based on this, it may be argued that colleges have targeted the right income group.

Which Age group do you target?

Table 16: Target Age Group (Mean Age 17)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15.00	9	45.0	45.0	45.0
	18.00	5	25.0	25.0	70.0
	20.00	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 16 shows that the target age of colleges is between 15 years to 20 years with 17 as the mean age. This is exactly what is conventionally a college and university going student’s age. From 15 to 18 years students attend higher secondary programs while from 18 to 20 they join two years or a four years university program.

How do you inform your audience/market/student body about the college and its programs?

Table 17: Basic Marketing Methods

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Personal Visit	1	5.0	5.0	5.0
	Direct Marketing	2	10.0	10.0	15.0
	Digital Marketing	1	5.0	5.0	20.0
	Social Media Marketing	1	5.0	5.0	25.0
	Multiple Methods Marketing	15	75.0	75.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 17 shows the responses on the question that how do colleges inform the market about their colleges and its offered programs. Responses show that about fifteen colleges use multiple methods which include advertisements using print, outdoor, cable TV etc., personal visits, digital and social media marketing. One college reported to use only personal visits to different schools and tutoring centers to market the college and its programs. Two reported to have used only direct marketing using telephone, personal visits and mobile text messages. One college reported to have only used social media for marketing purpose.

What attracts the student body most?

Table 18: Most Effective Marketing Channel

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Social Media Marketing	13	65.0	65.0	65.0
	Multiple Methods Marketing	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 18 shows interesting responses as thirteen colleges reported social media marketing as the most effective marketing channel while seven reported multiple methods marketing as most effective marketing. Looking at the target age group, 15 years to 20 years, and the digital penetration it seems correct that social media marketing plays effective role.

What are issues and challenges of student enrollment in this area?

Table 19: Enrollment Challenges

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Income	7	35.0	35.0	35.0
	Transportation	1	5.0	5.0	40.0
	Lack of Awareness	7	35.0	35.0	75.0
	Market Saturation	2	10.0	10.0	85.0
	Price Sensitive Market	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 19 shows responses to the question that what are the challenges colleges face in student enrollment. It is clearly shown that low income and lack of awareness are the two biggest challenges followed by price sensitive market, market saturation and transportation. It is important to note that price sensitivity of the market is the result of low income of the people. Lack of awareness actually calls for more efforts on the part of colleges to spread awareness.

Do you use digital/social media for college marketing?

Table 20: Use of Digital Marketing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 20 confirms that all colleges use digital media for marketing purpose.

Which digital/social media platform do you use for college marketing

Table 21: Type of Social Media Marketing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Face Book Marketing	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 21 shows that in response to the question that which social media is used for marketing, almost all respondents have responded Facebook as the prime social media. This seems to be a right choice for marketing because according to internet sources (*https://oosga.com/social-media/pak/*) Facebook is the most in use social media platform in Pakistan.

Which digital/social media platform is more effective in attracting the students?

Table 22: Effective Social Media Platform

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Face Book	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 22 further confirms the fact that Facebook is the most effective social media marketing platform as reported by the colleges.

Who manages your digital/social media marketing

Table 23: Social Media Management

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	In House	19	95.0	95.0	95.0
	Out Source	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 23 shows that except one college all the colleges have in house arrangement to manage social media marketing. In different responses it was learned that the social media are being managed by assigning additional duties to the faculty and staff. Only one college responded to have engaged an external agency for social media management.

Does the Franchiser/Head Office support in marketing efforts?

Table 24: Head Office Marketing Support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 24 and the figure confirm that all colleges receive a marketing support from the Head Office. Head Office here means the Franchiser, and in franchising system the brand and image building responsibility falls on the shoulders of the franchiser. Typically, franchiser use National TV and Print networks for advertisement and publicity. Moreover, national and regional events are also organized for the purpose. Some franchisers have also started national level social and digital media campaign to support and build brand.

Which digital/social media platform is used by the franchiser/Head Office?

Table 25: Types of Social Media Marketing Use By HO

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Facebook	18	90.0	90.0	90.0
	Any Other	2	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 25 shows that most of the Head Offices/Franchisers are also using Facebook as main social media platform for marketing. Two colleges have reported Instagram as part of their franchiser's social media strategy. As discussed already that Facebook as choice of social media marketing by both the franchisers and franchisees is well on merit as in Pakistan Facebook is the most in use social media platform.

Do you think that digital/social media marketing has improved your admissions over last three years?

Table 26: Effects of Digital & Social Media Marketing

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	19	95.0	95.0	95.0
	No	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 26 shows that respondents have confirmed that their use of digital and social media marketing has paid back as it has been proved effective in increasing the student enrollment. This is also supported by the fact that now organizations have started increasing social media spending for marketing.

Anything on the marketing of your college and group you want to tell

Table 27: Any Suggestions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Suggestions	8	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Timely Starting of Marketing Campaign	10	50.0	50.0	90.0
	Advertisement on Local Cable	2	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Table 27 shows the responses of the college principals on the last question of the survey that are their suggestions for improvement in marketing strategy. About eight respondents furthered no suggestion while ten were of the view that timely start of the marketing campaign would be key to the success. Couple of respondents emphasized on the use of local cable tv channels for advertisement. It was also suggested to keep the marketing on round the years and also involve social media influencers and brand ambassadors for the purpose. Some of the quotes from the suggestions are as below:

> I would suggest a timely advertising on channels and Social media. Previous Year Head Office started its campaign after the admissions time. It was not well in time. We were just glancing on our competitors who did well during admission campaigns but we lagged behind.

Another respondents added, "it is suggested to promote advertisement on local cable channels." "Advertisement throughout year rather than in exam days, put some brand ambassador like engineers, famous doctors, scientist, writer, poet as cellular companies hire celebrities and social media influencers such as actors and players as their brand ambassadors."

Discussion

In this section findings and results of the study are discussed under the light of the study objectives. Following were the study objectives:

- To explore and understand the marketing practices of franchise colleges.
- To explore and understand the digital marketing practices of franchise colleges.
- To explore the perceived contribution of digital marketing in the performances of the franchise colleges.

In previous section study findings and results were reported under the light of the responses received from 20 (twenty) respondents, principals of franchise colleges mainly from the different areas of the central and the south region of the province Punjab of Pakistan. The respondents were asked 26 (twenty-six) questions framed in the structured interview guide to seek the information necessary to address the study objectives. Interviews were conducted by the researcher both in person and on telephone. Interview had two parts, part one was dealing with the demographics of the principal and the college and part two was dealing with the marketing practices of franchise colleges including digital marketing and its effects on the student enrollment.

All colleges are led by the persons who are not only well qualified but also well experienced and of mature age. Colleges are mostly the franchises of the Teir 1 and Teir 2 college brands of the education industry. Most of the colleges have secured the survival stage and on the path of take-off. Some of the colleges have good student strength and are on the path of growth. Faculty-Staff-Student ratio is 1-2 which is quite acceptable as far as industry standards are concerned.

Annual average fee per student per is also not bad, all what is required is to increase the enrollment to be more financially viable. Colleges have targeted the income group which is on an average earning more than the country's per capita income. Colleges are facing competition which is challenging as well as full of opportunities.

Study has shown that franchise colleges use all the conventional and modern methods to market their institution and its offered study programs. Conventional marketing methods include mass media and outdoor marketing. In mass media print such as newspapers, magazines, leaflets are famous methods. Television advertisement with national to regional to local coverage is also important. In outdoor banners, billboards, hoardings, wall chalking all are famous methods. The use of direct marketing in the shape of personal visits, telephone calls and mobile text message services was impressive. Personal visits to high schools and tutoring centers were considered as major marketing strategy. These schools and tutoring centers for K-9&10 actually serve as nursey for the college admissions. Those colleges which manage access and relationship with such outlets they have good admissions. One of the respondents categorically declared personal visits to schools and tutoring centers as the nucleus of his marketing strategy. This is well supported by the Resource Based View (Wernerfelt, 1984), The Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) and Interrelated Marketing Communication Framework.

This was also important to know that marketing activities in franchise colleges are divided at two levels; strategic level and operational level. Strategic level deals with the brand building of the college and marketing for this level is assumed by the Franchiser commonly known as the Head Office. Head office launches TV, print and engagement campaigns at regional and national level. This is supported by both The Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) and Franchise Relationship Quality Model (Chiou et al., 2004). For example, a franchise college group has sponsored Pakistan Super League 2024. Moreover, Head Offices also organize musical festivals of the singers of the national fame etc. Marketing activities at the operation level are performed by the franchise colleges according to the local needs. On one hand Head office keeps on marketing round the year while franchise colleges become active at the time of admissions seasons.

Findings have also revealed that digital and social media marketing is used by both the franchise colleges and the Head Office. Both use Facebook as the principal platform for the social media marketing. According to a report there were 37.1 million users of Facebook making Facebook as the most famous social media platform (https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-pakistan). It was also reported that other social media platforms such as Instagram and WhatsApp are also in use but major focus remains on the Facebook. At Head Office level digital and social media is more professionally handled as compared to the franchise colleges. As reported by our respondents only one, out of twenty colleges, was using specialized agency to manage social media. Almost all the respondents acknowledged the fact that the use of the social media marketing has improved the college enrollment over last three years. This should be discussed along with the enrollment challenges as reported by the respondents. Low income of the people and lack of awareness were reported as the major challenges of the enrollment. Question is this that may the use of social or digital media help in any way. Answer is yes, the target age group is witnessing more and more penetration of internet and social media, therefore a more focused social media strategy may address the issue of lack of awareness on the colleges and their study programs. This is supported by Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003) and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989).

The issue of low income may be addressed through the offering of study programs by using the digital ways. This may be out of the scope of the individual colleges but can be taken up by the Head Offices.

Some of the suggestions given by the respondents to improve the marketing are worthwhile. It was rightly suggested to timely start the marketing campaign and keep it alive round the year. Moreover, the suggestion of creating national and local brand ambassadors among the educated and professional class was also worthwhile. Since franchise colleges have local scope, there is relevance of the advertisement on the local cable television channels.

This study has significance at three levels; at the level of the Head Offices, at the level of the colleges and at level of academia. Head offices may offer better and customized marketing support, colleges can chalk a better operational marketing strategy while academics may understand the phenomenon well and forward policy guidelines.

Findings of the study are not without limitations. First limitation is the number of valid responses received, only twenty out of hundred. Further the sampling design was convenience owing a number of practical reasons as explained in the relevant section. It was exploratory study on the subject, therefore a number of areas requiring further investigation and details remain unaddressed.

For analyzing the data only descriptive statics have been used which only offer initial insights. All these limitations offer a good opportunity to further the research on the same topic with the same context but with broader sample and scope.

Conclusion

The study was designed to know the marketing practices of the franchise colleges working in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Franchising is a unique phenomenon in which one party grants certain rights to operate under its name and the system. Since it is a two-party relation, its marketing effort and practice is split between two organizations associated as unequal partners. This study has explored that how marketing is performed in such a relationship of two organizations working for the common goal. The study has revealed that marketing activities in such a relationship are performed at two levels; strategic level and operational level. Marketing at strategic level is performed by the Franchiser/Head office aiming at brand building and general engagements with the market and society. While at operational level marketing activities are performed by the franchisee to attract the market segment. At both levels a combination of conventional marketing methods is used with variable effectiveness. It was interesting to note that at both levels Facebook is used as a common social media platform for marketing. The use of digital and social media marketing was reported to be beneficial for both the franchiser and the franchisee.

The study offers initial insights for all the stakeholders from industry, academia and policy institutions. The study is limited in many aspects such as sample size, depth of the information and sophistication of analysis. Building on this more sophisticated studied may be designed to further the knowledge on the phenomenon.

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