

# Perceived Usefulness of Instagram as a Marketing Tool in Higher Education Institutions

Rusliana Rusle<sup>1</sup>, Jastini Mohd Jamil<sup>2</sup>, Mohamad Fadli Zolkipli<sup>3\*</sup>,  
Izwan Nizal Mohd Shahrane<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Kolej Komuniti Bentong, KM 6, Karak Setia, 28600 Karak Pahang, Malaysia; rusliana@kkben.edu.my*

<sup>2</sup>*School of Quantitative Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia; jastini@uum.edu.my*

<sup>3</sup>*School of Computing, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia; m.fadli.zolkipli@uum.edu.my*

<sup>4</sup>*School of Quantitative Sciences, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 UUM Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia; nizal@uum.edu.my*

\* *correspondence author*

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## Abstract

Social media marketing, including the use of Instagram, is becoming a prevalent part of the promotional marketing mix by higher education institution. This study investigates the factors that influence the perceived usefulness of Instagram as a marketing tool in Higher Education Institutions specifically in Community College in Malaysia. An online questionnaire was used to collect data from the 278 semester one community college students in Pahang. Based on the results, most of the participants were Malay male at the age of 18 years old which were familiar with Instagram and frequently used the application. The results show that there is no difference between gender towards perceived usefulness of social media. The results also indicate that all the hypotheses suggested have been positive and significant. It is worth noting that there were strong connections between hedonic value and co-creation value towards perceived usefulness of social media as the marketing tools in higher education institutions. Additionally, this article contributes practically by providing some guidelines on Instagram advertising.

**Keywords:** social media; Instagram; higher education institution; technology acceptance model; digital marketing.

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## INTRODUCTION

The role of the Internet in the consumer's everyday life is becoming more important. A lot of organizations are utilizing social media channel as a communication medium with their customers. Many global business companies have started using Instagram, a worldwide used social media

network, as a marketing tool. Since there is effect of social media marketing on business experience is fruitful, and the younger generation's social media usage rate is high, it is a very attractive proposition to engage social media as a higher education marketing tool. Social media should be used by admissions and marketing professionals as the main communication source for student outreach, both for the sharing of information and for direct student interaction.

The institutions of higher education has gradually lost state support and faced intensified competition (Thornton, 2017). By recognizing the factors influencing students' college choice decision-making processes and associating those factors to college marketing and recruiting strategies, the institutions can focus on recruiting their prospective students. One of the factors is the use of social media. In today's academic challenge, Community College find the task of getting new students is harder. The enrolment pattern of students enrolled in community colleges do not meet student enrolment norms (Mahfuzah, Shazila, & Azlan, 2015).

Nowadays, modern styles that are built to be more time, effort and cost-saving, have replaced the traditional methods, proving the good impact of technologies of communication and information (Madar & Willis, 2014). Social media is commonly used in higher education institutions as a tool for marketing and promotional activities. Universities have spent a lot of resources on social media advertisements, including time, money and energy. For marketing purpose, institution should not simply exist on social media, but should strive for an interactive following by their target markets. The higher education institution's target market, high school students age 18-year-old are influenced by social media with more 70% of the students admitting their search and decision-making processes are affected by social media (Howell, 2018).

The efficacy of social media as a method of marketing and the factors influencing its effectiveness are little understood (Gaber et al., 2019). However, very little work has been reported on the perceived usefulness of social media as marketing tools in higher education institutions, especially through the Instagram app. It has become important for marketing departments in universities and colleges to determine the features of Instagram to enhance its role in improving social media marketing strategies (Assimakopoulos et al., 2017). This research work examining the perceived usefulness of Instagram as the marketing tools in Higher Education institutions specifically in Community College in Malaysia.

The rest of the paper is organized in the following way. Related Work section discusses about the related works of this study. Methodology section presents the methodology that based on a descriptive survey. Finding section presents the finding of this study. Finally, a few remarks and a discussion of future research are stated Conclusion section.

## **RELATED WORK**

Digital marketing is defined as an adaptive, technology-based process where businesses work together with clients to achieve their objectives (Kannan & Li, 2017). One of many methods that companies

can use in digital marketing to reach consumers is social media marketing (Sherman, 2019). This tool utilises social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, MySpace, LinkedIn and Youtube that offer a company a two-way communication with its customers and potential customers (Appel et al., 2020). Relative to conventional advertising, social media enables businesses to reach end consumers at very low costs (Tarik & Adnan, 2018).

Social media come with both opportunities and challenges, thus in-depth expertise to effectively formulate and execute policies is required (Maresova & Hruska, 2020). Instagram is owned by Facebook and the number of Instagram's user is 1,031.9 million users in 2020 (Statista, 2020). The number of Instagram users worldwide is projected to increase to 1,822.9 million users by 2026. Instagram, being one of the largest social networks worldwide, is particularly popular with teenagers. It is a social network in which people can post and share images by liking them and commenting on them and interacting with other images (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Companies use Instagram for marketing in order to reach large audiences (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Among the most logged on social media in consumer's spare time, Instagram offers a more entertaining advertising experience compared with other platforms where companies can post attractive pictures to interact with consumers (Voorveld et al., 2018).

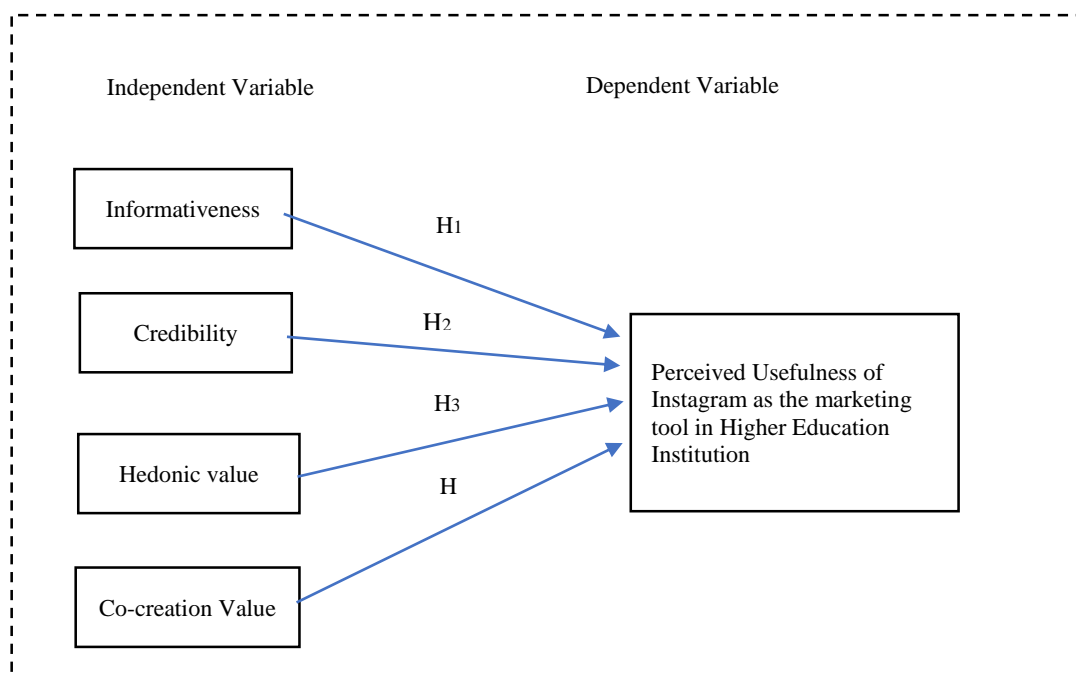
Nowadays, almost all higher education institutions have formed a presence on the Internet (Paladan, 2019). In higher education, digital marketing is considered significant, especially since HEIs have been under pressure from intense global competition. Therefore, knowing how to promote their brand is critical for universities (Kusumawati, 2019). Higher education has moved from reliance on government support to competitive markets. The transformation of higher education competition is a competition for quality that has become more standardized and prepared (Musselin, 2018).

Therefore, it is possible to clarify perceived usefulness in the sense of this work to the extent where a prospective user feels benefited from using social media. A system is high in perceived usefulness when user trusts that the system is an efficient way to perform the job(s). A person's assessment of the is based on the appeal of the usefulness of their preference (Salloum et al., 2019). The extent of perceived usefulness offered by the social media services positively impacts the usage frequency (Sago, 2020).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is a descriptive survey that aims to identify the factors that influence the perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions. The population in this study consists of first semester students at Community College in Pahang. From this population size, the sample size study was taken from a number of first semester students at Community College in Pahang. Sample selection was made randomly. Since the total population of the study is 623 people, then the total sample for this study is 278 people (Sekaran & Bougie, 2003).

The technology acceptance model (TAM) is the theoretical framework applied to understand the perceived usefulness of Instagram as a marketing tools in higher education institutions. Perceived Usefulness is a primary variable established in TAM as the important determinants of technology acceptance. Through an application of the perceived usefulness dimension, the perspectives on the value of social media as a marketing tools in higher education institutions were presented. The influence of perceived usefulness along with the related constructs; informativeness, hedonic value, credibility and co-creation value were examined through this study. Based on an extensive analysis of existing literature, all the factors that were defined is summarized into a conceptual framework provided. A conceptual model including the four hypotheses is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Conceptual Framework

Based on the previous studies, the selection of these four factors was critical to the usefulness of social media as a marketing tool. Items were adapted from previous literature and modified for the context of this study. The questionnaire was made using the original Likert scale included five symmetrical and balanced points. To reveal the relationships among these factors, hypotheses to the research questions were built.

Marketing managers shall give special attention to the informativeness of their advertisements and put an extra effort into the content of information they provide on their social media to achieve the desired results (Paymaei, 2019). The perceived value of online advertising was positively influenced by informative content of a message. Hence, Hypothesis 1 was subjected in this study:

*H1: There is a relationship between the factors of informativeness to the perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions.*

Credibility has a positive impact on the perceived importance of social media advertising by consumers in the sense of social media literature (Dao et al., 2014). Regarding value of advertising, credibility plays an important role. Based on the previous literature, Hypothesis 2 have been formulated:

*H2: There is a relationship between the factors of credibility to the perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions.*

Hedonic value is seen as one of the core elements of online brand community participation. A brand profile on the social network should provide fun and entertaining material to satisfy the client's need for hedonic pleasure. A significant component that arouses user's positive feelings is entertainment on social media. People who, for hedonistic purposes, use social media are known to be those looking for fun and pleasure. The results of a research on this topic show that the brand-related social media interaction was positively affected by entertainment value of social media pages (Seo & Park, 2018). Hence, Hypothesis 3 was subjected in this study:

*H3: There is a relationship between the factors of hedonic value to the perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions.*

The definition of co-creation is cooperation with the business or brand which the customer can communicate and interact and which, in some situations, can provide better service to customers and which aims to create an offer, service and experience (Sawhney, Verona, & Prandelli, 2015). Consumers can establish real-time co-creation with the brand via social media by providing feedback, exchanging, and participating with the brand by quickly conversing with brands in real-time on social media. (Vries & Carlson, 2014). Hence, Hypothesis 4 was subjected in this study:

*H4: There is a relationship between the factors of co-creation value to the perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions.*

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Demographic analysis involves five items including gender, age, race, years of owning Instagram account and hours spent browsing Instagram in a week. Based on the sample collected through the distribution of questionnaires, there are more male respondents than female respondents, accounting for 70.9 percent as against 29.1 percent, respectively. Most of the respondents are at the age of 18 years old (89.2.7%) and 19 years (10.1%) and 0.7 percent respondents were at the age of 20 years old. By ethnicity, the results show that the Malay occupied the highest percentage (96.4%), followed by Indian (2.9%) and Chinese (0.7%). Most of the respondents own an Instagram account for 3 to 5 years

(33.5%), followed by more than 5 years (30.6%), 1 to 3 years (28.1%), and 7.9 percent own an Instagram account for less than 1 year. Most of the respondents spend 5 to 10 hours in a week browsing Instagram (64%), followed by 11 to 20 hours (12.9%), more than 50 hours (7.9%), 41 to 50 hours (6.1%), 21-30 hours (5%) and 31-40 hours in a week (4%).

A pilot test was carried out to ensure reliability on all variables, to check internal consistency of the sample. It involved 20 students who are in semester one in community college in Pahang. The reliability test used to check the degree of consistency is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. As Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.768 to 0.914, all the constructs used in the research model display a high degree of internal consistency.

Table 1 depicted descriptive statistics for the main variables of the study. As we can observe from the table, the mean score for dependent variable; perceived usefulness is 4.53. The highest mean score for the independent variables was the informativeness with the mean value 4.26. Then, followed by credible and hedonic value with the mean value of 4.23 and 3.94 respectively. Next, the lowest mean value goes to co-creation value with mean value of 3.77.

**Table 1:** Summary of Descriptive Analysis (N =278).

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Perceived Usefulness	4.53	0.36566
Informativeness	4.26	0.63400
Credible	4.23	0.48667
Co-creation value	3.77	0.51473
Hedonic value	3.94	0.52064

The categorical variable in this study was gender. The sample was representative of two gender groups. The gender groups were male and female. The test was significant,  $t = 0.36$ ,  $p = .721$ , which is greater than .05. There was no statistically significant difference between gender toward perceived usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions.

Pearson Correlation analysis have been conducted in order to examine the correlation among the variables which are informativeness, credible, hedonic value and co-creation value with the perceived usefulness. Based on the correlation result in Table 2, there is a positive correlation between the informativeness and perceived usefulness ( $r = 0.239$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) which indicates that there is a relationship between these two variables. The correlation result is categorized as weak as the values are between the ranges of  $\pm 0.01$  to  $\pm 0.29$ . So, there was a weak positive correlation between the independent variables; informativeness with the dependent variable; perceived usefulness. The results support hypothesis 1 (H1), hence H1 is supported.

Besides, there is also a positive correlation between credibility and perceived usefulness ( $r = 0.285$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) which indicates that there is a relationship between these two variables. The results support hypothesis 2 (H2), hence H2 is supported. The correlation result is categorized as weak as the values are between the ranges of  $\pm 0.01$  to  $\pm 0.29$ . So, there was a weak positive correlation between the independent variables; credibility with the dependent variable; perceived usefulness. The results support hypothesis 2 (H2), hence H2 is supported.

Furthermore, the results also revealed a significant positive correlation between hedonic value and perceived usefulness ( $r = 0.305$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). According to Cohen (1988), the correlation result is categorized as moderate as the value are between the ranges of  $\pm 0.30$  to  $\pm 0.49$ . So, there was a moderate positive correlation between the independent variables; hedonic value with the dependent variable; perceived usefulness. The results support hypothesis 3 (H3), hence H3 is supported.

In addition, the results also revealed a significant positive correlation between co-creation value and perceived usefulness ( $r = 0.354$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ) which categorized as moderate as the value are between the ranges of  $\pm 0.30$  to  $\pm 0.49$  of correlation result. So, there was a moderate positive correlation between the independent variables; co-creation value with the dependent variable; perceived usefulness. The results support hypothesis 4 (H4), hence H4 is supported.

**Table 2:** Pearson's Correlation between the Constructs.

	Perceived Usefulness of Social Media			
	Correlation	Relationship Interpretation	Hypotheses	
<b>Informativeness</b>	Pearson (r)	0.239**	Weak	Accepted
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
<b>Credibility</b>	Pearson (r)	0.285**	Weak	Accepted
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
<b>Hedonic Value</b>	Pearson (r)	0.305**	Moderate	Accepted
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
<b>Co-Creation Value</b>	Pearson (r)	0.354**	Moderate	Accepted
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the result in Table 3, R square result of 0.152 specified that only 15.2% of the variance in perceived usefulness explained by the independent variables (informativeness, credible, hedonic value and co-creation value) which is a small percentage. It can also be deduced that at the significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ), there was a statistically significant interaction. Coefficient analysis showed that hedonic value has the significant relationship with the perceived usefulness ( $B=0.221$ ,  $t=2.865$ ,  $p=0.04$ ) where the significance level is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The co-creation value also has the significant relationship with the perceived usefulness ( $B=0.146$ ,  $t=2.197$ ,  $p=0.029$ ) where the significance level is less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 3:** Multiple Regression Analysis.

	<i>Perceived Usefulness of Social Media</i>			<b>Hypotheses</b>
	<b>Beta</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	
<b>Informativeness (H1)</b>	0.006	0.089	0.929	Not Supported
<b>Credibility (H2)</b>	0.098	1.380	0.169	Not Supported
<b>Hedonic Value (H3)</b>	0.221	2.865	0.004	Supported
<b>Co-Creation Value (H4)</b>	0.146	2.197	0.029	Supported
<b>R</b>	0.39			
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.152			
<b>Adjusted R Square</b>	0.14			
<b>Std. Error of the Estimate</b>	0.339			
<b>F</b>	12.25			
<b>Sig F</b>	0			
<b>N</b>	280			

## CONCLUSION

The discussion of the results begins with the descriptive analysis, which included frequency and percentages of the demographic data in the study, where it was revealed that most of the participants were male students (70.9%) at the age of 18 years old (89.2%) and Malay ethnic (96.4%). In Malaysia, the community college system offers a wide variety of Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) courses for students graduating from high school who are 17 years of age or older. Male students are more interested to further studies in TVET than the academic stream (Abdullah, 2019). Male enrolment in community college was consistently higher than the rate of female enrolment (Yong, 2017). Higher education institution should take effective measures by implementing more aggressive promotional programmes towards generation Z. Generation Z are individuals age 3 to 24 years who were born between 1995 and 2015. This study indicates that the average participant in the study has owned an Instagram account for 3 to 5 years (33.5%) and spend 5 to 10 hours in a week browsing Instagram (64%). From the statistics, it is evident that Generation Z were familiar with Instagram and that they used it frequently. Generation Z is the first generation to grow up in an internet environment where unlike previous generations, their perception of access to information and the world view has been influenced in a way (Betz, 2019). Gender can also influence the way people exchange social media information and how they utilize it to make decisions, according to literature (Lin & Wang, 2020). This research, however, showed no difference between gender about the perceived utility of social media usage for marketing purposes of higher education institutions.

After analyzing the data through descriptive statistics, the result determines that informativeness, credible, hedonic value and co-creation value are important factors that influence the perceived



usefulness of social media as a marketing tool in higher education institutions. Investing in all four aspects; informativeness, credible, hedonic value and co-creation value can give more leverage to higher education institution since their target audiences are social media users with higher education.

Hedonic value has the biggest effect on the perceptions of consumers towards perceived social media usefulness and offering. Thus, in the sense of social media promotion of higher education institutions, the main feature of its social media should be the element of hedonic value. Co-creation value had the second strongest important factor that influence perceived usefulness of social media. The social media page of the higher education institution has turned users from passive into active individuals who can quickly and at any time share their insights and ideas, which has also led marketers to the co-creation process. Users can connect easily on social media in real time, enabling them to co-create with the institution through Instagram in real time by providing feedback, sharing and engaging with the institution.

As for future research, the researcher would welcome opportunities to extend and contrast these results with other higher education institution. Further studies also could focus on other social networking site and the gathering of data through their members. A further study could replicate the study at the same institutions but alter the data collection by conducting all face-to-face interviews to develop a more in-depth, personal connection to the participants.

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