



Original Article

A CASE STUDY ON DIGITAL MARKETING OF LEVEL 9 ONLINE AND BLENDED COURSES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to critically assess and investigate digital marketing activities of Cork Institute of Technology's online courses. In 2011, CIT introduced its first thought online courses and presently offers a blended learning and fully online courses. This year in 2017 CIT offers 13 online programmes. For this case study, qualitative methods were used to gather research data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten master students who have e-learning experience to understand their experience in relation to CIT's online courses and marketing of e-learning courses in general. A systematic analysis method is conducted to CIT's digital marketing activities to gather data from 8 past social media advertisement of 3 online programs. This research finds that students value flexibility, convenience and price advantage of CIT's online courses while having concerns in relation to the self-motivation. Findings of this research highlighted issues such as face to face interaction for students and teachers and the difficulties they experience in communicating with each other. The answers from students in relation to issues around lack of face to face interaction showed that majority of the students feel more comfortable with taking fully online programs for technical subjects and they think a blended learning program would be more suitable for social science subjects instead of fully online programs.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Technological changes with mostly development of digital technologies and data affect not only the business area but also private life of people (Lentsiou et al., 2018). For example, thanks to the technological developments, social media is the most common way for people to communicate with others and to reach large number of people with lowest prices (Polat and Yarimoglu, 2018). Also, e-learning is the other important area of digitalization and technological developments. In Ireland, there are not many institutions that provide level 9 online learning programmes. There are 49 educational institutions in Ireland and only 12 of them offer online education programs (colleges.ie). The Cork institution of technology is one of the institutions located in County Cork which provides online courses (cit.ie).

The aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the online marketing activities of Cork Institute of Technology; such as social media activities, campaigns, direct online marketing activities, Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and pull

marketing techniques. The researcher is going to assess and investigate the effectiveness of online contents used in online marketing. The researcher analysed data from previous and current digital marketing campaigns. The study will provide data for the analysis of the above processes and identify strengths and weaknesses of CIT's digital marketing activities. This research consists of a case study investigating to see if there is a better way of marketing online courses at Cork Institute of Technology. In order to make key recommendations to CIT and other institutions in Ireland in terms of addressing the gaps and finding areas of improvement in digital marketing, qualitative research methods will be conducted using interviews to find out the best practice in digital marketing through online courses.

This study therefore concerns with assessment of the attitudes perceptions and understanding of master students in relation to the digital marketing of online courses at Cork Institute of Technology. This study firstly examines the Masters Student's viewpoints on

digital marketing of higher education e-learning programmes. Secondly, it will examine past digital marketing activities of Cork Institute of Technology. The following section describes the layout of this thesis. The research study contains five chapters including this introduction section. Each chapter has a specific focus. This layout was chosen for its ability to present clearly defined and specific research in a managed an orderly fashion, while comprehensively addressing the research topic.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 | E-learning: An Historical Context

According to Nicholson (2007:10), knowledge of the past is a key to understanding the present. The context of e-learning, it is important to note that there is no single evolutionary tree and no single agreed definition of e-learning (Nicholson, 2007:10). Since the 1960s, e-learning has evolved in different ways in Business, Education and the Training sector (Nicholson, 2007:11). Offir et al. (1994) described the historical development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use in the educational process and indicated that, since the introduction of ICT, the 'traditional open' courseware continuum succinctly and accurately depicts the progress made in the use of ICT for learning and instruction. The 'traditional open' continuum provides an insight as to how ICT evolved and developed as educational media since the early 1960s. The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the educational system has been hailed as a major catalyst of the long dreamed-about educational revolution (Hoyle, 1983). According to Jones et al., (1993) ICT is designed to serve as a major vehicle for improving the efficiency of the educational process. ICT development provides students with the opportunity of enriching their knowledge and comprehension of a subject matter by facilitating the ability to conduct comprehensive searches for sources hitherto available only in libraries and museums. The introduction of the use of spreadsheets and databases in the educational process contributed to the promotion of improved learning instruction and increased effectiveness in the educational process (Appelberg, 1997).

The steady evolution of ICT (radio, television, interactive video, electronic mail, world-wide web) has considerably influenced the development of distance learning (Jones & Knezek, 1995). The first generation of distance learning, using traditional printed material and communication via post and telephone, was superseded by second generation audio recordings, radio and television broadcasts (Southworth et al., 1981). Both first- and second-generation distance learning delivery systems were designed primarily to produce and distribute learning

materials as efficiently as the technology of the day permitted without any attention to the lack of interactive communication between students and teachers (Trentin, 1997). As a result of the development of enhanced third generation distance learning systems which include interactive video, email, and world-wide web technologies, learning activity has been redefined to include teacher-student interaction (Trentin, 1997). In contradistinction to this, Ottesen, (2007:275) argues that over the years there has been a strong urge to incorporate information and communications technology (ICT) in teaching practices; however, the pace of integration has been characterized as disappointing. Teachers' lack of competence, their resistance and lack of availability and stability of computers and infrastructure have been offered as explanations (Ottesen, 2007:275).

According to Wilson at al., (1997) third generation e-learning is flexible, and allows teachers to continuously monitor overall progress of students as well as permitting tutors to modify, reinforce and even model educational processes, thereby meeting the cognitive needs and requirements of students. Similarly, Becker, (1984) says that interactive video-conferencing or interaction by way of online Internet-based instructional and e-learning packages offer one-to-many tuition in which teachers and students are able to communicate synchronously thereby solving instructional and learning problems in real time.

The origin of e-learning is currently practiced in Business and Higher Education from the insightful work of Patrick Suppes at Stanford and Don Bitzer at the University of Illinois (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). Suppes and Bitzer clearly situated the use of technology within a broader educational agenda. In the early 1960s, Don Bitzer at the University of Illinois created PLATO, a timeshared computer system, to address concerns about student literacy (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). It allowed educators and students to use high resolution graphics terminals and an educational programming language to create and interact with educational courseware and to communicate with other users. PLATO's advances in Computer Assisted Instruction and its communication features were equally innovative and were the foundations of today's conference and messaging systems (Nicholson, 2007:10-16).

Two decades before the World Wide Web came on the scene, the PLATO system pioneered online forums and message boards, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, remote screen sharing, and multiplayer games, leading to the emergence of what was perhaps the world's first online community (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). When PLATO was eventually commercialized, it became the direct ancestor of today's e-learning systems such as Blackboard™ and

WebCT™ (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). In the 1960s, there were few educational applications of computers in universities, with most performing routine computational tasks (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). It was thought that the high cost of technology would prevent its ubiquitous uptake as an educational tool (Nicholson, 2007:10-16).

In 1966 Suppes argued that ‘... in the future it would be possible for all students to have access to the service of a personal tutor in the same way that ancient royals were once served by individual tutors, but that this time the tutors would be in the form of a computer (Nicholson, 2007:10-16). Suppes and Bitzer appears to have created the technology mainly as a tool, but also oversaw its operationalization in other dimensions (Nicholson, 2007:10-16).

Since today, e-learning has increased more and more in years especially in higher education institutions around the world and become a very popular method in short time (Jenkins et al., 2011; Stoica et al., 2017). Depending upon the improvements on ICT, it can be seen as the contemporary learning method which uses online platforms and tools. However, there are many reasons behind the motivations using e-learning tools such as users’ knowledge and skills in using ITs, perception to accept technology and the internet, etc. (Tarhini et al., 2016; Wong, et al., 2015). Also, Flavin (2017), stated that effective use of IC to change how students learn and how faculty teach is one of the main challenges that change the university education in the future.

2.2 | How People Learn

In his study, Cross (2004:103) questions, how do people learn? Why? What’s e-learning? And does it work? Cross (2004:103) addresses these questions and recounts the history and pitfalls of first-generation e-learning. According to Cross (2004:103), learning is one of life’s great mysteries and is something to engage the mind with. That aside, in more practical terms, learning is that which enables you to participate successfully in your life and in the environments that matter to you. Learning involves meshing new material into what you already know. Learning creates neural connections and rewires your brain (Cross, 2004:103).

“What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing,” (Aristotle) and “the only source of knowledge is experience” (Einstein). One of the best ways to learn is social; people learn with and from other people. People learn by doing (Cross, 2004:104). People learn because they have an innate desire to excel, the promise of reward, the fear of punishment, the lure of advancement, social pressure, peer pressure, curiosity, a quest for understanding, the satisfaction of accomplishment, status, pride and more (Cross, 2004:103).

Clarke et al, (2006) believes, information and communication technology (ICT) and e-learning are connected subjects. Before anyone called it e-learning, in late 1997, learning guru Elliott Masie defined e-learning as “online learning is the use of network technology to design, deliver, select, administer, and extend learning” (Cross, 2004:105). Similarly, in 1998, Jay Cross emphasizing the internet, also defined e-learning as “e learning is learning on Internet Time, the convergence of learning and networks (Cross, 2004:105).

Nicholson, P. (2007:1) connects CIT with interned and Defines e-learning as “thanks to the increasing educational success of the Internet and easier access to it. This broad field, which may include any kind of learning process aided by Information and Communication Technologies, is usually referred to as e-learning. According to Katz (2002), e-learning is the use of telecommunication technology to deliver information for education and training. The progress of information and communication technology development and e-learning is emerging as the paradigm of modern education (Katz, 2002). The great advantages of e-learning include liberating interactions between learners and instructors, or learners and learners, from limitations of time and space through the asynchronous and synchronous learning network model (Katz, 2002).

In order to benefit from e-learning an individual need to have a reasonable degree of ICT skills and confidence in using technology (Clarke et al.,2006). Tutors seeking to use e-learning methods need both technical and pedagogical skills (Clarke et al.,2006). It has been suggested that for e-learning the mix of skills such as acceptance of responsibility, collaborative learning, and time management, is different from more traditional forms of learning (Clarke et al.,2006). Similarly, Nicholson, P. (2007:1-11) also focuses on skills by indicating “ Broadly in industry settings, e-learning reflect an emphasis on informal an non-formal, just-in-time learning where the emphasis is on collaborative productivity. “Whilst in higher education settings, best practice online learning emphasizes the development of metacognitive skills where the emphasis is on reflective and collaborative learning.”

According to Pei-Chen Sun, et al., (2002), “e-learning is basically a web-based system that makes information or knowledge available to users or learners and disregards time restrictions or geographic proximity.” On the other hand, removing the focus from e(electronic), Cross (2004:105) argues that after the term “e-learning,” coined, today we live in an e-world. Networks facilitate virtually all learning. Most corporate learning today is at least in part e-learning. It has become trite to point out that the “e” doesn’t matter and that it’s the learning that counts. Similarly, Masoumi, et al., (2012) emphasizes

the quality of e-learning context and say that with globalization, there are worldwide calls for enhancing and assuring quality in e-learning, specifically in the context of the developing countries. Such calls for quality enhancement, accountability, added value, value for money, self-evaluation, and role players' satisfaction in higher education settings cannot go unheeded. Mc Garr (2009), also outlines that predominant use of the technology lies within discrete informatics subjects which tend to focus on learning about the technology rather than learning with it.

2.3 | Global E-learning Market

Hayes (2007) observes that although research into the use of ICT in education is into its third decade, there is still 'a pressing need to better understand how computer-based technologies are influencing learning opportunities. The education community expansion of instructional technologies throughout all sectors, research into the appropriateness, effectiveness, and modalities of learning via information and communication technology (ICT) continues to grow (Friedman, et al., 2003:402). Oliver (2005) says that higher education institutions all over the world, and not the least in developing countries, are challenged to become more competitive on a global level. According to Farrell, (2001), which follows more than 200 electronic-learning companies, the e-learning market will grow from \$550 million in 1998 to \$11.4 billion in 2003. For some institutions, businesses, and government agencies, education is becoming the nexus of innovative activity, e-commerce, and the Internet (Friedman, et al., 2003:403). There seems to be universal agreement that the worldwide e-learning market will show fast and significant growth over the next three years (IBIS Capital 2013:8-97). The worldwide market for Self-Paced e-learning reached \$35.6 billion in 2011 (docebo.com:8). The five-year compound annual growth rate is estimated at around 7.6% so revenues should reach some \$51.5 billion by 2016 (docebo.com:4). While the aggregate growth rate is 7.6%, several world regions appear to have significantly higher growth rates (docebo.com:4). With the inflow of an estimated \$6 billion of venture capital over the past five years, e-learning is being driven not only by start-up dot-com entrepreneurs but also by big corporations, for-profit spin-off ventures, as well as big and small universities (towerswatson.com).

Friedman et al., (2003:403) believes that education in the 21st century can be thought of as a significant thread of e-commerce. According to recent regional studies, the highest growth rate is in Asia at 17.3%, followed by Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America at 16.9%, 15.2%, and 14.6%, respectively (td.org). Eastern Europe market is driven by Russian Federation and Asia is driven by India, China and

Australia (docebo.com:8). Each of the world's regions has its idiosyncrasies in terms of the factors that drive this market (docebo.com:11). In Asia, for example, Government-funded projects related to literacy development in rural areas are a major driver to the introduction of e-learning (docebo.com:11). In the Middle East, governmental interventions play a critical role in the dissemination of e-learning material as educational methods (docebo.com:11). In some African countries, private universities are making the difference when it comes to investments. These Institutions are willing to provide a broad offering to their students in order to help them boost their careers (docebo.com:11). National governments are not the only ones playing a key role in the development of information and communication technologies (ICT) for education (docebo.com:12). Other sponsors of this trend are international authorities, such as UNESCO, which invests heavily in developing a modern framework for education in the region (docebo.com:13).

2.4 | Digital Marketing in The Context of E-learning

The development of alternative organizational and management structures for the new knowledge-based industries is also relevant to virtual education, which is not only dependent on an extensive and reliable ICT infrastructure, but also requires a post-industrial approach to organization and management (Farrell, 2001:30). Friedman et al., (2003:407) believes that it is imperative that educational organizations, particularly virtual education institutions, realize that a content management system is a requirement for success in this milieu. An estimated 160 million people are expected to be involved in higher education in the year 2025 and to service them, publishing houses are teaming with universities and education corporations to develop and distribute both new content and new delivery systems (Friedman et al., 2003:408). According to Farrell, (2001:109) the convenience and growing technological sophistication of virtual education is causing some traditional institutions to reassess how they organize, deliver and market their courses. As stated by to Kotler (2002) Marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs. One of the shortest definitions of marketing is "meeting needs profitably" (Kotler, 2002). Kotler says that (2002:5-6) marketing people are involved in marketing 10 types of entities: goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas. Drucker (1978) say that "the aim of marketing is to make selling superfluous. The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service fits him and sells itself. Ideally, marketing should result in a customer who is ready to buy" (Drucker, 1978).

Kotler (2002:6) says that the marketplace is physical, as when one goes shopping in a store; marketspace is digital, as when one goes shopping on the Internet. Kotler (2002:8) believes that in order to be successful in the on-line marketspace, it is important for marketers will to reorganize and redefine themselves.

According to Kotler (2002:7-13) In the Four P Components of the Marketing Mix, promotion is communication. Communication with market. To reach a target market, the marketer uses different kinds of marketing channels. Communication channels deliver messages to and receive messages from target buyers. They include newspapers, magazines, radio, television, mail, telephone, billboards, posters, fliers, CDs, audiotapes, and the Internet. Marketers clearly face a design problem in choosing the best mix of communication, distribution, and selling channels for their offerings. Ryan et al., (2011:11) says that Digital marketing is the fastest growth area of marketing we have ever witnessed. Ryan et al., (2012:17) outlines that the Digital Marketing sector is so big that now everybody competes for the lion's share of an annual pot worth approximately one trillion dollars. Global online population statistics (www.internetworldstats.com) put the number of internet users worldwide at about 1.3 billion and according to the latest stats, in just a couple of years, more than a quarter of the global population has access to the internet (Ryan et al., 2012:14). It is important to understand customers and create relevant conventional and digital marketing strategies (Chaffey et al., 2012:18). Digital marketing strategy consider how the internet strategy can be aligned with business and marketing strategies and describes a generic approach with phases of situation review, goal setting, strategy formulation and resource allocation and monitoring (Chaffey et al., 2012:18). According to Kotler (2002:18), customers increasingly expect higher quality and service and some customization. They perceive fewer real product differences and show less brand loyalty. They can obtain extensive product information from the Internet and other sources, permitting them to shop more intelligently. They are showing greater price sensitivity in their search for value.

Kotler (2002:6) believes that we can distinguish between a marketplace and a marketspace. According to Ryan et al., (2011:17) once it is decided what to do, in fact, need to pursue some form of digital marketing; the next step should be creating your own strategy. There is no "one size fits all" strategic panacea that's why businesses need to "bake" its own unique strategy based on its own particular set of circumstances (Ryan et al., 2012:18). In his book Kotler (2002:443-446) creates a Marketing Effectiveness Review Instrument and he outlines 5 areas to be questioned in order to measure

effectiveness of marketing which are Customer Philosophy, Integrated Marketing Organization, Adequate Marketing Information, Operational Efficiency and Strategic Orientation. Chaffey et al., (2012:472) however, gives different 5 areas of digital campaign measures and says that "an interactive marketing communication plan should have five main types of goals included such as Traffic building, Conversations with Visitors, Online Branding, Multi-channel Marketing and Long Term Brand Engagement" In line with Kotler, Ryan et al., (2011:97-98) says that markets should have their own ways measuring digital marketing success, and explaining that "digital marketing is not a prescriptive medium. There are far too many variables involved. What works for you won't necessarily work for me. The long and short of it is that nobody can tell you categorically what will or won't work for you online, not without an intimate knowledge of your business."

A critical review of the literature would indicate a widespread perception that digital marketing is an important means of harnessing and making the best use of e-learning in an educational institution. In the light of research discussed in the literature review it should be possible to route to discover better ways of digitally marketing Cork Institute of Technology online courses. The author's work will contribute to research work in this area as a result. As a case study, this research is specific to Cork Institute of Technology. This will have been the first study of its kind in relation to the online courses at CIT. As a result, this study aims to generate valuable data and recommendations to relevant stake holders of CIT online courses and other higher education institutes interested in digital marketing of the online courses

3 | METHOD

Gillham (2010:1), describes case study as "one which investigates case to answer specific research question and which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence, evidence which is there in the case setting, and which has to be abstracted and collated to get the best possible answers to the research questions." For the purpose of this research the case will be Cork Institute of technology and in this chapter the researcher will describe the research methodology and research methods used to answer the research questions and to achieve the research objectives for this case study.

The author outlines the research methodology used to describe and answer the central questions of this research in terms of research design, methods, sample selection data collection and analyses. It also outlines the choices taken by the author in relation to the methods deemed most appropriate, in undertaking this research.

The methodology of research used in this study includes interviews and analyses of past digital marketing campaigns. Online course offered by CIT is selected randomly and in total, eight campaigns are analysed that ran in the year 2016. Facebook and YouTube campaigns are analyzed by the researcher from the data provided by CIT. In order to analyse CIT's previous digital marketing campaigns a variety of tools were used such as Google Analytics, Alexa and insights of social media accounts. Using such kind of data collection and these digital analytics tools would always give reliable and valid data. Finally, the outcome of the analyses, primary and secondary gathered data as well as the digital marketing theory is used to make recommendations on ways to better market level 9 online courses.

3.1 | Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory

Saunders et al., (2009) suggest that qualitative method is used to describe any data collection technique (such as interviews) or data analysis procedure (such as categorizing data) that generates or uses non-numerical data, such as words, pictures or videos. Qualitative research relies on transforming information from observation, reports and recordings into data in the form of written word or visuals, images, not numbers (Denscombe 2010).

In carrying out research with master students, the qualitative method was chosen by the author and the most suitable method of collecting and ordering data. Interviews can be often the main source of data when using qualitative techniques and the author availed of it for gathering data from master students. It was the authors belief that such a method would deliver honest answers and high quality of insights from respondents about their opinion about e-learning in higher education and digital marketing of it. A questionnaire was developed for gathering the data the interviewees are divided in to two groups and the researcher conducted face to face and online interviewees (by using google hangouts).

According to Denscombe (2010), the grounded theory approach is one of the most preferred choice of methodology among social researchers in recent times and in particular, it has been adopted by those engaged in small scale project (such as this case study) using qualitative research.

Denscombe (2010) believes that qualitative inquiry is powerful as a source of grounded theory and that's why it has become the most used framework for analyzing qualitative data. Denscombe (2010) states that the grounded theory approach is an approach dedicated to generating theories and coding is one of the most central process of it. Employing the grounded theoretical approach to this study, the author addresses the issue of reviewing the interview answers through the use of coding.

3.2 | Sample

Particularly in digital marketing, there is a strong connection between marketing context and customer expectation. Conducive to finding out this link between customer and digital context and make valuable recommendations, it is important to understand targeted customers (students) in depth. Wengraf (2001:6) outlines "in depth" semi structured interviews as; "in depth" is not only to go into something to get a more detailed knowledge about it but also to get a sense of how the apparently straight forward is actually more complicated of how the "surface appearances" may be quite misleading about "depth realities". In order to understand customer behavior, the face to face questions were asked to students to understand "in depth realities". Semi structured in depth interviews were conducted to both first and second group. To ensure reliability and validity of the interviews, any type of participant error could adversely alter the way in which a participant performs is prevented by creating an online, standard and similar environment. Similarly, "participant bias" and "researcher errors" are taken under consideration to avoid any factor which produces a false response. The researcher was objective when interpreting the interviewee's answers. The answers from two interviewee groups are compared and findings are presented in line with digital marketing campaign analyses.

3.3 | Semi Structured Interviews

According to Kothari (2004:4), qualitative research such as interviews, are especially important in the behavioral sciences where the aim is to discover the underlying motives of human behavior. Wengraf (2001:5) says that the interview is a type of conversational face to face interaction where an interviewer asks concise unambiguous questions to which the interviewee is willing to respond and listen actively. In this study semi-structured interviews are conducted, where areas of interest have been predetermined and the key questions to be asked or information to be obtained have been identified. According to Wengraf (2001:5), semi-structured interviews are designed to have a number of interviewer questions prepared in advance but such prepared questions are designed to be sufficiently open that the subsequent questions of the interviewer cannot be planned in advance but must be improvised in a careful and theorized way.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted 10 interviews. All 10 participants were master students. The researcher divided the interviewees in to 2 groups in order to gather data analyses the answers and insights from respondents about their opinion about e-learning in higher education and digital marketing of e-learning.

First Group

The first group consist of 5 master students and they were all attending to an online higher education course. The researcher interviewed two students from CIT, two students from Griffith College and one student from University College Dublin. All interviews were done using Google Hangouts, an online video chat application allows to communicate through internet. All interviews recorded using a Samsung phone digital recorder. The author familiarized themselves fully using these interview devices and found them very reliable and easy to use. The quality of recording was also quite clear and this made it easier to transcribe. A consent form is approved verbally by each contributor, the consent is also recorded and all contributors agreed to have an interview recorded. It was the authors belief and choice that creating this group would deliver honest answers and insights from respondents about their opinion about e-learning. As they are already taking an online program already, it deemed to be the best way to get the insights from student for the purpose gathering data in order to answer the research question and create recommendations for CIT case.

Second Group

The second group consist of 5 students who had completed or currently studying on a classical master program and had e-learning experience in the past. The researcher conducted face to face interview for the participants of this group. All interviews recorded using a Samsung phone digital recorder. The author familiarized themselves fully using these interview devices and the quality of recording was also quite clear that made it easier to transcribe. A consent form is approved verbally by each contributor, the consent is also recorded and all contributors agreed to have an interview recorded. The author's reason and belief to create this group was that creating this group would deliver honest answers and insights from respondents about their opinion about e-learning and marketing of e-learning. As they are already taking a classical master degree and having e-learning experience, it is considered by the author that this group could represent the future target market for CIT's online programs and give valuable data for further marketing of CIT's online courses.

Comparing the first and the second group, the significant difference is that first group consist of students only who are studying an online higher education program. Second group are the master students who completed or currently studying in a classical master program and have any type of e-learning experience.

4 | FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

A significant finding emerging from this study is that all of the student defined the most valuable benefits of e-learning as "Easy to Use", "Simple", "Low Cost", "Easy to Access" and "Convenient". Particularly these

4 words were used by all of the interviewees. "You can do it in your own time a lot of the time. If the course allowed it, you could either choose to do the live conferences, or you could watch the recordings afterwards." This common answer is given by all interviewees. Nonetheless, the most common disadvantage of the e-learning is outlined as a "Lack of Face to Face Communication" among the master students. Supporting Trentin (1997), the data gathered from interviews has shown that there is still room for improvement on the lack of face to face interaction issue that can be also subject of CIT's online courses marketing.

Supporting Kotler (2002), marketers clearly face a design problem in choosing the best mix of communication, distribution, and selling channels for their offerings. This current study suggests that while promoting CIT's online courses it important to use these key words that were outlined by students in the communication message in order to raise the effectiveness of the campaign.

This current research study has found that one of the most important reason behind buying an e-learning program is defined as e-learning is a low-cost solution to upskill the students. "So the reason is because I wanted to reskill myself." Similar answers were given by all the participants. "I wanted to look at a low-cost solution to upskill myself without having to change my lifestyle". This research has found that price was defined as the most important reason on deciding to buy an e-learning program. 70% of the contributors defined "price" as one of the most important aspect of the e-learning course.

Supporting Kotler (2002), customers are showing greater price sensitivity in their search for value. This current study suggests that while promoting CIT's online courses, in the advertisement context or in the title it could be more attractive to refer the price and work life balance of the e-learning.

Supporting Ryan (2011), this research has found that Facebook is one of the most common social media platforms that is being used by students. The answers given to the interview questions showed that 70% of the participants using Facebook, 40% participants using Twitter and 20% of the participants using twitter as most preferable social media platform. "Facebook and LinkedIn", "Facebook. I use and a bit of Twitter".

According to the marketing campaign analysis for this research study, Facebook campaigns had good response rates. The campaign ran for the Master of Arts in E-learning program in 2016, and reached 14,228 Facebook users, and 223 of these users clicked the link on the advertisement to read more about the course. Cost per click was 0.67 euros. The campaign on YouTube ran for the same program, however, did not reach the same results. This study recommends

that Twitter and LinkedIn could be used for CIT's online courses social media campaigns.

This research has found that beside the digital marketing campaigns, conventional marketing activities are also effective. One of the participants to survey stated that when first she had heard about the online master program it was on a radio advertisement. "I heard about it mainly on the radio a couple of years ago and did a bit of research after that". Another significant finding emerging from this study, is that all of the students defined the visuals and the title of the advertisement to be the most important part to attract student's attention. Students give similar opinions about the course content and it is stated that if the visuals or the title is interesting, they go to the CIT main page and read the course content.

This study recommends that besides the digital marketing campaigns, conventional marketing activities are also effective and both marketing advertisements could run in a campaign where the same communication message is delivered. This research has shown that in digital media, the visuals and the title of the advertisement are the most important part to attract student's attention. Digital media advertisements which have short, interesting and need oriented titles, and which reflect the course content and overall brand image, seem to be more likely to attract students.

An important main finding emerging from this study is that affiliate marketing is commonly used in higher education. 40% of the master's student had their first e-learning experience by buying a personal development course that they heard of through Groupon. "I had lots of preconceptions about e-learning, but I was interested in digital marketing at that time and when I saw a discount in Groupon, I decided the buy the course. So, I would say that my reason for buying that first e-learning course was the price and course content".

Supporting Ryan et al., (2001:25), this study recommends that affiliate marketing could be useful to advertise CIT's online courses on a digital platform where the Institution's reputation won't be negatively affected.

This research has found that it is crucially important to be ranked on the first page of the search engine. " I think it's crucially important to be on the first page. I never look beyond the first page unless I'm really searching for something important." 100% of the contributors agreed on importance of being on the first page of a search engine and give similar opinion about the subject. Another interesting finding emerging from this study showed that although it is important to be on the first page, AdWords is not to be attractive for master students. "I usually skip over straight away because I don't trust it." 90% of the

interviewees outlined that they don't click on advertised search results and skip them. Contributors give similar opinion about the subject. "I'm gonna use the example Google. If I google something, the first three are always the page sponsored, sponsored ads, the big ads, I actually skip them".

Supporting Ryan et al., (2001:25), this study recommends that it is important to use many marketing techniques combined and compatible all together. It is recommended that instead of spending budgets on Google AdWords in the future, it could be better to invest in search engine optimization where the CIT web page will appear on the first page of a search engine organically.

This research has found that in the digital world, as much as the title and visuals of the adverts, the design of the web site is also important for master's students. "I will go into the website, and have to check for the description of the course, testimonials, and even some ratings out of the course itself." 80% of the contributors outlined that customer experience and testimonial are important and when they see an advertisement usually, they go to the main page and read the testimonials.

This research study recommends that it could be beneficial to CIT online course if on the advertisement itself or on the main page there are links related to customer experience and testimonials.

Table 1 Key Findings and Impacts

Research Findings	Impact of the Future marketing online CIT Courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-learning defined as "Easy to Use", "Simple", "Low Cost", "Easy to Access" and "Convenient" by interviewees. E-learning is defined as a low-cost solution to upskill the students. Facebook is the most used social media channel by master students, followed by Twitter and LinkedIn. As well as digital marketing campaigns, conventional marketing activities is also effective. Affiliate marketing is effective on students. It is important to be ranked on the first page of the search engine however advertised results on search engine are not preferred by students. The vast majority of the contributors outlined that testimonials and customer experience is important for them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Particularly these key words can be use in CIT's online marketing campaigns in the title or in the course content. In order to match the price sensitivity in student's search, the advertisement could refer to refer the price and work life balance. Beside YouTube campaigns, Twitter and LinkedIn advertisement can be used. CIT could use both digital and conventional marketing channels for its online courses. CIT could use affiliate marketing through appropriate web pages. It could be more effective to invest in SEO and appear in the first page organically rather than paying for it. It could be beneficial to CIT online course if on the advertisement itself or on the main page there are links related to customer experience and testimonials.

5 | CONCLUSION

This study examines the attitudes, beliefs and understanding of master students studying an online program at CIT and other institutions in relation to the marketing of e-learning and Its proposed future expansion. This case study also examines the past digital marketing campaigns of CIT's online programmes and expands on existing academic literature through its findings focusing on find out how to better market Its online offerings. Finally, this research study investigates future opportunities for marketing of its online courses.

The conclusion of this research study confirms that CIT has effective digital marketing campaigns but there is room for improvement. Cork Institute of technology must have a comprehensive marketing strategy aligned with institution mission and should run digital marketing campaigns under Its marketing orientation by generating a top-level plan. This would allow institution to have a high level of planning, applying, measuring, and adapting its marketing activities.

This study has highlighted the importance of having an overall strategy of marketing and notes that a powerful brand and strong marketing structure are key to achieving success for its digital marketing campaigns. It is beneficial to marketing of its online courses that CIT could put in place a quality assurance measurement and performance indicator for all of its online courses. Another important observation has emerged from this study that CIT could use expand its social media campaigns to more popular and preferred platforms by master students such as Twitter. It is recommended CIT for digital marketing of its online courses to invest in more SEO then and AdWords and to use affiliate marketing on a platform where CIT brand can lead to increase its value proposition.

The conclusion of this research study confirms that e-learning market growing nationally and internationally, growth of the online courses at Cork Institute of Technology is inevitable and there is no doubt that the increase in online offerings at CIT will be progressive for the Institution. It would allow the Institution to expand outside its geographical catchment area and recruit students from all around the world. This would lead to an increase in the student numbers and naturally an increase in the revenue they will bring. Such expansion also means the opportunity to provide a range of online programs as well as improvement in existing ones. In conclusion, the increase in online programmes at the Cork Institute of Technology has potential to bring more success to the institution. To ensure this, Cork Institute of Technology must ensure full staff corporation through dedication, openness, professionalism, education and quality assurance.

The Institution should create a high-level plan, study the multicultural perception of higher education in e-learning, and globally, encourage students to engage with CIT through the clever promotion of online courses.

The progress of development of more online courses in CIT are linked to many internal and industrial relations issues. A significant finding emerging from this study is the issue of perceived quality by students in relation the production and delivery of the online programmes of CIT. Among 50% of the contributors which are studying and off-line master's in business program at CIT, there is a strong belief that it is impossible to replace the course with online version of it. This perception seems to be the major challenge for CIT to beat in the future because the growth of the online courses at Cork Institute of Technology is inevitable. This study recommends that as stated by most of the interviewees in chapter 4, blended learning could be a good start of enlargement of the online courses at CIT. In order to ensure this, CIT could put in place a quality assurance measurement and performance indicator for all of its online courses.

This research has shown that students acknowledge the value and importance of e-learning in relation to the flexibility that CIT offers. Therefore, CIT in its drive to increase its online courses, it could be to its advantage to create and promote the flexibility of its programmes. A significant finding of this research is that unlike technical field related online courses, large percentage of the master students are against 100% online courses in social science related fields such as Masters in Business program offered by CIT. This study outlined that the main reason why students are against 100% online courses is the lack of face-to-face. This was seen as a major hurdle for students when it comes to learning online and again, by the student blended learning were shown as a solution to this problem. For CIT, this is important information that must be addressed when creating and designing online programmes. This study recommends that instead of creating %100 courses in social science related courses, it could be to its advantage to offer blended learning and promote the flexibility of its programmes.

Advertising is one of the most powerful forms of "pull" marketing strategy—persuading the customer to buy a product. "Push" marketing occurs when the product is presented assertively from the seller to the consumer. This research study has shown that Push marketing strategy is more useful for CIT online courses. This marketing strategy is a paid form of impersonal promotion that can appear in many forms. For example: print brochures or flyers, billboards, digital advertisement, television and radio ads, web site banners social media and e-mail campaigns. This research has shown that CIT is already using some of these forms such as print

brochures, digital advertisement and social media campaigns. This study recommends CIT to use Social Media Analytics, Management & Performance tools that they can measure success of their social media campaigns.

The focus of this research is the study of the attitudes and understanding in relation to the topic of marketing of online courses at Cork Institute of Technology. This section provides recommendations for future research pertaining to digital marketing of online courses offered by CIT. The findings of this current research provide the opinions and insights of ten interviewees and analyses of previous digital marketing campaigns of CIT's online courses relating to the objectives outlined in chapter 3. The findings in this study can be used by those involved in digital marketing from online higher education or personal development perspective or by those studying marketing, or by research professionals. In proposing the future research, the author would recommend that two strategies be employed. The first strategy should involve a focusing of the research on overseas target market for CIT's online course. The second strategy should involve a focusing of research on how to expand CIT's online courses internationally. Which direction to go with what kinds of course content?

As a part of the first strategy an area of study which deserves further extensive research relates to how to expand CIT's online courses internationally, would be an investigation on creating the online courses for international markets. As presented in chapter 2, international e-learning market is growing and non-English speaking markets such as Africa, middle east and Asia are growing rapidly in last decade. A study may be undertaken in relation to what type of online courses could be attractive and need oriented examining what type of English courses is need in such non English-speaking countries.

As part of the second strategy, an exciting area for future research would be an empirical study of the overseas target market for CIT's online courses. Is there an untapped potential in this target market? As presented in chapter 2, international e-learning market is growing, demand and interest to e-learning is raising. English speaking markets such as USA, UK Canada and Australia are mature and seems saturated but non-English speaking markets have potential for e-learning. Related to potential markets, another interesting area which merits further research could be an investigation into perceptions and effectiveness of the possible marketing campaigns in such markets relating to CIT's online courses examining what type of marketing strategy to follow in such markets in order to appeal to a wider audience, attract students in higher education and enticing more online students to CIT.

Future research should be also undertaken to gather the views of higher education students from a wide variety of cultures/countries in relation to the opinions and values which they hold in relation to the online qualifications, when compared to qualifications gained through traditional methods in their countries. Such research would provide insights into student perceptions across a range of countries/cultures. It is expected that more candidates will seek employment holding an online degree, therefore it could be important for CIT to learn viewpoint of students regarding e-learning in higher education. The findings of such research may be valuable to CIT in its digital marketing of and expanding of its online offerings internationally.

Finally, research may also be undertaken in relation to lecturers who work exclusively in the e-learning area. Such study would focus on examining their past experience as a lecturer and their role as an online lecturer. The results and findings may offer not only insights into ways of overcoming academic resistance but also overcoming of lecturing internationally through e-learning.

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