

Research on Distance Education Students' Preferences for School Choice of Online Media in Enrollment - A Case Study of Guangxi Open University

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Abstract: In the digital era, the influence of online media on distance education is increasing, and students' choice of different online media determines the level of distance education teaching services. A questionnaire survey was conducted on 2106 students of Guangxi Open University. By comparing the new media preference of different gender students in distance education institutions, this study found the effectiveness and shortcomings of current open university enrollment promotion, and proposed suggestions for remote education to classify and promote to different gender and age student groups, establish multiple new media enrollment platforms, and comprehensively promote publicity in two aspects.

Keywords: Online media, Student choice of schools, Guangxi Open University, Distance education

1 Introduction

In the new media era, more and more universities use diversified recruitment media to broaden the recruitment promotion channels, with the aim of improving the school's popularity and student quality. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) released the 51st "China Internet Development Statistics Report" in Beijing, which shows that as of December 2022, the number of Chinese netizens has reached 1.067 billion, an increase of 35.49 million compared to December 2021, and the internet penetration rate has reached 75.6%.[1] Distance higher education institutions have become an indispensable part of distance higher education institutions by using multimedia means for student support services in addition to early online teaching. Nowadays, Chinese higher education has entered the popularization stage, and the motivation for distance education institutions to recruit students has changed from academic compensation education to multiple aspects such as skill training, self-improvement, and continuing education. How distance education institutions meet the diverse educational needs of the people and carry out enrollment promotion work has become a topic of concern in society. At the same time, China's open universities have carried out a series of reforms. The government hopes that the open university will "build an internet-based platform for lifelong

education that integrates technology and education by 2025".[2] Therefore, this study takes Guangxi Open University as an example to investigate the new media preference of different gender student groups for school selection, and propose suggestions to promote the long-term development of Chinese distance education.

2 Literature review

In the fierce competition for students, enrollment is one of the important links in university work. Due to historical, cultural, social development, and other reasons, there are various different models of enrollment systems in universities around the world, resulting in differences in enrollment promotion strategies. In the United States, universities have more autonomy in the form of recruitment promotion, which can be carried out by schools based on their own actual situation. Block et al. believe that universities view students as customer service when promoting enrollment, and that teachers communicate with students to promote their academic success. This service model has achieved good results in the promotion of college enrollment. [3] German universities combine enrollment promotion with sports to attract new students through different clubs. Weimar et al. found after studying the relationship between enrollment and clubs in German public universities that university enrollment work and club cooperation can directly affect enrollment rates. [4]

There are many studies on university enrollment promotion, among which the first one dates back to 1990, but the number is not many, with only 6-8 studies every year.[5] It was not until around 2002 that Chinese universities began to expand enrollment, and enrollment promotion became more important. The number of research results also increased, and in 2008, it exceeded 100 for the first time, and has been increasing every year since then (Fig 1)..

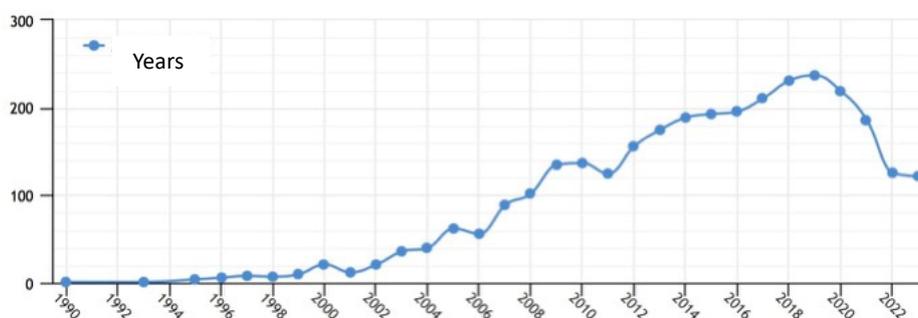


Fig 1: Annual Trend Chart of "University Enrollment Promotion" Document Retrieval

From the perspective of research content, there are few studies on enrollment promotion in distance education, and the results are also very scattered. The first study on enrollment promotion in distance education institutions was conducted by Sun Xu and Cheng Jiqiang from Beijing Radio and Television University. They proposed in 2013 that enrollment promotion is an important task in the construction of open universities based on the school's educational philosophy. They discussed the content and target group of open university enrollment promotion, and then analyzed feasible ways for open university enrollment

promotion from four aspects: traditional media, network media, outdoor media, and experiential activities. [6] This study opened up research attention in the field of distance education to multimedia in the field of enrollment promotion.

Afterwards, Sun Li conducted a combined interview and questionnaire survey to sample potential students of Beijing Open University. Through data analysis, he found that new media forms represented by WeChat are gaining influence among potential students, and distance education institutions need to readjust enrollment promotion strategies to effectively communicate with student groups, expand their student base steadily, and maintain the lifeline of school survival and development. [7] This study is the first to prove the influence of WeChat, a new media form, on enrollment promotion in distance education institutions.

Around 2018, various short video platforms became popular in China. Chen Smin from Guangxi Open University paid attention to the relationship between these new media and enrollment promotion in open universities. She analyzed the difficulties and challenges in current enrollment work through analyzing the priority order and degree of students' attention to school enrollment promotion in new media, taking Guangxi Open University as an example. This study summarizes the effectiveness and shortcomings of current open university new media enrollment promotion work from a student perspective to explore and consider open university new media enrollment strategies. [8] This article is a preliminary basis for this study.

Recently, Shao Hua from Penglai Polytechnic College found the influence of WeChat, Xiaohongshu APP, Zhihu APP, Douyin APP on enrollment propaganda. He pointed out that by making good use of integrated media approaches and platforms, more students can be attracted to apply for open universities. [9] This study conducted a classified study on the enrollment propaganda effects of various new media in China at present, which is enlightening for this research.

From the perspective of research methods, most studies are sample surveys of students from a certain distance education institution to understand their relationships between multimedia and enrollment propaganda through questionnaires.

It can be seen that existing research has proven the applicability of conducting surveys on students' preferences for school choice of online media in open universities, but lacks separate studies targeting different gender and age groups of students, so this research has certain value.

3 Research method

This study was conducted from November 2021 to June 2023 through a questionnaire survey of students enrolled in branches and learning centers of Guangxi Open University (Guangxi Open University is responsible for teaching guidance services for 14 prefecture-level cities' open universities, municipal TV and radio universities (branches), and 139 counties (districts) learning centers in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region). As of June 2023, a total of 2194 questionnaires were collected, of which 2097 were valid (mainly excluding questionnaires with short response time, consistent answers, and regular patterns), with a response rate of 95.44%. Among the surveyed subjects, 63.85% were female and 36.15% were male. 74.39% were rural students and 25.61% were urban students. 73.68% were college students and 26.32%

were undergraduate students. The birthplace of the students is concentrated in Nanning, Guilin, Beihai, Qinzhou, Chongzuo, Liuzhou in Guangxi, as well as a small number of other places outside Guangxi, but Guangxi students account for the vast majority.

This study used α reliability coefficient method to analyze the reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's α coefficient for all items was 0.737, indicating a high reliability coefficient and good reliability of the questionnaire design. Structural validity analysis was used to examine the factor analysis of all measured indicators related to this study. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin) value was equal to 0.908, indicating that the survey data is very suitable for extracting information and has good validity.

4 Research findings

The rapid development and popularization of new media technology have facilitated students' access to university information, which has had a certain impact on the behavior of selecting schools by candidates, especially on different gender groups of students. At the same time, it also has a certain impact on the university's enrollment promotion work. Therefore, universities need to use network new media technology to expand their enrollment influence. This study focused on the effectiveness, channels used, and information content of new media enrollment promotion (Table 1).

Table1 :Guangxi Open University new media enrollment publicity group differences

Population characteristic	Sex		Age		Education level		Student source	
	χ^2	p	χ^2	p	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
Enrollment channels	54.80	0.00	77.056	0.00	8.941	0.111	5.663	0.34
School brand	46.298	0.00	94.681	0.00	48.95	0.000	26.729	0.001
Individual development factors	11.778	0.067	37.767	0.004	13.789	0.032	11.021	0.088
Publicity platform	35.515	0.00	61.045	0.00	20.414	0.009	12.014	0.151

4.1 Good results achieved in new media enrollment propaganda channels

29.95% of the students who participated in this survey obtained enrollment information through new media platforms such as Weibo APP, Douyin APP, and Baidu APP. There are obvious differences in gender and age in terms of enrollment channels. Males prefer new media enrollment propaganda methods such as Baidu search engine, Weibo, and Today's Headlines, while females prefer Douyin APP and Bilibili APP. The group over 30 years old is more inclined to media enrollment propaganda than the 17-22 age group.

4.2 Word-of-mouth recommendations and school brand become the main channels for school brand image and reputation

In terms of school brand image and reputation, word-of-mouth recommendations and school brand occupy the highest proportion. The group over 40 years old pays more attention to comprehensively evaluating the development of school brand, professional characteristics, faculty strength, etc. when applying, while the 17-22 age group pays more attention to word-of-mouth recommendations, employment forms and professional skills. Students of different education levels are more concerned about professional characteristics when applying; there is no significant difference between different genders, both tend to consider skills training; rural students pay more attention to employment advantages and word-of-mouth recommendations, while urban students pay more attention to school brand.

4.3 Personal career ideals and future employment prospects are highly valued

In terms of personal development factors, career ideals (68.29%) and future employment prospects (54.7%) become the main motivations for application. There are no significant differences in gender and urban-rural sources, but there are obvious differences in different education levels and age groups. According to the data of this survey, with the increase of age, different age groups pay more attention to career ideals and family economic factors.

4.4 Future career prospects are most important in enrollment propaganda

In terms of preferences for enrollment propaganda information, most students pay more attention to future career prospects (62.85%), professional characteristics (54.17%), and skills training (53.17%), with low concerns about location, enrollment numbers, and past enrollment. There are differences between different education levels and age groups, and the data show that different education levels and age groups are more concerned about career ideals and future employment prospects.

4.5 Professional enrollment websites become the main channel for new media enrollment propaganda

In terms of specific categories of new media enrollment propaganda, the frequency of use of professional enrollment websites is the highest, followed by Baidu search engine, Wechat APP, Weibo, Toutiao and other online new media platforms. There is no significant difference between different education levels and sources of students, but there are obvious differences in gender and different age groups. Females prefer to browse enrollment information on professional websites, while males prefer to use search engines like Baidu. In terms of age differences, sources aged 23-40 prefer to use professional websites, Baidu APP, Wechat APP, Weibo APP and other new media platforms, while the preferences of sources aged 17-22 do not differ much.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Strengthen the construction of official channels and pursue diversified enrollment propaganda channels

Now, the age structure of distance education sources in China spans from 20 to 60 years old, with continuing education demands. Survey data shows that sources aged 20-40 are the main sources of Guangxi Open University, who are mainly low-educated groups hoping to improve their education levels while working through distance education. Their preferences for new media enrollment propaganda platforms are concentrated on using professional websites, Baidu, Weixin, Weibo and other new media platforms. Therefore, for these students, distance education institutions should strengthen the construction of their own enrollment websites while establishing and improving official publicity channels on various major new media platforms to help them get the most timely and professional enrollment information.

For students under 20 years old, they are usually just graduated from ordinary high schools or vocational high schools, hoping to further improve their education levels and get better jobs through continuing education. Therefore, for these students, distance education institutions should enrich the proportion of professional development content in enrollment propaganda.

The source group over 40 years old is more likely to choose distance education for personal interests or lifelong education. They have lower acceptance of new media enrollment propaganda channels than young people. Therefore, for these students, distance education institutions should focus on multi-dimensional content display of course teaching in enrollment propaganda.

5.2 Establish multiple new media enrollment platforms for comprehensive propaganda

According to the survey data, we find that student groups of different genders have different preferences for different new media. Therefore, distance education institutions should improve the multi-channel construction of all platforms based on students' personalized characteristics to achieve comprehensive propaganda effects. For example, in addition to common online new media platforms such as Weibo APP, Douyin APP and Baidu APP, attention should also be paid to newly emerging Xiaohongshu APP, Zhihu APP, etc. And for male students who prefer Baidu search engine, Weibo, Toutiao and other new media, enrollment propaganda can be carried out in the form of related text, pictures, etc.; for female students who prefer Douyin APP and Bilibili APP, related short videos can be produced for enrollment propaganda.

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