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STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS UNDER CONDITIONS OF HYPER-COMPLEX CHALLENGES

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СТРАТЕГІЧНІ НАПРЯМИ ПУБЛІЧНОГО УПРАВЛІННЯ ЦИФРОВОЮ ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЄЮ МАРКЕТИНГУ ЗАКЛАДІВ ВИЩОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ НАДСКЛАДНИХ ВИКЛИКІВ

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The article is devoted to the study of strategic directions of public management of digital transformation of marketing of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the context of extremely complex challenges. In the context of intensifying globalization competition and martial law in Ukraine, the marketing function is becoming critical as a tool for ensuring institutional stability, financial viability, and effective positioning of HEIs. It is argued that digital transformation is an imperative of today, determining the ability of higher education institutions to quickly adapt to a dynamic market and effectively attract students.

The aim of the study is to scientifically substantiate and develop a holistic concept for improving the marketing activities of higher education institutions, as well as to identify mechanisms for its integration into the public administration system to ensure synergy between national priorities and institutional goals. The methodological basis of the study is an interdisciplinary analysis of theoretical developments (public administration, marketing management, digital economy) and a systematic review of the current regulatory and legal framework. Empirical confirmation of the provisions was carried out using the example of the experience of the Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University (V. Dahl EUNU, relocated HEI), which operates in crisis conditions, demonstrating adaptation scenarios for digital marketing.

It has been established that HEI marketing goes beyond classical approaches, integrating the formation of emotional connections and personalized communication, catalyzed by LLM models, CRM systems, and analytics. It has been substantiated that public administration, implemented through licensing, accreditation, and financing mechanisms, indirectly determines the limits of marketing autonomy. An analysis of the dynamics of the

relocated university's contingent has demonstrated the effectiveness of anti-crisis digital management: the increase in applicants is ensured exclusively by contract-based enrollment and foreign students, which emphasizes international resilience and quality, confirmed by ISO 9001 certification.

The practical value of the study lies in the development of conceptual foundations and recommendations for improving marketing policy, contributing to the sustainable development of higher education institutions in conditions of dynamic socio-economic and security uncertainty.

Keywords: public administration, digital transformation, marketing, higher education institutions, complex challenges, crisis resilience, competitiveness, branding.

Problem statement. In the context of intensifying globalization processes and intensifying competition in the educational services market, the functioning of higher education institutions (HEIs) requires a transition to a strategically oriented paradigm of public administration. In this context, marketing activities become a critically important tool for ensuring sustainability, financial viability, and effective positioning of HEIs, especially in wartime, when access to education becomes limited. Research into the role of marketing in education is important because it allows for effective differentiation of educational products, rapid response to changes in consumer preferences, and the formation of an attractive institutional image among key stakeholders and international partners.

Data from the European Demographic Data Sheet 2024 show that as a result of events after 2022, more than 5.8 million Ukrainians received temporary protection in Europe, and more than 615,000 Ukrainian students went abroad to study. In September 2025, European Union countries provided temporary protection to 79,205 refugees from Ukraine. The highest figure since August 2023 is linked to the government's decision to allow men up to the age of 22 to leave Ukraine without hindrance [20].

Under such circumstances, linear-functional models of HEI management demonstrate a decline in effectiveness. This phenomenon can be explained by their inability to provide an adequate and flexible response to the highly dynamic challenges posed by external factors.

Overcoming this inefficiency and ensuring the competitiveness of HEIs is only possible through profound structural changes. One of these key changes is digital transformation, which is an imperative of today, having evolved from an optional extra to a critical necessity that determines the ability of HEIs to ensure their own competitiveness, effectively attract applicants, expand their network of partnerships, and build strong institutional recognition in the information space.

In the process of theoretical reflection, it has been established that marketing of higher education institutions in the 21st century goes beyond classical approaches to promotion, integrating the formation of emotional connections with target audiences, brand management, and personalized communication. Digitalization acts as a catalyst for this transformation, opening opportunities for the implementation of innovative tools: LLM models, CRM systems, user behavior analytics, content marketing, and communication process automation. At the same time, the activities of higher education institutions are significantly influenced by public administration and state education policy, which is implemented through licensing, accreditation, and state funding mechanisms.

Regulatory influence directly or indirectly defines the limits of marketing autonomy of institutions, therefore, research into the relationship between public administration and the marketing strategy of HEIs is particularly important for ensuring synergy between national priorities and institutional goals of HEIs.

The relevance of the proposed study is determined by its integrative nature, which involves considering HEI marketing not only as an economic category, but also as a public management and

technological category. The need to update approaches is due to the fact that most Ukrainian universities still use traditional or fragmented marketing strategies. This is evident in the lack of a comprehensive digital communication strategy, the lack of integration of digital channels, and content that does not meet the expectations of today's youth.

A comprehensive study of the impact of public administration as an external regulator and digital technologies as an internal driver will allow us to identify systemic patterns and develop a concept for improving marketing activities, ensuring the sustainable development of higher education institutions in the face of extremely complex economic and technological challenges.

Analysis of recent studies and publications.

First of all, scientific understanding of the issues of digital transformation of marketing of higher education institutions in the context of public administration requires a thorough analysis of theoretical developments and the current regulatory framework. An analysis of recent studies indicates the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, which lies at the intersection of public administration theory, marketing management, the digital economy, and education law. A systematic review of the regulatory field is critically necessary to determine the legal boundaries and possibilities of marketing activities of higher education institutions. Table 1 below systematizes the key regulatory and legal acts of Ukraine that directly or indirectly regulate the activities of higher education institutions and define the framework conditions for the implementation of their marketing policies in the context of digital transformation.

Among a number of Ukrainian researchers of the features of marketing communications in the field of higher education, it is worth noting I.O. Deynega, G.V. Yevtushenko, N. Zinchuk, S.B. Semenyuk. The features of the concept of marketing of educational services were revealed by I. Yakymenko [1], the concept of holistic socially responsible marketing was proposed and developed by I. Britchenko [12] and I. Chaika [22]. A large number of scientists conduct specialized research on the use of modern information technologies by higher education institutions during the promotion of educational services of the university. Almost all researchers justify the need for higher education institutions to use marketing communications to attract applicants, however, today the presence of various channels and communication environments in which marketing processes take place contributes to the introduction of new approaches to managing promotion policies [2]. However, the available

publications currently do not contain specific recommendations regarding the factors that

determine the effectiveness of marketing in higher education institutions.

Table 1

**Key regulatory acts of Ukraine regulate the activities of HEI
(marketing policy in the context of digital transformation)**

Document	Regulated aspects	Link
Law of Ukraine "On Education"	Determines the principles of state policy in the educational sphere, the principles of functioning of educational institutions.	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19
Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education"	A key document that regulates the activities of HEIs, their autonomy, financing, structure, and also provides for their independence in conducting educational activities (including marketing strategy).	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1556-18
Law of Ukraine "On Public Procurement"	Regulates relations in the field of public procurement, which may concern the purchase of marketing services and digital equipment of HEIs.	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/922-19
Law of Ukraine "On the Basic Principles of Ensuring Cybersecurity in Ukraine"	Important for ensuring the security of digital marketing platforms and university student databases.	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2163-19
Concepts of digital transformation of education and science for the period until 2026.	Determines the general vector of state policy in the field of digitalization, which affects the development strategies of higher education institutions.	https://mon.gov.ua/ua/news/koncepciya-cifrovoyi-transformaciyi-osviti-inauki-mon-
Order of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on approval of the Strategy for the Digital Development of Innovative Activity of Ukraine for the period until 2030 and approval of the operational plan of measures for its implementation in 2025-2027	Defines the general state policy for the development of innovation and the digital economy (WINWIN Strategy), including priority areas (EdTech, AI), which forms institutional requirements for strategies for innovation and digital development of higher education institutions.	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/1351-2024-%D1%80#Text
Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine "Issues of the Unified State Web Portal of Digital Education Action. Digital Education"	Defines the activities of the state digital educational resource, which is an element of state management of the digital space in education.	https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/184-2021-%D0%BF#Text
Licensing conditions for conducting educational activities	Establish requirements for the material and technical base and the educational process, which may include requirements for digital infrastructure, which indirectly affects digital marketing capabilities.	https://mon.gov.ua/static-objects/mon/sites/1/regulatorna_dijalnist/2025/oprylyudn-proyektiv-rehulyat-aktiv-2025/05/2

Ukrainian scientists O. Zhuravska, Yu. Zhitnik, T. Nagornyak [3] analyze the features of strategic management of higher education institutions in wartime.

N. Kononova and M. Us investigated the impact of the external environment on higher education institutions in the context of digitalization and proved that the use of STEEP+S analysis streamlines strategic planning of interaction marketing and significantly increases the adaptability of higher education institutions to a turbulent environment [7].

The issue of digital transformation of education was also studied by G. Vial [34], who considered digitalization as a strategic process of changing the logic of interaction within the organization and with external partners, as well as Schwab K. [30], who studied the impact of the fourth industrial revolution on educational institutions. The UNESCO report (2023) analyzed in detail the impact of digitalization on global education systems [32].

Our previous scientific research, conducted by the authors of the article in 2023 [24], was focused on studying the development trends and substantiating the significance of innovative approaches and digitalization processes in the organization of the educational process of higher education. As a result of the analysis, it was proven and argued that the implementation of innovative approaches is a strategically important factor for achieving a high level of quality and efficiency of educational services. In particular, the implementation of innovative technologies and full digitalization allows universities to quickly adapt to the modern requirements of the labor market and society, ensuring the creation of flexible, accessible and inclusive learning environments. Special attention within the framework of the aforementioned research [24] was paid to the Volodymyr Dal East Ukrainian National University (hereinafter referred to as the V. Dal SNU), a thorough assessment and analysis of the implementation of innovative approaches in the training of higher education applicants, which is carried out in the conditions of distance education due to the relocation of the university. The work presents a number of innovative approaches aimed at supporting research activities and improving the quality of education in the context of distance learning [24].

Despite the significant volume of scientific work, the issues of adapting the tools of strategic analysis of the external environment to the specifics of higher education institutions (HEIs) remain insufficiently developed. In particular, the direction

of strategic directions of public management of digital transformation of marketing of higher education institutions in the context of digitalization and security challenges requires further development, which requires a deep analysis of the impact of the macroenvironment on institutional strategy.

Purpose of the article is the scientific substantiation and development of a holistic concept for improving the marketing activities of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the context of digital transformation, as well as determining mechanisms for integrating this activity into the public administration system to ensure institutional sustainability and increase the competitiveness of HEIs.

Presentation of the main research material.

Marketing in education is a relatively new but dynamically developing field, which is increasingly considered as a strategic tool for managing a higher education institution. Educational marketing encompasses a set of actions aimed at researching, forming and satisfying the needs and expectations of various target audiences – applicants, applicants, parents, employers, donor organizations, etc. At the same time, unlike classical commercial marketing, the non-profit mission, trust and social significance of the product play a key role here.

According to F. Kotler's conceptual approach, services marketing is a special area that involves flexible adaptation to the intangible nature of the offer, interaction with the client and a personalized approach. Higher education as a service belongs to this category: it is an intellectual product, invisible until the moment of consumption, stretched in time, dependent on the image of the institution [8].

Marketing involves recognizing customer needs, developing and promoting products or services, pricing them, and distributing them effectively to develop strong customer relationships [35]. It is crucial for organizations to continue these activities to add value not only to promote and sell products, but also to ensure the sustainable growth of the organization.

Marketing activities of higher education institutions are built around the voluntary exchange of values between subjects of the higher education services market, and its specificity is determined by the peculiarities of market formation and demand on it. According to the market structure, the higher education services market is monopolistically competitive, which determines the conditions of competitive interaction between higher education institutions. By their nature, educational services are merit goods (merit goods), the peculiarity of

which is high social utility and the lag of demand from the long-term interests of society. As a result, state patronage of the educational services market arises, since individual consumers are ready to purchase a merit good at a price significantly lower than the equilibrium one, i.e. below the total costs of training specialists [24].

In the global experience, marketing in the education sector has long become a strategically important function that is directly intertwined with the mission, vision and core values of the educational institution. For example, universities in the UK, USA, Canada actively use comprehensive digital campaigns using SEO, content marketing, email newsletters, social networks, automated chatbots for first contact with potential applicants [32].

Marketing activities of higher education institutions have their own characteristics, which are determined by the uniqueness of their educational product. Among the key factors are the difficulties with clear market segmentation, a long communication process and the exceptional importance of the institution's reputation. Therefore, it is important to distinguish and note the features of educational marketing for domestic higher education institutions, among the main ones:

two-way nature, the consumer (recipient) not only receives the service, but also actively influences its content through feedback, evaluation, and participation in changes;

intellectuality of the product, the result of the educational process is knowledge, competencies, and worldview, which are difficult to quantify;

high importance of trust, the choice of a university is often based on reputation, reviews, advice from acquaintances and the image of teachers;

social responsibility, the university fulfills not only an educational, but also an educational, scientific, and humanitarian mission.

Central to educational marketing is the development of a marketing mix – a set of interrelated and complementary marketing factors that an institution uses to achieve desired changes in the parameters of the target market.

The main components of the marketing complex of educational services provided in Fig. 1 are:

service as a commodity: the range of educational services is quite wide, constantly and intensively updated, taking into account the requirements of clients, society, and scientific and technological progress;

price of the service: prices for educational services are formed under the influence of the market, the amount of effective demand; price can also be used to position the service;

service distribution channels: a set of independent organizations involved in the process of satisfying the demand for services, making them available to consumers;

system for promoting services to the market: promotion activities are aimed at specific target groups of consumers of educational services, at possible intermediaries.

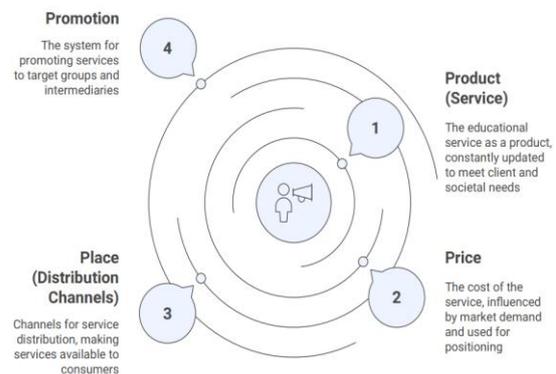


Fig. 1. Educational services marketing mix

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The national education system is undergoing transformations due to the influence of a complex of external environmental factors, which have both positive and negative nature. Military actions in Ukraine led to the forced displacement and departure of part of the population, primarily women with children. As a result of the movement

of the population, there was a redistribution of demand for educational services across the regions of the country, which is characterized by an increase in the load on educational institutions in the central and western regions of Ukraine [5].

The results obtained indicate a significant reduction in the number of entrants to national higher education institutions in the first year of the war. In the following two years, there was a slight increase in the number of higher education applicants, including those over 25 years of age. Analyzing the current demographic situation, it is necessary to note the almost twofold reduction in the number of graduates of higher education institutions over the past 15 years. To optimize the functioning of the higher education system, the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine is developing a set of measures that will bring the number of institutions in line with the current demographic situation and the needs of the labor market. The gradual reduction in the total number of entrants and the state policy to optimize the number of higher education institutions require participants in the educational services market to implement comprehensive strategies that will ensure their functioning in the long term [13].

In modern conditions, it is important to form a marketing policy of higher education institutions based on the following key concepts:

strategic marketing – long-term vision and planning, identification of target market segments, formation of a unique value proposition of an educational institution;

branding of educational services – building a strong emotional identity of the university, developing a visual style, slogan, and positioning among competitors;

positioning – a clear definition of what exactly sets the university apart from others: unique programs, international partnerships, dual education, digital infrastructure, etc.;

differentiation – creating a competitive advantage through innovation, quality of teaching, availability of services, and support for applicants;

market segmentation – the division of potential applicants according to criteria (age, geography, interests, level of training) and the adaptation of communications to each group.

Thus, marketing in the field of higher education today is not just an auxiliary tool for promotion, but a key management function that ensures the competitiveness of the institution, effective interaction with consumers of educational services, and contributes to the development of the university brand as a socially significant institution.

The scenarios of marketing activities of HEIs can be grouped into the following: adaptive (adaptation of development directions to changing needs of their target segments); proactive (strategy of a leader who chooses new directions of development before their competitors); intrapreneurial (intrapreneurship – revealing the entrepreneurial potential of employees, activating individual initiative); combined (combining several approaches into a single strategy) (Fig. 2).

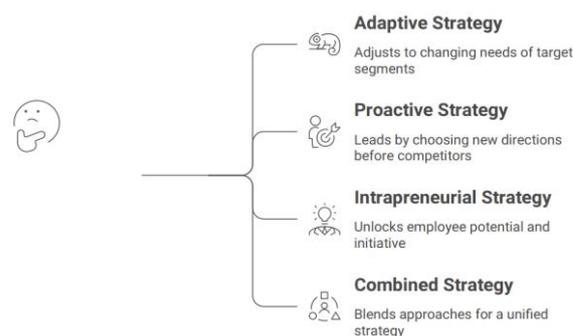


Fig. 2. Scenarios of marketing activities of HEIs

However, the implementation of any of the above strategies in modern conditions is impossible without a deep digital transformation. Digital tools are no longer an additional component of marketing activities – they have become its basis. The modern environment requires universities to completely review both approaches to interaction with applicants and the internal organization of educational processes. Online communications, automation of analytics, virtual information platforms, digital branding – these elements must be integrated into each of the marketing scenarios as basic components.

Thus, the digital transformation of marketing activities of a higher education institution is not only a response to the challenges of the global environment, but also a condition for adaptability and sustainable development in conditions of crisis uncertainty.

In these conditions, the digitalization of the educational space has become not only a requirement of the time, but also a survival factor for many institutions. The transition to digital formats, in particular the use of online marketing, social networks, virtual tours, interactive platforms and CRM systems, allows universities to effectively position themselves in conditions of crisis and excessive competition. Universities, which previously relied exclusively on traditional forms of promotion, are forced to rethink their strategy, go

beyond paper booklets and direct invitations, and adapt to the behavioral models of the digital generation.

In the current realities of the functioning of higher education institutions, the role of marketing activity is increasing as a key lever for creating competitive advantages and attracting future applicants. Transformations in the external environment, caused by globalization, digitalization, the war in Ukraine, demographic decline and economic instability, have led to the need to revise traditional marketing methods in the educational sector [9].

Digital marketing has become an integral strategy that uses the Internet and digital platforms, such as computers, mobile devices, and social media, to promote products and services [27]. Effective digital marketing strategies improve an organization's marketing and financial performance while providing personalized services and promoting customer well-being [27]. Digital transformation has fundamentally changed marketing strategies in all sectors of the global economy, especially in educational institutions.

Digital marketing strategies are vital to increasing customer engagement, promoting brands, and ensuring sustainability. Additionally, through a variety of digital platforms and tools, companies can create personalized experiences, engaging with their target demographics, building loyalty, and driving sustainable organizational growth [35].

In the context of the need to ensure stability in the face of internal and external challenges, as well as for empirical confirmation of theoretical provisions, special attention requires the study of the practical experience of leading HEIs operating in difficult crisis conditions. In particular, the Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, which until 2014 was one of the leading universities in Ukraine, which had a powerful material and technical base and a stable regional influence. The developed material and technical base was located in 57 educational and laboratory buildings and structures with a total area of about 230 thousand sq. m. In an extensive network of 9 branches located on the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, in the Luhansk and Kherson regions, about 2,000 teachers taught more than 30,000 students, of whom 1,500 were foreign. The university had 110 branches of departments in production, 40 research laboratories, 18 educational complexes. The university occupied leading positions in the ratings of scientific and educational activities of Ukraine and improved them. However,

the very ambitious plans for the development of the university were hindered by the war that began in 2014 [18].

The relocated university has become a phenomenon of higher education in Ukraine and an example of resilience, a desire to develop and improve the quality of education even in difficult conditions of existence near the front line and permanent hostilities. The dedicated work of the staff during 2014-2022 allowed to fully restore educational and scientific activities, create new sites and laboratories. The university improved its position in the TOP 200 ranking and in 2021 entered the QS Emerging Europe and Central Asia University Rankings for the first time. During the period of 2014-2022, the university implemented more than 50 international, national and regional projects, created 16 new laboratories and modern multifunctional educational spaces. For this purpose, the university was involved in more than 1.5 million euros and equipment as part of international technical assistance [19].

The process of introducing innovative technologies into the educational environment of the Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University requires significant resources that the university lost during the occupation of the territory of the Luhansk region, and special skills from teachers and higher education applicants, the absence of these components limits the introduction of innovative technologies into the educational process, which may negatively affect the quality of training of future specialists. That is why the application of innovative approaches and the coverage of their results in the European and global scientific space will make it possible to attract grant programs for the development of applicants, teachers and the Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University as a whole [24].

In 2023, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University was recognized as one of the best universities in Ukraine and is among the 66% of the best universities in the world in the international ranking STUDY ABROAD AIDE RANKINGS and entered the world international ranking "QS EUROPE UNIVERSITY RANKINGS – 2024" [24].

As of the end of 2024, the number of higher education applicants increased by 341 people (or 6%) compared to the previous year and amounted to 5,969 people. The increase was mainly due to the admission of applicants for education under the contract form of study (Table 2). The budget form of financing continues to decrease and

amounted to 1,719 people (-19.6% compared to the previous year).

Table 2

Total contingent of higher education applicants at V. Dahl SNU at various educational levels [4]

Educational level	As of the end of 2024	Total	Total including	By state order	Under contract
Bachelor's degree	2023	3126	32	1425	1701
	2024	3297	57	1260	2037
Master	2023	2187	60	672	1515
	2024	2210	83	409	1801
Doctor philosophy	2023	316	10	41	275
	2024	462	22	50	413
Aggregate	2023	5629	102	2138	3491
	2024	5969	162	1719	4251

Today, the university structure includes: 8 faculties, the Center for Educational Improvement, 1 research institute, 28 departments, 1 joint branch of the National Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, and other divisions. The university enrolls 5,969 higher education students (including those seeking a Doctor of Philosophy degree), and the educational process is provided by 259 full-time scientific, pedagogical, and research staff (of which 60 are Doctors of Sciences, 146 are Candidates of Sciences). Enrollment is carried out in 129 educational programs [4].

For the second year in a row, after moving to Kyiv, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University became one of 31 higher education institutions in Ukraine and one of 7 universities in Kyiv that were included in the QS Europe University Rankings 2024 and took 56th place in the annual academic ranking of universities “TOP-200 Ukraine 2023”, improving its pre-war performance [26].

The dynamics of changes in the total contingent of applicants for 2019-2024 are given in Table 2. According to the dynamics, we observe a trend towards an increase in the contingent, which is a positive phenomenon, but we must increase activity in this direction.

The data presented table 3 reflect significant volatility in the dynamics of the total contingent of higher education applicants at Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, which is directly correlated with external exogenous factors and institutional adaptation. During the period 2019/20–2021/22 academic year, there was a steady decrease in the total number of students (from 6,750

to 4,251 people, or by 37%). This trend was due to the consequences of the first wave of relocation of HEIs (2014) and demographic decline, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased uncertainty. At the same time, the share of students studying under a state order remained relatively stable, while the main decrease occurred due to the contractual form (from 4,192 to 2,161).

Table 3

Dynamics of changes in the total contingent of higher education applicants at V. Dahl SNU

2015-2024 роки [4]

Period	Total contingent		including	
	Total	Including foreign	By state by order	Under contract
2019/20 academic year as of October 1, 2019	6750	112	2558	4192
2020/21 academic year as of October 1, 2020	5545	150	2280	3265
2021/22 academic year as of October 1, 2021	4251	111	1979	2161
2022/23 academic year as of October 1, 2022	4502	104	2412	2090
2023/24 n.y. as of December 15, 2023	5628	102	2138	3491
2024/2025 n.y. As of December 15, 2024	5969	162	1719	4251

With the beginning of the full-scale invasion (2022/23 academic year) and in the following years, a positive dynamics of the restoration of the contingent was recorded, which indicates the effectiveness of anti-crisis management and the adaptation of the university to functioning in a distributed format. The total number increased to 5969 people as of the end of 2024, which is almost equal to the indicators of 2020. It is worth noting that the growth was ensured exclusively by the contractual form of education (an increase from 2090 to 4251) and a significant increase in foreign applicants (from 102 to 162 in 2024/25 academic year), which emphasizes the international resilience of the university. At the same time, the share of state orders in the contingent structure experienced the

largest decrease to 1,719 people in the 2024/25 academic year, which is associated with the redistribution of state places as a result of martial law and a change in the priorities of state education management.

In the fall of 2025, the V. Dahl State University successfully passed a supervisory audit and confirmed the validity of the certificate of compliance of the quality management system (QMS) with the requirements of the international standard DSTU EN ISO 9001:2018 (EN ISO 9001:2015, IDT; ISO 9001:2015, IDT), therefore, the quality of services provided in the field of higher education at the university meets the highest European and world standards [19]. Confirmation of the validity of the ISO 9001:2018 certificate is the result of the systematic work of the entire university staff and testifies to the reliability and efficiency of the educational process and all management procedures, a clear focus on the needs of applicants and other stakeholders, consistent improvement of the quality system, which is the basis of strategic development, as well as transparency and compliance of document flow and internal processes with internationally recognized standards [19]. Even in difficult times, the university provides students with free access to educational materials, resources, and information, which is an important aspect that contributes to improving the learning and organization of students' learning. [24].

Digitalization in universities has great potential to improve the quality of education, develop students' skills, and facilitate the university's transition into the digital era. However, it also requires attention to security issues, staff training, and effective implementation of digital tools to achieve maximum results [24].

During the study of the degree of digitalization of Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, it was found that it actively implements digital technologies in the educational process. In particular, electronic platforms for learning, the use of online resources and electronic reporting tools [24].

Let us consider in more detail the digital transformation of marketing at the V. Dahl SNU. For the purpose of effective public management of the university, an electronic document management system based on Megapolis.Doc.Net was implemented. This contributes to continuous educational activities and the implementation of university processes in the conditions of modern technological transformations [24].

Table 4 shows the main external and internal factors that affect the activities of higher education institutions in wartime, and demonstrates which of them can be partially or fully compensated for by the introduction of digital technologies.

Table 4

The main factors of the competitiveness of domestic higher education institutions in wartime

Group of factors	Impact of war	The opportunity to improve through digital transformation of universities
External factors		
Economical	Economic instability, reduced funding	Yes
Political	Suspension or slowing down of reforms, dependence on government decisions	No
Social\ Territorial	Growing educational gaps, displacement of applicants	Yes
Government regulation	Restrictions under martial law, evacuation of personnel	Part
Internal factors		
Financial	Decrease in income from contract training, loss of international partners, outflow of applicants abroad	Yes
Space-time	Relocation of institutions, lack of a stable learning environment, limited physical access to resources	Yes
Personnel	Loss of qualified specialists, reduced staff motivation	Yes
Informational	Data loss, need for backup	Yes

** the table was developed by the author based on a survey conducted in January-April 2025 of the main departments of the V. Dahl SNU*

Among the strengths of the marketing strategy of the V. Dahl SNU, one can single out the presence of a multi-channel online presence, regular

information updates, activity in social networks, adaptation to digital communication trends, as well as a high level of adaptability in crisis conditions. The university also has a positive academic reputation among the local community, has an extensive partner network, and actively involves applicants in the formation of content [24].

The weaknesses include the lack of a centralized marketing management system, fragmentation in content placement, a limited amount of visual and video content, the not fully realized potential of TikTok and YouTube Shorts, and the lack of a full-fledged CRM system to support the entrant at all stages [10].

Among the external opportunities, it is worth noting the growing demand for flexible forms of learning, the expansion of the digital audience, the openness of international platforms to cooperation, the positive trend towards personalized communication, and interest in Ukrainian educational institutions abroad.

The threats include a high level of competition in the domestic and international market of educational services, the activity of European higher education institutions in attracting Ukrainian applicants, information overload of the audience, limited budgets for promotion, cyberattacks during wartime, and a potential decrease in the level of trust in Ukrainian universities due to general instability.

The key task of the university is to form a holistic digital identity, which will aim to encompass much more than just the university website, but to form a comprehensive image by creating a visual design for social networks, improving the quality of content, and improving interaction and efficiency of communications.

To ensure this integrity, it is critical to develop a single brand book and form a team of specialists to coordinate the online presence.

An important tool for forming such an identity is a content marketing strategy. It includes planning publication topics, material formats (texts, videos, infographics), defining target audiences and performance metrics. The more thoughtful the content, the higher the level of trust in the university and the attraction of potential applicants.

The main tool for shaping this identity is a content marketing strategy. Clear planning of topics, formats (text, video, infographics), and targeting of the target audience directly affects the level of trust and attraction of applicants.

Content marketing is becoming the main tool for building trust and emotional connection between the university and the target audience. Its essence is not in promoting educational products, but in

providing valuable, informative and emotionally close content that meets the interests and needs of the user. This is especially true for generations Z and Alpha, who do not respond to classic advertising, but are willingly involved in interactive, personalized and authentic content.

The content strategy should include various formats: text articles, short posts, video reviews, stories, live broadcasts, podcasts, infographics, and visual selections. Real stories of applicants and graduates, as well as content "from the inside" – behind-the-scenes events, "a day in the life of an applicant" and opinions of teachers – are particularly effective.

The key to effectiveness is consistency. You need to have a clear content plan with thematic blocks, regularity of publications, and a calendar of seasonal campaigns (for example, an introductory campaign, the beginning of the school year, graduation, etc.).

Analytics should become the basis for adjusting the strategy (number of views, depth of interaction, comments, saves, and reposts) – all of these are performance indicators that allow you to adapt content to the audience's expectations.

A well-constructed content strategy is not just publications, but the language that the university speaks to its future applicant. And this language should be lively, human, and convincing.

A particularly promising direction is the creation of separate online platforms or mobile applications for interaction with applicants. Such tools allow personalizing communication, providing useful reminders, sending push notifications, and creating the effect of community involvement even before entering the university [1].

In the context of digitalization, interaction with potential applicants should take place not only through traditional communication channels, but also using modern digital platforms. These can be adapted university websites, specially developed mobile applications or chatbots that accompany the applicant at all stages of the admission campaign.

Such tools allow to significantly improve the quality of service and personalize the experience of a potential applicant. For example, an applicant can create a personal account, receive push notifications about deadlines for submitting documents, changes in admission rules, current dates of events (open days, consultations, etc.). The ability to register online, upload necessary documents or even take short surveys about the user's interests allows to collect preliminary analytics and recommend specific specialties that match his profile.

An additional benefit is the effect of early emotional engagement. When an applicant receives targeted greetings, personal recommendations, answers to their questions in the chat, or sees their application processed in real time, they feel valued, cared for, and cared for by the university. This not only improves the image of the institution, but also directly influences admission decisions.

Universities can also develop interactive modules, such as career guidance tests, career choice simulators, specialty cards with virtual “excursions” of departments, short videos and explanations. Such elements increase interest, improve understanding of the offer and make the selection process more conscious.

Particular attention should be paid to the mobile version of digital products. According to statistics, more than 80% of young people use a smartphone as their main device for accessing the Internet. Therefore, loading speed, adaptation to small screens, and convenient navigation are critically important elements.

Thus, digital platforms for applicants become not only a convenient functionality, but also part of the brand experience that forms the first impression of the university. The more technologically and attentively the HEI builds this interaction, the higher the level of interest and, accordingly, the conversion among real applicants.

No less important is the implementation of automated data collection and processing systems. With their help, HEIs can segment audiences by behavioral characteristics, evaluate the effectiveness of engagement channels, conduct A/B testing of advertising campaigns, and predict interest in new programs or specialties.

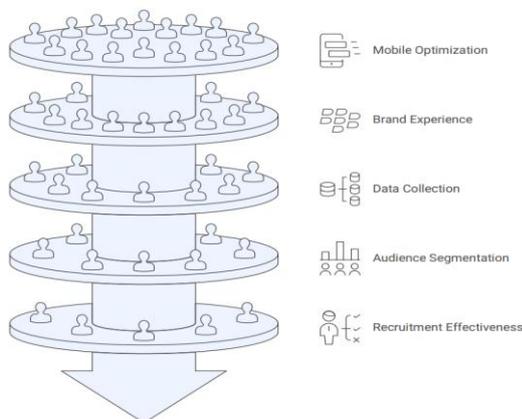


Fig. 3. Enhancing university recruitment through digital strategies

Digital marketing in higher education requires a deep understanding of target audiences, their

behavior, interests, and motivations. To do this, universities need to implement automated systems for collecting, storing, processing, and analyzing data. This primarily involves the use of CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems, web analytics systems (Google Analytics, Hotjar), and marketing platforms with support for A/B testing and predictive analytics.

CRM systems allow you to record all interactions with a potential applicant, such as the first visit to the site, registration for an open day, contact via chat, subscription to the newsletter, submission of documents. All this information is structured, segmented and allows you to form target communication scenarios depending on the user's behavior. For example, an applicant who has viewed specialties in the humanities can automatically receive a newsletter with reviews of applicants from the relevant departments, video tours or answers to frequently asked questions.

Universities can also use tools to track actions on the site, such as what the user is looking at, which pages they click on, and where there is lag or confusion. This allows them to improve the interface and increase conversions – for example, more applications by simplifying the registration button or improving the menu structure.

A special value is the ability to A/B test different variants of advertising banners, landing pages or email newsletters. The system automatically determines which variant gives the best results – and ensures optimization of marketing costs.

Predictive analytics, based on historical data, allows you to predict which educational programs may be more popular next year, which regions provide a higher percentage of applicants, how the dynamics of requests for individual specialties are changing. Such insights allow you to plan marketing campaigns in advance and more targetedly.

In general, automated systems are the basis for building a data-driven marketing strategy, where every decision is based not on intuition, but on real numbers and behavioral models.

In the context of modern reality, it is impossible not to mention the importance of cybersecurity and personal data protection. In the context of active use of online resources, universities must ensure the reliability of the platform, the protection of applicants' personal information, and the confidentiality of all communication. This is not only a legal requirement, but also an element of brand trust.

For higher education institutions that work with large amounts of personal data (name,

contacts, educational history, external assessment/NMT results, documents, banking information), the responsibility for maintaining confidentiality is critically important not only from a legal but also from an image perspective.

University marketing platforms must not only be functional, but also secure. Website hacks, database leaks, phishing attacks, unauthorized access to personal accounts – all these are risks that can destroy the reputation of even the most successful admissions campaign. In addition, current legislation (for example, the Law of Ukraine “On Personal Data Protection” or the European GDPR regulation for foreign applicants) requires strict compliance with the rules for processing, storing and transferring personal information.

The university should systematically build cooperation with applicant ambassadors, which should include:

launch of the “applicant ambassadors” program, an open selection among active youth interested in blogging, video, journalism, or simply ready to share their experience. Ambassadors can receive motivational bonuses – certificates, badges, mentions on official pages, merch, or additional opportunities (participation in events, access to the PR team, etc.);

candidate ambassadors need to be educated and supported through training or creating guides on how to write posts, shoot reels, and follow ethics on social media;

Involve applicants in the creation of official content, through the creation of interviews, a day in the life series, FAQ videos, podcasts. They can moderate question-and-answer sessions, conduct live broadcasts or Instagram Stories on behalf of the university on special days (for example, open days);

support UGC (user-generated content). Create a branded hashtag that applicants and applicants can use under their posts. Repost the best materials, organize contests (for example, “my first class at SNU” or “why I entered here”);

Provide feedback regularly, not through strict control, but through constant support.

Thus, the branding strategy through student ambassadorship ensures the emotional authenticity of the university’s image in the eyes of potential applicants. Instead of dry official information, future students see a lively, sincere, open university with which they can easily associate themselves. This approach builds trust, which is a key factor

when choosing a higher education institution in a competitive digital environment. The presence of real faces, personal stories, and a living student voice in communication creates a sense of belonging even before admission. This allows applicants to feel the atmosphere of the educational institution, imagine themselves as a part of it, and understand the lifestyle and values shared by the university community. It is through this emotional contact that deeper identification with the higher education institution brand occurs, which significantly increases the chances of attracting motivated and loyal applicants.

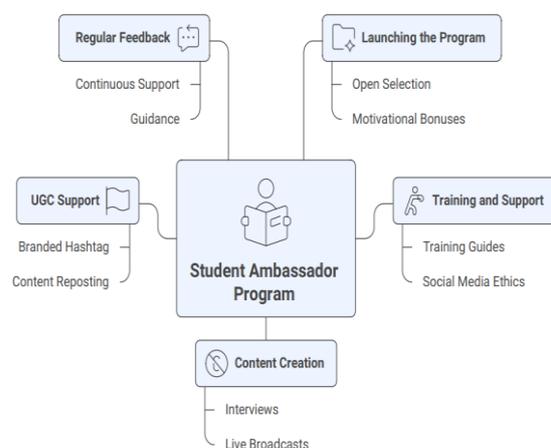


Fig. 4. Strategy for building student branding through ambassadors

These actions will contribute not only to attracting applicants, but also to forming a long-term emotional connection with the university brand, which will become the foundation for a sustainable growth in the number of applicants and improving the reputation of V. Dahl SNU.

Table. 5 Action plan for updating the digital identity and marketing strategy of the V. Dahl SNU. is designed for the phased implementation of changes during January–June 2026, with the full implementation of the new digital identity by June 2026 – precisely before the active phase of preparation for the 2026 admission campaign.

The implementation of these stages will increase brand awareness, strengthen trust in the institution among the target audience, and ensure systematic, consistent communication with applicants through relevant digital marketing channels.

Table 5

Action plan for updating the digital identity and marketing strategy of the V. Dahl SNU

West	Responsible(s)	Deadline	Notes
Creation of a digital transformation working group (marketer, designer, IT specialist, communicator)	Vice-Rector for Development, Head of Marketing	until February 1, 2026	Forming a cross-functional team
Audit of current digital identity (website, social media, advertising)	Digital Transformation Team	until March 3, 2026	SWOT analysis of digital touches
Development of an updated brand book (logo, colors, fonts, templates, tone of voice, adaptation for mobile)	Guest brand strategist, designer, SMM manager	until February 1, 2026	Presentation of the result to the team
Website update: UI/UX design, adaptability, speed, structure	Web team, IT department	until April 1, 2026	Parallel testing on smartphones
Unification of social media accounts: avatars, banners, tone of voice	SMM manager, copywriter	until April 20, 2026	Defining tone of voice for applicants
Creating a content bank: story templates, video covers, presentations	Creating a content bank: story templates, video covers, presentations	Creating a content bank: story templates, video covers, presentations	Creating a content bank: story templates, video covers, presentations
Designer, videographer, editor	Designer, videographer, editor	Designer, videographer, editor	Designer, videographer, editor
until May 1, 2026	until May 1, 2026	until May 1, 2026	until May 1, 2026
For constant content updates	For constant content updates	For constant content updates	For constant content updates

Conclusions. Today, digitalization has become a necessity for all modern organizations, in particular for universities that seek to maintain competitiveness, attract applicants and form their own recognition in the information space, and increase resilience in extremely complex conditions of existence. That is why the digital transformation of higher education institution marketing as a tool for public management of its resilience has become a key focus of the study. Theoretical analysis has shown that marketing of a higher education institution (HEI) in the 21st century goes beyond classical approaches, including the formation of an emotional connection, brand management, and personalized communication. Digitalization is a catalyst, opening up opportunities for the use of tools such as chatbots, LLM models, CRM systems, content marketing, and user behavior analytics. Research conducted in this direction on the example of the V. Dahl East Ukrainian National University, which resulted in the publication of the article [4], reports at several international conferences allowed us to highlight the strengths of the university – active participation in international projects and

experienced teaching staff, and also substantiated areas for development, such as the fragmented nature of marketing activities, the lack of a unified digital strategy, insufficient use of SMM and content marketing, as well as a weak level of integration of digital services and personalization of communications. In view of this, a number of substantiated practical recommendations have been formed: create a unified marketing strategy; implement a CRM system to automate communications; develop a mobile application, career guidance tests and virtual tours; actively integrate artificial intelligence (in particular LLM) to process requests and build personalized educational routes; involve student ambassadors in creating authentic content (Instagram, TikTok). The importance of regular analytics of the effectiveness of marketing activities based on key metrics is emphasized.

The conducted research confirms that ensuring the effectiveness of marketing activities of higher education institutions directly depends on the level of their full digital integration. It is the digitalization of marketing activities that serves as a source of

unique mechanisms for achieving increased flexibility and efficiency, which is a decisive factor in the process of forming a sustainable competitive advantage in the educational market, especially in the context of instability and blended learning.

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Чорна О.Ю., Паламарчук О. М., Ліщишина А.В. Стратегічні напрями публічного управління цифровою трансформацією маркетингу закладів вищої освіти в умовах надскладних викликів.

Стаття присвячена дослідженню стратегічних напрямів публічного управління цифровою трансформацією маркетингу закладів вищої освіти (ЗВО) в умовах надскладних викликів. В умовах посилення глобалізаційної конкуренції та військового стану в Україні, маркетингова функція набуває критичного значення як інструмент забезпечення інституційної стійкості, фінансової життєздатності та ефективного позиціонування ЗВО. Обґрунтовано, що цифрова трансформація є імперативом сьогодення, що детермінує здатність закладів вищої освіти оперативно адаптуватися до динамічного ринку та ефективно залучати контингент.

Метою дослідження є наукове обґрунтування та розробка холістичної концепції удосконалення маркетингової діяльності ЗВО, а також визначення механізмів її інтеграції в систему публічного управління для забезпечення синергії між національними пріоритетами та інституційними цілями. Методологічний базис дослідження становить міждисциплінарний аналіз теоретичних напрацювань (публічне управління, маркетинговий менеджмент, цифрова економіка) та системний огляд чинного нормативно-правового поля. Емпіричне підтвердження положень здійснено на прикладі досвіду Східноукраїнського національного університету імені Володимира Даля (СНУ ім. В. Даля релокований ЗВО), що функціонує в кризових умовах, демонструючи адаптаційні сценарії цифрового маркетингу.

З'ясовано, що маркетинг ЗВО виходить за межі класичних підходів, інтегруючи формування

емоційного зв'язку та персоналізовану комунікацію, що каталізується LLM-моделями, CRM-системами та аналітикою. Обґрунтовано, що публічне управління, реалізуючись через механізми ліцензування, акредитації та фінансування, опосередковано визначає межі маркетингової автономії. Аналіз динаміки контингенту релокованого університету засвідчив ефективність антикризового цифрового менеджменту: приріст здобувачів забезпечено виключно за рахунок контрактної форми та іноземних студентів, що підкреслює міжнародну результативність та якість, підтверджену сертифікацією ISO 9001.

Практична цінність дослідження полягає в розробці концептуальних засад та рекомендацій для удосконалення маркетингової політики, сприяючи сталому розвитку ЗВО в умовах динамічної суспільно-економічної та безпекової невизначеності.

Ключові слова: публічне управління, цифрова трансформація, маркетинг, заклади вищої освіти, надскладні виклики, кризова стійкість, конкурентоспроможність, брендинг

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