

DIGITAL MARKETING AS A GATEWAY TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE KROK UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

Iryna Petrova¹, Iryna Dyachuk², Olena Bielova³

¹Doctor of Science (Economics), Professor, Head of the Department of Marketing and Behavioral Economics, KROK University, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4206-5403>

²PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Marketing and Behavioral Economics, KROK University, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7032-9379>

³PhD in Economics, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Marketing and Behavioral Economics, KROK University, Kyiv, Ukraine, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9359-6947>

Abstract. At the current stage, Ukraine hosts over 100 private institutions of higher education, 170 public universities, and 40 municipal institutions. Operating in a digital-first environment, these institutions must now implement strategic approaches to digital marketing to promote their educational services effectively. In today's competitive landscape, engaging with target audiences is inseparable from the use of digital marketing channels. This shift underscores the fact that both internal and external communications within educational institutions are now fundamentally digital, characterized by multi-channel outreach, openness, and interactivity.

A well-defined digital strategy enables educational institutions to boost educational mobility, swiftly update academic programs, and adapt teaching methodologies to contemporary demands. Digital communications broaden access across diverse channels, including websites, social networks, mobile applications, interactive displays, and local networks. Leveraging these platforms strategically ensures an institution can maintain a strong presence, engage prospective students, and build long-term relationships within the educational market.

Studies indicate a significant increase in mobile usage across Ukraine, driven by widespread adoption of multiple devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) per user. Reliable access to various forms of internet, including cable, mobile, satellite, and radio, plays a pivotal role in making digital

platforms accessible to a broad audience, which must be considered when forming strategic digital marketing goals.

The multi-channel media environment also enables users to access multiple accounts across social networks and messaging platforms, presenting opportunities for educational institutions to diversify content and tailor it to specific platforms. Each platform - be it Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook Messenger, or Telegram - demands distinct communication strategies to reach and retain audiences effectively.

Channel selection is especially crucial when promoting educational programs, as institutions must communicate each program's relevance, competitiveness, and innovative strengths to diverse target segments, from prospective students and their families to alumni and professionals. Beyond academic programs, higher education institutions also offer supplementary educational products - such as specialized courses, training sessions, and online conferences - that benefit from a strategically aligned promotional approach.

KROK University, one of Ukraine's leading private universities, has adopted a strategic approach by actively leveraging popular social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to engage with its primary audience—youth aged 15 to 25. While the core content remains consistent, each platform requires unique messaging and promotional tactics to enhance engagement and brand visibility,

ultimately impacting campaign performance and audience reach.

An analysis of KROK University's social media growth from 2022 to 2024 reflects the impact of a focused digital strategy. Over this period, Facebook followers reached 6,995 (+19%) with a 31% increase in reach; Instagram's audience grew to 6,100 followers (+8%) with a 30% reach increase; YouTube subscribers rose to 1,693 (+19%), with a 40% increase in reach; Telegram followers expanded to 1,474 (+19%); and TikTok gained traction with 5,859 followers (+9.5%).

As of the current reporting period, KROK University's combined social media audience, including affiliated pages, totals 34,861—a growth of 11.7% (+4,000 followers) from the previous year. In 2022,

this growth reached 26% (+7,860 followers). These trends underscore the effectiveness of the university's digital marketing efforts, but also point to areas for strategic improvement.

To remain competitive and responsive to the rapid evolution of digital trends, KROK University must continue refining its digital marketing strategy. By integrating advanced digital tools, adapting to emerging platforms, and leveraging data-driven insights, the institution can sustain growth, enhance brand visibility, and ensure its educational offerings remain relevant and accessible. These strategic initiatives will not only strengthen KROK University's position in the educational market but also drive sustainable engagement and competitive advantage in the digital era.

Keywords: marketing; digital marketing; higher education; strategic communication; social media engagement; multi-channel strategy; educational mobility.

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