Which Works Better for Kampus Merdeka MSIB: Ads or Content?

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Abstract
This study aims to evaluate the influence of social media advertising and content marketing on the brand awareness of the Kampus Merdeka MSIB program at Infinite Learning. The research uses a quantitative approach with non-probability sampling through purposive sampling techniques. A total of 160 students who had been exposed to Infinite Learning's advertisements or content on Instagram participated as respondents, and data were collected through an online questionnaire. Data analysis was carried out using the SEM-PLS method. The results indicate that social media advertising has a positive and significant effect on brand awareness, while content marketing has a positive but not significant effect. Although the individual effects differ, the combination of both strategies shows a significant influence on increasing brand awareness. These findings suggest that the synergy between advertising and content strategies on social media is more effective than applying them separately in building brand awareness for Infinite Learning's MSIB program.
Keywords: Social Media Advertising, Content Marketing, Brand Awareness, Digital Marketing.

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INTRODUCTION

In the modern era, digital transformation is progressively shaping various sectors, particularly the field of marketing. Marketing is a crucial aspect that can serve as the foundation for introducing and developing a business. A survey conducted by Media Indonesia shows that 74.5% of consumers prefer to make shopping transactions online rather than in physical stores. The application of digital marketing is also inseparable from the role of social media. This is emphasized by Wardhana (2014), who states that social media has a central role as a strategic communication medium in strengthening brand awareness in the midst of increasingly fierce digital competition. Various companies, including Infinite Learning, have widely applied digital marketing. Marketing is now not only done conventionally, but has begun to switch to a digital system, including the Infinite Learning company.

Infinite Learning is a subsidiary of Infinite Studios, engaged in technology, digital training, and development. One of Infinite Learning's flagship programs is the Kampus Merdeka MSIB program, which works with the government to provide training for students across Indonesia. Despite regularly running digital marketing strategies through advertisements and content, the company still faces the challenge of low brand awareness of the Kampus Merdeka program. This is evident in the company's comparison with competitors, where both have the same opportunity with the same program. However, the competitor's followers and engagement related to the Kampus Merdeka program, achieved without advertising, significantly outperform those of Infinite Learning. As of January 2025, Infinite Learning has 11,200 Instagram followers, significantly fewer than its competitor, which has 772,000 followers. This is emphasized by the finding that the amount of MSIB content produced by Infinite Learning's competitors is less, but has higher interactions, such as likes and comments, than the content produced by Infinite Learning. The findings indicate that the content produced by Infinite Learning lacks relevance to the audience, resulting in low engagement. Relevant and engaging content is highly preferred by students as the audience of the MSIB program, so they are interested in interacting as it makes them feel connected to the brand and increases their likelihood of recognizing and joining the MSIB program. This low brand awareness is crucial, considering that in the Customer-Based Brand Equity model, brand awareness is the primary foundation in shaping brand equity through customer perception. Brand awareness is the main gate for consumers to remember, choose, and consider a brand. This is certainly not in line with research (Hasanah & Aziz, 2022), which states that advertising and content significantly affect brand awareness. Further assessment and evaluation are needed to evaluate the impact of social media advertising and content marketing efforts by Infinite Learning in introducing the Kampus Merdeka brand and program to their target market.

In the context of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), social media is an important tool to reach audiences and strengthen customer relationships (Kanneth & Backk, 2022). Kotler (2021) asserts that advertising plays an important role in shaping consumer awareness, a notion supported by Richards & Curran (2002, p. 74), who also emphasize the significance of advertising as a component of marketing strategy. This shows that advertising is the initial stage in forming awareness. Geng et al. (2021) mentioned five dimensions of social media advertising, namely: informativeness, entertainment, credibility, interactivity, and personalization.

The growth of social media and the increasing use of digital devices strengthen the effectiveness of these platforms in advertising (Handoko et al., 2023; Putri, 2021). Digital advertising through social media is considered capable of encouraging interaction and increasing awareness, especially if the content matches the needs of the audience (Tan et al., 2018; Anggun et al., 2019; Maria et al., 2020). Meanwhile, Lee et al. (2018) said that informative and emotional ads can trigger audience engagement. These findings are built mainly from studies in commercial sectors such as fashion, beauty, and tourism, which tend to rely on emotional and visual impulses to attract consumer attention. In the context of digital education, especially in MSIB

programs, audience characteristics are usually more rational, seek functional value, and have expectations in the credibility of advertisements and companies.

Content marketing is a strategy that focuses on creating and distributing valuable and relevant content to attract and retain audiences (Abiyyuansyah et al., 2019). This strategy is considered effective in introducing brands and building brand awareness because it can reach audiences organically and encourage engagement and loyalty through messages that are narrative and sustainable (Al-Assaf, 2024; Putri, 2021; Trong et al., 2020). According to Kotler (2021), its essence is not just promoting, but delivering continuous information to build strong relationships. To get these results, content must be packaged with attractive visuals, the proper flow, and a communication style that suits the characteristics of the audience (Miles, 2014). This effectiveness is also reflected in user interactions such as likes, comments, and shares that indicate the level of audience engagement with the brand message (Sabate, 2014). According to Pulizzi (2014), the six dimensions of content marketing include: value, relevance, consistency, engagement, storytelling, and visual quality. However, many content marketing practices are developed in commercial sectors such as fashion, culinary, and beauty, where content tends to be light, emotional, and visual. Meanwhile, in the digital education sector, educational content is generally informative and cognitive, which does not always appeal to young audiences like Gen Z, who prefer fast-paced and personalized entertainment-based content. While educational content has high informational value, it often lags behind entertainment content due to lower emotional and visual appeal. According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2020), this condition is exacerbated by the phenomenon of content saturation and social media fatigue, where audiences tend to ignore branded content that does not touch them emotionally or is too information-dense. Therefore, it is important to evaluate how content marketing strategies in the education sector can adjust their approach to remain relevant and competitive in shaping brand awareness among Gen Z.

Brand awareness is the initial and fundamental component in the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) pyramid, which is the basis for consumers to recognize, remember, and consider a brand during the purchase decision-making process (Kotler & Keller, 2012). This theory is reinforced by the study of Maulani and Sanawiri (2019), which states that brand awareness reflects the ability of consumers to identify and remember a brand that belongs to a specific product category. Brand awareness signifies how strongly a brand sticks in consumers' minds, either spontaneously or when triggered by specific cues (Aaker, 2014). In digital marketing, brand awareness is an important indicator because companies can reach a wider audience, save costs, and encourage increased sales (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The indicators of brand awareness, according to Aaker (2014) and Kotler & Keller (2012), consist of brand recognition, brand recall, top of mind, familiarity, and perceived exposure.

Previous research has not examined social media advertising and content marketing on brand awareness within the scope of companies engaged in education. Research conducted by Hasanah & Aziz (2022) examines the impact of advertising and content on brand awareness in the beauty industry. Similarly, Kusdianti & Wilujeng (2024) investigate the influence of content on the tourism sector, while Genoveva (2022) explores the impact of content on the MSME sector.

The use of Instagram as the leading platform for research is still minimal. This is evident in the use of YouTube as the primary platform for research in Febriyantoro (2020) and Genoveva (2022), whereas TikTok is the leading platform used in the latter's research.

Based on the explanation above, it is important to conduct this research to empirically analyze how social media advertising and content marketing contribute to increasing brand awareness of Infinite Learning's Kampus Merdeka program. The results of this study are expected to serve as the basis for evaluating Infinite Learning's digital marketing strategic decision-making in introducing its brand, particularly through the independent campus program.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a causal explanatory design that aims to analyze the cause and effect between constructs. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling, with a purposive sampling method involving 160 respondents. The sample size was determined using Hair's formula, which states that the sample size is obtained from the total number of indicators multiplied by 10. The criteria for respondents in this study were students who actively use Instagram and have been exposed to advertisements or content related to the Infinite Learning campus program. To verify that the respondents met the established criteria, several screening questions were asked. These screening questions filtered out respondents who did not meet the criteria, allowing only those who did to continue filling out the questionnaire. The variables in this study include social media advertising (X1), which refers to the use of social media platforms to promote products or services (Kotler, 2021); content marketing (X2), which is a marketing strategy that focuses on creating and distributing valuable and relevant content to attract audiences (Abiyyuansyah et al., 2019); and brand awareness (Y), which is defined as the ability of consumers to recognize and remember a brand (Aaker, 2014).

Data was obtained from an online questionnaire to expedite data distribution. The instruments used in this study were developed from the theoretical indicators employed. A pilot test was first conducted using data from 30 respondents to check the quality of the research instruments. Only instruments that passed the pilot test were included in the final questionnaire for the study. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS with the SEM-PLS method through three stages: the outer model, inner model, and hypothesis testing. The outer model is employed to evaluate the validity of the research instrument, both in terms of convergent validity, assessed through outer loadings and the AVE value, and discriminant validity, examined using cross loadings and the HTMT ratio. Reliability is further tested by applying composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha. Instruments that meet the criteria of validity and reliability are then assessed in the inner model stage. At this stage, the research model is analyzed using path coefficients and R-square values to measure the strength of relationships among variables. Finally, hypothesis testing is conducted to verify the proposed hypotheses, both partially through p-values and t-values, and simultaneously by employing the F-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Result
Respondent Characteristics

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

No.	Respondent Characteristics	Total	Percentage (%)
Gender			
1	Male	46	28,7%
2	Female	114	71,3%
Total		**160**	**100%**
Age			
1	<18 Years	6	3,8%
2	18-23 Years	137	85,6%
3	>23 Years	17	10,6%
Total		**160**	**100%**
Domicile			
1	Batam	69	43,13%
2	Padang	14	8,75%
3	Medan	8	5%
4	Semarang	6	3,75%
5	Jakarta	6	3,75%
6	Pasuruan	5	3,13%

No.	Respondent Characteristics	Total	Percentage (%)
7	Yogyakarta	4	2,5%
8	Malang	4	2,5%
9	Palu	3	1,88%
10	Jambi	3	1,88%
11	Others	43	26,88%
Total		**160**	**100%**

Source: data processed by researchers (2025)

Based on the distribution of questionnaires, most respondents were aged 18-23 years. This age group, between freshmen and final year students, is entitled to participate in the independent campus program. In terms of gender, there are far more female students than male students. This indicates that female students are more exposed to advertisements and content from the independent campus program than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, based on the distribution of domicile, most of the respondents came from the city of Batam, followed by the cities of Padang, Medan, and various other cities in Indonesia. The data indicates that many students exposed to advertisements and program content reside in the same area as the company, specifically the city of Batam. Padang and Medan followed Batam city because the company has collaborated with campuses in these areas, allowing many students to view the program content. Overall, the distribution based on domicile has begun to spread to various regions in Indonesia, although the number is still far below that of Batam city.

Convergent Validity

The convergent validity test aims to ensure that the indicators in one construct actually measure the same concept. The convergent validity test is tested with outer loading; if the variable loading factor value is above 0.7 and the Average Extracted Variance (AVE) value is more than 0.5, it can be declared valid (Hair et al., 2017). The test results using smartPLS show the results of outer loading and AVE values as follows.

Table 2. Convergent Validity Test Results

Variables	Item	Outer Loading	AVE
Social Media Advertising (X1)	X1.1	0,790	0,668
	X1.2	0,823	
	X1.3	0,760	
	X1.4	0,774	
	X1.5	0,816	
	X1.6	0,833	
	X1.7	0,817	
	X1.8	0,842	
	X1.9	0,851	
	X1.10	0,782	
	X1.11	0,813	
	X1.12	0,890	
	X1.13	0,825	
Content Marketing (X2)	X2.1	0,757	0,584
	X2.2	0,770	
	X2.3	0,746	
	X2.4	0,776	
	X2.5	0,702	
	X2.6	0,813	
	X2.7	0,749	
	X2.8	0,744	

Variables	Item	Outer Loading	AVE
	X2.9	0,785	
	X2.10	0,731	
	X2.11	0,768	
	X2.12	0,778	
	X2.13	0,798	
	X2.14	0,774	
	X2.15	0,759	
	X2.16	0,773	
	Y.1	0,760	
	Y.2	0,772	
	Y.3	0,748	
	Y.4	0,730	
	Y.5	0,707	
Brand Awareness (Y)	Y.6	0,714	0,525
	Y.7	0,708	
	Y.8	0,705	
	Y.9	0,712	
	Y.10	0,702	
	Y.11	0,709	

Source: Processing results with smartPLS, 2025

Based on the outer loading results, it can be concluded that each indicator can explain its construct well. Meanwhile, the AVE value proves that the existing variation is purely due to the construct itself, and all statements can measure the construct.

Discriminant Validity
Discriminant validity serves to ensure that a construct is empirically different from other constructs within the same model framework. The discriminant validity test was conducted using cross-loading and HTMT ratio, yielding the following results.

Table 3. HTMT Ratio Test Results

Variables	HTMT	Description
Social Media Advertising – Content Marketing	0,879	Valid
Social Media Advertising – Brand Awareness	0,619	Valid
Content Marketing – Brand Awareness	0,551	Valid

Source: Processing results with smartPLS, 2025

Based on the findings in Table 3, all constructs are below 0.9, which indicates that each construct is unique and does not overlap with the others. Meanwhile, the cross-loading results can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Cross Loading Results

Item	Brand Awareness	Content Marketing	Social Media Advertising
X1.1	0.376	0.667	0.790
X1.2	0.462	0.674	0.823
X1.3	0.433	0.669	0.760
X1.4	0.452	0.670	0.774
X1.5	0.449	0.685	0.816
X1.6	0.530	0.722	0.833
X1.7	0.499	0.726	0.817

Item	Brand Awareness	Content Marketing	Social Media Advertising
X1.8	0.492	0.723	0.842
X1.9	0.519	0.686	0.851
X1.10	0.507	0.599	0.782
X1.11	0.515	0.634	0.813
X1.12	0.563	0.760	0.890
X1.13	0.462	0.740	0.825
X2.1	0.404	0.757	0.676
X2.2	0.420	0.770	0.680
X2.3	0.364	0.746	0.669
X2.4	0.417	0.776	0.688
X2.5	0.313	0.702	0.551
X2.6	0.435	0.813	0.694
X2.7	0.359	0.749	0.650
X2.8	0.307	0.744	0.600
X2.9	0.364	0.785	0.650
X2.10	0.328	0.731	0.596
X2.11	0.421	0.768	0.581
X2.12	0.368	0.778	0.575
X2.13	0.426	0.798	0.630
X2.14	0.470	0.774	0.687
X2.15	0.438	0.759	0.672
X2.16	0.519	0.773	0.669
Y.1	0.760	0.458	0.534
Y.2	0.772	0.348	0.457
Y.3	0.748	0.442	0.521
Y.4	0.730	0.378	0.409
Y.5	0.707	0.402	0.486
Y.6	0.714	0.361	0.368
Y.7	0.708	0.433	0.395
Y.8	0.705	0.349	0.393
Y.9	0.712	0.313	0.379
Y.10	0.702	0.336	0.340
Y.11	0.709	0.345	0.361

Source: Processing results with smartPLS, 2025

The cross-loading results show results below 0.7 (value below outer loading) for the value of items on other constructs. This indicates that the correlation between items and other constructs is smaller, suggesting that the items accurately represent their constructs and are therefore declared valid.

Reliability

The reliability test aims to assess the accuracy, consistency, and reliability of the instrument in measuring a construct. Reliability measurement can be done using two methods, namely Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability. The criterion used is that the Composite Reliability value must be greater than 0.70 to be considered reliable in research (Hair et al., 2017). If the Composite Reliability value exceeds 0.7, the construct can be considered to have good reliability.

Table 5. Reliability test results

	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Social Media Advertising	0,958	0,961
Content Marketing	0,953	0,956
Brand Awareness	0,910	0,915

Source: Processing results with smartPLS, 2025

Based on Table 5, it can be seen that all variables in this study are declared reliable because they meet the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability criteria.
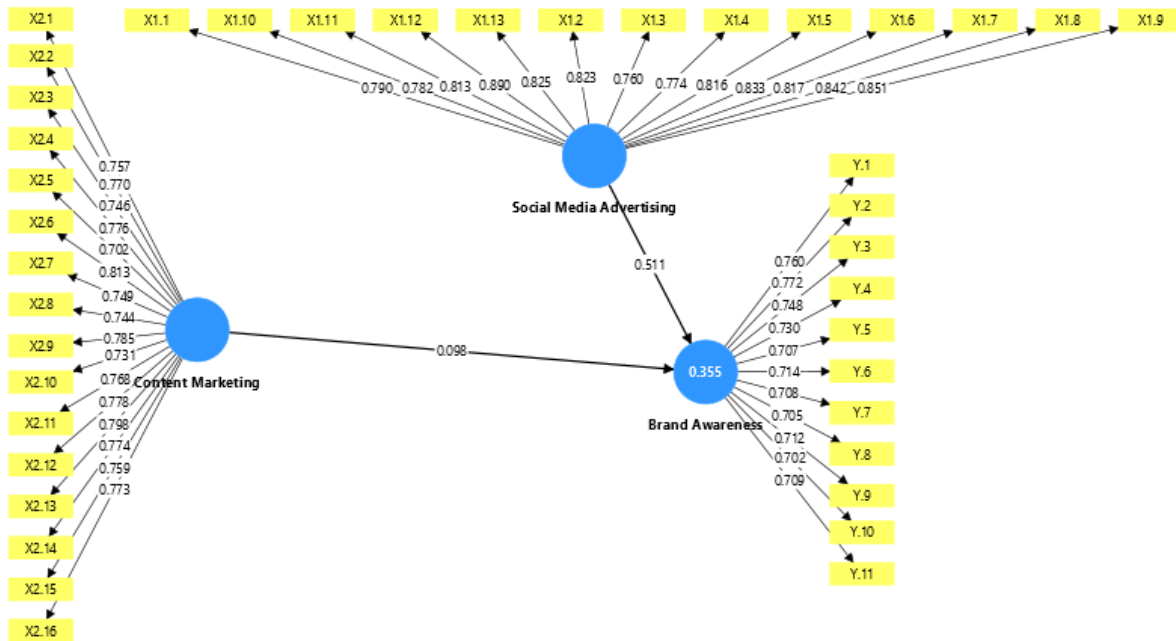
Inner Model

Figure 1. SEM-PLS Results (Inner Model)
Source: Data processed by researchers (2025)

Testing the inner model using path coefficient and R-squared. The findings indicate that social media advertising has a considerable positive effect on brand awareness, while content marketing has a more minor but positive effect. Meanwhile, the R-squared results show that 35.5% of the variation (change) in brand awareness increase can be explained collectively by social media advertising and content marketing variables. Other variables, such as influencer marketing and testimonials, can explain 64.5% of the remaining variation.

Hypothesis Testing
Hypothesis testing is done using two ways. Partial hypothesis testing is done using the t-value and the p-value. Simultaneous hypothesis testing is done using the F test.

Table 6. T-value and P-value results

	Directions	Original Sample (O)	T-statistics	P-value
Social media advertising →Brand awareness	+	0,511	4,157	0,000
Content marketing →Brand awareness	+	0,098	0,732	0,464

Source: Processing results with smartPLS, 2025

Based on the test results, hypothesis 1 is accepted because the t-statistic and p-value values meet the test requirements. In contrast, hypothesis 2 is rejected because the t-statistic value is below 1.96 and the p-value is above 0.05. Social media advertising has a significant influence due to the advertising used. Infinite Learning employs hard-selling content in the form of a carousel, which provides clear information. The targeting used in the advertisement has also been effective, as it targets audiences aged 18-25 years, aligning with the age criteria of students, thereby ensuring the advertisement's success. Meanwhile, content marketing has a minimal impact on brand awareness of the MSIB Infinite Learning program, primarily because Infinite Learning employs a predominantly soft-selling approach, utilizing 80% reels and 20% carousels for promotion. The soft-selling content is considered less valuable because it does not explicitly provide important information related to the program. The soft-selling content is not relevant to the target audience, which is students, resulting in minimal interaction with the content.

Simultaneous hypothesis testing can use the F test. The results of the F test are determined based on the comparison of the F-table and F-count. if the results of the equation show that the F-table value is smaller than the F-count, then this can prove that the hypothesis is accepted (Sugiyono, 1967). The calculation for the F table is as follows.

$$df1 = k-1 = 3-1 = 2$$
$$df2 = n-k-1 = 160-3-1 = 156$$

Note:
n = number of samples
k = total variables

When the results of df1 and df2 are known, the calculation is carried out and produces an F table value of 3.05. We will compare the results of the F table with the F count.

$$F = \frac{\dfrac{R^2}{(k-1)}}{\dfrac{(1-R^2)}{(n-k)}} = \frac{\dfrac{0{,}355^2}{(3-1)}}{\dfrac{(1-0{,}355^2)}{(160-3)}} = 11{,}32$$

Based on the calculation, the calculated F value is 11.32, indicating it exceeds the F table value. In accordance with the provisions, if F table is smaller than F count, it can be concluded that social media advertising and content marketing together have a significant effect on brand awareness. Infinite Learning utilizes carousel content to advertise because it contains relevant information that resonates with the audience, reinforced by beautiful visualizations that make the content comfortable to view and read. The ads also have good targeting so that the intended audience is right on target. This proves that hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that social media advertising significantly enhances brand awareness of the MSIB Infinite Learning program. This aligns with the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) theory, which emphasizes advertising as a key component in effectively conveying brand messages through social media (Kanneth & Bacck, 2022; Kotler, 2021). The results reinforce the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) concept, where advertising fosters brand awareness as the foundation for brand equity (Kotler & Keller, 2012). These findings are consistent with Karen and Zai (2022) and Muthuswamy (2023), who assert that well-designed social media advertisements significantly boost audience interest and brand recall. Credibility and personalization are critical in shaping brand awareness, particularly for students, the program's target audience. Advertisements tailored to the audience's age range, incorporating company and independent campus logos to enhance credibility, amplify their

impact on brand awareness. Infinite Learning's social media advertising team should optimize targeting to reach broader, more relevant audiences, such as those interested in technology or located in areas with many campuses.

In contrast, content marketing, while positively influential, does not significantly impact brand awareness. This is consistent with Karen and Zai (2022), who note that content often lacks relevance to audience needs, and Mooduto et al. (2025), who found content less effective than testimonials in driving engagement. Despite alignment with content pillars, distribution fails to reach audiences beyond active followers. However, Pulizzi (2014) suggests content can strengthen brand-consumer connections. The limited impact of content on brand awareness requires further evaluation to optimize its effectiveness. This contrasts with Al-Assaf (2024), who found that valuable, accessible content significantly boosts brand awareness, and Novita et al. (2023), who emphasize emotional, targeted storytelling for brand recall. Infinite Learning should assess its content to target students in the MSIB program better, using A/B testing to identify the most effective content types for this audience.

When combined, advertising and content marketing significantly enhance brand awareness. This supports Hasanah and Aziz (2022), who found that synergy between social media advertising and content marketing substantially increases brand awareness. This approach enables Infinite Learning to reach broad audiences through targeted advertising while sustaining engagement and reinforcing brand identity through consistent content. Hard-selling content, with clear information and logos for credibility, outperforms soft-selling content for advertising purposes.

This study fills a gap in the literature, as prior research primarily focused on the beauty industry (Hasanah & Aziz, 2022), MSMEs (Genoveva, 2022), and tourism (Kusdianti & Wilujeng, 2024), often using YouTube (Febriyantoro, 2020) or TikTok (Genoveva, 2022) as primary platforms. Studies on digital marketing in the technology education sector, like Infinite Learning, are scarce. Thus, this research offers empirical and practical contributions, demonstrating the relevance of advertising and content-based digital marketing in education, particularly for reaching students via Instagram.

From the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) perspective (Kotler & Keller, 2012), social media advertising effectively builds the initial CBBE pyramid stage—brand recognition and perceived exposure. While content marketing's impact is not yet significant, it holds potential to enhance familiarity if further developed. This underscores that building brand awareness requires an integrated approach combining reach (advertising) and engagement (content).

CONCLUSION

The digital marketing strategy through social media advertising is proven to be effective and has a significant effect in increasing brand awareness of the Kampus Merdeka Infinite Learning program. On the other hand, content marketing, although showing a positive direction of influence, does not have a statistically significant impact on brand awareness when used separately. However, when the two strategies are combined and run simultaneously, their effect on increasing brand awareness is significant.

The findings in this study are consistent with the research of Hasanah & Aziz (2022), which also shows that the combination of advertising and content has a significant influence on increasing brand awareness. In this context, the results reinforce that the synergy between social media advertising and content marketing can form a strong brand perception among the audience, namely, students in the digital education industry. In addition, this study provides empirical evidence that clarifies the concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE), namely that brand awareness is an important early stage in building the value of a brand, because awareness becomes the main entrance for consumers to recognize, remember, and ultimately consider a brand (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

This study is subject to several limitations. Instagram was chosen as the sole platform of analysis because it represents the primary social media channel prioritized by Infinite Learning in executing its digital marketing activities. The number of respondents was limited to 160 students, determined using Hair's formula, which restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalized to a larger population. The focus on the MSIB program was driven by its position as Infinite Learning's latest initiative, making the results more reflective of the dynamics of a newly launched program rather than the company's broader strategy. These limitations underscore the need for future research that incorporates multiple social media platforms, expands the sample size, and compares various programs to strengthen generalizability and provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies within the education technology sector.

For future research, this study can be expanded by involving other digital platforms such as TikTok or YouTube, which have different user characteristics. Future researchers are also advised to explore the role of mediating customer engagement and brand trust, as well as potential additional variables, such as influencer marketing and testimonials to find out more about the mechanism of the relationship between digital marketing strategies and brand awareness.

Infinite Learning is advised to further optimize the use of advertising in reaching the target market and periodically evaluate the effectiveness of the content so that the content becomes more qualified and attractive to a broader audience. This can be achieved by selecting targets based on the interests of students in the technology sector and focusing on areas with multiple campuses. In addition, budgeting should be given more attention so that the money used in advertising does not end up in vain. The content produced by Infinite Learning needs to be more relevant to students. This can be achieved by creating content from the community and alumni of the MSIB program. In evaluating the content, A/B testing should be conducted to determine which type of content performs best. By leveraging a combination of targeted advertising and well-integrated content, we can increase brand awareness of the Kampus Merdeka MSIB program in the future.

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