

**OPEN UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (OUM) :
THE PATH TRAVELLED (2000 – 2020) &
THE WAY FORWARD (2021 – 2030) -
ISSUES, CHALLENGES,
OPPORTUNITIES**

ANGELINA LEE BEE CHEEN

**OPENUNIVERSITYMALAYSIA
2020**

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OPPORTUNITIES**

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A Master's Project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Corporate Communication

Cluster of Education and Social Sciences
Open University Malaysia

2020

DECLARATION

Name: Angelina Lee Bee Cheen

Matric Number: 

I hereby declare that this Master's Project is the result of my own work, except for quotations and summaries which have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: 

Date: 29 August 2020

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August 2020

ABSTRACT

Moving forward into the 3rd decade since its establishment, Open University Malaysia (OUM) was established with the core mission of knowledge globalization utilizing the open and distance learning (ODL) concept. The initiative of this research paper is to identify the issues and challenges faced by the organization in the aspect of their new media marketing methods as it continues to operate in a dynamic and borderless world of advancing digital communication technologies. Target samples of the OUM alumni, OUM new learners and the general public could only be approached through online questionnaires due to the onset of the country's Movement Control Order (MCO) ruling during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is still in-force since 18th March 2020. The final analysis will identify the strengths and weaknesses of OUM's current online digital marketing communication strategies, and also introduce new media improvements and opportunities that should be considered by the university to enhance their corporate communications and marketing strategies for greater brand awareness and business economics.

Keywords:

Open and Distance Learning, New Media, Global, Digital Communications.

**UNIVERSITI TERBUKA MALAYSIA (OUM) :
DARI ASAL HINGGA KINI (2000 – 2020)
& MELANGKAH KE HADAPAN (2021 – 2030)
-ISU, CABARAN, MENYAHUT PELUANG**

ANGELINA LEE BEE CHEEN

Ogos 2020

ABSTRAK

Melangkah ke dekad ke-3 sejak penubuhannya, Universiti Terbuka Malaysia (OUM) ditubuh berteras kan misi globalisasi pengetahuan menggunakan konsep pembelajaran terbuka dan jarak jauh (ODL). Inisiatif makalah penyelidikan ini mengenalpasti masalah dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh organisasi ini dalam segikaedah pemasaran dalam talian mereka di dalam dunia yang dinamik dan pasempadan dengan kemajuan teknologi komunikasi digital berterusan. Sampel sasaran iaitu golongan alumni OUM, pelajar-pelajar baru OUM dan golongan masyarakat yang dapat dibuat melalui tinjauan dalam talian disebabkan an Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan (PKP) negara semasa situasi pandemik COVID-19, yang masih berkuatkuasa sejak 18hb Mac 2020. Analisis akhir makalah ini akan mengenalpasti kekuatan dan kelemahan strategi semasa komunikasi pemasaran dalam talian OUM dan juga memperkenalkan kaedah-kaedah peningkatan dan peluang-peluang yang harus dipertimbangkan dalam membantu universiti ini untuk meningkatkan strategi komunikasi korporat serta pemasaran mereka dalam usahapeningkatan kesedaran jenama dan ekonomi perniagaan.

Kata Kunci:

Pembelajaran Terbuka dan Jarak Jauh, Media Baru, Global, Komunikasi Digital

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TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE PAGE		
DECLARATION		ii
ABSTRACT		iii
ABSTRAK		iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		v
TABLE OF CONTENTS		vi
LIST OF TABLES		viii
LIST OF FIGURES		ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		x
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND	
	1.1 Research Background	1
	1.2 The Impact of Global & Digital Communication	4
	1.3 Problem Statement	6
	1.4 Research Objectives	10
	1.5 Significance of Research	12
	1.6 Scope of Research	13
	1.7 Theoretical Perspective	14
	1.8 Definition of Key Terms	16
	1.9 Conclusion	17
CHAPTER 2	RESEARCH VARIABLES & HYPOTHESES	
	2.1 Definition of Variables	18
	2.2 Literature Review	20
	2.3 Research Model	26
	2.4 Hypotheses	28
	2.5 Conclusion	33
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	
	3.1 Qualitative & Quantitative Research	36
	3.2 Major Data Gathering Methods	42
	3.3 Population	48
	3.4 Analysis	49
	3.5 Software	50
	3.6 Conclusion	50

CHAPTER 4	DATA ANALYSIS&RESULTS	
4.1	Variables Validity	53
4.2	Pilot Test	53
4.3	Demographics	55
4.4	Correlation Analysis	57
4.5	Regression Analysis	63
CHAPTER 5	DISCUSSIONS&RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS	
5.1	Research Initiation	67
5.2	Research Problem & Analysis	70
5.3	Research Catalyst	78
5.4	Enhancement Proposals for OUM	79
REFERENCES		83
APPENDICES		87

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methodologies – Variances	37
Table 2	Pilot test (Reliability Analysis)	54
Table 3	Respondent demographics by percentage	55
Table 4	Correlation analysis (OUM Alumni)	58
Table 5	Correlation analysis (OUM new learners)	60
Table 6	Correlation analysis (general public)	62
Table 7	Multiple regression analysis	64

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Open University Malaysia (OUM) logo	1
Figure 2	OUM website	2
Figure 3	OUM digital platforms	3
Figure 4	Literature reviews on media effects	21
Figure 5	Independent and Dependent Variables	27
Figure 6	Malaysia's digital media consumption 2019	31
Figure 7	Malaysia ADEX (2015 – 2019)	32
Figure 8	Malaysia's websites ranking based on monthly traffic 2019	47
Figure 9	Malaysia's digital technology consumption 2019	68

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of variance
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
DV	Dependent Variable
IBM	International Business Machines Corporation
IV	Independent Variable
ODL	Open and distance learning
OUM	Open University Malaysia
SPSS	Statistical product and service solutions

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION& BACKGROUND

The contents of this chapter will reveal the initiation process of this research topic endeavor as part of the requirement to fulfill the Open University Malaysia's Master of Corporate Communication programme. It will highlight on the aspects in which the research perspective and objectives are based upon. A general understanding of this research will be laid out as a guide into the procedures involved in completing this project.

1.1 Research Background



Figure 1 : Open University Malaysia (OUM) logo

Source : Open University Malaysia (2020, about us)

Open University Malaysia (OUM) is an educational institution that was established at the turn of the 21st century with a digital concept of open and distance learning (ODL). As submission of a research paper was part of the compulsory programme requirements for the Master of Corporate Communication certification, and with the hands-on experiences in utilizing the university's digital learning tools and applications for the past year, an initiative was stemmed to analyze the organization's digital communication exposure and implementations which was seen as lacking in usage and exposure optimization.

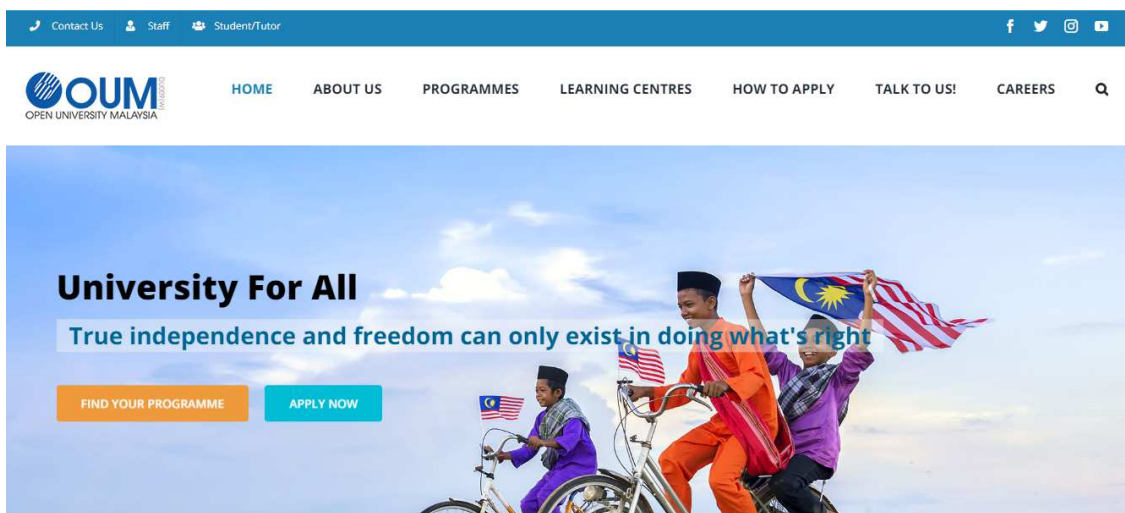


Figure 2 : OUM website

Source :<https://www.oum.edu.my/>

As a university offering higher education certifications through the concept of online distance learning since the year 2000, OUM has an official website to share details of its organization and has registered on four social networking sites for their digital socializing communication channels. These sites are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

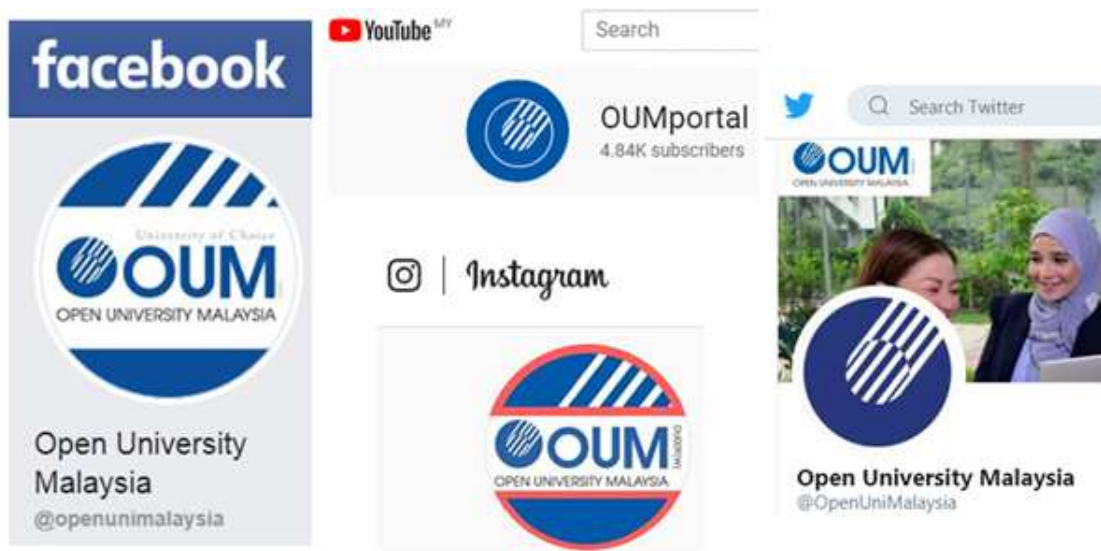


Figure 3 : OUM digital platforms

Source : Compiled for OUM AMKP5217 Research Paper (January 2020)

By observing the social platform contents, it is noticeable that consumer participations are lacking although the OUM team are said to be active with information dissemination.

There does not seem to be justifiable encouragement for the viewers to participate or respond to the messages or postings. These digital media platforms can be powerful marketing tools with strategically planned applications as the networking strength is able to communicate messages globally within a short period of time.

Therefore, this research paper is focused on further analyzing the relevant existing facts and figures for more comprehensive reports and proposals, with the hope and aspirations of enhancing OUM's growth going into their 3rd decade of its operations.

1.2 The Impact of Global & Digital Communication

As humanity embraced the 21st century, global communication technologies continued its swift advancements especially with the innovations of the Internet (Naik, 2009). A general summarization can be taken from a quote by the American entrepreneur Bob Parsons who expressed that we are at the losing end of life if the Internet and its digital communication capabilities are not understood and adopted (Scharper, 2012).

The Internet was the catalyst for the rise of digitalized new media utilization with the creation of an information cybersphere. This global communication technology was thoroughly manifested by the Malaysian government as the main stream of the country's

activities with a scope encompassing the economic, political and social aspects (Abu Hassan, 2008). Various studies on the levels of acceptance of the various Malaysian communities towards usage of the Internet found that access to cyber media and digital information have become an important and must-have daily aspect of life whether it is at work, in education centres or even in one's personal abode (Ali Salman, 2014).

New media environments and technologies are able to engage users in proactive interactions which are total contrasts to the traditional media effects of passive one-way communication channels that do not provide the producers with crucial feedback for their business improvements. Research suggests that participatory usages of new media are based on user behavioral pattern. Therefore utilizing these digital two-way communication media should be encouraged in targeting prospective audiences (Cho, 2009, p. 136). The effort will also encourage expansion of the existing groups of stakeholders with aims of increasing the organization's economic returns and strengthening its image and reputation as competitions within industry players heighten as the market goes borderless.

The new media utilizations at Open University Malaysia have yet to be optimized as the education hub moves into its 3rd decade of operations. Being an ODL institution initiated by the country's Ministry of Education (Open University Malaysia, 2020), digital

communication methods and applications should be the core of their business and operational implementations.

Their digital applications of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube have not garnered substantial support from its local public, similarly to its official website. The effectiveness of their approaches and the community awareness of their establishment do not seem to reflect positively against the organization's aim of being recognized as one of the premier global ODL universities (Open University Malaysia, 2020).

1.3 Problem Statement

As stated above, OUM's new media methods and strategies do not seem to be on par with their establishment's aim of being a premier global ODL university. As an example, the OUM official Facebook page lacks two-way participation in the form of comments or shares although creative and attention-grabbing postings are done practically on a daily basis from the organization's communications team (Facebook, 2020). With the challenging and adventurous path travelled from the initial set-up of its establishment in the year 2000 till 2020 and moving forward into the next decade of global digitalization, this research intends to analyze the effectiveness the five new media platforms utilized. And to identify the scope of community awareness towards the efforts executed in order

to propose enhancement strategies to increase OUM's business profile and financial status.

To proceed with this research, the problem components are translated into questions to identify its subcomponents in order to progress towards an approach of the matters at hand (Malhotra, 2007, p.53). These questions will be the cornerstone for the research to minimize unrelated data for the final analysis and proposals of the respective problems if the research hypotheses are satisfied by the data analyzed.

Five research questions will be put forward to represent the identified relevant queries to the existing visible new media environment at OUM. These research questions are also based on the literature reviews in the following chapters of this research paper to substantiate the validity of the analyses. The research questions are as follows:

1.3.1 How effective are the OUM official website contents and user-friendliness in creating, sustaining and encouraging public awareness towards the organization?

An official organization website represents the image and identity of the company and therefore must be presented in a professional manner. Company information and data that are relevant to their stakeholder's interest must be available on the site and updated accordingly to reflect the

latest activities of the organization. Websites which are not user-friendly have higher probabilities of navigation difficulties and may deter prospects from exploring for more of the organization's information, subsequently creating a bigger opportunity for penetration by competitors.

1.3.2 How effective are the OUM official Facebook contents and user-friendliness in creating, sustaining and encouraging public awareness towards the organization?

Social networking platforms such as Facebook exposed the global community to virtual networking on a social level, which evolved into a business networking media with the mammoth audience potential. Being an asynchronous media, Facebook is a two-way communication platform that has impacted global communities to build relationships across borders and creating economic markets without boundaries.

1.3.3 How effective are the OUM official Twitter contents and user-friendliness in creating, sustaining and encouraging public awareness towards the organization?

Another renowned social networking site is Twitter. It is similar to Facebook in terms of the two-way virtual communication capabilities and

global audience penetration. Twitter leans towards micro blogging compared to Facebook's personal interaction forte (Daniel, 2018). Creative and interesting contents will attract consumer participations and promote sharing of the organization's information in this era of virtual competitions aiming for market audience attention.

1.3.4 How effective are the OUM official Instagram contents and user-friendliness in creating, sustaining and encouraging public awareness towards the organization?

Instagram is an online social media platform that focuses on images and video sharing therefore has higher quality resolutions. It is rumoured to have gained recognition as among the most used virtual social platform due to participations by famous and renowned international personalities (Daniel, 2018).

1.3.5 How effective are the OUM official YouTube contents and user-friendliness in creating, sustaining and encouraging public awareness towards the organization?

This social networking platform allows video uploads that can be virtually accessed by the global communities. It also encourages viewer feedbacks and queries directly on the platform which is an advantage to

organizations in monitoring the responses to the information uploaded. YouTube has proven to be a powerful tool in promoting products or services if the video “goes viral” as it attracts an unexpected large number of views through the quick dissemination of the video on the Internet by the public.

The ability of the organization to manage the influx of prospects in a strategic and planned manner will produce a high financial outcome and subsequently a better brand reputation to boost.

1.4 Research Objectives

This research was initiated with the objective of identifying and analyzing the effectiveness of OUM’s new media platforms and applications usage in order to put forward the relevant enhancement proposals as the organization moves into its 3rd decade of operations in a digitalized environment.

Based on the recent activities on OUM’s new media platforms, identification of five main objectives were confirmed and are inked for this research with the aim of enhancing OUM’s business opportunities going into their 3rd decade of operations.

- 1.4.1** Enhance the effectiveness of the OUM official website contents and user-friendliness in order to create, sustain and encourage public awareness towards the organization.

- 1.4.2** Enhance the effectiveness of the OUM official Facebook contents and user-friendliness in order to create, sustain and encourage public awareness towards the organization.

- 1.4.3** Enhance the effectiveness of the OUM official Twitter contents and user-friendliness in order to create, sustain and encourage public awareness towards the organization.

- 1.4.4** Enhance the effectiveness of the OUM official Instagram contents and user-friendliness in order to create, sustain and encourage public awareness towards the organization.

- 1.4.5** Enhance the effectiveness of the OUM official YouTube contents and user-friendliness in order to create, sustain and encourage public awareness towards the organization.

1.5 Significance of Research

This research aims to assist the management of Open University Malaysia in enhancing their current strategies and the effective utilization of new media platforms in order to widen their marketing target audience scope particularly focusing on their premier stakeholders. In doing so, it is hoped that OUM will be able to gain a continuously expanding market share in the ODL sector with the global prospects as the eventual goal for the organization.

It is hoped that proposals which will be based on the data analyses results of this project will be considered as feasible and will be followed with the implementations by OUM. Their current and future learners will also benefit with the enhancements to be made on the university's communication methods of social networking platforms as they continue their pursuit for education excellence in the ODL environment.

It is a without doubt that the acceptance of digital communication advancements must be interwoven with daily lifestyles or one might be left behind as the years past. Similarly, OUM's administrative team that manages their new media platforms must always be on the alert in order to adjust and embrace the evolving global digital technologies. It is also crucial for them to be alert in this area as the organization was established with digital learning as its core business concept.

The research results should be able to ascertain the relevant actions that need to be taken by the top management with the collaboration of OUM's administrative team managing the new media application.

1.6 Scope of Research

As OUM has yet to expand its footprint prominently outside of Malaysia, this research is concentrated within the country. The population focus is concentrated towards their new learner intakes, alumni and the general public.

Data collection was initially planned to be an onsite and also online activity within the time frame of approximately two months but due to the government's movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the best option is to approach the entire process with online surveys methods.

Three different sets of questionnaires are shared online either by email or social media targeting the three subject groups, to assess the different levels of awareness and their experiences when accessing the OUM new media platforms.

1.7 Theoretical Perspective

In line with the objectives of this research, which will focus on new media utilization and the effectiveness levels of each application or platform, the uses and gratification theory will be applied as a guide to understand the theoretical aspects.

There have been constant debates, reviews and literatures in relation to measuring or identifying levels of user satisfaction or impact from the days of traditional media in the likes of printed and broadcast media. However, digital media environments in the recent years have created a change in the understanding and analysis of these effects due to the diverse and evolving cyber technologies (Werder, 2009).

Theories abound in these phenomena as the impact of new media on the audiences can be conceptualized from multiple aspects. The perspectives vary based on effects seen in users, uses and also the media sources (Foss, 2009).

For this research project, the uses and gratification theory (UGT) will be used as a guide to understand further on the relationships between the OUM new media utilizations and its audience perceptions. As analyzed by Cho in 2009, the framework of this theory targets the interactive activities and relationships of users towards the selected media.

UGT was the brainchild of Katz, Blumler and Guruvitch(1974) where the knowledge gap was focused on what will the audience conceptualize from the media, and not as per the general consensus that the effectiveness of the media creates the impact levels of the audiences (Foss, 2009)

Other researches related to the concept of this theory summarized that audiences are attracted to selected media mainly for personal satisfaction and the individual attractions to the media contents (Narimah, 2018). Habitual usage of preferred media especially those that proactively encourages participatory interactive activities has been linked to increases in the levels of relationship and self-gratification (Cho, 2009).

With its socio-psychological tradition (Narimah, 2018), UGT is most relevant to this research as the variables are related to individualized perceptions and inclinations towards OUM's new media approaches. It is hoped that with the utilization of the UGT the university will witness a more accurate analysis to assist OUM in developing a visionary roadmap to widen and sustain their audience influences.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The following are a number of key term definitions that are mentioned in this research due to their relatable elements. These terms may be elaborated further as it is mentioned throughout the various Chapters of this project.

➤ Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

The concept of knowledge attainment through online channels specifically the Internet. It allows education to be gained and shared between persons and/or groups from different continents at their respective local time schedules.

➤ New Media

A variety of digital communication channels which transformed the reality of globalization into new dimensions of interaction, encompassing the economic, political and social environments of the world as we know it.

➤ Global

Worldwide or whole scopes of all human endeavours, be it political, social or educational to name just a few. Encompasses elements that are viewed by communities the world over.

APPinfo

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	7	13.7	13.7	13.7
No Response	44	86.3	86.3	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceWeb

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	38	74.5	74.5	74.5
No Response	13	25.5	25.5	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceFb

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	26	51.0	51.0	51.0
No Response	25	49.0	49.0	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceTw

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	13	25.5	25.5	25.5
No Response	38	74.5	74.5	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceInsta

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	22	43.1	43.1	43.1
No Response	29	56.9	56.9	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceYoutube

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	16	31.4	31.4	31.4
No Response	35	68.6	68.6	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceVLE

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	35	68.6	68.6	68.6
No Response	15	29.4	29.4	98.0
6.00	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

EnhanceApp

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	30	58.8	58.8	58.8
No Response	21	41.2	41.2	100.0
Total	51	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX E

Statistical analysis for OUM New Learners

Frequencies

Statistics

		Gender	Age	Education	Marital	Income	Sector	Residence
N	Valid	58	58	58	58	58	58	58
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Frequency Table

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	35	60.3	60.3	60.3
	Female	23	39.7	39.7	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20 - 29	16	27.6	27.6	27.6
	30 - 39	32	55.2	55.2	82.8
	40 - 49	10	17.2	17.2	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

Education

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Secondary / Vocational	27	46.6	46.6	46.6
	College	7	12.1	12.1	58.6
	University	24	41.4	41.4	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

Marital

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Single	26	44.8	44.8	44.8
	Married	32	55.2	55.2	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

Income

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	RM36,000 and below	37	63.8	63.8	63.8
	RM36,001 - RM48,000	15	25.9	25.9	89.7
	Above RM60,000	6	10.3	10.3	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Sector

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government	25	43.1	43.1	43.1
	Private Sector	32	55.2	55.2	98.3
	Unemployed	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Residence

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Urban	44	75.9	75.9	75.9
	Suburb	14	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Frequency Table

Initiation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Website	26	44.8	44.8	44.8
	Social Media	18	31.0	31.0	75.9
	Word of Mouth / Recommendation	14	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Frequency

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Frequently	35	60.3	60.3	60.3
	Seldom	23	39.7	39.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	