DIGITAL MARKETING TOUCHPOINTS AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN ONLINE EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM UZBEKISTAN IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
This research proposal examines how digital marketing touchpoints shape consumers' enrollment and retention behavior in online education in Uzbekistan. Using a mixed-methods design and a systematic review of international evidence, it tests whether trust-building touchpoints and low-friction offers narrow the gap between intention and enrollment, and whether low-cost acquisition channels also support retention.

Keywords: digital marketing, online education, EdTech, consumer behavior, customer journey, enrollment, retention, Uzbekistan

Annotatsiya
Ushbu tezis O'zbekistonda onlayn ta'limda raqamli marketing kontakt nuqtalarining iste'molchilarning kursga yozilishi va o'qishni davom ettirishiga ta'sirini o'rganishni taklif qiladi. Aralash metodlar va xalqaro tadqiqotlarning tizimli sharhi orqali ishonchni oshiradigan kontakt nuqtalari va kirish to'siqi past takliflar yozilish niyati bilan haqiqiy yozilish o'rtasidagi tafovutni qisqartiradimi, jalb qilish narxi past kanallar esa o'qishni davom ettirishni ta'minlaydimi, shu sinovdan o'tkaziladi.

Kalit so'zlar: raqamli marketing, onlayn ta'lim, EdTech, iste'molchi xulqi, mijoz yo'li, kursga yozilish, o'qishni davom ettirish, O'zbekiston

Аннотация
В работе предлагается исследование того, как точки контакта цифрового маркетинга влияют на запись потребителей на онлайн-курсы и их удержание в Узбекистане. На основе смешанного дизайна и систематического обзора международных исследований проверяется, сокращают ли точки контакта, повышающие доверие, и предложения с низким порогом входа разрыв между намерением и записью, и обеспечивают ли каналы с низкой стоимостью привлечения удержание клиентов.

Ключевые слова: цифровой маркетинг, онлайн-образование, EdTech, поведение потребителей, путь клиента, запись на курс, удержание, Узбекистан

INTRODUCTION

Online education companies acquire customers almost entirely through digital channels: social media content, influencer endorsements, paid advertising, free trials, and retargeting. Their commercial performance depends on how well these marketing touchpoints convert attention into enrollment and

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enrollment into continued use. Digital marketing research has developed frameworks for studying this path, but most of the evidence comes from retail, travel, and consumer goods. Education differs in important ways. It is a high-involvement purchase, the benefit is delayed and uncertain, and the customer must keep investing effort after paying. Evidence from open online courses shows that low completion is a persistent pattern, which means acquisition efficiency alone is a misleading measure of marketing success.

Two gaps follow. First, little research links specific marketing touchpoints to behavior across the full customer journey in education, from first exposure to retention. Second, emerging markets such as Uzbekistan, where social platforms dominate discovery and trust relationships are strongly personal, are rarely studied, so it is unknown whether models built elsewhere apply.

This study asks: how do digital marketing touchpoints shape consumers' enrollment and retention behavior in online education in Uzbekistan, and how do these effects compare with international evidence?

Objectives. (1) To measure the effect of different marketing touchpoints on enrollment intention and actual enrollment. (2) To test whether the touchpoints that maximize acquisition also support retention. (3) To compare the results with published evidence from other markets.

Theoretical framework. The study treats marketing exposure as an input to consumer decision-making, modeled with the Theory of Planned Behavior: marketing touchpoints influence attitude, subjective norm (through social proof and endorsements), and perceived behavioral control (through trial offers and pricing clarity). A behavioral economics lens explains why intention often fails to become action, notably present bias. The customer journey perspective structures the analysis across stages, from awareness to retention.

Hypotheses.

- **H1:** Touchpoints that increase perceived trust (endorsements, verifiable outcomes, peer evidence) raise enrollment intention more than purely promotional touchpoints.
- **H2:** Low-friction offers (free trial, small first payment) narrow the gap between intention and enrollment, especially for consumers with stronger present bias.
- **H3:** Channels with the lowest acquisition cost do not necessarily produce the highest retention.
- **H4:** Trust-based touchpoints matter more in Uzbekistan than reported in markets where institutional trust is higher, as indicated by the international literature.

METHODS

Design. A sequential mixed-methods design with four components.

Component A: Consumer survey. A two-wave online survey of adults in Uzbekistan who have been exposed to online education marketing. Wave 1 measures touchpoint exposure, trust, attitude, subjective norm, perceived control, and time preference. Wave 2, several months later, records whether respondents enrolled. Scales will be adapted from validated instruments, translated into Uzbek and Russian by back-translation, and piloted. Sample size will be set by power analysis, with quotas by age, gender, and region. Analysis will use PLS-SEM for the intention model and logistic regression for the intention–enrollment gap.

Component B: Marketing and funnel data. With written agreement from partner EdTech companies, anonymized campaign-level and learner-level data will be analyzed: spend and leads by channel, conversion at each funnel stage, cost per acquisition, and cohort retention. Channel

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comparisons will use regression with controls for period, offer, and audience segment, and matched campaigns where available. Survival analysis will examine how acquisition channel relates to churn.

Component C: Interviews. Semi-structured interviews with consumers (enrolled, dropped out, and non-enrolled) and with EdTech marketing managers, coded thematically to explain results the quantitative models cannot.

Component D: International comparison. A systematic review of empirical studies on digital marketing and consumer behavior in online education and comparable high-involvement digital services across regions. The search strategy, inclusion criteria, and coding scheme will be registered before the review. Effect directions from the Uzbek models will be mapped against the reviewed studies to separate consistent mechanisms from context-specific ones.

Ethics. Participation will be voluntary and informed. Company data will be anonymized, and linkage between survey and company records will rely on explicit consent. Institutional ethics approval will be obtained before data collection.

EXPECTED RESULTS

As this is a proposal, no findings are reported. This section states what each analysis is designed to reveal and how outcomes would be interpreted.

- **Touchpoints and intention (H1).** The model is expected to show that trust-building touchpoints have a stronger relationship with intention than promotional ones. If this does not hold, it would suggest that price and offer terms outweigh credibility signals in this market.
- **Friction and the intention–action gap (H2).** A meaningful share of consumers with positive intention is expected not to enroll, with the gap related to present bias and payment friction. A null result would indicate structural barriers, such as price or payment access, rather than psychological ones.
- **Acquisition versus retention (H3).** The study expects channel rankings by acquisition cost to differ from rankings by retention for at least some channels. This would show that standard acquisition metrics can mislead budget decisions.
- **International comparison (H4).** The review is expected to show some mechanisms recurring across markets and others varying with context. Where Uzbek results diverge from the reviewed literature, the interviews will be used to examine why.

DISCUSSION

Contribution. Theoretically, the study applies consumer behavior and customer journey frameworks to a high-involvement digital service in an under-researched market. Methodologically, it connects self-reported intention to recorded behavior and to company funnel data, which most studies keep separate. Comparatively, it positions Uzbekistan within the international evidence rather than treating it in isolation. For practice, it offers EdTech marketers a basis for allocating budgets by long-term value instead of acquisition cost alone.

Limitations. Survey respondents who recall marketing content may differ from those who ignored it. Company data depend on partner agreements and may not generalize across providers. Observational campaign data limit causal claims, so matched comparisons and interviews are used for triangulation. Attrition between survey waves will reduce the matched sample. Differences in measures across published studies mean the international comparison supports pattern comparison, not statistical pooling.

Future research. The framework can be extended to other Central Asian markets with primary data, and to experimental tests of the touchpoints and offer designs the findings point to.

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