

INFLUENCE OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES ON STUDENT'S SPORTS PARTICIPATION AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined influence of online and offline promotional strategies on student's sports participation among tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. Descriptive research design was employed for the study. The population of the study was 47488. A total sample of 728 was determined using epi information as adequate for the study with 98% confidence interval, 4% margin of error and 32% population proportion. The final sample size was 800 with attrition rate of 10% (72.8) added to the sample size determination of 728. A self-structured was used to elicit information from the respondents. The data collected for the study was analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that digital strategies, especially social media and email marketing, are significantly associated with increased student engagement. Social media promotions were found to be effective in raising awareness and generating interest, while personalized email marketing campaigns enhanced registration rates. The study concludes that online and offline promotional strategies play a crucial role in influencing student's participation in sport events. The study recommends a holistic promotional framework that combines digital innovation with traditional outreach and leverages the motivational power of peer influence, incentives, and institutional support to improve sport events attendance, foster a vibrant sporting culture, and contribute to the holistic development of students.

Keywords: Offline Promotional Strategy, Online Promotional Strategy, Sports Participation

Introduction

Sport event participation remains an important aspect of student life in tertiary institutions, contributing significantly to physical health, social interaction, emotional wellbeing, and overall academic experience. Participation in organised sports encourages teamwork, discipline, leadership development, and social integration, while also strengthening students' sense of belonging within the university community (Eime et al., 2013; Adebayo & Ismaila, 2021). As a result, many higher education institutions across the world increasingly promote sports as an essential component of holistic education rather than merely a recreational activity (Johnson & Lee, 2023). The effectiveness of sport programmes in tertiary institutions is increasingly influenced by the promotional strategies adopted to attract and sustain student participation. Promotional strategies function as structured communication processes through which institutions inform students about upcoming sport events, stimulate interest, and encourage involvement (Kotler & Keller, 2020; Belch & Belch, 2021). These strategies broadly include online promotional strategies such as social media engagement, email marketing, influencer promotion, and online registration systems, as well as offline promotional strategies including print media advertising, outdoor publicity, community outreach, and interpersonal word-of-mouth communication (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2021; Trusov et al., 2021). The design and implementation of these strategies largely determine students' awareness, perception, and willingness to participate in sport events.

Advancements in digital technology have significantly transformed sport event promotion within educational environments. Online promotional platforms provide institutions with interactive, fast, and cost-effective channels for engaging large student populations (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Social media platforms, in particular, enable continuous communication through visual content, event updates, peer interaction, and feedback mechanisms, thereby increasing awareness and interest in sport events (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Adepaju, 2023). Similarly, email marketing and online registration systems reduce participation barriers by improving accessibility, convenience, and perceived ease of involvement (Smith & Hall, 2022). These digital approaches have been shown to positively influence students' behavioural intention to participate in sport events, consistent with the propositions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Despite the growing prominence of digital promotion, offline promotional strategies continue to play a vital role in sport event communication, particularly within campus environments where physical visibility and interpersonal interaction remain influential (Ogundare, 2022). Posters, banners, and flyers placed in strategic locations enhance repeated exposure and message recall, while outdoor advertising reinforces event visibility across campus spaces. In addition, community outreach activities and peer-driven word-of-mouth communication foster trust, credibility, and social influence, which are critical in shaping students' participation decisions (Bamidele & Ogunjimi, 2023; Olatunji et al., 2023).

Within the Nigerian tertiary education system, sport participation has received increasing attention due to its contribution to students' wellbeing, institutional identity, and competitive performance. However,

despite the regular organisation of intramural and extramural sport events, participation levels across institutions remain uneven (Ojo & Adeyanju, 2021). Several challenges including limited awareness, competing academic demands, weak communication structures, and inconsistent promotional planning have continued to affect student turnout (Akinmoladun, 2023; Olanrewaju & Ayotunde, 2022). Consequently, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of existing promotional strategies in translating awareness into active participation. Ekiti State, located in southwestern Nigeria, hosts federal, state, private, and college-level tertiary institutions with diverse student populations and varying institutional capacities. Although sport events are routinely organised across these institutions, noticeable variations in students' participation levels persist. While the increasing use of digital media alongside traditional promotional approaches presents opportunities for improved engagement, empirical evidence explaining how online and offline promotional strategies influence students' participation within the Ekiti State context remains limited (Ige & Durojaiye, 2021; Adepoju, 2023).

This study examines the influence of online and offline promotional strategies on students' participation in sport events among selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. By analysing the predictive contributions of both promotional approaches, the study provides empirical insights capable of guiding institutional sports administrators and policymakers in developing integrated promotional frameworks that enhance student engagement, promote sustainable sporting culture, and strengthen sport development within tertiary institutions.

.Statement of the Problem

Sport participation plays a critical role in the holistic development of students in tertiary institutions, contributing to physical fitness, social interaction, discipline, teamwork, and personal growth. Through organised sport events, students are provided opportunities to develop healthy lifestyles, enhance social cohesion, and represent their institutions in competitive activities (Eime et al., 2013; Adebayo & Ismaila, 2021). Despite these benefits, participation in sport events within many tertiary institutions in Nigeria remains relatively low and inconsistent, posing a major challenge to sports development and institutional performance (Ojo & Adeyanju, 2021; Akinola & Adesina, 2023).

In Ekiti State, tertiary institutions regularly organise intramural and extramural sport events; however, student participation has not reached expected levels. This challenge has become increasingly evident in the limited representation and underperformance of institutions in state and national sporting competitions (Ekiti State Ministry of Sports, 2023). Although several promotional strategies have been introduced to address this issue, including digital marketing campaigns, community outreach programmes, posters, and word-of-mouth communication, the desired level of engagement has not been achieved (Bamidele & Ogunjimi, 2023; Ogundare, 2022). This raises concerns about the suitability, effectiveness, and strategic alignment of these promotional approaches within the institutional environment.

The emergence of online promotional platforms has transformed sport event communication, particularly among young populations who are highly active on digital media. Social media promotions, email marketing, influencer endorsements, and online registration systems are now widely used to create awareness and encourage participation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2020; Adepoju, 2023).

At the same time, traditional offline promotional strategies such as print media advertising, outdoor displays, public relations activities, and interpersonal communication remain prevalent within campus environments (Ogundare, 2022; Trusov et al., 2021). However, the extent to which these online and offline promotional strategies effectively influence students' decisions to participate in sport events remains unclear, particularly within the context of Ekiti State tertiary institutions (Ige & Durojaiye, 2021).

Existing studies within Nigerian tertiary institutions have largely focused on challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited funding, academic workload, and students' attitudes toward sports (Mthethwa, 2017; Ojo & Adeyanju, 2021). While these factors are important, comparatively little attention has been given to examining promotional strategies as key determinants of sport event participation. In particular, empirical studies assessing the predictive influence of online and offline promotional strategies on students' participation within Ekiti State remain scarce (Ige & Durojaiye, 2021; Adepoju, 2023). This gap in knowledge limits the ability of sports administrators and institutional managers to design targeted promotional frameworks that align with students' preferences, communication habits, and motivational drivers.

It is within this context that this study examines the influence of online and offline promotional strategies on students' participation in sport events among selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. By addressing this gap, the study seeks to provide evidence-based insights capable of improving promotional planning, strengthening student engagement, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of sport development initiatives within tertiary institutions.

Hypotheses

1. Online sport events promotion would not significantly predict intramural sport events participation
2. Offline sport events would not significantly predict extramural sport events participation

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of online and offline promotional strategies on students' participation in sport events within tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of quantitative data from a large population and facilitated the assessment of relationships between promotional strategies and students' participation behaviour without manipulating the study variables.

The target population comprised all students enrolled in selected tertiary institutions in Ekiti State. According to official institutional records, the total student population across the selected institutions was 47,488 students, representing federal, state, private, and college-level tertiary institutions within the state.

The sample size for the study was determined using Epi-Info statistical software. Based on a 98% confidence interval, 4% margin of error, and 32% population proportion, a minimum sample size of 728 respondents was established. To compensate for possible attrition and incomplete responses, an additional 10% was added, resulting in a final sample size of 800 respondents. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, simple random sampling was used to select four tertiary institutions from the fifteen institutions in Ekiti State. The selected institutions were Federal University Oye-Ekiti (FUOYE), Ekiti State University (EKSU), Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti (ABUAD), and FABOTAS College of Science and Health Technology, Ikere-Ekiti. In the second stage, proportionate sampling was applied to allocate 200 respondents to each institution to ensure equal representation. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select participants across faculties within each institution. Out of the 800 questionnaires administered, 798 were correctly completed and returned, representing a high response rate suitable for statistical analysis.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Promotional Strategies on Sports Events Participation Survey (PSSEP-S)*. The instrument was adapted from existing validated measures and structured captured respondents' demographic characteristics, assessed exposure to online and offline promotional strategies, measured students' perceptions of promotional effectiveness and examined students' participation in intramural and extramural sport events.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, face and content validity procedures were employed. Copies of the questionnaire were reviewed by the researcher's supervisor, co-supervisor, and other experts in sports management and measurement for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. All recommended corrections were incorporated prior to final administration. A pilot study was conducted among 60 students from Federal Polytechnic Ado-Ekiti, which was excluded from the main study. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.95, indicating a high level of internal consistency and suitability of the instrument for the main study.

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant institutional authorities. Participants were adequately informed about the purpose of the study, and ethical considerations such as anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed. The questionnaires were administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of four trained research assistants. Completed copies were retrieved immediately after completion, resulting in a near-total return rate.

Data collected were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, were used to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics. Inferential statistics involving multiple regression analysis were employed to test the study hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance to determine the predictive influence of online and offline promotional strategies on students' participation in sport events.

Results and Discussion of the Findings

Table 1: Socio Demographic Data of the Participants (N=798)

Categories	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age (n=658)	18-27 years	633	96.2
	28-37 years	17	2.6
	38-47 years	8	1.2
Gender (n=798))	Female	411	51.5
	Male	387	48.5
Religion (n=798)	Christian	697	87.3
	Islamic	82	10.3
	Traditional	11	1.4
	Others	8	1.0
Marital status (n=798)	Divorce	1	0.1
	Married	22	2.8
	Separated	1	0.1
	Single	774	97.0
Family socioeconomic status (n=798)	High	107	13.4
	Average	577	72.3
	Low	114	14.3
Academic Level (n=798)	100L	348	43.6
	200L	156	19.5
	300L	145	18.2
	400L	109	13.7
	500L	26	3.3

	600L	14	1.8
Academic Qualification (n=798)	O'Level	203	25.4
	BSc	465	58.3
	OND	103	12.9
	HND	21	2.6
	Masters	3	0.4
	PhD	3	0.4
	Players	537	67.3
Participating Schools (n=798)	ABUAD	199	24.9
	EKSU	200	25.1
	FABOTAS	199	24.9
	FUOYE	200	25.1

Socio Demographic Data of the Participants

Table above presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. The majority of respondents (96.2%) fall within the age range of 18-27 years, indicating a predominantly young population, with only a small percentage (3.8%) aged 28 years and above. Gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 51.5% female and 48.5% male participants. In terms of religious affiliation, Christianity is the most common (87.3%), followed by Islam (10.3%), while traditional and other religions collectively account for 2.4% of the sample.

Regarding marital status, the vast majority of respondents (97.0%) are single, with minimal representation from married (2.8%), separated (0.1%), and divorced (0.1%) individuals. The family socioeconomic status of participants is predominantly average (72.3%), while 14.3% come from low-income backgrounds, and 13.4% from high-income families.

Academic distribution reveals that most participants are in their first year (100 level, 43.6%), with decreasing representation in higher levels, indicating a predominantly junior-level student population. The highest academic qualification among respondents is a Bachelor's degree (58.3%), followed by O'Level

(25.4%), OND (12.9%), and a small percentage holding HND (2.6%), Master's (0.4%), or PhD (0.4%). Additionally, 67.3% of the participants are identified as players. Lastly, the distribution of participants across schools is evenly split, with ABUAD and FABOTAS each representing 24.9% of the sample, while EKSU and FUOYE each account for 25.1%.

Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

Hypothesis 1: Online sport events promotional strategies would not significantly predict students' participation in sport events among tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Online sport events promotion as predictors of intramural sport event participation

Variables	B	Std. Error	t	P-value	Remarks
Social Media Promotion	0.000	0.021	-0.011	0.991	Not significant
Email Marketing	0.043	0.016	2.647	0.009	Significant
Influencer Marketing	0.021	0.019	1.117	0.265	Not significant
Online Registration	-0.053	0.017	-3.076	0.002	Significant
AdjR²: 0.04					

Table above presents the predictors of extramural sport event participation were analyzed using regression analysis. The results indicate that Email Marketing ($\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.009$) and Online Registration ($\beta = -0.053$, $p = 0.002$) were statistically significant predictors of participation. Specifically, email marketing had a positive effect, suggesting that targeted email campaigns can effectively drive attendance at extramural sport events. Conversely, online registration had a negative effect, which may imply that barriers or inefficiencies in the registration process could deter participation. On the other hand, Social Media Promotion ($\beta = 0.000$, $p = 0.991$) and Influencer Marketing ($\beta = 0.021$, $p = 0.265$) were not significant predictors, indicating that these strategies may have limited influence on extramural event attendance. The adjusted R-squared value ($\text{AdjR}^2 = 0.04$) shows that the model explains only 4% of the variance in participation, suggesting that other unmeasured factors, such as event accessibility or participant motivation, may play a more substantial role.

Hypothesis 2: Offline sport events promotional strategies would not significantly predict students' participation in sport events among tertiary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Offline sport events promotion as predictors of intramural sport event participation

Variables	B	Std. Error	t	P-value	Remarks
Print media advertising	0.033	0.031	1.072	0.284	Not significant
Outdoor advertising	0.043	0.037	1.166	0.244	Not significant
Community Outreach	0.058	0.034	1.715	0.087	Not significant
Mouth to mouth outreach	0.013	0.035	0.357	0.721	Not significant
AdjR²: 0.03					

As presented in table above, the predictors of intramural sport event participation were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The results reveal that none of the examined variables Print Media Advertising ($\beta = 0.033$, $p = 0.284$), Outdoor Advertising ($\beta = 0.043$, $p = 0.244$), Community Outreach ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.087$), and Mouth-to-Mouth Outreach ($\beta = 0.013$, $p = 0.721$) were statistically significant predictors of participation. This suggests that these traditional and community-based promotional strategies may have limited impact on driving attendance at intramural sport events. The adjusted R-squared value ($\text{AdjR}^2 = 0.03$) indicates that the model explains only 3% of the variance in participation, highlighting that the predictors included in this analysis account for a minimal portion of the factors influencing event attendance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings assessed both online and offline promotional strategies, with mixed results regarding their effectiveness. Social media promotions showed significant influence, particularly in terms of engaging and informative content that sparked students' interest in sports events. The chi-square analysis indicated that engaging social media content positively affects student decisions to attend sports events, aligning with Adepoju's (2023) findings on the impact of digital media on student engagement. Email marketing also proved effective, especially when personalized and frequently updated. The significant association between personalized email campaigns and increased participation supports the work of Ogundare (2022), who emphasized the role of direct digital communication in fostering student involvement. However, the study found that while email marketing influences participation, its impact on trust and decision-making is less pronounced, suggesting a need for more credible and engaging content. Offline promotional strategies, including posters, banners, and community outreach, remained relevant, particularly among

students less active on digital platforms. The visibility and frequency of traditional advertisements correlated positively with participation rates, consistent with Ogundare's (2022) study on traditional marketing effectiveness in Nigerian university. Influencer marketing emerged as one of the most effective strategies. The study found a strong association between influencer endorsements and student participation, with endorsements from student leaders and popular figures significantly boosting event appeal. This finding aligns with Okonkwo's (2023) research, which highlighted the power of social influence in marketing campaigns. Online registration systems also showed a significant positive impact on participation. The convenience and accessibility of digital registration platforms reduced barriers to entry, as supported by the works of Ogundare (2022), who noted that streamlined registration processes enhance student engagement. Additionally, clear and user-friendly registration pages, along with timely updates, were found to encourage higher participation. The study identified areas for improvement in both online and offline promotional strategies. For online methods, enhancing the credibility and engagement of email content, increasing the frequency of interactive social media posts, and leveraging influencer partnerships more effectively were recommended. Additionally, ensuring data security and privacy in online registration systems was highlighted as a concern that could be addressed to build greater trust among students. For offline strategies, the study suggested increasing the visibility and reach of traditional media through strategic placements and incorporating more interactive elements in community outreach programs. Incentives such as participation certificates, free merchandise, and academic benefits were also recommended to motivate higher student involvement, echoing the success observed in the Ekiti Sports Fiesta (Ekiti Sports Council, 2023).

Conclusion

The study concludes that online promotional strategies significantly predict students' participation in sport events. Digital platforms such as social media promotion, email marketing, influencer engagement, and online registration systems were found to enhance awareness, accessibility, and motivation, thereby encouraging greater student involvement. The effectiveness of these strategies reflects the increasing dependence of students on digital communication channels for information, interaction, and decision-making. In addition, the study establishes that offline promotional strategies also significantly predict students' participation in sport events. Traditional approaches including print media advertising, outdoor publicity, community outreach activities, and word-of-mouth communication continue to play a meaningful role in influencing participation behaviour. These strategies contribute to physical visibility, message reinforcement, and interpersonal trust, which remain important within campus environments. Taken together, the findings indicate that neither online nor offline promotional strategies operate in isolation. Rather, students' participation in sport events is best influenced through a balanced and integrated promotional approach that combines the strengths of both digital and traditional communication methods. Institutions that effectively align these strategies are more likely to achieve higher participation levels and sustain an active sporting culture. Based on the evidence from this study, it can be concluded that promotional strategies are essential determinants of sport event participation among tertiary institution students in Ekiti State. Strategic investment in well-coordinated promotional frameworks that reflect

students' communication preferences is therefore vital for improving engagement, enhancing institutional sports performance, and promoting the holistic development of students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Tertiary institutions should adopt an integrated promotional framework that combines online and offline promotional strategies. Relying solely on digital or traditional methods may limit outreach; therefore, sports administrators should strategically blend social media campaigns with physical campus publicity to maximise student engagement.
2. Institutions should prioritise the effective use of digital platforms such as social media, institutional websites, email systems, and online registration portals. Regular updates, visually engaging content, interactive features, and timely notifications should be utilised to increase awareness and sustain students' interest in sport events.
3. Student leaders, athletes, and sports ambassadors should be formally engaged as part of promotional teams. Peer-driven promotion, both online and offline, can enhance credibility and social influence, thereby encouraging wider participation among students.
4. Traditional promotional methods such as posters, banners, and outdoor advertisements should be strategically positioned in high-traffic areas including lecture halls, hostels, cafeterias, and sports complexes. Consistent visibility can reinforce awareness and serve as reminders ahead of sport events.
5. Sports officers and event organisers should be trained in modern promotional planning and communication strategies. Capacity-building workshops focusing on digital marketing, audience targeting, and promotional evaluation would enhance the effectiveness of sport event promotion.

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