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DIGITAL MODEL OF APPLICANT BEHAVIOR IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The article presents the results of a study of the digital model of applicants' behavior in the context of the transformation of interaction between applicants and higher education institutions. The relevance of the topic is due to growing competition in the educational services market, changing expectations and behavioral strategies of applicants, as well as the active introduction of digital technologies into the processes of administration and communication with potential students. The digitalization of the admission campaign is seen as a systemic transformation not only of the technical infrastructure but also of the model of interaction, which ensures greater flexibility, transparency, and personalization of educational services.

The study uses an empirical approach based on data from the 2025/2026 admission campaign at the Private Higher Education Institution “European University” (Kyiv), where a comprehensive digital ecosystem for applicant support was implemented, including web and mobile channels, interactive communication tools, automated data verification, and the possibility of a multichannel trajectory. The analysis covers five key stages of the digital admission cycle: profile creation, application submission, contract signing, payment, and enrollment. A comparative assessment of the effectiveness of Web, Mobile, and combined Web/Mobile channels was conducted based on conversion rate criteria, user activity, and applicant retention within the digital funnel.

The results of the study showed higher stability of the web channel in the initial stages, the advantage of the mobile channel when conducting financial transactions, and the greatest effectiveness of the multichannel approach. It has been established that the ability to switch dynamically between environments helps overcome user barriers, provides a more continuous and personalized trajectory, and increases the overall level of completion of the admission process. The total conversion rate of the digital funnel in the sample studied was about 70%, which indicates the high efficiency of the technical and organizational solutions implemented and substantiates the feasibility of multichannel service design in a digital university. The results of the study are relevant for the development of digital transformation strategies for universities aimed at enhancing the user experience, optimizing administrative procedures, and forming a sustainable educational ecosystem in the digital environment.

Key words: digital university, applicant, admission campaign, multichannel strategy, educational analytics, digital trajectory, digital avatar, AI agents.

Problem statement. The rapid digital transformation of the socio-economic environment and changes in the structure of demand for competencies in the labor market necessitate a rethinking of the mechanisms of the educational services market and the logic of applicant selection. The spread of IT solutions, automation, and “data-centric” approaches in various fields of activity is leading to qualitative changes in personnel qualification requirements, which, in turn, is transforming applicants' expectations regarding program content, modes of study, speed of results, and the practical relevance of education. Under these conditions, there is a grow-

ing risk of an imbalance between the supply of educational products and the dynamic demands of the labor market, which is exacerbated by the emergence of new learning formats (blended, distance, modular), alternative trajectories for acquiring competencies, and new professional niches.

At the same time, the performance of the educational services market and the admission trajectories of applicants is determined by the quality of institutional rules, resource provision, and quality standards, as well as the ability of the educational environment to respond promptly to changes in demand for com-

petencies, with the effectiveness of relevant management decisions largely depending on an understanding of the behavioral logic of target groups.

In this context, the scientific problem of the insufficient development of a digital model of applicant behavior as an economic and social agent in the educational environment becomes particularly relevant. Despite the existence of studies on the interaction between the educational services market and the labor market, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis in scientific discourse of the behavioral characteristics of applicants in digital channels (searching for information, building trust, comparing alternatives, assessing risks and benefits, the influence of social proof, micro-decisions in the admission “funnel”) as well as tools for measuring the effectiveness of institutional and managerial influences on this behavior in the context of digitalization. This limits the ability of educational institutions to design relevant communication and service frameworks of the admission campaign, to adjust educational offers in a timely manner, and to ensure proactive compliance with the competence requirements of the economy. Therefore, there is a need to develop an analytically sound digital model of applicant behavior that integrates behavioral determinants of choice and digital traces of interaction with the educational environment and can be used to improve the quality of management decisions in the field of educational services.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The issues of digital transformation of the educational environment and the behavior of applicants in the admission process have been widely covered in contemporary literature. In the context of educational service management, the introduction of intelligent agents plays a special role, which, according to O. Gassmann, transforms the traditional service model and redistributes the operational load in organizations [Gassmann: 6].

Research by O. Gassmann, K. Frankenberg, and others emphasizes the platformization of the educational space as a necessary condition for innovative flexibility and scalability of services, which directly affects the strategic positioning of universities in the digital age [Gassmann: 145]. N. Verina’s work reveals

the conceptual foundations of digital transformation, where the key factors are the standardization of procedures, the integration of digital platforms, and the optimization of user experience [Verina: 721–722].

G. Kortemeyer, in collaboration with colleagues, analyzes student behavior after the pandemic in the context of choosing modes of study, which resonates with the theme of digital trajectories – the authors emphasize the change in educational priorities and the growing role of personalized approaches in the digital environment [Kortemeyer: 230]. A look at digital behavior from the perspective of economic feasibility and motivational factors complements the research of A. Krap, which highlights the impact of technology on management approaches, including the issue of attracting applicants through digital channels [Krap: 181].

B. Williamson and co-authors emphasize pedagogical transformations during times of crisis and provide empirical arguments on how digital technologies are changing the dynamics of educational interactions, particularly in the field of remote support for applicants [Williamson: 109]. In general, the analyzed sources highlight the importance of deploying holistic digital ecosystems in higher education institutions that enable flexibility, inclusiveness, and effective communication with applicants at all stages of their educational trajectory.

The aim of the article is to examine the digital model of applicant behavior in the educational environment in the context of the transformation of interaction between applicants and higher education institutions, to analyze the impact of various digital technologies on the effectiveness of the admission campaign stages, and to substantiate the feasibility of introducing intelligent digital tools as a means of increasing personalization, reducing transactional complexity, and increasing the conversion of applicants into students.

Results and discussions. The modern educational services market is characterized by increased competition and growing demands for service quality, which stimulates the active digitalization of the interaction between universities and potential applicants. The digital transformation of the education sector is taking

place not only under the pressure of crisis circumstances, but also due to motives to increase the effectiveness and scalability of educational services [Bobro: 131]. At the same time, formal higher education is gradually losing its status as an unconditional advantage in the labor market, as employers increasingly value the practical experience and applied skills of graduates [Krap: 181]. In response to these trends, universities are reviewing their educational practices and implementing innovative platform models for the provision of educational services [Gassmann: 200]. In particular, the digitalization of the admission process is increasingly seen as a response to the challenges of the 21st century: it allows for cost optimization, reduction of procedural fragmentation, and improved management of interactions with applicants [Verina: 722; Bobro: 133]. Moving selection procedures online expands the geography of potential candidates and reduces the time and material costs of administering the admission campaign [Bobro: 133].

University admission is a complex administrative and communication procedure, within which applicants are forced to operate in conditions of information uncertainty, high density of requirements, and time constraints, which amplifies the stress component even with adequate academic preparation. Therefore, customer-oriented service design of admission services and constant digital support (explanations, reminders, feedback) aimed at reducing psychological workload and increasing the manageability of the admission process becomes a priority [Williamson: 109]. In this context, the digital organization of admission procedures acts as an institutional mechanism for reducing “transactional” complexity, ensuring a standardized sequence of actions, integration of information flows, and prompt feedback to applicants at each stage. In addition, modern digital services of educational institutions are increasingly complemented by intelligent agents (automated chat assistants) that take on routine consultations and thus change the architecture of customer interaction. This approach is consistent with management trends, where the introduction of AI agents redistributes the operational load and transforms the user service model [Gassmann: 8].

One of the key prerequisites for successful interaction between a university and potential students is a developed digital ecosystem of the institution [Kortemeyer: 230]. In a “digital university,” all points of contact with stakeholders, including applicants, are united by a common information infrastructure that ensures the integrity of the experience, consistency of services, and continuity of communication. This means that, from the very first interaction with the university, applicants are integrated into a unified digital environment that provides continuous digital support for the subsequent stages of their educational trajectory: choosing an educational program, submitting documents, enrollment, and further support for interaction during their studies [Bobro: 133]. In such an ecosystem, specialized digital services are created to support applicants at the stage of choosing an educational program and directly during the admission campaign [Bobro: 133; Krap: 15]. Innovative interaction tools (e.g., personal accounts, online chat with the admissions committee, electronic preparatory courses) increase the attractiveness of the university for the “digital generation” of applicants and, at the same time, ensure the manageability of processes within a single platform.

An example of the implementation of such a model is the digital infrastructure of the Private Higher Education Institution “European University” (Kyiv). Here, in the 2025/2026 admission campaign, a pilot project called “Applicant’s Personal Electronic Account” was implemented – a web and mobile application EUni in a “single window” format, which aggregated all key services of the admission campaign and provided end-to-end support to applicants at every stage of their admission trajectory. The analysis of the digital behavior of applicants to the European University in the 2025/2026 admission campaign covered five key stages of the process:

- 1) profile creation;
- 2) document submission;
- 3) contract signing;
- 4) payment;
- 5) enrollment.

Thus, the applicant’s digital trajectory begins with the creation of a personal account in the university admission environment, which is the entry

point to the entire ecosystem of interaction and determines the further course of participation in the admission campaign. It is this initial stage that reflects the applicant's initial interest and readiness to engage in the document submission process (see Figure 1).

As shown in Figure 1, at the initial stage of digital interaction between applicants and the university, which includes creating an applicant's personal account, confirming contact details, and filling out an initial questionnaire, the use of the web channel dominates. In particular, 2,350 profiles were created in the web version, while the number of profiles created via the mobile channel was 1,120, and via the multichannel method, 1,410. At the same time, the conversion rates between sub-stages remain high (91.2% and 93.3%), which indicates the convenience of the interface and the effectiveness of the initial attraction of applicants. At the same time, users who combined Web and Mobile (Web+Mobile) demonstrated steady growth in numbers at every stage, indicating the adaptive behavior of applicants and the relevance of a multichannel approach to retaining the contingent in the digital funnel.

At the stage of submitting applications (electronic documents), the system saw a decrease in the total number of active applicants to 2,500 (conversion relative to registration – 83%) (see Figure 2).

The results of the analysis showed significant differences in conversion rates between channels. In particular, 1,440 applications were submitted via the Web channel, which is 80% of the number of web profiles at the previous stage. In contrast, only 760 applications were submitted via the Mobile channel, which is approximately 63% of the profiles created from smartphones. This indicates that applicants who registered via mobile devices were less likely to complete the process of submitting documents compared to PC users. Possible reasons include a less convenient interface for uploading scanned copies of documents or filling out forms on a small screen, or lower engagement among those who use their phones. A similar trend can be observed in other areas: for example, although users often browse offers on their smartphones, they prefer to perform more complex actions, such as completing an airline ticket purchase, on their desktop devices (55% of transactions versus 45% on mobile devices) [Bouchrika, 2026].

It is worth highlighting the emergence of the Web/Mobile multichannel category: about 300 applicants (12% of applications submitted) used both channels before or during the submission of documents. This means that some of the applicants who initially registered their profile on one of the channels switched to the other to submit their application. Possible scenarios include an applicant creating an account via the web chan-

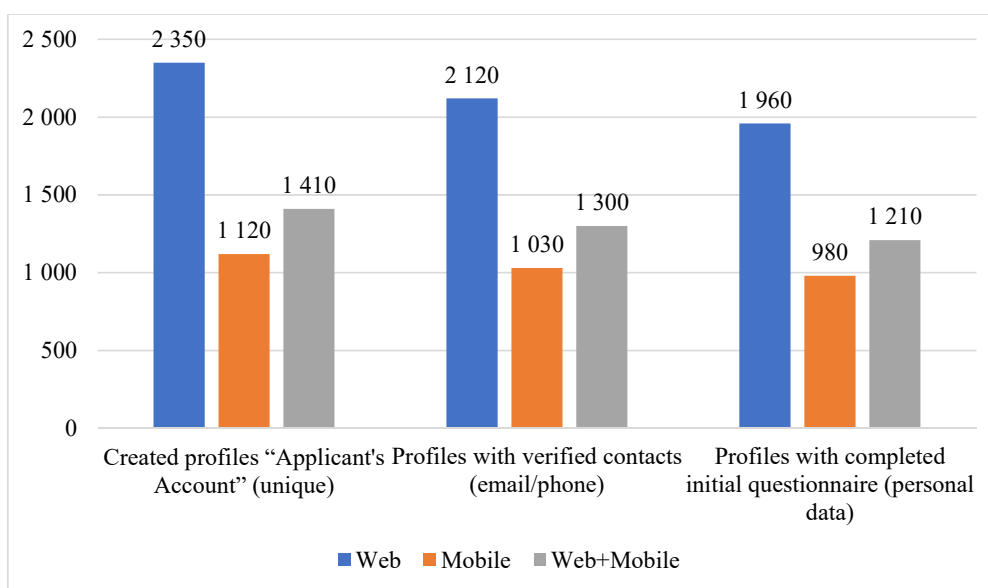


Fig. 1. Dynamics of applicants completing the profile creation stage in the electronic account through various channels

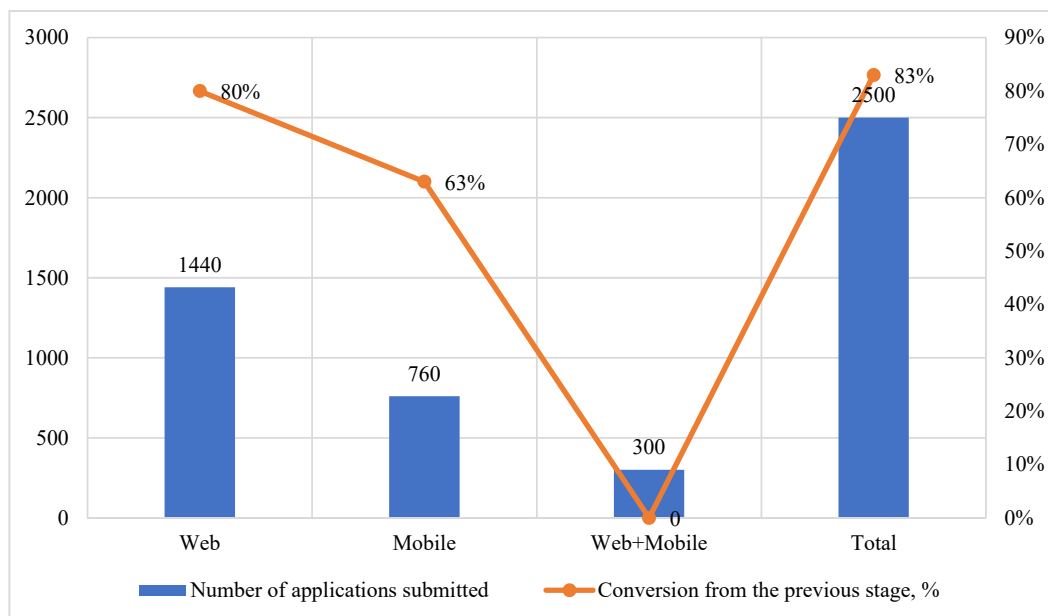


Fig. 2. Distribution of submitted applications by channel and conversion to the “Profile Creation” stage

nel but uploading photos of documents from their phone, or vice versa: registering via the mobile channel but submitting the application from a computer. The multichannel strategy at this stage made it possible to “select” those users who might find it inconvenient to complete the entire procedure on a single device. As a result, the overall conversion rate for this stage (83%) was significantly higher than it would have been if limited to a single channel, exceeding the weakest channel (Mobile) by 17%. Providing alternative ways to submit documents helped reduce the dropout rate of applicants at this stage.

At the stage of signing contracts with the university (corresponding to the applicant’s recommendation and consent to study on a contract basis), 2,300 people successfully completed the process, which is 92% of the number who submitted applications. The overall conversion rate here is significantly higher than in the previous stage – most of those who submitted documents reached the contract signing stage. However, the distribution by channel shows that the difference in the behavior of Web and Mobile users remains (see Figure 3).

Through the Web channel, 1,340 applicants made it to the signed contract stage, which is 93% of the number of online applications, meaning that the dropout rate among online users is

minimal. In contrast, only 80% of Mobile applicants reached this stage (610 out of 760). It turns out that one in five applicants who applied via smartphone did not sign a contract, possibly because they chose another institution or did not show up for the final registration. Web-oriented applicants demonstrate a higher commitment to the result, which may be due to their greater tendency to plan their admission steps in advance or to the fact that the process of signing a contract (e.g., via electronic signature or in person) was less problematic for them.

The Web/Mobile category grew even more at this stage: 350 people used both channels by the time the contract was signed, which is 50 more than when the applications were submitted. This reflects the fact that some applicants switched to another channel during this stage. For example, some of those who applied via the web channel could confirm or sign the contract from their phone (or get advice via a mobile application), or vice versa – mobile users switched to a computer to carefully review the terms of the contract before signing. As a result of these transitions, the number of multichannel applicants increased by 17% compared to the previous stage (Web/Mobile conversion over 100%). This growth in the multichannel segment again had a positive impact on overall performance:

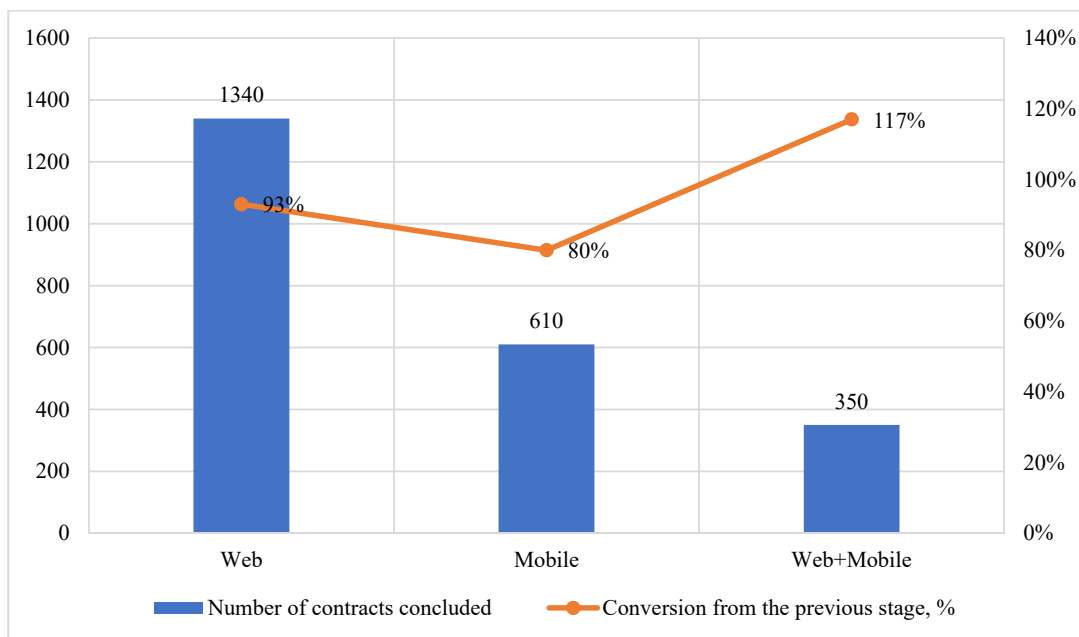


Fig. 3. Distribution of concluded contracts by channel and conversion to the “Application Submission” stage

even with a relatively lower share of mobile users, the overall conversion rate of 92% is close to the high rate of the web channel. Thus, the ability to alternate channels made it possible to retain a significant portion of applicants: those who might have refused to continue due to the limitations of a single channel completed the stage by using an alternative route.

The contract payment stage proved to be one of the most successful in terms of retaining applicants: of the 2,300 people who signed the contract, 2,200 made the payment, i.e., the conversion rate was 95.7% (almost 96%). This high rate indicates that the vast majority of applicants, after signing the contract, followed through on their intention to make the actual tuition payment (see Figure 4).

The difference between the channels at this stage was almost neutralized. For the Web group, the conversion rate from the previous stage was 90% (1,200 payments from 1,340 contracts), and for the Mobile group, it was even slightly higher – 93% (570 payments from 610 contracts). This means that mobile users who proceeded to sign a contract were practically on par with web users in terms of payment. It can be assumed that the few individuals who did not make a payment after signing the contract may have reconsidered their decision or encountered financial difficulties;

however, this outflow is small and proportionally similar for both channels. It is also important that the multichannel behavior of applicants played a significant role again at the payment stage. The number of the Web/Mobile group increased sharply to 430 people (80 more than at the contract stage, i.e., +23% from the previous one). This jump reflects that many applicants changed the channel specifically to make a payment.

The most common situation was that applicants who had completed all previous stages via the web channel used mobile banking or a payment application on their smartphone (QR code, online banking) to make their payment, which automatically classified them as multichannel users. The reverse change was somewhat less common – for example, someone who submitted documents from their phone might decide to make the payment via a computer. The fact that a significant part of the audience chose an alternative channel at the payment stage is consistent with the principle of convenience: young people actively use mobile applications for financial transactions, and providing this opportunity increased the share of successful payments. The multichannel strategy at this stage made it possible to avoid potential barriers: applicants could pay for their studies in the way that was easiest for them (for example, via smartphone if they did not have a PC at hand, or

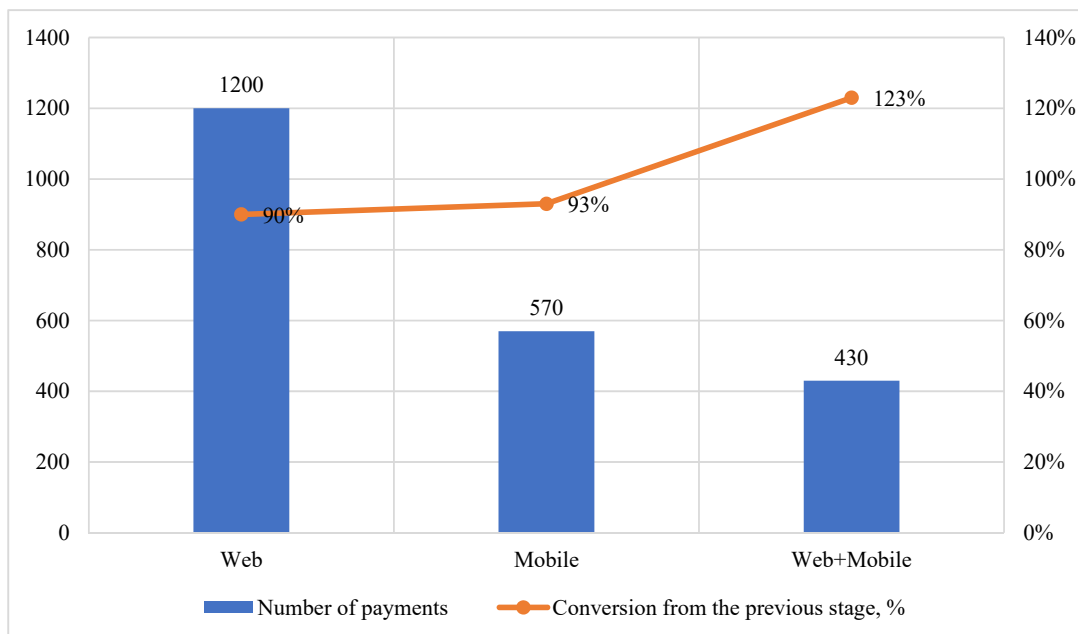


Fig. 4. Distribution of payments made by channel and conversion to the “Contract” stage

vice versa). As a result, the overall conversion rate of 96% is higher than for each channel – the synergy effect of multichannel marketing.

In terms of absolute numbers, the Web channel still accounts for the largest share of payments (1,200 people, or 55% of the total), but Mobile and Web/Mobile channels together already generate almost half of all payments. This indicates that both direct mobile payments and, in particular, the combined use of channels have become decisive for the successful completion of the admission campaign at the financial stage.

At the final stage, according to the results of the enrollment order, 2,089 applicants were enrolled at the European University. The overall conversion rate from the payment stage is 95%: almost everyone who paid for their studies was enrolled. The slight difference (2,200 payments versus 2,089 enrollments) can be explained by isolated cases where applicants refused to study at the last minute or did not submit the original documents by the deadline, but such cases account for less than 5%. Thus, of the 3,000 profiles registered at the beginning, 69.6%, or more than two-thirds, received final student status, which is a high indicator of the overall “funnel pass” of applicants.

The distribution by channel among those enrolled reflects the cumulative effect of all previous stages (see Figure 5).

As we can see from Figure 5, the web channel remains dominant in terms of numbers: 1,160 students (55% of the total) completed the entire process using only web resources. The number of mobile-only students is 519 (25%). The remaining 410 people, or about 20% of all enrolled students, used both web and mobile channels during the admission campaign (Web/Mobile category). Conversion rates to the final stage levelled off at a high level for all segments. In particular, almost all web users were enrolled after payment (97% conversion rate) and 95% of multichannel users, while the conversion rate for mobile users was slightly lower at 91%. This indicates that at the final stage, the multichannel strategy and web channel ensured the most stable conversion of applicants to the end of the process. Although the mobile channel had a slightly higher dropout rate at the final stage, it still showed high results, considering that 9 out of 10 mobile applicants who paid for their studies were successfully enrolled.

The data obtained as a result of empirical research indicate a clear dependence of applicants’ behavior in the digital admission cycle on the chosen channel of interaction. The web channel consistently demonstrates higher conversion rates in the early stages, particularly when submitting applications and documents, which cor-

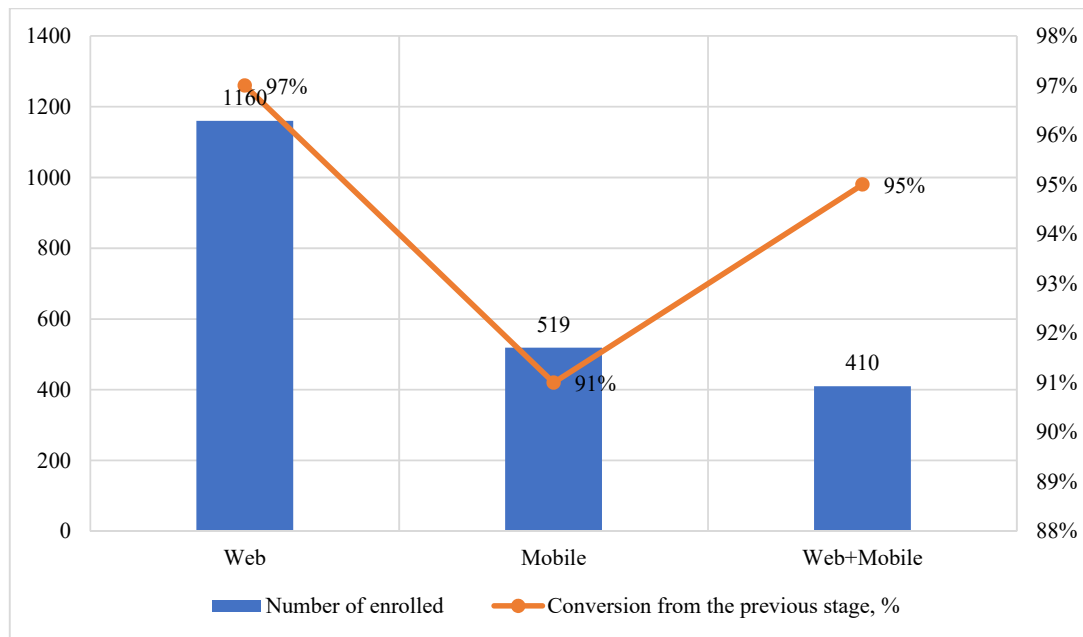


Fig. 5. Distribution of enrolled students by channel and conversion to the “Payment” stage

relates with the nature of interaction focused on performing more complex actions using desktop interfaces, which are perceived as more reliable and convenient for filling out voluminous forms. In contrast, the mobile channel has certain limitations in retaining users in the process, especially at stages related to the verification of intentions and the conclusion of contracts. These differences are likely due to the specific nature of the mobile environment, which is less suitable for prolonged cognitively demanding operations, as well as potential distrust of performing official actions via a mobile phone. At the same time, it is the mobile channel that plays a significant functional role in the final stages, particularly during payment, which can be explained by the active use of digital payment services among the target audience.

The results also demonstrate the effectiveness of a multichannel approach, which ensures the adaptability of the process and increases the overall conversion rate. The use of multiple channels allows users to choose the most convenient mode of action in each specific case, thereby compensating for the shortcomings of each environment. Multichannel users demonstrated the highest completion rates for the admission process, and their share increased from zero at the beginning of the campaign to one-fifth of all enrolled students. The overall integral

coefficient of digital funnel completion, which reached about 70%, is evidence of effective digital interaction architecture and the soundness of the technical and organizational solutions implemented. In the absence of the possibility to switch between channels, this indicator would be significantly lower, which is confirmed by noticeable differences in user behavior along individual trajectories.

Thus, it can be stated that the multichannel strategy not only increases the effectiveness of the admission campaign by reaching a wider target audience but also creates a more flexible and continuous digital experience for applicants. In the context of growing digital competition between higher education institutions, such a communication model becomes crucial for retaining the contingent, reducing barriers to decision-making, and converting potential applicants into students.

Conclusions. The digital transformation of the system of interaction between higher education institutions and potential applicants necessitates a thorough review of the architecture of admission services. Empirical data obtained from the European University’s admission campaign show significant differences in the behavior patterns of applicants depending on the digital channel they choose. Thus, the web interface

provides greater stability and efficiency at stages that require structured and formalized actions (filling out questionnaires, uploading documents). Mobile applications, on the other hand, are more actively used in the final stages, especially during financial transactions, and demonstrate a growing role in ensuring the flexibility of the digital experience.

The multichannel strategy proved to be the most effective in terms of the overall completion rate of the admission process. The ability to

switch between channels adaptively reduced barriers to passing critical stages and ensured that applicants remained in the digital funnel.

Taking into account multichannel trajectories, developing integrated digital support services, and including intelligent agents are key conditions for effective digital interaction with applicants. Further research should focus on developing tools for analyzing applicant behavior and personalizing educational navigation based on artificial intelligence.

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ЦИФРОВА МОДЕЛЬ ПОВЕДІНКИ АБІТУРІЄНТА В ОСВІТНЬОМУ СЕРЕДОВИЩІ

У статті представлено результати дослідження цифрової моделі поведінки абітурієнтів у контексті трансформації взаємодії між вступником і закладом вищої освіти. Актуальність теми зумовлена зростаючою конкуренцією на ринку освітніх послуг, зміною очікувань і поведінкових стратегій вступників, а також активним впровадженням цифрових технологій у процеси адміністрування та комунікації з потенційними студентами. Цифровізація вступної кампанії розглядається як системне перетворення не лише технічної інфраструктури, а й моделі взаємодії, що забезпечує підвищення гнучкості, прозорості та персоналізації освітнього сервісу.

У дослідженні застосовано емпіричний підхід на основі даних вступної кампанії 2025/2026 рр. у Приватному закладі вищої освіти «Європейський університет» (м. Київ), де було реалізовано комплексну цифрову екосистему супроводу абітурієнта, включно з веб- та мобільними каналами, інструментами інтерактивної комунікації, автоматизованою верифікацією даних та можливістю мультиканальної траєкторії. Аналіз охоплює п'ять ключових етапів цифрового вступного циклу: створення профілю, подання заяв, укладання договору, оплата та зарахування. Проведено порівняльну оцінку ефективності каналів Web, Mobile та комбінованої моделі Web/Mobile за критеріями коефіцієнтів конверсії, користувацької активності та збереження абітурієнта в цифровій воронці.

Результати дослідження засвідчили вищу стабільність веб-каналу на початкових етапах, перевагу мобільного каналу при здійсненні фінансових транзакцій та найбільшу результативність мультиканального підходу. Встановлено, що можливість динамічного перемикання між середовищами сприяє подоланню користувацьких бар'єрів, забезпечує більш безперервну та персоналізовану траєкторію, а також підвищує загальний рівень завершеності вступного процесу. Сукупна конверсія цифрової воронки у досліджуваній вибірці склала близько 70%, що свідчить про високу ефективність впроваджених техніко-організаційних рішень та обґрунтовує доцільність мультиканального сервісного дизайну в цифровому університеті. Результати дослідження є актуальними для розробки стратегій цифрової трансформації університетів, спрямованих на посилення користувацького досвіду, оптимізацію адміністративних процедур і формування сталої освітньої екосистеми у цифровому середовищі.

Ключові слова: цифровий університет, абітурієнт, вступна кампанія, мультимедійна стратегія, освітня аналітика, цифрова траєкторія, цифровий аватар, AI-агенти.

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