

Understanding Students' Higher Education Enrolment Intentions Through Social Media Marketing: Evidence from Madhya Pradesh, India

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the marketing and communication practices of higher education institutions. Universities and colleges increasingly use platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, and other digital channels to communicate with prospective students, promote academic programmes, showcase campus facilities, communicate placement achievements, and establish institutional identity. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing in shaping students' intentions to enrol in higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, India. The study proposes an empirical framework examining the influence of information quality, content attractiveness, institutional credibility, social media engagement, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), perceived usefulness, and interactivity on students' enrolment intentions. A quantitative research approach is proposed, using a structured questionnaire administered to prospective and current higher education students in selected districts of Madhya Pradesh. Data may be analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, multiple regression, exploratory factor analysis, and structural equation modelling. The study is expected to provide evidence regarding the extent to which social media marketing contributes to students' institutional awareness, trust, engagement, and enrolment intentions. The findings may assist higher education institutions in developing effective, transparent, and student-oriented digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Higher Education, Enrolment Intention, Digital Marketing, Student Decision-Making, e-WOM, Social Media Engagement, Madhya Pradesh.

Introduction

The digital transformation of society has fundamentally changed the way individuals obtain information, communicate with organisations, and make decisions. Social media has emerged as one of the most influential digital communication channels, enabling organisations to communicate directly with audiences through interactive and user-generated content.

Higher education institutions are increasingly adopting social media as a strategic marketing and communication tool. In the past, prospective students primarily relied on university brochures, newspapers, education fairs, counselling sessions, family members, teachers, and institutional visits when selecting an educational institution. Today, students can access extensive information through social networking platforms before visiting or contacting an institution.

Social media enables higher education institutions to present information about academic programmes, faculty expertise, infrastructure, campus facilities, scholarships, student activities, research achievements, placement opportunities, alumni accomplishments, and institutional events. Videos, testimonials, student-generated content, live sessions, webinars, virtual campus tours, and interactive posts can provide prospective students with a more immediate understanding of institutional offerings.

The higher education environment in India is highly competitive. Students increasingly compare institutions based on academic quality, affordability, placement opportunities, reputation, infrastructure, location, accreditation, student experiences, and career prospects. Social media can influence several of these perceptions by shaping institutional visibility and providing information during the decision-making process.

Madhya Pradesh provides a relevant geographical context for examining this phenomenon. The state has a diverse higher education ecosystem consisting of government and private universities, autonomous institutions, engineering and technical colleges, management institutions, professional colleges, and specialised educational institutions. The increasing digital engagement of young people creates an important opportunity for institutions to understand how social media marketing affects student recruitment.

However, the existence of social media communication does not automatically establish its effectiveness. Institutions may have large numbers of followers but still experience limited conversion of social media engagement into applications or enrolments. Consequently, it is important to identify the specific dimensions of social media marketing that influence students' enrolment intentions.

This study therefore proposes an empirical investigation into the effectiveness of social media marketing in shaping students' higher education enrolment intentions in Madhya Pradesh.

Problem Statement

The increasing adoption of social media marketing by higher education institutions has created a need to evaluate whether these activities actually influence students' enrolment decisions.

Students are exposed to information from official institutional accounts, current students, alumni, educational influencers, review platforms, advertisements, and peer networks. This creates both opportunities and challenges for higher education institutions.

The central problem of this study is therefore:

To what extent is social media marketing effective in shaping students' intentions to enrol in higher education institutions in Madhya Pradesh, and which dimensions of social media marketing have the greatest influence on enrolment intention?

Research Gap

Although social media marketing has received considerable attention in marketing research, several gaps remain in the higher education context.

First, much of the existing literature examines social media from a general consumer-marketing perspective rather than focusing specifically on higher education enrolment.

Second, studies conducted in one geographical or institutional context may not adequately explain student behaviour in Madhya Pradesh.

Third, social media effectiveness is multidimensional. Simply measuring social media usage or frequency may not adequately explain its impact. Factors such as information quality, credibility, engagement, e-WOM, interactivity, and perceived usefulness need to be examined collectively.

Fourth, students' enrolment intentions may be influenced by trust and engagement generated through social media communication. These potential mediating mechanisms require further investigation.

Therefore, this study attempts to develop and empirically evaluate an integrated framework explaining how social media marketing affects higher education enrolment intentions.

Research Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of social media marketing in influencing students' higher education enrolment intentions.
2. To examine the effect of social media information quality on students' enrolment intentions.
3. To determine the influence of content attractiveness on students' perceptions of higher education institutions.
4. To examine the relationship between institutional credibility and enrolment intention.
5. To analyse the influence of social media interactivity on student engagement.

Research Questions

RQ1: How effective is social media marketing in influencing students' higher education enrolment intentions?

RQ2: Does information quality significantly influence enrolment intention?

RQ3: Does content attractiveness significantly influence students' perceptions and enrolment intentions?

RQ4: Does institutional credibility influence students' enrolment intentions?

RQ5: Does social media interactivity increase student engagement?

Hypotheses Development

H1

Social media marketing effectiveness has a significant positive influence on students' higher education enrolment intentions.

H2

Social media information quality has a significant positive influence on students' enrolment intentions.

H3

Content attractiveness has a significant positive influence on students' enrolment intentions.

H4

Institutional credibility communicated through social media has a significant positive influence on students' enrolment intentions.

H5

Social media interactivity has a significant positive influence on student engagement.

Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing has become an important component of contemporary digital marketing. Kaplan and Haenlein highlighted the interactive and participatory characteristics of social media, while Mangold and Faulds identified social media as an important element of the modern promotional mix.

In higher education, social media allows institutions to communicate directly with students and create communities around institutional brands.

Social Media Marketing in Higher Education

Higher education institutions increasingly use social media to promote their programmes and communicate institutional experiences. Constantinides and Stagno identified the potential of social media as an instrument for higher education marketing.

Social media can complement institutional websites by offering more interactive and dynamic communication.

Information Quality

Students need accurate and relevant information when comparing higher education institutions. Information quality can therefore influence perceived usefulness and trust.

Information regarding courses, fees, placements, scholarships, infrastructure, accreditation, admission procedures, and career opportunities is particularly important.

Content Attractiveness

Visual content can influence how prospective students perceive an institution. Videos, photographs, student testimonials, campus tours, event coverage, and faculty interactions can make institutional communication more engaging.

Institutional Credibility

Credibility represents the perceived reliability and authenticity of information. In an environment containing both official and user-generated information, institutional credibility becomes particularly important.

Institutions that provide transparent, consistent, and verifiable information may develop stronger trust among prospective students.

Research Methodology

Research Approach

A **quantitative research approach** is recommended because the objective is to statistically evaluate relationships among measurable constructs.

Research Design

The study will adopt a **descriptive and explanatory cross-sectional research design**.

Study Area

The research will be conducted among prospective and current higher education students in selected areas of **Madhya Pradesh, India**.

For broader representation, the study can include respondents from:

- Indore
- Bhopal
- Gwalior
- Jabalpur
- Ujjain
- Sagar

The final locations should be selected according to the actual sampling frame.

Target Population

The target population may include:

- Students completing senior secondary education
- Undergraduate students considering further education
- Prospective undergraduate applicants
- Students considering postgraduate education
- Students actively researching higher education institutions through social media

Sample Size

A sample of approximately **500 respondents** is proposed for the empirical study.

For a multi-construct SEM model, the final sample should be justified using an appropriate statistical power/sample-size procedure rather than relying only on a rule of thumb.

Questionnaire Design

A structured questionnaire may consist of four sections.

Section A: Demographic Profile

- Age
- Gender
- Educational qualification
- Academic stream
- Residence
- Type of institution
- Monthly/annual household income, if relevant and ethically justified

Section B: Social Media Usage

- Frequency of social media usage
- Preferred platform
- Daily usage duration
- Type of educational content viewed
- Frequency of institutional-page visits

Section C: Social Media Marketing Variables

Respondents may rate statements relating to:

- Information quality
- Content attractiveness
- Institutional credibility
- Interactivity
- e-WOM
- Perceived usefulness
- Student engagement
- Institutional trust

Data Analysis

The collected data may be analysed using **SPSS, AMOS, SmartPLS, R, or equivalent statistical software.**

Descriptive Analysis

- Frequency
- Percentage
- Mean
- Standard deviation

Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability may be used to examine internal consistency.

Validity

The study should examine:

- Convergent validity
- Discriminant validity
- Factor loadings
- Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) can initially examine the underlying factor structure.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can subsequently verify the measurement model.

Proposed Data Interpretation Framework

The effectiveness of social media marketing can be assessed using several dimensions:

Effectiveness Dimension Expected Outcome

Awareness	Students become aware of institutions/programmes
Information	Students obtain useful academic and admission information
Engagement	Students interact with institutional content
Trust	Students develop confidence in institutional communication
Consideration	Students shortlist the institution
Intention	Students express willingness to apply/enrol

This framework enables the research to distinguish between **social media visibility** and actual **enrolment intention**.

Managerial Implications

The study can provide several practical implications for higher education institutions.

Develop an Integrated Social Media Strategy

Institutions should not treat social media merely as an announcement platform. It should be integrated with admissions, branding, student engagement, alumni relations, and placement communication.

Emphasise Authentic Content

Student testimonials, alumni stories, faculty interactions, campus activities, laboratory demonstrations, internships, and placement experiences can provide more authentic representations of institutional life.

Improve Information Accuracy

Institutions should regularly update information concerning:

- Admission
- Fees
- Scholarships
- Courses
- Accreditation
- Placements
- Infrastructure
- Faculty
- Academic calendar

Encourage Two-Way Communication

Social media teams should respond promptly to student queries and provide mechanisms for prospective students to interact with admission counsellors and current students.

Theoretical Contribution

The study can contribute to higher education marketing literature by integrating social media marketing variables with student decision-making.

The framework can potentially combine concepts derived from:

- Theory of Planned Behavior
- Technology Acceptance Model
- Social Media Marketing
- Electronic Word-of-Mouth
- Relationship Marketing
- Trust-based decision-making

The integrated model may help explain how digital information and engagement translate into higher education enrolment intention.

Conclusion

The growing importance of social media has transformed the student recruitment environment in higher education. Prospective students increasingly use digital platforms to search for information, compare institutions, evaluate student experiences, interact with universities, and develop perceptions of institutional credibility.

This study proposes an empirical framework for evaluating the effectiveness of social media marketing in shaping students' higher education enrolment intentions in Madhya Pradesh. By examining information quality, content attractiveness, institutional credibility, interactivity, electronic word-of-mouth, perceived usefulness, student engagement, and institutional trust, the study moves beyond the simple measurement of social media presence.

The proposed research can provide valuable evidence regarding how digital communication contributes to student recruitment. For higher education institutions, the ultimate objective should not simply be increasing followers or social media visibility but converting meaningful digital engagement into informed enquiries, applications, and enrolment decisions.

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