

## The Impact of Social Media Promotion on Students' Selection of Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

This research endeavour seeks to explore and understand the extent to which social media platforms shape and influence the information-gathering behavior of students, particularly in the context of making critical educational decisions. The focus is placed on examining how these digital platforms affect students' choices when selecting higher education institutions. This research explores the impact of social media on students' information-seeking behavior, with a specific emphasis on how it shapes their decision-making processes concerning the selection of higher education institutions. The primary objective is to assess the extent to which information acquired through social media platforms impacts university choice. A quantitative research method was used, involving the administration of electronic questionnaire to a selected sample 200 senior secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate students across the state of Uttarakhand, India. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and PLS-SEM. A structural model was constructed to test the proposed hypotheses, while a measurement model was applied to evaluate the reliability and validity of the research instrument. The empirical findings of the study highlight a significant and meaningful impact of social media on the choices made by students in relation to higher education. The results suggest that social media not only serves as a major source of information but also plays a crucial role in shaping students' perceptions, expectations, and ultimately their decisions when selecting universities or colleges for further studies.

**Keywords:** Online Marketing, Social Media, Students' Decision-making, Students' Choice, Higher Education Institutions.

### 1. Introduction:

Marketing management entails creating and implementing strategic marketing plans that support broader business objectives. It involves leveraging customer insights, tracking essential performance metrics, and optimizing internal operations to drive success and enhance overall business performance. In recent years, social media has emerged as a significant and influential marketing tool, playing a crucial role in the success of a product, service, or business (Hawkins & Vel, 2013). Conventional marketing has now been overtaken by digital marketing. In today's globalized world, industries across all sectors are shifting towards digital platforms to stay competitive and differentiate themselves. It is fair to say that we are now living in a digital era where geographical boundaries no longer exist, and the reach of businesses is virtually limitless (Gondane & Pawar, 2021). Building on this perspective, our objective is to assess the influence of online advertising through social media on university promotion, as these institutions serve as key providers of educational services. Higher education institutions must develop effective marketing strategies to align their educational and social services with consumer needs. Simply offering attractive admission options is not sufficient for long-term success. Universities must carefully consider the type of programs they provide and the external factors that influence their relevance in the job market. To enhance the effectiveness of higher education marketing, it is essential to identify the key factors that impact students' decisions when selecting a university and academic program (Popescu, 2021).

In simple terms, digital marketing involves promoting products or services using electronic devices or the internet. It is essentially synonymous with internet marketing. Nowadays, countless businesses rely on digital marketing as it provides a more efficient and cost-effective way to connect with a vast audience (Gondane & Pawar, 2021). For many, social media is primarily seen as a platform for posting daily updates and photos on networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). However, from a broader perspective, social media has established itself as an affordable and accessible information-sharing tool for individuals, businesses, organizations, governments, and other entities. It serves as a space for learning, educating, sharing, networking, marketing, advertising, and enhancing ideas that are being disseminated. Weinberg (2009) describes Social Media Marketing (SMM) as an all-encompassing strategy for promoting products and services via social media platforms. This approach allows businesses to connect with a much larger audience than conventional marketing methods. Pentina and Koh (2012) suggest that Social Media Marketing (SMM) facilitates extensive consumer engagement within online communities, brand pages, and fan pages. It also amplifies the reach of promotional content created by companies and organizations on widely used social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and others. Rajkumar, Joseph, and Sudhakar (2021) conducted a study in 2020, which found that social media is the most crucial platform for business marketing. Most marketers reported increased website traffic due to social media, and 86% acknowledged that their efforts had significantly boosted brand awareness. (Sutherland et al, 2020) According to this survey, Facebook dominated the market with a 94% share, followed by Instagram at 76%, LinkedIn at 59%, Twitter and YouTube both at 53%, and Pinterest at 25%. Additionally, Messenger Bots, Snapchat, and TikTok each accounted for 25% of the market.

“Table 1: Top Five Social Media Platforms

Top 5 Social Media sites	Establishment year	Monthly users
1. Facebook	2004	2.23 billion
2. Youtube	2005	1.9 billion
3. Whatsapp	2009	1.5 billion
4. Instagram	2010	1 billion
5. Twitter (X)	2006	335 million

Data Source: Smarther (26 November 2024)”

## **2. Social Media and Higher Education**

The growing influence of social media among teenagers and young adults has made it a key tool in decision-making, extending beyond communication to become a vital source of information. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can use social media to attract prospective students, making it essential to understand its impact on their choices. As higher education marketing evolves, the exact role of social media in shaping college decisions remains unclear. To market effectively, HEIs must gain insight into students' experiences and needs, ensuring their strategies align with student expectation (Sola, 2021). Social media marketing (SMM) in a student-led organization, with an emphasis on its activities on Facebook and Twitter. The findings suggest that SMM serves as a valuable addition to conventional marketing approaches by facilitating the timely dissemination of information, fostering engagement, and enhancing transparency (Richter, 2011). Utilizing social networks for online marketing is a contemporary and widely favored strategy among students. These platforms have revolutionized marketing by enabling institutions to gather feedback, recommendations, and comments from stakeholders, ultimately enhancing their services and offerings. Additionally, universities can

reach a broader audience through social media, allowing them to develop compelling offers for their target groups (Constantinides, 2014).

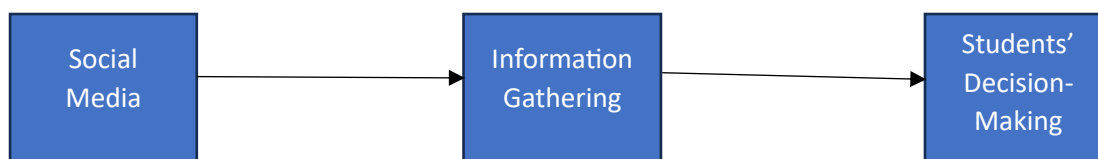
Social media platforms or networking sites play a crucial role in this context. Through platforms like Facebook and Twitter, various groups—including prospective and current students, alumni, staff, and faculty—gain awareness of the established reputation of higher education institutions (Foroudi, 2017). Having a social networking account allows institutions to simultaneously announce events and gather feedback (Seric, 2017). A key advantage of social networking sites is their ability to showcase multiple content columns at once, enabling users to access various sections related to their searches efficiently (Jan and Ammari, 2016). (Montag, 2015) highlighted that WhatsApp plays a leading role among communication applications. Based on the existed research Facebook pages enable visitors to quickly and easily exchange information by bookmarking, liking, or re-tweeting each other's profiles (Alexa, 2012)

### **3. Objectives of the study**

There are two objectives of this research:

- 1) To know the impact of Social Media platforms on Information gathering for Higher Education Institutions.
- 2) To know the impact of Information gathering on students' decision-making regarding selection of Higher Education Institutions.

### **4. Research Framework**



### **5. Hypothesis**

H1: Social media has significant impact on students' information gathering regarding Higher Education Institutions.

H2: Information gathering has significant impact on students' decision-making regarding selection of Higher Education Institutions.

### **6. Research Methodology**

#### **6.1 Research Design**

The research model of this study is based on the descriptive research design. To assess the validity of these hypotheses, data were collected from students across Uttarakhand. The research was based on three variables - Social Media, Information Gathering from different Social Media Platforms and Students' Decision-Making.

#### **6.2 Sample**

The study targeted students enrolled in various courses at Higher Education Institutions in Uttarakhand. Purposive Sampling has been used to collect data. Out of 300 students who received the electronic questionnaire, 200 provided valid responses. "The questionnaire utilized a Likert scale, with response options ranging from '1 – Strongly Disagree' to '5 –

Strongly Agree”. All items of the questionnaire taken from the existed literature – all items of social media adapted from Umesh, N. (2022), items of information gathering adapted from Rajkumar, S. (2020) and items of students’ decision- making adapted from Kunwar, J. (2017).

### 6.3 Data Analysis

“Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23.1 and SmartPLS version 4.1.0.3”. “In line with the SEM approach proposed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the analysis followed a two-step process comprising the measurement model and the structural model”. SmartPLS-SEM was utilized to assess both stages of the model.

“Table 2: Sample Characteristics

Classification	Frequency	Composition Ratio(%)
Gender		
Male	45%	90
Female	55%	110
Educational Qualification		
Intermediate	20	40
Graduation	50	100
Post-Graduation”	30	60

## 7. Results

Fitting measurement models

“The PLS-SEM method's model analysis approach has been employed to fit measurement models by assessing reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity”

### Reliability

“According to Hair et al. (2020), an outer loading of 0.60 is considered the minimum acceptable threshold”. Upon careful inspection one item of social media did not meet this criterion and has been removed (SM4= 0.596), three items of information gathering has been removed (IG1=0.572, IG2=0.558 and IG3=0.577) and one item of Decision-making has been removed (DM5= 0.557).

### Convergent Validity

“Convergent validity was evaluated through the SmartPLS approach by examining outer loadings, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR). As per Hair et al. (2020), convergent validity is confirmed when AVE values exceed 0.50, factor loadings are above 0.60, and CR values are greater than 0.70”. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.

“Table 3: “Outer loadings, reliability analysis and AVE”

Variables	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach’s Alpha	Combined reliability	AVE
Social Media	SM1	0.710	0.901	0.894	0.516
	SM2	0.687			
	SM3	0.635			
	SM5	0.705			
	SM6	0.778			

	SM7	0.751			
	SM8	0.793			
	SM9	0.845			
	SM10	0.726			
Information Gathering	IG4	0.612	0.823	0.869	0.506
	IG5	0.620			
	IG6	0.709			
	IG7	0.726			
	IG8	0.686			
	IG9	0.786			
	IG10	0.732			
Students' Decision-Making	DM1	0.617	0.865	0.915	0.546
	DM2	0.714			
	DM3	0.786			
	DM5	0.715			
	DM6	0.798			
	DM7	0.685			
	DM8	0.731			
	DM9"	0.683			

### Validity

“As recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values should remain below 0.90”. The outcomes of this analysis are detailed in Table 3.

Table 4: Discriminant validity test (HTMT results)

	DM	IG	SM
DM			
IG	0.841		
SM	0.345	0.242	

### Fitting structural research model

The study’s hypotheses were tested after the measurement models were established, followed by the evaluation of the structural (conceptual) model. To confirm a good model fit, R-squared values were examined.

### R Square

This criterion plays a key role in determining the adequacy of the study’s conceptual model. “Based on Cohen’s guideline, an R<sup>2</sup> value exceeding 0.26 (26%) is considered acceptable for explaining variance”. The findings from this assessment are shown in Table 4.

“Table 5: R square results

	R- square”
DM	0.518
IG	0.060

### Hypothesis Results

At this stage, the research hypothesis is evaluated using the t-values and p-values generated by the partial least squares (PLS) algorithm applied to the research data.

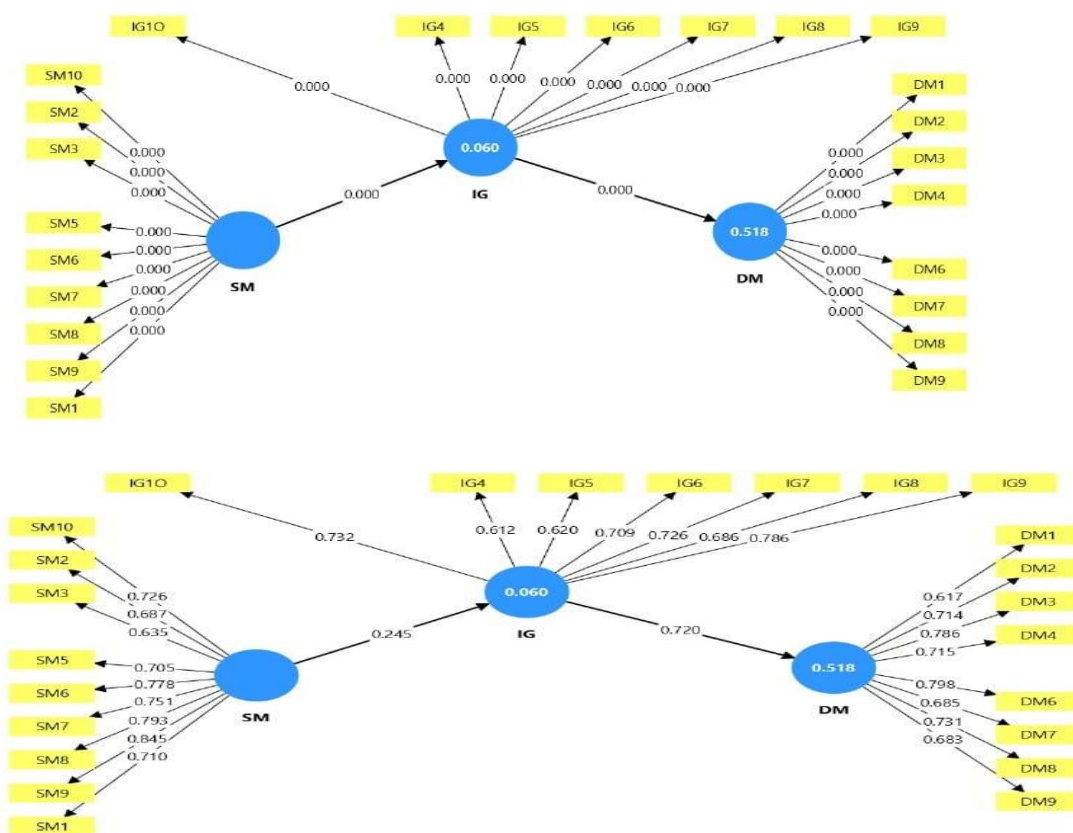


Table 6: Hypothesis result

Hypothesis	T-value	P-value	Results
IG->DM	16.450	0.000	Supported
SM->DM	3.441	0.001	Supported
SM->IG	3.758	0.000	Supported

### 8. Discussions

Social media currently plays a vital role in students’ lives, particularly in the university selection process, where many students heavily rely on it for information. The study found that information gathering is a key factor influencing students’ decisions when choosing higher education institutions, with a strong effect indicated by a beta value of (16.450) the result is line with the Rajkumar (2023). Furthermore, the findings support the hypothesis that social media has a significant impact on students’ decision-making in selecting a university, as shown by a beta value of (3.441). Additionally, the results indicate that social media significantly influences the information-gathering process related to university admissions, with a beta value of (3.758) results supported in line with the research work Dirin (2021). Although there is a notable relationship between social media and information gathering, the R Square value for this relationship is below 10%, suggesting that other sources—such as university websites, friends, and other channels—also play a considerable role in the information-gathering phase.

## 9. Conclusions

Social media has become a vital medium for facilitating communication between higher education institutions and prospective students. It allows universities to efficiently showcase their academic programs, share important announcements, and engage directly with potential candidates through interactive platforms. For students, social media serves as a convenient and accessible source of diverse information, including details about admission processes, campus facilities, academic offerings, and student life. The results of the study demonstrate that social media significantly and positively influences students by aiding their information-gathering efforts and shaping their decisions regarding the selection of higher education institutions.

## 10. Limitations and scope for Future research

This study presents several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the sample size is relatively small in comparison to the overall population, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, alternative sources of information beyond social media, which students may use during the selection of higher education institutions, should be clearly identified and analyzed. Future research could address these limitations by including a larger and more diverse sample, potentially covering additional states. Moreover, further studies could explore the impact of social media not only on university selection but also on students' course selection decisions.

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