

Review on the Impact of Social Media Marketing on Student Enrolment Decisions in Private Universities/Institutions

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ABSTRACT:

Over the past decade, social media have become integral to our daily lives. They have transformed how people live and become one of the important means of communication, entertainment, and social interaction. Students have significantly increased their usage and time spent on social media. Private Universities recognize the importance of social media and utilize it as a communication tool to attract prospective students and encourage enrollment in various programs. This article reviews the recent research on how social media marketing impacts student enrollment decisions. The objective is to identify effective tools in social media that impact students' enrollment decisions. Ultimately, the result shows that advertising, promotion, content marketing, and word-of-mouth are effective tools in social media to influence students' decisions in enrollment in private universities and provide recommendations for further studies.

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Student Enrolment Decisions, Private Universities/Institutions

1. Introduction

Marketing involves the exchange of value between customers and businesses and the management of profitable relationships with them. It is a crucial function in any industry for communication and building customer relationships (Aung et al., 2024). In today's digital age, social media plays a significant role in people's daily lives, profoundly influencing consumer decision-making. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become integral tools for information dissemination information, community building, and projecting institutional identities. Universities and institutions leverage social media for brand promotion and information dissemination, using marketing and advertising strategies to attract prospective students to their various programs.

Higher education and social media convergence have emerged as a defining characteristic in this dynamic landscape. Private universities and institutes increasingly recognize the strategic importance of integrating social media into their operational frameworks. These platforms have transcended their initial function as mere communication channels, evolving into indispensable tools for brand cultivation, stakeholder engagement, and student recruitment (Htet et al., 2023). Integrating social media within the higher education sector signifies not a fleeting trend but a significant paradigm shift, reshaping how institutions position themselves in a competitive market and influencing students' decisions regarding their academic pursuits.

Furthermore, the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated digital platforms for communication and education, introduces an additional layer of complexity. The increased internet usage during these periods underscores the urgent need to explore the intricate dynamics of social media's influence on enrolment decisions (Lawton et al., 2021). This research investigates the profound impact of social media marketing on students' enrolment decisions in private universities and institutes. The significance of this study lies in its capacity to bridge theoretical insights with practical implications. As these institutions adapt to societal changes, technological advancements, and

the evolving global education landscape, a nuanced analysis of how social media strategies influence student decisions becomes imperative.

2. Review of Literature

This paper examines the impact of social media marketing on student enrolment decisions within private universities/institutions in Myanmar. This study delves into the relationships between various forms of social media marketing and student enrolment decisions, providing a detailed analysis of which specific types of social media marketing exert the most significant influence on attracting prospective students. The research encompasses a range of social media marketing strategies, including advertising, promotion activities, content marketing, and word-of-mouth communication. By investigating these elements, the study aims to offer comprehensive insights into the effectiveness of different social media marketing approaches in shaping student enrolment patterns.

2.1 Social Media

Social media sites represent a recent innovation intended to foster communication and collaboration on a large scale. Since their invention, such sites have diffused so rapidly that the number of users is growing daily, and they have become an integral part of people's personal and professional lives (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Social media encompasses websites and various digital communication and information channels through which active consumers engage in specific behaviors. Social media is an online-based communication tool where users can communicate via the internet because many social media creators are interested in promoting products or services through social media, which others can easily access. Social media users have been used in various circles for direct communication, promotion, or other marketing activities. Marketing activities, especially promotions with social media, have entered the world of education, particularly private universities, as a marketing strategy tool for these colleges. (Adam & Gunarto, 2021) Social media refers to the digital platforms that facilitate creating, posting, and engaging content, connecting users, and advertising business content for promoting brand, sales and engaging customers. The most prominent social media platforms are Facebook, YouTube, X (Formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Viner, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Among them, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok are businesses' popular digital marketing channels used to create brand awareness, sales promotion, and customer engagement.

Facebook: Facebook was launched in 2004 and is owned by Meta Platform Inc. (Formerly Facebook, Inc.). It is a globally dominant social networking platform with over 3.05 billion. It enables users to connect with friends and family, post and share updates, follow public figures and businesses, join interest-based groups, and explore trading through Marketplace. Facebook caters to a diverse demographic, and geographic to provide digital space to social interaction and information sharing.

YouTube: YouTube was initiated in 2005 and is owned by Google LLC; it is the premier platform for video sharing and viewing with 2.49 billion monthly users. It offers various content, from personal vlogs to educational videos, music, and live streams. Users can subscribe to channels, engage with creators, and monetize their content through ads and memberships.

Instagram: Instagram created in 2010, has grown into a leading platform for photo and video sharing with 2 billion monthly active users. Instagram allows users to post photos and videos, stories, and Reels, and to engage with content through likes, comments, and direct messages.

TikTok: TikTok launched in 2016, has rapidly become a global sensation with over 1.22 billion monthly active users. The platform specializes in short-form video content, encouraging creativity and viral trends through its extensive library of effects, filters, and soundtracks.

X: X formerly known as Twitter, founded in 2006 is a microblogging platform known for its real-time communication and trending topics. With over 666 million monthly active users, it allows users to post and interact with short messages called "tweets", follow breaking news, and participate in public conversations.

Viber: Viber was established in 2010 and is a versatile messaging and VoIP platform with over 823 million monthly active users. It offers text messaging, high-quality voice and video calls, and multimedia sharing,

Telegram: Telegram was launched in 2013 and is a messaging app renowned for its privacy and security features, boasting over 800 million monthly active users. It provides cloud-based messaging file sharing and media distribution, supporting large group chats and broadcast channels.

Table1: Social Media Monthly Active Users and Percentage of Social Media Usage

No.	Social Media Platform	No. of Monthly Active User	Percentage of Social Media Usage Compared to Global Population	Percentage of Social Media Usage Compared to Internet User
1	Facebook	3.05 billion	37.74 %	57.00 %
2	YouTube	2.49 billion	30.81 %	46.54 %
3	Instagram	2 billion	24.75 %	37.38 %
4	TikTok	1.22 billion	15.09 %	22.80 %
5	LinkedIn	1 billion	12.37 %	18.69 %
6	Viber	823 million	10.18 %	15.38 %
7	Telegram	800 million	9.90 %	14.95 %
8	X	666 million	8.24 %	12.44 %

Source: DataReportal (Simon Kemp, 2024)

As per the above data, students' impressions and decisions about university admission are largely shaped by their interactions with social media (Verma & Jain, 2024). Facebook is the most dominant social media platform, boasting over one-third of the global population and more than half of internet users. Facebook is the most popular social media platform for personal and educational use (Šola & Zia, 2021). The use of targeted Facebook campaigns plays a significant role in this process. Other social media platforms are also influencing student's decisions on university admission.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

The changing marketing communication from traditional to digital using various social media platforms to communicate between universities and students in private universities/institutions can be cost-effective, real-time communication, engagement, and variety of information. Using social media can generate qualitative and quantitative benefits, the quantitative potential of prospective students can be effectively addressed through messages, comments, and reviews through social media, which continue to grow significantly, additionally, social media serves as a powerful tool for persuading students interested in pursuing in their studies (Grigoraş & Alexandru, 2022)

Social media marketing bridges the gap between brands (Universities) and their customer (Students), creating a more personalized and engaging communication channel (Adetunji, Rashid, & Ishak, 2018). Social media marketing constitutes a category within marketing communication, encompassing a spectrum of activities deployed through various social media platforms. It involves diverse communication strategies, including social media advertising, social media promotion, social media content marketing, and social media word-of-mouth.

Social media advertising is a critical component of digital marketing strategies for universities. It involves creating and disseminating brand-related content aimed at promoting the institution, enhancing brand awareness, and stimulating enrollment. Social media advertising is a type of digital advertising. It refers to spending money to deliver content to a target audience on your preferred social media platform (Newberry & McLachlan, 2022). This targeted approach ensures that advertisements reach prospective students who are most likely to be interested in the university's offerings. Social media has been an effective platform for disseminating advertisements (Bruhn, Schoenmueller, & Schafer, 2012). Social media advertising involves disseminating creative and entertaining brand-related information

by brand owners on social media platforms. Its primary objectives are to promote brands, enhance awareness, and stimulate brand purchases.

The cost-effectiveness of social media promotion makes it accessible to institutions of all sizes. (Yasa, Adnyani, & Rahmayanti, 2020) emphasizes that contemporary companies, including educational institutions, extensively embrace social media promotion due to its affordability, making it accessible to businesses of all sizes, ranging from large-scale corporations to small enterprises. Typically utilized social media promotions can manifest on various platforms, such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and Facebook (Jose, 2018) (Bellaaj, 2023). This is the social media platform commonly adopted by businesses in the education sector. Promotional campaigns on these platforms can highlight various aspects of the university, such as the academic programs, campus activities and events, and student achievements. These promotions raise awareness and create excitement and interest among prospective students. The ability to reach a large audience relatively cheaply makes social media promotion a valuable tool for private universities looking to increase enrollment.

Content marketing is a vital strategy within social media marketing that focuses on creating and distributing valuable content to attract and retain a target audience. According to (Smith & Zook, 2019), content marketing is content that contains information that will be of value to customers. Content marketing is the main tool for planning, creating, and distributing content (Bondarenko & Yashchenko, 2023). Content marketing is a tool or a set of techniques for all the different content formats available and strategies for creating them, depending on the resources available, the amount of content required, and the organization's goals. For universities/institutions, this can include information about academic programs, faculty expertise, research opportunities, and student facilities. Effective content marketing strategies can help universities showcase their strengths and unique offerings, thereby attracting prospective students who align with the institution's values and academic focus.

Social media applications have empowered customers to share their experiences with a larger audience than traditional methods. When individuals have utilized a product or service to share their own experiences through stories, comments, or recommendations, this form of promotion can profoundly influence the decisions of others (Alalwan et al., 2016). When current students or alumni share their positive experiences through stories, comments, or recommendations, it can profoundly influence the decisions of prospective students. Word-of-mouth on social media refers to a form of communication or marketing approach that encourages people to help spread viral messages or publicize brands on the internet (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). For universities/ institutions, enabling students and alumni to share their authentic experiences can create a trustworthy and reliable image of the institution, ultimately driving enrolment.

2.3 Student Enrollment Decision

Purchasing decisions are predicated on identifying and satisfying specific needs (Adam & Gunarto, 2021). When making a decision, it is imperative to delineate the steps and processes involved in gathering pertinent information related to that decision. According to Kotler and Keller, there are five indicators in the purchasing decision process (Adam & Gunarto, 2021), (1) Problem Recognition: Consumers identify a need or a problem influenced by internal desires or external stimuli, prompting the consideration of a purchase. (2) Information Search: students actively seek information about products or services that can meet their identified needs, demonstrating a heightened interest in gathering relevant details. (3) Alternative evaluation: Consumer compare various options, weighing the benefits and features of different products or services to determine which best fulfils their needs. (4) Purchasing Decision, after evaluating the alternatives, consumers decide, to choose the product or service that they believe will best satisfy their requirements. (5) Post-purchase behaviour: Following the purchase, consumers reflect on their decision and may feel satisfied with their choice or, conversely, may experience dissatisfaction or buyer's remorse if the product or service does not meet their expectations.

The process of selecting private universities/institutions involves these seven steps. The author's conceptualization explains the impact of social media on student enrolment decisions with each step.

1. **Problem Recognition:** Prospective students need to attend a different program and are triggered by an advertisement shown on social media pages or through the "Like" and "Comment" which are crucial tools to

make students recognize a need. If ads are popping up on students' new social media feeds, this is one point to trigger their study needs.

2. **Information Search:** Prospective students searching for university information can use social media platforms and ask their friends or word-of-mouth.
3. **Evaluation of alternatives:** Different advertisements, reviews, social media word-of-mouth, and blogs are excellent sources for obtaining valuable information.
4. **Purchase Decision:** Prospective students explore various alternatives and often consult social media Pages or read reviews on social media pages before making a final decision, such as choosing a private university/institution.
5. **Post-purchase Behavior:** After choosing the university, students express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their choices to meet expectations through posting, commenting, reviewing, social media word-of-mouth, and blogging to future prospective students.

2.4 Relationship between Social Media Marketing and Student Enrolment Decisions

Social media marketing has emerged as a pivotal factor in influencing student enrolment decisions at private universities/institutions. Over the past decade, the social media usage rate has been increasing surprisingly, and Facebook has dominated the social media market, the platform is now used by almost all organizations for marketing and communication purposes (Šola & Zia, 2021).

Social media platforms have been utilized by individuals from diverse backgrounds for purposes such as direct communication, promotion, and other marketing activities. In particular, marketing activities, especially those involving promotions via social media have permeated the realm of education. Private universities specifically, have adopted social media as a strategic marketing tool. Several promotion indicators can be identified through social media, namely: (1) Context: Make news a direct message to convey the intended content; (2) Communication: Share news to facilitate mutual understanding, responses, foster connections, ensure comfort, and effectively convey the message; (3) Collaboration: Work together to improve outcomes; and (4) Connection: Maintain and nurture established relationships (Verma & Jain, 2024).

Active participation in social media positively influences students' perceptions of colleges and universities, subsequently affecting their choices when applying to these institutions (Verma & Jain, 2024). Several research studies examine the relationship between social media marketing and student enrolment decisions, (Salih Alnaser et al., 2020) examined social media marketing and student enrolment decisions are strongly correlated in private universities.

3. Discussion

The convergence of social media and higher education marketing has significantly increased its influence on students' enrolment decisions. This study explores the multifaceted impact of social media marketing on students' decisions regarding private universities/institutions, focusing on broader implications for education marketing strategies.

Social Media Platforms are effective tools that universities to leverage to build brands, engage stakeholders, and attract prospective students. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok serving primary channels for disseminating information, promoting academic programs, and engaging stakeholders. The data indicates that Facebook has a vast user base with targeted advertising capabilities and the most influential platform, then followed by YouTube and Instagram.

Different social media marketing strategies including advertising, promotion activities, content marketing, and word-of-mouth communication. Social media advertising emerges as an influential tool in shaping students' enrollment decisions. Social media ads allow universities to reach prospective students who are more likely to be interested in their programs. Social media advertising is an effective tool for delivering tailored messages directly to a relevant audience, thus maximizing the impact of marketing efforts. Facebook, the most dominant platform with over one-third of the global population use, allows universities to create personalized ads that attract prospective students, thereby influencing their decision-making process.

Social media promotion is another potent tool identified in the literature. It makes them accessible to all sizes of institutions for cost-effectiveness. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are commonly used for promotional activities. They enable universities to highlight various aspects of their offering, such as academic programs, campus events, and student achievements. Social media promotion is an invaluable tool to reach a larger audience at a relatively low cost, interactive for real-time engagement with prospective students for increasing enrolment.

Content Marketing is a vital strategy within social media marketing that significantly influences student enrolment decisions. Effective content marketing strategies help universities show their strength and unique offerings, making them more attractive to prospective students. Content Marketing can include information about academic programs, faculties and expertise, research opportunities, and student facilities through building brand awareness and establishing the institution as a thought leader in the education industry. Universities can foster trust and credibility among prospective students to influence their enrolment decisions by consistently providing valuable content.

Social media word-of-mouth is another significant factor that influences student enrolment decisions. Social media platforms enable customers to share their experiences with a larger audience that influences the decisions of others and it is enhanced more authentic and trustworthy than traditional advertising. The opinions of their peers or alumni are more likely to be trusted by prospective students than official marketing messages, making word-of-mouth a crucial tool in social media marketing for private universities/institutions.

The combination of targeted advertising, promotion, valuable content, and authentic word-of-mouth creates a comprehensive marketing ecosystem that attracts and retains students. The integrated use of these tools enables private universities/institutions to engage with students at various stages of their decision-making process.

4. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the findings from this research align with the objective in the abstract, confirming that social media marketing is a critical factor in influencing student enrolment decisions in private universities. The comprehensive analysis of social media tools advertising, promotion, content marketing, and word-of-mouth shows their effectiveness in shaping prospective students' perceptions and choices.

Using social media platforms in private universities and institutions that are crucial to student enrolment. The shift from traditional to digital marketing communication has revolutionized how private universities engage with prospective students. Social media platforms offer a dynamic and interactive environment for universities to showcase their strengths, engage with students, and influence enrolment decisions.

These findings highlight the necessity to strategically integrate targeted advertising, cost-effective promotions, valuable content marketing, and powerful word-of-mouth, social media marketing has become an indispensable tool for private universities seeking to attract and enrol students in today's competitive educational landscape. The results of the study provide a solid foundation for future research into various methods and concepts to explore how social media marketing strategies influence student enrolment decisions in public and private universities.

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