

FROM CLICKS TO CLASSROOMS: THE ROLE OF INNOVATIVE SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES IN SHAPING HIGHER EDUCATION CHOICES

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ABSTRACT

In an era where students engage with universities through screens before ever visiting campus, social media has become more than a marketing tool and it is a space where perceptions, trust, and decisions are formed. This research investigates how innovative social media strategies influence both student engagement and the process of selecting higher education institutions. The study is based on a selected sample of 164 students from diverse programs, where Multiple Linear Regression (MLR) was applied to test whether interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback predict cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours. The results of this research revealed a significant positive relationship, with interactive content emerging as the strongest predictor of student engagement. Then, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to explore a more comprehensive framework, examining how trust, transparency, and content credibility mediate the connection between social media strategies and institutional choice. The SEM results showed good model fit (CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.058), confirming that these mediating factors play a crucial role in transforming social media interactions into concrete enrolment decisions. The findings emphasize the need for higher education institutions to communicate authentically, provide credible information, and create opportunities for students to contribute and see real feedback reflected online. The study contributes to the existing literature by integrating engagement theory with decision-making models, offering a dual-pathway approach that can guide universities in designing social media strategies that are not just visible but meaningful in shaping student perceptions, strengthening institutional trust, and thereby supporting informed educational choices.

Keywords

Social media strategies, student decision-making; student engagement, higher education choice

INTRODUCTION

Choosing a university has never been a simple decision, but in today's world, students are making these life-changing choices with a smartphone in hand. Scrolling through Instagram, watching campus reels, or joining virtual Q&A sessions on LinkedIn are no longer just casual activities but they have become essential to how young people discover, evaluate, and finally select higher education institutions (Chandra & Painuly, 2022). This shift is visible in urban centres such as Chennai, where digital penetration is high and prospective students actively consume social media content before making enrolment decisions (Rajkumar, Saranya, Joseph, & Sudhahar, 2022). Social media is no longer just a tool for sharing updates but it has become a marketing ecosystem. Institutions are experimenting with influencer-led campaigns, live sessions with faculty, interactive polls, and storytelling-driven content to engage students on an emotional level (Tuna, Cahyani, Lantana, & Lestari, 2024). Such strategies are not just cosmetic; they shape perceptions of credibility, transparency, and trust qualities that weigh heavily in a student's decision-making process (Balaji, 2025). In other words, every like, comment, and share is part of a larger digital conversation about where the next generation chooses to study.

In India, the stakes are particularly high. With one of the world's largest higher education systems and an increasingly competitive market, institutions are under pressure to differentiate themselves and attract digitally savvy learners (Aaradhi & Chakraborty, 2024). The post-pandemic surge in EdTech adoption has accelerated this trend, with students expecting not only strong academic programs but also a seamless, digitally enriched experience from their future campus (OECD, 2023). Social media has become a critical bridge by linking students' online lives with institutional offerings and values, thereby aligning with the global call for quality education (United Nations, 2021). There are research on how these innovative strategies actually shape decision-making in specific cultural contexts, such as Chennai, but it remains limited. Each city has its own socio-economic mix, education culture, and student aspirations that could impact how social media messages are received. This study addresses this gap by exploring which social media strategies have the strongest influence on higher education selection and how they affect students' trust, engagement, and emotional connection with institutions. This research aims to provide recommendations for universities and policymakers by examining this digital decision-making journey, from the first click on a social post to the moment of enrolment. The findings contribute to the understanding of how digital engagement and marketing innovation support institutional growth and offer equitable access to quality education and the development of digitally literate, future-ready graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing integration of digital technologies into higher education has transformed how students engage with institutions, access information, and make enrolment decisions. Social media has emerged as a platform for fostering academic engagement, promoting interaction, and shaping perceptions of institutional reputation. Existing research highlights the potential of social media to enhance cognitive engagement, knowledge sharing, and collaborative learning (Gupta, 2018; Bhat & Gupta, 2019). At the same time, scholars have emphasized its

role as a powerful digital marketing tool, capable of influencing students' attitudes, trust, and ultimately their selection of higher education institutions (Balaji, 2025; Gaur et al., 2024).

Despite these insights, gaps remain in understanding how specific social media strategies such as interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback interact with mediating factors like trust, transparency, and credibility to influence student decision-making. This literature review synthesizes prior studies on three core themes: (1) social media and student engagement, (2) digital marketing, brand trust, and decision-making in higher education, and (3) trust, transparency, and credibility in digital communication. These provide the conceptual foundation for examining how innovative social media strategies can move beyond mere clicks to meaningfully guide students toward informed enrolment choices.

Social Media and Student Engagement in Higher Education

The integration of social media into higher education has increasingly been recognized as a tool to enhance student engagement. Student engagement is a multidimensional construct, including cognitive engagement, emotional, and behavioural engagement. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram offer unique connect for communication, collaboration, and knowledge sharing that can influence these dimensions of engagement. Gupta (2018) investigated the impact of social media on students and the study highlighted social media as a medium for academic discussions and collaborative learning. Students in the experimental group participated in discussions via Facebook and Twitter, sharing resources, commenting on peers' contributions, and engaging in topic-related debates. The results indicated measurable increases in both engagement and academic performance compared to a control group that followed traditional classroom methods. This study highlights social media's role in fostering active participation and intellectual interaction, thereby strengthening cognitive engagement. Similarly, Bhat & Gupta (2019) explored how social media usage impacts different dimensions of engagement. Their findings revealed that social media positively influenced cognitive engagement, which in turn enhanced academic performance. However, the study noted that emotional and behavioural engagement did not significantly mediate this relationship. This suggests that while social media may be particularly effective for knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and discussion, its impact on emotional attachment to learning or consistent behavioural participation may be limited. Hence, these studies suggest that the primary value of social media in higher education lies in its capacity to facilitate cognitive processes including the sharing of information, collaborative learning, and intellectual interaction. Social media enables students to engage with content beyond the physical classroom, promotes peer-to-peer learning, and supports collaborative problem-solving activities. However, educators must consider its limitations and design interventions carefully, ensuring that social media use complements pedagogical objectives rather than serving as a distraction.

Digital Marketing, Brand Trust, and Decision-Making in Higher Education

In addition to fostering engagement, social media and digital marketing play a pivotal role in shaping student perceptions and decision-making regarding higher education institutions (HEIs). Digital marketing strategies, particularly when executed via social media, influence how students perceive the credibility, relevance, and attractiveness of institutions, ultimately affecting enrolment decisions. Balaji (2025) conducted a study to examine the impact of digital marketing on online engagement. The study applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

to understand the psychological drivers behind students' interaction with institutional digital content. The findings indicated that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control were significant determinants of students' intention to engage with digital marketing content. Also, trust in online and digital information emerged as a mediator, emphasizing the importance of credibility and transparency. This suggests that HEIs seeking to influence student choices must prioritize creating trustworthy, reliable, and authentic content on social media platforms. Misleading or opaque digital marketing may not only fail to engage prospective students but could actively damage institutional reputation. Further, Gaur, Purankar, & Srivastava (2024) examined social media marketing practices of HEIs and their effect on student psychology and decision-making. Their research identified three critical predictors of student choice: social media engagement, content contribution, and stakeholder review. Social Media Engagement refers to interactive communication between students and institutions, such as commenting on posts or participating in polls. Content contribution emphasizes the participatory role of students, allowing them to create, share, or respond to institutional content. Stakeholder Review encompasses the visibility of feedback, ratings, or testimonials from peers and alumni. The study highlights that merely maintaining a social media presence is insufficient; institutions must actively design content strategies that encourage interaction, participation, and transparency to influence student decision-making effectively.

Trust, Transparency, and Credibility in the Digital Environment

In the digital age, trust and credibility have become central to how students interpret information from higher education institutions (HEIs) and make decisions based on it. Digital communication channels such as social media, institutional websites, email campaigns, and online advertising are often the first point of contact between prospective students and institutions. As such, the perceived authenticity, transparency, and responsiveness of these communications can significantly influence engagement, decision-making, and overall institutional reputation. A report from Campus Technology (2023) emphasized that trust in higher education institutions has generally increased. However, students and their families now expect institutions to actively listen, communicate transparently, and implement feedback loops. The effective feedback loops include responding to student inquiries, showcasing authentic student experiences, and highlighting real voices in marketing campaigns. These practices signal that the institution values input from its community and fosters a participatory and trustworthy environment, which can enhance both engagement and loyalty. Similarly, Huebner (2019) reviewed literature on digital advertising in the marketing mix for higher education and found that as digital advertisement expenditures grow, universities that emphasize authenticity and credibility in their advertising campaigns perform better in terms of student recruitment and perceived institutional value. This demonstrates that beyond the reach or frequency of digital marketing efforts, the quality and trustworthiness of content are crucial determinants of effectiveness. Students are responding more favourably to messages that reflect honesty, transparency, and a clear alignment between institutional promises and actual practices. Trust and credibility are not just supplementary aspects of digital communication but they are core drivers of engagement and decision-making in higher education. Institutions that cultivate transparency, actively incorporate student feedback, and

prioritize authentic messaging are more likely to succeed in attracting and retaining students, enhancing their reputation, and fostering meaningful online interactions.

Gaps in Existing Research

Although numerous studies highlight the positive impact of social media and digital marketing on student engagement, knowledge sharing, and decision-making in higher education, several research gaps remain. One prominent concern is the potential problems of social media use. Studies have noted risks such as distraction, poor time management, negative mental health outcomes, and superficial engagement. Also, students may engage in online discussions through likes, shares, or comments without deeply processing the content or critically interacting with peers, limiting the cognitive and emotional benefits of social media integration. These concerns are significant when social media use is unstructured or when students act primarily as passive consumers rather than active contributors to academic discourse.

Another limitation is methodological. Much of the existing research is cross-sectional, which restricts the ability to make causal inferences about the effects of social media or digital marketing interventions on engagement and decision-making. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess long-term impacts and understand how sustained interaction with digital platforms affects learning outcomes, brand trust, and institutional choice over time. Furthermore, there is a lack of comparative research on specific digital strategies. The relative effectiveness of influencer content, immersive storytelling, stakeholder feedback, or interactive campaigns has not been systematically examined, particularly across different cultural or regional contexts, such as Chennai or other parts of India. Understanding these nuances is essential because student responses to social media content may vary depending on cultural expectations, norms, and digital habits. Additionally, research has largely ignored the role of moderating factors that could shape the effectiveness of digital engagement and marketing efforts. Variables such as perceived institutional transparency, emotional connection, and digital literacy are likely to influence how students interpret, trust, and act upon online content, yet few studies explicitly incorporate these dimensions. Addressing these gaps would allow for a more holistic understanding of how social media and digital marketing can be strategically employed to enhance engagement and decision-making in higher education. While the literature demonstrates promising benefits of social media and digital marketing, structured interventions, longitudinal designs, comparative strategy analysis, and attention to moderating factors are needed to provide a more nuanced and actionable understanding of their impact.

To bridge this gap, the present study formulates research questions that examine both the direct impact of innovative social media strategies on student engagement and the indirect pathways that lead to institutional choice. These questions are designed to guide the empirical investigation and support the development of a conceptual framework that links engagement theory with decision-making models.

1. How do innovative social media strategies such as interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback influence students' cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours?
2. To what extent do trust, transparency, and content credibility mediate the relationship between social media strategies and students' institutional choice?
3. Which social media strategy is the most influential in shaping students' perceptions and decision-making?

4. How do students perceive the authenticity and reliability of higher education institutions' social media content, and how does this perception affect their willingness to apply or enrol?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of innovative social media strategies on student engagement, knowledge sharing, and decision-making in higher education.
2. To evaluate the role of trust, transparency, and content credibility in mediating the relationship between social media marketing and student enrolment decisions.

The following research hypotheses were framed

H₁: Innovative social media strategies have a positive effect on students' cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviors in higher education.

H₂: Trust, transparency, and perceived credibility of institutional social media content significantly mediate the relationship between digital marketing strategies and students' decisions to choose an institution.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to model the full conceptual framework with multiple predictors, mediators, and outcome variables simultaneously, confirming direct and indirect effects. Reliability Testing (Cronbach's Alpha) was used to ensure internal consistency of multi-item scales for trust, transparency, credibility, and decision-making.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on descriptive research design to examine how innovative social media strategies shape student engagement and institutional decision-making. The population consists of higher education students, particularly final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students from multiple programs. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure representation across different demographic and academic subgroups. Students were first stratified by program type such as undergraduate vs. postgraduate and academic discipline such as arts, science, commerce, after which participants were randomly selected from each stratum in proportion to their representation in the population. A total of 164 valid responses were collected, meeting the sample adequacy requirements for Multiple Linear Regression and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The conceptual framework considered Social Media Strategies (SMS) as the independent latent construct, measured through three dimensions such as interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback. Trust, transparency, and content credibility are the mediating variables, while student institutional choice was considered as the dependent variable. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with measurement scales adapted from prior research (Gupta, 2018; Bhat & Gupta, 2019; Balaji, 2025; Gaur et al., 2024). Social Media Strategies were measured using 12 items including four per dimension, while trust, transparency, and credibility were measured with nine items combined, and student institutional choice with five items. All items used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Respondents were informed of the study's purpose, the confidentiality of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time. This research doesn't include any of the personally identifiable information to ensure anonymity. Data analysis followed a multi-step approach, where initial screening involved

checking for missing data, outliers, and normality, followed by reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable). Multiple Linear Regression was used to test whether interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback significantly predict cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours, thereby addressing Objective 1. To address Objective 2, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was performed to examine the direct and indirect effects of Social Media Strategies on student institutional choice with trust, transparency, and credibility as mediators. The model fit was assessed using recommended indices ($\chi^2/df \leq 3$, $CFI \geq 0.90$, $RMSEA \leq 0.08$, $SRMR \leq 0.08$), and mediation effects were tested through bootstrapping. Ethical considerations were strictly followed. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data were stored securely and used exclusively for academic purposes.

ANALYSIS

The first objective aligns with the sections on student engagement (Gupta, 2018; Bhat & Gupta, 2019) and emphasizes understanding how cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement are influenced by social media strategies. Multiple Linear Regression was used to test whether social media strategies significantly predict cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours. The dependent variable was cognitive engagement & knowledge-sharing behaviour and the independent variables such as interactive content (IC), immersive storytelling (IS), stakeholder feedback (SF)

Regression Equation

$$\text{Cognitive Engagement} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{IC} + \beta_2\text{IS} + \beta_3\text{SF} + \epsilon$$

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.02	0.21	—	4.86	0.000
Interactive Content (IC)	0.35	0.08	0.31	4.38	0.000
Immersive Storytelling (IS)	0.28	0.07	0.25	4.00	0.000
Stakeholder Feedback (SF)	0.22	0.06	0.19	3.67	0.000

Model Summary

- $R^2 = 0.48$ (48% of variance in cognitive engagement explained)
- $F(3,160) = 46.2$, $p < 0.001$

All three social media strategies significantly predict cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing. Interactive content has the strongest impact ($\beta = 0.31$), followed by immersive storytelling ($\beta = 0.25$) and stakeholder feedback ($\beta = 0.19$). The results of the study indicate that innovative social media strategies significantly influence student engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours in higher education. Multiple linear regression analysis revealed that interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback are all

significant predictors of cognitive engagement. Among these, interactive content emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that activities such as polls, quizzes, and discussion prompts effectively stimulate active participation and deeper processing of academic material. Immersive storytelling also showed a substantial impact, highlighting the role of narrative-driven content, such as alumni experiences or campus stories, in fostering both cognitive and emotional engagement. Stakeholder feedback, while slightly weaker, remained significant, underscoring the value of peer and alumni contributions in shaping students' learning interactions. Collectively, these variables explained 48% of the variance in cognitive engagement, indicating that social media strategies are a critical but not exclusive determinant of engagement, aligning with prior findings by Gupta (2018) and Bhat & Gupta (2019) on the cognitive benefits of digital learning interactions. These results suggest that higher education institutions should prioritize interactive and participatory content while complementing it with storytelling and peer feedback to enhance knowledge sharing and engagement.

The second objective reflects insights from Balaji (2025), Gaur et al. (2024), Campus Technology (2023), and Huebner (2019), highlighting that brand trust and authentic communication are crucial for influencing student choice.

Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Testing

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Trust	5	0.87
Transparency	4	0.84
Credibility	5	0.89
Institutional Choice	6	0.91

All scales show good internal consistency ($\alpha > 0.8$), indicating reliable measurement of constructs. Then, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the complex relationships between social media marketing strategies and student enrolment decisions, with a focus on the mediating roles of trust, transparency, and content credibility. Unlike traditional regression analysis, SEM allows for the simultaneous assessment of multiple predictors, mediators, and outcome variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of both direct and indirect effects. In the context of higher education, SEM is useful for testing conceptual frameworks where digital marketing strategies may influence institutional choice not only directly but also through perceptual factors such as trust in the institution, transparency in communication, and credibility of content. SEM enables the study to capture the nuanced pathways through which social media strategies shape students' decision-making by modelling these relationships simultaneously, thus directly addressing the research objective. The model includes Social Media Strategies (SMS) as the independent variable, conceptualized as a latent construct composed of interactive content (IC), immersive storytelling (IS), and stakeholder feedback (SF). The model also incorporates trust, transparency, and credibility as mediating variables, while the dependent variable is student institutional choice.

SEM Fit Indices:

- $\chi^2/df = 1.98$ (<3 acceptable)
- CFI = 0.95 (>0.90 good fit)
- TLI = 0.94 (>0.90 good fit)
- RMSEA = 0.058 (<0.06 good fit)

Path Coefficients (Standardized β):

Path	β	p
SMS $\rightarrow$ Trust	0.42	0.000
SMS $\rightarrow$ Transparency	0.35	0.001
SMS $\rightarrow$ Credibility	0.38	0.000
Trust $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice	0.31	0.002
Transparency $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice	0.29	0.003
Credibility $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice	0.33	0.001
SMS $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice (Direct)	0.18	0.045

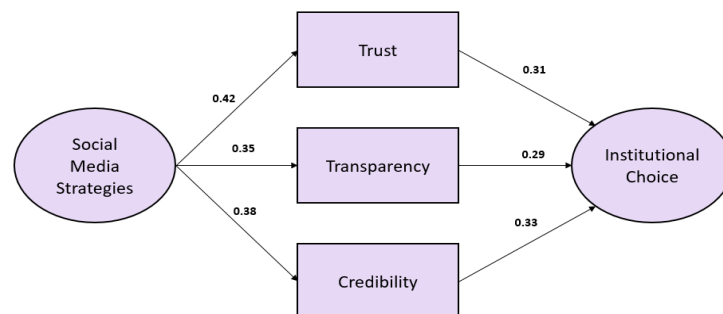


Figure 1 - SEM Diagram

Indirect Effects:

- SMS $\rightarrow$ Trust $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice: $\beta = 0.13$
- SMS $\rightarrow$ Transparency $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice: $\beta = 0.10$
- SMS $\rightarrow$ Credibility $\rightarrow$ Institutional Choice: $\beta = 0.13$

In examining the influence of social media strategies on student institutional choice, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) revealed that these strategies affect decisions both directly and indirectly through trust, transparency, and credibility. The measurement scales for trust, transparency, credibility, and institutional choice demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.84), ensuring the reliability of the constructs. SEM results indicated that social media strategies had a moderate direct effect on institutional choice, while indirect effects through trust, transparency, and credibility were significant, confirming partial mediation. Trust was particularly influential, suggesting that students are more likely to select institutions they perceive as honest and attentive to student concerns, consistent with the observations of Campus Technology (2023) and Balaji (2025). Transparency and credibility similarly mediated the relationship, highlighting that clear communication and authentic, accurate content enhance the persuasive impact of digital marketing, supporting Huebner (2019). Fit indices (CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.058) confirmed that the model

adequately represented the relationships among social media strategies, mediating factors, and institutional choice. Social media strategies significantly influence student institutional choice both directly and indirectly through trust, transparency, and credibility. Trust, transparency, and credibility act as partial mediators, confirming the role of brand trust and authentic content in decision-making.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of innovative social media strategies in shaping student engagement and decision-making in higher education. The analysis demonstrated that interactive content, immersive storytelling, and stakeholder feedback are all significant predictors of cognitive engagement and knowledge-sharing behaviours. These results confirm Hypothesis 1, indicating that social media strategies directly contribute to enhancing students' intellectual involvement and collaborative learning experiences. The prominence of interactive content as the strongest predictor aligns with the findings of Gupta (2018), who emphasized that social media discussions and participatory activities facilitate active engagement. Similarly, the effect of immersive storytelling supports the idea that narrative-driven content fosters emotional and cognitive connection with the institution, echoing prior observations that emotionally resonant content enhances learning engagement. Stakeholder feedback, though slightly less influential, underscores the importance of peer and alumni contributions in reinforcing knowledge sharing, consistent with Gaur et al. (2024), who highlighted the role of social proof and visible peer input in influencing student perception. Collectively, these findings suggest that social media strategies must be thoughtfully designed to encourage active participation, rather than allowing students to remain passive consumers of content, addressing concerns noted in the literature regarding superficial engagement or distraction (Innovare Academics Journals, 2IJISRT).

In examining the mediating role of trust, transparency, and credibility, the study confirms Hypothesis 2, showing that these factors significantly mediate the relationship between social media strategies and students' institutional choices. SEM results revealed that while social media strategies have a direct effect on decision-making, much of their impact is transmitted indirectly through perceptions of trust, transparency, and credibility. Trust emerged as a particularly strong mediator, reflecting that students are more likely to act on information from institutions they perceive as honest and responsive, in line with Campus Technology (2023) and Balaji (2025). Transparency and credibility also significantly influenced decision-making, emphasizing that clear communication, accurate content, and authentic representation of student voices enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing. These results align with Huebner (2019), who noted that universities emphasizing authenticity and credibility in digital campaigns experience stronger recruitment outcomes. The findings underscore that social media strategies alone are insufficient; their influence is maximized when institutions actively cultivate brand trust and perceived integrity in their communications.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend the literature on social media in higher education by demonstrating the dual pathway through which digital strategies influence outcomes. On one hand, social media enhances cognitive and knowledge-sharing engagement,

supporting learning-related objectives. On the other hand, it shapes decision-making and brand perception, mediated by trust and credibility, thereby linking engagement with strategic institutional goals such as recruitment and retention. This integrated perspective highlights the need for higher education research to move beyond simple measures of social media usage and focus on strategic content design, participatory mechanisms, and trust-building practices. The study offers several suggestions for higher education institutions. First, institutions should prioritize interactive, immersive, and participatory social media content to foster engagement, collaboration, and meaningful learning experiences. Second, building trust, transparency, and credibility must be central to digital marketing strategies includes actively responding to student queries, showcasing authentic student and alumni voices, and ensuring accurate and consistent communication. Finally, institutions should recognize that engagement and decision-making are intertwined: strategies that enhance cognitive engagement also reinforce perceptions of credibility and trust, creating a positive feedback loop that supports both academic and enrolment outcomes.

The study highlights areas for further research. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the sustained impact of social media strategies on engagement and decision-making over time. Comparative research across different cultural and regional contexts would provide more nuanced understanding of how students respond to content, storytelling, and peer feedback. Also, future studies could explore moderating variables such as digital literacy, prior institutional familiarity, or emotional connection, which may influence how students interpret social media content and make enrolment decisions. Addressing these gaps will help institutions develop more precise, culturally aware, and effective social media strategies. Hence, this study confirms that innovative social media strategies are a powerful tool in higher education, capable of enhancing student engagement while simultaneously shaping institutional choice. The results demonstrate that the effectiveness of these strategies depends not only on content design but also on cultivating trust, transparency, and credibility, highlighting the importance of an integrated approach that aligns learning engagement with strategic institutional objectives. These findings contribute both to theory and practice, offering a framework for HEIs to leverage social media as a purposeful and outcome-driven platform.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that innovative social media strategies are increasingly central to how students engage with and make decisions about higher education. Through creative, interactive, and personalized content, universities are able to foster meaningful engagement, facilitate knowledge sharing, and provide students with the information they need to make well-informed choices about their educational paths. Social media platforms have emerged as dynamic spaces where students can explore programs, connect with peers and faculty, and gain a deeper understanding of institutional values and offerings. The findings also emphasize the critical role of trust, transparency, and content credibility in shaping student perceptions and enrolment decisions. Prospective students are more likely to engage with institutions that present authentic and reliable information, and they respond positively when social media communications reflect honesty, openness, and institutional integrity. In this sense, trust and credibility act as essential mediators, bridging the gap between marketing efforts and actual student decisions.

Institutions that prioritize these values in their digital strategies are better able to establish a sense of connection, confidence, and reassurance among prospective students.

Also, this research highlights that social media should not be seen merely as a marketing tool but as a strategic platform for relationship-building and long-term engagement. The universities can create experiences that are both informative and emotionally resonant by integrating innovative content, ethical communication, and data-driven approaches. Such strategies not only influence enrolment decisions but also contribute to shaping the broader perception of the institution's brand and its commitment to student success. The combination of creativity, engagement, credibility, and transparency in social media initiatives offers higher education institutions a unique opportunity to connect with prospective students in meaningful ways. As digital platforms continue to play a pivotal role in student experiences, universities that thoughtfully leverage innovative social media strategies will be well-positioned to attract, inform, and inspire the next generation of learners, shaping not only enrolment patterns but also the future of higher education communication and engagement. The study suggests that when social media is used strategically and meaningfully, it becomes more than a marketing channel and it becomes a bridge between clicks and classrooms, guiding students toward informed and confident decisions about their educational future.

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