

# Role of Online Marketing in University Admissions: Indian Students' Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Universities all over the world are familiar with the use of digital marketing as a strategic tool in their marketing campaigns. An imperative issue for research is to comprehend how digital marketing influences potential students and what its role is in the decision making process of selecting a course of study or a university. The core aim of this study is to review the extent to which private universities in the national capital region (NCR) explore social networking sites by way of innovative marketing and promotion communications tool, and the extent to which they leverage through this medium to engage with the students. The research is based on the primary data collected through circulation of questionnaires among students in NCR in the study area, to test the exploratory factor analysis; responses have been analysed. A self-administered questionnaire was outlined, knowing students' perception about the factors impelling effectiveness of digital marketing on university admissions. The results reveal that efficiency of digital marketing hinges on influencing factors like students' videos on the web page, hashtags, reviews of alumni, event page, mobile marketing, virtual tour, blogs, use of Pinterest and WhatsApp. The study proposes findings that can be used by private universities in order to manage their admissions and also contributes to the literature of digital marketing, by proposing an advanced methodology in addressing student's admission by analysing mutually exclusive indicators pertaining to current and future opportunities for the organisation.

**Keywords:** Digital Environment University Admissions, Promotion Effect, Questionnaire Data

## INTRODUCTION

During the last few years, businesses have been revolutionised with digital technologies, especially the Internet, coming into play. Chief business decisions, such as customer relationship management, brand management, product development, profitability, buying and selling, and communication have observed the distinguished effect and application of digital technologies (Hudson, Roth & Madden, 2012). A marketing practice goes digital if it rests upon a digital platform for operation (Yasmin, Tasneem & Fatema, 2015).

The technological upheaval in the last two decades has altered communication in present-day higher education settings. In this era of digitalisation, technology has been wielding pressure on businesses to acclimate their practice into new and diverse mechanisms that

the world is presently demanding. Since everyone is inadvertently immersed in the digital era, digital marketing has become a vital tool to help compete in the market. Digital communication aims at creating a direct relationship between the marketer and the clients using digital broadcast technology (Bird, 2007). Digital marketing has elongated the boundaries of education too. Deciding on an educational institution by a potential student is a significant decision. It requires substantial amount of time and financial resources. More importantly, the selection of an educational institute directly influences the career choice of the student. Digital knowledge, especially the Internet, has transformed every aspect of business. Vital business decisions, such as product development, brand management, cost-effectiveness, customer relationship management, communication, and buying and selling have felt the remarkable effect and use of digital knowledge. Search ads and digital displays influence

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offline and online purchasing for a vendor; digital ads are comparatively more effective than offline advertisements in motivating online behaviour (Dinner, Van Heerde & Neslin, 2013).

## EVOLUTION OF DIGITAL MARKETING

Michael Porter has said, “The vital question is not whether to set up Digital Technology - companies are left with no choice if they desire to stay competitive - but how to deploy it”. Digital marketing is described as managing and implementing marketing using electronic media, for instance, the Web, interactive TV, email, and wireless media, in concurrence with digital data of consumers’ characteristics and conducts. The conception of digital marketing was foremost used in the 1990s, though at that time, it was mostly about advertising to customers. This method of online advertising began in 1998 (Fain & Pedersen, 2006). Swiftly, it became the dominant business model of the key search engines (Jansen & Mullen, 2008). It is the most promptly growing segment of online marketing space. Nonetheless, between 2000 and 2010, with the emergence of innovative social and mobile tools, the concept was extended. It was transmuted from an advertising-oriented tool for users to a notion of crafting and engaging an experience that involves them (Brosan, 2012).

In recent times, social network sites have advanced exponentially in popularity, especially among young adults. Numerous organisations, including educational institutes, have realised the growth of social network sites as an opportunity to advertise themselves on this new platform. The role of the Internet in communicating educational opportunities has two advantages: Internet usage by students to enable information hunting and decision making; and e-business implementation and execution by educational institutions. The findings of the research show that potential overseas students certainly use the Internet (Gomes & Murphy, 2003). Educational institutions should promptly establish processes for answering online queries and alter their web sites to attract overseas students. Since the era of finding out the day’s events in the morning newspaper, to immediate gratification with apprisees from social media, people’s opinion is formed by a technology-

centered bubble, whose access is restricted to a digital platform. The digital upheaval has changed the way customers perceive business stratagems (Ghotbifar, Marjani & Ramazani, 2017).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital marketing is growing swiftly. In the digital age, education has endured numerous changes. Digital platforms have eased the system such that students can have access to academic information. Digital marketing and its mechanisms have been evolving in the education sector to further develop the business practices. Hence, institutions are stimulated to encourage these mechanisms and implement them in their business structures. The use of online strategies is an ideal channel to entice students. Digital marketing has become a crucial tool to proactively outshine the competition. Marketing was formerly a word that could be used merely in the most silent tones in academia, and in earlier times, thoughts about marketing and advertising of educational institutes very so often gained inadequate support (Edmiston-Strasser, 2009). Through the growing popularity of social networking sites, several business organisations have started capitalising money and time in fabricating, purchasing, and marketing on social network sites. Nonetheless, there is slight evidence on the efficacy of advertising on social network sites, though there are a number of evaluations on social network sites, mostly focused on social issues. Relatively, there is less evidence on research on the marketing and promotion aspects of social network sites (Kelly, Kerr & Drennan, 2010; Cha, 2009). Educational institutions have also been making use of endorsements from their alumni and present students, faculties, and employers in their marketing communications. In order to reduce the level of seeming risks in selecting the institution, prospective students may count more on word of mouth, rather than advertising, in taking their final decision (Pampaloni, 2010). Concerns were raised regarding unreliable feedback from social networking promotion and the struggle in measuring results. With the relatively modern application of technology, academic staff have slight guidance, information, and statistics on effective and influential online marketing, advertising, and recruiting strategies (Merrill, 2011). A majority

of universities have limited access on social networks like Facebook and Twitter; the reason for this is lack of innovative applications. Factors like university reputation and ranking, and availability of social and cultural facilities play an important role in the choice of an institute of higher education among students. Only having presence on social media platforms is not enough for higher education marketing; it needs to be part of a promotional mix and accordingly, marketing strategies need to be developed. There are some challenges of using social media platforms. Openness is a disadvantage for organisations trying to keep things hidden from public scrutiny (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012). There is likely growth and significance in using digital marketing directed at millennials, but the marketing strategies must be professed positively by this online generation. Social media offers companies ease of access to entities, and also facilitates the big firms which validate and run colleges, universities, or educational institutions. These institutes favour social media platforms to influence students, particularly international students (Habes et al., 2019).

There are digital marketing approaches that are significantly more effective in grasping the attention of millennials, inspiring repeat visits to a website and reassuring millennials to post online reviews (Smith, 2012). Search engine optimisation generates a meaningful result in international education, while increasing viewer traffic. As the key words are identical among entire webpages in this area, it is essential for companies to work with marketing departments to create specific key words that can appeal to more users from their broad viewers (Satish & Sunil, 2012). Ninety universities in Asia, Africa, and Europe were covered to find out usage of social networking for education enrolling and marketing. Outcomes showed that higher education institutions in certain geographical parts do use it, but findings vary. The results focus on universities integrating the use of social media into their marketing and promotion programmes so as to reach their projected audiences, and offer an effective and inspired education experience to students (Kuzma & Wright, 2013). Use of social platforms such as Facebook is increasing rapidly in higher education system. From the research, it is inferred that frequency of using Facebook is higher than the MOODLE platform. Students find learning through Facebook entertaining, interactive, and easy compared

to MOODLE. Closed groups are more popular among students than the MOODLE platform. Social network gives an opportunity to spread media production such as videos, newspapers, magazines, and photos or articles (Osepashvili, 2014). The relevance of content, convenience, and credibility play a pivotal role in decision making. The findings indicate that academic institutes need to furnish strong credible support and statistics on important aspects like placement records and alumni data, which are prominent parameters while selecting an institute. Institutes should also avoid providing fake, ambiguous, outdated, incomplete, and biased content. 'Reference group' influence plays a crucial role and is one of the deciding factors. Hence, testimonials of alumni, existing students, as well as industry experts, need to be the focus. Another attribute that emerged in the study was convenience, where the required data is easily available and the website provides various other platforms for the consumers to engage, review, and ask questions (Dhote, Jog, Gavade & Shrivastava, 2015). To recognise factors of social media marketing influencing brand loyalty with respect to university going students, the data collected from students of five diverse private universities situated in Dhaka was analysed by using multiple regression analysis method. The result specifies that when the contents of social media marketing are related to the brand, it has the maximum influence on the brand loyalty of students. Additionally, valuable and current contents in social media marketing also impact the students' brand loyalty. Thus, it is a challenge for marketers to brand highly engaging content that is likely to attract students' attention (Hossain & Sakib, 2016).

There is great competition among educational institutions, which incited many universities to make use of contemporary communication techniques to reach students (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). Here, the students interact and network for educational discussions through the Internet, which has made it possible for scientific processes to work closely with modern knowhow and technology. Similarly, education has become modern and flexible as opposed to the traditional educational approaches and methodologies (Namaziandost & Nasri, 2019).

Developing processes by using knowledge for consumers can benefit firms enhancing their service

quality and consumer satisfaction (Tseng, 2016). In the study to examine the challenges and difficulties faced by e-commerce trade in India, the results focus on the e-commerce industry to support the building of infrastructures, increasing Internet connectivity, and increasing awareness among the people on digital marketing and e-commerce transactions (Vyas & Gupta, 2017). Consumer knowledge from social media is considered an imperative organisational asset. In a research conducted on how to transform huge social media data into beneficial consumer knowledge, the findings of the paper indicated how the knowledge from consumers and knowledge about consumers can be used to help companies in fostering knowledge for consumers (He, Zhang, Tian, Tao & Akula, 2019).

## RESEARCH GAP AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

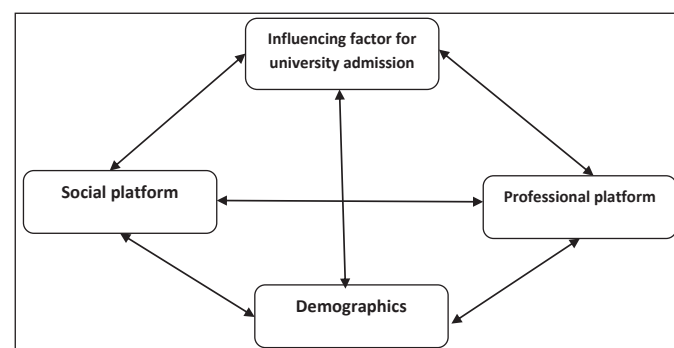
The outcomes of the above studies offer a useful indication of social media implementation as a part of digital marketing, but then most of the studies provide ambiguous results. They lack a comprehensive perspective. It can be interpreted from the above studies that the latest technological progresses continue to press educational institutions to discover new ways to communicate and attract prospective students. Since traditional media and marketing campaigns are expensive and have limited reach, many universities have recognised the potential of social media and have capitalised on them to promote their programmes to attract prospective students. Many studies have been conducted in the field of digital marketing in India. However, so much is still unknown; the influence of digital marketing in the education sector needs to be studied.

The University of Massachusetts Dartmouth study on the use of social and digital media by universities as a division of marketing and outreach have shown that 100% of respondent institutions are now using some form of social media. However, it does not reveal actual data on how effective the use of such tools are in terms of enrollment or elevating institutional worth.

It is a big challenge for universities to entice good students to join each year, while competing with other universities. Higher education marketing, also termed as admission management, is a huge business in the

academic arena. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which private educational institutes in NCR are using social network sites by means of innovative marketing communications tool and the degree to which they are leveraging this medium to engage with the students. The results from this study will help provide a better understanding of the usage of social network sites as a marketing tool among private educational institutes in NCR. The exploratory findings will provide to be a scope for future research and possibly for the promotion strategies of the universities.

Primary research has been conducted by the author to study the effectiveness of digital marketing on university admissions. The study is conducted in the national capital region of India, on students studying in private universities. Recent research will be beneficial to most educational institutions, to effectively communicate their vision, programmes, and courses to their target students. The study suggests which social media platforms they should have a presence in to best utilise their online advertising techniques. Universities will be able to reach out to more students, especially outstation ones, as they look for information online. The study is designed to contribute to existing social media researches; thus, the chosen topic needs to be explored and further examined by researchers and scholars.



**Fig. 1: Theoretical Framework**

## OBJECTIVES

The study will help us comprehend the perceptions of consumers regarding the use of digital platforms by universities as part of their marketing tactics for enrollment of students. The widespread use of digital promotion needs to be studied in the education sector.

Digital marketing is used less in the education sector. A few of the private universities are using it and still cannot be gauged properly. Active involvement of youth on the Internet and the impact of social media has changed students' buying behaviour, as well as decision-making process. Thus, educational institutions are adapting to the latest trends in technology, revamping their marketing strategies to reach out to their target audience in a most effective and responsive way. However, universities will face many issues and challenges in the development and implementation of their marketing tactics and promotional strategies. The education sector has transformed entirely and this is due to the prevalent access to information that people have due to the Internet. Universities are engaging actively on social media, which, as Okazaki and Taylor (2013) suggested, if effectively tapped and designed, may help in the university's branding. Therefore, social media that encourages a culture of participation, engagement, and collaboration, has a high potential to be used by universities to increase visibility and attract more students (Constantinides, 2004). The study tries to understand the factors influencing effectiveness of digital marketing on university admissions. The research elaborates on how a potential student perceives the university web page and what the trigger points are, and what a student notices on the web page before applying for admission to a university.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Instrument Design

To examine the study, a self-administered questionnaire was used to test the exploratory factor analysis. The questionnaire comprises two sections; the first section consists of demographic details of the respondents or target population, such as gender, age, education, and family income. The other/second part includes questionnaire items intended to measure influence of digital marketing on university admissions using the five-point Likert scale.

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data among students in Delhi, Ghaziabad, and Noida, and responses were analysed. Convenience sampling was used to select the cities. The objective was to have an equal representation of both metropolitan and non-metropolitan cities.

The self-administered questionnaire was framed knowing student's perception about the factors influencing effectiveness of digital marketing on university admissions. Exploratory research was conducted to know which medium students prefer the most for gathering information about the university.

Research was conducted during the winter of 2018 for a time period of two months. A Likert scale measures attitudes by asking people to respond to a series of statements about a topic, in terms of the extent to which they agree with them, therefore tapping into cognitive and affective components of attitudes of the respondents.

A sample size of 260 students was considered, out of which 258 had responded by filling up the survey. Link to the surveys were distributed through email and sent individually to each candidate. In order to collect data, the identities of the survey respondents have been kept anonymous for this research. The respondents were aware of the fact that their answers were being used in the study to deduct a hypothesis regarding the influence of digital marketing on university admissions: evidence in North India. The questionnaires were made up of a list of questions related to the objectives of the study.

### Respondents' Profile

The demographic profile of the sample respondents is given in Table 1. Responses from both the gender was equal. A majority of the respondents (students) are in the age group 19 to 23. These respondents, after completing high school, look for university course information for a Bachelor's degree. There are 153 respondents (59.3%) in this category. In the age group 24 to 28, there are 61 respondents (23.6%) looking for Master's courses after completing their Bachelor's degree. Around 26 respondents (10.1%) are in the age group of less than 19 years, looking for a Bachelor's degree. It can be inferred that only 18 respondents (7%) fall in the age group of more than 28 years. Results show that there is diversity in the courses studied; a majority was represented by 107 respondents (41.5%) of Bachelor's degree holders, followed by 116 respondents (45%) undertaking Master's degree, 32 (12.4%) high school students, and three (1.2%) Ph.D. holders.

Students' annual family income data is collected for the marketing strategists of universities, so that they can target particular groups, while building campaigns for their respective university admissions. Respondents have been asked about their annual family income - 88 respondents (34.1%) do not wish to disclose their family income, 56 respondents (21.7%) fall in the income bracket of Rs. 2 lakh - 5 lakh a year, 52 respondents (20.2%) in Rs. 5 lakh - 10 lakh, 13 respondents (5%) in the bracket less than Rs. 2 lakh a year, and 49 (19%) in more than Rs. 10 lakh.

**Table 1: Demographic Description of Respondents**

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	129	50
Female	129	50
Age (years)		
Less than 19	26	10.1
19 – 23	153	59.3
24 – 28	61	23.6
Above 28	18	7.0
Education		
Intermediate or below	32	12.4
Graduation	107	41.5
PG	116	45
Ph.D. or above	3	1.2
Family Income		
Less than 200000	13	5.0
200000 – 500000	56	21.7
500000 – 1000000	52	20.2
More than 1000000	49	19.0
Do not wish to disclose	88	34.1

### Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha test was performed to check the reliability of questions or items. Cronbach's alpha values for all the constructs are above the acceptable 0.60 limit (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2010). Table 2 and Table 3 display results of different factors for reliability and sample adequacy. The Cronbach's alpha test was applied and it resulted in 81% of scale reliability. It indicates that the internal consistency of the selected scale is good. The highest Cronbach's alpha value was

observed for 'streaming platform' (0.822), followed by 'online impact' (0.825). Researchers should look for Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or higher. KMO-Bartlett's test, which is a measure of sampling adequacy, was conducted to test the eligibility of the data (Bornstedt & Knoke, 1988). The KMO value of 0.852 > 0.5 was observed, indicating multivariate normality among variables. Since the significance value observed was less than 0.005, factor analysis was performed subsequently.

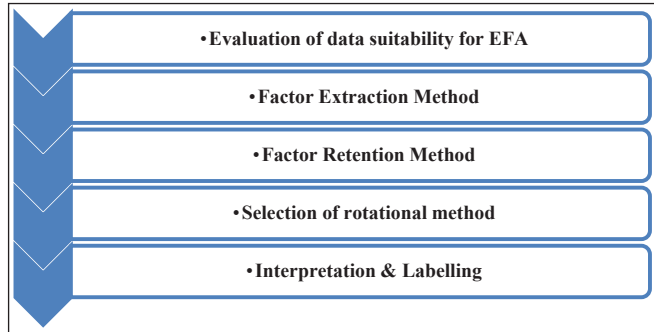
**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

<i>Items</i>	<i>Cronbach's <math>\alpha</math></i>
<b>Overall Scale</b>	<b>0.810</b>
Streaming Platform	0.822
Online Impact	0.825
Student Video	0.791
Website Design	0.789
Review	0.794
DM Effectiveness	0.787
Event Page	0.785
LinkedIn Ad	0.786
Blogs	0.784
Mobile Marketing	0.804
Virtual Campus Tour	0.794
Hashtags	0.785
Landing Page	0.785
Content	0.798
Snapchat	0.821
YouTube	0.813
Pinterest	0.812
WhatsApp	0.812
Twitter	0.812
Instagram	0.815
LinkedIn	0.815
Facebook	0.817

### Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Before performing the measurement model analysis, an EFA was performed using Jamovi to identify the underlying factors, as per the guidelines suggested by Gerbing and Anderson (1988). Principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted to extract a set of factors. The broad purpose of factor analysis is to summarise data

so that relationships and patterns can be easily interpreted and understood. It is normally used to regroup variables into a limited set of clusters based on shared variance.



**Fig. 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis Implementation Steps**

The variables having factor loadings less than 0.5 can be eliminated (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2005). However, we have eliminated the loading less than 0.35. Finally, three factors comprising 18 variables, all having Eigen values of unity and above were removed and the results are shown in Table 4. Further, in order to assess the appropriateness of the data for PCA, the uniqueness derived from the factor analysis were reviewed. The uniqueness score is relatively large, which suggests that the data set is appropriate (Stewart, 1981).

Before going towards the extraction of the constructs, there are a few tests that should be examined in order to find the adequacy of the sample and the suitability of data for FA (Burton & Mazerolle, 2011). Sampling adequacy provides the researcher with information regarding the grouping of survey items. Grouping items into a set of interpretable factors can better explain the constructs under investigation. Measures of sampling adequacy evaluate how strongly an item is correlated with other items in the EFA correlation matrix (Burton & Mazerolle, 2011). Prior to the final extraction of factors, a Bartlett test of sphericity (1545) and KMO measure (0.852) of sampling adequacy confirmed a significant correlation among the variables so as to warrant the application of factor analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 1998), which is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.852
Bartlett's Test	Chi-square	1545
	Degree of Freedom	153
	Sig.	.001

**Table 4: Principal Component Analysis**

<i>Component Loadings</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Uniqueness</i>
Blogs	0.765			0.411
Landing Page	0.762			0.403
Event Page	0.743			0.438
Hashtags	0.735			0.435
LinkedIn Ad	0.717			0.479
DM Effectiveness	0.708			0.494
Website Design	0.678			0.510
Student Video	0.650			0.552
Virtual Campus Tour	0.624			0.606
Review	0.608			0.623
Content	0.560			0.666
Mobile Marketing	0.470			0.771
Facebook		0.873		0.229
Instagram		0.871		0.234
WhatsApp		0.366		0.842
Twitter			0.842	0.289
LinkedIn			0.813	0.335
YouTube			0.367	0.810
Note: Varimax rotation was used				

Through factor analysis, we got three constructs for our study. However, the varimax rotation suggests that these three constructs include several variables, as mentioned in Table 4. To substantiate our results, confirmatory factor analysis has been employed and the results are shown in Table 5. The results reveal that there are three constructs involved in digital marketing, such as social platforms, professional platforms, and other influencing factors of digital marketing. Social platforms as a construct includes Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp; professional platforms consist of Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and YouTube. However, influencing factors of digital marketing include student video, website design, Google review, digital media image effectiveness, hashtags, blogs, event page, mobile marketing, content on

website, and virtual campus tours; these are the important elements for any digital marketing advertisement and related campaigns.

The estimates and related significance value suggest that almost all the variables considered in the study are

significant compared to the construct like demographics, which are insignificant for confirmatory factor analysis. In social media platform, WhatsApp has the insignificant contribution in the construct. Hence, in path analysis, we had tried to bring the residual effect of FaceBook on WhatsApp as a variable.

**Table 5: Confirmatory Factor Analysis**

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Lower (95% Confidence Interval)</i>	<i>Upper (95% Confidence Interval)</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Stand. Estimate</i>
Social Platforms	Facebook	0.69174	0.34225	0.02095	1.3625	2.021	0.043	1.4689
	Instagram	0.17920	0.09172	-5.59e-4	0.3590	1.954	0.051	0.4608
	WhatsApp	0.05010	0.03721	-0.02283	0.1230	1.346	0.178	0.2571
Professional Platforms	Twitter	0.35497	0.03746	0.28154	0.4284	9.475	<.001	0.9451
	LinkedIn	0.26552	0.03668	0.19363	0.3374	7.239	<.001	0.5346
	YouTube	0.00974	0.00443	0.00105	0.0184	2.197	0.028	0.1552
	Pinterest	0.14178	0.02195	0.09877	0.1848	6.461	<.001	0.4751
Influencing Factors	Student Video	0.65301	0.06520	0.52522	0.7808	10.016	<.001	0.6025
	Website Design	0.74254	0.06812	0.60903	0.8760	10.901	<.001	0.6429
	Review	0.53001	0.05777	0.41678	0.6432	9.175	<.001	0.5592
	DM Effectiveness	0.79515	0.06925	0.65942	0.9309	11.483	<.001	0.6685
	Event Page	0.77739	0.06117	0.65749	0.8973	12.708	<.001	0.7193
	LinkedIn Ad	0.79213	0.06810	0.65865	0.9256	11.631	<.001	0.6768
	Blogs	0.75841	0.05871	0.64334	0.8735	12.918	<.001	0.7303
	Mobile Marketing	0.55122	0.08195	0.39061	0.7118	6.727	<.001	0.4250
	Virtual Campus Tour	0.58424	0.05966	0.46731	0.7012	9.793	<.001	0.5907
	Hashtags	0.80142	0.06555	0.67295	0.9299	12.226	<.001	0.7023
	Landing Page	0.75441	0.05731	0.64208	0.8667	13.163	<.001	0.7390
Content	0.53662	0.06351	0.41214	0.6611	8.450	<.001	0.5194	
Demographics	Education	5.76186	9.85570	-13.55495	25.0787	0.585	0.559	6.0216
	Gender	0.00905	0.01610	-0.02251	0.0406	0.562	0.574	0.0181

## FINDINGS

### Robustness of the Model

To analyse the data, the structural equation model was set using Jamovi. The measurement model was specified to test the reliability of the constructs. The robustness of the model can be judged by the goodness fit indices and badness fit index, and these can be obtained through path analysis. The chi-square by degree of freedom measures the exact fit and the value of  $\chi^2/Df$  should be below three (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2005); the value revealed in the model is 2.86. Goodness-of-Fit can be measured by Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker

Lewis Index (TLI). Comparative Fit Index (CFI) measures the incremental fit. It is 0.779, and the prescribed range of 0 to 1 is acceptable. Higher values indicating a better fit is good for CFI. Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) also indicates the goodness-of-fit index. The value of TLI as 0.767 was found in our study and the value is within the prescribed limit of 0 to 1. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) measures the badness-of-fit index; the value of RMSEA is 0.094 and it was found to be acceptable, as 0.10 is the recommended limit for the acceptance of models. The lower RMSEA value is 0.0772, which indicates a better fit model.

Cudeck and Browne (1983) established AIC and BIC to perform a cross-validation; with Akaike Information

Criteria (AIC) it is slightly liberal and with Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) it is more conservative. Homburg (1991) applied AIC and BIC measures to SEM, and suggested that both AIC and BIC perform well at the identified level in the data-generating model. The higher the values of AIC and BIC, the better the model; here, the results suggest that the value of BIC is better than AIC.

**Table 6: Model Fit**

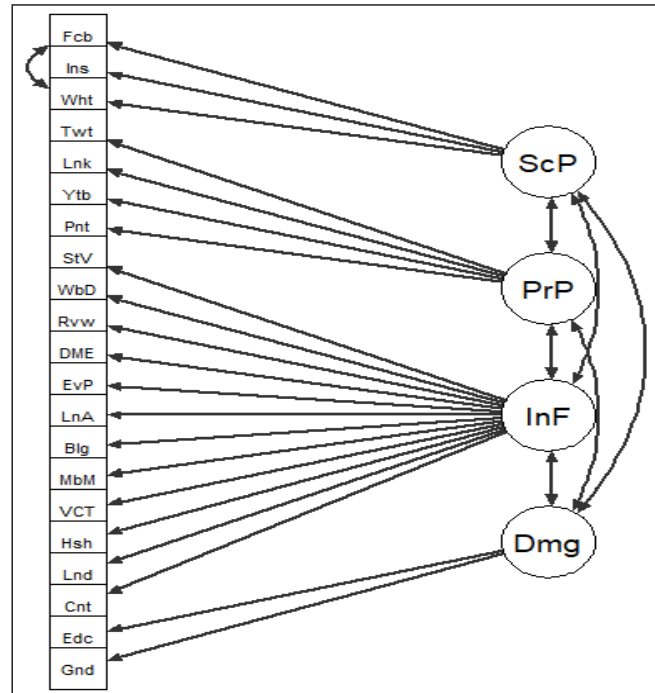
<i>Test for Exact Fit</i>	
$\chi^2$	518
Df	181
$\chi^2/Df$	2.86
P	<.001
Fit Measures	
CFI	.779
TLI	.767
SRMR	.0703
Lower (RMSEA 90% CI)	.0772
Upper (RMSEA 90% CI)	.0945
AIC	9456
BIC	9707

**Path Analysis**

Path diagram suggests the four-measurement model with a comprehensive structural model. The indicators of social platform (Scp) measurement model are Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, where the covariance exists between the residuals of FaceBook and WhatsApp. The indicators of professional platform (Prp) measurement model are Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and YouTube. However, there are two other measurement models considered in the study, influencing factors (Inf) model and demographics (Dmg) model. The influencing factors model signifies a positive significant relationship between the social platform (Scp) and professional platform (Prp). The results signify that universities should take special care of influencing factors such as student videos, hashtags, and reviews of alumni, while they showcase advertisement through any digital platform, either social or professional.

All the latent variables considered in the study are interrelated and the structural model is revealed between

the entire latent variables; they are statistically significant. The standard estimates of all the variables considered in the study are shown in Table 5, with their respective p-values.



**Fig. 3: Path Diagram**

**RECOMMENDATIONS/POLICY IMPLICATION**

Current research is beneficial to educational institutions to effectively communicate their vision, programmes, and courses to the target students. It is evident they would now need to move beyond just traditional information sources. Universities will be able to reach out to more students, especially outstation ones as they look for information provided online. Social media can provide the global reach, ease the process of information access, and can be cost-efficient in reaching out to students. The study suggests which social media platforms they should have presence in to best utilise their online advertising techniques.

Digital marketing and social networking can be a huge source of enrollment efforts and also beneficial to the university in increasing admissions to their programmes. Nonetheless, it is still believed that the majority of focus should be towards strengthening the experience potential students have on the university's official website.

Social media provides us the opportunity to narrate the actual stories of alumni and students of education institutions, which can generate loyalty, trustworthiness, and thus earn prospective students, and eventually, their respect too (Solis & Carroll, 2008).

Apart from the leading social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn, universities should also think about localised social media sites. The essential purpose of localisation is to take their programmes and answers to the queries closer to users or end-users by reducing or dismantling cultural blocks and language barriers.

Active alumni alliance is one of the effective ways of connecting with prospective students. This can be done by encouraging alumni to be active participants or administrators of localised sites, discussion pages, and forums; inspiring potential students to join forums and participate; and encouraging the use of social media applications to endorse sharing of information and vigorous engagement. Active alumni collaboration is another effective way to connect with students. This includes motivating alumni to write personal blogs about their campus experiences and how their institution has helped them achieve their goals.

## LIMITATIONS

- The study being exploratory in nature, the sample size was restricted to 258 consumers (student group). The geographical scope of the study was restricted to National Capital Region zone. Focus of the study was mainly to understand which social media students prefer the most for viewing the advertisements and to click. The focus was also to analyse the effectiveness of digital marketing for education-related decision-making.
- Sample size: It was restricted to 260; it is large enough to ensure a representative distribution of the population using statistical tools; selected groups were targeted. Had it been smaller in size it would be difficult to maintain the distribution curve.
- Lack of available and reliable data: The respondents can give false or select incorrect responses; this will cause significant obstacles in finding a trend and a meaningful relationship. Data can be missing.

However, it will be an opportunity to describe the need for further research.

- Longitudinal effects: The geographic scope of the study was restricted to the NCR zone of India.
- In view of the difficulties faced in getting the relevant information, we are constrained to term the exercise as a first approximation of the ground reality.

## CONCLUSION

This research study was conducted to gain insight into and an understanding of digital marketing's impact on the students' decision-making process for university admissions. The study scrutinised the impact of social media platforms on admissions of students in university, on the basis of the choices of a particular media platform. To examine this phenomenon, the research advanced a conceptual model sustained by risk theory and conducted the study on students from three private sector universities in Jordan (Alnaser et al., 2020). The results show that particular social media platforms are extremely correlated to students' admission-linked decision-making process.

After reviewing papers, it was found that less research is done on the influence of digital marketing in the education sector. This is where the research gap was found. Primary research has been conducted by the author to study effectiveness of digital marketing on university admissions. After analysis of the data collected through survey, the results reveal that effectiveness of digital marketing depends on factors such as students' videos on the webpage, hashtags, web design, event page, mobile marketing, virtual tour, blogs, usage of Pinterest and WhatsApp. Non-effectiveness of digital marketing depends on factors such as Snapchat, streaming platforms, online presence, reviews, LinkedIn ads, landing page, and content. Social media presents an ideal opportunity by not only balancing institutional control of the communication and admissions process, but also adapting to the changing engagement patterns of prospective students (Choudaha, 2013).

## SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Advance scope of study would gather information and demographics of prospective international as well as

domestic students. Public universities could also be studied. This would help universities strategise and target the correct audience in their digital marketing campaigns. Future studies may focus on social media analytics to have an in-depth track of social media usage by students. Social media analytics has developed as a significant area of research. Social media analytics deals with developing and gauging informatics tools and structures to gather, monitor, examine, summarise, and envisage social media data, to simplify talks and interactions to find out valuable patterns and intelligence (Stieglitz, Mirbabaie, Ross & Neuberger, 2018; Fan & Gordon, 2014). Further research is essential to understand the global dominance of social media in higher education universities. For instance, studying a larger number of universities in various countries may produce different results regarding social media promotion outreach. Additional area for investigation could be an enquiry of social networking sites that are more culturally motivated to users in definite geographical areas or languages.

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