Social Media: Influencing Factors in Higher Education Recruitment

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Abstract The swift diffusion of online social networking sites is changing the way organizational communication takes place now a day. Higher education institutes are also observed using social media channels for various purposes including marketing, student recruitment, alumni communication and other student related services. Admission offices see this as a tool to attract Prospective students and students also use social media in selection of course and institute for higher education. Thus, Social media is used at both ends. The content over social media is often perceived more trustworthy source rather than sponsored content transmitted through the traditional media of the promotion mix. Unfortunately, universities/institutes using these technologies often fail to understand the unique opportunities and challenges that accompany the adoption of social media. Also there is lack of quantitative studies and measurements in role of social media in admission effectiveness. In this paper, an effort has been made to identify influencing factors in selection of higher educational institutes by students. The data was collected engineering students and analyzed using factor analysis with reliability and validation checks. This study will help higher education institutes in designing affective campaign and policy over social media use to reach prospective students which will further help students in reaching institutes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of social media in India has been on rise for the past few years. Its popularity is among all age groups and among youth it's taken with huge enthusiasm. Cheapest high speed internet access [1] and affordable smart phones helped in this phenomenal growth of social networking. As on January 2018 there are 250 million active internet users in India [2]. Social media offers several opportunities like easy access to information, ability to express, create social groups, pictures and videos sharing, learning opportunities, seeking and maintaining relatives and friends etc. This connection and grouping of people on social media is called social networking. This rapid diffusion of online social networking is changing the very nature of organizational communication. Social networking over social media is used by corporate, business houses, institutions for reaching to prospective clients and building relations. They are giving link to their social media account on their websites, product catalogues, brochures and advertisements and inviting people to visit and join their network.

Colleges and universities particularly higher education institutes have taken a keen interest in this trend. They are using social media to communicate various types of contents to engage students. Higher education institutes are now observed using social media for various purposes like

marketing, student recruitment, student support, alumni communication etc. Over the time, the student admission process has involved various strategies and tools, including direct mailings, fetes & fairs and various forms of print advertising etc. In recent years, social media has played an increasingly important role in shaping the landscape of college admissions and recruitment. Engaging students during institute search process is prime concern of higher educational institutes. The first ways, prospective students interact with higher education institute is through social networking sites. Considering the high cost involved in student recruitment and popularity of social media now days, the use of social media in college admissions and student recruitment is a timely and important issue for admissions administrators.

Students are also turning away from traditional mode of communication and relying more on social media communication due to perception that it provides more trustworthy information then corporate sponsored communication. Prospective college students perceive students written blogs to be authentic especially when student disclose personal details and feelings about campus. As with many technologies, adoption of the Internet especially for its social uses has seen its highest levels of usage among young college students in India. The majority

of current college students have had access to the Internet and computers for a large percentage of their lives. These digital natives see these technologies as a logical extension of traditional communication methods, and perceive social networking sites as often a much quicker and more convenient way to interact [3].

Considering the expensive and demanding nature of student recruitment and the current popularity of social media, the use of social media in college admissions and student recruitment is a timely and important issue for admissions administrators.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In today's digital era, success of an organization is accredited by the efficient use of social media sites. Higher education institutions also had been adopters of this global phenomenon and provide valuable insights about the institute and to reach prospective students. In this section we will discusses existing studies on the use of social media in college recruitment and identify the gaps in existing studies.

Gretzel et al 2008 [4] find in his study that people joined online platforms for many reasons like searching for and sharing information, discussing issues, and making inquiries. These online activities are being performed via a new form of communication technology known as social media or Web 2.0.

Paris et al 2010 [5] defined social media as ―a second generation of Web development and design, that aims to facilitate communication, secures information sharing, interoperability and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

Barnes et al 2010 [6] made first study on the institutes and their use of social media. The study revealed high usage of social media sites by institutions of higher education. The study found that higher education institutes were outpacing the more traditional Fortune 500 companies as well as the fast-growing Inc. 500 companies in their use of social media to communicate with their customers (i.e., students). At that time, 8% of the Fortune 500 companies were blogging compared with 19% of the Inc. 500 while 32% of colleges and universities were using this tool. The study shows higher education institutes were early adopters and high users of social media.

Davis III, Charles HF, et al. 2012 [7] in his paper on literature review and research directions on social media use in higher education states that it is perceived as social networking sites are generally being used for improving pedagogical practices and have limited relative use for other purposes (i.e., recruitment, marketing, and alumni relations). A "Getting Connected" poll was conducted to address extent of use of social media with focus on perception of the value social media could add to the

institution. It was found that most of the higher educational institutes saw value in the use of social media. It was also found that the greatest value attributed by use of social media was in the marketing and in the delivering of information about the college to students.

Faculak 2012 [8] finds in his study that college admissions offices have recognized the growing popularity of social media and virtually all admissions offices now use social media to some extent for student recruitment. Research studies have shown that social media is commonly used among prospective college students during the college-choice process. Higher education institutes use social media technology to recruit prospective students. Admissions departments had understood the significance of social networking sites. The ability to create and maintain a community online is a significant advantage for admissions departments seeking to recruit prospective students for enrollment.

S.Palmer 2013 [9] has put up in his research that Use of social media is frequent in student recruitment. Social media in higher education has range of uses including Learning and teaching, general marketing, student services, student recruitment, alumni communication etc. There is limited research on use of social media by higher education institutes and there is requirement of some form of evaluation of effectiveness as relationship between activity and outcome is different.

Jean Kelso Sandlin et al, 2014 [10] mention in his study that engaging students during college search process is chief concern and one of the first ways in which prospective students interact with institute is through social media. Building authenticity by forming realistic expectations in use of social media is foundation for improved recruitment and retention.

Waite and Wheeler 2014 [11] mention in his study that colleges and universities are finding marketing over social media as innovative and showing keen interest in its use. Study also found that institutes are struggling to use these technologies due to lack of know how about content and feedback. One of the intent of using social media is recruiting and retaining graduate and post graduate students. Study also emphasize on more research in determining content of student interest and to find out interest of students of different departments.

Elena and Ioana 2015 [12] made a study to test reliability in accessing prospective candidates and a suitable way to integrate facebook scrutiny into admission procedure. It was found that though facebook profiles are not perceived as very creditable source profiles should be deemed as indicators of user personality and conduct. It may be used as additional screening tool. It was also found that admission offices are very much interested in browsing and searching

students on social media.

Gurvinder Singh et. al. 2017 [13] concludes in his study that universities and higher educational institutes are making their presence on social media to reach prospective students and students are also using social media tools for searching the institute for admission. Study also concluded that marketing on social networking sites should be treated as an additional channel with unique characteristics that can complement and enhance other marketing activities.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Above mentioned studies show that there is high usage of social media sites by prospective college students and they use these sites in selection of institutes for admission purposes. Therefore use of social media is win-win situation for both organization and perspective customers. Studies also emphasize on need of more research in this area to make use of social media more effective. These facts offer a scope and potential for admission offices to explore and tap this phenomenon to approach prospective students.

Unfortunately, there are very little studies on influencing factor that affect the use of social media. Existing research studies also lack in quantitative analysis and effectiveness in use of social media for recruitment purposes. In this paper, an effort has been made to identify factors which influence the choice of institute and appeals the most to students while looking for institutes of higher education. These factors will also help institute administrators and admission officials in designing campaigns and strategies to connect with and recruit prospective students.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Sample selection

For the present study, data has been collected from first year students of engineering studies in the state of Punjab. The students were selected from government run engineering colleges including engineering colleges of state universities. The demographic profile (Gender, Age and Residential Status) of students is as in following table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender	Residential Status		Age	
	Urban	Rural	Under 18	Above 18
Male	79	30	82	27
Female	65	18	72	11
Total	144	48	154	38
	192		192	

B. Design of questionnaire

To fulfill the objective of the study a well structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Websites and social media sites of the institutes were visited to draw the questionnaire so that the validity of the study could be enhanced. A pilot survey was conducted with 30 respondents to analyze the content validity of questionnaire. Likert scale was used to collect data. Reliability of statements has been tested using cronbach alpha. Statements having low alpha value (<0.5) have been dropped to improve the reliability of the statements.

C. Data collection

Final questionnaire was got filled from 230 students in Punjab on random basis. To collect data personal visits and gentle follow up were made. 192 questionnaires were selected for final analysis after data cleaning, review of questionnaire and removing half-filled questionnaires. Data was collected in the period of Aug- Nov 2018 from various institutes.

D. Testing of internal reliability

To check the internal reliability of observed variables Cronbach's α has been used (Hair et al., 2010). Review of literature revealed the acceptable range of Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.7-1 (Nunnally, 1978). In the present work, this value comes out 0.72, which was acceptable.

E. Data analysis

We will first examine the appropriateness of factor analysis by running Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy is a statistical measure indicating sampling adequacy and the proportion of variance in our variables that might be caused by underlying factors. High values (more than 0.5) generally indicate that factor analysis may be useful with our data. Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the hypothesis that our correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which further indicates that our variables are unrelated and therefore unsuitable for structure detection. Small values (less than 0.05) of the significance level indicate that a factor analysis may be useful with our data.

F. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.791
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Sq	690.435
	Df	91
	Sig.	.000

Source: SPPS Output

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's test results (table 2) gives KMO value of 0.791 (>0.5) imply sampling adequacy. Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant (p<0.05) indicates that factors are highly correlated and suitable for

Statements	Communalities	Anti Image Correlation
Social media helps in connecting to university	.525	0.835a
I get regular updates about courses	.568	0.791 a
There is an active participation on social media	.597	0.835 a
Like exploring/visiting the university on social media	.528	0.828 a
Communicate with pass out/alumni students	.603	0.797 a
Helps in interacting with university administration	.516	0.808 a
Social media offers greater acceptability	.602	0.790 a
Information available on social media is not reliable	.567	0.761 a
Difficult to collect information about courses	.656	0.695 a
Interaction on social media page of university is unidirectional	.544	0.776 a
Does not reflect true image of university	.589	0.795 a
Get up to date information about course	.561	0.813 a
Contents provided on social media are not relevant	.562	0.795 a
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.		
a: Reproduced Communalities (Source: SPPS Output)		

factor analysis.

G. Exploratory Factor analysis

The exploratory factor analysis has been applied to identify the various influencing factors prospective students look out for admission purposes. Principal Component analysis method was applied for extracting factors and orthogonal rotation with varimax was employed. The latent root criterion was applied for extraction of factors. Communalities show the amount of variance that a variable shares with other variables. Extraction communalities are the estimates of the variance in each variable accounted for the factor in the solution. Small value less than 0.5 indicate variables that do not fit with factor solution, and such statements were dropped from further analysis. After dropping these variables, factor analysis was again applied on the remaining variables. The results are shown as under.

Table 3 Communalities and anti image correlation

Anti image correlation values indicate KMO values for individual statements and should be more than 0.5 for each statement. It is observed from results that each individual statement has value more than 0.5 and results of factor analysis fit to be relied upon.

H. Factor Extraction and Rotation

Eigen values greater than one or only the factors having latent roots were measured significant; all other factors with latent roots less than one have to be considered insignificant. In present study three factors were considered as significant for analysis. Eigen values for three factors were 2.580, 2.515 and 2.027 respectively as evident from table 4. The "% of Variance" column gives the percent of variance accounted for by each specific factor or component, relative to the total variance in all the variables. The "Cumulative %" column gives the percent of variance accounted for by all factors or components up to and including the current one.

Table 4: Total Variance Explained by Extracted Factors after Rotation

Component	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total Eigen Values	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.580	19.845	19.845
2	2.515	19.348	39.193
3	2.027	15.589	54.782

Source: SPPS Output

After removal of weak loading factors, 3 strong factors loading were left. From the rotated component matrix, it is clearly seen that 3 factors were liable for 54.782 per cent of the overall variance. In a good factor analysis, there are a few factors that explain a lot of the variance and the rest of the factors explain relatively small amounts of variance. Therefore, we can leave all those remaining factors which account for a very small amount of cumulative variance.

I. Naming of Factors

In the present study three major factors or decision variables were found affecting the student choice towards choice of course and institute on social media. All these factors have been given appropriate names according to the variables that have been loaded in each of the factors.

The first factor emphasizes the importance reliable image and information of the institute; second factor revel the importance of updated and timely information with focus on direct interaction with institute authorities; third factor highlights the importance of networking and students like to connect to alumni as well as with university administration.

The various factors have been shown in Table 5 along with the factor loading of each variable. The reliability of

Table 5: Perceived factors and Cronbach Alpha

Factor	Factor Name	Statements	Factor loading	Reliability (Cronbach Alpha)
F1	Reliability	Reflect true image of university	.723	0.746
		Information available on social media is reliable	.707	
		Interaction on social media page of university is not unidirectional	.699	
		Contents provided on social media are most of time relevant	.695	
		Easy to collect information about courses	.635	
F2	Up to date information	I get regular updates about courses	.733	0.718
		There is an active participation on social media	.686	
		Get up to date information about course	.636	
		Social media helps in connecting to university	.595	
		Like exploring/visiting the university on social media	.512	
F3	Networking	Communicate with pass out/alumni students	.775	0.672
		Social media offers greater acceptability	.666	
		Helps in interacting with university administration	.582	

Source: SPPS Output

each of the factor was tested using chronbach alpha test. The table 5 also shows that all the factors have chronbach alpha values more than 0.6 and thus are reliable.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

From above discussions and results we can conclude that students going to pursue higher education like to use social media for selection of course and institute. There are few factors which students look out for in search of course and institute. Students believe that there are regular updates on course and admission information on social media which help them in selection of course and institute. Students also believe that social media provide reliable information and reflect true image of institute.

As it is found that students use and rely on social media content for search of course and institute, therefore institute should focus more and put serious consideration on this channel of connecting with students. Timely and regular updates help students.

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study does not give quantitative measure of use of social media in selection of course and institute. For further studies can be made with collection of more comprehensive demographic profile data and social media sites surfing pattern to get more insight. Further, demographic characteristics and family profile of the participants can be studied to establish relationship with factors extracted. The outcome of relationship will further insight in use of social media and will help the engineering institutes in drafting the policy framework towards target oriented content on social media. This will further result in better outcome of social media use for students as well institutes. More such studies can also be planned for other disciplines with varied and extensive respondent profile. After getting results from various disciplines with varied respondent profile results can also be generalized for broader applications.

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