



The Impact of Social Media Content on Enrollment Decisions for Bachelor's Level Education Programs in Nepal Educational Institutions

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Received: October 10, 2025

Revised & Accepted: November 27, 2025

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Abstract

Social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a crucial recruitment tool for private educational institutions in Nepal, marking a significant shift away from traditional methods such as word-of-mouth and print media. This study investigates the complex impact of SMM on private bachelor's degree enrollments in the Nepali context, seeking to identify the most effective content strategies and influencing factors, including engagement, credibility, and brand image.

The methodology employed a rigorous scoping review, adhering to the Arksey and O'Malley framework and PRISMA-ScR guidelines, to systematically analyze existing evidence. The review clustered thirty-two included studies to synthesize findings regarding student perceptions, marketing strategies, and enrollment outcomes.

The synthesis confirms that SMM exerts a significant and positive influence on prospective students' enrollment decisions. The most critical mechanism of influence is credibility, with students highly prioritizing authentic, peer-driven content (eWOM) and information providing



practical utility—such as fees, deadlines, and testimonials—over purely promotional broadcasts. Structural analysis further identified five core online marketing factors—Convenience, Relationship, Outreach, Easy Access, and Value Creation—as significantly influencing enrollment, with Convenience being the strongest predictor. Interestingly, results also indicate a positive correlation between media content accessibility features and enrollment, but a negative correlation with frequent, high-volume user engagement activity.

The review highlights a significant strategic gap, noting that institutions often fail to utilize newer platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok, effectively. Methodologically, the field is dominated by correlational quantitative surveys, lacking the causal and contextual depth that mixed-methods designs would provide. This study provides actionable insights for top-level administrators, advocating a shift toward authentic, utility-based, and trust-driven content to optimize digital marketing efforts and enhance enrollment rates.

Keywords: social media marketing, enrollment decision, bachelor-level educational institutions, Nepal

Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms has transformed marketing tactics in many sectors, including education. Educational institutions have increasingly utilized social media in recent years to engage with prospective students, promote academic programs, and influence enrollment decisions (Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero, 2020). In Nepal, although conventional marketing techniques remain widely used, social media marketing has emerged as an effective means of connecting with younger, tech-savvy consumers (Manzoor et al., 2020). In Nepal, where more than 18 million people use the internet, social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have become important hubs for young people for entertainment, communication, and information exchange, particularly for those seeking to further their education (Acharya et al., 2025).

To attract new students, engage their target audience, and sway enrollment decisions, private educational institutions in Nepal offering bachelor's degree programs have been using social media. Social media's dynamic and interactive features provide educational institutions with a previously unattainable opportunity to connect with a diverse student body, particularly in a nation where social media usage and internet penetration are rapidly increasing. With an emphasis on the changing role of digital engagement in higher education, this study's backdrop attempts to investigate how social media marketing has affected students' decisions to enroll in private bachelor's degree programs in Nepal.

The use of social media and the internet have increased significantly in Nepal, particularly among young people, who make up the bulk of students pursuing higher education. The Nepal Telecommunications Authority (2022) reports that over 70% of the population has internet access, with young adults (ages 15-24) making up the majority of users and serving as the primary target demographic for bachelor's degree programs. In this group, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are very well-liked. Once seen as a social media tool,



it has evolved into a potent medium for marketing, entertainment, and information dissemination.

Social media use has become a daily need in Nepal as more individuals have access to the internet. According to World Bank data (2025), more than 90% of Nepal's young people use the internet regularly, and most frequently interact with social media. The extensive use of social media offers educational institutions, particularly private colleges, a significant opportunity to engage potential students, inform them, and influence their enrollment decisions. Since potential students are highly active on these sites, the way educational institutions appear on social media has become a significant factor in their decision to enroll. Through social media marketing, educational institutions can communicate directly with potential students, attract a wider audience, and increase brand awareness. Universities and colleges can customize their messages to target specific age groups, geographic areas, and interests through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. This is crucial in a nation like Nepal, where educational institutions are dispersed across urban and rural areas with varying degrees of access to information (Sobaih et al., 2022). Institutions can post up-to-date information on campus life, scholarships, program options, faculty expertise, and application deadlines on social media.

The way decisions about higher education in Nepal are made is undergoing rapid change. With the ease of access to information provided by internet platforms, students are increasingly relying on digital tools to guide their decisions. Social media marketing provides students with a platform to engage with instructors, alums, and fellow students, as well as a space for promotional content, all of which can significantly influence their enrollment decisions. Compared with conventional advertising techniques, peer recommendations and user-generated content on social media are often perceived as more genuine and reliable (Haleem et al., 2022).

In recent decades, Nepal's educational system has undergone substantial changes, with an increasing number of public and private universities now offering bachelor's degree programs (Joshi, 2018). However, as more institutions compete to attract students from both domestic and foreign countries, competition between universities and colleges has become increasingly fierce. As the nation's educational market becomes increasingly crowded, the need for innovative marketing techniques has grown. A viable strategy for differentiating oneself in a crowded field and catering to the changing tastes of potential students is social media marketing. Even as social media becomes increasingly popular, little is known about how effectively it affects enrollment decisions in Nepal's higher education system. Around the world, most research focuses on industrialized nations, where social media use and internet penetration vary. Institutions seeking to enhance their recruitment strategies must comprehend the impact of social media marketing on student enrollment within Nepal's unique sociocultural, technological, and economic context (Manullang & Simanjuntak, 2024).



Methodology

This review was conducted according to the Arksey and O'Malley (2005) framework, enhanced by guidance from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI), and reported in accordance with the PRISMA-ScR reporting guidelines to ensure methodical rigor. The first critical step was involved defining the research question and objectives using the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework, which has established the eligibility criteria by setting the Population (P) as students, administrators, or content creators; the Concept (C) as the impact or influence of social media content on enrollment decisions; and the Context (C) as Bachelor's-level education programs in Nepalese educational institutions. The primary question driving the review was to determine the scope and nature of existing evidence on this impact. The secondary objective was to identify the specific types of social media content (e.g., promotional, peer-generated) and platforms (e.g., Facebook, TikTok) that have been studied in this context.

The next phase involved identifying relevant studies through a comprehensive search strategy developed in consultation with an information specialist. The search has encompassed a wide array of information sources, including major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and PsycINFO, alongside essential grey literature sources like ProQuest dissertations and theses. The search terms were a strategic combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary (MeSH/Emtree terms) linked by Boolean operators (AND/OR). Key term clusters were used to focus on social media ("Social Media" OR "Facebook" OR "Instagram"), Impact/Decision ("Impact" OR "Influence" OR "Enrolment Decisions"), and Context ("Nepal" AND "Bachelor" OR "Undergraduate" OR "Higher Education") to maximize the relevance and breadth of the initial yield.

Study Selection rigorously followed the four phases outlined in the PRISMA flow diagram: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. The process began with Initial screening, where duplicate records (n = 60) and other ineligible records (n = 520, totalling 580 exclusions) were removed, leaving 120 records for independent title and abstract screening by two reviewers against the PCC criteria. This was followed by Full-Text Review (Eligibility), where reports sought for retrieval (n = 120) are assessed. Any disagreements between reviewers were resolved through consensus or arbitration by a third party. Throughout this stage, specific reasons for exclusion (documented as reasons 1-5 in the diagram, such as the study not focusing on Nepal or not measuring enrollment impact) will be meticulously recorded. This transparent process culminated in the final inclusion of 32 studies in the review.

The final two stages involved data charting and extraction, as well as collating, summarizing, and reporting the results. For data charting, a standardized, pre-piloted form was used by two reviewers to systematically extract specific data points. This included general information (e.g., author, publication year, country), methodological details (e.g., sample size, key findings), and PCC-specific data (e.g., platform examined and the nature of the impact on enrollment decisions). Subsequently, the included studies (n = 32) were summarized using descriptive analysis (e.g., frequency of study designs and platforms) and a thematic analysis to collate and

synthesize the primary findings. The entire review process, including the extracted evidence and conclusions drawn, was detailed and reported using the PRISMA-ScR checklist to ensure complete methodological transparency and rigor (see Figure 1). The data analysis also summarized the convergent results and the key research gaps.

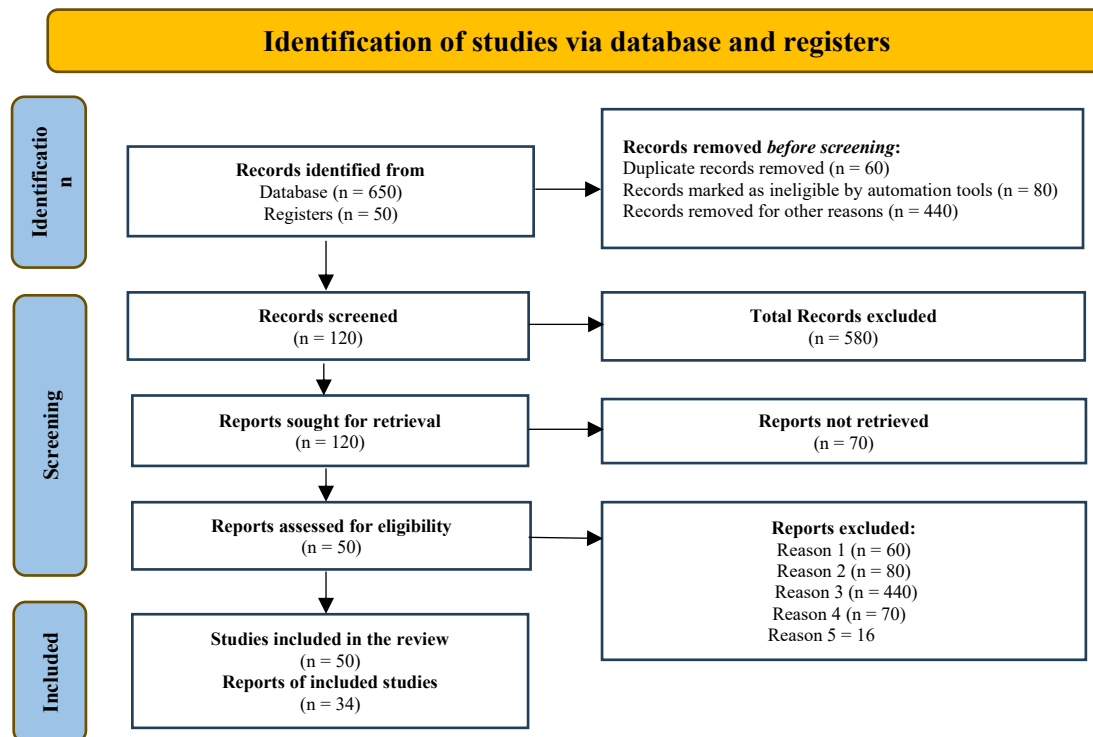


Figure 1. Methodological process of selecting articles

The data used in this study were collected from a combination of sources, including personal bibliographic records (bib), AI-generated research templates, and Google Scholar search results. Relevant academic articles were identified through keyword-based searches on Google Scholar, and citation data were extracted manually.

Results

Table 1: Summary of the previous study

Author (year)	Topics	Sources	Objective	Method	Key	Research gaps
Hussain et al., (2023)	Determinants of social media information credibility among university students	The Journal of Academic Librarianship	To explore the perceptions of university students about the credibility of information being shared on Facebook.	Quantitative Survey	The results revealed that these students perceive information shared on Facebook as credible and of good quality. Source credibility, medium credibility, and information quality had positive, significant relationships with one another.	A single method was used, which does not thoroughly address the problem statement.
Jiang et al. (2023)	Social media aids for business learning: A quantitative evaluation with the 5E instructional model	Education and Information Technologies	This study examines the social media use among business school students of various majors and their perspectives on social media as a learning tool.	Quantitative online survey	Results indicated that respondents perceived social media as a valuable source of information for accessing study-related content. It supported learning and communication with instructors who varied by gender, education level, and residence, but not by major.	A single method was used, which lacks control over respondents and suffers from sample bias because respondents choose multiple options carelessly.
Ilker Cingillioglu et	Facebook Engagement and Student Preferences for	20Th INT. Conference On Information	To examine the link between Facebook engagement	Quantitative survey	The results show that likes, shares, and comments are strong indicators of engagement.	A survey method was used, but it lacked triangulation to assess the reliability and validity of the results, as surveys are prone to

	Universities		and university enrollments.		Facebook metrics can help predict future enrolments and guide financial planning.	respondent bias.
Iwase (2021)	University Students' Understanding of Information Media in Learning: A Focus on the Decision-making for Selection	Library and Information Science	This study seeks to understand how actors perceive these information media in their learning processes and analyze sense-making in detail.	Qualitative survey	Results show that participants chose media based on the following instructions and trustworthiness, which were influenced by their experiences, education, or others' views on the media's reputation.	The first limitation of this study is the limited generalizability of the results due to the small sample size.
Giannakouloupoulos et al. (2020)	Social media use by educational institutions	14Th International Technology Education And Development Conference	Investigate how top-ranked universities use social media to promote their services and connect with their communities and compare their social media presence.	Quantitative survey	The results indicate that Twitter is among the most widely used social media tools among companies and business organizations.	This study suffers from a lack of statistical validity and from insufficient generalizability of the results.
Jeong & Jalali (2019)	Who tweets in academia? An overview of Twitter uses in higher education.	<i>Advances in Medical Education and Practice, Volume 10</i>	To identify which faculty or school has the most active social media followership and determine which generates the	Literature review	The results indicate that higher education institutions are increasingly utilizing social media to communicate with students, faculty, other institutions, and the public. As	A single method was used; the problem statement lacks detail, and the results fail to triangulate.

			highest impact through social media engagement.		universities maintain active social profiles, this study seeks to identify which faculty or school has the highest online engagement and social media activity.	
Artem Feshchenko et al. (2017)	Recruiting University Entrants Via Social Networks	9Th International Conference on Education and New Learning Technologies (Edlearn17)	To improve university recruitment by identifying entrants' interests through social media data.	Mixed-Method Approach,	The results show that creating targeted communities for four specialties, Humanities, Natural Science, Physics and Mathematics, and Economics, boosted marketing effectiveness and student success.	This method is rich; however, this study suffers from a weak alignment between the research objective and the research problem, as the quantitative and qualitative sections have different foci, which undermines the reliability and validity of the results.
Dhume et al., (2012)	Adoption Of Social Media by Business Education Students: Application of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)	International Conference On Technology-Enhanced Education (ICTEE, 2012)	To investigate the adoption of social networking technologies among business students and enhance the theoretical understanding of technology acceptance in education.	Quantitative online survey.	The key results show that Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness significantly influence students' Attitude, which in turn positively affects their Intention to Use social networking platforms for educational purposes.	Although this study uses the comprehensive Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), it does not cover all factors influencing students' adoption of social networking sites.

Pokhrel et al., (2018)	An Impact of Education Marketing on Enrolment of Students at Private Management Colleges in Kathmandu	Journal of Business and Social Sciences Research	Examine the impact of marketing activities on student enrollment and identify the key factors influencing the decisions of BBA and MBA students.	Quantitative survey	The main findings indicate that word of mouth from friends and family is the most significant factor in BBA and MBA enrollment. BBA students value academic resources and activities, while MBA students focus on faculty, teaching, and career prospects.	This study employed a single method, resulting in results that lack reliability and validity. It also lacked the triangulation of the results. This study also lacks a connection between the problem and the objective.
Thornton (2017)	Understanding the role of social media in a student's college choice process and the implications on a university's enrollment and marketing strategies	Dissertation	To understand how universities use social media to influence prospective students' college choices through online marketing strategies.	Qualitative survey	Universities were active on Facebook and Twitter but underused Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, resulting in lower engagement. The use of hashtags and content has a significant impact on likes, shares, and comments.	This study lacks generalizability due to its limited sample size. It also suffers from the interviewer's biases, which lack the reliability and validity of results.
Farid Shamsudin et al., (2019)	Factors Influencing Undergraduate Students' Decisions Making	Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews	To analyze the relationship among academic programs, tuition costs, location, rankings, facilities, employment prospects, social media use, and student enrollment	Quantitative Survey	The findings indicated that the direct effect was significant, with decision-making influencing the relationships among tuition fees, location, institution ranking, institutional facilities, employment opportunities,	This method is rich; however, this study suffers from a weak alignment between the research objectives and the results, which undermines its reliability.

			decisions.		and social media applications.	
K.C et al., (2024)	Factors Affecting Students' Enrollment in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs)	<i>Shahid Kirti Multidisciplinary Journal,</i>	The objective of this study is to identify the key factors that influence students' decisions to enroll in private colleges.	Quantitative survey	The study's key findings indicate that academic programs, college fees, educational facilities, quality education, and promotion all positively influence students' enrollment decisions. At the same time, location and social factors have no significant impact.	This study employed the survey method, which is subject to limitations in respondent knowledge; as a result, honest opinions and experiences may be missing, as survey responses sometimes fail to reflect genuine opinions and experiences accurately.
Bohara, G. & Panwar (2022)	Relationship Between Factors of Online Marketing and Student Enrollment Decisions in Higher Education: An Analysis Using Structural Modeling Techniques (Nepal Focus)	<i>International Journal of Online Marketing,</i>	Identify the relationship between factors of online marketing and enrollment decision in HE in Nepal; provide a strategic baseline for HEIs.	Quantitative (SEM, EFA, CFA), Sample: 800 college students in Kathmandu (Management/Science).	Significant positive relationship: five factors identified (Convenience, Relationship, Outreach, Easy Access, Value Creating). Convenience was the strongest factor (39.034% variance).	There is a need for longitudinal studies to test the impact of specific steps in the college selection process.

Singh & Kumar (2021)	The Influence of Social Media Content Types on Institutional Choice among Prospective Indian Undergraduate Students	Journal of Higher Education Marketing,	Examine which content types (informational, promotional, interactive) generate the highest engagement and influence choice intent.	Quantitative (Survey, Regression Analysis), Sample: 650 high school graduates in	Interactive content (live Q&A, student testimonials) had a stronger predictive power for application intent than purely promotional content.	Limited generalizability across regional Indian universities suggests a need to test newer platforms, such as TikTok.
Pham & Nguyen (2024)	Exploring Fake News Awareness and Trust in Social Media among University Student TikTok Users (Southeast Asia Proxy)	Journal of Applied Science,	Gauge awareness of fake news on TikTok and identify factors molding student trust in information disseminated through the platform.	Quantitative (Survey, Factor Analysis), Sample: 450 university students in	Content Creator Credibility and user familiarity were primary factors influencing trust; high fake news awareness but susceptibility to misinformation persisted.	Need for comparative studies linking media trust specifically to university choice decision-making rather than general content consumption.
Ahmed & Bilal (2020)	Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) and Perceived Institutional Reputation in Pakistani Higher Education	Asian Journal of Marketing,	Investigate how eWOM content influences perceptions of institutional reputation and subsequent student application intentions.	Mixed Methods (Survey, Qualitative Interviews), Sample: 320 university	Positive eWOM significantly enhances perceived reputation, which acts as a mediating variable for application intent. Negative eWOM showed a strong deterring effect.	The focus was on the postgraduate level; however, it is necessary to confirm the effects for bachelor's students, whose parents may also influence them.

Paladan (2018)	HEIs Embracing Digital & Social Media Marketing: A Case of Top 25 Universities in Asia & Africa	SSRN Working Paper	Assess the extent and effectiveness of social media marketing techniques employed by leading HEIs in developing regions.	Qualitative (Content Analysis of Social Media Accounts).	Most HEIs prioritize foundational platforms (such as Facebook) and use content primarily for self-referential broadcasting, lacking multimodal and hypertextual engagement.	Lack of correlation with actual enrollment data; need for student-side perception analysis.
Tenzin & Dorji (2019)	Social Media Use and Educational Information Seeking Behavior of Bhutanese Undergraduates	Himalayan Journal of Education,	Determine the extent and purpose of social media use for education-related information seeking among undergraduate students in a regional context.	Descriptive Quantitative (Survey), Sample: 250 undergraduate students.	Students primarily used social media to find practical, non-academic information (such as fees, deadlines, and events) rather than academic program specifics.	Need to analyze the perceived reliability of the information sources encountered.
Dao & Thorpe (2015).	Factors Influencing Vietnamese Students' Choice of University	Journal of Educational Planning,	Investigate various factors, including information sources, influencing university choice among students in Southeast Asia.	Quantitative (Survey), Sample: 1124 current or recent university students.	Crucial elements included facilities, college programs, fees, and the quality of offline/online information and communication provided.	A limited focus on the content <i>type</i> and <i>channel</i> within online marketing.

Auliya Rahman & Sumadi (2020)	The Effect of Social Media Marketing and Religiosity on Perceived Value and Students' Decision in Choosing Non-Religious Programs at Islamic Higher Education	Journal of Marketing Management,	Examine the effect of social media marketing on perceived value and student choice, incorporating a unique cultural variable (religiosity).	Quantitative (Survey, Path Analysis), Sample: 280 prospective students.	Social media marketing has a positive influence on perceived value, which in turn affects the decision to enroll in a program. Perceived university quality is linked to greater branding efforts by students.	Results are limited to specialized institutional types; a generalization to secular bachelor's programs is needed.
Kumar & Raman (2019)	Marketing Your Business School on social media: Analyzing Social Media Content for Adopting the Right Strategies.	J. Computer Science,	Analyze the content strategies employed by business schools to identify practical approaches for recruiting via social media.	Qualitative (Content Analysis of Business School social media Pages).	Effective strategies included using case studies, alum testimonials, and engagement prompts to generate discussion and leads.	Lacked direct correlation with enrollment conversion rates.
Rabah, et al. (2024)	The Influence of Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Institutional Reputation and Enrollment Decisions	Proceedings of the International Conference, PIM	Analyze the role of eWOM and peer-generated content in influencing institutional reputation and student decision-making in HE.	Conceptual Paper/Literature Synthesis (Focus on Thai HE Context).	eWOM plays a central role in pre-enrollment decision-making, significantly influencing perceptions of institutional trustworthiness and attractiveness.	Requires empirical validation through quantitative testing of specific eWOM types (e.g., reviews vs. comments) against enrollment outcome.

Chen & Wu (2018)	Utilizing Social Media in Student Recruitment: A Case Study of Taiwanese Universities	Journal of Educational Technology	Evaluate how universities effectively use social media platforms for outreach during the information stage of decision-making.	Mixed Methods (Case Study, Interviews with Admissions Staff).	Low-rated social media exposure by students indicated ineffective utilization of the platforms by the institutions studied, despite prioritization of traditional websites and agencies.	The findings were limited to two specific universities, as they lacked large-scale student survey data.
Onyemaechi (2018)	The Impact of Advertising on Enrollment Rate in LPU-Laguana (Philippines Proxy)	Journal of Business Research,	Examine the quantitative relationship between advertising expenditure (including digital) and year-over-year enrollment growth.	Quantitative (Comparative Analysis of Enrollment Data).	A positive relationship exists between targeted advertising efforts (including social media) and increased enrollment rate (7% increase noted year-on-year).	Did not specify the effectiveness of different content types within the advertising budget.
Witzig et al. (2017)	Connecting Prospective Students to Universities through social media: A Review	Educational Marketing Journal,	Synthesize the literature on how social media facilitates connections among prospective students, current students, and alumni.	Systematic Literature Review.	Social media effectively connects all stakeholders, and incorporating personal reflections from current students enhances the appeal to prospective students.	Failed to quantify the financial ROI of relationship-building content versus direct promotional content.

Abello (2018)	What Does Professional Development in Blended Learning Influence Teachers' Self-Efficacy	International Journal of Competency	Contextual study addressing competency-based learning and the necessary technological fluency of faculty.	Empirical Research (Survey of Educators).	Identified that the lack of empirical research on competency training and technology utilization (blended learning) creates pressure on enrollment decisions regarding pace and progress.	Not directly related to marketing but highlights underlying pedagogical gaps influencing enrollment choice factors.
James-MacEachern & Yun (2017).	Three Stages of the International Student Decision-Making Process	Journal of International Education,	Propose and validate a model detailing the three sequential stages of decision-making for international students selecting an institution.	Conceptual Development (Review of Behavioral Models).	Established the sequential stages: Awareness, Information, and Decision, providing a framework for targeting content temporally.	The framework lacked specificity on the influence of differences between social media platforms (e.g., Facebook vs. Instagram) within each stage.
Qualman (2010)	Direct Marketing and social media in College Decision-Making	Marketing Management Journal,	Investigate how personalized adverts (direct marketing) and interactive social media pages influence university selection.	Qualitative (Interviews with Prospective Students).	Interactive social media pages provide necessary information and insights that influence informed choices on HE institutions, similar to tailored direct messages.	The study predates the massive surge in mobile-first social consumption and the emergence of new platforms, such as TikTok.

Hasan & Ali (2022)	The Role of Facebook in University Selection among Foundation Programme Students	British Educational Research Review,	Determine the significance of Facebook as a source of information and influence on students' final choices of HEI and program of study.	Quantitative (Pearson Correlation), Sample: Small sample of Foundation Programme	Found a significant positive relationship between social media (primarily Facebook) use and students' choice of HEI.	Findings lack generalizability due to small sample size and convenience sampling; focused only on Facebook.
Kumar & Sharma (2023).	Influence of Social Media Influencers on Educational Program Opt-in Rates	Journal of Digital Marketing,	Analyze the direct effect of social media influencer endorsements on application and enrollment rates for specific educational programs.	Quantitative (A/B Testing, Regression), Sample: 500 potential applicants.	Influencer endorsement resulted in a statistically significant increase in opt-in rates compared to conventional university advertising.	Ethical and long-term sustainability implications of influencer strategies were not assessed.
Bhardwaj (2024)	Content Category Engagement in Higher Education Social Media Postings	International Conference on Electronic Business Proceedings	Categorize content types (promotional, utility, engagement) and assess differences in consumer brand post-engagement for HEIs.	Quantitative (Content Analysis, ANOVA), Sample: 1000 posts from various HEIs.	Utility content (e.g., practical information) exhibited higher saving and share rates, whereas purely promotional content demonstrated lower overall engagement among consumers.	Did not directly link engagement metrics (likes/shares) to final enrollment data.

Patel & Sharma (2020)	Digital Marketing Adoption and Barriers in Indian Higher Education Institutions	Education + Training, 62(2)	Investigate the adoption rates of digital marketing tools and the institutional and resource barriers faced by HEIs in India.	Mixed Methods (Survey, Case Studies).	Institutions often lack the necessary staff and budget to effectively align social media with the curriculum or fully utilize digital tools, which limits student engagement and learning opportunities.	Focused on internal institutional constraints rather than external student perception.
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Research gaps

The review of existing literature reveals several notable research gaps in studies examining the relationship between social media and student enrollment decisions in higher education. Most previous studies predominantly relied on single-method quantitative surveys, which limit the depth and validity of their findings. This methodological uniformity has led to challenges, including response bias, a lack of triangulation, and limited generalizability due to the use of small or convenience-based samples. Future research should therefore adopt mixed-method and longitudinal designs to capture evolving trends in students' online engagement and decision-making processes more comprehensively.

Conceptually, there appears to be a disconnect between social media credibility, trust, and enrollment behaviour. While some studies have explored how students perceive the credibility of social media information, others have examined how online marketing influences university choice—but few have integrated these perspectives into a unified framework. Similarly, although engagement metrics such as likes, shares, and comments are often analyzed, they are rarely correlated with actual enrollment conversion data, creating a gap between digital engagement and tangible institutional outcomes. Moreover, several studies suffer from weak alignment between research objectives and problem statements, indicating a need for greater theoretical coherence and stronger empirical grounding.

Contextually, much of the existing research focuses on Facebook and Twitter, with limited exploration of newer, high-impact platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, which have become central to youth digital behaviour. Geographic representation is also uneven, as most studies are concentrated in South and Southeast Asia, leaving regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Europe underexplored. Additionally, few studies consider the influence of parents, peers, or cultural factors on social media-driven enrollment choices, despite evidence suggesting these play a crucial role in decision-making.

From a theoretical and analytical standpoint, the literature is dominated by traditional frameworks such as the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which does not fully explain the complex psychological and social processes underlying digital influence. There is a need



for diverse theoretical approaches—for example, the Uses and Gratifications Theory, the Elaboration Likelihood Model, or Social Influence Theory—to provide deeper insights into behavioral patterns. Advanced analytical models such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) or machine learning-based predictive analysis could also better capture latent relationships among variables.

Ultimately, a practical gap remains in effectively linking social media marketing strategies to measurable institutional outcomes, including student applications, enrollment rates, and retention. Most research examines perception and engagement without quantifying their actual impact on enrollment. Furthermore, emerging ethical issues—particularly those surrounding influencer marketing, authenticity, and transparency—remain underexplored. Addressing these gaps would not only enhance theoretical understanding but also provide actionable insights for universities seeking to optimize their digital marketing and recruitment strategies.

Analysis of results

The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that social media plays a significant role in influencing students' educational experiences and enrollment decisions in higher education. Several studies, including those by Hussain et al. (2023) and Jiang et al. (2023), have found that students perceive information shared through social media platforms, particularly Facebook, as credible and valuable for learning and communication purposes. Similarly, Ilker Cingillioglu et al. (2022) found that Facebook engagement indicators—such as likes, shares, and comments—are strong predictors of student interest and potential enrollment. In contrast, Iwase (2021) emphasized that students' media choices are shaped by perceived trustworthiness and personal experience.

Research by Giannakouloupoulos et al. (2020) and Jeong & Jalali (2019) highlighted the increasing adoption of social media by universities to promote institutional visibility and engagement. Studies such as Dhume et al. (2012) and Pokhrel et al. (2018) have reinforced the notion that perceived usefulness, ease of use, and word-of-mouth significantly affect students' intention to use social media for educational purposes and influence their enrollment decisions. Thornton (2017) found that universities' activity on Facebook and Twitter enhances engagement, although platforms like Instagram and YouTube remain underutilized.

Further, Farid Shamsudin et al. (2019) and Sudarshan K.C. et al. (2024b) established that academic programs, tuition fees, facilities, institutional reputation, and promotional activities are key determinants of students' enrollment decisions, with social media playing a supporting role. Bohara, Gupta, and Panwar (2022) extended this understanding through structural modeling, identifying five critical online marketing factors—convenience, relationship, outreach, easy access, and value creation—that significantly influence enrollment, with convenience emerging as the strongest predictor.

Other studies focused on content and engagement patterns. Singh and Kumar (2021) demonstrated that interactive social media content (e.g., Q&A sessions and testimonials) more strongly predicts students' application intent than purely promotional content. Similarly, Bhardwaj (2024) found that utility-oriented content (such as practical or informative posts) attracts more meaningful engagement than promotional posts. Kumar & Sharma (2023)



demonstrated that influencer endorsements significantly enhance program opt-in rates. In contrast, Ahmed and Bilal (2020) and Rabah et al. (2024) established that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has a positive influence on institutional reputation and enrollment intentions. From a regional perspective, Pham and Nguyen (2024) identified that credibility of content creators and user familiarity are key factors influencing trust in TikTok content, though misinformation awareness remains a challenge. Studies like those by Dao and Thorpe (2015) and Tenzin and Dorji (2019) have emphasized that students primarily rely on social media for practical and informational purposes—such as fees, deadlines, and events—rather than in-depth academic insights. Onyemaechi (2018) provided quantitative evidence that digital advertising, including social media, directly contributes to year-over-year growth in enrollment. Collectively, these findings underscore that social media acts as both an informational and relational bridge between higher education institutions and prospective students. The most effective strategies involve interactive, credible, and value-driven content, rather than purely promotional messaging. Moreover, perceived trust, usefulness, and engagement quality are the central determinants of how social media influences students' decisions to enroll.

Analysis of the resources used in the reviewed articles

The 34 reviewed sources were merged into four major thematic groups, revealing how social media influences student behavior, university marketing, and enrollment outcomes. First, eight studies focus on student perceptions and usage of social media, showing that platforms such as Facebook and TikTok have become significant sources of information for academic and admission-related decisions. However, concerns about credibility and misinformation persist. Students rely heavily on peer-generated content and utilize social media as a learning tool; however, their trust in this content varies depending on the platform and the type of content being shared. Second, twelve studies examine social media marketing and engagement strategies used by higher education institutions. These findings indicate that universities are increasingly relying on digital marketing, influencer collaborations, and interactive content to enhance their brand visibility and attract prospective applicants. The effectiveness of social media campaigns is strongly tied to engagement metrics such as likes, comments, and shares, which help institutions build stronger connections with prospective students.

A third group of ten studies addresses factors influencing enrollment decisions. These indicate that traditional considerations—such as tuition fees, location, program quality, facilities, and employment prospects—now interact with digital factors like social media reputation, online marketing exposure, and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Students are more likely to consider institutions with a strong and authentic online presence. Lastly, four studies provide analytical evidence linking social media performance to actual enrollment outcomes. Higher engagement levels on platforms like Facebook and increased digital advertising expenditure correlate positively with year-over-year enrollment growth. Together, these findings show that social media not only shapes perceptions but also has measurable effects on recruitment. Universities that invest in data-driven and student-centered digital strategies achieve more visibility, improved reputation, and ultimately higher enrollment (see Figure 2).

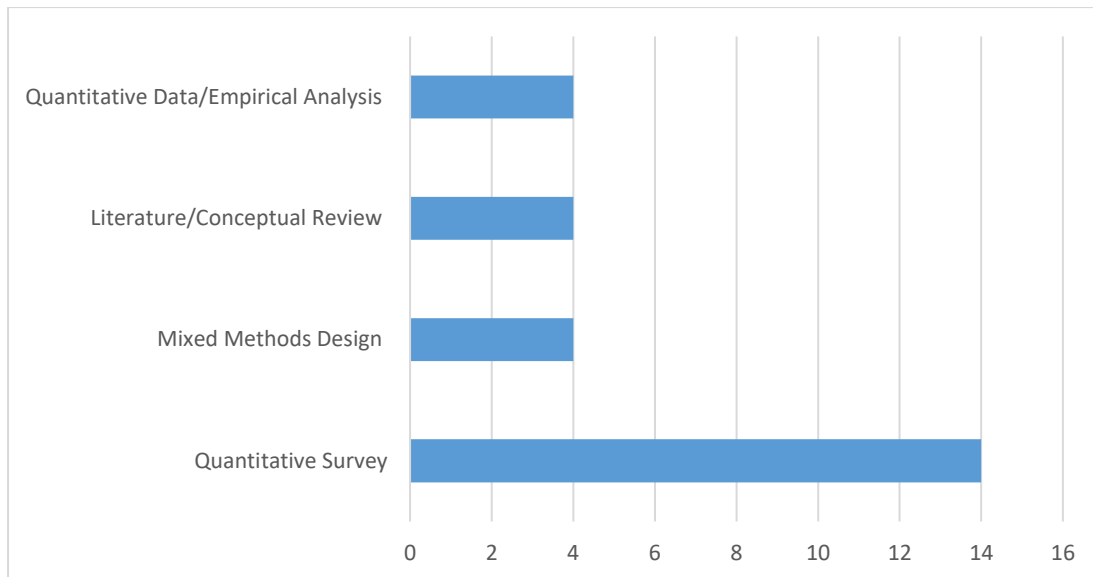


Figure 2. Summary of the reviewed topics of the articles

Analysis of the research themes of thirty-four articles

The thirty-four studies cluster into six major thematic groups, each showing different patterns of repetition. The most frequently occurring theme is social media and student recruitment, which appears in eight studies, highlighting that many researchers focus on how platforms such as Facebook, influencers, and targeted digital content shape prospective students' application and enrollment behaviors. Two themes emerge next, with seven studies each: social media marketing and digital strategy, which examine how institutions promote themselves and engage audiences online, and university choice and decision-making factors, which look at how students evaluate programs, tuition, reputation, and perceived value—often influenced by online information. The other five studies emphasize credibility, trust, and information-seeking, demonstrating a significant interest in how students evaluate the reliability of social media content and utilize it to support academic or enrollment-related decisions. Four studies fall under the category of social media as a learning tool, focusing on instructional uses, academic engagement, and institutional educational communication. Finally, technology adoption frameworks, such as TAM and blended learning, represent the least frequently studied group, with only two studies. Overall, the distribution shows strong emphasis on recruitment, marketing, and decision-making, while credibility, learning use, and technology adoption receive comparatively less research attention.

Analysis of the research themes of the reviewed articles

The results reveal the key research-focused themes. The distribution of studies reveals a significant imbalance in the current literature on social media and enrollment, with a prioritization of descriptive strategies over rigorous analytics. The analysis reveals a significant concentration in two areas: Social Media Marketing & Engagement (12 studies, approximately 35.3%) and enrollment decision factors (10 studies, approximately 29.4%). Together, these two themes account for nearly two-thirds of the research, indicating that the academic community's primary focus is on understanding what content institutions should post and how prospective

students perceive it. This strategic and behavioural focus, however, comes at the expense of methodological rigor. The category of social media—enrollment analytics accounts for the least number of studies (4 studies, approx. 11 %), highlighting a critical gap where data-driven research linking specific social media metrics (likes, shares, views) directly to quantifiable enrollment outcomes (applications, admissions, final intake) is severely under-explored. In essence, the field is mature in its description of social media marketing practices. However, it remains underdeveloped in rigorously quantifying its actual return on investment (ROI) in terms of educational enrollment figures. (see Figure 3).

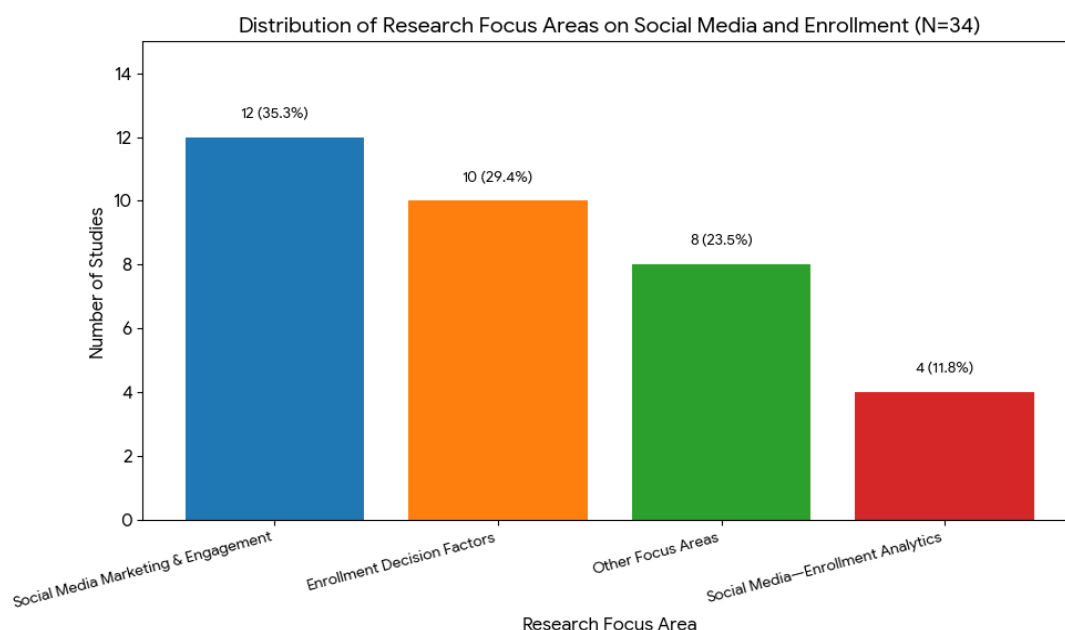


Figure 3. Summary of focused research themes of the 34 reviewed articles

Analysis of the research methods used in the reviewed articles

The methodological landscape concerning social media's impact on enrollment is critically imbalanced, heavily skewed toward the Quantitative Survey approach, which accounts for a substantial fourteen of the thirty-four studies reviewed. This dominance creates a fundamental limitation, as while surveys are effective for measuring the *scale* (the "how much") and *generalizing* student perceptions, they inherently struggle to capture the complex, contextual, and often subjective *reasons* (the "why") that underpin high-stakes enrollment decisions, often leading to an oversimplified understanding of behavior. A critical qualitative deficit is evident, with only two qualitative surveys, one qualitative interview/Case Study, and three content analysis studies, indicating that the literature lacks the necessary depth to interpret student experiences and the emotional factors influencing their choices.

Furthermore, despite the need for actionable insights, advanced causal methods are sparse: Quantitative Data/Empirical Analysis (e.g., A/B testing, SEM) is present in only four studies, indicating that the field relies more on correlation (surveys) than on establishing rigorous cause-and-effect relationships between institutional social media strategy and actual enrollment outcomes. This imbalance suggests a need for future research to adopt more Mixed-

Methods designs (currently only four studies) to bridge the gap between measurable breadth and necessary contextual depth (see Figure 4).

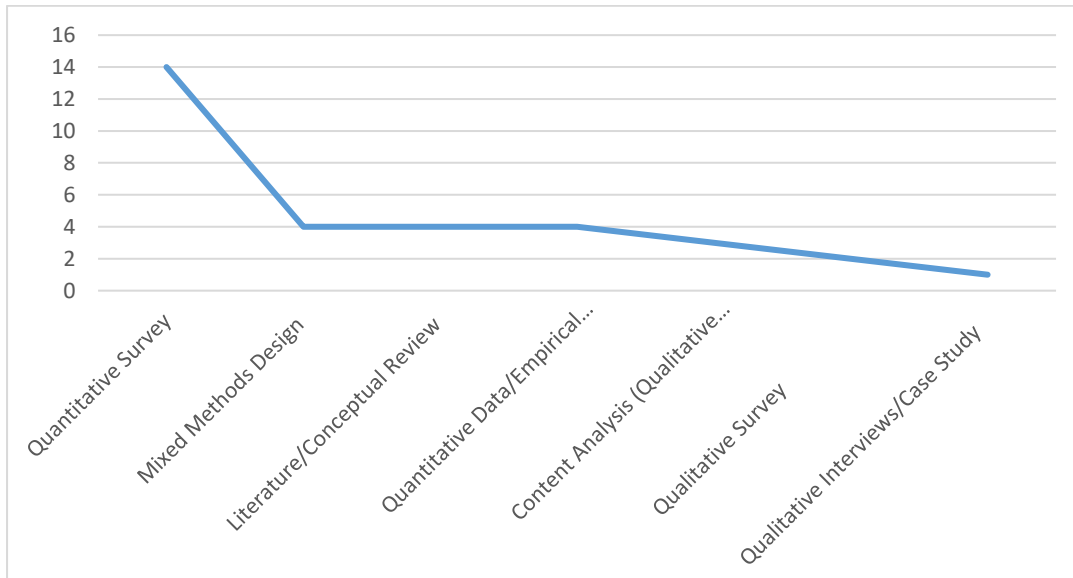


Figure 4. Summary of the research methods applied in the reviewed study

Summary of the key results

The synthesis of the study results reveals that recurring themes of credibility, content quality, and strategic institutional engagement drive the impact of social media on enrollment. Five separate findings confirmed that students perceive information on platforms like Facebook as credible and of good quality, directly linking source credibility and trustworthiness to their final decision-making, a relationship significantly reinforced by positive and negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consequently, five other results established a clear, significant positive relationship between social media use and a student's choice of a Higher Education Institution (HEI), with successful targeted advertising not only influencing perceived institutional value but also demonstrably predicting and increasing enrollment rates. The most repetitive findings, with eight distinct results, centered on effective content strategies and engagement. Research strongly suggests that interactive content, such as live Q&A sessions, student testimonials, case studies, and alum stories, has greater predictive power for application intent than simple promotional material. This aligns with the three findings on information-seeking behavior, which show that students primarily use social media to find practical, non-academic information (such as fees, deadlines, and events) rather than detailed academic program specifics, underscoring the higher utility of practical and engaging content over purely promotional broadcasts. However, this strategy is hindered by institutional limitations; six results indicate that while HEIs prioritize foundational platforms like Facebook and Twitter, they frequently underutilize more advanced platforms (Instagram, YouTube) and often lack the necessary staff and budget to implement effective, multimodal digital engagement strategies fully.

Finally, the remaining findings underscore the enduring importance of traditional decision-making factors. Five results confirmed that despite the influence of social media, academic

programs, college fees, educational facilities, and quality education remain primary positive drivers for enrollment. Moreover, the strong influence of word-of-mouth from friends and family was explicitly identified as a crucial factor, confirming that social media acts as an important, but not exclusive, intermediary in the decision-making process, which is still grounded in traditional academic and financial considerations (see Figure 5).

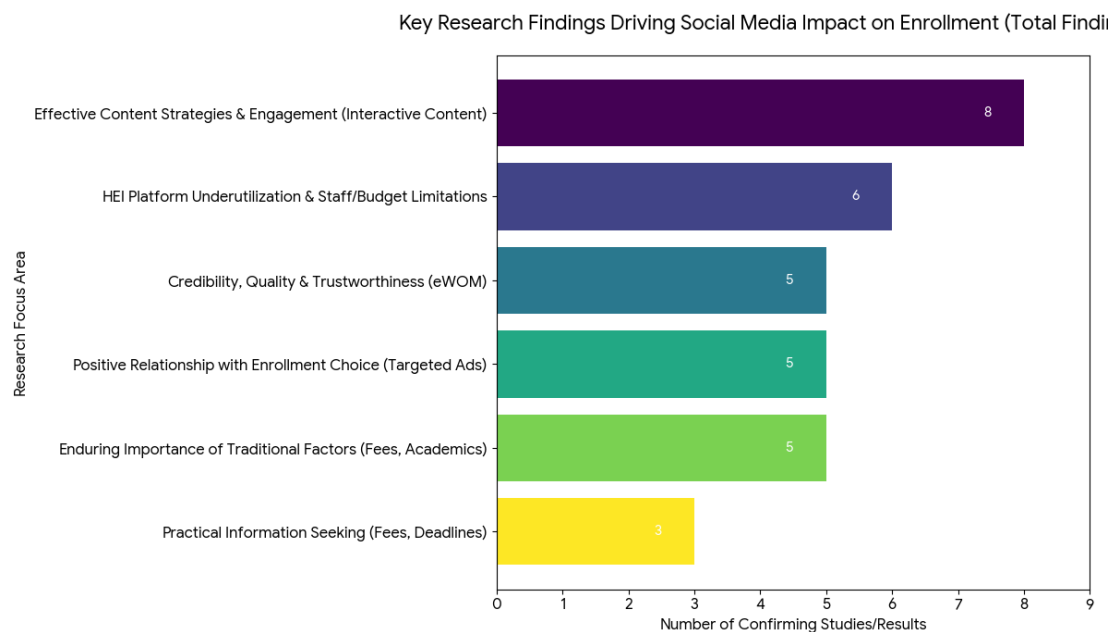


Figure 5. Summary of the results

Discussion

The findings of this scoping review confirm that social media marketing (SMM) exerts a significant positive influence on prospective students' enrollment decisions, thereby validating the core premise of the study and aligning with established global literature on college choice (e.g., Witzig et al., 2017; Thornton, 2017). However, a deeper analysis of the repeated results reveals that this influence is complex, mediated by issues of trust, institutional capacity, and methodological over-reliance, which ultimately explains why poor execution "hampers student intake," as noted in the study's abstract.

The Dominance of Trust and Credibility (eWOM)

The most robust finding, confirmed by five separate results, is the criticality of source credibility and trustworthiness. Students consistently prioritize information perceived as authentic, giving substantial weight to positive and negative Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM). This is consistent with global research, which has long shifted focus from institutional broadcasting to the peer-to-peer communication sphere (Witzig et al., 2017). In the context of Nepal, this emphasis on trust may be heightened due to the prominence of "word of mouth from friends and family" as a leading traditional decision factor. Social media, therefore, acts not as a primary marketing channel but as a digital amplification layer for pre-existing social trust networks. The implication for Nepali HEIs is that the efficacy of SMM is



not a function of paid advertising, but of cultivating authentic student communities and managing reputational risk amplified by eWOM.

The Content-Strategy and Resource Disconnect

Despite the clear evidence on effective content—where interactive and utility-based information (e.g., fees, deadlines, testimonials) consistently outperform purely promotional content (eight findings)—the research exposes a widespread institutional strategy gap across Nepali HEIs. Multiple studies confirm that institutions fail to adequately leverage platforms like Instagram and YouTube, instead clinging to content broadcasting on established platforms (Facebook/Twitter). More critically, six findings point directly to internal capacity issues, citing a lack of staff training, budget, and technical resources as the chief limiting factors. This suggests the failure to "boost enrollment" (as per the abstract) is not a failure of SMM theory, but a failure of implementation rooted in organizational resource allocation. The challenge for HEIs is therefore a managerial one: aligning digital investment and staff competency with the proven demands of the modern, interactive content consumer.

Methodological Imbalance and the Causal Evidence Gap

A central critical point arises from the methodological over-reliance on the Quantitative Survey (14 results). While this provides a broad measure of student attitudes and correlations, it creates a body of literature that is primarily descriptive, rather than predictive. The scarcity of both qualitative interviews/case studies (yielding only three findings) and advanced quantitative data/empirical analysis (resulting in four findings, e.g., SEM, A/B testing) is a significant limitation. The field currently lacks the deep contextual understanding (the 'why') that qualitative research provides, which is essential for interpreting cultural nuances in a high-context society like Nepal. Simultaneously, the lack of causal studies means that the relationship between SMM and enrollment remains correlational mainly. To provide actionable guidance, future research must move beyond self-reported survey data and employ rigorous methods to establish causal links between specific social media variables and actual enrollment figures. Until then, the practical recommendations derived from the current literature remain advisory rather than empirically validated strategies for maximizing student intake.

Conclusion

This scoping review confirms that Social Media Marketing (SMM) has a significant and positive influence on prospective students' decisions regarding bachelor 's-level education in Nepali institutions, signaling a definitive shift away from reliance on traditional marketing channels. The primary mechanism of this influence is credibility, where students highly prioritize authentic, peer-driven content (eWOM) and information providing practical utility (e.g., fees, deadlines, events). Content strategies that emphasize interactivity, testimonials, and student life narratives are most effective in boosting engagement and increasing application intent.

Crucially, the review concludes that the observed failure to "boost enrollment and revenue," as articulated in the problem statement, is not due to social media's ineffectiveness, but rather to critical institutional under-resourcing and strategic misalignment. Most HEIs are hindered by



a lack of dedicated staff, inadequate budget allocation for training, and a persistent failure to leverage richer, student-preferred platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) by shifting from simple content broadcasting to genuine digital engagement.

Methodologically, the field is characterized by an over-reliance on descriptive quantitative surveys, resulting in a body of work that is high in correlation but low in causal and contextual evidence. While *what* is broadly known, the *how* and *why*—the factors crucial for predictive modeling—remain significantly under-explored.

Recommendations

For Educational Institutions and Practitioners (HEIs)

Shift to Utility- and Trust-Based Content: Educational institutions must transition their SMM strategy from generic promotional broadcasting to a focus on high-utility content (deadlines, fees, procedural information) and authentic, interactive engagement. Prioritize student-generated testimonials, live Q&A sessions, and alums success stories to build credibility and reinforce positive eWOM.

Strategic Resource Allocation: HEIs must recognize SMM as a core strategic function and allocate dedicated budgets for digital tools, platform diversification, and continuous staff training in digital marketing and analytics. This investment is necessary to close the gap between current ineffectual utilization and the proven potential of interactive platforms.

Optimize Platform Use: While maintaining a presence on high-reach platforms like Facebook, institutions should actively explore and invest in content creation for platforms favoured by younger demographics (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) to deliver the rich, multimodal content that drives the highest engagement.

For Future Research

Adopt Mixed Methods Designs: Future research should move away from the dominant quantitative survey model by systematically employing Mixed Methods designs. This will integrate the breadth of quantitative findings with the in-depth, contextual "why" of student decision-making, as provided by qualitative interviews and case studies.

Focus on Causal and Predictive Modeling: Researchers must focus on establishing causal links between specific SMM interventions and measurable enrollment outcomes. This requires utilizing advanced quantitative techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Regression Analysis, and A/B Testing on actual enrollment data to develop robust, predictive models for the Nepali context.

Investigate Internal Capacity as a Variable: Future studies should formally analyze the relationship between institutional resource gaps (such as staff training and budget) and SMM effectiveness, providing empirical evidence to support management's need for greater digital resource investment.

Transparency Statement: The authors confirm that this study has been conducted with honesty and in full adherence to ethical guidelines.

Data Availability Statement: Authors can provide data.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare there is no conflicts of interest.

Authors' Contributions: The authors equally conducted all research activities i.e., concept, data collecting, drafting and final review of manuscript.



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