



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING ON STUDENT ENROLLMENT IN ONLINE DEGREE PROGRAMS

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Abstract

Online degree programmes have become an important part of higher education. As more institutions offer online courses, attracting students has become increasingly competitive. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn provide institutions with a direct way to reach potential students. Advertisements on these platforms can introduce students to courses, explain their benefits, provide information about fees and eligibility, and encourage students to apply.

This study examines the impact of social media advertising on student enrolment in online degree programmes. The study is based on secondary information obtained from published research, government reports and other reliable sources. The study focuses on three questions: whether social media advertising creates awareness, whether it influences students' intention to enrol, and what makes social media advertising more effective.

The review of existing research shows that social media can play an important role in student recruitment. Students often use social media while searching for information about courses and institutions. Research also suggests that useful and engaging content can influence students more effectively than simple admission advertisements.

The study concludes that social media advertising can contribute significantly to student enrolment when it provides useful information, builds trust and connects students with the right programme. Higher education institutions should therefore focus not only on reaching a large audience but also on providing relevant information and making it easy for interested students to move from enquiry to enrolment.

Keywords: *Social Media Advertising, Online Education, Student Enrolment, Higher Education, Digital Marketing, Student Recruitment.*

1. Introduction

The way students search for higher education has changed considerably. In the past, students depended mainly on newspapers, education fairs, brochures, relatives, teachers and visits to colleges. Today, much of this search happens online.

A student looking for an online MBA, BBA, BCA or other degree can find information within minutes. They can compare courses, fees, eligibility, duration and career opportunities. They can also watch videos, read reviews and communicate with institutions without visiting a campus.

Social media has become an important part of this process. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and LinkedIn allow educational institutions to communicate directly with prospective students.



An advertisement may appear while a student is watching a video, browsing Instagram or reading a post on LinkedIn. The advertisement may introduce a programme, explain its benefits or announce admissions. If the student is interested, a click can take them to the institution's website, where they can find more information and apply.

This makes social media more than just a communication platform. It has become an important part of student recruitment.

The growth of online education has made this issue even more important. Students choosing an online programme cannot always judge the institution by visiting its campus. They may depend heavily on websites, social media, reviews and online information before making a decision.

The University Grants Commission has established regulations for online degree programmes in India and maintains information on institutions and programmes permitted to offer online education. This has contributed to greater acceptance of online learning. (deb.ugc.ac.in).

At the same time, competition among online degree providers has increased. Institutions must therefore find effective ways to attract potential students.

This study examines whether social media advertising can help institutions attract and enrol students in online degree programmes.

2. Statement of the Problem

The number of online degree programmes has increased. At the same time, students have more choices. An institution may spend money on advertisements and reach thousands or even millions of people. But reaching people does not necessarily mean getting students.

For example, an advertisement may receive 100,000 views but generate only a small number of applications. Another advertisement may receive fewer views but attract students who are genuinely interested in the programme.

This raises an important question:

Does social media advertising actually influence students to enrol in online degree programmes?

The answer is not straightforward. Students may see an advertisement, become interested, visit the website and compare several programmes before making a decision.

Their final decision may also depend on fees, course quality, recognition, career opportunities and recommendations from friends or family.

Therefore, this study examines the role of social media advertising as one part of the student decision-making process.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study has three objectives:

1. To examine the role of social media advertising in creating awareness and interest in online degree programmes.

2. To study the relationship between social media advertising and students' intention to enrol in online degree programmes.
3. To identify the factors that make social media advertising more effective in attracting students.

4. Review of Literature

Social media is now widely used by higher education institutions. Universities use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn to communicate with students and promote their programmes.

Chugh and Ruhi (2018) reviewed research on social media in higher education and found that social media has become an important way for institutions to communicate and interact with students.

Kumar and Nanda (2019) also observed that social media can help higher education institutions maintain continuous communication with their audiences.

These studies suggest that social media has moved beyond simple information sharing. It has become part of the relationship between institutions and students.

Rutter, Roper and Lettice (2016) examined the relationship between university social-media activity and student recruitment. Their research found a positive relationship between social-media interaction and recruitment performance.

The study suggests that institutions with stronger social-media activity may have an advantage when attracting students.

This does not mean that social media is the only reason students choose an institution. Instead, it can help an institution become more visible and easier for students to discover.

Students usually consider several sources of information before choosing a higher education programme.

These may include:

- Friends and family
- Teachers
- University websites
- Search engines
- Social media
- Online reviews
- Rankings
- Alumni
- Education websites

Research by Vrontis et al. (2018) found that social media was one of the sources used by students when searching for information about universities.

This is important because students may not make their decision immediately after seeing an advertisement. The advertisement may encourage them to investigate further.

A recent study by Tran et al. (2026) provides strong evidence on this issue. The researchers examined more than one million social-media posts from 94 universities and found that the type of content used by universities can influence student acquisition. Content showing the quality of interaction between students and the institution was particularly useful.

This suggests that students respond not only to advertisements but also to the information and experience communicated through them.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The study uses a descriptive research approach based on secondary information. The purpose is to understand the role of social media advertising by examining existing research and publicly available information.

5.2 Sources of Data

The study uses information from:

- Government reports
- UGC publications
- Higher education reports
- Published research papers
- Academic journals
- Research databases
- Published studies on social media and student recruitment

The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) provides official information about higher education in India. According to AISHE 2021–22, total higher-education enrolment in India was approximately 4.33 crore students. The UGC Distance Education Bureau provides information about institutions and programmes permitted to offer online education.

6. Major Findings

One of the clearest benefits of social media advertising is increased awareness. A student may not know about a particular online programme until an advertisement appears on their social media feed. This is especially useful for newer programmes or institutions that are trying to reach students beyond their traditional geographical market. Social media allows institutions to reach students in different cities and, in some cases, students in other countries.

An advertisement rarely provides all the information a student needs. Instead, it encourages the student to look for more information. Trust is particularly important when choosing an online degree. Students may have concerns about whether the programme is recognised, whether the teaching is good and whether the qualification will help their career.

A student who simply sees an advertisement is different from a student who watches the video, clicks on the link, asks a question or shares the information. Engagement indicates a stronger level of interest. Recent research has found that interaction and personalised communication can influence student engagement, and engagement can in turn influence enrolment intention. This means institutions should encourage interaction rather than simply broadcasting advertisements.

7. Suggestions

Social media advertising plays an important role in creating awareness about online degree programmes. It can influence students' interest and intention to enrol by providing useful and relevant information. However, factors such as fees, programme quality, recognition and career opportunities also affect enrolment decisions. Effective advertisements should be informative, engaging, credible and focused on students' needs. Overall, social media advertising can significantly support student enrolment when combined with a strong educational offering.

8. Conclusion

Social media advertising helps create awareness about online degree programmes. It can increase students' interest and influence their intention to enrol. Relevant, informative and trustworthy content is more effective in attracting students. However, fees, quality, recognition and career opportunities also influence enrolment decisions. Overall, social media advertising can support student enrolment when combined with a strong educational offering.

9. Limitations of the Study

1. The study is based mainly on secondary data and published research.
2. Actual social media advertising expenditure and campaign-level enrolment data are not publicly available.
3. Social media engagement does not always result in actual student enrolment.
4. Students' decisions are also influenced by factors such as fees, course quality, reputation and career opportunities.
5. Therefore, the findings indicate the role of social media advertising but do not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship with enrolment.

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