



Predictors of Enrolment Intention on Social Media: Guidelines for Universities

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ABSTRAK

Secara global, sebagian besar institusi pendidikan tinggi menggunakan media sosial dalam kegiatan sehari-hari mereka. Konsekuensinya, kebutuhan akan pedoman untuk menggunakan media sosial secara efektif dalam rekrutmen mahasiswa telah menjadi kebutuhan karena universitas bersaing satu sama lain. Namun, pedoman penggunaan media sosial masih langka, terutama di ranah pendidikan tinggi dan rekrutmen mahasiswa. Studi ini menganalisis pedoman media sosial dengan menentukan prediktor niat masuk ketika media sosial digunakan selama perekrutan siswa. Tinjauan literatur mengungkapkan adanya lima konstruksi yang mungkin terkait dengan niat untuk mendaftar di universitas. Kuesioner dikembangkan dan diberikan kepada sampel mahasiswa dari empat universitas negeri. Sebanyak 412 kuesioner dianalisis menggunakan regresi linier berganda dan ditemukan empat prediktor niat mendaftar, yaitu fungsi media sosial, keterlibatan media sosial, konten media sosial, dan kebutuhan informasi. Dari prediktor niat masuk dan dari temuan deskriptif penelitian ini, dan literatur tambahan, pedoman media sosial diperoleh dan direkomendasikan untuk digunakan oleh universitas selama perekrutan mahasiswa.

ABSTRACT

Globally, a vast majority higher education institutions are using social media in their day-to-day activities. Consequently, the need for guidelines to effectively use social media in student recruitment has become a necessity as universities compete among themselves. However, guidelines to use social media are scarce, especially in the realm of higher education and student recruitment. This study analyze social media guidelines by determining the predictors of enrolment intention when social media are used during student recruitment. Literature review revealed the existence of five constructs that may be associated with the intention to enrol at a university. A questionnaire was developed and administered to a sample of students from the four public universities. A total of 412 questionnaires were analysed using multiple linear regression and it was found that there are four predictors of enrolment intention, namely social media functionalities, social media engagement, social media content and information needs. From the predictors of enrolment intention and from the descriptive findings of this study, and additional literature, social media guidelines were derived and were recommended to be used by universities during student recruitment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term “social media” was first used in Tokyo online media environment. Social media has subsequently been defined in several ways by many different authors. A definition that has gained some authority in recent years social media is internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content (Aichner et al., 2021; Carr & Hayes, 2015). In fact, social media are considered to be effective channels of communication as they are fast, accessible and offer relatively easy methods to share information. Several studies now concur that social media have become an essential component and a powerful marketing tool which marketers should utilise to their full potential (Ait Lamkadem & Ouiddad, 2021; Cant, 2016; Capriotti et al., 2021). In the field of higher education, social media are used to achieve several objectives. For instance, it has been shown that Facebook is used as an educational tool in higher education as it can bring multiple benefits such as increased interaction, improved performance, and higher engagement (Hutchinson, 2016; Rauniar et al., 2014). Universities also use social media for administrative purposes, enabling submission of assignments while facilitating communication with faculty. An important administrative task of universities is the recruitment of students, without which, the activity of a university shall cease to exist (Dagli et al., 2021; Nwedu, 2019). The fact that prospective students are digital natives, universities can expect to reach them on social media, and the same applies to the prospective students, who expect universities to be present on social media (Condie et al., 2018;

Mazurek et al., 2019). Therefore, reaching prospective students on social media platforms seems to be an unavoidable option for universities. Further, as competition among institutions intensifies, admissions experts in the field of higher education support the fact that communication through social media plays an important role at the stage of enrolment by helping applicants and personalising their experience. In many universities, a social media platform is often the first point of contact for prospective students.

During student recruitment, the use of Facebook and YouTube have been shown to help in attracting local and international students create connections with prospects and improve their enrolment processes (Mwenda et al., 2019; Peruta & Shields, 2018). Previous study provide evidence of how universities use Facebook to help students and alumni to identify strongly with the institution while generating a significant return on their marketing investment (Shields & Peruta, 2019). Social media messages (images, videos, captions, etc.) have been shown to help prospective students gather impressions of the academic culture, campus, activities and key features of an institution, which in turn, helped them to better decide about their future university (Lai et al., 2020; Zhu, 2019).

However, how should social media be used by universities is still under-researched (Al-Thagafi et al., 2020; Roopchund et al., 2019). In several industries, the utilisation of social media is often performed without established guidelines. In the realm of student recruitment, the use of social media is still intriguing university administrators, who claim that they have no guidelines on how to proceed (Chen & Divall, 2018; Jędrzejczyk, 2021). Even if university administrators are aware that prospective students do make use of various social media platforms, some of them are still not convinced of the utility of social media in student recruitment. Therefore, they have no strategies on how to apply social media to enhance the reputation of universities and assist in the enrolment of new students. The aim of this study, which is to analyze guidelines for social media usage based on empirical data, shall be achieved by determining the predictors that can lead a prospective student to enrol at a university. Therefore, focusing on the public universities in Mauritius, the research objective of this study shall be first, to find out the predictors of enrolment intention when social media are used during student recruitment. Then, guidelines for social media usage shall be derived from the predictors. This study shall therefore contribute by adding to the scientific literature, where there is clearly a gap, and bring concrete managerial guidelines to universities.

2. METHOD

Extant literature has revealed five constructs which may be associated with the construct enrolment intention, based on the literature review involving the six constructs, a conceptual model is proposed at Figure 1.

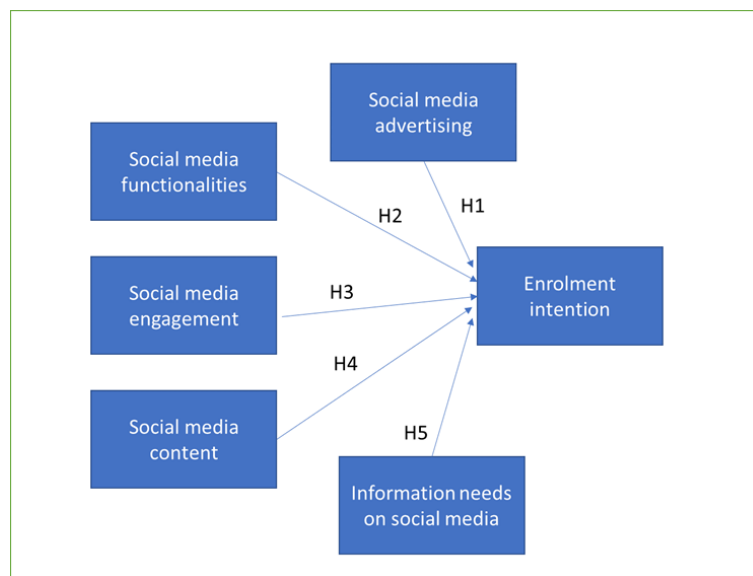


Figure 1. Conceptual Model Representing Predictors of Enrolment Intention

The conceptual model at Figure 1 depicts that the enrolment intention of prospective students can be the result of five predictors, namely advertising on social media, the use of social media functionalities, engagement on social media, the content used on social media and meeting the information needs of prospective students. A conceptual model and the formulation of hypotheses, a quantitative approach using the survey methodology was

designed and implemented. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire which was administered online. Based on the constructs identified, scales for questionnaire items is show in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Scales for Questionnaire Items

| Constructs | Scales/items |
|--|--|
| Enrolment Intention | I considered applying at the university where I am now, as my first choice during enrolment. I had the intention to join this university rather than another university during the enrolment period. I intend to study again at this university in the future. |
| Social media advertising | I was influenced to enrol after I saw the adverts on the social media page of the university. I was interested to seek for more information following the advertisements I saw on the social media of the university. I paid attention to advertisements made by the university on social media. Overall, I am persuaded by the social media advertisement of the university. date about university courses on offer |
| Social media functionalities | The university clearly revealed its uniqueness through its social media pages. I can easily recognize the university by its profile picture on its social media pages. |
| Identity | The social media pages of the university are distinct from that of other universities. |
| Presence | I receive notifications from the university’s social media very often. The university frequently posts updates on its social media accounts. |
| Relationships | I am always aware of the university’s social media activities. I often share the university’s posts on my social media account. I frequently react to the social media posts of the university. It is important that the university seeks the opinions of its followers on its social media platforms |
| Reputation | The university has a large number of followers on social media compared to other universities. The university receives positive comments on its social media posts. The university receives lots of likes on its social media posts. |
| Sharing | The university shares interesting information about its courses on social media. The university shares interesting photos/videos on social media. The university shares important links on social media |
| Conversations | I receive answers to my queries from the university’s social media page. The university replies to the comments of prospective students on its social media pages. The social media accounts of the university are interactive. |
| Groups | The number of fans/followers is very high on the official social media accounts of the university. The university’s followers are very active on the university’s official social media pages. The university’s social media pages provide a platform for healthy discussions. |
| Social media engagement | I frequently comment on the university’s social media posts I usually post photos/videos on the university’s social media page I usually reply to other user’s comments on the university’s social media page. |
| Social media creating behaviour | |
| Social media contributing behaviour | I share the university’s posts regularly I like or react to most of the university’s posts. I invite my friends to the university’s social media page |
| Social media consuming behaviour | I only read the comments posted by others on the university’s social media page. I only view the photos posted on the university’s social media page I only watch the videos posted on the university’s social media page |
| Social media content categories | Social media content promoting courses offered are helpful for prospective students. Educational offers posted on the university’s social media can influence prospective students to enrol. Social media content showing the syllabus of university programmes can improve the intention of students to enrol. |
| Education | |
| Research | The university social media must show more research-related events (seminars, conferences, scientific meetings, etc.) The research conducted by the university must be better promoted on social media. |

| Constructs | Scales/items |
|--------------------------|--|
| Society | Prospective students find it important to know about the research achievements of the university before enrolling. Collaborations and partnerships with other institutions must be displayed on social media. Employability, career and job placements opportunities must be posted on the university's social media. |
| Identity | Prospective students find it important to see student life/community/social/extra-curricular events (e.g. open days, exhibitions, showcases, sports) organised by the university on its on social media. |
| Relationship | A related scale for "Identity" has been under Social media functionality |
| Administration | A related scale for "Relationship" has been created for under Social media functionality The university's social media must display enrolment procedures and deadlines. The university's social media must display the support offered by the university (services, contact points, working hours, email addresses of staff/units, etc...). |
| Information | The university's social media must provide clarifications for fees and financial assistance. |
| Information needs | A related scale for "Information usefulness" has been under Information needs (below). The university's social media was useful for exchanging information with university personnel during student enrolment. |
| Information usefulness | The university's social media offered useful resources during enrolment. The university's social media helped prospective students obtain important updates about the pandemic. |
| Information credibility | I trust the information provided on the social media platforms of the university. The guidance provided by the university on social media during enrolment was credible. The social media advertisements did not provide any misleading information to prospective students. |
| Information accuracy | The information shared on social media during enrolment was always precise. Queries answered on social media by university personnel were correct and to-the-point. The expectations created on social media during enrolment proved to be accurate, once I joined the university. |

Base on Table 1 adapted from extant literature were then validated by experts and subsequently a first draft of a survey questionnaire was developed and piloted. The survey questionnaire consisted of seven parts, with each part measuring the five constructs mentioned before and two more parts which captured the demographics of the respondents and their social media expectations. Once designed, the first draft of the online questionnaire was subjected to expert validation and subsequently piloted with a group of 30 randomly selected university students from the four public universities in Mauritius. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for each item was calculated and found to exceed 0.6. Hence, all items were considered as reliable.

A stratified sampling approach was used to select participants for the survey. The sample required for this study consisted of students who recently joined the four public universities. These students are first year-first semester students, who are expected to better to recall their enrolment experiences. Students from all four public universities of Mauritius were selected using the stratified sampling procedure, whereby the sample selected is proportionate to the number of first year and first semester students of each university. The estimated number of first year students who enrolled in each university was obtained from the yearly report "Participation in Tertiary Education" published by the Higher Education Commission (Higher Education Commission, 2021:21). Based on 95% confidence, 5% error margin and calculated, the sample size required was 367, with Hence, the sample sizes required from the four public universities were calculated and were as follows: University of Mauritius:150; Open University of Mauritius: 147; University of Technology, Mauritius: 58; Université des Mascareignes: 14.

The online questionnaire was then emailed to the administration of each university to be sent to relevant respondents and also sent directly to groups of university students (e.g. student unions) for further dissemination. A follow up was done with each university administration and students were contacted directly and motivated to fill in and submit the online questionnaire. Once completed questionnaires were received, the data were processed using both descriptive and inferential analyses. Inferential analyses occurred through multiple linear regression. Correlations were first worked out, followed by multiple linear regression. The five hypotheses mentioned earlier were tested and the significance each proposed predictor of enrolment intention was determined.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The total number of respondents of the survey was 421, from which 9 exited as they did not consent to participate. Hence, the data has been analysed based on a sample of 412 respondents as displayed in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Respondents Distribution Across the Public Universities

| Public universities in Mauritius | Number of respondents | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| University of Mauritius | 166 | 40.3 |
| Open University of Mauritius | 185 | 44.9 |
| University of Technology, Mauritius | 43 | 10.4 |
| Université des Mascareignes | 18 | 4.4 |
| TOTAL | 412 | 100.0 |

Part of the survey identified the social media platforms preferred by prospective students and their perceived importance of each platform during enrolment. Descriptive statistics for these two items are at [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Social Media Platform Preferences of Prospective Students

| Social media platforms used | Number of responses | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Facebook | 297 | 58.0 |
| Instagram | 112 | 21.9 |
| YouTube | 40 | 7.8 |
| TikTok | 4 | 0.8 |
| LinkedIn | 17 | 3.3 |
| None | 12 | 2.3 |
| Other | 30 | 5.9 |
| TOTAL | 512 | 100.0 |

From [Table 3](#), it can be inferred that Facebook and Instagram are the most favourite social media platforms of prospective students who are enrolling at public universities in Mauritius. However, TikTok, is the least preferred one during enrolment, probably due to its newness.

Another part of the survey identified the challenges which prospective students face during student recruitment and gathered their suggestions for social media content that that influence their enrolment during the recruitment process. Regarding challenges encountered, the students 29.4% of the respondents (n=119) reported that they were confused during student recruitment; 53.6% (n=221) stated that they required additional information and 47.8% (n=181) reported that they needed additional information mostly during the application phase of the recruitment process. Social media content that can influence enrolment is shown in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Social Media Content That Can Influence Enrolment

| Social media content | Mean |
|---|------|
| Information about career prospects | 4.48 |
| Admission procedures | 4.42 |
| Information about scholarships | 4.37 |
| Information about the semester schedule | 4.37 |
| Information about course curriculum | 4.35 |
| Information about placement | 4.35 |
| Information about the university's reputation | 4.32 |
| Upcoming events | 4.27 |
| Photos/videos of university events | 4.23 |
| Profile of academics and their expertise | 4.22 |
| Photos/videos of campus facilities | 4.13 |
| Photos/videos of student achievements | 4.13 |
| Information about the university's partners | 4.01 |
| Photos/videos of lecture samples | 3.99 |
| Photos/videos of students' testimonials | 3.95 |
| Photos/videos of orientation sessions | 3.92 |
| Photos/videos of student projects | 3.92 |
| Photos/videos of graduation ceremonies | 3.77 |

Base on Table 4, provided interesting results which university administrators could use to create content during student recruitment. Even though the sample size of 412 was considered to be statistically large, the survey data was tested for validity and reliability, prior to data analysis. Both the lower and upper acceptable limits for internal consistency were respected for each set of statements and the internal consistency of the questionnaire with regards to all the constructs was confirmed. The construct validity and sampling adequacy testing results respectively measured by Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic showed that the p -values obtained for Bartlett's test were less than 5% and hence significant, meaning that the constructs represented by the sets of statements were unidimensional. Furthermore, the sample was adequate, given that each KMO statistic was at least 0.5.

As a procedure required before multiple regression, correlation analysis was conducted to confirm whether the testing of a multiple regression model is justified. Also, multiple regression analysis usually requires that all data assumptions be checked and satisfied before implementation. Since each construct is interval, Pearson's coefficient was used to measure the correlations. The correlations among the independent constructs were all positive and statistically significant at the 1% level, except for the correlation between *Social Media Advertising* and *Social Media Content* ($r = 0.093$, $p = 0.059$). Furthermore, each independent construct had a correlation with *Enrolment Intention* that was positive and significant at the 1% level. Besides correlation not implying causality the testing of a multiple regression model was justified under these circumstances.

The five hypotheses based on the conceptual model were implicitly tested while conducting multiple regression in SPSS. The results of hypothesis-testing are given in the output table of coefficients via the p -values of each predictor as show in Table 5.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | SRtandardized Coefficients | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|----------------------------|--------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. |
| (Constant) | 0.975 | 0.660 | | 1.477 | 0.140 |
| Semester | 0.023 | 0.050 | 0.021 | 0.459 | 0.647 |
| Age group | 0.088 | 0.053 | 0.082 | 1.656 | 0.098 |
| Gender | 0.070 | 0.094 | 0.034 | 0.750 | 0.453 |
| Level of studies | -0.020 | 0.132 | -0.007 | -0.151 | 0.880 |
| Nationality | 0.297 | 0.465 | 0.028 | 0.639 | 0.523 |
| University | -0.251 | 0.060 | -0.194 | -4.168 | 0.000 |
| Social Media Advertising | -0.046 | 0.052 | -0.045 | -0.880 | 0.379 |
| Social Media Functionalities | 0.376 | 0.116 | 0.231 | 3.240 | 0.001 |
| Social Media Engagement Behaviour | 0.222 | 0.078 | 0.181 | 2.860 | 0.004 |
| Social Media Content | -0.180 | 0.097 | -0.102 | -1.853 | 0.065 |
| Information Needs | 0.418 | 0.108 | 0.231 | 3.883 | 0.000 |

Referring to Table 5, it can be seen that *Social Media Functionalities* ($\beta = .231$, $t = 3.240$, $p = .001$), *Social Media Engagement Behaviour* ($\beta = .181$, $t = 2.860$, $p = .004$) and *Information Needs* ($\beta = .231$, $t = 3.883$, $p < .001$) had positive and significant impacts on *Enrolment Intention* at the 1% level. With a β -coefficient of equal magnitude with that of *Social Media Functionalities* (.231), *Information Needs* had the greatest impact on the dependent variable, as it had a smaller p -value. Moreover, it should be noted that *Social Media Content* ($\beta = -0.102$, $t = -1.853$, $p = 0.065$) was significant at the 7% level, which is non-negligible. In this study, though the default significance testing level was 5%, *Social Media Content*, which had a negative impact on *Enrolment Intention*, will be considered as a significant determinant of the latter. Interestingly, the results showed that social media advertising has no significant impact on enrolment intention while social media content has a significant negative impact on enrolment intention, to be discussed next.

Discussion

Predictor 1: social media functionalities

Given that social media functionalities have been found to have a significant and positive effect on the enrolment intention of prospective students, it is crucial for universities to implement these functionalities. The construct "social media functionalities" based on the Honeycomb Model provides seven social media functionalities which universities can integrate in their recruitment strategies to positively influence prospective students to enrol (Kietzmann et al., 2011). For example, universities can use the "identity" functionality to project their corporate and brand identity (Diba et al., 2019; Malhotra, n.d.). Universities can therefore emphasise their uniqueness with pictures, colour schemes, tag lines, unique selling points and other differentiating elements that

can contribute to showing the university's brand. Universities can also use the "sharing" functionality for sharing the right information, images and videos on social media. The "share" button is found on all social media platforms, requires little effort to use. The "group" functionality of social media is well documented in literature depicting that individuals may fulfill their information needs by joining relevant groups on Facebook, and, therefore, universities must use this functionality during student recruitment (Chawla & Chodak, 2015; Motahari-Nezhad et al., 2021).

Predictor 2: social media engagement behaviour

Engagement behaviour on social media has been described to be either active or passive and consist of three types: creating behaviour, contributing behaviour and consuming behaviour. Consuming behaviour is basic and involve passive actions such as reading a post, looking at a photo, watching a video, whereas contributing behaviour is a moderate level of engagement, whereby users make contributions to existing content on social media (Dolan et al., 2019; Oliveira, 2020; Ürer Erdil et al., 2021). Therefore, universities can post social media content so that prospective students get engaged by "liking", "sharing", "tagging" or inviting a friend to like the page. At a higher level of engagement, "creating" behaviour, requires users to be more proactive and initiate actions on the university's social media platform. For example, a prospective student starts commenting positively on the university's posts, or posts emoticons, uploads videos or publishes pictures to support the university.

Predictor 3: information needs

Providing prospective students with practical, credible and quality information can influence their enrolment decision. The significant and positive impact of information needs on enrolment show that prospective students need the right type of information on social media, that is useful, credible and quality information to make informed decisions about the university of their preference (Nanath et al., n.d.; Ürer Erdil et al., 2021). Useful information for prospective students can be information about career prospects, admission procedures, scholarships, semester schedule, course curriculum, events, campus facilities, etc., as determined by the survey. Credible information on social media requires that the information posted be "accurate, caring, competent, complete, convincing, ethical, honest, impressing, reliable and warranted. The source of any content they post must come from authoritative sources, such as the Academics of the University, its senior staff, the Government, journalists or other trusted sources. The quality of information posted on the university's social media platform also plays a determining role in the prospective student's decision-making process and universities must strive to maintain quality on their social media platforms.

Predictor 4: social media content

The finding that the impact of social media content is significant but negative on enrolment intention, is unexpected. However, there are studies showing that information overload on social media, considered when the amount of information on the platform exceeds the processing capacity of the user, is a potential stressor which can have negative effects on users (Laumer & Maier, 2021; Weiss et al., 2022). Several authors have observed the potential risks associated with too much content on social media, leading to users' avoidance intention such as unfriending/unfollowing, blocking or ignoring posts (Dai et al., 2020; Wu & Zheng, 2023). Therefore, the findings showing that social media content has a significant but negative impact on enrolment intention makes sense, as too much content can have an adverse effect. The social media content proposed by students in Table 4, is however, worthy of consideration by university administrators when planning social media content for student recruitment.

Social media advertising

Another unexpected finding is the result showing that social media advertising does not impact significantly on enrolment intention. This is however in contradiction with studies which argue in favour of social media advertising as a determinant of purchase intention or buying behaviour (Liao & Huang, 2021; Sari & Aras, 2021). However, this does not mean that public universities in Mauritius should not undertake social media advertising. Advertisements may not determine if enrolment will take place but play an important role in the early stages of the buyer's journey and can help create awareness (Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

The main objective of the study was to determine the predictors of enrolment intention of prospective students when they use social media during student recruitment. Theoretically, this study, has for the first time, brought together major frameworks such as the seven building blocks. The guidelines derived from the predictors is a major step, as extant literature does not provide such set of guidelines for social media usage in student recruitment. Theoretically, the four predictors provide the basis for a framework for social media usage to enhance

student recruitment. At a practical level, universities can adapt the guidelines proposed and test the outcomes during student recruitment. Using social media, however, requires that the users remain up-to-date with the features of each social media platform, which keep on evolving. The practical usage of the predictors shall depend on the technical abilities and creativity of the user, who now has a tool with which to experiment.

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