

TECH-ENABLED PLATFORMS AND STUDENT ENROLMENT

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ABSTRACT

Particularly among young people and college students, use of social media has been on the rise. It's a conduit via which individuals may communicate and trade digital content such as thoughts, ideas, and views. The most frequent definition of social media is the network of websites and mobile applications that allow users to communicate with one another, share and discover information, and build social networks. The educational system has benefited greatly from the advancements in information and communication technologies. The advent of several social media platforms has brought about a revolutionary change in the education industry, particularly because of its relationship with the tech-savvy youth. The educational system is gradually incorporating these innovations. Information and communication technologies and social media are being used by educational institutions to enhance the lives of its students. With the use of social media, educational institutions, instructors, parents, and students may all communicate and collaborate more effectively. As a direct response to the COVID - 19 epidemic, most schools have implemented tech-enabled student enrolment platforms, streamlining their academic and administrative processes in the process. This research examines how the use of technology-enabled platforms affects the impact of social media on student enrolment. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of a questionnaire the author had developed independently based on a review of the relevant literature. The SPSS software was used to check the validity of the hypotheses.

KEYWORDS - *Student enrolment, Social Media, Technology enabled enrolment systems, COVID -19*

I. INTRODUCTION

Even in more remote locations, the Internet has become a common household name. Whether you're five years old or sixty years old, everyone today understands what the Internet is and how to use it. With the Internet's rapid expansion, businesses of all stripes are looking for ways to take advantage of its accessibility. Social media platforms emerged as a result of developments in internet technology. Whether they are eager or hesitant to adopt new technologies, schools cannot deny the pervasive influence that the Internet and social media have on today's college campuses. Today's educational institutions use technology-based services to expedite student-related academic and administrative operations.

Students and schools alike can benefit from the many channels of communication made possible by social media. YouTube is useful for both students and educators since instructors may post lesson plans for online viewing at students' leisure or in response to specific needs. Many prestigious colleges now offer online classes that students may access using tools like Zoom, Skype, and others. The best aspect of using social media in the classroom is that students may learn directly from subject matter experts by subscribing to and routinely monitoring the channels of those experts. The educational industry makes extensive use of social media for administrative purposes in addition to academic and teaching-learning uses. According to research done by the University of Massachusetts in 2008 [1], the percentage of people who use and are familiar with social media increased from 55% to 53% in that time. The use of social media and other technology-based applications, such as blogs, instant messaging, message boards, video blogging, podcasting, etc., is becoming increasingly commonplace among today's students.

The admissions offices' use of technology-enabled tools, however, is more pertinent to the prospective students. The percentage of schools using technology-enabled enrolment tools jumped from 29% in 2007 to 61% in 2008, according to a separate survey from the University of Massachusetts. According to research done by Cappex.com in 2010 [2], Facebook has surpassed all other social networking sites in popularity among university admissions departments. The survey also revealed that admissions offices often post updates, news, images, and college-related videos to keep current students interested and to strengthen ties with alumni. Even in India, higher education institutions are increasingly using social media to reach out to potential new students.

Uploading fresh information often, which involves a lot of work and ingenuity, is the biggest barrier for these educational institutions to stay up with social media. While some schools do provide blogging platforms, the majority of school and university blogs do not allow for user comments, severely limiting the blogs' potential for growth and change [3]. College admissions offices are often the first point of contact for prospective students and their families, making it imperative that they maintain a spotless public image at all times. However, the benefits of using social media to attract and enrol students outweigh the drawbacks since it enables institutions to engage with students of a tech-savvy generation in relevant and engaging ways. Today's students may use social media to research institutions, fields of study, and employment opportunities. Many students still use college websites as their primary research tool, and campus visits remain popular among others, but social media platforms are being used as a complementary resource. Because of these advantages, universities have begun utilising social media as a means of attracting new students [4].

Current and prospective students alike have been demanding greater levels of customization inside the university's online student communities. Spending significant time, energy, innovation, and creativity is necessary to meet the individualised needs of present students, prospective students, parents, faculty, and alumni. Most universities now utilise professional enrolment services, which monitor every page, every post, and every visitor, and which constantly assess the efficacy of social media use and the extent to which content is informative to the various subsets of the target audience. Students spend a lot of time on social media sites like Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram with their friends, but the National Research Centre for College & University Admissions' 2017 Social Admissions Report found that they don't use these platforms to learn more about schools. The vast majority of students check college websites first when looking for details like this. Students often use social media to narrow down their list of possible universities, making it a key factor in their final selection. Students seldom utilise social media to learn more about available college options, and instead use it to sway their decision on where to apply.

Problem Statement

In the modern day, social media is being utilized more and more as a promotional tool. In the face of fierce competition, businesses throughout Tanzania, including HLIs, are looking for more cost-effective ways to win over clients. The term "social media" encompasses a wide range of online platforms that encourage and facilitate the production, distribution, and consumption of user-generated material online. Although social media was created to bring people together, it has now become a powerful tool for administration. It has already had a profound impact on enterprises all around the globe, and it is certain to have further far-reaching effects in the future. Thus, HEIs may use this innovation to their advantage by proactively promoting their activities through social media. It is believed that universities and colleges might better reach and recruit new students through the usage of social media.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Because of rising costs associated with higher education and greater rivalry among institutions, schools and universities are increasing their marketing efforts to attract potential students. Students today can pick and choose among a dizzying array of higher education options; as a result, admissions officers must be creative in their efforts to attract talented young people to their campuses by advertising their schools on platforms where they spend a lot of time online [5, 6]. Colleges and universities can improve their enrolment numbers by learning about and appealing to the various criteria that prospective students use to make decisions [5, 7, 8, 9, 10].

One of the most cutting-edge applications of the Internet to the business world is social media marketing [11, 12]. Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Twitter, and Instagram are among the most widely used social media sites nowadays [13, 11]. Colleges and universities are using various college choice models [9, 11, 10, 14] to better understand the factors that influence a student's decision to enrol at a given institution, and to tailor their marketing strategies accordingly.

Reference [15] created the first model to try to capture how students make decisions about which colleges to apply to. According to research by [16], prospective students' college decisions are influenced by both internal and external variables, both of which were first highlighted by [15]. Reference [17] offered an alternative strategy for selecting colleges and universities. Predisposition, search, and final selection were the three components of this paradigm [18, 5]. After finishing high school, students are in the pre-disposition stage [14] and must decide whether or not to enrol in postsecondary education. At this point, students have decided to pursue further education at a college or university and have begun researching available programmes and options [10]. Students then use this data to select a college or institution of their liking [19, 18]. This is the final stage. Students typically weigh financial considerations and the advice of friends, instructors, and guidance counsellors when deciding which institution to attend [11].

Other choice models exist as hybrids of the two examples given above. Colleges and universities may promote themselves more successfully to prospective students if they have a thorough understanding of both the student and the institutional qualities that impact students' decision [11, 12, 10].

Colleges and universities now use social media as a promotional strategy because of the widespread use of the platforms among today's youth. Modern students spend a lot of time on social media; this is an opportunity for schools to connect with both current and potential students in meaningful ways [20, 21]. Most modern universities actively recruit both domestic and international students using social media [22, 23, 24]. The target audience now heavily utilises and depends on these social media channels to receive the essential information, hence these are gradually replacing the previously employed traditional marketing platforms. Location, facilities, courses, testimonials, etc., about colleges and universities are all easily accessible on social networking platforms [25].

Several studies conducted in the last decade on student enrolment on social media sites found that the vast majority of students enrolled in their higher education institutions through social media platforms [21, 23, 25] and other studies found that many educational activities take place on social media platforms [11,20,24]. According to some research [10, 11, 24, 25], between 40 and 60 per cent of Facebook users who have visited a college or university's website are interested in enrolling there.

The education sector has been hit hard by the problems caused by the Covid-19 epidemic. There have been several issues with the academic and administrative functioning of schools, colleges, and institutions [26]. Platforms like Zoom and Google meet helped universities and schools stabilise and adapt to the problems posed by the epidemic. However, the procedure of enrolling students was another difficulty that required immediate correction [26]. Most Indian kids and their families prefer a hands-on admissions process that includes visiting the school in person. The manual admittance procedure would not have been viable at most educational institutions, however, due to the epidemic and lockdowns prevalent in practically every state. Therefore, enrolment services have turned to the internet medium, made possible by technological advancements. Enrolment is the initial step for a student to become part of an educational institution, and students are viewed as the most important stakeholders [15, 18, 20]. To meet the pandemic challenge and maintain effective administration of the educational institution, a rapid and radical shift from traditional platforms to online platforms was necessary. This study not only examines the impact of social media on college enrolment, but also investigates the role that technological participation plays in mediating this effect.

While there is research on the impact of social media on enrolment in higher education, there is far less on the function of technology-enabled platforms as a mediator between prospective students and institutions. Therefore, the study's primary goals are to ascertain the extent to which social media platforms affect student enrolment and to comprehend the function of technology as a mediator in this connection.

Therefore the two hypotheses that have been formulated to be tested in this study are:

H1: Social media impacts the student enrolment in HEIs

H2: Technology enabled platforms usage mediated the influence of social media on student enrolment

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

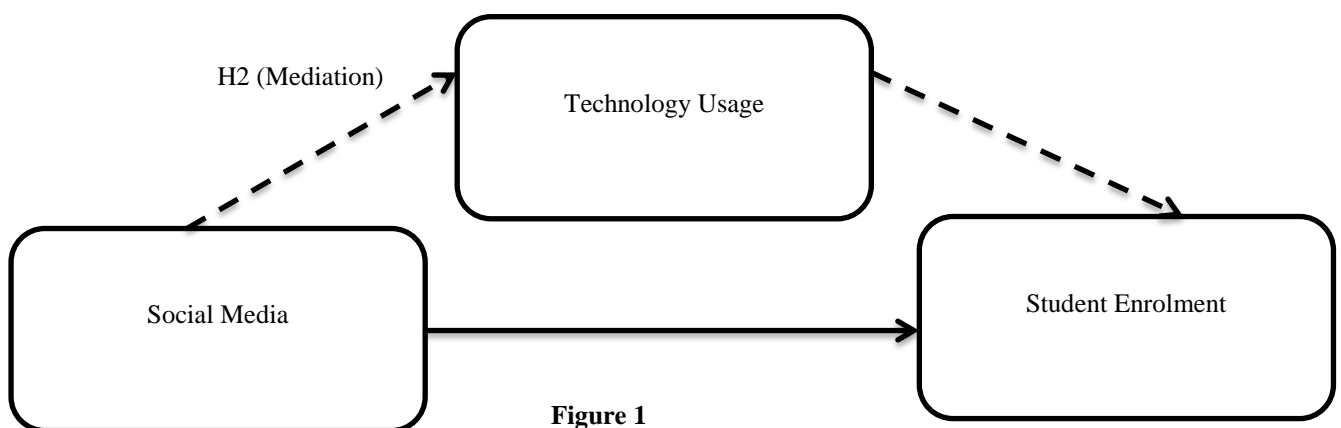


Figure 1

IV. STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the factors of social media that impact the student enrolment in HEIs
2. To determine the influence of social media on student enrolment in HEIs
3. To understand the mediating role of tech-enabled platforms between social media and student enrolment

V. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs an empirical and descriptive methodology. The questionnaire was created by the author after a careful study of the relevant literature. Two hundred students from a variety of educational backgrounds in Bangalore were surveyed using questionnaires. These students ranged in age from twelfth standard to doctoral candidates. Respondents were either currently enrolled in a course at a college or university or were planning to enrol at such an institution. Multiple students' email accounts, group chats, and messengers were used to distribute the link to the Google form version of the questionnaire. After collecting the data, tabulation was performed, and the SPSS software was used for analysis and interpretation.

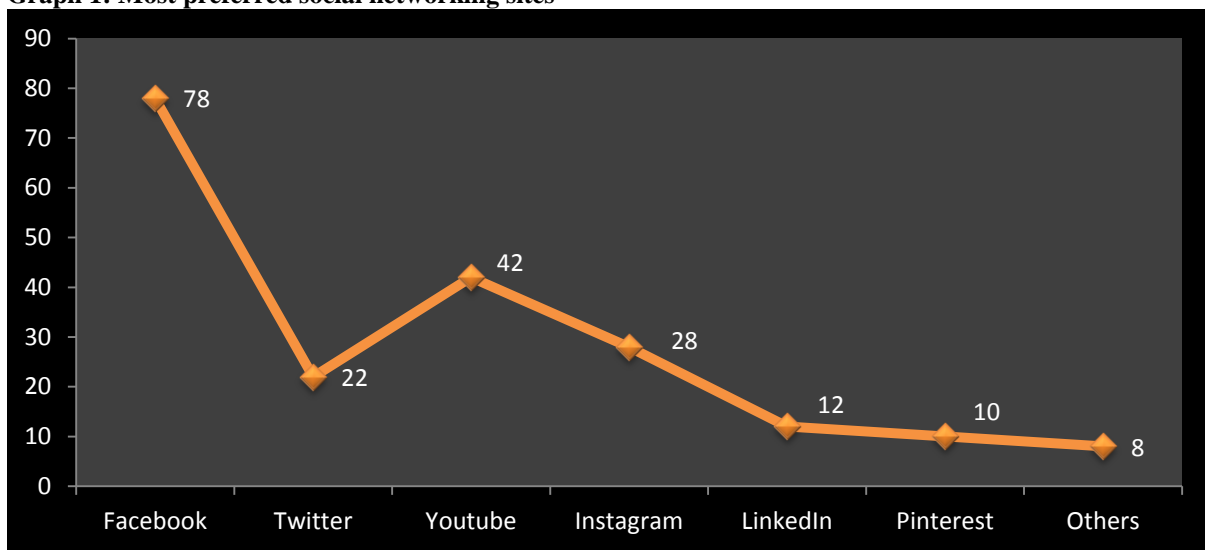
Respondents Profile

The sample distribution comprised of 54.5 per cent male students and 45.5 per cent female students. Nearly 25 per cent of the respondents were twelfth standard students, 44 per cent were college students and 31 per cent were university students. Almost 38.5 per cent of the students were between the age group of 15 to 20 years, 31.5 per cent of them were between 20 and 25 years of age, and 30 per cent of them were above 25 years of age. More than 75 per cent of the respondents were based on urban locations while 25 per cent of them were based in rural locations. More than 85 per cent of the respondents were unmarried while 15 per cent of them were married.

VI. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

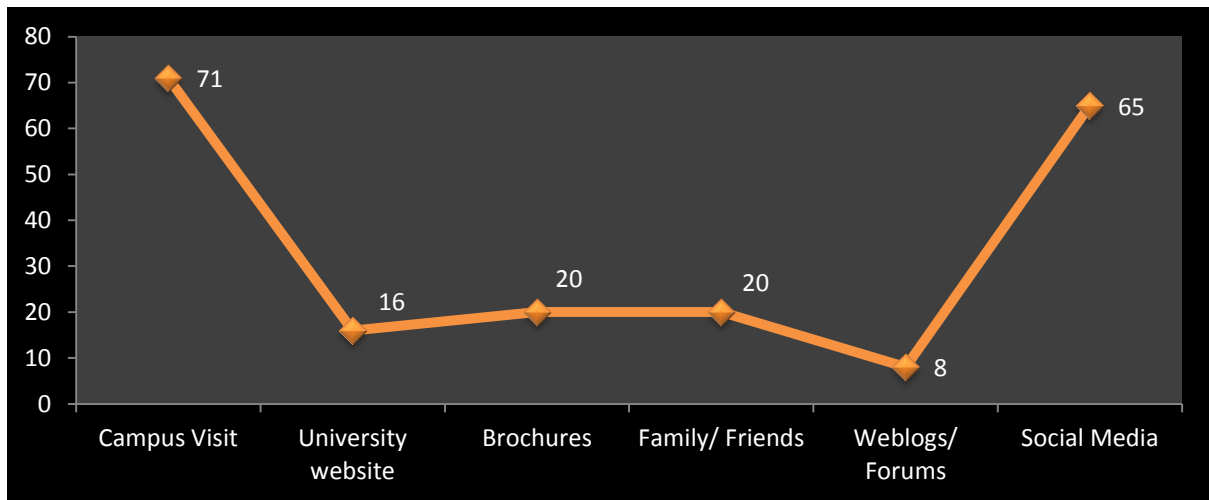
Reliability of the Instrument: The research instrument comprised of three sections. The first section comprised of demographic statements, the second section comprised of statements pertaining to social media and the third section comprised of statements pertaining to technology based student enrolment. The Cronbach alpha value for the research instrument was 0.887 which is high indicating good internal consistency between the items.

Graph 1: Most preferred social networking sites



From the data collected from the 200 respondents in Bangalore, we can conclude that Facebook is the most popular social networking platform among Bangalore's student population.

Graph 2: Most preferred information sources in making a choice about a college or a university



As can be seen in the preceding graph, prospective students value campus visits and word-of-mouth recommendations from current students and alumni the most when deciding which college or university to attend. Therefore, as it was difficult for students to travel as a result of lockdown during the epidemic, students turned to social media as the next logical source of information when picking which institution or university to enrol in.

Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was used to divide the social media data into several categories. Using factor analysis, social media activity may be broken down into their constituent parts. To extract these factors, we performed a principal component analysis and employed the Varimax rotation approach. Three factors were found after applying the Varimax rotation to the data, with no cross-loadings. The input variables were factored into three categories, as follows: (1) social media platforms used for social engagement; (2) social media platforms used for information search; and (3) social media platforms used for sharing content. Each case's factor loadings were calculated.

Table No. 1: Factor Analysis

Factors	Dimension Name	Statements	Factor loading
F1	Social Engagement	To keep in touch with family/ friends	0.816
		To view pictures and videos of friends and family	0.747
		Search for new friends/ contacts	0.647
		Know about the whereabouts of friends	0.636
		Entertainment purpose	0.621
F2	Information Seeking	Get more information about studies	0.788
		Get information about different universities	0.724
		Reading reviews of different products	0.706
		Read opinions and testimonials about colleges and universities	0.747
F3	Content Contribution	Share opinions through forums	0.744
		Review products that you have purchased	0.662

	and used	
	Post/ Share experiences	0.625
	Participate in polls	0.659
	Subscription to RSS feeds	0.635

Hypothesis 1: Social media influences the student enrolment in higher educational institutions

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Model Summary, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Coefficient values of Social Media and Its Influence on Student Enrolment

		Social Media	Student Enrolment
	Mean	4.70	4.08
	SD	0.69	0.62
Model Summary	R2	0.373	
ANOVA	F	149.82	
	Sig	0.000	
Coefficient	B ₀	0.159	
	B _(Social Media)	0.286	
	t	14.479	
	Sig	0.000	

At the 1% level of statistical significance, a correlation test between social media use and student enrolment was shown to be positive and significant. Pearson's correlation between social media use and student enrolment was found to be 0.775, suggesting a strong association between the two. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine whether or not social media had an effect on student enrolment, and the findings are shown in table 2 above. Based on the data in the table above, we may conclude that social media accounts for 37.3% of the observed variation in student enrolment ($p = 0.0001$). This confirms the direction idea stated before. With an R2 value of 0.301, more than 30% of the variance in student enrolment could be attributed to the information seeking factor of social media when a linear regression was performed between each of the factors of social media and student enrolment. These factors are social engagement, information seeking, and content contribution.

Specifically, the correlation between information seeking and student enrolment was found to be the strongest (coefficient = 0.701), followed by the correlation between social engagement and student enrolment (coefficient = 0.578), and finally the correlation between content contribution and student enrolment (coefficient = 0.489).

Hypothesis 2: Usage of technology enabled platforms mediated the influence of social media on student enrolment

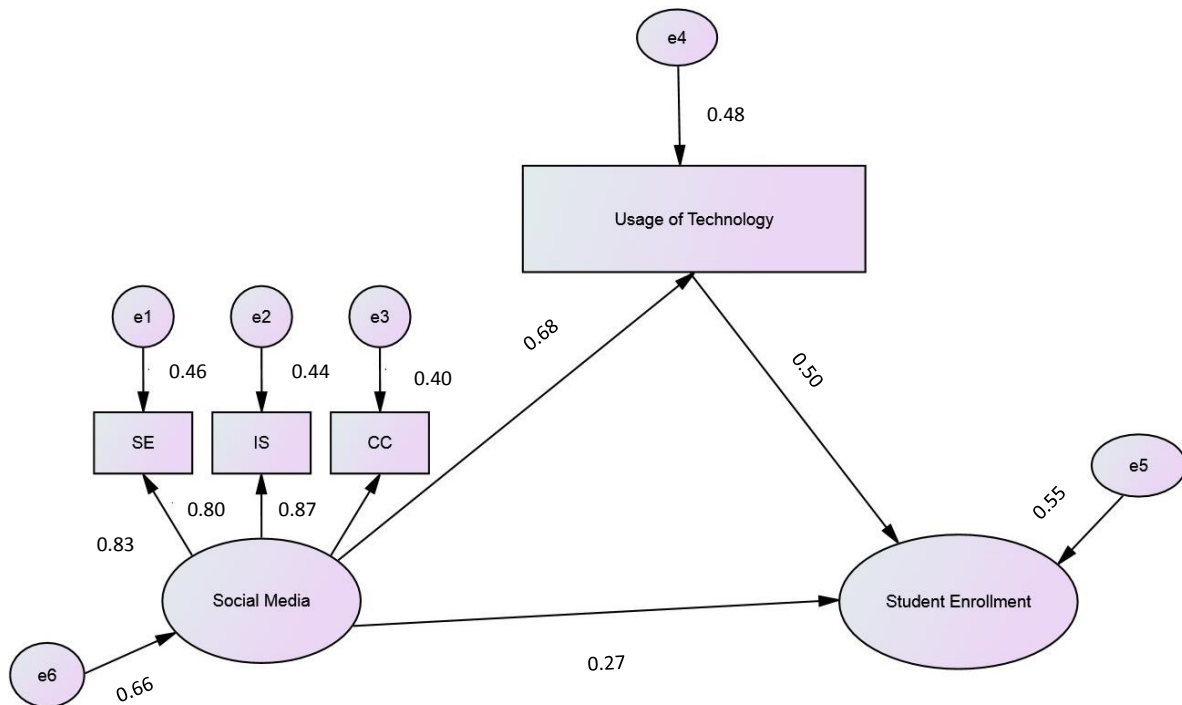


Figure 2: Path diagram of the mediator role of Usage of Technology enabled platforms between Social Media and Student Enrolment

The model examining the function of Technology Usage as a mediator between Social Media and Student Enrollment has a goodness-of-fit index of. The chi-square test statistic, expressed as 2/df, is 3.043 (p.001), which is less than 5. The root-mean-squared error of approximation (RMSEA) is.0161, which is within the acceptable range of 0.05-0.10, suggesting a good fit; the normed fit index (NFI) is.928, the comparative fit index (CFI) is.963, and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) is.983, all of which are within the acceptable range of 0.90-0.99, indicating a good fit. That developed model may then be utilized to test the mediation if it turns out to have a satisfactory match. Table 3 displays the findings of a study of the direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect of the mediator on the dependent variable. The beta coefficients shown in the table have all been standardised.

Table 3: Standardised coefficients of mediator role of Usage of technology between Social Media and Student Enrolment

Variables	B	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Decision
Tech-enabled platforms<---Social Media	.678**	.269**	.34**	.61**	Partial mediation
Student enrolment<--- Social Media	.269**				
Student enrolment<--- Tech-enabled platforms	.501**				

**The significance level of all the values is $p < .01$

From Table 3, it is clear that the Social Media effects Usage of Technology ($\beta = .678, p < .01$), Usage of technology effects Student enrolment ($\beta = .501, p < .01$) and Social media effects Student enrolment ($\beta = .269, p > .01$). To look at the mediating effect of usage of technology enabled platforms, both the direct and indirect effects were computed. It is evident from table 2, that the direct path coefficient is .269 is significant. When the mediator is added into the model, the standardised path coefficient changes to 0.34 which is significant, indicating thereby a partial mediated effect on the relationship between Social media Student enrolment. The null hypothesis is rejected and it is concluded that Usage of technology mediates between Social Media and Student enrolment.

DISCUSSIONS

Students at all levels of education utilise social media to connect with peers, learn from one another's perspectives, and shape their own decisions. Schools often push students to become active on social media in order to reap the benefits of this medium for themselves. It's become common practise for today's youth to

use social media to research potential options before settling on one [27, 28]. The Covid-19 epidemic has introduced additional obstacles to the efficient operation of educational institutions, especially the enrollment of students in higher education. Computer digitalization is one of the most significant developments available to educational institutions at the present time [29]. Computers are increasingly being utilized for vital purposes such as communication and the distribution of information as a result of technological advancements. In order to adapt to the new normal and guarantee the institution's smooth operation, student enrollment systems have experienced a quick and disruptive transformation as they have shifted from old methods to more advanced online platforms [30]. It is more convenient and possible for international students to inquire about and enroll at the university of their choice thanks to online student enquiry and enrolment systems [26, 30]. Many studies have produced similar results about the usage of social media for the purpose of student enrolment and believe that usage of social media by the admissions office is only going to increase here afterwards [25, 26].

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

It's no secret that colleges and institutions are now starting to recognize the significance of social media and allocating more resources accordingly. The results show that even with the obstacles, the HLI's understand the value of social media. According to the results of this research, educational institutions need to devote more time, money, and administrative energy into utilizing social media, and this applies to all of their departments and faculties. Culture, insufficient funding, and infrastructure-related aspects like tools and equipment are all hindrances that may be overcome with the backing of upper management. It is indicated that the adoption of necessary infrastructure, among other actions, is needed if colleges are to prosper by successfully leveraging social media for the promotion of their activities. To further expand one's social media following, one must develop competitive tactics and procedures. This might be free or sponsored traffic. The marketing efforts of the many entities of a university need to be coordinated into a single, cohesive whole. If the responsible team doesn't take an integrated market approach, they may fail. Even if they are convinced that their plan would enhance traffic, they may run against resistance from other divisions. The success of colleges' use of social media should be measured by the amount of consumer response they get, including queries for clarification. The good news is that social media provides a ton of room for innovation and the testing of several low-cost marketing strategies. Unlike with more conventional forms of promotion like billboards or print ads, the performance and return on investment of digital marketing initiatives can be tracked in real time using tools like analytics dashboards. However, social media makes it possible for the public to view complaints, negative comments, or criticism directed at educational institutions. Without adequate handling, including the providing of explanation before negative feedback becomes viral; the university's image might be damaged by unfavorable remarks or a lack of an effective response. The institution's reputation may be damaged by the widespread use of social media.

VIII. IMPLICATIONS

The results of this research would add significantly to what is already known about the impact of social media on education and enrolment practices. Institutional leaders in K-12, higher education, and the wider education system may find this research useful. This study might be expanded by contrasting traditional admissions processes with their digital counterparts at educational institutions. While the participants in this study are all college students in Bangalore, the findings might be generalized to college students in other regions of the nation, particularly in less populous or rural areas. If this study were to be expanded, student evaluations of existing online enrollment systems in schools might reveal which characteristics are crucial for creating a successful student enrolling platform.

IX. LIMITATIONS

The sample size is limited covering a wide range of strata of students ranging from twelfth to doctoral students. There could be an inherent bias among the respondents in the usage of questionnaires. The study is restricted to HEIs in Bangalore and could be extended to a wider geographic area in the future studies.

X. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to determine how social media affects college enrollment. It also establishes how far social media may sway college applications and how far technological platforms can affect college enrollment. According to the results of this research, the use of social media has a significant impact on enrollment decisions. It was also shown that the use of social media significantly increases the number of people enrolling in colleges and universities. It was discovered that the use of technology-enabled platforms moderated the effect of social media on student enrollment. Though promising, studies of the marketing potential of social media for educational institutions have a long way to go before they can be considered comprehensive.

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