

Digital Marketing's Influence on Gen Z's Choice of Academic Institutions in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, academic institutions in Nepal are increasingly active on social media platforms, often more so than on their official websites. This research evaluates the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies employed by Nepalese academic institutions in attracting Generation Z (Gen Z) students, who dominate the student population from secondary education to the PhD level. The study explores the relationship between academic institutions' social media efforts and Gen Z students' decision-making processes, focusing on the types of content that resonate most with this demographic.

Additionally, the study examines the role of trust and credibility in digital marketing and identifies strategies that institutions can adopt to enhance their online presence. A survey of 152 Gen Z students, primarily from Kathmandu Valley, provides insights into their social media usage patterns, preferences, and perceptions of digital marketing content. The findings guide Nepalese academic institutions in refining their digital marketing strategies to better engage and attract Gen Z students.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Social media, Gen Z, Nepalese academic institutes, Marketing strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a dynamic field that has evolved significantly over the years, particularly in response to global crises, technological advancements, and societal changes. The rise of the internet has transformed the marketing landscape, enabling businesses to reach customers through new digital channels. Digital marketing, which leverages electronic commerce to promote and sell goods and services online, has become an essential component of contemporary business strategy.

This rapid growth in digital marketing has not only expanded the reach of businesses globally but has also significantly altered consumer behavior. This is especially evident with Generation Z (Gen Z), a demographic that has grown up with technology as a fundamental part of their lives. Businesses, including academic institutions, must adopt digital marketing strategies to effectively engage this generation, as digital channels play a crucial role in influencing their decision-making processes.

1.1 Understanding Generation Z

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents the first generation of "digital natives," individuals who have been immersed in technology from a young age. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z has had uninterrupted access to the internet, social media, and digital platforms, shaping their consumer behaviors and preferences in profound ways (Giunta, 2017; (Mude & Undale, 2023). They value authenticity, transparency, and social responsibility and are highly influenced by peer reviews, online communities, and social media content.

These characteristics make traditional marketing strategies less effective in engaging Gen Z. Instead, businesses must adopt a digital-first approach that leverages social media, influencer marketing, user-generated content, and personalized experiences. In particular, Gen Z's preference for brands and organizations that align with their values, such as environmental sustainability and ethical practices, plays a pivotal role in shaping their consumer choices.

1.2 Digital Marketing and Gen Z's Educational Choices

The impact of digital marketing on consumer behavior extends beyond retail and service industries to the educational sector. In Nepal, where digitalization is rapidly increasing, academic institutions are now utilizing digital marketing to attract and engage prospective students. Understanding how digital marketing influences Gen Z's choice of academic institutions is crucial, especially as this demographic increasingly relies on online platforms to make informed decisions about their education (Perera et al., 2023).

As more Nepali students use social media and digital tools to explore their options for higher education, academic institutions need to ensure they have a strong online presence. This includes engaging students through platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube,

where they can provide real-time updates, showcase their academic offerings, and create an interactive community that resonates with the interests and values of Gen Z.

1.3 Relevance of Digital Marketing in Nepal's Educational Landscape

While internet penetration in Nepal remains relatively low compared to global standards, the country is on the brink of complete digitalization, with the number of internet users steadily increasing each year. As a result, digital marketing is becoming an essential tool for Nepalese educational institutions seeking to stay competitive in a rapidly evolving academic environment.

Traditional marketing methods, such as print media or television advertisements, may no longer be sufficient in attracting this generation of tech-savvy students. Gen Z's heavy reliance on digital platforms means that educational institutions must focus on creating a consistent and engaging presence across multiple channels, including social media, search engine marketing (SEM), and email marketing, to provide personalized and relevant content that appeals to this cohort (Lamichhane, 2022).

1.4 Problem Scenario

In today's highly competitive academic landscape, offering quality education alone may not ensure a steady influx of students to an institution. Generation Z, in particular, tends to gravitate towards educational institutes that not only provide excellent academics but also boast modern infrastructure, foster entrepreneurial growth, expand networking opportunities both locally and globally, and maintain a robust presence on social media. While there is limited statistical research to substantiate these observations fully, it is evident that Generation Z's easy access to the internet and widespread use of smart devices have empowered them with information at their fingertips. Consequently, institutions with a strong digital and social media presence are believed to hold a distinct advantage in attracting this tech-savvy generation.

1.5 Motivation

As a tech-savvy generation with easy access to information through social media and online platforms, Gen Z relies heavily on digital content to make decisions. In Nepal, the growing competition among academic institutions makes it essential to understand the impact of digital marketing on student enrollment. By investigating this, the study seeks to offer insights on how institutions can effectively engage with Gen Z and enhance their digital presence to attract more students.

1.6 Objective

The objectives set for this research are:

- » To identify the most influential social media platforms for Gen Z students in Nepal

when selecting academic institutions.

- » To assess the effectiveness of various types of social media content (e.g., videos, testimonials, influencer endorsements) in attracting Gen Z students.
- » To evaluate the role of trust and credibility in academic institutions' digital marketing efforts among Gen Z students.

1.6.1 Research questions

The research explores the digital habits of Generation Z in Nepal. It examines how academic institutions can leverage social media and websites to enhance student engagement, ultimately attracting more students to choose their institute.

- » Which social media platforms do Gen Z students in Nepal engage with most when researching academic institutions?
- » What types of social media content are most persuasive for Gen Z students in Nepal when making academic decisions (e.g., videos, testimonials, influencer endorsements)?
- » How does trust in social media content influence Gen Z's decision to choose a particular academic institution in Nepal?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to gain a conceptual understanding of earlier research on Generation Z (Gen Z) perceptions and how digital marketing influences their choice of educational institutions.

Catherine Giunta's study (Giunta, 2017) highlights Gen Z's strong emphasis on trust and honesty, particularly in educational settings. Gen Z relies heavily on social media for communication and information gathering, which can be both a strength and a risk due to potential misinformation. The study also emphasizes Gen Z's comfort with technology and collaborative work through digital platforms. However, it points out that this reliance on social media can sometimes hinder critical thinking. While focused on U.S. students, the research does not explore how these traits might vary across different cultural contexts, including how trust is built in online environments.

Research from Vietnam and Sri Lanka (Perera et al., 2022) underscores the growing use of social media among prospective students, with both user-generated content (UGC) and firm-generated content (FGC) contributing to higher education institutions' (HEIs) brand credibility. However, it reveals cultural differences, with Vietnamese students being more influenced by both UGC and FGC than their Sri Lankan counterparts. This research highlights the significance of digital marketing for private HEIs but suggests further exploration of public institutions is needed.

A study from India (Mude & Undale, 2023) compares Gen Z and Gen Y's social media usage

and information-gathering habits, noting minimal differences in frequency. However, Gen Z engages more with digital platforms for entertainment, education, shopping, and brand interaction. Despite being “digital natives,” their information-seeking behavior closely aligns with that of Gen Y, challenging assumptions about Gen Z’s superior digital proficiency. The findings, based on a convenience sample in Pune, India, warrant broader exploration across regions and generations.

Another key study (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018) emphasizes that Gen Z values personalized, hands-on learning experiences that offer tangible career benefits, such as internships and skill development. Although highly tech-savvy, they still seek personal connections, especially in the workplace. The study suggests that more research is needed to understand how educators in developing countries are adapting to Gen Z’s digital preferences. Most studies focus on Western students, and cultural differences in Gen Z’s expectations in developing countries remain underexplored.

In Indonesia, a study (Fathinasari et al., 2023) on digital marketing shows that Gen Z prefers user-generated content over traditional advertising. Peer reviews and testimonials are valued more than direct advertisements, as authenticity and real-world experiences matter most to them. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat are identified as key channels for brand engagement, with personalized content and quick responses strengthening connections.

In Kathmandu, Nepal, a study (Shah et al., 2023) finds that Gen Z’s restaurant choices are influenced more by perceived image and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) than by promotions or popularity metrics, diverging from global trends. This finding suggests that cultural factors play a role in how digital marketing influences decision-making among Nepalese Gen Z.

Another study (Lamichhane, 2022) in Nepal explores the use of digital marketing tools like social media, email marketing, mobile marketing, SEO, and SEM in influencing consumer behavior, particularly in Pokhara, Nepal. It highlights a shift from traditional to digital marketing, with social media emerging as the most influential tool due to high consumer engagement. Mobile marketing shows potential, especially through time-sensitive offers, while email marketing is less effective unless personalized. This study employed a quantitative approach, analyzing data from 150 consumers using SPSS and techniques such as regression and correlation analysis. However, the study has limitations, including a focus on social media over SEO/SEM, a small sample size, and a lack of qualitative insights. Future research could explore emerging tools like AI and behavioral economics principles to deepen the understanding of consumer decision-making.

A study specific to Nepalese students (Shrestha & Hansen, 2021) highlights the digital savviness of Gen Z and their preference for technology-driven learning methods. It suggests

that digital marketing aimed at engaging this group should focus on visual, interactive content and real-life experiences. While the findings align with global trends, cultural factors unique to Nepalese students may shape their engagement with digital platforms, underscoring the need for educational institutions to adapt their curricula accordingly.

Other studies (Duffett, 2017; Gurunathan & Lakshmi, 2023) further emphasize the pivotal role of social media marketing in shaping Gen Z's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses toward brands and institutions. For instance, South African research shows that while social media marketing influences awareness and initial engagement, its impact weakens as students' progress to decision-making and action. The generational shift in digital platform usage is evident, with Gen Z relying on Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat for brand interaction, while older generations prefer platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

Smart technologies, such as mobile apps and self-service kiosks, are reshaping retail experiences for Gen Z (Priporas et al., 2017). Their preferences for tech-driven efficiency come with concerns about reduced job opportunities and social interaction, indicating a nuanced relationship with technology in the retail environment.

The role of AI chatbots in customer service was explored in study (Nicolescu & Tudorache, 2022), which found that while chatbots offer convenience and efficiency for simple tasks, they struggle with complex or emotional interactions. Cultural differences in chatbot usage were noted, with trust being influenced by privacy concerns, particularly in sensitive sectors like finance.

Social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn are playing an increasingly important role in higher education, facilitating student engagement, peer feedback, and collaborative learning (Tess, 2013). The study suggests that while social media can enhance engagement, concerns about privacy and distractions persist.

The article (Fagerstrøm & Ghinea, 2013) examines the increasing role of social networks, particularly Facebook, in higher education marketing. It emphasizes value co-creation through interactive engagement between applicants and institutions, enabling two-way dialogue that fosters trust and aids in decision-making. A field experiment conducted at a Norwegian university college showed that applicants engaged through Facebook groups had significantly higher enrollment rates (88.8%) compared to non-participants (43.3%). Despite these promising outcomes, the study also highlights potential drawbacks such as privacy concerns, the digital divide, and limited generalizability. The article calls for further research on the long-term impact and cross-cultural effectiveness of such digital strategies.

The study (Cyriac, 2020) examines the role of social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, WhatsApp) in attracting Indian students to Irish universities. It emphasizes social media's impact on decision-making, course selection, and cultural understanding, highlighting brand visibility through informative content and alumni

interactions. Economic opportunities, university reputation, and career prospects were key factors influencing student decisions, while the quality of education in India acted as a push factor. Using qualitative interviews with 10 Indian students, the study employed thematic analysis to examine how these platforms influenced decision-making. While the findings align with global trends showing social media's growing dominance over traditional marketing, limitations include the small sample size and the focus on specific platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Future research could integrate emerging platforms like TikTok, employ mixed-method approaches, and explore cross-cultural comparisons or post-enrollment engagement through digital tools.

The shift from traditional to digital marketing in higher education continues to evolve, with a strong emphasis on social media, mobile-friendly websites, and SEO strategies (Jan & Ammari, 2016). Social media is particularly effective in creating initial engagement, while university websites are key to shaping decision-making processes.

Finally, studies on digital marketing strategies in higher education institutions across different countries (e.g., Greece, Vietnam, and Poland) (Makrydakis, 2021; Al-Thagafi et al., 2019; Kisiołek et al., 2021) reveal a growing reliance on mobile-friendly websites, SEO, and social media platforms to attract Gen Z students. These studies consistently show that Gen Z prefers engaging with universities through platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. However, some institutions face challenges in adopting comprehensive digital marketing strategies due to resource constraints, indicating that more research is needed on how emerging technologies, such as AI and chatbots, can enhance student recruitment and retention.

In conclusion, the literature reflects a global shift toward digital marketing strategies in engaging Gen Z students, with social media playing a central role in influencing their choice of academic institutions. While these findings offer valuable insights into how digital marketing strategies shape Gen Z's decision-making processes, especially in developing countries like Nepal, further research is needed to explore cultural nuances and the effectiveness of emerging digital tools.

3. METHODS

The study investigates the influence of digital marketing on Generation Z's choice of academic institutions in Nepal. The target age group for this research ranges from 14 to 26 years, encompassing students preparing for the Secondary Education Examination (SEE) and seeking admission to higher secondary institutions, as well as those pursuing advanced degrees such as PhDs.

To gather data, a survey was employed as the primary research method. The survey was conducted between July and September 2024, with voluntary participation from 152

students studying at various educational institutions majorly within the Kathmandu Valley. These students represented a broad spectrum of academic levels, ensuring a diverse sample reflective of Generation Z's educational choices.

4. RESULTS

Demographic information of the participants is that most of the respondents were from the age groups between 18 and 23 (64.5%), followed by 13.2% from the age group over 23 and 26, and from the age group over 16 and 18 and 4.55% from the age group over 26 and from age groups 14 and 16. Among participants, 56.6% were male, 42.8% were female, and 0.6% preferred not to mention. 67.1% were from Kathmandu, 19.1% were from Bhaktapur, 8.6% were from Lalitpur, 1.3% were from Janakpur and rural areas, and 0.65% from Ghorahi, Biratnagar, Tulsipur, and Suburban. The survey participants were majorly studying their undergraduate, i.e., 70.4%, higher secondary school (15.7%), SEE (7.2%), postgraduate (5.3%), and A-level (1.4%). The majority of participants were from a management background (78.8%), science (14.5%), technology (5.3%), and a bachelor in travel and tour (1.4%). As a process of data filtering, it was found that SEE-passed students were found to get enrolled in A-levels, so for this research, SEE and A-level will be seen as A-level.

4.1 Social Media Usage

Most of the participants were found to use social media platforms daily, i.e., 88.8%, 6.6% used once a day, 3.3% used a few times a week, and 1.3% rarely used social media. A-levels, +2 students, undergraduate students, and postgraduate students were found to use social media several times a day.

Among the participants, who mentioned the use of social media daily, among them 40.3% used 3 to 4 hours daily; similarly, 22.8% used 5 to 6 hours daily, 21.5% used 1 to 2 hours daily, 9.4% used more than 6 hours daily, and 6% used less than one hour. It was found most A-level students and +2 students used social media for 3-4 hours per day, most undergraduate students used it for more than 4 hours per day, and postgraduate students used it for 1-2 hours maximum in most cases.

Among participants, it was found Instagram is most popular among Gen Z of Nepal, after that YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, Twitter, Snapchat, Discord, Pinterest, Reddit, and Viber, respectively. As per different categorizations, A-level students seem to use Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube most; +2 students seem to use YouTube and Instagram most; undergraduates seem to use Facebook and Instagram most; and postgraduates seem to use Facebook and Instagram most.

4.2 Influence of Digital Marketing

It was found that most of the participants have come across advertisements for academic institutions on social media platforms, i.e., 88.2% and 11.8% have not found or marked advertisements for academic institutions on social media platforms. The majority of students from different categories have come across advertisements for academic institutions on social media.

It was found Only 5.9% of participants were found to be engaged with advertisements related to academic institutions on social media, 17.1% were often engaged, 42.8% were sometimes engaged, 25.7% were rarely engaged, and 8.6% were never engaged with advertisements related to academic institutions. The majority of students from different categories were found to have sometimes advertisements related to academic institutions on social media.

It was found from the survey that video advertisements are the most effective material that influences the decision-making process for selecting an academic institution; similarly, influencer endorsement, virtual campus tours, informational webinars, infrastructure, sponsored posts, testimonials, travel packages, and fun, engaging, and entertaining posts/ videos, respectively, were found to play a positive role for academic institution selection. The majority of students from different categories were found to prefer video advertisements over others. However, undergraduate students also prefer sponsor posts and virtual campus tours whereas postgraduate students also prefer influencer endorsement and sponsor posts.

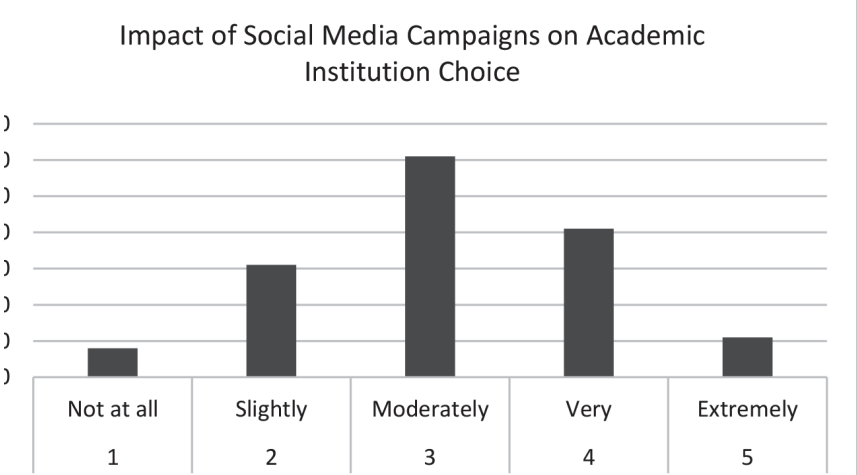


Figure 1: Social media marketing campaigns shape your decision on choosing an academic institution

It was found that A-level students had the lowest influence regarding selecting academic institutions through digital marketing campaigns done by the academic institute on social media with a mean value of 2.69, respectively mean value of postgraduate is 3, likewise +2 students mean value is 3.04 and undergraduate mean value is 3.18.

4.3 Perceptions and Trust

The survey indicated that students look for information about career prospects, scholarship opportunities, course offerings, campus facilities, student life, and faculty qualifications respectively in social media advertisements about academic institutions. In the case of A-level students, they were found to go for a course offering, faculty qualification, and campus facility mostly, +2 students go for campus facilities and course offering mostly, undergraduate goes for a course offering, career prospects, campus facilities, faculty qualification, and scholarship opportunity and postgraduate students goes for course offering mostly.

The survey indicated that the credibility of information about academic institutions shared on social media majorly depends upon the professional presentation of content, verified social media accounts, recommendations from friends/family, engagement (comments/shares), number of followers/likes, and up-to-date videos respectively. In the case of A-level students, they were concerned over verified social media accounts and engagement, +2 students were concerned over verified social media, undergraduate students were found to be concerned over the professional presentation of content, verified social media and engagement and postgraduate students over the professional presentation of content, verified social media and engagement.

The survey indicated that only 19.7% of participants trust information about academic institutions shared by influencers on social media, 68.4% sometimes trust it and 11.8% do not trust it completely. All categories of students seem to trust information sometimes only. The reasons for participants for not trusting were "Due to people often lying out of greed for money, trusting someone on social media becomes difficult and worrisome.", "It can provide false information.", "I don't trust blindly because the influencer may not be appropriate about the academic institution and student facilities.", "Because they are paid to say so. Why would I think it was genuine?", "All are scripted.", "They are simply getting paid to promote these institutions.", "Why would anyone think that they are being honest in regard to these promotions?", "They only talk and share the benefits that they will get.", and "Instead of sharing extra knowledge, which is really useful for the public."

The survey indicated that academic experts are the most trusted when it comes to recommendations about educational institutions, followed by industry professionals, industry professionals, international influencers, local influencers, and others, respectively. All categories of students agreed on academic experts whereas undergraduates also influence industry professionals and local influencers equally and post-graduate students have similar views as of undergraduate students.

The reason behind trusting international influencers was "Because they compare the organization globally and promote things.", "Famous and trustworthy.", "Opinion matters.", "Someone who has achieved a significant amount of success, and a part of that is mainly related to the college providing a great platform.", "They have verified social media accounts

with reasonable information.” “Because international influencers have gone through a variety of academic meetings.” “If Mr. Beast recommends something, I will 100 percent buy that product.”, and “Tend to be much more honest”.

Reasons behind trusting local influencers were “They probably will not lie about being local.”, “Have a well-built reputation, allowing for trust building and easy communication.”, “Because they tend to be more trustworthy and reliable in local and clear news without lots of sponsorship and fake news.”, “Local influencers such as Wangden Sherpa and Ashutosh Bhr will make me think about the ad.” and “Influencers like good vloggers, and content creators on Instagram and TikTok. I trust them in academic advertising”.

The reason behind trusting others was “I would only trust those students enrolled in the given institutions. Only the customers can give you the best reviews.”, “Mr. Balen Saha.” and “Those who have moral value and share content with data and proof”.

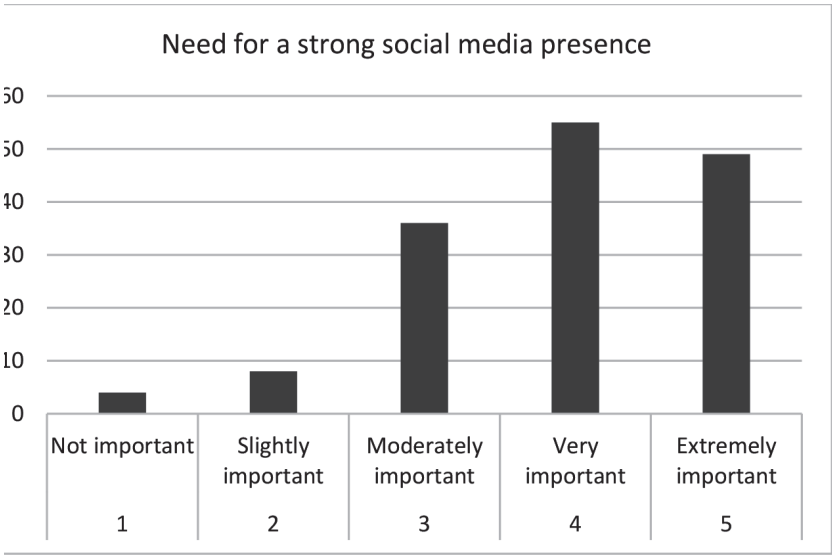


Figure 2: Importance of a Strong Social Media Presence for an Academic Institution

Undergraduate students feel that it is important for an academic institution to have a strong social media presence with the highest mean average value among others, i.e., 4, similarly +2 with a mean value of 3.78, A-level with a mean value of 3.53, and postgraduate with a mean value of 3.5.

4.4 Decision-Making Process

The survey indicated that 22.4% of the participants were influenced by social media advertisements while choosing their current academic institution, whereas 38.8% of the participants had minimum influence, and 38.8% of the participants did not consider social media advertisement for their final decision. All categories of students were not negative

about it.

The factors that were considered while making decisions as per high frequency are academic reputation, recommendations from friends/family, location, financial considerations, social media marketing, social compatibility, secure future, student life, and welcomeness, inquiries with the coordinator, and quality offering with precise duration and proper research on facilities provided like placements. All categories of students agreed upon academic reputation also preference was given to recommendations from friends/family and social media marketing by undergraduate students.

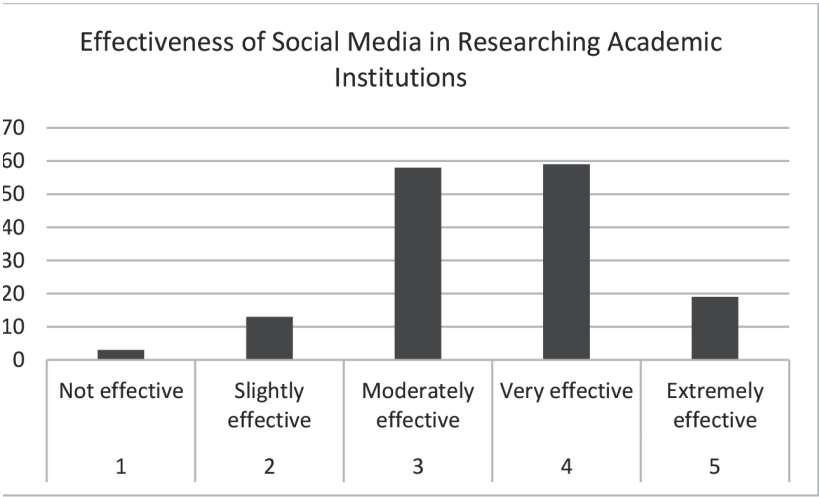


Figure 3: Social Media’s Role in Researching Academic Institutions

The undergraduate students thought social media helps gather information about potential academic institutions the most compared with other categories of students with a mean value of 3.57, likewise, postgraduate students had a 3.5 mean value, +2 students 3.39 and A-level 3.23.

The survey indicated Gen Z 5.9% always discuss social media content related to academic institutions with their peers. Whereas 22.4% often, 46.1% sometimes, 19.1% rarely, and 6.6% never discuss social media content related to academic institutions with their peers. Most students of all categories discuss sometime about social media content.

The survey indicated that 28.9% of Gen Z are influenced in the selection of academic institutions if they spontaneously interact with potential students. Whereas 56.6% may get influence 14.5% will not influence. Most students of all categories had a positive impression of academic institutions’ spontaneous interaction.

Some of the stories shared by participants about where social media content significantly impacted their choice of academic institution were “The explanation of the infrastructure in

a certain video.” “A virtual tour of the college and the information they had provided regarding their course.” “Social media significantly influenced my decision to choose the college for BHM, showcasing vibrant student life, modern facilities, industry connections, and real-time insights through engaging content.” “The main reason I chose Plus Two at Global College Management was its strong social media presence, showcasing various activities. The infrastructure videos were another key factor, and seeing students conduct programs further motivated me to join.” “Instagram posts showcasing vibrant campus life, supportive professors, and real student experiences at University X made me feel connected and influenced my decision to choose it over others.” “The content was inspired by the popular Nepali comedy show Meri Bassai, featuring clips of Bandre and Magne Budo reciting their lines. The script fits perfectly to promote the institution, making it impactful due to the nostalgic connection with these beloved characters and the emotions they evoke.” “Meme pages and other various accounts (which are beneficial to a certain extent)”.

4.5 Behavioral Insights

The survey indicated that 7.9% are very likely to follow an academic institution’s social media page after seeing their advertisement, whereas 44.7% are likely, 29.6% are unlikely or neutral, and 17.8% are very unlikely to follow an academic institution. A-levels and +2 most of the students seem unlikely to follow, whereas undergraduates most seem to be in between follow and unlikely, and in the case of postgraduates most seem to follow.

The activities participants engage in when researching academic institutions on social media, arranged as per high frequency, are watching videos, reading posts, following links to the institution’s website, commenting and asking questions, participating in live Q&A sessions, sharing posts with friends/family, discussing with friends, and directly coordinating with page admin. In all categories, most of the students agree upon watching videos, and in the case of undergraduate students, they prefer reading posts too. Most seem to be in between follow and unlikely, and in the case of postgraduates, most seem to follow.

4.6 Open-Ended Questions

The possible features or content in a social media advertisement that could be considered for academic institutions by participants were “Course curriculum and further opportunities,” “Showing the institution’s facilities,” “Academic reputation and scholarships,” “The authenticity of the post or advertisement,” “Their facility, staff, location, and financial capabilities,” “Virtual Tour,” “Current alumni feedback,” “Students say what they feel in the ad instead of following a script,” “To attract prospective students through social media, academic institutions should highlight authentic student success stories, campus life, faculty expertise, career prospects, and diverse extracurricular. Interactive content like live Q&A sessions, detailed program information, and posts on diversity, scholarships, and sustainability are key to building trust and engagement. Success metrics and industry connections also reassure students about their future.” “Course details in brief. Academic

facilities. Options for academic research," "Content related to academic courses and its facilities," "Teachers' academic background and personal experience in the domain field," and "Reels".

A suggestion for academic institutions to improve their social media marketing strategies participants was to "improve content creation," *"make fun, short, and elaborate videos that can make the audience laugh with current social world jokes," "genuineness," "give the exact information about the fee structure and output of the students in terms of skills, exploration, and achievements," "hire young people for marketing," "create relatable content with the youth, facilities, and somewhat about the fees and student life," and "visual appeal".* "Try to advertise more but not that much where you would face problems, research other social media influencers, and strategize your plans of action." "Students and alumni, if satisfied, can become powerful brand ambassadors, influencing others and helping the institution stay a top choice." "Academic institutions can enhance social media marketing by sharing authentic student and alumni stories, showcasing campus life, highlighting faculty expertise, promoting career opportunities, offering interactive content, and emphasizing diversity, scholarships, and success metrics. Regular updates and engaging content help attract and influence prospective students." "Being more active and posting regularly." "Support memes or viral pages related to the institution, enhance the website's interactivity and information, and create a more professional online presence." "Spend good money to select influencers." "Follow the recent trends." "Set clear goals and target audience, engage with diverse content, highlight achievements, host live events, personalize for segments, maintain consistent branding, collaborate with influencers, track performance, engage with followers, and showcase diversity." "My suggestion is to adapt omnichannel." "Academic institutions should use authentic student stories, interactive content, high-quality visuals, influencer collaborations, and clear, accessible information in social media marketing." "Do not rely only on top students to market the college; try to market the experience, not the students." "My suggestion is to not make too many videos and make videos that make students feel like we can do something out of this." and "To advertise your academic institution's relationship with various industries and professional partnerships."

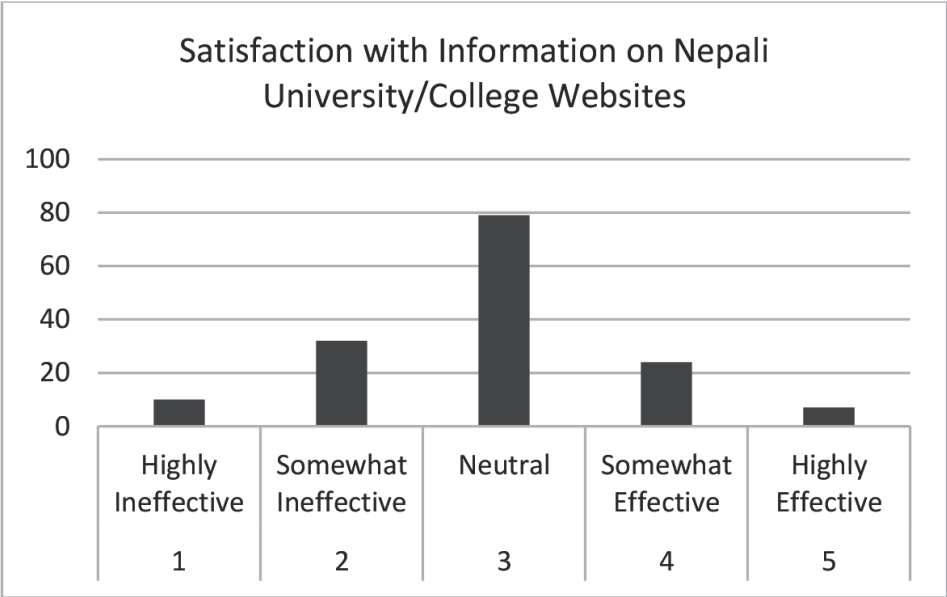


Figure 4: Satisfaction Levels with Information on Nepali University/College Websites

The postgraduate students, among other category students, seem to be more satisfied with the current information provided by Nepali universities/colleges on their official websites, with a mean value of 3.37, whereas A-level has a mean value of 3, undergraduate has 2.96, and +2 student mean value is 2.39.

The survey indicated that most of the participants, i.e., 59.9%, agreed that omnichannel marketing should be adopted by academic institutions in Nepal, whereas 31.6% felt it might have a positive impact, but 8.6% felt unnecessary. In all categories, most of the students seem to be positive about omnichannel marketing.

The participants' thoughts on omnichannel were *"consistent brand experience."* *"Omnichannel marketing is a customer-centric strategy that delivers a seamless" and "consistent experience across online and offline channels."* *"Integrating data and personalizing interactions boosts customer satisfaction and loyalty. Though challenging, its benefits—enhanced engagement, higher conversions, and valuable insights—make it essential for cohesive brand experiences."* *"It would be easier to access and get information, which would be more effective and beneficial."* *"It helps brands meet customers where they are and provides a cohesive journey that can drive satisfaction and loyalty."* *"Yes, it would be effective to adopt omnichannel, as it will advertise the product in various social media."* *"Omnichannel marketing integrates various platforms for consistent, seamless customer experience, enhancing engagement, loyalty, and personalized interactions across all touchpoints."* *"Social media, email, and offline channels are very important for student life; it's a good impact on your future."* and *"can reach potential niches through different platforms."*

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study confirm that, like their global counterparts, Generation Z in Nepal are frequent users of social media. It define the scope of digital marketing i.e. social media marketing in case of Nepal. The analysis reveals that Nepali Gen Z engages significantly on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok, indicating heavy social media usage. Among these, Instagram and YouTube are particularly popular. However, there are notable differences across educational levels. For instance, undergraduate students are more engaged on social media compared to postgraduates, who are less active due to their professional commitments. Postgraduate students tend to use social media less frequently, possibly because their professional lives limit their time online. On the other hand, undergraduates and pre-university students (A-level and +2) show higher levels of engagement, with undergraduates actively using social media to explore academic and career opportunities.

When considering social media platform preferences, A-level and +2 students appear to favor Instagram over Facebook, preferring to share visual content like photos. This trend differs from undergraduates and postgraduates, who show relatively higher engagement with Facebook. In terms of video content, YouTube is widely favored across all groups, while TikTok is also gaining popularity.

In terms of decision-making, social media's influence on where Nepali Gen Z students choose to study is relatively limited. Particularly for A-level students, decisions about academic institutions are often influenced more by parents or guardians than by social media. Key decision-making factors include the academic institution's reputation, word of mouth from friends and family, and the location of the institution. Quick responses from academic institutions via social media—whether through chatbots or manual interactions—positively influence Gen Z's decision-making process. Although discussions about academic institutions on social media appear neutral among peers, direct interaction with academic institutions is perceived positively.

However, some trust issues arise with content shared by academic institutions on social media. Gen Z demands genuine and transparent content, particularly in terms of course offerings. Academic institutions are expected to clearly outline their programs and services on social media. Furthermore, Gen Z students tend to trust academic experts when seeking guidance, while undergraduate and postgraduate students also highly regard the opinions of industry professionals and local influencers.

The study highlights that while social media plays a role in information gathering, it can be improved to better serve Gen Z's needs. This generation prefers consuming video content, and the quality of videos and their relevance significantly impact their perceptions of academic institutions. However, information provided by Nepali universities and colleges

on their official websites is often found to be unsatisfactory, pointing to a clear need for improvement in this area.

Regarding the parameters to consider in digital marketing by academic institutions, several key factors emerged. First, the reputation of the faculty, the infrastructure of the institution, and the creation of improved, genuine content should be emphasized. Academic institutions should focus on creating short, creative videos, such as Instagram reels, to capture Gen Z's attention. Hiring young marketers who understand the preferences of Gen Z is also essential for successful engagement. Additionally, highlighting career opportunities, research possibilities, and collaborations with industries resonates strongly with this generation.

Finally, academic institutions need to adopt an omnichannel marketing approach. As potential students engage with academic institutions through multiple touchpoints, providing a seamless and cohesive experience across platforms is crucial. Ensuring consistency in communication across social media, websites, and other digital channels will help academic institutions build trust and effectively attract potential students from Generation Z.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that similar to their global counterparts, Generation Z in Nepal are frequent users of social media. However, the popularity of different platforms varies across age groups. Social media appears to be more effective in enhancing visibility for academic institutions rather than directly influencing decision-making regarding where to study. Despite the widespread use of social media, the reputation of academic institutions continues to be a key factor in the decision-making process for Nepali Gen Z. Additionally, this generation places high trust in academic experts when evaluating educational options. Video content is particularly favored by Gen Z, and academic institutions should prioritize omnichannel marketing to provide a seamless experience across different touchpoints.

This study is limited by its scope, as the data was primarily collected from a small sample of participants in the Kathmandu Valley and from a few academic institutions. As such, the results may not fully represent the experiences and behaviors of Gen Z across Nepal. Furthermore, the research relied solely on surveys for data collection, whereas including interviews would have provided a more in-depth analysis. The study also focused exclusively on social media, leaving other aspects of digital media, such as SEO and email marketing, unexplored.

Future research could expand the geographic scope by collecting data from various regions of Nepal, including both urban and rural areas, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how Gen Z selects academic institutions. In addition to surveys, interviews with Gen Z students should be incorporated to deepen the analysis. Future studies could also explore other digital marketing strategies, such as SEO and email marketing, to provide a broader perspective on how digital media influences student decision-making.

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