

The Role of Digital Marketing in Shaping Student Enrollment Decision: Insights from Engineering Colleges in India

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of digital marketing strategies in influencing students' enrolment decisions at engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu. It investigates the strategies students use when deciding which engineering college to attend in Tamil Nadu, focusing on social media marketing and email marketing, and relationship management in marketing engineering colleges. This study used a survey of students from engineering colleges. The relationships among the study variables were examined using structural equation modelling. The findings indicate that marketing content, the use of social media, and the management of institutional online reputation significantly affect students' enrolment decisions, whereas email marketing and virtual campus tours are relevant but marginally affect students' enrolment decisions. This study enables higher education institutions to enhance their digital marketing to facilitate student enrolment. It also focuses on the evolving digital environment and the marketing of education.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Student Enrollment, Engineering Colleges, Social Media Marketing, Content Marketing, Tamil Nadu.

Introduction

Digital marketing is pivotal in the development of modern businesses and institutions. The focal point is the rapid uptake of technology interconnected to the internet. The utilisation of social media, search engines, emails, and company websites, which have become part of everyday routines, presents useful means for accessing and interacting with secondary and primary target audiences. In contrast to traditional marketing techniques, such as print advertising, radio, and television, digital marketing presents opportunities for greater contact with targeted audiences, lower costs, and unmeasurable performance of the advertising effort. The mass transfer to digital is an indicator of the growing poster child of marketing and advertising of mass media to marketing and advertising to the consumer (Pamulang, 2021). In the last few decades, rapid and increasing digital diffusion and marketing have occurred in most sectors of the economy, resulting in a phenomenal shift in the way organisations, especially businesses, interact with their target audiences. In the education sector, digital marketing is replacing traditional outreach methods in educational institutions. Print media, campus educational visits, and educational fairs have been supplanted with digitally driven methods

(Gondane, 2021). The penetration of the Internet and smartphones has made social media, search engines, and educational institutions content. Engineering colleges in India impact economic and technology development as they represent a significant percentage of higher educational institutions in the country. Such schools train graduates in various disciplines and provide sectors such as IT and manufacturing with a trained and efficient workforce. As India aspires to take its place as the front-runner in world technology. Educational engineering is one of the primary sectors which needs to be developed in order to train, and cultivate engineers, and entrepreneurs capable of solving problems which is vital in propelling the country to achieve its ambitions. College engineering institutions, and R & D institutions have the capacity and capabilities to engineer collaborations in the sciences between industry and government. Such institutions facilitate economic and social mobility by equipping graduates with the skills to obtain lucrative careers; hence, the skills facilitate mobility found in the economy of the country (Mühendislik et al., 2020). Indian engineering education is one of the most competitive sectors in the Indian higher education sector. This intense completion makes it crucial to come up with efficient and effective strategies which helps with planning in order to clearly address the challenges of engineering colleges differing.

Recently, in India, methods of recruiting students have changed to the digital landscape. Engineering colleges in India have historically used word of mouth, brochures, apimaging, and in-person physical events to recruit students. The shift toward digital technology and online platforms has motivated recruitment advertising to become digitally and data-driven. Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn as well as SEM and SEO have all become fundamental to recruitment advertising. The shift to mobile technologies and the Internet has enabled the bypassing of physical barriers. This has become especially important in the highly competitive Indian education market, especially as engineering colleges become more competitive in recruiting top talent.

Research on digital marketing in higher education continues to grow. However, little is known about the marketing of engineering colleges in India, and

research is heavily focused on other institutional types. Most research has focused on other higher education sectors; therefore, little is known about the use of social media marketing, search engine optimisation, or content marketing and how these techniques affect prospective engineering students. The research conducted also lacks the marketing of engineering colleges and how this marketing affects prospective students' perceptions and, in turn, their ultimate decision to enrol. The research also lacks recent digital marketing techniques, such as the use of influencers or marketing analytics, and how these techniques might improve recruitment within engineering colleges. The research focuses on how digital marketing techniques affect the rate of recruitment within Indian engineering colleges. With the shift to more digital techniques, there is a need to explore the use of digital marketing to determine which techniques are best to attract prospective students. The research will focus on how various forms of digital marketing— social media marketing, email marketing, SEO and SEM, content marketing, CRM, etc.— affect students' decisions, increase recruitment, and subsequently increase student enrolment in institutions. The effectiveness of strategies will indicate institutions focus on prospective students and enhance recruitment.

Objectives of the Study

1. To determine how different digital marketing strategies affect the student enrollment rate in engineering colleges
2. To understand how the perception of students of digital marketing campaigns affects the enrollment decision of students.
3. To determine which digital marketing strategies help in higher student enrollment and provide engineering colleges with the needed data for effective marketing.

Review of Literature

Research on the influence of digital marketing on student enrolment in higher education, especially in Indian engineering colleges, has sparked interest. Digital marketing has changed how institutions connect with prospective students, providing them with marketing tools to convert enrolment. This

literature review discusses the impact of digital marketing on student enrolment in processed literature. Digital marketing in higher education is well documented and its role increasingly acknowledged. As stated in Om Prakash (2023), Indian engineering colleges have turned to digital marketing as a means of differentiation in an overtly competitive landscape. Documented evidence corroborates that institutions employing targeted digital marketing campaigns experienced increased inquiries and applications, therefore validating that digital marketing is central to the contemporary recruitment process.

Okten and colleagues (2021) looked at how well social media marketing works in higher education, and honestly, the results are pretty clear. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn seem to do a great job reaching younger people—exactly the crowd that undergraduate engineering programs want. Their study showed that when schools actually engage with students on social media, they're much more likely to influence where those students choose to go. The big reason? Social media makes it easy for direct, personal conversations.

Mistry (2020) dug into content marketing and found that things like blogs, webinars, and informational videos really matter. Good content not only draws in potential students, but it also holds their attention while they're deciding where to apply. Well-made content boosts how credible and high-quality an institution looks. This isn't a fluke—earlier studies from Mumbua (2022), Nuseir and team (2021), and Hung (2020) all pointed out that strong content helps build a school's brand and reputation.

Afifah (2022) took a different angle, focusing on search engine marketing (SEM) for student recruitment. Colleges in India that put money into SEM got better search rankings, saw more people visiting their websites, and ended up with more applications. It just shows that being visible online really matters, since that's where most students start their college search anyway.

Email marketing's getting a lot of attention too. Recent work (Iddris, 2019; Wijaya, 2023) and a study by Harbi and Ali (2022) showed that personalized email campaigns work way better than generic ones.

When schools send emails tailored to a student's interests—like program details, scholarships, or campus events—those messages get opened more and actually lead to more applications. This lines up with what Ghosal and Prasad (2020) and Sotomayor-Vidal and colleagues (2022) found: make it personal, or it just doesn't connect.

Zooming out a bit, other researchers (Biswas, 2020; Kusumawati, 2019) have looked at the bigger picture. Studies by Labausa and team (2023), Mumbua (2022), and Nuseir et al. (2021) examined how using all these digital marketing tactics together can boost student enrolment. Their results? Schools that blend social media, content marketing, SEM, and email campaigns end up attracting and enrolling more students. A lot of experts (Al-azzam & Al-mizeed, 2021; Sharma, 2022) argue that you really need a holistic approach if you want the best results.

Still, it's not all smooth sailing. Abdulghaffar and Bazuhair (2023) pointed out that not every college has the cash or know-how for fancy digital marketing. Smaller schools, especially in rural spots, just can't keep up with big, well-funded institutions. That's causing a bigger gap in enrolment between rural and urban colleges.

Then there's the issue of digital literacy. Silvhiany and Sriwijaya (2021) raised this point, and other studies back it up: digital marketing works in cities, but it doesn't have the same impact in rural areas where internet access and digital skills are lower (Nogueira, 2022). So, while digital marketing is powerful, it can't do everything alone—schools need other strategies to reach everyone.

In short, the research shows that digital marketing—through social media, content, SEM, and email—really does help schools attract and enroll students. But challenges like limited resources and digital literacy can get in the way. One-size-fits-all solutions just don't cut it. Future studies need to figure out how colleges can adapt their digital marketing to handle these challenges and get better enrolment results.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the impact of digital marketing strategies on student enrolment ratios in engineering

colleges across Tamil Nadu. The study aimed to assess how different digital marketing efforts, such as social media marketing, email campaigns, and search engine marketing, influence prospective students' decisions to enrol in engineering programs. The target population for this study consisted of students who had recently enrolled in engineering colleges across Tamil Nadu. Engineering colleges were chosen for this study due to their critical role in shaping India's technological workforce and the intense competition these institutions face in attracting students, particularly in regions with high concentrations of engineering institutions. Tamil Nadu, as a leading educational hub in India, boasts a large number of engineering colleges, making it an ideal location for this research. The state has one of the highest enrolments in engineering education, with recent studies highlighting that over 30% of the total engineering seats in India are located here, and colleges in Tamil Nadu have increasingly turned to digital marketing to maintain their enrolment numbers amidst fluctuating demand and a declining interest in engineering courses (Raj & Kumar, 2023). This focus on Tamil Nadu allows for a detailed examination of how digital marketing strategies are being implemented in a highly competitive and significant market. A stratified random sampling technique was utilized to ensure a representative sample, accounting for factors such as geographic location, type of institution (public or private), and student demographics. A total of 337 questionnaires were distributed among students from various engineering colleges, with 320 questionnaires successfully collected, yielding a high response rate of approximately 95%.

Data was gathered through a structured questionnaire, which was initially developed in English. To ensure the questionnaire's relevance and clarity, it was reviewed by a group of 10 academicians specializing in engineering education. Based on their feedback, necessary adjustments were made to refine the instrument. Following this, a pilot study involving 25 recently enrolled students was conducted to evaluate the questionnaire's readability and applicability. Adjustments were made based on the pilot study results to enhance the survey's effectiveness. For respondents who were proficient

in English, the questionnaire was self-administered. However, for those who preferred regional languages, the questionnaire was translated, and responses were collected by trained research assistants who conducted interviews and recorded the participants' verbal feedback. This approach ensured that the survey was accessible and comprehensible to all respondents, regardless of language preference. The collected data was analyzed using statistical software, with both descriptive and inferential statistics being applied. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data, while inferential techniques, including multiple regression analysis, were employed to examine the relationship between various digital marketing strategies and enrolment decisions. The reliability of the measurement scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.80, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability of the survey instrument.

Let's break down who's actually applying to these engineering colleges. First off, more men than women — men make up 56% of the sample (179 people), while women are at 44% (141 people). That's pretty much the usual story in engineering programs, where you tend to see more guys than girls.

Now, looking at where these students come from, most of them (55%, or 175 people) grew up in cities. About 31% (100 people) are from semi-urban areas, and just 14% (45 people) are from rural backgrounds. So, it's clear that engineering colleges mostly attract city and semi-urban kids, probably because there's just more access to good schools and resources there.

If you check where everyone's living now, the vast majority — 84% (268 people) — stay in Tamil Nadu. Students from other states make up 14% (44 people), and only 2% (8 people) are international. So, these colleges mostly serve local students, which lines up with how a lot of engineering schools focus on their own regions.

As for what they're studying, undergrads are the big group here. About 68% (218 people) are pursuing their bachelor's, while 32% (102 people) are in postgrad programs. That's not surprising, since undergrad programs usually have more seats to fill.

On the money side, 35% (111 people) come from families making more than Rs. 10,00,000 a year. Most students — 56% (179 people) — are in the middle-income group (Rs. 3,00,000 to Rs. 10,00,000), and 9% (30 people) are below Rs. 3,00,000. So, you see a lot of middle-income students, but there's also a fair amount of financial diversity in the mix.

Overall, these stats paint a pretty clear picture: there's a gender imbalance, a big urban tilt, and most students are local. That means colleges might need to work harder to reach out to women and rural students if they want a more balanced crowd. The heavy focus on undergrads is worth noting too, since it shows where the real demand is. And with so many students from middle-income families, financial support and aid could make a real difference for a lot of them.

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Structural Model

The R^2 value for Student Enrolment is 0.879, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.876, as shown in Table 4. The R^2 value of 0.879 indicates that approximately 87.9% of the variance in Student Enrolment can be explained by the model's predictors. The adjusted R^2 of 0.876 takes into account the number of predictors in the model, confirming that the model remains robust after adjusting for the number of variables. This high R^2 value demonstrates the strong explanatory power of the model, indicating that the selected variables are highly relevant in predicting student enrollment outcomes.

Table 5 presents the Q^2 value for Student Enrolment, which is 0.786. The Q^2 value assesses the model's predictive relevance by comparing the predicted values to the actual values. A Q^2 value greater than zero indicates that the model has good predictive relevance, meaning it can effectively predict the dependent variable. For Student Enrolment, the Q^2 value of 0.786 signifies that the model has substantial predictive power, as it indicates that the model's predictions are significantly better than a model with no predictive power.

Table 6 provides a summary of hypothesis testing results for the relationships between the independent variables and Student Enrolment. Content Marketing ($\beta = 0.497$, $T = 9.383$, $p = 0.000$) has a significant and positive effect on Student Enrolment. The high t-statistic (9.383) and a p-value of 0.000 indicate that this relationship is highly significant. This suggests that effective Content Marketing strategies contribute considerably to increasing student enrolment, highlighting its critical role in recruitment efforts. Customer Relationship Management ($\beta =$

0.146, $T = 2.629$, $p = 0.009$) shows a positive and significant impact on Student Enrolment. With a t-statistic of 2.629 and a p-value of 0.009, this effect is significant, although smaller compared to Content Marketing. This indicates that good Customer Relationship Management practices are important for student recruitment but may not be as influential as other factors. The effect of Email Campaigns on Student Enrolment ($\beta = -0.04$, $T = 0.764$, $p = 0.445$) is not significant. The negative coefficient and high p-value (0.445) suggest that Email Campaigns do not significantly influence student enrolment decisions, indicating that this marketing strategy may need reevaluation or improvement. Mobile Marketing ($\beta = -0.213$, $T = 3.144$, $p = 0.002$) has a significant negative effect on Student Enrolment. The t-statistic of 3.144 and a p-value of 0.002 indicate a statistically significant negative impact. This finding suggests that Mobile Marketing strategies may not be effective and could potentially hinder enrolment, requiring further investigation and adjustment. Online Reputation Management ($\beta = 0.2$, $T = 5.957$, $p = 0.000$) shows a significant positive effect on Student Enrolment. With a t-statistic of 5.957 and a p-value of 0.000, this variable plays an important role in enhancing student enrolment. Effective management of online reputation is crucial for attracting prospective students. Search Engine Marketing ($\beta = 0.182$, $T = 3.113$, $p = 0.002$) has a significant positive influence on Student Enrolment. The t-statistic of 3.113 and a p-value of 0.002 indicate a significant effect, suggesting that Search Engine Marketing strategies are effective in boosting student enrolment. Social

Media Marketing ($\beta = 0.267$, $T = 4.197$, $p = 0.000$) exhibits a significant positive impact on Student Enrolment. The high t-statistic (4.197) and a p-value of 0.000 confirm the significant role of Social Media Marketing in recruitment, emphasizing its importance in reaching and engaging potential students. The effect of Virtual Campus Tours on Student Enrolment is not significant ($\beta = 0.08$, $T = 1.244$, $p = 0.214$). The low t-statistic (1.244) and high p-value (0.214) suggest that Virtual Campus Tours do not significantly impact enrolment decisions, indicating that other factors may be more influential. Webinar ($\beta = -0.043$, $T = 1.089$, $p = 0.277$) show a non-significant negative effect on Student Enrolment. The low t-statistic (1.089) and high p-value (0.277) indicate that Webinars do not have a substantial effect on student enrolment, suggesting that this method may not be as effective in influencing prospective students.

The analysis of the structural model highlights several key findings. Content Marketing, Customer Relationship Management, Online Reputation Management, Search Engine Marketing, and Social Media Marketing all have significant positive effects on Student Enrolment, indicating their effectiveness in recruitment. In contrast, Email Campaigns, Mobile Marketing, Virtual Campus Tours, and Webinars do not show significant impacts, with some even having negative effects. These insights can guide engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu to focus on the most effective marketing strategies and refine or reconsider less impactful ones to enhance student enrolment outcomes.

Table 5 Q²– Indicator of Cross-Validated Redundancy

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Content Marketing	1280	1280	
Customer Relationship Management	1280	1280	
Email Campaigns	1280	1280	
Mobile Marketing	1280	1280	
Online Reputation Management	960	960	
Search Engine Marketing	1280	1280	
Social Media Marketing	1280	1280	
Student Enrolment	1280	273.538	0.786
Virtual Campus Tours	960	960	
Webinar	1280	1280	

Table 4 R² Value

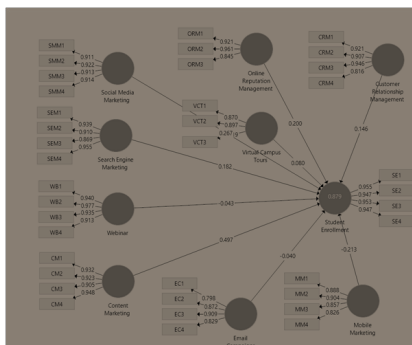
	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Student Enrolment	0.879	0.876

Table 6 Hypothesis Testing with Structural Model

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values	Decision
Content Marketing -> Student Enrolment (H ₁)	0.497	0.495	0.053	9.383	0	Accept
Customer Relationship Management -> Student Enrolment (H ₂)	0.146	0.144	0.055	2.629	0.009	Accept
Email Campaigns -> Student Enrolment (H ₃)	-0.04	-0.038	0.053	0.764	0.445	Reject
Mobile Marketing -> Student Enrolment (H ₄)	-0.213	-0.212	0.068	3.144	0.002	Accept
Online Reputation Management -> Student Enrolment (H ₅)	0.2	0.198	0.033	5.957	0	Accept
Search Engine Marketing -> Student Enrolment (H ₆)	0.182	0.181	0.059	3.113	0.002	Accept
Social Media Marketing -> Student Enrolment (H ₇)	0.267	0.271	0.064	4.197	0	Accept
Virtual Campus Tours -> Student Enrolment (H ₈)	0.08	0.077	0.065	1.244	0.214	Reject
Webinar -> Student Enrolment (H ₉)	-0.043	-0.04	0.039	1.089	0.277	Reject

Conclusion

In summary, this research investigates how different digital marketing strategies work—or do not work—in attracting more students to engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu. The results clearly indicate that content marketing, social media marketing, online reputation management, and search engine marketing are effective. They help colleges reach and attract students. On the flip side, Email Campaigns, Mobile Marketing, Virtual Campus Tours, and Webinars just aren't moving the needle right now.



So, what should engineering colleges do with this information? First, they need to double down on content marketing and social media. Creating blog posts, articles, and videos that speak to what students care about can build trust and generate interest. An active social media presence helps too. It is not just about posting updates; it is about showing what campus life is actually like, interacting with students, and making the college feel accessible.

Managing your online reputation also matters significantly. Colleges need to keep an eye on their reviews, respond to feedback, and deal with negative comments quickly. When a college has a solid online reputation, students are more likely to trust it. Search Engine Marketing is another big one. If a college's website is easy to find and packed with good information, students are more likely to check it out and apply. Investing in SEO and paid search ads pays off here.

Email campaigns and mobile marketing are not useless; however, they need some work. Personalising emails and making them more relevant could help boost engagement. For mobile, colleges should ensure that their content works well on phones and is useful to students who are always on the go. As for virtual campus tours and webinars, they are not very effective as they are now. Making them more interactive or adding cool tech like virtual reality, or even live Q&A sessions, could make a difference. That said, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. This study only looked at engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu, so the findings might not hold up elsewhere. Tamil Nadu has its own unique culture and context, which can change how digital marketing works. In addition, all the data came from self-reported surveys, which are not always reliable; what students say does not always match what they actually do.

Looking ahead, researchers should investigate how these strategies work in other places and with different types of colleges. Comparing different regions or types of schools could reveal useful differences. It also makes sense to examine how these strategies work together, not just individually. Are there certain combinations that work better? What happens over the long term? Tracking results over time would help colleges maintain fresh and

effective marketing. Finally, it is worth exploring new digital tools, such as AI and machine learning, to determine if they can disrupt the status quo and help colleges connect with students in entirely new ways.

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