

Role of Social Media in Promotional Practices of Indian Universities for Recruiting International Students

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how Indian institutions use social media platforms as a key component of their marketing campaigns to attract foreign students. It describes the strategic roles of social media (visibility, involvement, advertising, and reputation management), examines platform-specific strategies, talks about potential and difficulties, and provides useful advice for organizations looking to maximize foreign hiring. In order to provide a structure that Indian universities can use and modify, the conceptual paper draws on current marketing theory, online interaction concepts, and higher education recruitment practices.

Keywords: social media, international student recruitment, Indian universities, higher education promotion, digital marketing



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INTRODUCTION

The recruitment of international students has become a strategic focus for institutions globally due to the internationalization of higher education. Social media offers an affordable way to connect with potential students around the world because of its reach, targeting possibilities, and engagement. Social media allows for two-way contact, peer influence, interactive storytelling, and data-driven targeting, in contrast to traditional marketing and static websites. Knowing how to use social media appropriately is crucial for Indian institutions operating in a market that is getting more and more congested.

Why Social Media Matters for International Recruitment

The use of social media in recruitment tactics can be explained by three useful benefits:

1. Reach and targeted visibility: Platforms allow geo- and interest-targeting that precisely reach candidate cohorts in priority source markets.
2. Engagement and authenticity: Video, live Q&A, student take-overs and alumni stories increase perceived authenticity and trust — important drivers in student choice.
3. Cost-efficiency and measurability: Paid campaigns combined with analytics and UTM-tracking enable measurement of funnel metrics (awareness → leads → applications).

Platform-Specific Roles and Tactics

Different platforms serve different roles. Indian universities should align platform choice with audience behaviour and campaign goals:

- Facebook: Community-building, event promotion (open days, webinars), paid targeting by country, age, and interests.
- Instagram & TikTok: Visual storytelling of campus life, student take-overs, short-form reels highlighting labs and classrooms — resonate with younger audiences.
- LinkedIn: Critical for graduate recruitment and showcasing faculty research, industry partnerships, and career outcomes. Sponsored content and alumni networks help reach professionals and prospective postgraduate students.
- YouTube: Long-form videos, virtual campus tours, course explainers and student testimonials that support the consideration-stage decisions.
- WhatsApp / Telegram & Regional Platforms: For direct communication and localised follow-up (application reminders, document checklists); widely used in many international student source countries.
- Regional Platforms: In certain markets (e.g., WeChat for China, VK for Russia), using regional platforms or partners is necessary to reach audiences effectively.

Content Strategy & Messaging

Effective content follows a funnel model — from awareness to conversion — and is tailored to the prospective student's decision stage:

- Top of Funnel (Awareness): Short videos, eye-catching images, infographics about

programme highlights, international rankings, scholarship opportunities.

- Middle of Funnel (Consideration): Webinars, faculty Q&As, alumni testimonials, virtual open days, course-specific explainer videos, campus life stories.
- Bottom of Funnel (Decision): Clear call-to-action (CTA), application walkthroughs, visa guidance, scholarship application instructions, testimonials from recently enrolled international students.

Messaging should emphasise: academic strengths and industry linkages; career outcomes and internship placements; support services (international office, language support, accommodation); safety, cost of living, and cultural integration support; scholarships and financial aid specific to international students. Tone must be authentic, transparent, and culturally sensitive.

Targeting, Analytics, and Personalisation

Social media enables sophisticated audience targeting and measurement:

- Geo-targeting to focus on priority source countries or cities.
- Interest and behaviour targeting to reach students interested in specific fields (e.g., engineering, management).
- Retargeting to re-engage website visitors who viewed programme pages.
- A/B testing of creatives, copy, and CTAs to improve conversion rates.
- Tracking & Analytics: Track click-throughs, responses to forms, webinar participation, and attributed enrollments using platform analytics and UTM-associated URLs.

Relevance and conversion are increased via personalization, such as country-specific websites and local language messaging.

Role of Influencers, Alumni, and Students

Peer pressure has a significant impact on students' decision-making:

- By sharing career outcomes, alumni advocates can increase the credibility of employability claims.
- Current international learners can create content on everyday living and obstacles (housing, visa procedures), host takeovers, and post Q&As.
- In target markets, education counsellors and micro-influencers can increase reach and provide localised credibility.

In order to guarantee congruence and authenticity while engaging with influencers, universities should implement governance (guidelines, disclosure policies, incentives).

Challenges and Risks

- Quality vs. Quantity: Organisations should concentrate on engagement and quality leads

because a large number of followers does not ensure conversion.

- Misinformation and Reputation Management: Universities require regular monitoring and a crisis-management procedure since adverse feedback or crises may propagate swiftly.
- Privacy and Data Compliance: Gathering and handling application data internationally presents legal issues (e.g., GDPR-like legislation in certain markets).
- Resource Restrictions: Content producers, community administrators, analysts, and money for paid advertising are all necessary for successful campaigns.
- Platform Access Restrictions: Alternative methods or collaborations may be required since some platforms are prohibited or underutilized in specific countries.

Practical Recommendations for Indian Universities

1. Create a cohesive social media plan that unites the brand, foreign office, and admissions teams; establish KPIs (enrollments, leads, awareness, and applications).
2. Make content hub investments: For every target market, create landing pages that are specific to the program and, if feasible, localized.
3. Make use of video and storytelling: Give priority to both short and long videos that highlight real experiences of learners and academic prowess.
4. Create an ambassador program by hiring and educating current and former students to produce material and facilitate connections.
5. Use data appropriately: Use monitoring to gauge the return on investment of campaigns while making sure that foreign data flows are compliant with the law.
6. Localize campaigns: For top source nations, use language, currency, feedback, and other culturally appropriate content.
7. Monitor and react: To identify problems early, keep up active community management, prompt answers to questions, and a social monitoring program.
8. Coordinate premium and organic strategies: To preserve authenticity and community, use organic content and paid advertisements for exact targeting.
9. Assess long-term results: Monitor student retention and results to connect social media expenditures to organisational objectives.

CONCLUSION

For Indian universities looking to attract international students, social media is a game-changing instrument. Social media may increase reach, enhance lead quality, and boost an organisation's reputation overseas when utilised wisely, combining targeted sponsored marketing, real storytelling, data-driven personalisation, and active community interaction. To guarantee long-term effects, institutions must reduce risks through governance, compliance with information procedures, and ongoing assessment.

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