

# Impact of Social Networking Sites as a Marketing Tool for Business School Promotions

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## ABSTRACT

*In selecting a Business School (B School), a prospective student finds it very difficult in selecting the right choice for him/her. Most of the B Schools promise the same facilities, infrastructure, placements, and exposure to various subjects, etc. A student is bombarded with various choices and finds it difficult to find the right B School. Hence, it is necessary for a student to find a trusted source of information in selecting a B School. Marketers of B Schools at the same time are finding it hard to market their institutions, create a brand and sell the college and courses to students. A lot of expenditure is spent on promoting colleges through advertisements, college fairs, and event sponsorships. Social networking sites are becoming more and more popular by the day. The enormous growth rate of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc are evidence for the same. More businesses are looking forward to harness the huge potential which these social networking sites offer to expand their business and to reach out to large numbers of audience in a very cost effective way. These sites are hugely popular among the masses, provide a media for interaction and communication directly and build trust and relationship. The study aims to understand the influence of word-of-mouth communication and social networking sites in selecting a B School. It would also help to understand the effectiveness of these methods of marketing over traditional methods of marketing, such as advertising. The study would also give an insight on the various parameters that would influence the decision making of a student. This study also seeks to understand how the people are using social networking sites as well as their attitudes to this form of communication.*

**Keywords:** digital marketing, marketing, social network

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## INTRODUCTION

A social networking service also known as social networking site (SNS) is a platform for the users to interact their opinions through online tool. It helps the people to build social network or social relations which known people and unknown people can connect to each other and share idea for extension of business and knowledge. People also use social media for sharing their person or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real life connection through online platform of social networking.

Social networking services vary in format and the number of features and they can incorporate new information and communication tools, social networking can operate using tablets, desktops, mobile phones, smart phones, and smart watches, laptops through connection of 3G or 4G network. Social networking also help for sharing photos, documents, videos, live chat, group chat using Share-it app, WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

On the flip side, there are dangers associated with social networking sites that

include data theft and viruses, which are on the rise. The most prevalent danger though often involves online predators or individuals who claim to be someone that they are not.

Some of the most popular social networking sites include Myspace, Friend Wise, Friend Finder, Yahoo! 360, Facebook, Instagram and Classmates [1].

### Statement of the Problem

Analyzing the effectiveness of social networking sites as a marketing tool for BSchools promotion.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of this dissertation is to understand the thought process that goes in a students' mind in making their choices before joining a B School. The study aims to find:-

- What are the offline and online media that play a role in decision making process?
- Who are the important people that help students in this process or influence their decisions typically?
- How any other sources (relatives, magazines, friends, acquainted alumni etc) are used in the process?
- How effective are the social networking sites in helping students make choices and the perception of students about information in these networking sites.

### Need for the Study

The study would help to understand the influence of word of mouth communication and social networking sites in selecting a B School. It also would help to understand the effectiveness of these methods of marketing over traditional methods of marketing such as advertising. The study would also give an insight on the various parameters that would influence the decision making of a student.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

While making the management research project, several research papers have to be studied and understood. I have already undergone the below mentioned research papers. The details of the paper and the main crux of the papers are given:

According to Tiffany A. Pempek, Yevdokiya A, Yermolayeva, Sandra L. Clavert (2009) conducted a research on college students' social networking experience on Facebook. He interviewed 92 undergraduates completed a diary-like measure each day for a week, millions of contemporary young adults were using Facebook for building the social contacts and chats.

According to Kuan-Yu Lin (2011) conducted a research on why people use social networking sites, An empirical study integrating network externalities and motivation theory. Social network sites were fast online tool for passing and share the files and documents. He collected 402 samples through online survey and analysis the data using structural equations modeling (SEM).

According to Abed Abedniya (2009) stated that internet and World Wide Web are the key components in today's technology based different organizations and service related business activities. Social networking allows the users to promote their product and services to the people network. He used structural equation modeling is used for finding the inter-correlations among the social network and internet application.

According to Greg Fish and Timothy Lee (2009) stated that social networking sites are any online communities that enable people with shared interests to communicate through a variety of networks. The most popular of these networks are MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Employers are interested in using social networking sites to screen job

applicants by reviewing their social networking information to determine their “fit” within the organization, but many believe this practice is unethical.

### Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on understanding the impact of social networking sites in decision making process of an individual. The study aims to find out the possibilities of using a social networking media vis-à-vis traditional advertising as marketing tool. The study would also try to find out the perception of students towards social networking as marketing communication tool, the acceptance level and the level of impact on their decision-making process [2-3].

### Sources of Data

**Primary Data:** The primary data will be collected by getting questionnaires filled up by people.

**Secondary Data:** Data related to the industry and various articles had been collected through the sources like journals and magazines. The secondary data is also collected through research websites.

### Research Methods

The research method used was descriptive research as the study involves survey method, where those respondents were interviewed who is believed to possess the desired information.

### Sampling Plan

- Sampling unit: Students who use social networking sites.
- Sample size: 70
- Sampling procedure: I will use non-probability judgment and convenience methods.

### METHOD OF CONTACT

I have used direct contact and e-mail to contact sampling units. The questionnaire was prepared and with help of Google docs, an online questionnaire was created

and mailed to several respondents, who in turn filled it up and reverted. Also, questionnaire was distributed in printed version and responses were collected.

### DATA COLLECTION METHOD

An online survey was done. A suitable questionnaire was prepared, and an online questionnaire was created in Google docs. This online questionnaire was mailed to several respondents in Bangalore. The respondents in turn filled the questionnaire and replied. Also, the questions in printed paper was distributed, responses were collated with those obtained online. Thus, the required primary data was collected.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to the following areas:

- The study limits only to study the perception of students in making decisions related to choosing a career with the help of social networking sites.
- The study was only aimed at students who wanted to pursue a management degree and their perception towards social networking sites as a tool to help them in making decision to choose a college.
- Because of limitation of time and cost, the sample size taken for the survey will be restricted to only 70.
- The sample size taken for the survey may not include the people from different age groups, educational background, experience, etc. proportional to existing traits in the population of whole mankind.
- The study does not include the perception of colleges towards using social networking sites as a preferred tool for communication and marketing their colleges [4].

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A survey was created to understand the students’ perspective about information in

social networking sites, ease of access to these sites, their penetration, influence of these social networking sites in their decision-making process for selecting a college and preference of students towards social networking sites over other forms of communication and promotion.

### **Broad Framework for Survey Creation:**

A student goes through the following steps in his or her decision process to enroll at a college as under:

**Problem Definition:** Identify that further studies will improve his or her career.

#### **1. Prospects**

- Understand what drives this realization.
- Is it mainly internal or external driven?

#### **2. Information Search:** Evaluate various options that are available as:

- Understand this process in more detail.
- What are the inputs?
- What is wrong with the current set of inputs?
- Is there any wish list? Does he or she think that having access to certain kinds of information or input would help the process?
- How is the search process driven-self-led versus external input driven?

#### **3. Conclusion of Search:** Identifies the best possible options as:

- For some, it might be merit driven admissions process and a top tier school.
- For others, it may be a management seat
- How does this realization come about?
- What is best is not the same for all students?
- Shortlist based on a number of criteria i.e. location, fees, facilities etc.
- Capture all the criteria for selection.
- Capture all the influencers in the

selection process-seniors, fellow students, friends, parents, siblings, counsellors, agents, professors, coaching classes, internet, social networks (Facebook etc.) etc.

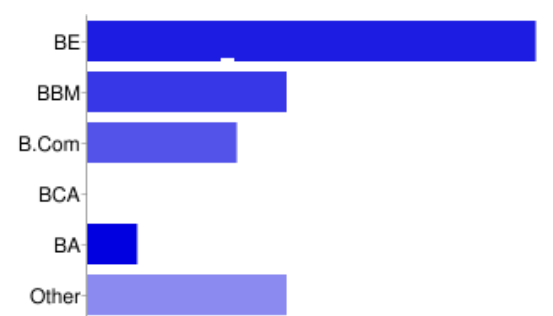
#### **4. Final Decision:** Apply, gain admission and join

#### **5. Post-facto Analysis**

- Analyse the decision
- Are you satisfied with your decision?
- If not, what are you unhappy about?
- What additional information or tools during your application process help you avoid this decision or make a more informed one?

### **GRADUATION PROGRAM**

*Types of program you are graduating/graduated*

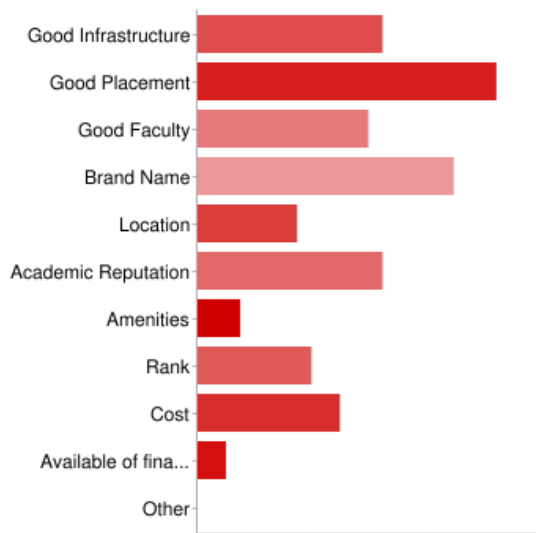


**Fig. 1.** Type of graduation program.

In Figure1, these were the profile of the students who were willing to pursue MBA/Management course. As evident, most of the respondents were from an engineering background. The remaining was from different courses like B.B.M, B.Com, B.A and B.Sc. A few of the correspondents were from M.A, Law and other courses.

### **FACTORS IN CHOOSING A COLLEGE**

*What would be the main factors that you would consider in choosing a particular college for pursuing your higher studies? (if desired you can tick more than one).*



**Fig. 2.** Factors influencing selection.

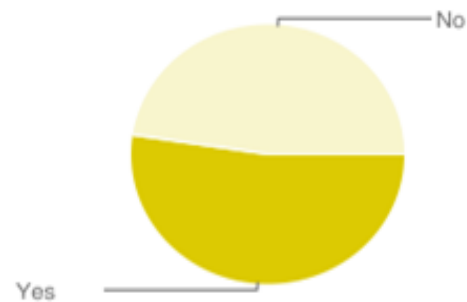
In Figure2, there are so many factors which a student considers while selecting a college. A management degree provides leverage and boosts career opportunities if done at a reputed institute. Not surprisingly, good placements were the top criteria for the students to select a college. Closely followed were the Brand name of the college, Academic reputation and Good infrastructure provided by the college were among the priority list of students. Good faculty, ranking of the college, cost of education, location and amenities were other factors which were considered by students in picking a college for management education [5].

### DECISION MAKER

*Was the decision of selecting a particular institution or university solely made by you?*

It is necessary to understand the influencers of decision. In Figure 3, we wanted to know if the decision of selecting a particular university was made by the student himself or was helped by others such as parents, mentors, siblings, relatives etc. As seen, around 52% of the students responded saying that the decision to pursue a management course was solely made by them. The rest responded that there were others who were decision

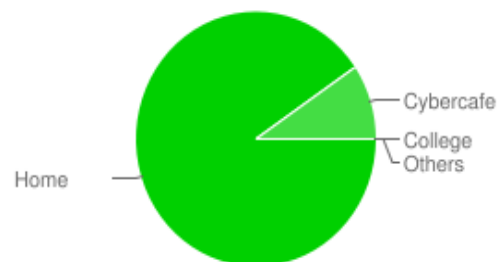
influencers for their choice of management course.



**Fig. 3.** Decision maker.

### INTERNET ACCESS

*Where do you access the internet?*



**Fig. 4.** Internet access.

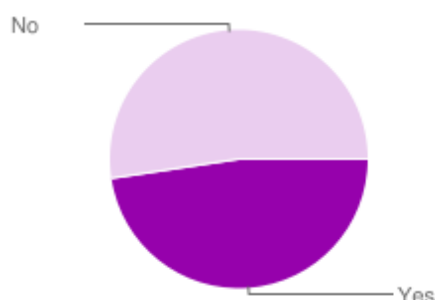
Access to internet is one important criterion in judging the effectiveness of social networking marketing effectiveness. In Figure4, ease of internet access by majority provides more exposure to social networking marketing. In our sample, 90% of the students responded saying that they had access to internet at home. This is a good penetration rate, which shows the potential and reach a social networking site can have.

### ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUMS

*Do you rely on online discussion forums to make decision about the college to join?*

This question was formulated to assess the perception of students about the online threads and discussions on their decision-making process. In Figure 5, around 52% of the people do not feel that they can rely enough on discussion forums to get inputs for their decision. This may be because the

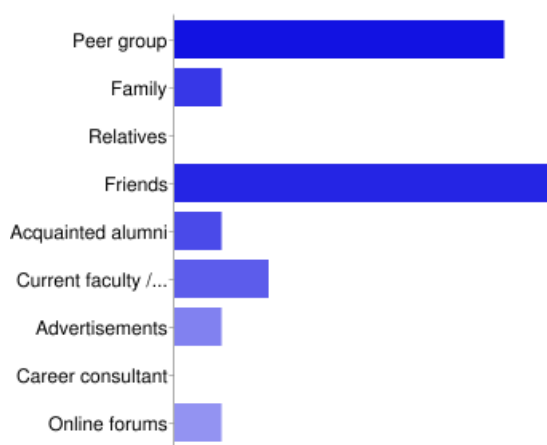
identity of the participants and their inputs relevance may not be very clear. Students trust more on inputs provided by a known/recognized individual whom they know.



**Fig. 5. Online forums.**

### ONLINE SOURCES AS A TOOL FOR DECISION MAKING

*What are the sources you rely on in making decisions in choosing a college?*

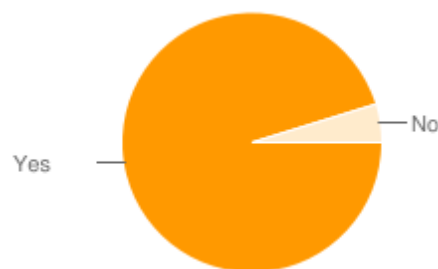


**Fig. 6. Sources for decision making.**

In Figure6, the respondents said that they relied more on the inputs provided by their friends and peer group more important than others. It is fair enough, since they trust acquainted people and inputs received from them for making any important decisions.

### FEEDBACK AND OPINION VIS-À-VIS ADVERTISEMENT

*Do you prefer peer feedback and senior's opinion in choosing a college over advertisements and promotional events by college?*

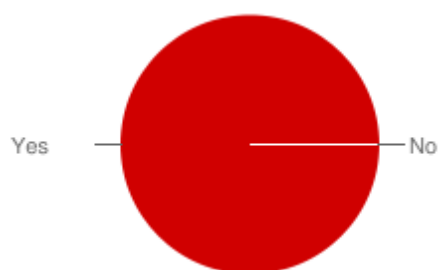


**Fig. 7. Word-of-mouth vis-a-vis ADS.**

In Figure7, this question was to understand the significance of word-of-mouth communication over traditional advertising. As seen, most respondents preferred to take inputs from their peers or seniors in making a decision on career than relying on advertising. This gives us an idea about the importance of social networking marketing in promoting B Schools rather than relying on traditional advertising to promote their colleges.

### MEMBERSHIP IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

*Are you a member of social networking sites such as facebook, Twitter, etc?*

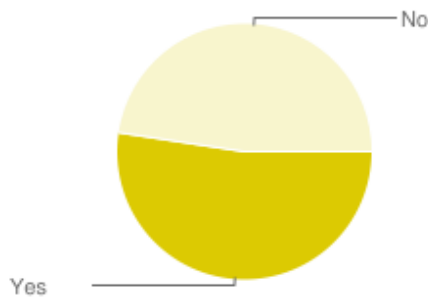


**Fig. 8. Membership in social networking sites.**

In Figure 8, 100% of the respondents were members of some social networking sites. This shows the penetration level of these sites and their popularity. Majority of the students are a part of one of the major social networking sites. Thus, these social networking sites play a very important role as tools in sharing of information and inputs.

### SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN INFORMATION COLLECTION

*Do you take help of Facebook or other social networking sites in collecting information about the college to choose?*

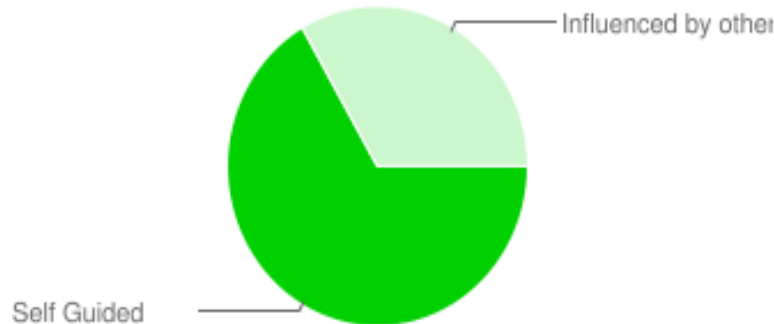


**Fig. 9.** SNS for collecting information.

In Figure 9, about 52% of the respondents already agree that they took the help of one of the social networking sites in making a decision to choose a college. The ease of access, availability of information at the tip of hands, communities in these sites help students gather information easily than ever and help them make informed decisions.

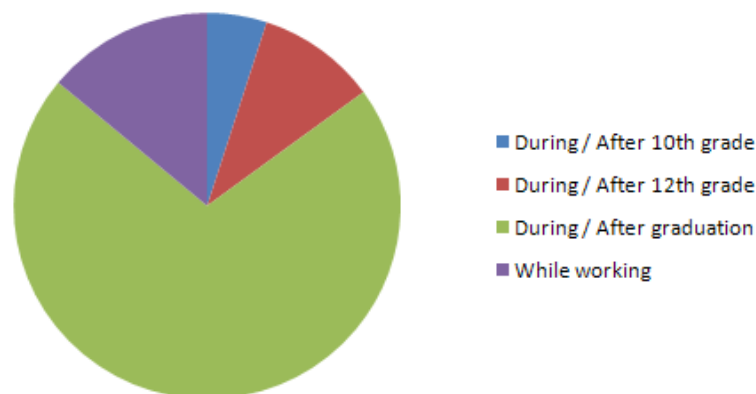
### DECISION INFLUENCERS

*Was the decision to opt for higher education self-guided or influenced by*



**Fig. 10.** Decision influencers.

### Percentage of Respondents



**Fig. 11.** Target population.

*others (Peers, parents, seniors, career counselors, etc)?*

In Figure 10, the decision to opt for higher education was made by the respondents themselves in 67% of the sample. These are the people who would look forward to gather information from various sources including social networking sites in making an informed decision.

### DECISION TO PURSUE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

*When did you make the decision of pursuing MBA?*

In Figure 11, most of the respondents said that they made a choice to pursue a course in M.B.A after their graduation. Thus, they are the majority target audience to which marketers of any B School should address. Catering to the graduation students would improve the prospects of marketers of B Schools to be successful.

## FINDINGS

The study was carried out in order to find out the significance of social networking sites in marketing efforts of an organization, B Schools in particular. An effort was done to understand the students' perspective in making a decision to join a management school. The role of social networking sites and word of mouth communication in making a decision about selection of a B School was analyzed. The decision influencers were studied and the effectiveness of social networking media over traditional advertising was studied.

Some of the findings were:

- Majority of the students felt that they could rely on peer feedback and senior's opinion over advertisements in order to make an informed decision in choosing a college. This shows the power of word of mouth communication and social networking sites' influence on decision making process of a student.
- Majority of the students had access to internet at home, making access to social networking sites easier than ever.
- All the respondents were a part of one of the major social networking sites. This shows the penetration and reach of these sites. This also reflects the ease at which information can be spread to the mass using these tools.
- Around half of the respondents said that they relied on online discussion forums in decision making. This shows that there is still a certain amount of apprehension in the minds of students regarding the authenticity of information shared in these discussion forums.
- Around two thirds of the respondents said that their decision to pursue a management course was self-guided. These are the people who would look out for various sources of information including social networking sites for collecting information for making decisions.
- The decision to pursue management course was taken during or just after graduation by most respondents. These are the target audience for marketers of B Schools. Threads, communities and information posted on social networking sites should cater to this audience.
- Finally, it is necessary to understand the students' priorities in choosing a college. Marketing is all about delivering customer satisfaction profitably. The main criteria for selection as per the sample respondents were good placements, brand name, academic reputation and good infrastructure. A good marketer would ensure these are given due consideration during marketing of his college.

Thus, a social network-based promotion catering to students' requirement would be a win-win situation for both students as well as marketers of B Schools.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- After the study, it is recommended marketers promoting B Schools should consider social networking sites as an important tool for promotion. It is cost effective, complements traditional promotional media, and reaches a large population very easily and quickly.
- Also, students are more receptive to word of mouth communication in these sites than advertisements by colleges. Marketers can use this opportunity to create blogs, threads and communities in social networking sites to provide authentic information to the students and at the same time promote the college.
- At the same time, marketers should be aware of foul mouthing, spams, rumors and negative word of mouth spread about their college. They must ensure there is moderation in the content that is posted and due care is taken to avoid spamming and abuse of members.

- In this study, only the response from the students has been collected and analyzed. It is recommended to further study the perspective of management of B Schools towards social networking as a marketing tool before effective strategies can be formulated.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the study, it is evident that social networking sites and word of mouth communication are powerful tools which influence the decision making of a student. It would be profitable and cost effective for marketers of B Schools to harness these tools to maximum potential in order to achieve mutual benefit. Social networking and word of mouth communication would complement the existing advertisement and promotions carried out by colleges. Students would get more transparent and authentic information to make their choice and at the same time enable marketers of these colleges to harness these cost-effective tools and promote their colleges.

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