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IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BRAND PERCEPTION AND REPUTATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AMONG STUDENTS IN BENGALURU

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Abstract

Bengaluru is often considered to be the education centre of South India, with hundreds of institutions and universities fighting for students' attention every year. In such a competitive market, social media has quietly become one of the primary factors determining a student's college choice. This study uses social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp groups to investigate how Bengaluru students see and assess the reputation and brand of higher education institutions (HEIs).

This work is based on a review of prior. It shows that a few negative online reviews or comments can damage a college's reputation far more quickly than in the past, and that students are significantly more willing to believe peer material, placement posts, and campus life videos than an institution's own marketing. The research paper concludes with some helpful advice on how Bengaluru colleges might use social media in a more genuine and reliable way.

Keywords: *Social Media, Brand Perception, Reputation, Higher Education*

1. Introduction

A few years ago, students may tour the campus, speak with seniors, or read a printed prospectus to learn more about an institution. These days, most homework is done on a phone screen. A student in Bengaluru will typically look at a college's Instagram page, watch a few YouTube videos, browse LinkedIn placement posts, and perhaps even message a current student on WhatsApp, asking, "Is it actually worth it?"
Students can easily make this judgement because Bengaluru is home to several engineering colleges, management institutes, and arts and science colleges. Because there are so many possibilities in the area, a student's initial impression of an institution is frequently formed online, sometimes even before they have seen the campus. For this reason, brand perception and reputation—that is, how people typically feel and think about an institution—have grown to be such a crucial issue for institutions to consider.

Social media has changed the speed and reach of news, even if it didn't create the news itself. Within hours, a single viral post, a funny meme mocking a professor, or a heated comment thread about tuition rises might influence perceptions inside a college's own community or across the country. This implies that online posts from students, alumni, and even irate parents can have an equal impact on a college's reputation as the school itself.

By analysing how social media is directly influencing Bengaluru students' opinions of various HEIs and what universities can do about it, this research paper aims to understand this shift.

2. Literature Review

Past studies of Indian students found that social media and influencer posts strongly affected how they judged and chose a college. This was most true when the posts came from people they could relate to, not from the college's official page (Alam, Ahmad, and Parveen, 2025).

A study of IIM Ahmedabad, IIM Bangalore and IIM Calcutta checked which Facebook and Instagram posts got the most attention. Students liked real, human posts better than formal college messages (IIMS Journal of Management Science, 2023). Posts on campus life, student wins, and placements got far more engagement than posts about academic notices.

Research done during COVID-19 showed that people liked colleges that kept talking to them during the crisis. Those colleges posted often, stayed consistent and sounded human (Bhattacharya and Faisal, 2020).

Another study looked at Indian colleges and international students. Social media helps students get to know a college, but it works alongside family, friends and alumni. It does not replace them. The same study found that a focused, well-planned presence works better than being on every platform. Too much content on too many platforms can leave students confused (Kumar and Raman, 2020).

A study in Uttarakhand asked how a college's image depends on the online source that talks about it. Online word-of-mouth acts like a bridge to the final image a student forms. Who shares a message, and how it is written, matters as much as what it says (Kaushal and Anuj, 2022).

A newer study in Navi Mumbai surveyed nearly 400 students and found the same thing. Regular online activity and good online word-of-mouth explained a big part of why students trusted and chose a college. Students also found posts by other students more believable than posts by the college's marketing team (Mohanty and Sinha, 2026).

One study looked at Bengaluru college students and how they use social media in their studies. Its main focus was study habits, not branding. Still, it showed that students spend a large part of their day on these apps (Swathi and Bala Sendhil Kumar, 2023). So anything a college posts, or anything said about it, quickly reaches its own students.

Another study split college choice into three steps. Students first hear about a college on social media. Then they use it to understand the college's reputation and culture. Finally, they go back to it to double-check their choice before applying (Kavya, 2024). Research on future management students suggest that students use social media to check admission details, read senior reviews, get a feel for the campus, look for internships and jobs, and stay in touch with alumni. A college's brand, then, grows slowly from many small moments, not from one post.

A study of Indian business schools found a link between regular social media activity and how well students knew and liked the college. This worked best when the posts were fun and interactive, not just promotional (Jaipuria Institute of Management, 2016).

Research from Indonesia found the same thing outside India. Entertaining posts, interaction and word-of-mouth all affected how well students knew a university and whether they chose it (Kharisma and Haryono, 2023).

Not every study says social media is the deciding factor. One study on Instagram photos found that students and other users shared and trusted posts that felt real, had a clear focus and sounded relatable (Serranno and Ramjaun, 2016). In other words, how honest a post is matters more than how often a college posts.

An older international survey of undergraduates gives a useful reminder. Most students said advice from friends and family, and the official website, mattered far more than social media in their choice (Archer, cited in Times Higher Education, 2011). Social media is one piece of the picture, not the whole thing.

Put together, these studies point to one idea. Students now judge a college by what it says about itself, what peers and alumni say about it, and how honest its social media feels. But social media rarely works alone. It adds to older sources of trust like family advice, campus visits and word from people they know.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. 1To find out how much social media shapes the way Bengaluru students see a college's brand.
2. To find out which platforms and types of posts students trust most when judging a college.
3. To understand how bad reviews and negative comments hurt a college's reputation among students.
4. To suggest simple, practical steps Bengaluru colleges can take to build an honest social media presence.

4. Research Methodology

This is a descriptive study. It reviews earlier research on social media and college branding. It also uses informal observations and secondary information from student conversations, review sites and college social media pages common in Bengaluru. The conclusions come from patterns in past studies and how students usually behave. A future version could add a proper questionnaire for students at other Bengaluru colleges to give stronger statistical support.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1 Social media is the first stop. Most students check a college's YouTube channel or Instagram page before they even open its website. In just a few seconds of scrolling, they form an opinion. It depends on whether the page looks friendly, professional and active.

5.2 Students trust other students more. Research shows that students trust posts made by other students more than polished ads. Think of a "day in my college life" reel, a placement story or a review video. Most Bengaluru students would probably agree. They can tell the difference between marketing and the real thing.

5.3 Placement and campus life posts get the most attention. Posts about student wins, hostel life, placements and fests get more likes, shares and comments. Posts about circulars, teacher qualifications or rankings get less. Students seem to care more about what life will really feel like at a college than about its credentials.

5.4 One bad review can spread fast. In a single day, one angry comment, complaint thread or review about poor facilities or high fees can spread across college forums and WhatsApp groups. Many Bengaluru students say they check Google reviews or ask in local Telegram and WhatsApp groups before applying to private colleges. So reputation needs care all year round, not just during admission season.

5.5 Influencers and consultants matter more now. Education YouTubers and Instagram pages review colleges, compare fees and talk about placements. They are not official, but students find them useful. Many students believe these outside voices more than the college itself, because they seem fairer.

6. Challenges

Pressure to stay active all the time: Students want fresh posts often. That is hard for small colleges that have little staff or money for social media.

Over-polished posts feel fake: Many colleges still post heavily edited, formal content. Students spot this easily and often do not trust it.

7. Suggestions

1. Colleges should encourage real posts by students, like honest placement stories and campus vlogs, instead of only scripted promo videos.
2. Even a small, trained social media team should be in charge of posting and of answering student questions and complaints quickly.
3. Colleges should answer bad feedback in public, not delete it or ignore it. Over time, this builds trust.
4. Colleges should pick platforms based on where their audience actually is. Instagram and YouTube work for future students, and LinkedIn works for showing alumni success.
5. Colleges could work with real student ambassadors, not only paid influencers, because students trust their peers more.

6. Conclusion

Social media is now one of the biggest things shaping how Bengaluru students see colleges. Colleges have lost a lot of control over their image, because students, alumni and even strangers now share in building it. Colleges that still depend only on one-sided ads will fall behind. Those that stay honest, post regularly and talk with their students will build a stronger and more trusted brand. In a crowded education city like Bengaluru, the colleges that treat social media as a real relationship with students, not just another ad channel, will come out with the best reputation.

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