

## Use of Social media for communication by Top Business Schools in India



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*Social Media (SM), a part of communications strategy of any organization, is a hybrid channel as the control of the organization on messaging through social media is limited. The prevalence of the Internet and the online social networks has increased the reach of messages within a limited time span reducing the response time available to organizations. The organization's ability to engage with the different stakeholders through social media has to be studied and mechanism for understanding the same has to be evolved. In this context, a study was conducted on the use of social media by 105 of the top Business Schools in India. The study used Internet based data through websites and SM sites. The metrics are defined for Facebook and Twitter and performance of various Business Schools were statistically analyzed. This is descriptive research, where the sampled institutions were compared on different demographic variables using appropriate statistical tests.*

*Key Words: Social Media; Business Schools; User Generated Content (UGC)*

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### Introduction

Organizations communicate to their stakeholder through various channels of communication. The mass media communication may be termed as advertising or publicity. The direct communication is termed as direct marketing. The advances in communication technology have created Social Media, capable of communicating with large groups of stakeholder as well have personalized messages. The selection of the media is critical to ensuring the message conveys to the to the appropriate target audience at an appropriate time.

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The media may be broadly classified into traditional (hoardings, print, radio, and television) and new media (Internet and mobile). The newest form of media is Social Media (SM) which combines digital content with increased consumer control on the message dissemination. SM is not a homogenous entity and like channels of television, it also has multiple avenues, each with its own characteristics, content and interactive capabilities. Organizations have to respond promptly and suitably so that the consumer messages do not hamper or harm the achievement of the organizational goals. They have to therefore identify the most influential social media alternatives which are channels for the individual messages, and establish their official presence on these channels for more effective response.

This research, therefore, examines the following questions: a) What are the preferred SM alternatives for Business Schools; b) examine if there is any difference in preferences due to different analysis criteria; c) what the metrics for measuring the performance of the Business Schools on Facebook and Twitter and d) Examine if there is any significant difference in performance metrics due to different analysis criteria. The study used probability estimates from sample data to rank the social media alternatives and identify the most used social media alternatives. The hypothesis of significant difference between different sample groups on individual social media presence is tested using Chi-Square tests, whereas the difference in total social media presence is tested using ANOVA and independent sample t-test. Mann Whitney U Test and Independent samples Kruskal Wallis Tests (Nonparametric tests) are used to test the significance of different analysis criteria on the performance metrics of Facebook and Twitter.

### **Purpose of Communication**

Communication is intended to convey an idea to the audience eliciting a behavioural response. The messages conveyed to the customers and other external stakeholders are vital for the business success of any business or nonprofit organization. Communication is key to the building of relationships with the customers (Andersen, 2001). The role of communications in marketing relations is providing an understanding of partners intentions and capabilities (Andersen, 2001). The selection of the appropriate communication channel is one of the most difficult challenges for marketers due to the availability of large and diverse means of communication (Keller, 2001) Internet has changed the way the service organizations communicate to the customers (Holm, 2006; Lagrosen, 2005) Service organizations can go for customized communication targeted at building relationships or undertake mass communication aimed at specific transaction goals (Lagrosen, 2005). The effect of the messaging is to create a brand identity (Dahlén et al, 2010; Ghodeswar, 2008) of the organization.

The Internet is becoming the primary component of the communication platform as it is more cost-effective and has the potential for mass customized communication (Castronovo and Huang, 2012). Integrating the SM communication strategy of an organization is a challenge. The word of mouth marketing and social media marketing have become more and more important due to the increasing penetration of the Internet and the popularity of the SM. Internet-based digital communications are becoming more and more important in business operations (Caporale et al, 2013; Groß, 2013; Milolidakis et al, 2014; Piotrowski, 2012; Trainor et al, 2014). The communication mix used to communicate with the external stakeholders includes social media (Erskine et al, 2014; Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

The audience of messaging aimed for customers through any media should be the target market for the products offered. Since the users of SM are predominantly in the age group of 18 to 34 years (Bolton et al, 2013), it is considered to be an appropriate mode of reaching the prospective

students of a Business School. However, the question regarding which SM alternative is to be used needs to be addressed since it is costly and less effective to use a variety of SM. One approach is to imitate the competitors (Shenkar, 2010).

The focus of the study is to identify whether Social Media is used by Business Schools as part of their communication activity and then verify whether the use of SM in communication is varying based on demographic characteristics of the institutions.

### **Social Media**

Social media technology is helping individual and group conversations through telecommunication networks. Social media is a communication mechanism without central control centre “Social media employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content”(Kietzmann et al , 2011, p 241). The social media is interactive, scalable and accessible to general masses. It uses digital content and provides facilities for social conversations or dialogues. For the purpose of this research, we define Social Media as any Internet resource that provides the facility of interaction between and among the Business School and the external stakeholders (primarily students) through Internet to share ideas, personal messages, and other content.

Social media harnesses the potential of now-pervasive online connectivity in our everyday lives (Davis III et al , 2012). Social media is a hybrid element of the promotional mix of the organizations (Mangold and Faulds, 2009), since control on the messaging is not with the organization.

### ***Types of social media***

The variety of social media include blogs, social networking sites, review and rating sites, video sharing sites, online communities, collaborative gaming sites where users work with user generated content (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). Kaplan and Haenlein(2010) classified the social media into six different types based on theories from media research and social processes as Collaborative projects, Blogs and Microblogs, Content Communities, Social Networking Sites, Virtual Game Worlds and Virtual Social Worlds.

### ***Influence of Social Media***

Social media is also a good source understanding the perceptions and attitudes of customers towards brands (Gensler et al, 2015). The ubiquitous and dynamic nature of social media has significantly influenced brand management practices (Gensler et al, 2013). The measurement of brand performance in terms of brand awareness, brand engagement and word of mouth is easier in the social media (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010). Managing the brand in the era of user-generated communications has been a subject of recent studies (Campbell et al, 2014; Gensler et al, 2013; Habibi et al, 2014; Pérez-Latre et al, 2011). The advent of social media has resulted in brand managers losing the command and control over the story-telling about their brands (Kuksov et al, 2012). Measuring influence requires appropriate metrics capable of benchmarking with competing organizations. This research provides metrics for SM use by Business Schools.

### **Research Approach and Outline of the Research**

The research has found that prospective students or customers prefer using the Internet and social networking sites (SNS) for information search regarding most of their decisions (Bolton et

al, 2013; Gunter et al, 2009). Students formulate their opinions/perceptions regarding higher education using social media (Constantinides and Stagno, 2012; Constantinides, n d ). A study was conducted on the use of social networking for educational recruitment and marketing and has found that the current employees are ill-equipped to take the optimum benefit of the full potential of social media sites (Kuzma and Wright, 2013). The benefits of social media use for specific purposes of marketing, recruitment, learning and/or student engagement in higher education is not examined by researchers (Davis III et al, 2012).

The variety of SM makes it a challenge to identify the SM alternative organizations should monitor and participate. Therefore, a need for a study identifying the current preferences of the different business schools is felt by the researchers. Two approaches were identified by the researchers to address the gap. One approach is to search, the user profiles for the business school on the different social media alternatives. Another approach was to visit the website of the organizations and identify the links to the different social media alternatives. The first approach was rejected since the types of social media available are plenty and a complete listing was also not available to the researchers. Another challenge is to identify the official SM account of the organization. The researcher has, therefore, chosen the second approach. The current research addresses the gap in the literature in this regard and aims to identify the preferred social media alternatives for Business Schools in India. It also examines whether there are any significant factors that can explain any possible difference in the preferences of business schools on the social media alternatives.

Three dimensions – Reach, Discussions and Outcomes – were proposed to study the contribution of social media to marketing efforts (Murdough, 2009) Though the practitioner literature refers to broad metrics as part of Social Media Analytics, use of these metrics for Business Schools in the Indian context was not found in the academic literature. The operational definitions for different SM metrics used in the study are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Operational Definitions of Different Social Media Metrics**

<b>Social Media Metric</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Social Media Presence	Business school having a user account on the social media acknowledged on their website
Total Social Media Presence	The number of different social media alternatives (selected for the study) where the Business School has a user account
<b>Facebook</b>	
Number of Likes	The number of individuals who may be considered as Fans of the page or individual interested in the page and
User rating	The rating given by the users on a scale of 1 to 5 on the page
<b>Twitter</b>	
Number of Tweets	The 140 character messages sent to the social media app
Followers	The users on whose timeline your message will be displayed
Following	The users whose messages will become part of your timeline, whose content you will like to be updated about

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To identify the preferred social media alternatives for Business Schools in India
- To examine whether there is any significant differences in the social media presence of individual alternatives and total social media presence based on various analysis criteria
- To identify metrics for Facebook and Twitter

- To examine whether there are any significant differences in different performance metrics for Facebook and Twitter based on the analysis criteria.

### **Methodology**

The study is a cross sectional study based on data collected from the Internet. There are more than 3400 institutions offering PG level programs in Management in India. This study looks at 105 institutions which are considered among the top Business Schools in India. This study uses Internet research (Chintalapati and Viswanath, 2010; Harris, 2010), which is planned and structured mechanism for collecting data from Internet sources which are publicly available. The source of data is the websites of the Business Schools and the social media pages of these institutions. The official websites of the Business Schools were identified using Google Search. The websites are reviewed for links of Social media on the home page, contact page, etc. The social media alternatives linked to the website of the Business Schools were identified and tabulated for official social media presence. The data were collected manually by the researchers by visiting each website and respective social media pages MS-Excel and SPSS 20.0 were used for tabulation, coding and statistical analysis.

More than eight social media alternatives were identified during the data collection activity. However, social media alternatives preferred by at least 25 business schools or more are only considered for further analysis with regard to metrics. The metrics of top two social media alternatives were identified for social media analytics.

### ***Analysis criteria used***

The analysis carried out includes probability estimates to identify the preferred SM alternative. We examined the possible differences in samples based on the location of the institution, funding support and multiplicity of program offered. Another comparison is between the IIM and non IIM institutions. The statistical tests used are ANOVA and Independent samples t test. Non parametric test was also used to test the hypothesis regarding the metrics of Facebook and Twitter.

### **Results and Discussion**

The total sample of 105 Business Schools consisted of 13 from East Zone, 33 of North Zone; 27 from South Zone; and 32 from West Zone. There are 60 Business Schools from Metro location and 45 Business schools from Non Metro locations. The cross tabulated descriptive for the metro and the zone are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Metro and Zone Cross tabulation of Top Indian Business Schools**

	Zone				Total
	East	North	South	West	
Non Metro	8	13	11	13	45
Metro	5	20	16	19	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>105</b>

### ***Social Media Presence***

The researchers identified eight social media alternatives by accessing the websites of the Business Schools. Blog a traditional format of user generated content generation; Facebook, a popular social networking service; Twitter a microblogging service; YouTube a content sharing service for video files; LinkedIn, a professional social networking alternative; Google Plus, a social networking alternative which replaced Orkut; PagalGuy, a community for Business School aspirants, and Wikipedia, a wiki of the content developed through volunteer users. SM links to Picasa, Pinterest, groups and forums by very few organizations are ignored in further research.

### Preferred Social Media Alternatives

The interval estimates for presence of Business Schools on different social media alternatives was calculated to identify the preferred social media alternative for Business Schools in India.

**Table 3: Estimates for probable presence for different social media alternatives**

Presence on social media site	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube	Blog	Google +
No	26	38	67	56	62	80
Yes	79	67	38	49	43	25
Proportion of “Yes” in sample	0.75	0.638	0.361	0.466	0.409	0.238
Standard Error for proportions	0.04	0.046	0.046	0.048	0.047	0.041
Lower confidence level of estimate	0.66	0.546	0.269	0.371	0.315	0.156
Higher confidence level of estimate	0.83	0.730	0.453	0.562	0.503	0.319

**Note:** Estimating population parameter based on sample proportions **when  $n/N < 0.05$** ; z value (97.5%) = 1.96

We may conclude the order of preference as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Blogs, LinkedIn, and Google Plus. The zone wise presence for different SM alternatives is detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Zone wise presence of Indian Business Schools on different SM alternatives**

	Zone				Total
	East	North	South	West	
Facebook	10	26	18	25	79
Twitter	9	22	15	21	67
LinkedIn	3	17	8	10	38
YouTube	7	16	12	14	49
Blog	3	16	13	11	43
Google +	5	7	5	8	25

Chi-Square test of independence is used to evaluate whether the number of institutions having presence on individual social media alternatives is significantly different on the analysis criteria different analysis criteria. The results are summarized in the Table 5.

**Table 5: Probability values of Chi-Square test of independence at  $\alpha = 5\%$  for individual social media alternatives and different analysis criteria**

Analysis Criteria	Facebook	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube	Blog	Google+
Metro and non-metro	0.151	0.907	0.348	0.693	0.819	0.290
Zone	0.694	0.771	0.160	0.924	0.303	0.551
IIM and Non-IIM institutions	0.880	0.664	0.425	0.220	0.684	0.185
Funding Source	0.003	0.131	0.255	0.001	0.364	0.420

Programs offered	0.432	0.607	0.949	0.386	0.572	0.562
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There is no difference in terms of presence of individual social media alternatives except for Facebook and Twitter between private and public institutions. It is observed that the presence on Facebook and YouTube is significantly different for institutions funded by government and private sources. In case of Twitter, the difference is not statistically significant at a significance level of five percent. Though there is 17 government funded institution with Twitter a/c against 50 private institutions, it is not statistically significant. Whether a large sample study will validate the same finding has to be examined by researchers in the future. The lack of significant difference in other cases may be attributed to the low number of institutions with a presence on other social media alternatives as given in Table 3. The 18 public and 61 private institutions with a Facebook page, whereas 7 public and 42 private funded institutions were present on YouTube. We may infer that SM use by a government-funded institution is not appropriate in comparison to their private competitors.

#### *Total Social Media Presence*

Total social media presence is defined as the total number of social media alternatives officially acknowledged by the Business School on their website. The study identified eight social media alternatives in the initial stages of the research. Hence, the maximum score for total social media presence is 8. The total social media presence for each business school is calculated and was found that the maximum is 7 for a Business school with an average of 3.41 and standard deviation of 2.42. The data have normality as examined using Q-Q plots. The study examined whether the total social media presence is significantly different based on various analysis criteria.

**Table 8: Hypothesis Testing of Total Social Media Presence at  $\alpha = 5\%$  on different criteria**

Analysis Criteria	Type of test used	Probability value
Metro and non-metro Zone	Independent sample t test	0.209
IIM and Non-IIM institutions	ANOVA	0.839
Funding Source	Independent sample t test	0.745
Programs offered	Independent sample t test	<b>0.026</b>
		0.410

The significance of the zone was tested using ANOVA since there are 4 zones and the significance of other analysis criteria is tested using the independent sample t-test as there are only two groups. It is concluded that there is a significant difference in the total social media presence between government funded Business Schools and private Business Schools.

#### **Performance Metrics for Facebook and Twitter**

The other objective of the study is to examine the performance of business schools on Facebook and Twitter on defined criteria in terms of reach, discussions, and outcomes. This study considers the measure for reach for both Facebook and Twitter and Discussion is measured only for Twitter. The business schools which have not linked to Facebook and Twitter accounts on their websites were also identified through the search feature on the social media alternative. Therefore the number of Business schools with a Facebook profile has increased from 79 to 92 and the number of Twitter handles has increased from 67 to 79. The data are not normally distributed and therefore non-parametric tests are used for hypothesis testing (Gibbons and Chakraborti, 2011).

**Table 9: Hypothesis testing of Facebook metrics at  $\alpha = 5\%$  on different analysis criteria**

Analysis Criteria	Number of Likes	Average User Rating
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Metro and non-metro	0.792	0.168
Zone	0.493	0.080
IIM and Non-IIM institutions	0.531	0.004 <sup>#</sup>
Funding Source	0.043 <sup>#</sup>	0.008 <sup>#</sup>
Programs offered	0.413	0.206

# Significant results

Independent Samples Kruskal – Wallis Test and Mann – Whitney U Test (non parametric tests) are used for testing the hypothesis developed to examine the statistical significance on different analysis criteria for Number of Likes and Average User Rating. The average user rating is different for IIM institution vis-à-vis non-IIM institutions. It is as per the expectations that the premium institution brand is better recognized and rated. The “reach” measured through number of likes is significantly different between the government funded institutions and the private funded institutions. The number of likes for private institutions is more than the government funded institutions, whereas in terms of average user rating the government funded institutions are better rated than the private institutions.

**Table 10: Hypothesis testing of Twitter metrics at  $\alpha = 5\%$  on different analysis criteria**

Analysis Criteria	Number of Tweets	Followers	Following
Metro and non-metro	0.516	0.107	0.682
Zone	0.444	0.558	0.521
IIM and Non-IIM institutions	0.702	0.135	0.001
Funding Source	0.026	0.304	0.002
Programs offered	0.676	0.735	0.251

A significant difference in the samples is observed in three cases. In case of ‘Following’ by the business school between IIM and non IIM institutions, the number of individuals followed by non IIM business schools is significantly more than the IIMs. The significant difference is also observed between the government funded institutions and private institution in terms of ‘number of tweets’ and the ‘Following’ metrics for Twitter. In both these situations the performance of the private institution is significantly better than the government institutions.

Non parametric tests help us in drawing conclusions regarding the sample data collected and does not support generalization of the findings to a larger population. Another issue with the metrics is the huge range, low means and high standard deviations in the continuous data of the different metrics, indicating the need for a large sample study and also a comparative study between Indian institutions and the Business Schools from developed countries with better social media penetration and usage.

### Discussion of the results

The first objective of the study helps the business schools to have a better informed social media communication strategy. The study has empirically ranked the preferred SM alternatives of competitors which may be imitated. The location of the business school may not be a hurdle and therefore the same strategy in terms of social media presence is applicable to all business schools. There is a significant difference between the government funded and private business schools. It indicates to the government institutions to revisit their communication practices and adopt more interactive communication methods. Social Media as a communication channel is a new idea and it is still to be a major communication alternative. The communication policies which are



compartmentalized into admissions, industry relations, alumni relations, etc are getting converged as social media have increased transparency and reach of the messages to different stakeholders. The addressing of this challenge needs to be studied theoretically and models developed for empirical evaluation.

The low values in the “reach” metric of Facebook (likes) and Twitter (followers) indicates freshness of the media. The opportunity for other business schools that have not started their social media journey to be competitive in this media space is still available as the communication channel is new and not very popular in usage.

The significant differentiators are between the IIMs and non IIMs; and between private and government funded institutions. This indicates that the premium brand identity may have an effect on the customer acceptance of communication, whereas private institutions have first mover advantage in the use of social media.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

The study provides a basis for a broader study with a larger sample. Another possible research dimension is a longitudinal study capturing the growth in the usage of the social media and the changing performance metrics over time. Other research dimension is the development of metrics for other social media alternatives. Social media as a communication channel is a new idea and needs to be explored in greater detail so that customized communication is possible to different target audience – students, parents and recruiters.

### **Conclusion**

This study has ranked the social media alternatives and has suggested that the Business Schools should have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn to effectively integrate the SM as a communication channel to messaging through other media. The significant difference between government funded and private institutions indicate that the institutions have to establish processes to handle this dynamic media. Private institutions predominantly led by promoter administrators have more freedom to communicate than the government institution with established hierarchy and approval structure for external communications. A detailed study on the institution communication strategy and culture is required to validate this proposition.

The performance metrics are defined for use by the future researchers. The most basic infrastructure required for social media is access to the internet and it is free to use. Therefore, organizations have established their presence. However, the metrics indicate very low to medium use and communication strategy for personalized communication through this new media has to be developed.

This research, an initial study into the use of social media, addressed a gap in academic literature and forms the foundation for further study on the use of social media for various functional activities by institutions in India. Social Media is a new area of study and the increasing penetration of the mobile has necessitated research to help optimize the results from this new technology driven medium.

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