Michael Cant

Department of Marketing and Retail Management, University of South Africa

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6925-8822

Joy Beesoon

Open University of Mauritius

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-7693-9624

Dwindling Enrolment: Is Social Media the Answer to Student Recruitment?

Abstract: Around the world, the competition among universities to recruit students has intensified in recent years. With more and more educational institutions entering the market globally, the recruitment rivalry across these institutions has taken new dimensions. This has compelled universities to utilise all means at their disposal to reach prospective students– and that includes technology and, by implication, social media. Both students and universities have objectives and expectations when it comes to social media usage, and it is, therefore, important to establish a set of guidelines regarding the use of social media during student recruitment. The main aim of the study is, therefore, to propose a set of guidelines so that universities can effectively use social media during student recruitment**.** The study was conducted in Mauritius, where there is a high concentration of higher education institutions so that the findings could be adapted by other universities due to the global usage of social media. As an exploratory study, the research focused on the public universities in Mauritius. Out of 49,497 students who registered in all higher education institutions in Mauritius, 25,390 were enrolled in the four public universities in Mauritius (Participation in Tertiary Education 2021, 2022:1). This clearly shows the need for the public universities to utilise social media appropriately to reach prospective stu-

dents and obtain their share of students from the market. A qualitative approach was followed in this study, which is exploratory in nature, with eight university administrators from public universities, who were interviewed by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews. In addition, a total of 32 first-year students from public universities participated in focus group discussions. The data collected were then subjected to thematic analysis using the Braun and Clarke procedure. The findings revealed that in all the public universities in Mauritius, the administrators face challenges to effectively use social media for student recruitment due mainly to the fact that they are unsure of which social media platforms and features to use; they lack the skills and resources to run a social media campaign and are not trained to create social media content. Prospective students, on the other hand, showed a preference for their social media platform to be Facebook. It was also found that the types of information and content which students would prefer to obtain on social media include career advice, course curriculum, courses on offer, eligibility, fees, payment facilities, and procedures, amongst others. Based on all the findings, a set of guidelines was proposed.

Keywords: Social media, student recruitment, higher education, thematic analysis, Mauritius, focus group, in-depth interviews, social media content, Facebook.

Introduction

The role that education plays in the life of an individual is vital. Investments individuals make in education, specifically higher education, are considered to be the most critical investments for the development of human capital and society as a whole (Makwinja, 2020; Rey-Garcia & Mato-Santiso, 2020; Arora, Jain, Gupta and Sharma, 2020; Chankseliani, Qoraboyev & Gimranova, 2021). However, around the world, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate in an uncertain environment (Chapeli & O'Sullivan, 2017) and face several challenges, such as decreasing government funding (Harper & Harrison, 2020; Son-Turan, 2021; Maruru, 2022), inequality of access (Makwinja, 2020; Maringe & Ndofirepi, 2018) and issues about

quality (Onuka, 2018; Momunalieva *et al.*, 2020). Unfortunately, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has worsened the situation of HEIs around the world (Ilieva & Raimo, 2020; 2020; IAU, 2020; Leung, 2022), creating unexpected hardships from widespread contamination, fear, deaths, and disruptions in institutions (Chan Sun & Lan Cheong Wah, 2020). Consequently, student recruitment has been severely impacted by the pandemic with reduced enrolment in HEIs around the world. It is projected that the decrease in student numbers will persist for at least the next three to five years (Ling, 2020; Mitchell, 2020; Dennis, 2020; Marinoni, van't Land & Jensen, 2020). The HEI sector in Mauritius, as is the case in many other countries, has not been spared and has suffered from declining enrolment as well (Participation in Tertiary Education 2020, 2021:4).

Mauritius, which is part of Africa, has a relatively short history of its higher education landscape, with the first university, the University of Mauritius, starting its operations in 1965, or three years before the independence of the country. The higher education sector in Mauritius consists of 10 Publicly-Funded Institutions (FFIs) and 44 Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs). Only four institutions out of the 10 PFIs are defined as universities (Participation in Tertiary Education 2020, 2021:13). In 2021, out of 49,497 students who registered in all HEIs, 25,390 were enrolled in the four public universities in Mauritius (Participation in Tertiary Education 2021, 2022:1). Given this state of affairs, this study investigated how the four public universities in Mauritius are currently recruiting students, how they are using social media, and what challenges they encounter, with the aim of understanding the process from both the administrators' point of view and those of prospective students. The aim of the study shall be to propose a set of guidelines for the effective use of social media during student recruitment.

Literature review

If there is no student recruitment, the activity of a university ceases to exist (Nwedu, 2019). In general, student recruitment involves the application of a wide range of marketing and sales techniques, such as employing the services of agents and recruiters and making use of brochures, websites, social media, prospectuses, media relations, and alumni networks (James-MacEachern, 2018). With progress in technology, the advent of the internet, and the social media phenomenon, the application of the marketing concept in higher education evolved over the years. Studies demonstrate that universities have started using social media as part of their marketing and recruitment strategies, communicating with prospective students, engaging them, and therefore helping drive student recruitment ((Nevzat, Amca, Tanova & Amca, 2016; Gök & Gümüş, 2018; Peruta & Shields, 2018; Farinloye, Wayne, Mogaji & Watat, 2020).

The rise of social media

Aichner, Grünfelder, Maurer, and Jegeni (2021) posit that the term "social media" was first used in 1994 in a Tokyo online media environment called Matisse. Social media has subsequently been defined in many ways by many different authors. Despite the fact that several definitions of social media have been attempted so far, Navarro, Moreno, and Zerfass (2018:30) conclude that there is still no clear, agreed-upon definition of social media, a situation, which they argue, is hindering the development of the strong and stable theories. A definition that has gained some authority in recent years is the one proposed by Carr and Hayes (2015:49), who define social media as "…internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of mass personal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content."

The rise of the social media phenomenon is considered to have started in 1997 with a website named Six Degrees (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Ahmad, 2018), followed by Lunar Storm in the year 2000 (Mozelius, 2013) and MySpace, in 2003 (Augustyn, 2019). From then onwards, a number of social media platforms were created, while others, unfortunately, disappeared. As from 2003, several social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and, more recently, TikTok came into existence and grew in popularity to such an extent that around the world, the usage figures grew by several million in a few years, to reach billions in 2022 and worldwide, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. number of social media users per platform worldwide (Statista, 2022)

Social media platform	Number of monthly active users worldwide (million)
Facebook	2,910
YouTube	2,562
Instagram	1,478
TikTok	1,000

Benefits of social media

Besides being used by individuals for communication and entertainment, social media are also used by organisations to accomplish a number of corporate objectives. Several studies have shown that, compared to traditional channels, social media are considered to be more cost-effective because they are fast, accessible and offer easy methods to share information and improve communication (Barnard, Bothma, & Cant, 2017; Paswan, 2018; Harb, Fowler, Chang, Blum & Alakaleek, 2019; Upadhyay, 2019; Capriotti, Zeler & Camilleri, 2021). Furthermore, social media resulted in an explosion in "no- or low-cost organic marketing," whereby a company creates content and shares it amongst its social media followers (Malesev & Cherry, 2021:69). Some authors argue that social media is an "essential component" and a "very powerful marketing tool" which marketers should use (Cant, 2016:78; Ait Lamkadem

and Ouiddad, 2021:29). Universities, as well, do believe in the power of social media. The Digital Marketing Institute (2019) argues that there is already a worldwide trend of universities and colleges implementing social media strategies to connect with students, parents, prospects and staff.

Social media in student recruitment

A number of authors support the integration of social media usage by universities, arguing that in some institutions, social media is the first point of contact between prospective students (Mazurek, Korzyński & Górska, 2019; Condie, Ayodele, Chowdhury, Powe & Cooper, 2019; Russel, 2017). In the context of enrolment activities, studies by Mazurek, Korzyński, and Górska (2019) demonstrate the increased significance of social media used by universities to attract students. Several HEIs are already using social media platforms (Vrontis *et al.,* 2018; Zhu, 2019; Al-Thagafi *et al.*, 2020; Valerio-Ureña, Herrera-Murillo & Madero-Gómez, 2020). For instance, Facebook and YouTube are used to attract local and international students (Mwendaa, Sullivan & Grand, 2019), create connections with prospects, and improve their enrolment processes (Peruta & Shields, 2018; Mazurek, Korzyński & Górska, 2019). More evidence of university marketing through social media came from studies such as those conducted by Mwendaa, Sullivan & Grand (2019), who demonstrated how YouTube videos are used to market courses in Australian universities. Shields and Peruta (2019) provide evidence of how universities use Facebook to help students and alumni to identify strongly with the institution while generating a significant return on their marketing investment. Social media messages (images, videos, captions, etc.) have been argued to help prospects to gather impressions of the academic culture, campus, activities, and attractions of the institution, which can, in turn, help them in better decisions about their future (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019; Mazurek, Korzyński & Górska, 2019; Shields & Peruta, 2019; Zhu, 2019). However, even if there is an abundance of literature that support the value of social media in student recruitment in higher education, guidelines on how to use social media to recruit students are absent (Chen & DiVall, 2019).

Guidelines to use social media in student recruitment

In the realm of higher education, it has been argued that using social media in student recruitment is "not simple" and universities still struggle to coordinate social media with traditional media strategies (Peruta & Shields, 2018: 2). At a theoretical level, researchers agree that social media still lacks a coherent body of theory. Significant gaps remain in the knowledge of how organisations are using social media (Navarro, Moreno & Zerfass, 2018) and several authors agree that little has been done to synthesise how marketers are incorporating social media in marketing (Shawky, Kubacki, Dietrich & Weaven, 2019; Pantano, Priporas, Migliano, 2019; Valos et al., 2019; Dolan, Conduit, Fahy & Goodman, 2018). Attempts have been made to provide social media guidelines such as the framework for social media engagement (Panagiotopoulos *et al.*, 2015); the strategy cone (Effing and Spil, 2016); the framework for

social media engagement (Dolan *et al.*, 2019); and the framework for social media content strategy (Oliveira, 2020). However, none applies to student recruitment.

Problem statement

In light of the above arguments, it has been deemed critical that social media guidelines be developed to help universities use social media in student recruitment. To guide the research process, choice of research methods, and development of instruments, the main problem to be addressed has been formulated, and it is simply to determine how universities should use social media during student recruitment and establish guidelines for that purpose. That is, essentially, which social media platforms they should use, what features they should use, and which content/information they should share during student recruitment. The following shall therefore be determined:

1. How do universities currently use social media during student recruitment;
2. What challenges do they encounter in using social media; and
3. How do prospective students use social media, what challenges do they encounter, and what information/content do they expect to find on social media during the recruitment period?

Research design

To address the problem of developing social media guidelines to guide university administrators in student recruitment, the study made use of two research methods, namely the semi-structured in-depth interview and the focus-group discussion. Semi-structured interviews are effective for data collection when the researcher wants to: (1) collect qualitative, open-ended data; (2) explore participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs on a particular subject and (3) probe deeply into personal and sometimes delicate matter concepts (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Focus-group discussions were implemented to address some of the issues identified.

The participants identified for the interviews were administrators of public universities in Mauritius who had a supervisory role in the universities' marketing and/or admission processes. A total of eight participants were involved in the in-depth interviews.

For the focus-group discussions, first-year, first-semester university students were identified as participants as they just went through the admissions process and would be better at recalling their recruitment experiences. A total of four focus groups were conducted, one at each public university, with eight students per university.

To ensure that the data was reliable, trustworthy and credible, Guba's model of trustworthiness was applied to this study (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017). Hence, the trustworthiness of this study was determined by the credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability of the data.

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ANALYSIS

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The process of thematic analysis is considered a long and slow process through which the researcher works to transform a mass of "messy information into stream-lined analysis, telling a clear and coherent story about the data and what they mean." (Nowell *et al.* 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019: 249). As the term 'thematic analysis' is often associated with a distinctive set of procedures, the six-step approach of Braun and Clarke will be followed to analyse both the semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group data (Newton-Levinson, Leichliter, Chandra-Mouli, 2016).

Thematic analysis of the semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions

Before thematic analysis began for both data groups, all recordings were transcribed, and the dataset corresponding to each transcript was imported to the software QDA Miner Lite, which assists in the qualitative data processing. Processing of the data was performed both manually and with the software, which mostly helped in coding the dataset.

All transcripts were read several times so that the researcher gets immersed as much as possible in both the interview and focus group data. Casual notes and personal reflections, also termed as "noticings" by Braun *et al.* (2019:852) were also noted on the margins of the transcripts.

All initial codes identified from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were assembled. For both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, themes have been found inductively from the coded data. Mind maps have been used as an aid to visualise different possibilities of regrouping codes into themes. It was ensured that themes/subthemes did correspond coherently to coded data – leading to defining and renaming each theme/subtheme where needed.

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RESULTS

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Profile of participants

The profile of the in-depth interview and focus group participants involved in the data collection process is indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Profile of the in-depth interview and focus group participants

Public University	Interview participants	Focus group participants composition of each group
A	Responsible of Marketing Responsible of Admissions Responsible for the Facebook page	8 students First-year, first semester Both male and female Mauritian
B	Responsible of Marketing Responsible for the Admissions Office	8 students First-year, first semester Both male and female Mauritian
C	Director-General (overseeing both Marketing and Admissions)	8 students First-year, first semester Both male and female Mauritian
D	Responsible of Marketing Responsible for the Admissions Office	8 students First-year, first semester Both male and female Mauritian

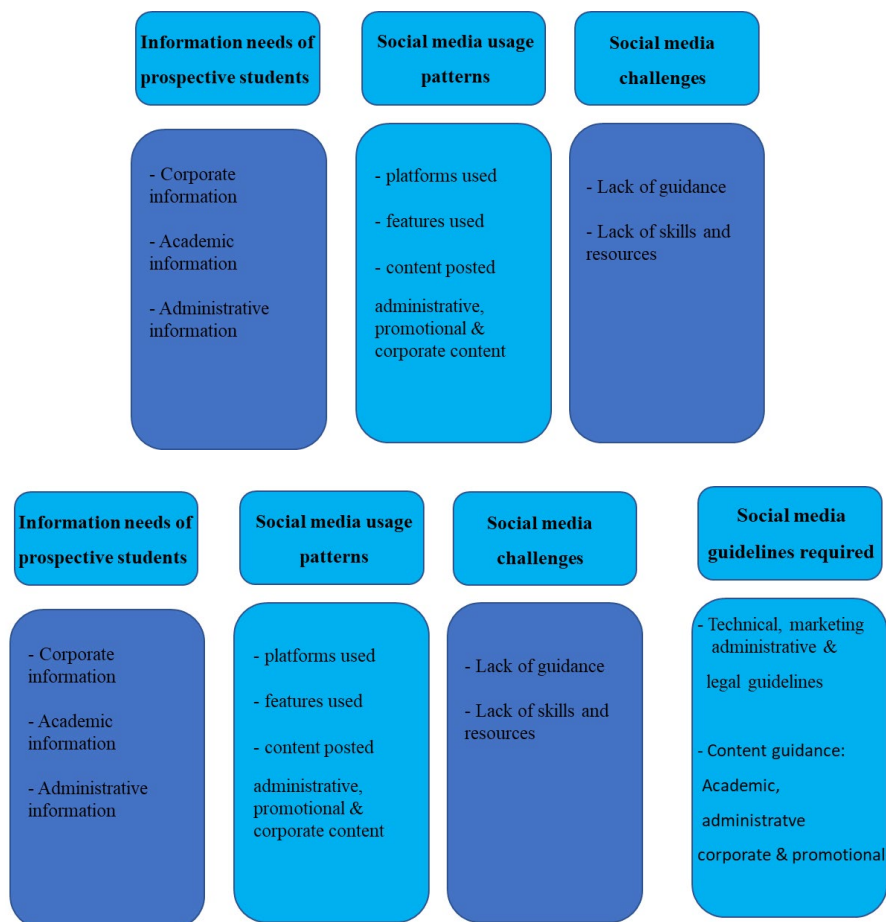### Findings from the semi-structured in-depth interviews

Firstly, following the thematic analysis phases applied to the in-depth interview data, seven main themes with corresponding subthemes were identified. The seven main themes with their corresponding subthemes are displayed in Figure 1.

Marketing activities during enrolment

It has been found that all four public universities in Mauritius organise marketing activities to recruit students during the enrolment period. What has been found to be common is that marketing activities are either in terms of advertisements, events, such as fairs and open days or interactions between university and prospective students. Interactions occur via phone, email, personal visits, and social media, through which university staff provide information and help or influence prospective students to enroll.

Figure 1. Seven main themes with their subthemes

Information needs of prospective students	Social media usage patterns	Social media challenges
- Corporate information - Academic information - Administrative information	- platforms used - features used - content posted administrative, promotional & corporate content	- Lack of guidance - Lack of skills and resources

Information needs of prospective students	Social media usage patterns	Social media challenges	Social media guidelines required
- Corporate information - Academic information - Administrative information	- platforms used - features used - content posted administrative, promotional & corporate content	- Lack of guidance - Lack of skills and resources	- Technical, marketing administrative & legal guidelines - Content guidance: Academic, administratve corporate & promotional

Source: Thematic analysis of the semi-structured in-depth interview data

Marketing not formalised

Even if the four public universities report that they conduct various marketing activities to recruit students, three of them revealed that marketing is not fully formalised. For example, the absence of a marketing budget, the absence of a full-fledged marketing department, with staff having proper appellations and skills, and so on, have been reported. The subtheme related to lack of strategy reveals that public universities do not have a social media strategy to recruit students. The subtheme related to the need to modernise subtheme further points out that the marketing function in Mauritian public universities needs to evolve and, for instance, align with international trends and adopt digital marketing.

Information needs of prospective students

The theme, "Information needs of prospective students," relates to the fact that during enrolment, universities have to provide a continuous flow of information to prospective students who have questions on, for instance, courses on offer, career opportunities, the curriculum of courses, conditions for free education, eligibility, procedures, etc. However, it is observed that this theme is quite broad and encompasses three sub-themes related to the information needs of prospective students. The three sub-themes are corporate information, academic information, and administrative information. "Corporate information needs" represents the need of students for information about the university's recognition and reputation. "Academic information needs" relate to module information, assessment, curriculum, and career prospects, whereas "Administrative information needs" refers to enrolment key dates, procedures to apply, documents to be sent, conditions, eligibility for a particular course, procedures to be followed, documents to be submitted, etc.

Social media usage patterns

The "social media usage patterns" of the four public universities has been a key theme. The university administrators have revealed which social media platforms they use, platform features they apply, and content they post during the recruitment period. Under the subtheme "Platforms used," universities mostly expressed that they use such platforms as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn. The second subtheme, "Features used," relate to whether the universities use free features, paid features, advert features, and other features, such as the live features of the platforms. The third subtheme, "content posted," reveals content that the universities post on social media during student recruitment, which is, for example, posting of event-related information (graduation, open day, orientation), latest news, student activities, documents (newsletter, reports), student testimonies, campus facilities, scholarships, videos, and so on.

Social media challenges

"Social media challenges" were expressed by the university administrators of all the public universities of Mauritius. Public universities reveal that they encounter several issues with social media during student recruitment. Concerns are expressed about the lack of skills and resources and the need for staff to use social media to receive more guidance; hence two subthemes associated with the main theme have emerged, namely "lack of guidance" and "lack of skills and resources." Lack of guidance refers to the fact that staff is sometimes at a loss on how to deal with negative comments, unofficial groups, unknown profiles, or reach for international students on social media. "Lack of skills and resources" relates to technical and human resource unavailability.

Social media guidelines required

A key theme formulated that assembles the overall requirements of the four public universities when it comes to the guidance they need when using social media

during student recruitment is "social media guidelines required." It has been found that universities require:

(i) Technical, marketing, administrative, and legal guidelines; and

(ii) Content guidelines

Technical guidelines refer to specific functionalities such as how to use Facebook stories, Facebook ad manager, Facebook Messenger, Insights, and so on. Marketing guidelines refer to, for example, using the social media platform to target better prospective students or how to use the various advertising options at different stages of student recruitment for online applications and branding in general. Administrative guidelines refer to how they would decide about platform choice, how to plan the budget and timing of campaigns, or how the social media workflow should be at different stages of student recruitment. The need for ethics guidelines and training were also expressed as a requirement for staff who handle social media so that dos and don'ts become clear.

Universities also require guidance for the development of appropriate content to post on social during student recruitment. Several types of content regrouped under academic, corporate, administrative, and promotional materials to be developed have been expressed by university administrators.

Findings from the focus group discussions

Prospective students who participated in the focus group discussions provided a different perspective on their experience with public universities and social media usage during the recruitment period. The data have been thematically analysed and regrouped under two main themes with their related subthemes, as portrayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Two main themes with their subthemes
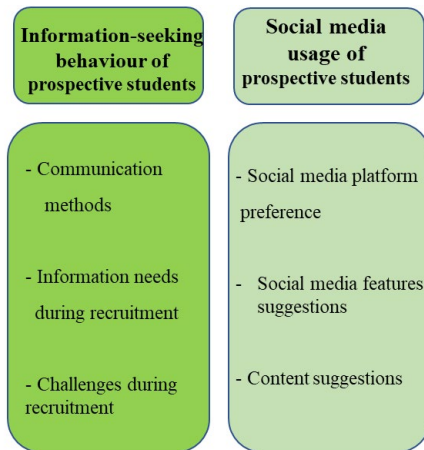
Source: Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions data

Under "Information-seeking behaviour of prospective students," participants revealed the various communication methods they employ during recruitment, encompassing phone calls, visits, interactions during events, emails, and also the use of social media. They also expressed various "Information needs during recruitment," which are of academic, administrative, promotional/corporate nature. Through "Challenges during recruitment," participants expressed all difficulties they encountered as far as support and finding relevant information are concerned.

Under "Social media usage of prospective students," valuable findings were gathered as the participants revealed their "social media platform preference." Through "Social media platform preference," the participants prefer to obtain enrolment information and interact with the universities during recruitment, mostly through Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. They also provided several suggestions about which social media features universities may adopt during recruitment to serve their needs better. For example, they mention the use of chats, live features, stories, targeted advertising features, and so on. Further, through "Content suggestions," the participants suggested that the social media platforms of the universities must have relevant promotional/corporate, academic, and administrative content during student recruitment.

Discussions

As revealed by the above-mentioned findings, public universities in Mauritius have embraced the marketing function in order to recruit students. This is consistent with several findings that higher education institutions around the world have no other option than to apply marketing strategies and activities in order reach prospective students and enroll them (Mogaji & Yoon, 2019; Setiawan, Cavaliere, Hussaini, Villalba-Condori, Arias-Chavez, Gupta, Untari, & Regin, 2020; Gordon-Isasi, Narvaizam & Gibaja; 2021; Hannan, 2021).

Meeting the information needs of prospective students is key during student recruitment, and universities must become aware of how prospective students reach them and which information they require during their decision-making process to join a university (Ürer Erdil, Tümer, Nadiri & Aghaei, 2021). It has also been demonstrated that the decision to join a university is similar to a once-in-a-lifetime purchase, and prospective students require more fact-based and non-marketing information (Yang, Yen & Balmer, 2020). As found in this study, universities in Mauritius recognise that their prospective students have a number of information needs, while the universities may sometimes find it to be a challenge to deliver adequately the information required. Prospective students having unfulfilled information needs should be a concern during marketing, and universities can address them using new technologies (Babaitsev, Mikova, Kosyanenko, Podoprigora, 2020). Public universities in Mauritius have been adopters of social media for marketing and student recruitment, as revealed in the findings presented in this study, which is an approach strongly supported by extant literature (Vrontis *et al.*, 2018; Zhu, 2019; Al-Thagafi et

al., 2020; Gunina, Komárková & Přibyl, 2019; Kumar & Nanda, 2019; Valerio-Ureña *et al.*, 2020; Wong, Tan, Hew, Ooi & Leong, 2022). However, even if public universities in Mauritius report that they are using social media in student recruitment, they also admit that there are several weaknesses and challenges they face in this activity, from lack of strategy, guidance to use technical features, guidance to create content and managing the platforms amongst others, which are nevertheless consistent with what other authors have found about the difficulties in using social media in student recruitment (Chen & DiVall, 2019; Oliveira, 2020). The managerial implications of this study shall therefore be of value to public universities in Mauritius, as guidelines shall be proposed to administrators while the social media expectations of prospective students shall be met.

Conclusion

This study has explored the student recruitment process from the perspectives of both public universities and prospective students in Mauritius. The current marketing practices, recruitment challenges, information needs, social media usage behaviours, social media usage weaknesses, and expectations from prospective students gathered in this study shall pave the way for a series of guidelines. Presented in terms of decisions to be taken and tactics to be tried by public universities (Table 3), a series of propositions for public universities have been formulated to help them use social media in student recruitment. The tactics pertaining to each social media platform originate from the wealth of suggestions gathered from both university administrators and prospective students who participated in the study.

The managerial implications are therefore important as it has been the first study that has reconciled findings from all public universities and their prospective students to propose a series of guidelines.

Table 3. Guidelines for social media usage by public universities in Mauritius

Social media decisions	Tactics
Social media platforms selection	Use Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube
Social media features	- use chats, inboxes, direct messaging, and automated messages - use live features of the platforms - use sponsored ads - create events - post Facebook stories - use Instagram Highlights - use Instagram TV (IGTV) - Facebook 360 - use targeting features - post polls/request voting - use metric features to monitor post performances - Explore and experiment with other features of each platform by consulting their online Help pages
Content to be posted on social media	- post adverts - post events (graduation, open day...) - post the latest news - post student works and activities - post documents (newsletter, reports) - post student testimonies - show campus activities/facilities - promote scholarships - promote university achievements - post content to connect with alumni - profile of lecturers - organise virtual events - post short films about the university on YouTube - share sample videos of lectures
Information needs of prospective students to be fulfilled on social media	- provide career advice - provide course curriculum - show courses on offer - provide eligibility information - provide fees information - explain the free education scheme - describe payment facilities - clarify application procedures - mention recognition of the university - provide key enrolment dates - provide an FAQ - engage students in content creation

Limitations of the study and future research

The study, being exploratory in nature, was conducted in Mauritius and only with its public universities. Regional and international differences in higher education contexts, types of institutions, and behavioural patterns or attitudes of other pro-

spective students may yield different sets of results with different sets of guidelines. The guidelines proposals are based on suggestions from a group of local students who may not represent the entire population of prospective students internationally. Hence, for generalisability and more accurate predictions, a quantitative approach and a larger sample size with different strata should be used – and this is a recommendation for future research. The exploratory phase is just beginning, from which further studies should emanate.

Also, future studies should answer questions that are beyond the scope of the current one. For instance, university administrators expressed the need for guidance regarding:

» equipment required to create content for social media;
» recruitment of staff with the right profile to work on social media;
» a process/ workflow for social media management;
» how to combine several social media platforms in a campaign;
» social media ethics guidelines; and
» social media expenditure/budgeting guidelines.

The research has nevertheless set the foundation for the development of a theoretical framework. In a future study, the themes identified could be transformed into constructs and assembled into a theoretical framework for social media usage in student recruitment.

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Malejąca rekrutacja: Czy media społecznościowe są sposobem na rekrutację studentów?

Abstrakt: W ostatnich latach na całym świecie nasiliła się konkurencja między uniwersytetami w zakresie rekrutacji studentów. Wraz z coraz większą liczbą instytucji edukacyjnych wchodzących na rynek globalny, rywalizacja rekrutacyjna między tymi instytucjami nabrała nowego wymiaru. Zmusiło to uczelnie do wykorzystania wszelkich dostępnych środków, aby dotrzeć do potencjalnych studentów – w tym technologii i, co za tym idzie, mediów społecznościowych. Zarówno studenci, jak i uniwersytety mają swoje cele i oczekiwania, jeśli chodzi o korzystanie z mediów społecznościowych, dlatego istotne jest ustalenie zasad dotyczących korzystania z mediów społecznościowych podczas rekrutacji studentów. Głównym celem badania jest zatem zaproponowanie zestawu wytycznych, aby uniwersytety mogły skutecznie korzystać z mediów społecznościowych podczas rekrutacji studentów. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone na Mauritiusie, gdzie istnieje duża koncentracja

instytucji szkolnictwa wyższego, tak, aby wyniki mogły zostać zaadaptowane przez inne uniwersytety ze względu na globalne wykorzystanie mediów społecznościowych. Jako badanie eksploracyjne, skupiono się na publicznych uniwersytetach na Mauritiusie. Spośród 49 497 studentów, którzy zarejestrowali się we wszystkich instytucjach szkolnictwa wyższego na Mauritiusie, 25 390 było zapisanych na cztery uniwersytety publiczne (Participation in Tertiary Education 2021, 2022:1). Wyraźnie wskazuje to na potrzebę odpowiedniego wykorzystania mediów społecznościowych przez uczelnie publiczne w celu dotarcia do potencjalnych studentów i pozyskania ich części z rynku. W badaniu zastosowano podejście jakościowe, które ma charakter eksploracyjny, z ośmioma administratorami uniwersytetów publicznych, z którymi przeprowadzono wywiady za pomocą częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadów pogłębionych. Ponadto, 32 studentów pierwszego roku z uczelni publicznych wzięło udział w zogniskowanych dyskusjach grupowych. Zebrane dane zostały następnie poddane analizie tematycznej z wykorzystaniem procedury Brauna i Clarke'a. Wyniki badania wykazały, że na wszystkich publicznych uniwersytetach na Mauritiusie administratorzy stoją przed wyzwaniami związanymi z efektywnym wykorzystaniem mediów społecznościowych do rekrutacji studentów, głównie ze względu na fakt, że nie są pewni, z których platform i funkcji mediów społecznościowych korzystać; brakuje im umiejętności i zasobów do prowadzenia kampanii w mediach społecznościowych i nie są przeszkoleni w zakresie tworzenia ich treści. Z drugiej strony, potencjalni studenci wskazywali, że preferowaną przez nich platformą mediów społecznościowych jest Facebook. Stwierdzono również, że rodzaje informacji i treści, które studenci chcieliby uzyskać w mediach społecznościowych, obejmują między innymi porady dotyczące kariery, programu nauczania, oferowane kursy, warunki przyjęcia, opłaty, udogodnienia płatnicze oraz procedury. Na podstawie wyników badań zaproponowano zestaw wytycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, rekrutacja studentów, szkolnictwo wyższe, analiza tematyczna, Mauritius, grupy fokusowe, wywiady pogłębione, treści mediów społecznościowych, Facebook