



Social Media Marketing and Enrollment Intent Among College-Bound Learners: Evidence from a Private Higher Education Institution in Region IV-A, Philippines

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Abstract

Social media has become a primary channel through which higher education institutions (HEIs) communicate brand identity, reduce information asymmetry, and influence college choice among Senior High School (SHS) learners. This study examined digital marketing preferences, social media exposure, and perceived institutional online presence, and tested the extent to which these factors predict intention to enroll/consider enrolling in a masked private HEI in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), Philippines. Using a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected in 2025 from 822 SHS learners (Grades 11–12) through an online questionnaire. Descriptive results showed strong preference for social media marketing ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 1.02$) relative to tarpaulins ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.55$) and radio advertisements ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.86$), alongside substantial social media exposure ($M = 4.5$ hours/day, $SD = 2.2$). Awareness of the HEI's digital channels exceeded 80%, but high-effort engagement was limited (23% reported sharing institutional posts). Perceived content relevancy ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 0.55$) and familiarity/clarity ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 0.62$) were rated highly, while frequency of updates was comparatively weaker ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.75$). Multiple regression analysis predicting intention to enroll (1–5 scale) from trust, website usage, social media usage, age, gender, and location was significant ($R^2 = 0.26$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$; $F(9, 812) = 31.70$, $p < .001$). Brand trust emerged as the strongest predictor of intention ($B = 0.42$, $\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$), with a smaller positive contribution from social media usage ($B = 0.15$, $\beta = 0.08$, $p = .045$), while website usage was not significant ($p = .119$). Results support a trust-centered interpretation of digital recruitment effectiveness: social media is the dominant channel of attention, but trust is the proximate driver of enrollment intention. Strategic priorities include trust-building communication, calibrated posting cadence, and the conversion of awareness into advocacy-oriented engagement.

Keywords: *higher education marketing; social media marketing; Senior High School learners; brand trust; enrollment intention; digital engagement; Region IV-A; Philippines*

1. Introduction

The rapid diffusion of social media platforms has reshaped how organizations communicate value, cultivate stakeholder relationships, and sustain competitive positioning. Marketing communication is no longer constrained to one-way messaging; it is increasingly mediated by interactive channels where attention, perceived authenticity, and peer-to-peer sharing shape brand meaning and behavioral intent. In education markets—where “choice” involves both economic and identity considerations—digital presence becomes a strategic interface between institutions and prospective learners, particularly in contexts where online information is consulted before campus visits or formal inquiries.

Prior research in social media marketing suggests that platform-based engagement can influence patterns of consumer attention, participation, and loyalty formation, especially among younger cohorts who treat social media as a

primary environment for information discovery and evaluation (Bowden et al., 2021; Bhayani & Seshapu, 2025; Jibril et al., 2019). While the mechanisms differ across industries, the central logic remains: online visibility and engagement practices may strengthen brand associations, improve perceived relevance, and reinforce trust—outcomes that are closely aligned with intention-based decisions. In the context of higher education, these outcomes translate into institutional reputation, perceived fit, and the likelihood of recommending or considering enrollment.

In the Philippines, the Senior High School (SHS) segment occupies a structurally pivotal position in the higher education pipeline: students are explicitly preparing for tertiary pathways, and institutions compete for their attention during the period when school choice becomes salient. This makes SHS learners a strategically significant audience for HEI marketing, especially in regions with dense institutional competition such as Region IV-A (CALABARZON). In this setting, social



media marketing becomes a practical mechanism for an HEI to signal relevance (e.g., offerings and student life), maintain familiarity (e.g., recognizable institutional identity), and demonstrate operational seriousness through consistent and updated communication.

Despite the centrality of social media in institutional branding, many HEIs evaluate performance informally—often using surface metrics (e.g., follower counts, likes, impressions) rather than linking digital presence to outcomes that matter in educational choice, such as trust and intention to recommend or consider enrollment. Moreover, social media effectiveness is not reducible to visibility alone. Audience judgment is shaped by content attributes (e.g., relevancy to student needs), brand clarity and familiarity, and the perceived cadence of updates—features that may either reinforce or undermine trust. Where institutional content is perceived as relevant but inconsistently maintained, strategic risk emerges: engagement may remain passive, and the institution may fail to translate awareness into stronger advocacy or enrollment intent.

Within this context, the present study examines social media marketing among SHS learners who are preparing for college entry, using a private HEI in Region IV-A (CALABARZON) as the masked case setting. Using 2025 survey evidence intended to inform the 2026–2027 intake cycle, the study documents channel preferences and social media usage patterns, assesses perceptions of the institution’s online presence (Facebook and website), and describes trust- and intention-related outcomes. The study is positioned as an evidence base for refining institutional branding strategy—particularly in terms of content design, engagement orientation, and platform maintenance—while maintaining appropriate interpretive limits consistent with a descriptive, cross-sectional design.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To examine social media marketing preferences, social media usage patterns, and perceptions of a private HEI’s online presence in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), and to relate these indicators to brand-relevant outcomes such as trust and intention to enroll.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine SHS learners’ comparative preference for social media marketing relative to selected traditional promotional channels.
2. To describe SHS learners’ social media usage patterns and brand-following behavior across major platforms.
3. To assess awareness of and engagement with the HEI’s primary digital channels (Facebook page and official website), including low- and high-effort engagement behaviors.
4. To evaluate perceptions of key quality dimensions of the HEI’s online content and presence (e.g., relevancy, familiarity, and frequency of updates).
5. To describe reported trust toward the HEI brand and intention to enroll for the 2026–2027 intake cycle, and to examine their statistical relationships with social media usage and perceived institutional online presence (as applicable to the correlational/regression analyses).

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Social Media Marketing for HEI Recruitment and Branding

Empirical studies generally converge on the proposition that social media marketing (SMM) constitutes a strategically consequential channel for higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in shaping prospective students’ decision pathways from awareness to inquiry, application, and eventual enrollment or recommendation. Across multiple contexts, quantitative findings suggest that institutional social media promotions, when coupled with favorable brand image, are associated with stronger preference and selection intentions among prospective students (Sugiartana et al., 2025; Šola & Zia, 2021). Complementing this, integrated marketing communication (IMC) research highlights that social media functions most effectively when embedded within coordinated communication strategies rather than treated as an isolated tactic, with evidence indicating positive relationships between digitally integrated communication and HEI choice (Roy & Misra, 2024).



Beyond channel presence, the literature increasingly emphasizes the role of specific social media activities that amplify brand meaning and facilitate decision-making. Studies indicate that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), interactivity, personalization, influencer marketing, and other engagement-oriented mechanisms strengthen brand perception and contribute to higher propensity for institutional consideration (Alam et al., 2024; Sriyanto et al., 2025). Work focused on digital marketing's role in the student decision-making process further suggests that prospective students actively use online platforms to evaluate institutional offerings, social proof, and experiential cues that reduce uncertainty in school choice (Kusumawati, 2019). In parallel, qualitative and mixed-method evidence indicates that prospective students frequently consult social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to gather information and form impressions, supporting the view that social media environments function as practical decision infrastructures in higher education markets (Kusumawati, 2019; Shields & Peruta, 2018).

Recent studies reinforce that digital marketing strategies, including social media-driven recruitment, can predict enrollment decisions in private university settings, often modeled through multivariate approaches such as PLS-SEM and consumer decision frameworks (Syunita & Tikno, 2025; Sriyanto et al., 2025). Research focusing on prospective student behavioral engagement also underscores brand equity as a mediating mechanism through which SMM activities translate into engagement outcomes (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022). For international student segments, evidence indicates that marketing mix decisions combined with social media strategy can influence university choice, implying that digital channels interact with other institutional signals (Al-Dmour et al., 2024). Taken together, the literature positions SMM as a central recruitment and branding tool that may complement—if not surpass—traditional promotional methods, depending on context and execution (Syunita & Tikno, 2025; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022; Sriyanto et al., 2025).

Although the evidence base remains relatively thinner in the Philippine HEI context, local qualitative evidence suggests that community discourse on feeder-school Facebook ecosystems can function as a socially constructed repository of institutional culture and values. Specifically, thematic analysis indicates that recurring “value

signals” (e.g., belonging, safety, creativity, excellence, leadership, integrity) operate as practical evaluative criteria used by families and learners in forming institutional perceptions (Atento & Espelita, 2025). While the study does not quantify enrollment intention, it offers a context-relevant basis for asserting that HEI social media marketing anchored on authentic community discourse can strengthen brand resonance and stakeholder loyalty—conditions that are plausibly antecedent to school choice preferences (Atento & Espelita, 2025).

2.2 SHS/Gen Z Social Media Usage and Receptivity to Digital Marketing

The broader digital marketing literature suggests that social media use intensity and brand-following behaviors are meaningfully related to receptivity toward social media marketing, though the magnitude and consistency of effects vary by sector and outcome. Across consumer contexts, evidence indicates that frequent engagement with brand content (e.g., likes, shares, comments) is associated with higher trust, loyalty formation, and intention-related outcomes, especially among cohorts that interact with social media daily (Joshi et al., 2025; Khan, 2022; Titiloye et al., 2025). A uses-and-gratifications perspective further clarifies that information-seeking and identity expression motives drive brand-consumer interactions on social media, which, in turn, are associated with favorable brand attitudes (Qin, 2020). Moreover, influencer marketing research suggests that credibility cues, parasocial interaction, and content authenticity can operate as psychologically salient drivers of responsiveness, reinforcing why brand-following and social platform immersion matter for behavioral intent (Joshi et al., 2023).

At the level of mechanism, social media use intensity may function as a facilitating condition that translates curiosity or interest into action-oriented behaviors. For example, evidence from sport consumption contexts identifies social media use intensity as a mediator linking curiosity to impulsive buying, implying that heavier platform engagement can increase the probability that exposure converts into behavioral outcomes (Chen et al., 2025). However, not all studies identify a simple direct effect of use intensity; sector-based findings indicate that responsiveness may be more strongly predicted by eWOM dynamics and structured engagement features than by usage intensity alone, suggesting that context and the nature of marketing stimuli



remain important boundary conditions (Sarkis et al., 2025). Complementary review evidence also maintains that social media marketing influences consumer behavior across industries, but the strength of effects depends on message quality, credibility, and engagement design rather than exposure alone (Anjorin et al., 2024).

Within education-aligned contexts, recent studies provide additional interpretive grounding for Generation Z and SHS segments. Evidence from feeder-school ecosystem analysis suggests that learners and families actively process and respond to value-aligned messaging in social media environments and that engagement patterns reflect sensitivity to relational trust and identity-relevant content (Atento & Espelita, 2025). In a different but complementary domain, a thematic review in health professions education characterizes Generation Z as a cohort shaped by short-form digital content and technology-mediated learning expectations, implying that institutions operating in this cohort's environment are compelled to adopt communication approaches aligned with digital habits (Bermido et al., 2025). Together, these studies support a reasonable expectation that SHS/Gen Z learners' habitual social media use and brand-following tendencies increase the likelihood that institution-initiated digital messaging will be noticed, evaluated, and potentially translated into intention-related outcomes, contingent on content quality and trust signals (Atento & Espelita, 2025; Bermido et al., 2025).

2.3 Quality of Institutional Online Presence: Relevancy, Familiarity, and Update Frequency

A recurring conclusion in the institutional social media literature is that perceived quality—particularly content relevancy and brand clarity—often matters more than frequency of posting alone. Evidence from higher education contexts indicates that emotionally resonant and institutionally meaningful content tends to generate higher engagement (likes and shares), whereas posting frequency, when treated as a mechanical output, does not necessarily increase engagement and may even relate inversely to some engagement indicators (Capriotti et al., 2023; Soares et al., 2021). This positions “update frequency” as a nuanced factor: while inactivity can signal weak responsiveness, excessive or poorly designed posting can dilute attention, suggesting that cadence must be strategically aligned with content value (Capriotti et al., 2023; Soares et al., 2021).

Content strategy research further suggests that engagement is strengthened when universities emphasize relevant and consistent topics aligned with organizational identity, rather than relying heavily on functional or purely informational content that does not reflect student meaning-making processes (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Capriotti et al., 2024). At a more granular level, engagement behavior has been shown to vary by content format and platform, implying that the same message can perform differently across channels depending on media affordances and user norms (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Likewise, social media context can moderate engagement behaviors, reinforcing that perceived trustworthiness and richness of content shape how users interpret and respond to posts (Cao et al., 2021). Evidence from small retail and MSME settings parallels these conclusions by showing that strategic content capability—creating relevant, analytically informed, and audience-aligned posts—predicts stronger social engagement and performance outcomes (Devereux et al., 2019; Pratama et al., 2025). While these studies are not HEI-specific, they reinforce the generalizable principle that digital engagement is primarily a function of value delivery and credibility cues rather than exposure volume.

Philippine-context evidence adds further support for emphasizing relevancy and familiarity as central dimensions. Feeder-school ecosystem analysis highlights that community discourse prioritizes value signals (belonging, excellence, integrity) and implies that HEIs that echo and extend these values through online communication can develop greater resonance and relational continuity (Atento & Espelita, 2025). Additionally, evidence from a Philippine retail pharmacy case study suggests that trust is reinforced through consistent, transparent communication and credibility anchored on compliance and service reliability—features that, by analogy, would position institutional websites and social media pages as credibility-bearing artifacts in education markets (Atento & Atento, 2025). Collectively, the literature supports a model where institutional online presence is evaluated through perceived relevancy (decision usefulness), familiarity (brand clarity and identity coherence), and appropriately calibrated update frequency (signals of responsiveness without content dilution), each contributing to engagement and favorable institutional evaluation (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Capriotti et al., 2023; Soares et al., 2021; Atento & Espelita, 2025).



2.4 Brand Outcomes: Trust and Enrollment Intention

Brand trust is widely conceptualized as a pivotal antecedent of behavioral intention in high-involvement service contexts, including higher education. Empirical studies show that trust can directly predict intention outcomes (e.g., intention to enroll and recommend) and can also operate as a mediating mechanism through which brand awareness and digital marketing activities influence intention (Barus, 2023; Sriyanto et al., 2024; Sriyanto et al., 2025). Research further suggests that while brand awareness contributes to intention, its effects may be strengthened or transmitted via trust, highlighting trust's role as a mechanism that reduces perceived risk and increases confidence in institutional choice (Barus, 2023). Related evidence indicates that brand reputation and perceived benefits also shape enrollment decisions, implying that trust-related evaluations are intertwined with broader assessments of institutional value (Magasi & Bwemelo, 2024; Mertaningrum et al., 2025).

Studies in specialized HEI segments further reinforce the trust–intention pathway. Evidence from Islamic higher education settings suggests that identity-congruent signals may interact with trust in shaping enrollment intention, underscoring the role of credibility and fit for particular student populations (Juhaidi et al., 2024). Additionally, research on religious brand credibility indicates that institutional branding anchored in religious identity can shape business school choice, further supporting the idea that credibility cues generate trust that translates into choice behaviors (Collazos-Ortiz et al., 2025). Empirical brand valuation approaches also indicate that intention to enroll and recommend can be analyzed as brand outcome indicators, supporting their appropriateness as dependent variables in HEI branding research (Macías et al., 2023).

Philippine-based conceptual and case evidence offers convergent support for this logic. The consumer-centered marketing framework derived from feeder-school ecosystem discourse explicitly maps pathways from community-embedded values to consumer triggers—including trust and credibility—which then inform marketing design and institutional outcomes such as stakeholder loyalty and enrollment-relevant perceptions (Atento & Espelita, 2025). Although the study is qualitative rather than a formal mediation test, it provides context-grounded support for treating trust as a

central mechanism linking digital messaging to intention-related outcomes (Atento & Espelita, 2025). Parallel evidence from a Philippine retail pharmacy case positions brand trust as a difficult-to-imitate strategic resource that sustains loyalty and positive word-of-mouth in trust-sensitive environments, reinforcing the broader service-brand proposition that credibility strongly predicts recommendation behavior (Atento & Atento, 2025). Taken together, the literature supports the inclusion of brand trust and intention to enroll as core outcomes in studies examining institutional social media marketing effectiveness (Barus, 2023; Sriyanto et al., 2024; Macías et al., 2023; Atento & Espelita, 2025).

2.5 Synthesis of Literature

Across the four domains, a coherent explanatory logic emerges. First, the HEI marketing literature positions social media marketing as a central recruitment and branding channel, with evidence linking digital strategies and engagement mechanisms (eWOM, personalization, influencer cues) to prospective student decision outcomes (Alam et al., 2024; Roy & Misra, 2024; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022; Sriyanto et al., 2025). Second, digital habit research indicates that intensive social media use and brand-following behaviors increase the likelihood that marketing exposure becomes psychologically consequential—through attention, interaction, and identity-relevant processing—though outcomes depend on stimulus quality and context (Chen et al., 2025; Qin, 2020; Sarkis et al., 2025). Third, institutional communication studies clarify that perceived content relevancy and familiarity (brand clarity) are robust drivers of engagement and positive evaluation, while update frequency functions as a contingent credibility signal requiring strategic calibration (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Capriotti et al., 2023; Soares et al., 2021). Fourth, brand scholarship consistently identifies trust as either a direct predictor or a mediating mechanism linking institutional signals to intention outcomes such as intention to enroll and recommend, especially under conditions of high perceived risk and high involvement (Barus, 2023; Sriyanto et al., 2024; Macías et al., 2023).

Importantly, Philippine-based evidence complements these international findings by emphasizing that social media discourse within feeder-school ecosystems encodes community-defined value signals and that these value signals



activate consumer triggers such as trust, credibility, and identity affirmation (Atento & Espelita, 2025). This suggests that an HEI's digital marketing effectiveness depends not only on platform presence or posting cadence but also on whether online communication reflects decision-relevant values recognized by SHS learners and their families. In a parallel service domain, evidence that trust operates as a strategic resource sustaining loyalty and recommendation behavior further strengthens the plausibility of a trust-centered model for HEI branding (Atento & Atento, 2025). Collectively, the literature supports a framework in which SHS learners' receptivity (digital habits and brand-following), the perceived quality of the institution's online presence (relevancy, familiarity, appropriately managed update frequency), and trust jointly shape intention to enroll.

2.6 Research Gap

Several actionable gaps remain, motivating the present study's focus and variable selection:

1. Philippine quantitative evidence gap for SHS-to-HEI choice. While international studies substantiate SMM effects on HEI choice, Philippine-context evidence remains comparatively limited and is often qualitative or conceptual, leaving a need for survey-based empirical profiling of SHS learners' channel preferences, engagement patterns, and outcome indicators (Atento & Espelita, 2025).
2. Under-specification of online presence quality dimensions in HEI studies. Many studies operationalize "social media effectiveness" via engagement counts or generic attitude measures, but fewer directly assess perceived relevancy, familiarity/brand clarity, and frequency of updates as distinct evaluative dimensions that map cleanly onto actionable marketing design decisions (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Soares et al., 2021).
3. Limited differentiation between passive awareness and active advocacy. Awareness and low-effort engagement (e.g., knowing the page, liking posts) may not translate into high-effort engagement (e.g., sharing, recommending), yet many designs do not explicitly separate these behaviors as different stages of conversion and loyalty intent (Shields &

Peruta, 2018; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022).

4. Need for localized evidence on the trust–intention pathway under digital recruitment. Although trust is widely supported as a direct predictor or mediator of intention, the mechanisms remain context-dependent, particularly in culturally and economically specific HEI markets where family influence, credibility cues, and perceived risk may be distinct (Barus, 2023; Sriyanto et al., 2024; Atento & Espelita, 2025).
5. Comparative channel preference still underreported in HEI choice models. Some studies emphasize digital strategies, but fewer explicitly benchmark social media marketing against traditional channels within the same respondent population, which is essential for institutions deciding how to allocate recruitment resources (Roy & Misra, 2024; Šola & Zia, 2021).

These gaps justify a focused examination of SHS learners' channel preferences, usage intensity, and evaluations of institutional online presence quality—linked to trust and intention to enroll—within a specific Philippine regional setting.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional, quantitative survey design with an associational/predictive analytic component. The design was used to (a) describe Senior High School (SHS) learners' exposure to and preferences for social media marketing channels, and (b) examine how selected predictors—including trust and digital channel usage—statistically relate to intention to enroll a masked private higher education institution (HEI) in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), Philippines. Data collection was conducted in 2025 to inform insights relevant to the 2026–2027 intake cycle. Given the cross-sectional nature of the design, findings were interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

3.2 Research Setting and Participants

The setting is a private HEI in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), treated as a masked case



environment to protect institutional identity. Participants were Senior High School learners (both Grade 11 and Grade 12) who were college-bound within the Philippine K–12 system. The final sample comprised 822 respondents ($N = 822$).

3.3 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit SHS learners who were within the HEI's recruitment horizon for the 2026–2027 intake. The achieved sample size ($N = 822$) was considered sufficient for stable estimation of descriptive statistics and for multiple regression modeling with a limited set of predictors, consistent with common quantitative research practice.

3.4 Research Instrumentation and Measures

Data were gathered using a structured online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument included the following measurement domains:

a. Demographic profile.

Respondents reported age, gender, and location (within Region IV-A).

b. Social media usage.

Social media usage was measured using self-reported daily usage intensity and coded into five ordered time categories: (1) less than 1 hour/day, (2) 1–2 hours/day, (3) 3–4 hours/day, (4) 5–6 hours/day, and (5) 6+ hours/day. Higher codes indicate greater daily social media exposure.

c. Website usage.

Website usage captured respondents' frequency of visiting the HEI's official website, measured on a 5-point usage scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = very often) and treated as a predictor in the regression model.

d. Brand trust.

Trust toward the HEI brand was measured using a 5-point rating scale, with higher scores indicating stronger perceived trust.

e. Intention to enroll.

The dependent variable (DV) was intention to enroll, measured through a 5-point likelihood scale anchored from Very Unlikely (1) to Very Likely (5).

f. Supplementary descriptive domains (reported in results profiling).

In addition to the predictors used in the regression model, the questionnaire included descriptive assessments aligned with the study's results profiling, such as comparative preference for promotional channels and perceived quality dimensions of the HEI's online presence (e.g., relevancy, familiarity/clarity, and update frequency). These were measured using 5-point rating scales, with higher values indicating more favorable evaluations.

g. Instrument quality assurance. Questionnaire items were adapted from prior literature and reviewed for clarity and content relevance. Because the primary study variables were analyzed as single-item indicators or as distinct domain ratings, internal consistency indices (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not treated as decision criteria for the reported analyses.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected in 2025 via an online survey distributed to SHS learners (Grades 11–12) within the HEI's recruitment catchment in Region IV-A. The survey link was accompanied by an informed consent statement describing the study purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality protections, and the option to discontinue at any time. Responses were recorded electronically and exported for statistical processing.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded in two stages:

Descriptive statistics.

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed to summarize respondent demographics, marketing channel preferences, digital usage patterns, awareness and engagement indicators, and perceived quality ratings of the HEI's online presence.

For descriptive interpretation of 5-point ratings, positivity rates were computed as the proportion of respondents selecting the two highest response options (4–5), consistent with common practice in survey-based reporting of favorable judgments.



Multiple regression analysis (predictive model).

A multiple regression model was estimated with intention to enroll as the dependent variable and the following predictors: trust, website usage, social media usage, age, gender, and location (entered using indicator variables with other provinces as the reference category). The analytic intent was to determine whether the predictors significantly explain variation in intention, controlling for demographic characteristics.

A generic model specification is expressed as:

$$\text{Intention}_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Trust}_i) + \beta_2(\text{WebsiteUsage}_i) + \beta_3(\text{SocialMediaUsage}_i) + \beta_4(\text{Age}_i) + \beta_5(\text{Gender}_i) + \beta_6(\text{LocationIndicators}_i) + \epsilon_i$$

Categorical predictors (e.g., gender and location) were entered using appropriate coding (dummy coding for binary variables; indicator variables for multi-category location classifications). Standard diagnostics (e.g., multicollinearity checks and residual assessment) were considered to support interpretability of regression estimates. Statistical significance was evaluated at conventional alpha levels (e.g., .05).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Data were collected through an online instrument with confidentiality safeguards, and results were reported in aggregate. Institutional identity was masked in the manuscript to prevent reputational or competitive harm and to maintain respondent and institutional privacy.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 822 Senior High School learners (N = 822) participated in the 2025 survey (Grades 11–12). In terms of gender, 48% were male (n = 395) and 52% were female (n = 427). The age distribution was as follows: 16–17 years (38%, n = 312), 18–19 years (36%, n = 296), 20–21 years (20%, n = 165), and 22 years and above (6%, n = 49). With respect to location, respondents were primarily from Laguna (38%, n = 312) and Batangas (35%, n = 288), with the remainder from Quezon/Lucena (10%, n = 82), NCR (7%, n = 58), and other provinces (10%, n = 82) (e.g., Ilocos, Bicol, Visayas, Mindanao).

4.2 Preferred Promotional Channels

Respondents rated social media marketing as the most preferred promotional channel (M = 4.56, SD = 1.02), followed by tarpaulin-based promotions (M = 3.86, SD = 1.55). Radio advertisements were least preferred (M = 2.12, SD = 1.86). The pattern indicates a clear preference for digital promotion over selected traditional formats among SHS learners.

4.3 Social Media Usage and Brand-Following Behavior

Respondents reported substantial social media exposure, averaging M = 4.5 hours per day (SD = 2.2). A majority (65%) reported following consumer brands on major platforms, indicating a cohort with routine exposure to brand communication in social media environments.

4.4 Digital Channel Awareness and Engagement

Awareness of the HEI's primary digital channels was high, with more than 80% indicating awareness of the HEI's Facebook page and official website. However, high-effort engagement was limited: only 23% indicated that they share institutional posts, suggesting a gap between visibility and advocacy-oriented diffusion.

4.5 Perceived Quality of Institutional Online Presence

Ratings of the HEI's online presence were strongest for content relevancy (M = 4.88, SD = 0.55) and familiarity/clarity (M = 4.62, SD = 0.62). In contrast, frequency of updates received a lower average rating and exhibited greater variability (M = 3.20, SD = 1.75), indicating uneven perceptions of posting cadence across respondents.

4.6 Outcome Levels: Intention and Trust

For the primary outcomes, respondents reported generally favorable judgments. Intention to enroll/consider enrolling was positive for 88% of respondents, while brand trust was positive for 80% of respondents, based on the positivity rule defined as selecting the top two response categories (4–5) on the 5-point scales. These findings indicate strong baseline levels of intention and trust within the sample, supporting regression analysis to identify which predictors explain variation in intention beyond overall favorable ratings.

Table 1. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Enrol (N = 822).

Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Intention to Enrol (N = 822)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
(Intercept)	0.20	0.106		1.89	.059
Brand Trust	0.42	0.050	0.35	8.40	<.001
Website Usage	0.12	0.077	0.06	1.56	.119
Social Media Usage	0.15	0.075	0.08	2.00	.045
Age	0.01	0.006	0.05	1.67	.095
Gender (Female = 1)	-0.05	0.070	-0.02	-0.71	.478
Location (ref. = Other provinces)					
Batangas	0.25	0.142	0.07	1.76	.078
Laguna	0.40	0.176	0.09	2.27	.023
Quezon / Lucena	0.06	0.130	0.02	0.46	.645
NCR	0.11	0.112	0.03	0.98	.327

4.7 Regression Analysis

A multiple regression model was estimated to predict intention to enroll (DV scored 1–5, where higher scores reflect greater likelihood to consider enrolling). Predictors included brand trust, website usage, social media usage, age, gender (female = 1), and location indicator variables (reference category: other provinces). Overall model fit was statistically significant: $R^2 = 0.26$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$, $F(9, 812) = 31.7$, $p < .001$, indicating that the predictor set explained approximately 26% of the variance in intention to enroll.

. DV = intention to enroll (1–5). Brand trust and website usage were measured on 5-point scales. Social media usage was coded as a 5-category daily time-use measure (from <1 hour/day to 6+ hours/day). Age was measured in years. Gender is dummy coded (1 = female, 0 = male). Location is represented by indicator variables with other provinces as the reference category because it includes all regions not in immediate proximity to the university.

Key findings from the regression were as follows:

1. Brand trust emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to enroll ($B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.050$, $\beta = 0.35$, $t = 8.40$, $p < .001$). Holding other variables constant, higher trust ratings were associated with substantially higher enrollment intention scores.
2. Social media usage showed a small but statistically significant positive association with intention ($B = 0.15$, $SE = 0.075$, $\beta = 0.08$, $t = 2.00$, $p = .045$). This indicates that greater social media usage corresponds to slightly higher intention to enroll, net of trust and demographic controls.
3. Website usage was not a statistically significant predictor ($B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.077$, $\beta = 0.06$, $t = 1.56$, $p = .119$), suggesting that, after controlling for the other variables, differences in website usage levels did not reliably explain



variation in intention to enroll within this sample.

4. Age was not statistically significant at conventional thresholds ($B = 0.01$, $SE = 0.006$, $\beta = 0.05$, $t = 1.67$, $p = .095$), though the direction was positive.
5. Gender (female = 1) was not significant ($B = -0.05$, $SE = 0.070$, $\beta = -0.02$, $t = -0.71$, $p = .478$), indicating no meaningful gender-based difference in intention to enroll under the model.
6. For location (reference: other provinces), only Laguna showed a statistically significant positive difference ($B = 0.40$, $SE = 0.176$, $\beta = 0.09$, $t = 2.27$, $p = .023$). Batangas was marginal ($p = .078$), while Quezon/Lucena ($p = .645$) and NCR ($p = .327$) were not significant. This indicates that, controlling for trust and usage variables, respondents from Laguna demonstrated higher intention scores relative to those categorized under other provinces.

Collectively, these results suggest that trust is the most consequential explanatory factor for intention to enroll, with social media usage providing a smaller incremental contribution. Geographic proximity or connectedness to the HEI's core catchment (particularly Laguna) also appears to matter, whereas website usage, gender, and age did not show reliable independent effects in the specified model.

4.8 Discussion of Findings

This section interprets the descriptive and regression results in relation to the study objectives and the four literature domains (Sections 2.1–2.4). Interpretations are framed as associations/predictive relationships, consistent with the cross-sectional survey design.

4.8.1 Salience of Social Media Marketing as the Dominant Recruitment Channel

The strong preference for social media marketing over tarpaulins and radio indicates that, for SHS learners in the recruitment horizon, institutional messaging is most likely to be noticed and evaluated through digital channels. This pattern is consistent with evidence that social media functions as a primary information environment for prospective students and can materially shape school

choice processes and institutional evaluations (Shields & Peruta, 2018; Kusumawati, 2019; Šola & Zia, 2021). The finding also aligns with integrated marketing communication perspectives suggesting that digital channels increasingly serve as central touchpoints in HEI choice, particularly when messaging is coordinated and decision-relevant (Roy & Misra, 2024; Al-Dmour et al., 2024).

From an operational standpoint, the result implies that traditional promotions may remain supportive but are unlikely to carry the same persuasive weight as social media within this cohort. This reinforces a strategic allocation argument: recruitment resources should prioritize platform-based communication where SHS learners naturally concentrate attention.

4.8.2 High Platform Immersion and Receptivity Among SHS Learners

Reported social media exposure (mean hours/day) and the prevalence of brand-following behavior indicate that respondents are not merely occasional users but are routinely immersed in social platforms where brand judgments are formed and reinforced. This is consistent with studies showing that higher social media activity and brand engagement tendencies are linked to stronger responsiveness to marketing stimuli, including attitudinal and intention-related outcomes (Qin, 2020; Khan, 2022; Joshi et al., 2025). The IJHBA-based evidence likewise supports the plausibility that SHS learners and families process value-aligned messages in digital environments and that such exposure can heighten sensitivity to institutional signals (Atento & Espelita, 2025). In parallel, cohort-level accounts of Gen Z digital habits reinforce that contemporary students are shaped by technology-mediated content consumption norms, which institutions must accommodate in communication practice (Bermido et al., 2025).

However, this receptivity should not be read as automatic persuasion: high usage is a condition for exposure and attention, not a guarantee of trust or enrollment intent. The quality and credibility of content remain decisive.

4.8.3 Awareness is High, but Advocacy Behaviors are Limited

Although awareness of the HEI's Facebook page and website exceeded 80%, the comparatively low rate of sharing suggests that most engagement remains at a passive or low-effort level rather than



translating into advocacy-oriented behaviors. This distinction matters because “visibility” metrics alone (awareness, views, likes) may not produce the stronger, network-driven effects that sharing and peer diffusion can generate. The pattern is consistent with the broader logic that engagement is multi-layered and not reducible to platform presence (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022). Practically, the HEI’s social media may be functioning effectively as an information channel but less effectively as an advocacy engine.

A likely implication is that the content may be informative and relevant but not sufficiently designed to elicit high-effort actions (e.g., share-worthy narratives, peer-referable proof points, or interactive formats).

4.8.4 Relevancy and Familiarity are Strong; Update Frequency is the Main Weakness

Respondents rated content relevancy and familiarity/clarity very favorably, which indicates that learners perceive institutional content as decision-useful and coherent. This is consistent with the literature emphasizing that content strategy and perceived value—not posting volume—drive engagement and positive evaluation (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Capriotti et al., 2024; Soares et al., 2021). It also resonates with the Philippine feeder-school ecosystem argument that digital discourse is interpreted through “value signals” and that institutional messaging gains traction when it reflects community-recognized values (Atento & Espelita, 2025).

In contrast, frequency of updates received the lowest rating and the widest dispersion, suggesting uneven respondent experiences with posting cadence. This aligns with higher education evidence that posting frequency alone does not guarantee engagement and that poorly calibrated cadence may even be counterproductive (Capriotti et al., 2023; Soares et al., 2021). The more actionable interpretation is that cadence should be managed as a credibility signal—regular enough to convey responsiveness and seriousness, but strategically paced and content-driven rather than purely frequent.

4.8.5 Predictors of Intention to Enroll: Trust as the Core Driver, With Smaller Effects for Social Media Use and Location

The regression model explained a meaningful share of variance in intention to enroll ($R^2 = 0.26$;

adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$), indicating that the selected predictors jointly provide a substantive account of enrollment intention differences within the sample.

The dominant finding is that brand trust is the strongest predictor of intention to enroll ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$). This directly supports the trust-centered strand of the HEI branding literature, which consistently positions trust as a key antecedent (and sometimes mediator) of enrollment and recommendation intentions (Barus, 2023; Sriyanto et al., 2024; Macías et al., 2023). In practical terms, this suggests that recruitment communication should not be evaluated only by reach or engagement, but by its capacity to generate credibility cues—competence, integrity, consistency, and social proof—that accumulate into trust.

Social media usage also predicted intention positively ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = .045$), albeit with a comparatively small effect. This supports the general view that higher platform immersion increases the likelihood that marketing exposure becomes behaviorally relevant, but it also indicates that usage intensity is not the primary mechanism. This nuance is consistent with evidence that responsiveness often depends more on message and engagement features than on use intensity alone (Sarkis et al., 2025). Conceptually, social media use may function as an enabling condition, while trust functions as the proximal driver of intention.

Notably, website usage was not a significant predictor ($p = .119$) after controlling for the other variables. This does not imply that the website is unimportant; rather, it suggests that the measured variation in usage (hours/day categories) may not translate into differential enrollment intention once trust and social media use are accounted for. Two plausible interpretations follow: (a) the website may function as a baseline credibility artifact accessed similarly across respondents, producing limited variance; or (b) the usage metric (time-based) may not capture the specific website interactions that matter (e.g., admissions page views, scholarship details). This pattern is consistent with the broader content-quality literature: channel presence and usage are less decisive than perceived relevance, clarity, and credibility of the information encountered (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023; Cao et al., 2021).

Location results indicate that respondents from Laguna showed higher intention than those in the reference “other provinces” category ($p = .023$).



This is consistent with a proximity/catchment logic: where the HEI's presence is culturally or geographically closer, baseline familiarity and perceived accessibility may increase intention. The finding is descriptive-predictive rather than causal, but it provides a practical segmentation insight for recruitment planning within Region IV-A.

Age and gender were not significant predictors in the model, implying that within this SHS-oriented sample, intention differences are better explained by trust and platform-related exposure than by these demographic characteristics.

4.8.6 Consolidated Interpretation: The "Visibility → Trust → Intention" Logic

Across findings, a coherent pathway is suggested: social media is the preferred channel and the cohort is highly exposed; content is perceived as relevant and familiar; trust is high and statistically central to intention. This pattern is consistent with frameworks that position social media marketing as influential insofar as it produces trust-building signals and brand equity effects that translate into behavioral intention (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022; Sriyanto et al., 2025; Atento & Espelita, 2025). The key weakness is not relevance or clarity, but the conversion from awareness to higher-effort engagement and advocacy, alongside the need to manage update frequency as a credibility signal rather than a volume target.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

This study examined social media marketing preferences, digital usage patterns, perceptions of institutional online presence, and their relationship to intention to enroll/consider enrolling among Senior High School (SHS) learners in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), Philippines, using a masked private HEI as the case context. Based on the descriptive and regression results, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Social media marketing is the dominant preferred channel for HEI recruitment communication among SHS learners. Respondents rated social media marketing higher than traditional promotional channels, indicating that institutional visibility and persuasion efforts are most likely to be effective when concentrated in

digital platforms where SHS learners allocate attention.

2. The SHS cohort is digitally immersed and routinely exposed to branded communication, creating high potential receptivity to institution-initiated messaging. Average daily social media use and substantial brand-following behavior suggest that the audience is structurally positioned to notice and evaluate social media-based institutional signals.
3. Institutional digital presence is widely known, but high-effort advocacy remains limited. Awareness of the HEI's Facebook page and website was high; however, sharing behavior was comparatively low, implying that institutional messaging is more frequently consumed than actively amplified.
4. Perceived content quality is strong in decision-relevance and clarity, while perceived update cadence is the primary weakness. Relevancy and familiarity/clarity ratings were high, indicating favorable evaluations of the content's usefulness and coherence. In contrast, frequency of updates received lower ratings and greater variability, suggesting inconsistencies in perceived posting cadence or visibility of updates.
5. Brand trust is the most consequential predictor of intention to enroll, with a smaller positive contribution from social media usage and a location effect favoring the HEI's core catchment. Multiple regression results indicate that trust has the strongest positive association with intention to enroll, while social media usage has a modest positive effect. Website usage was not a significant predictor after controls. Respondents from Laguna exhibited higher intention relative to the "other provinces" reference group.

Overall, the findings support a trust-centered interpretation of HEI recruitment effectiveness: social media functions as a high-preference channel and an exposure environment, but trust is the proximate driver of intention to enroll. Strategic improvements should therefore prioritize trust-building communication, conversion of passive



awareness into active engagement, and disciplined content cadence.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for the masked private HEI in Region IV-A, with direct alignment to the identified predictors and descriptive weaknesses:

1. Reorient social media strategy explicitly toward trust-building outcomes.

Since trust is the strongest predictor of intention to enroll, institutional content should consistently communicate credibility cues such as academic quality signals, graduate outcomes, licensure/recognition indicators (where applicable), transparent admissions guidance, clear tuition/aid information, and evidence of student support services. Content should emphasize verifiable proof points and minimize purely promotional messaging without substantiation.

2. Develop an “advocacy conversion” content layer to increase high-effort engagement (sharing).

To address the gap between awareness and sharing, the HEI should design shareable content formats that SHS learners can credibly repost, such as: short student stories, “day-in-the-life” vignettes, micro-FAQs for applicants, scholarship explainers, and program outcome snapshots. Calls-to-action should be specific (e.g., “share with a friend deciding for college”) and paired with content that carries social value for the sharer.

3. Standardize posting cadence while preserving content value (avoid frequency-for-frequency’s sake).

Because update frequency was the lowest-rated dimension, the HEI should set a minimum posting cadence (e.g., a predictable weekly schedule) to signal responsiveness. Cadence should be consistent across admission peak periods, while ensuring content remains relevant and not repetitive. A content calendar with themes mapped to the enrollment funnel (awareness → consideration → decision) is recommended.

4. Strengthen segmentation for the HEI’s primary geographic catchment while maintaining broader reach.

The location effect (Laguna) suggests that proximity and regional familiarity may support higher intention. Recruitment campaigns can prioritize localized narratives, partner-school visibility, and regional community engagement in Laguna and Batangas while still offering tailored content for audiences from NCR and other provinces (e.g., commuting/relocation guidance, hybrid onboarding information, dormitory and safety details if applicable).

5. Refine measurement of website utility and integrate website content with social media pathways.

Website usage was not a significant predictor, which may reflect measurement limitations or low-intent browsing. The HEI should ensure that social media posts lead directly to high-value website pages (program pages, admissions steps, scholarships, FAQs), with clear tracking of click-through behavior. For future research, website usage should be operationalized as purpose-driven access (e.g., “visited admissions page”) rather than time spent online.

6. Institutionalize continuous feedback cycles using SHS audience inputs.

Given the strategic importance of perceived relevancy, the HEI should periodically test content relevance through quick polls, comments analysis, and short survey pulses during campaign periods. This supports rapid refinement of messaging to match SHS learner concerns.

5.3 Implications

Practical Implications (HEI Management and Recruitment Practice)

The results imply that HEI recruitment success in the SHS segment is not primarily a function of channel presence, but of whether digital communication generates trust. Marketing teams should therefore treat social media not only as a reach mechanism but as a credibility management tool.

The observed gap between awareness and sharing indicates that institutions should distinguish between passive visibility metrics and advocacy behaviors. Recruitment analytics should track both low-effort (views/likes) and high-effort (shares/inquiries) conversion indicators.



Theoretical Implications (Branding and Digital Marketing in Education)

The findings reinforce trust-centered models in higher education branding by empirically showing that trust outperforms usage-based indicators as a predictor of intention to enroll.

The modest effect of social media usage suggests that usage intensity may operate as an enabling exposure condition rather than the central mechanism, implying that future models should place greater emphasis on content quality and credibility signals as mediators between exposure and intention.

Methodological Implications (Measurement and Modeling)

The non-significance of website usage suggests that time-based measures may not adequately capture the website's decision-making role. Future research should employ more granular indicators (e.g., admissions-page visits, scholarship-page access, time on decision-relevant pages).

The cross-sectional design supports predictive association but not causal inference. Future studies may improve inference by incorporating longitudinal follow-up (e.g., tracking actual application or enrollment behavior) or adding mediation testing (e.g., whether trust mediates the relationship between digital presence evaluations and intention).

Policy and Sector Implications (Regional HEI Competition)

For institutions in Region IV-A, the results suggest that digital recruitment strategies should be calibrated to the regional catchment dynamics: proximity-based familiarity may influence intention, but trust-building content remains critical for audiences outside the immediate region.

Sector-wide, the findings imply that HEIs may benefit from adopting minimum standards for digital communication cadence and transparency in admissions-related information, particularly in environments where students rely heavily on online evaluation.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings and when planning subsequent investigations.

1. Cross-sectional design and non-causal inference.

Data were collected at a single point in time; therefore, the regression results should be interpreted as predictive associations rather than causal effects. Future research may adopt longitudinal designs that track whether stated intention translates into actual application, admission, or enrollment outcomes.

2. Purposive sampling and generalizability constraints.

The use of purposive sampling and the masked single-HEI context limits external validity. While the sample size is large, results are best interpreted as reflective of SHS learners within the HEI's recruitment catchment and survey reach. Future studies may employ multi-site sampling across HEIs or stratified sampling across provinces to strengthen generalizability.

3. Measurement limitations for website usage and engagement.

Website usage was measured using time-based categories, which may not capture decision-relevant behaviors (e.g., visiting admissions requirements, scholarship pages, program descriptions). Future studies should operationalize web engagement through more granular indicators, such as page-specific visits, click-through behavior from social media, or self-reported purpose of website use.

4. Limited modeling of content-quality dimensions and mediation mechanisms.

While descriptive results captured perceived relevancy, familiarity/clarity, and update frequency, the regression model emphasized trust, usage variables, and demographics. Future models can test whether perceived online presence quality predicts intention directly or indirectly via trust (formal mediation testing), and whether effects vary by location or grade level.

5. Unmeasured confounders relevant to college choice.

Enrollment intention may also be shaped by factors not captured in the current model, such as tuition affordability, program availability, perceived employability, parental influence, peer influence, accessibility/transport, scholarships, and prior campus exposure. Future research should



incorporate these variables to improve explanatory power and reduce omitted-variable bias.

Future research directions may therefore include (a) a multi-HEI comparative study within Region IV-A, (b) a funnel-based tracking design from awareness → intention → actual enrollment, and (c) a mediation model testing whether trust transmits the effects of online presence quality and social media engagement into enrollment intention.

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