THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY AND COURSE

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Keywords

International students, Marketing, Social media, University course selection, University decision making, University recruitment.
Abstract

International student mobility and globalisation has caused universities around the world to compete for students by promoting their universities and courses using a variety of methods. Concurrently, prospective international students go through a university search, decision-making and selection process using a variety of information sources. Before the advent of social media, traditional information sources such as print media, broadcast media, education fairs and university websites have been dominant. The popularity and pervasiveness of social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, now presents an alternative university information source as many teenagers and students engage, collaborate and participate in these online communities. This thesis investigates how social media influences international students decision of course and university.

The data collection process was performed through a survey comprising of demographic; dichotomous; multiple choice; rating scale and open-ended questions. 167 international students responded to the survey questionnaire. The findings indicate active social media participation amongst international students; the role of social media in influencing international students’ decisions on course and university selection and the role of social media in meeting their information needs. Overall, this study contributes to the understanding of university and course decision making amongst international students using social media. It also provides inputs for universities to formulate strategies for social media participation and recruitment.
Definitions

This study will only use and include conceptual definitions. A conceptual definition is a standard, commonly understood definition of a particular term. The definition of terms relies on concepts which are usually derived from dictionary, published journals, and studies. The terms used in this study are as follows:

- **Traditional information sources**: these are information sources that are not social media, for example, print media such as brochures and prospectuses; broadcast media such as radio and television; road shows & exhibitions; friends, family, high school counselors, and websites.

- **Social media information sources**: Information sources from social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram.

- **Social media**: Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. Applications dedicated to forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, and wikis are among the different types of social media (Whatis, 2012).

- **Social media marketing techniques**: Social media marketing is a form of Internet marketing that utilises social networking websites as a marketing tool. The goal of social media marketing is to produce content that users will share with their social network to help a company increase brand exposure and broaden customer reach. Social media marketing helps a company get direct feedback from customers (and potential customers) while making the
company seem more personable. The interactive parts of social media give customers the opportunity to ask questions or voice complaints and feel they are being heard. Social media marketing has become more common with the increasing popularity of Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

- International student recruitment: "is a core part of student admissions for many colleges and universities" (LFHE, 2012).

- Prospective students: Students seeking a university course of study during whilst in high school.

- International students: "are persons admitted by a country other than their own, usually under special permits or visas, for the specific purpose of following a particular course of study in an accredited institution of the receiving country. International students are students who do not hold the citizenship of the country for which the data are collected" (OECD, 2003).

- Marketing: Marketing originated with the 4 P’s – Product, Price, Place, Promotion but over the years has evolved into a number of other marketing strands such as relationship marketing, services marketing and now social media marketing. Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (AMA, 2013).

- Decision-making: it is “the thought process of selecting a logical choice from the available options” (Business Dictionary, n.d.).
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Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: QUT Verified Signature

Date: December 2014
Acknowledgements

The research journey is like a beginning without an end. It takes one through a multitude of emotions – of hope, excitement, despair but finally of accomplishment. It becomes even more challenging when you have to undertake research offshore, with full-time work responsibilities and missing the support of research peers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The advent of information and communications technology has changed the way people and organisations function, communicate, transact, recruit, and conduct business. To keep pace with the ever-changing business and marketing trends, business organisations have integrated information and communications technology & internet technology into their business and communication processes as well as production and marketing strategies. The advent of Social media and now social media innovation and development has influenced organisations to discover effective and sustainable ways to communicate with their consumer base and to attract prospective consumers or clients. This new communication and marketing challenge now extends to universities and educational institutions that attempt to influence international students' decision-making processes.

Previously, traditional information sources such as print and broadcast media, friends, family and websites have been dominant sources of university course information. Increasingly however, many studies of youth, teenagers and Gen Y overwhelmingly suggest that they are prolific users of the Internet and in particular social media applications. As future prospective students, they are likely to turn to social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, to seek university course information.

The first three sections of this chapter outline the background and context of the research, and its purposes. The next section describes the significance and scope of the research. Finally, the last section includes an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis.
1.1 Background

The face and structure of international student recruitment is evolving due to the continued social media revolution that affects people's behavior, decision-making, beliefs, and perceptions. The demassification of communication media and technology led to consumer empowerment and tougher competition among universities and higher educational institutions (Flew, 2011, p. 165). The impact of social media and Internet technology on people's buying behavior and decision-making pressured educational institutions to adapt to the new trends and developments by becoming more responsive and effective in adopting and implementing recruitment and marketing techniques.

However, universities confront a number of issues and challenges in the development and implementation of their marketing goals and strategies. Some of these issues and challenges include lack of knowledge of and expertise in the use of social media as a marketing tool, poor Internet-based marketing techniques, the expanding complexity of marketing and recruitment strategies and practices, the fast-evolving social media, the changing decision-making and communication choices and processes of potential students using new devices and social media platforms and applications.

The advent and development of Web 2.0 led to the explosion of social media, which include social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, wikis, blog sites, hosted services, video-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo, NetFlix, Hulu, Yahoo, etc.), and web applications, among others. Many studies show that social media attract young people, particularly teenagers. For example, a recent survey shows that 73 percent of Europeans, or around 347 million users, currently use social
network sites (Insites, 2011). The most popular social network site in Europe is Facebook with at least 62% registered users.

A 2011-2012 study in the United States reveals that Americans, particularly those aged between 18 and 24, spent 21 percent of their time online (Brand Watch, 2012). Americans aged 18 to 24 spend most of their time on social network sites compared to other age groups. Those aged 25 to 34 have at least 82 percent mobile web usage. It was also found that while 94 percent of Americans still use personal computers for social media use, the use of other new devices such as smart phones and tablets are increasing (Brand Watch). Globally, the total number of mobile subscribers reached 6.5 billion in 2012 (Social Networking Watch, 2012). It is expected to reach 7.5 billion in 2015, with highly populated Africa and the Asia Pacific both expected to contribute 65 percent of the total mobile subscribers.

On the other hand, despite restrictions, social media use still continues to expand in the Arab World. A study found that at least 30 percent of the region's population has access to Internet as of end of 2011 (Zuehlke, 2012). This figure is slightly higher than the Asia Pacific region's 27 percent. Interestingly, foreign social media sites, like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, remain widely popular in the Arab region. However, the number of Arabic sites continues to expand.

These recent statistics and new technological developments continue to press educational institutions to discover new ways and techniques to communicate with and to attract prospective students in various countries. Larger educational institutions in various countries do not only compete for potential students; they also compete for the best and brightest students from the four corners of the world (Social Media Week, 2012). Since traditional media and marketing campaigns are expensive
and have limited reach to international students, many universities have recognised
the potential of social media and have since capitalised on them to promote their
programs and to attract prospective students.

Most American universities have seen the unlimited potentials of social
media and Social media in connecting with and recruiting international students.
These well-known universities that have been using social media include Yale
University, University of Rochester, John Hopkins University, University of Oregon,
Harvard University, and Princeton University (Social Media Week, 2012). In
addition, 92 of the 100 top colleges and universities in the United States utilize social
media to promote their programs to potential students. However, the average number
of social media sites being utilized is 3.7. Still Facebook remains the most used
social media site.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Students entering colleges and universities are considered digital natives
(Thompson, 2007) and the “Social Networking Generation” (Joly, 2007, p.71) due to
their frequent engagement in social networking activities (Schroeder & Greenbowe,
2009). This is supported by figures from the 2012 The PEW Internet Project which
revealed that 73% of online teens and 72% of young adults, who would comprise of
prospective university students, use social network sites for a variety of purposes.
Morris (2012) suggested that social media is used by international students to assist
in the university decision making process. This is supported by Levitz (2012) who
observed that 46% of prospective students visited a college’s Facebook page and
69% “liked” a college’s page. Similarly, universities are also engaging actively on
social media which as Taylor (2008) suggests if effectively tapped and designed, may
help in the university’s branding. Therefore, social media which encourages a culture of participation, engagement and collaboration, has a high potential to be used by universities to increase visibility and attract more students. (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011).

Most prior studies have been country and faculty specific, but not on international students as a whole. Therefore the problem statement of this study is: Whilst social media appears to have much promise and potential, it is still to be empirically determined whether and what role social media plays in international students’ decision of university and course.

This statement of the problem does not merely require the investigation international students' social media use, activities and preferences, but also social media marketing techniques that may be used and applied by universities.

Thus, this research focuses on the relationship between international students' social media usage with their university decision-making processes. The secondary research questions are as follows:

1. What social media do international students use to search for a university or course?

2. Which social media sites influence international students' university decision-making process?

3. What are the international students' social media usage and preference?

4. What are the social media sites and channels that can be used by universities to recruit and attract international students?
1.3 Significance of the study

Like most organisations, public or private, universities should be able to effectively communicate their vision, programs and courses to their prospective clients-- the students. One way is to apply the most effective means of communication and marketing techniques in order to properly and effectively inform and attract prospective students. The question is not whether universities should choose between traditional marketing methods and digital or online marketing methods. The important question is how do universities tap or use social media to effectively attract and recruit international students.

The intended beneficiaries of this study are as follows:

- *Academia or universities*. This study aims to inform and universities of the effective social media sites as well as effective social media marketing techniques that can be used to attract prospective international students. As already stated in the introduction section, one of the challenges that confront universities in regard to social media use is the complexity and the 'evolutionary' nature of the Internet technology and the ever-changing social media choices and decision-making process of Internet users, particularly the young people. This study can assist universities and colleges by investigating the most commonly used social media sites and devices by teenagers as well as the most effective ways and techniques to attract and communicate with potential international students. This study also seeks to recommend effective ways and social media applications and sites to reach out to international students. It is not enough for colleges and universities to merely establish connection with their prospective students; it is also important to attract their
attention and participation, and to established proactive connection.

- **International students.** This study will benefit international students in terms of universities' use of effective marketing techniques and availability of student-university communication channels. Yearly tens of thousands of international students venture out of their home country to study abroad. Apart from relying on traditional information sources, they also rely on social media sites for academic and other related information. The goal of universities is to reach out to these international students via social media.

- **Contribution to social media marketing research.** Although numerous studies have explored and investigated the marketing and communication value of social media, only a few studies focused on the impact of social media in international students' decision-making process. This study contributes to social media and marketing literature by introducing new social media strategies that can be used by universities and further examined by researchers and scholars.

### 1.4 Scope

The research scope pertains to limits of the study. The research scope or limits is primarily determined by the respondent or research population to be used; the sample drawn from the population; and the factors, variables and topics included or involved in the study (Padua & Santos, 2008, p. 16). The scope of this study is confined itself to a survey by international students to ascertain the impact or influence of social media on international students' university decision-making.
1.5 Delimitations

One potential limitation of this study is the use of the sampling method that may reduce the generalisability of findings. This study does not cover cultural and trust and security aspects of social media.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The remainder of this thesis details first the Literature Review domains of Marketing, Social Media and University Decision making in Chapter 2. This is followed by the Research Design chapter outlining the Methodology & Research Design, Research Question, Research Objectives and Research Hypothesis. The Results and the Analysis are presented in Chapters 4 and 5, followed by the Conclusion in Chapter 6.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this particular chapter, related literature and past studies are reviewed and discussed from three general fields: marketing, university decision-making, and social media or social media. These broad topics are thoroughly discussed and presented in the context of higher education institutions with international student recruitment goals and vision. The relevant literature and previous studies from these areas are then fused, synthesized, and integrated into an international student university decision-making model. The main goal of this chapter is to effectively and properly understand the concepts of university decision-making and social media marketing using social media, and how they impact international students' decision making process.

2.1 International Student Mobility

Efficient international student recruitment and marketing process and techniques relies among other push and pull factors, a profound understanding of student mobility patterns and university decision-making processes. An in-depth view or understanding of what students want and where they want to study certainly provides colleges and universities an important lead on how to redesign and improve their recruitment process and marketing strategies.

The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (n.d.) defines international or internationally mobile students as "students who have crossed a national or territorial border for the purpose of education and are now enrolled outside their country of origin." On the other hand, the OECD (2003) defines international students as "persons admitted by a country other than their own, usually under special permits or
visas, for the specific purpose of following a particular course of study in an accredited institution of the receiving country. International students are students who do not hold the citizenship of the country for which the data are collected."

If a university lacks an effective marketing and recruitment vision, it may be difficult to develop and implement promotional ideas and campaign to reach out to, and attract, international students on the global front. For universities with international student recruitment in mind, they need to find ways to develop new techniques to attract international students. Choudaha & Chang (2012) warn that the environment of intense competition globally amongst universities and budget cuts pressure universities to become more strategic and to focus on international student recruitment. This situation makes international student recruitment a highly valuable component to the financial viability of many universities in the United States and other countries. But recruitment of international students comes at a cost which relates to university budgets. Therefore, apart from using the traditional forms of recruitment methods, universities need to look beyond and experiment with other forms of recruitment including social media (Choudaha & Chang, 2012). They advise that in-depth understanding of global student mobility trends and their decision-making process will help consolidate institutional recruitment efforts more effectively.

The advent and development of social media has had a significant impact on higher education in the same way it influenced industries and the global corporate world. The social media phenomenon has begun to influence both higher education and the international students’ decision-making process. On the part of international students looking for potential universities or colleges to attend to, they use social
media and other new online communication channels to obtain information and other related university information.

The next section examines some of the international student mobility trends and factors that steer student mobility. This understanding will certainly provide colleges and universities clear perspectives and view of what international students want where they want to study, how they choose academic programs and courses, and why they want to study abroad.

2.1.1 International student mobility and study destinations

In its annual report, the UIS reveals that international students' global mobility greatly expanded from 2.1 million students in 2002 to more than 3.4 million in 2009. This suggests that there is steadily increasing number of international students each year. The renowned destinations of study for international students are the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. However these preferred study destinations are now coming under pressure from education hubs in Asia such as China, Singapore and Malaysia.

Globally, recent data show that international student enrolment increased by 4.7 percent (from 690,923 to 723,277) during the school year of 2010 to 2011 (Institute of International Education, 2011). The figure improved to 6.5 percent during the academic year 2011 to 2012 with a total of 228,467 new enrollees. The top places of origin of international students in the United States are China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, and Canada (see table below).
Figure 2.1: Top places of origin

C. TOP PLACES OF ORIGIN of International Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Place of Origin</th>
<th>2010/11</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>157,558</td>
<td>194,029</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>103,895</td>
<td>100,270</td>
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<td>-3.5</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>73,351</td>
<td>72,295</td>
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<td>-1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>22,704</td>
<td>34,139</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>27,546</td>
<td>26,821</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>-2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>24,818</td>
<td>23,250</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>21,290</td>
<td>19,966</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>14,888</td>
<td>15,572</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>13,713</td>
<td>13,893</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>12,184</td>
<td>11,973</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>10,301</td>
<td>9,621</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>-6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>9,458</td>
<td>9,347</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>8,947</td>
<td>9,186</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>8,777</td>
<td>9,029</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>8,098</td>
<td>8,232</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>8,136</td>
<td>8,032</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>-1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>8,236</td>
<td>7,626</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>6,942</td>
<td>7,131</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>7,148</td>
<td>7,028</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>5,626</td>
<td>6,982</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>6,735</td>
<td>6,743</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>6,456</td>
<td>6,295</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>-2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>5,491</td>
<td>6,281</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4,330</td>
<td>4,924</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>4,692</td>
<td>4,805</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The figure above shows that China and India are the biggest suppliers of international students to the United States with a total number of 194,029 and 100,270 mobile students, respectively. In terms of the total number of international students in the world, the number increased by 5.7 percent, from 723,277 in academic year 2010-2011 to 764,495 in AY 2011-2012. On the other hand, the total number of international students from Saudi Arabia increased by 50.4 percent, from 22,704 to 34,139. This shows that the oil-rich Arab country is sending more international students to the United States for the past few years.
2.1.2 Factors that steer the flow of international students' mobility

In their study, Choudaha and Chang (2012) found that some key trends and patterns of international student mobility. Despite considerable drop or decline in international student enrolment, the United States will remain the main destination of international students due to the quality of its education and openness to foreign learners and other cultures. The contributions of China and India are too big to ignore, however, there are now emerging nations that supply thousands of international students to top destination nations, which include South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, Mexico, and Vietnam (see Figure 3).

These developments suggest that increasing competition among higher education institutions and decreasing budgets pressure colleges and universities to improve their recruitment and marketing strategies and to use social media marketing techniques and strategies.

Figure 2.2: Percentage of international students in total enrolment by host countries

![Figure 2.2: Percentage of international students in total enrolment by host countries](source: Choudaha & Chang (2012))
The start of the 21st century indeed signaled the rapid flow of international student mobility as well as migration from developing countries to the highly industrialized economies. In the past, most international students were financed and supported by financial aid, scholarship grants and inter-government student exchange programs. Today, an increasing number of international students are funded by their parents and families (Choudaha & Chang, 2012).

2.1.3 Factors that influence international students’ to study abroad

One of the most challenging decision-making processes high school students need to deal with upon graduation is where to attend university. When choosing where to finish tertiary education, a student needs to make the right decision, because such a choice or decision could affect him financially, emotionally, philosophically, or even ideologically for the rest of his/her life.

This next section presents and discusses 7 evidence-based factors that influence international students’ decision-making process. The factors include financial aspect, push and pull factors, knowledge of study destination, and availability of program/course, social network influences, students’ personal motivations, and attractiveness of higher education abroad.

2.1.3.1 Financial factor

One of the factors that can significantly impact prospective students' decision-making process is financial aspect, which includes the cost of education as well as the cost of living and studying abroad. This makes decision-making a goal-oriented, purposive process that requires the decision-makers caution, preparation, efforts and initiatives. These efforts or initiatives cover doing extensive research,
filling out forms (both printed and online), taking tests and examinations, travelling, and so on. Where students plan to attend university can affect how much a student owes when he/she leaves college (Kingsbury, 2012).

According to EduPASS (2013), an online resource site that provides relevant information to international students intending to study abroad, particularly in the United States, there are sources of financial aid that may be availed of by international students. Some of the sources of financial aid include from the international students’ home country; aid from international organisations; aid from private sponsors; aid from the host Government and aid from the University (Edupass; 2013).

2.1.3.2 Push and pull factor

Usually, parents play a big role in pushing their children to study abroad. In a previous study, it was found that Thai female international students were greatly influenced by their parents who were so eager in sending their children to foreign universities (Takeuchi, 2008, p. 166). In some cases, parents who sent their children to study in the United States have relatives or family members nearby (Jenkins, 2001, p. 30). Another study reveals that many international students were forced to study abroad as a way to get out of their native country and to obey their parents’ wishes (Andrade & Evans, 2009, p. 48). This is more prevalent in societies that stress much value on parental respect, like Thailand and other Asian countries.

Some of the push factors, according to Phang (2013), include perceptions of better quality of foreign higher education system; lack of access to quality, good local higher education; availability or presence of technology-based higher education programs. On the other hand, the pull factors that encourage international students to
pursue higher education abroad (Phang, 2013; Maringe, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Pimpa, 2003) include the geographic propinquity of the host nation (e.g., a Canadian or Mexican citizen who wants to study in the U.S.); language commonality and opportunity to enhance second language; the higher education institution’s reputation for quality; teaching personnel’s credential, qualification and reputation; availability of courses and programs; and the institution’s effective recruitment and marketing campaigns.

2.1.3.3 Knowledge of study destination

International students who have gone abroad or who have frequently visited a particular host country, like the United States, U.K., Australia or Canada, are most likely to study abroad because of their personal knowledge of their prospective place of study or the country itself. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the factors that influence students’ selection of a host country are personal recommendations or suggestion and personal knowledge or awareness of the host country. The recommendations could come from family, friends, peers. In addition to these factors, financial issues; social links and relationships; environmental issues; and geographic proximity are considered influential in the decision-making process of students.

Maringe (2006) noted that financial costs and the availability of part time jobs for international students can be strong factors that influence behavior and decision-making process. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also made the same observation, stating that the possibility of working part-time could influence international students’ decision-making process, as it is one of the possible ways for them to finance their studies abroad.
Other influencing factors include a higher education institution, city or a nation’s image or reputation (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006). For instance, hundreds of thousands of international students would like to attend American universities because of the image of the U.S. as the superpower nation and the home of most of the best universities in the world. Some aspects that relate to the choice of destination include multicultural values, safety or security, international experience, good facilities, quality university environment, liberalized immigration processes, less restricted visa application, and good quality of life (Chen & Zimitat, 2006).

According to Engelke (2008), most international students choose universities that are committed to satisfying and addressing their needs and expectations. Student quality experience and satisfaction can serve as a living testimony to the institution’s commitment to quality education and student care (Price, Matzdorf, Smith & Agahi, 2003). When these international students graduate, they become university ambassadors and would be encouraged to share their experiences to prospective international students.

2.1.3.4 Availability of in-demand programs and courses

The availability of in-demand courses and programs and the presence of a wide range of choices is the most important factor that can influence international students’ decision-making process. However, this may be balanced by cost factors, especially when the student and his parents cannot afford very expensive tuition and school fees. Maringe’s (2006) research suggests that when choosing programs or courses, including which schools or universities to attend, international students put much stress on value for money. Part of their decision-making process includes career prospects, better return on investment, and a brighter future.
2.1.3.5  **Attractiveness of higher education abroad**

According to Counsell (2011), a personal desire to enhance their foreign language proficiency and better quality education encourage many Chinese students to attend foreign universities, preferably in the United Kingdom and the United States. Chinese students believe that colleges programs and degrees in the United Kingdom are better than the local programs being offered in most Chinese universities and colleges. For Taiwanese students, their decision to acquire higher education degrees in Australia was influenced by their individual perceptions and beliefs, while those who attended American schools were influenced by their peers and family members (Chen & Zimitat, 2006).

Chen and Zimitat (2006) thus conclude that for many Asian international students, the main motivations for choosing a college in the United States and Australia are related to improved job prospects; understanding of the Western culture; and to enhance their English skills and proficiency.

2.1.3.6  **International students’ personal motivations**

Apart from the cited influencing factors, there must be other aspects that can influence their behavior, perceptions, beliefs and decision-making processes. Ivy (2004) found that international students’ decision-making processes can also be influenced by ethnic origin and social background. For instance, Afro-Caribbean students were strongly motivated by their desire to secure a better jobs prospect, whereas Asian Indian students were greatly influenced by social factors (e.g., peers, society’s norms, economic condition, etc.) For Chinese students, one main motivation to study abroad is the country’s punitive one-child policy. Since many Chinese parents were only allowed one child, their desire is to provide their children
with quality education and thus a better future.

On the other hand, a study conducted by Mpianjira (2009) found that international students were usually influenced by their beliefs, perceptions and aspirations, such as the need to broaden personal experience, learn new cultures, better living. There are perceptions associated with higher quality education abroad; the need to achieve worldwide recognition; and higher credentials and status associated with studying in progressive countries. Competitive admission requirements in the home country; the inability to obtain a good place for a course chosen at home; and the personal desire to improve one’s English mastery and proficiency were also factors that influenced the decision to study abroad.

### 2.1.3.7 Influence of traditional information sources

International students who turn to traditional information sources may be influenced by a number of factors such as professors, friends, trusted advisors, relatives, and family members (Chen & Zimitat, 2006). According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2006), word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals are strong factors that can influence students’ decision-making processes. Although the final verdict is in the hands of the student involved, his decision may still be influenced by his parents, friends, family members and former teachers. In his study on Thai students choices of international education and families, Pimpa (2003) identified five family influences: financial support from the family might limit or expand the scope of a student’s country choice for study; information from any family member who used to study in Australia; family expectations from parents and siblings; competition among family members and to compare themselves with others in terms of academic achievement; and persuasion, in the form of parents trying to convince students to study abroad
because everyone else did it. Thai students are strongly influenced by their families’ financial support and expectations (Pimpa, 2003). Taiwanese student’s intentions to study in the USA are influenced mostly by family and peers (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). Education agents abroad play an increasingly important role in helping prospective international students choose where to study. Most students do their own research when deciding where to study, but many also gather information and advice from friends.

A British Council (2010) study indicates that prospective students appear to be making up their own minds with very low numbers citing family pressure.

2.1.4 Summary of the main factors influencing students’ decision-making

The Table 2.1 below presents a summary of the evidence-based factors that had an impact on international students’ decision-making approaches.

**Table 2.1: Summary of the main factors influencing students’ decision making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key factors identified from literature</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Country of study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to better local education</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better employment prospects</td>
<td>Chen &amp; Zimitat; Maringe, 2006; Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeking advice from agencies</td>
<td>Cheung, Yuen &amp; Cheng, 2011</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial factors</td>
<td>Pimpa, 2003; Maringe, 2006; Bodycott, 2009; Price, Matzdorf, Smith &amp; Agahi, 2003</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural factors</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Counsell, 2011; Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental and social factors</td>
<td>Chen, 2007</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations and influences</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Literature Review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from friends, families and former teachers</td>
<td>Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007; Pimpa, 2003; Chen, 2007 Chen &amp; Zimitat; Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>The U.K. Australia Canada Australia Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration factors and prospects</td>
<td>Maringe &amp; Soutar, 2002;</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign University’s quality and better facilities</td>
<td>Bodycott, 2009; Price, Matzdorf, Smith &amp; Agahi, 2003</td>
<td>Hong Kong The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign life experience</td>
<td>Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs of higher quality of foreign higher education system</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Chen &amp; Zimitat; Counsell, 2011</td>
<td>Australia Australia The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media marketing and promotional efforts</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002;</td>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In search for better quality of life</td>
<td>Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security and safety</td>
<td>Chen &amp; Zimitat; Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007; Chen, 2007 Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>Australia The U.K. Canada Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching credentials, qualification and reputation</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Maringe, 2006</td>
<td>Australia The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student satisfaction</td>
<td>Price, Matzdorf, Smith &amp; Agahi, 2003</td>
<td>The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common language and the chance to improve English skills and proficiency</td>
<td>Chen &amp; Zimitat; Bodycott, 2009; Counsell, 2011</td>
<td>Australia Hong Kong The U.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic nearness of the destination</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Bodycott, 2009</td>
<td>Australia Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education institution’s reputation for quality</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Bodycott, 2009; Maringe, 2006; Cubillo et al, 2006</td>
<td>Australia Hong Kong The U.K. Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of a wide range of courses and programs</td>
<td>Mazzarol &amp; Soutar, 2002; Maringe, 2006; Pimpa, 2003;</td>
<td>Australia The U.K. Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University environment</td>
<td>Price, Matzdorf, Smith &amp; Agahi, 2003; Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007; Bodycott, 2009;</td>
<td>The U.K. The U.K. Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy, liberalized visa application</td>
<td>Cubillo et al, 2006; Maringe &amp; Carter, 2007;</td>
<td>Spain The U.K.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.2 University Choice & Decision-making: Definition & Theoretical models

2.2.1 Definition

Decision-making is defined as "the act of choosing one alternative from a set of alternatives" (Griffin, 2007, p. 96). This, however, is not the definition of decision-making process, which is broader in scope and context. Thus, Griffin (2007) states decision-making process "includes recognizing and defining the nature of a decision situation, identifying alternatives, choosing the best alternative, and putting it into practice." This definition is highly applicable to the context of higher education. Maringe and Carter (2007), on the other hand, define decision-making as a complicated process that requires and entails numerous, often elevated phases undertaken by a student who plans to attend college. As Hanson (2005) states, the main goal of decision-making process is to make a final decision or choice between an array of available or alternative options.

Over the years, the university and course decision-making process has been influenced by many attributes at the pre-search and search stages. Traditional information sources such as brochures, education exhibitions, websites, parent, friend and peer influence have been dominant. The advent of social media now presents another information source for university and course choice and decision-making in a different way – through collaborating, communicating and through community interaction. The theoretical models presented in the next section explore the origins and developments of the decision-making process.
2.2.2 Theoretical Models

Several theoretical models describe the factors that influence student’s intention to further their study at a specific university. Although these models may have been formulated many years ago, preceding the Internet era, they are still valid in the context of and as a basis to explore the evolution of factors influencing decision-making. For instance, the characteristics described in Hanson & Litten’s (1984) Model of College Choice are also mentioned in recent studies by Chen & Zimitat (2006), Mazzarol & Soutar (2006) and Pimpa (2003). The conceptual approaches that describe the college choice process and factors that lead students to their college choice can be found in three models (Hossler et al, 1989): Economic models; Sociological models; and Combined models.

2.2.2.1 Economic Models

Economic models emphasise choice between enrolment in a college or university and the pursuit of a non-collegiate alternative. Economists are interested in the relationships between the attributes of “goods” (e.g. college and job characteristics) and individual choices (Jackson, 1982). Generic research indicates that individuals will select a particular college or university if the benefits of attending outweigh the perceived benefits of attending a non-college alternative (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985). Economic models also emphasize the rational decision-making process of students and their families and the variety of ways in which different student’s rate and use the college attributes to make their final college choice (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999).

Jackson's (1982) model proposes that students' college choices involve three stages. In the preference stage, a student's educational aspirations and attitudes about
college enrolment, is shaped by his or her level of academic achievement, family background and social context (e.g., the influence of peers, neighbourhood, and school). In the exclusion stage, the student goes through a process of eliminating some institutions from the prospective list. Tuition fees, location, and academic quality are among the factors that may be considered in eliminating higher education institutions. Finally, in the evaluation stage, students are faced with a choice set of institutions before they make their final choice.

**Figure 2.3: Economic model of college choice**

![Economic model of college choice](image)

*Source: Jackson (1982)*

### 2.2.2.2 Sociological Models

Sociological models were developed from educational and status attainment research, focusing on the aspirations of individuals desiring to pursue a Higher Education Institution. These models specify a variety of social and individual factors leading to a student’s occupational and educational aspirations (Jackson, 1982). Sociological models of college choice (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985) have
focused on the identification and interrelationship of factors including parental encouragement (Sewell & Shah, 1978), influence of significant others (Chapman, 1981) and academic performance (Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969) as indicators of enrolment in universities. Chapman’s (1981) model of student choice focused on the characteristics of prospective student & student’s family) and the characteristics of his/her college, which he identifies as cost, location, and availability of the program. More importantly it identifies influencers in the decision making process - the school counsellor, teachers, friends, and parents.

**Figure 2.4: Sociological model of college choice**

![Sociological model of college choice](source)

*Source: Chapman (1984)*

### 2.2.2.3 Combined Models

Combined models utilize the most powerful indicators in the decision-making process from the economic and social models, providing a conceptual framework that predicts the effects of policy-making interventions (Hossler et al, 1985). Various types of combined models contain multiple stages of the college choice process with
two general categories of combined models: a three-stage model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982; Hanson & Litten, 1982) and a multi-stage model typically containing between five and seven stages (Litten, 1982; Chapman, 1984). Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three phase model emphasizes aspiration, search, and choice. The major differences between the models are the descriptions of the intervening variables or characteristics and how they define institution activity to encourage student enrolment (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1985).

There are few established combination models that investigated the factors that seem to determine students’ intentions to study at an HEI. Chapman (1981) presented the first well constructed theoretical frameworks incorporating various aspects of the affecting students’ intention to study at a HEI relevant to this study. Similar to the models of Chapman (1986) and Jackson (1982), Hanson & Litten (1982) also view the choice of higher education institutions as a longer process that is divided into three stages: Deciding to go to College; Investigating Colleges; Application, Admission & Acceptance. The uniqueness of this model is that they categorized all determinants of choice which appeared in previous studies into their model and assigned each of categories of determinants to the specific stages of the model. Compared to Chapman’s institution-based model and Jackson’s student-based models, Hanson & Litten’s model is a hybrid between the two (Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007) as it incorporates student characteristics, personal attributes, environmental attributes and college characteristics and actions.
2.2.2.4 Model of International Students’ Preferences

Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, (2006) established a number of factors that are key in the university decision-making process of prospective students. These include personal reasons, country image, city effect, and institution image and program evaluation. Among the personal reasons are advice on the course suitability, prospects of personal improvement such as flexibility of the course to allow study and working concurrently and the ethnocentrism of the program to accommodate persons with multicultural backgrounds. The country image effects relate to cultural fitness of studying at a selected University and hindrances that will prevent or delay their graduation achievements. Students also like to understand the country social and university academic reputations and socio-economic status, all of which add to the prestige of their university choice and possibly enhance their employment
prospects. Another decision factor before enrolling in a University is the city effect which relates to city image, cost of living and environment. Essentially, the student would like to know all about the city and in tandem with that, the subsistence cost while undertaking a university study. Most Students may survive on educational loans and grants and as such their finances are limited. The city effect is where there study is not hindered by surrounding activities of the city. This is because such disturbances are a nuisance and prevent maximum goal achievement. The environment aspects include weather factors and other physical planning and municipal issues (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006).

Institutional or university image and annual ranking of universities are possibly key factors in employers tend to reward graduates or employees who have been through such reputable institutions. Timeliness and quality of communication is of importance to students in the search and decision-making stage as prospective students would be eager to receive information during their search process and also after they enroll. Students would also like to see or view facilities of the University. Facilities would not necessarily be limited to teaching and learning but also other areas such as sports & recreation, accommodation, cafeteria, etc. According to the Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino (2006) decision-making model, the University’s programme evaluation strategy is an issue which international students seek prior understanding before enrolling. International students seek to establish the best University program for specialisation according to the career aspirations and dreams. The final issue of program evaluation is the cost and financial options. Most international students would like to establish overall costs such as university fees and other ancillary fees and whether the institution offers scholarships (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006).
Figure 2.6 Model of international students’ preferences


2.3 University choice & Decision-making

The five components of the college selection process model describe the stages through which students move along the path toward the ultimate selection of a college. The stages are identified as follows: Pre-Search Behavior; Search Behavior; Application Decision; Choice Decision; and, Matriculation Decision (Chapman, 1986). The premise upon which this model is based is that college selection consists of search and choice components. Thus, it is important to define clearly the terms "search" and "choice" as used throughout this modelling effort.

Search refers to searching for the attribute values which characterize colleges. Relevant college attributes might include cost, academic quality, future career prospects and opportunities (upon graduation), quality of life while a student at the
college, and related considerations that might be of interest to students in the ultimate college choice decision. The search phase concludes with the application decision, when a student decides on the set of colleges to which formal applications for admission will be submitted. Some search activity is inevitable during the choice phase as well. Choice refers to choosing among the colleges which have admitted a student. Search and choice are distinct but interrelated phases of the college selection process. However, it is useful to recognize the distinctiveness of these two stages in analysing student behaviour because different considerations arise at the search and choice stages.

A detailed description of each of the stages of the college selection process follows.

**2.3.1 Pre-Search**

Pre-search behavior begins when a student first recognizes the possible need and desirability of a college-level education. Parental influences may lead to such a realization on the part of the student well before the high school years. Thus, the pre-search stage may be much extended, covering many years. This length of time plus the difficulty in assessing when pre-search behavior actually first begins make this stage of the college selection process the most difficult to research. Pre-search activities presumably involve an assessment of the costs and benefits associated with attending college in general (and perhaps certain college types, in particular), plus a corresponding assessment of the costs and benefits of alternative non-college post-high school options.
Given the recognition of the possible need for a college-level education, a student implicitly and perhaps continuously scans a range of possible information sources to learn about the availability of information sources, their content, and some information about various college options and perhaps even specific colleges. Research on pre-search behavior would focus primarily on the college-going decision of students: the decision of whether higher education should be pursued at all. The subsequent stage in the college selection process, search, addresses issues related to the initial phases of choosing a particular college option. College-going behavior might be studied by examining higher education participation rates of various market sub-groups. A range of demographic variables (for example, parental education and income levels, socioeconomic status, gender, ethnic group membership, religious affiliation, and the like) might be useful predictors of college-going behavior. However, empirical evidence in the marketing segmentation area suggests that other things -- such as personal attitudes and values toward higher education correlates - would be even stronger predictors of college-going tendencies.

Due to the difficulty in assessing when pre-search begins, research on pre-search may be limited to attempting to measure the extent to which factors such as family circumstances, lifestyle, personal values, and culture influence subsequent stages of the college selection process. The assumption that these fundamental determinants of college selection behavior are exogenously determined for the purposes of studying the rest of the college selection process implies that they are beyond the immediate influence of any particular college.
2.3.2 Search

For a student to reach the search behavior phase of the college selection process, the pursuit of a college-level education must have been concluded to be a viable and desirable step. Search behavior presumably begins in earnest sometime during a student's high school years. The search behavior stage is characterized by extensive and active acquisition of information about possible college alternatives. Knowledgeable "others" are presumably consulted with great frequency and in depth. Knowledgeable "others" might include high school teachers, high school counselors, family members and relatives, family friends, college alumni, and acquaintances attending particular colleges. Students typically write to a number of colleges to request descriptive information, such as college catalogs and relevant brochures. Students receive unsolicited direct mail from individual colleges. Some actual visits to colleges occur.

The search phase involves active search, rather than the relatively passive search-related activities that might be found in most consumer nondurable goods settings. College selection is an important milestone in a student's life, and extensive high-involvement search efforts are to be expected. It is postulated that information search efforts are directed toward determining the attributes possessed by various college alternatives. Students are presumably interested in learning about a college's costs and benefits. Among the relevant benefits are the college's academic dimensions, future career prospects and opportunities (upon graduation), and its quality of life. Chapman and Litten (1984) describe these as consumption and investment benefits. A variety of information sources are tapped by students so that they may form a belief about what life would be like at specific colleges. A
potentially wide range of college alternatives are presumably examined during the search phase, although the number of colleges given serious consideration may be only a relative handful.

Search may also entail learning about and identifying the "right" attributes to consider. (The "right" attributes are not expected to be the same for all students, although some attributes are likely to be commonly seen as relevant to many students.) This possibility introduces considerable complexity into efforts to model the college selection process.

Thus, the search stage involves considerable complexity for the student -- extensive (generating college alternatives) and intensive (assessing where specific colleges lie in an attribute-space sense) search efforts are required (Chapman and Litten, 1984), as well as efforts directed to identifying the salient attributes. At some point, search stops and the student chooses a set of colleges to which applications are to be submitted. Search terminates presumably because the cost of further search (in terms of time, money, and effort) is not thought to materially reduce the uncertainty with regard to where the colleges' attributes really lie, or to identify any significantly more promising college alternatives than are already known to the student.

2.3.3 Application Decision

Search behavior ends when a student decides to apply to a set of colleges. By definition, the application set consists of those colleges to which a student submits an application for admission. At this point, the pursuit of a college-level education is serious and the number of college alternatives has been narrowed down to a few. Students are most likely to apply to colleges in which they are interested and to
which they are likely to be admitted. Thus, a student's expectations as to the probability of admission are relevant here. In addition, it is presumed that only colleges viewed as being at least minimally acceptable on all major dimensions are included in the application set.

The notion of a "safe" or "backup" college merits special attention. Students may apply to a fairly low preference but perceived high-probability-of-admission college (often the local public institution) just to ensure that at least one positive admission decision is forthcoming. After a student submits applications, the colleges must then make their admissions and financial aid decisions. Subsequently, the outcome of these decisions must be communicated to the students:

2.3.4 Choice Decision

By definition, the choice set consists of all those colleges to which a student is admitted. Note that this is another point where some uncertainty enters into the college selection process - namely, the uncertainty with regard to whether a student will be admitted to a college. Students may form expectations about the probability of admission to particular colleges, but they cannot be certain of admission. This is especially true for selective colleges where the number of applications from minimally qualified students may exceed the number of available freshmen slots by factors of two to five. Indeed, some highly selective colleges receive more applications from straight-A students than there are available slots!

At the choice decision phase, the student is presumed to possess relatively complete information on all relevant college attributes, since the student is informed of the availability of financial aid amounts and mix (the allocation of financial aid
between grants/scholarships, loans, and part-time jobs). Search activity during this stage is intensive only, being concerned with improving a student's information stockpile as to where the colleges in the choice set lie in an attribute-space sense.

The choice process presumably involves a trade-off among the multi-attribute college alternatives in the choice set. The need for trade-offs exist because any single college may not be dominant on each of the students relevant attributes. Also, the homogenizing nature of the application decision -- which suggests that all colleges to which applications are submitted must be judged (implicitly, at least) to be minimally satisfactory on all major dimensions -- suggests that modelling the student decision maker as weighing the relative merits of each college alternative, in a compensatory fashion, would be a reasonable approach. The choice decision phase normally ends with the selection of a specific college to attend. However, some students will end the choice decision stage by deciding to defer admission to a later time, perhaps because the student was not admitted to a highly preferred first choice college, or because financial considerations or some other change (since the application decision stage) in the student's personal life makes it impossible to pursue a college education at this point in time.

Existing published research on the college selection process has focused largely on the college choice stage. Major studies of college choice behavior include Chapman (1984, 1986), Manski and Wise (1983).

While less plentiful, some empirical research exists in the other areas, although it primarily focuses on student demographics as determinants of behavior. In the pre-search area, studies of college-going behavior based on students' demographic backgrounds are relatively numerous. For example, Manski and Wise
(1983), and Radner and Miller (1975). In the search behavior area, Litten and Brodigan (1982) cite the sources of information that students report they use.

2.4 Marketing – Theoretical foundations

From the 1980s, emerged a number of disciplines which continue to influence present-day marketing strategies and practices. A significant development during this period was the focus on marketing as a service (Gronroos, 1984; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1985) and a relationship process (Gummesson 2002; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Social marketing and services marketing emerged (the adaptation of marketing to social change) within the period from 1980-2000. Relationship marketing emerged in the 80’s while the influence of the Internet manifested in direct marketing and viral marketing in the 90’s and; permission and e-mail marketing in the 2000’s. The Internet has and continues to play an influential role in marketing as an information source, communication channel, transaction facilitator and distribution tool. Since the 70’s, technology developments initially resided alongside relationships and subsequently used as a primary tool in relationship marketing, as reflected in database marketing (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 1995); customer relationship management (CRM and e-commerce) and to the present time strongly influenced by social media.

Therefore the development of marketing thought and marketing theory suggests that marketing has been in a state of flux since the very beginning, adapting to changing business conditions and the external environment. That in turn led to the introduction of influential marketing concepts such as relationships, community, collaboration and engagement that have become a hallmark of the interactions between organisations, universities and their customers.
2.5 Traditional University Marketing & Recruitment Methods

Universities use a variety of marketing methods to attract and recruit students. These include media advertising (for e.g. print and broadcast), outreach activities (for e.g. school visits), exhibitions & road shows, recruitment agents as well as public relations activities. A key characteristic of these long-established methods is the ‘human touch’ or ‘face-to-face contact’ with prospective students. The Internet influence subsequently led to universities developing websites for marketing and recruitment of students. These methods could be termed as traditional marketing methods.

2.5.1 Print media, mass media & publicity

Conventional marketing methods employed by Universities are well documented in academic literature. Wernick (1991) highlighted the use of advertising and publicity methods by universities. Demiray et al (2007) highlighted the use of print material, advertisements, brochures and word-of-mouth communication, education fairs marketing initiatives by universities in Turkey and Australia. These conventional methods are still widely used by universities worldwide to reach out to their stakeholders – both domestic and international.

2.5.2 Technology & Web Influence

The emergence of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) in the period of mid-to-late 1990’s (Fjermestad & Romano, 2002), provided a customer relationship dimension to university marketing. The shift towards customer focus began from the 80’s and onwards and it was not until the 90’s that the first of the many CRM applications began to appear in the marketplace.
CRM has been purposefully used for marketing and enrolment by a number of universities. The University of Southern Hemisphere (USH) implementation was in response to competition and to find a new way to convert international student enquiries to enrolments. GMU (George Mason Univ.) targeted prospective students on an invitation basis; i.e., schools maintain databases on professionals or highly qualified prospects that may be interested in a particular field of study. These targeted contacts are mailed brochures, curricula, and other basic information to enhance their interest in GMU. (Wen-Bin Cheng, Gulledge, 2003).

Therefore it is evident from existing research and observations that university marketing methods have evolved over time. Despite the evolution to technology based marketing, conventional marketing methods continue to be used for student recruitment. It is also evident that universities have adopted technology based marketing at various stages over time.

The influence of web-sites and portals is not limited to reach alone, but also extends to the marketing approach of universities, changing them to become service-oriented (Strauss, 2002), exercising strong influence on marketing methods (Callahan, 2005), evolving from being mere information providers to being more customer and market focused (Astani, 2003, McCredie, 2002).

University websites have become ‘internationalised’ as a result - a tool to reach out to international students and as a source for education opportunities (Adams, Banks, 2002; Gomes, Forrest, J., & Forrest, E., 2001). Instantaneous access of promotional material globally and appeal of the Internet to domestic and international students are some of the other reasons.
In addition to university websites, country and regional education portals have also emerged, primarily to compete as ‘regional centres of education excellence’ while complementing the marketing and publicity efforts of universities – IDP (www.idp.com.au) and AEI (Australia), British Council (United Kingdom), MACEE (USA), New Zealand (Education NZ). They exist as independent offices or as part of a consular office.

2.6 Social Media types and features

Since the development and introduction of Social media technology, social media has increasingly transformed the way people, industries, firms and universities conduct their business and relay information (Qualman, 2010). Facebook has become the world's most popular social network with over 1 billion users with prolific users in many countries as listed in Table 2.2. In addition, the Facebook demographics in Figure 2.7 also indicate nearly half of Facebook users (46%) are those of school going age and teenagers. For universities with a presence on social media, this suggests that they would need to optimise their Facebook social media marketing strategies in order to reach out to more prospective international students.

Table 2.2: Countries with the largest number of Facebook users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>No. of Facebook users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>159,646,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>70,486,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>63,820,860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>48,234,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>41,976,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>32,845,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>31,195,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>30,579,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>25,400,060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>25,043,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In 2011, it was found that more than 200 million users accessed Facebook via mobile device each day. This shows the increasing use of mobile devices to access social media sites, which also include Twitter and YouTube. Facebook users who accessed the site using mobile gadgets were also more active compared to non-mobile users. In terms of Facebook users by age, those aged 18 to 25 are the most active users, as they represent 25.8 percent of the total Facebook population. Facebook users aged 26 to 34 comprise 26.1 percent of the social network site's total users, while users aged 13 to 17 represent 20.6 percent (SocialMediaToday, 2011).
2.6.1 Social media types

In addition to Facebook, there are a number of popular social media sites. The features of these social media sites are described below:

1) **Facebook** ([http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Facebook](http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Facebook))

Facebook is a popular free social networking website that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues. Members can create a personal profile and Groups which allows members who have common interests to find each other and interact. Within each member's personal profile, there are several key networking components. The most popular is arguably the Wall, which is essentially a virtual bulletin board. Messages left on a member's Wall can be text, video or photos. Another popular component is the virtual Photo Album. Photos can be uploaded from the desktop or directly from a smart phone camera. Another popular profile component is status updates, a microblogging feature that allows members to broadcast short Twitter-like announcements to their friends. All interactions are published in a news feed, which is distributed in real-time to the member's friends.

Facebook is also popular as a marketing channel. The Marketplace feature allows members to post read and respond to classified ads. Events allows members to publicise an event, invite guests and track who plans to attend and Pages allows members to create and promote a public page built around a specific topic.

2) **Twitter** ([http://tweeternet.com/](http://tweeternet.com/))

Twitter is a social networking and microblogging service that allows you answer the question, "*What are you doing?*" by sending short text messages.
characters in length, called "tweets", to your friends, or "followers." Twitter’s uniqueness is the use of a hashtag preceding the topic of interest or discussion or event, for example, #social media. The short format of the tweet is a defining characteristic of the service, allowing informal collaboration and quick information sharing. Twittering is also a less gated method of communication: you can share information with people that you wouldn't normally exchange email or IM messages with, opening up your circle of contacts to an ever-growing community of like-minded people.

Tweets are sent using the Twitter website directly, as a single SMS alert, or via a third-party application such as Twitterfox add-on for Firefox. Tweets are displayed on a users profile page, on the home page of each of the user’s followers, and in the Twitter public timeline. Twitter has many uses for both personal and business use. It's a great way to keep in touch with friends and quickly broadcast information about where you are and what you're up to. For example, "I'm downtown and aching for some sushi. Anyone like to join me?" For business, Twitter can be used to broadcast a company's latest news and blog posts, interact with customers, or to enable easy internal collaboration and group communication.

3) LinkedIn (http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/LinkedIn)

LinkedIn is a social networking site designed to build one’s professional identity online and stay in touch with colleagues and classmates; discover professional opportunities, business deals, and new ventures; and get the latest news, inspiration, and insights.

A LinkedIn member’s profile page, which emphasizes employment history and education, has professional network news feeds and a limited number of
customizable modules. Basic membership for LinkedIn is free. Network members are called “connections.” Unlike other free social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, LinkedIn requires connections to have a pre-existing relationship.

With basic membership, a member can only establish connections with someone he has worked with, knows professionally (online or offline) or has gone to school with. Connections up to three degrees away are seen as part of the member's network, but the member is not allowed to contact them through LinkedIn without an introduction. Premium subscriptions can be purchased to provide members with better access to contacts in the LinkedIn database.


YouTube is a website designed for sharing video clips. Video files can be very large and are often too big to send to someone else by email. By posting a video on YouTube, a video can be shared by simply by sending the other person a url ‘link’ – that is, the 'address' of the relevant internet page. Viewers and users can comment on and rate movies or other clips.

When YouTube was created, it was intended for people to post and share original video content. But since then it has also become both an archive for storing favourite clips and songs and jokes, as increasingly as a marketing site for companies to promote their products and services.

Nowadays the term ‘viral video’ is common. This refers to a video clip that people have liked so much that they've shared its link by email with millions of others around the globe – in effect, it's spread like a virus. Companies have realised
that they can harness this ability to reach potential customers and have created their own YouTube accounts for posting advertisements and other marketing videos.

5) **Google+** ([http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Google-plus](http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Google-plus))

Google+ is a Google social networking project. The Google+ design team sought to replicate the way people interact offline more closely than is the case in other social networking services, such as Facebook and Twitter. The project’s slogan is “Real-life sharing rethought for the web.” The key features of Google+ are Circles and Hangouts. Circles are like categories for connections, to share updates selectively with different groups. Examples of such groups might include family, friends, office colleagues and people that you share a particular interest with. Circles may be discrete or have overlap, so that, for example, someone you work with who’s also in your book club will get updates for both groups. Users outside a circle can see a list of member names but not the name of the circle. Hangouts are an option for video chat for up to 10 people at any given time. Google’s emphasis is on creating the kind of space that replicates casual ad-hoc gatherings in the real world.

Google+ users can discuss topics with others through the Spark feature. The interface is an adaptation of Google search. Google describes it as: “The friends you have are the ones that allow you to geek out about what you are absolutely passionate about… and they have enough of a commonality to let you explore it.” Huddle is an option for text message group chats, for Android, iPhone and SMS devices. Pictures and videos taken can be uploaded to a private photo album through the Instant Upload feature. Users can then decide whether to share them and which circles to share them with. Streams are similar to Facebook news updates but the user can see updates for particular circles rather than updates for everyone at once. Google+ is
integrated with other Google applications, such as Gmail, Google Maps and Google Calendar.

6) **MySpace.com** (http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/MySpace)

Originally founded as a venue for aspiring musicians and bands to share music and concert dates, MySpace has grown into a complex site where users can create profiles, including photographs, blogs, and music or movie preferences. Other features of the site include chat rooms, forums, classified ads, newsgroups and a venue for sharing videos or music. Each user can choose to invite friends to create profiles or link to existing ones, creating a social network that can be exponentially expanded as users with similar tastes, interests or shared friends are discovered and added.

7) **Pinterest** (http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/P/pinterest.html)

Pinterest lets people categorise and share images and videos from their own personal media collection or from websites they visit. The site’s name is a combination of the words “pin” and “interest.” Pinterest categories include architecture, art, DIY and crafts, fashion, food and drink, home décor, science and travel. (http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Pinterest).

**Pinterest** uses a system of "boards" which is a collection of photos on any topic you choose to pin about. On the Pinterest website the word pin is used to mean *any image added to Pinterest*, while the word board means *a set of pins*. Pinterest requires brief descriptions but the main focus of the site is visual. Clicking on an image will take you to the original source, so, for example, if you click on a picture of a pair of shoes, you might be taken to a site where you can purchase them.
An image of blueberry pancakes might take you to the recipe; a picture of a whimsical birdhouse might take you to the instructions. Users can browse or search for image content and can follow the boards of other users and can “like” or repin other users’ pins.

You can follow boards when you find one that is of interest and be notified when it's updated. You will also receive a notification when another Pinterest user "repins" from your board.

8) **Instagram**  

The name Instagram comes from a combination of the words “instant” and “telegram”. This social media site challenges the assumption that taking interesting photos required a big bulky camera and a couple years of art school. Instagram facilitates the sharing of images and photos on multiple platforms and services seamlessly. Image filters transform photos into professional-looking snapshots. In addition, uploading is made fast and efficient. Photos can be shared on Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter and Foursquare. Many ‘selfies’ or self portrait shots are shared via Instagram. On Instagram, you can follow other users' photo streams as they post them and you can be followed back by those users (or other users) as well. Using the "Profile" icon located on the lower menu of the Instagram screen, you can search for friends by name or find friends that are already connected to you on other social networks like Facebook or Twitter.

When you decide to follow a user, that user's Instagram photos will appear in your feed, which can be found under the "Feed" icon on the lower menu. You can press "Like" on any photo to let someone know that you admire their photography, or
you can leave a comment. Instagram is not just a photo app. It's also a popular social network. When you take photos using the Instagram app, they will always appear in the feeds of the users who are following you. You can browse through the "Explore" tab to find new users to follow and creative photos to look at.

9) **Flickr** (https://www.flickr.com/about)

Flickr enables people to make their photos available to people who matter to them. This includes a blog of moments captured on their camera phone, or maybe they want to show off their best pictures or video to the whole world in a bid for web celebrity. Or maybe they want to securely and privately share photos of their kids with their family across the country.

Flickr’s aim is to get photos and video into and out of the system in as many ways as possible: from the web, from mobile devices, from the users' home computers and from whatever software they are using to manage their content. More importantly Flickr is a social media platform that pushes these photos and videos in as many ways as possible: on the Flickr website, in RSS feeds, by email, by posting to outside blogs.

Flickr makes the process of organizing photos or videos collaborative. In Flickr, you can give your friends, family, and other contacts permission to organize your stuff - not just to add comments, but also notes and tags.

### 2.6.2 Social media features

O’Reilly (as cited by Cooke & Buckley, 2008, p.277), defines Social media as an “architecture of participation” where “individuals collaborate and publish information online” while Webb (2004, as cited by Cooke &Buckley, 2008, p. 280)
similarly identifies the key attributes of Social media as: identity, presence, conversations, relationship building, sharing and reputation (Thomson, 2008).

### 2.6.2.1 Engagement

Bowden (2009) and Heath (2007) cite the emergence of customer engagement in their marketing literature. Engagement occurs at individual and/or context specific levels with particular objects, such as brands (Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009), products or organisations (Patterson, Yu, & DeRuyter, 2006). Bowden’s (2009: 65) definition of customer engagement is focused on customer loyalty as “a psychological process” for new customers of a service brand and of maintaining long-term loyalty. Patterson et al. (2006) define engagement as the level of a customer’s physical, cognitive and emotional presence in their relationship with a service organisation. Engagement is acknowledged as a potentially highly context-specific variable that may impact on consumer choice (Heath, 2007) in relation to particular engagement objects such as brands, products or organisations (Patterson, Yu, & DeRuyter, 2006).

Online customer engagement is a recent social phenomenon spurred initially by the Internet and now by social media. The proliferation of online engagement is evident in the numerous online communities and exchanges such as blogs, groups and social media. In particular, engagement has gained tremendous momentum through social networks and microblogging sites such as Facebook and Twitter. The ‘population’ of these communities are in the region of tens of millions and growing. Thus customer engagement is occurring not only on traditional product focused communities, but even more communities that serve as meeting or networking places.
2.6.2.2 **Collaboration**

Collaboration is defined as a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work together toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results (Chrislip, & Larson, 1994, p.5). In the online world however, relationships take on different dimensions (Kim, H, Kim, G., Park, & Rice, 2007).

A fundamental impact of the use of Internet and web-based technologies are the communication modes and mechanisms amongst users. Thus communication and relationships are independent of geographic distance (Katz & Rice, 2002; Wellman & Gulia, 1999), complement traditional communication modes (Johnson-Smaragdi, 2001; Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2006), foster “connected presence” (Licoppe & Smoreda, 2005) and “communicative readiness” (Nardi, 2005). All of these exert influence on media choices and uses amongst different users (Nardi, 2005; Wei & Lo, 2006).

Independent studies highlight the influences: teenagers use of email for communicating with "adults" and institutions, transmitting lengthy and detailed information to many others, instant messaging for day-to-day conversations with a range of friends (Lenhart, Madden & Hitlin, 2005); instant messaging for social use amongst 13-18 year olds (Boneva, Quinn, Kraut, Kiesler, and Shklovski 2006); maintain and extend their social networks (amongst Finnish teenagers) (Oksman & Turtianen, 2004); maintaining existing relationships through email and IM (Cummings, Lee and Kraut, 2006).

In their seminal work, Tapscott & Williams (2006) use the term ‘Wikinomics’ to extend the current understanding of the collaboration phenomenon.
The ‘mass collaboration’ revolution is causing change & disruption and introducing new and novel methods of doing business. Participants of this revolution termed “prosumers” participate in vociferous dialogue and debate (“blogosphere”) and collaborate across organisational boundaries (“wiki workplace”). Wikinomics is thus seen as ‘the new art and science of collaboration’ and eventually influences and displaces company structure (Tapscott, & Williams, 2006).

Wikinomics incorporates openness, peering, sharing and acting globally (Tapscott, & Williams, 2006). It replaces the protective nature of companies spurring innovation (Goldcorp); encourages value creation through “peer production” or “peering” (Linux, MySpace, YouTube); allows a mass of individuals and groups to co create products & access markets through “new low-cost collaborative infrastructures” (P&G); and spurs new “weapons of mass collaboration” (Skype). More recently, the Social media and social media phenomenon is driving mass collaboration and comes at very little or no cost to organisations, small businesses and individuals.

Therefore Tapscott & Williams (2006) suggest that future of companies lies in the hands of the uberc onnected, amorphous mass of self-organized individuals, driven by peer production and mass collaboration. These are the foundations of the current new, influential wave of social media and social networks which work on mass and peer collaboration.

2.6.2.3 Communities

Communities and exchanges have proliferated as a result of the phenomena associated with collaboration and engagement. In this context, customer-to-customer
exchanges have become an increasingly influential component that companies (and universities) cannot choose to ignore.

For example, customer-to-customer (C2C) know-how exchanges occur in a variety of contexts, including virtual environments of the Internet. Gruen (2005) explains C2C exchanges through a model that draws upon the MOA (motivation, opportunity, ability) theory. Given the influence of communities, the model focuses on the maintenance and enhancement of a community that can provide customer value in addition to that directly provided by the marketing organisation through their product offering.

Communities and exchanges have also proliferated as a result of the Internet. McAlexander et al (2002) highlight the value created through C2C exchanges through the creation of brand communities in the automobile industry (Jeep and Harley Davidson). Communities and exchanges also exist in internet customer communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Kozinets, 2002).

2.6.2.4 Virtual platforms and online communities

With the use of social media channels such as virtual fairs, virtual tours and exhibits, higher education institutions may not only save resources and money for more important functions and purposes, they may also reach as many prospective students as they can. The use of Facebook and Twitter, for example, can guarantee 24-hour connectivity with prospective students, and they are also very accessible. Facebook also allows prospective students to ask questions and post feedback.

One of the organisations that offers recruitment services to colleges and universities and provides information to international students who want to study
abroad is EducationUSA (2013). Every year this organisation provides international
students with accurate, updated and professional information about American
colleges and universities. It also organizes virtual fairs, providing colleges and
universities access to a virtual web-conference environment where they can connect
with international students through online Q&A sessions and online presentations.

Many universities now offer multiple virtual tours by simply visiting their official
websites. This system allows prospective students to view great videos and
photography about the institution’s facilities, environment, classrooms, gymnasium,
programs, and library, among others. Among American universities that have the
most appealing design features, videos and photographs include the following:

- Carnegie Mellon University: http://www.cmu.edu/tour/
- Baylor University- http://www.baylor.edu/virtualtour/
- Rice University- http://www.rice.edu/virtualtours/
- University of Miami- http://www6.miami.edu/marcom/tour/
- San Diego State University- http://arweb.sdsu.edu/es/virtualtour/
- John Hopkins University- http://apply.jhu.edu/visit/tour.html
- University of Notre Dame- http://tour.nd.edu/
- Washington State University- http://virtual-tour.wsu.edu/
• Dickenson College- [http://tour.dickinson.edu/](http://tour.dickinson.edu/)

**Figure 2.9: Dickinson College virtual tour**

[Image of Dickinson College virtual tour]

• Brown University- [http://students.brown.edu/bruin/vtour/](http://students.brown.edu/bruin/vtour/)

**Figure 2.10: Brown University virtual tour**

[Image of Brown University virtual tour]

Another online advisor that provides information to both higher education institutions and international students is [WESStudentAdvisor.org](http://WESStudentAdvisor.org). This organisation provides free and accurate information by enabling college admission agents and
students to meet with prospective international students. To further inform prospective international students about tips and things they need to know about the host country and schools they want to attend to, this online advisor also features blogs by both experts and current students.

Another effective connecting tool for prospective international students is the use of virtual videos and promotional video campaigns to further help them appreciate campus life abroad and encourage more reliable expectations. According to Choudaha (2013), such promotional campus videos, which may be posted on YouTube and on the university website, provide a highly convincing communication and virtual platform to prospective enrollees. This recruitment technique now becomes even more effective and important with the expanding use of mobile gadgets, tablets and browsing devices.

It is also important and advisable for universities to maintain open online forums where students can discuss about any issues and which encourage students to share their views and opinions. This communication channel will inform prospective issues that the institution values free market of ideas, student empowerment, and student participation. The presence and availability of online campus communities will also provide additional information to prospective international students seeking more detailed and personalized information from university students, parents, alumni and other stakeholders.

Examples of social media in building virtual platforms for higher education institutions are as follows:

- International Student Forum: online discussions and message boards (http://www.internationalstudentforum.com/)
• WESStudentAdvisor.org/EducationUSA – webinar based blog

• International Student Online: application and student centre (http://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/application-process/)

• Virtual Fair (http://bit.ly/XB6CD7)

• GMatch MBA Virtual Fair (http://bit.ly/9mNf1n)


• UMN International Student Ambassadors Blogs (http://bit.ly/15xZagG)

• Australian Catholic University International Student Blogs (http://bit.ly/oShmoM)

• The International Experience at Dartmouth Youtube (http://bit.ly/qSda4H)

2.6.3 Strategic benefits of social media

Most previous studies have focused on the use and value of social media marketing in business organisations and industries. Only a few research dwelled into the use of social media marketing in the context of higher education recruitment. Without a doubt the continued growth of international student enrolment and mobility can be attributed to social media development and globalization. The internationalization of high education, which led to increased international student mobility, is merely the effect certain global factors, such as the continued economic and political integration of nations, globalization, liberalization of immigration policies, and information and technology developments. While it is already a widely known fact that the globalization of higher education is no longer a new
phenomenon, its degree and limits have been gradually expanding to encompass a widening understanding that "internationalization is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility" (Hudzik, 2011).

Effective internationalization in higher education indeed requires the right ideas and comprehensive approach. Internationalization is a highly complex process that does not only demand the effective use of social medial marketing and recruitment tools; ever more, it requires the adoption of realistic, practical and efficient approaches and strategies. As Altmann & Ebersberger (2013, p. 83) argue, "Successful internationalization in higher education institutions requires a broad-based approach, as we have seen, is the result of many factors." They then stressed the importance of leadership in developing and designing a clear academic and recruitment vision, and in securing and guaranteeing institutional support. Social media can indeed help higher education institutions achieve internationalization, which relies on faculty and student support. Thus, colleges and universities today seek to achieve internationalization through the help of social media and other communication channels, as they believe that international students "help to enrich the learning environment by offering a range of perspectives in a classroom setting, and help to diversify what is typically a homogenous student body (Altmann & Ebersberger, 2013).

However, there appears to be existential obstacles to the achievement of comprehensive internationalization, such as increasing competition among host countries and among top universities, budgetary constraints, and lack of effective social media marketing strategies. There are two competitive advantages that colleges and universities must take into account when considering an effective and
sustainable marketing campaign and these are resource efficiency and cost effectiveness. These two strategic factors are achievable through the use of social media. According to Choudaha (2013), social media offers at least four strategic benefits on the areas of cost, speed, personalization, and relevance.

- **Relevance:** Social media’s adaptability to international students' preferences. The creation or establishment of effective, accessible and easy-to-use communication channels with prospective international students will definitely contribute to cost-effectiveness and resource efficiency. There are certain things and factors that prospective students consider when making decision where to study. According to Nicholls et al., (1995), prospective students' decision-making process entails a complex consumer behavior with high degree of involvement that emanate from unusual buying, product options, notable brand differences, and product pricing. This suggests that this decision-making process can become even more complicated for potential international student who has not yet visited his prospect school or university before making a final decision. From international students' point of view, social media offers a limited communication channel and tentative idea built entirely on personal experiences and views of alumni and students. This means that social media is valuable to the extent that it offers an opportunity to "tame the fundamentally unpredictable and serendipitous nature of word of mouth without losing what makes it so valuable in the first place-- its authenticity" (Zeisser, 2010). A 2012 survey reveals that 71 percent regularly use social networks such as Facebook and LinkedIn, while 69 percent have microblogging (Twitter) accounts (CMS Wire, 2012). More and more people also use video-sharing and photo-sharing sites, wikis, and
podcasting, among others. These developments encourage businesses and marketers to use social media as their marketing tools by redesigning their marketing strategies and practices.

**Figure 2.11: Social media usage increasing**

![Social Media Usage Table](image)

*Source: CMS Wire (2012)*

- **Speed**: Social media allows fast-paced, seamless communication across geographic boundaries. Social media does not only establish or guarantee authenticity and accuracy; it also enables fast-paced communication and exchange of information that can impact potential international students' decisions, perceptions and expectations. As Nurlida (2009, p. 16) correctly observes, the prospective students' "satisfaction with their choice of college is therefore dependent on their satisfaction of the information they have acquired with regards to the college attributes." One important role of social media is to allow university webmasters and admission officers the
opportunity to complete and provide the vital and required information that can positively impact a prospective international student's behavior, perception and decision-making process.

- **Cost:** Social media is proven as a highly cost-effective marketing and communication tool. The use of social media offers great opportunity to colleges and universities to reach to a large number of audiences, inform the public, recruit, and announce scheduled university events without spending too much money and using too many resources. Unlike traditional media campaigns like campus events, international exhibits, quiz bee or any kinds of academic-related competitions, which all require significant funding and amount of resources, social media enables higher education institutions to save on direct costs such as event expenses, registration and travel. Instead of employing expensive traditional marketing campaigns, a university use authentic communication from model students who are and can be trained to promote the institution to prospective students. Furthermore, universities may also be able to reach more prospective students by creating highly creative yet cost-effective video campaigns or any types of online campaigns to be posted on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and any other media-sharing sites.

- **Personalization:** Social media allows users to customize languages and messages. This is one of the best features of social media as it allows allow international students to view and read information in their local language. Many American universities did this to attract thousands of Chinese, Indian, South Korean and Saudi Arabian students.

A social media campaign must be logical, based on established and tested
techniques and strategies, and practical (e.g., cost effective and resource efficient). This makes social media marketing more complicated than traditional marketing, because marketers need to effectively simplify the highly complicated nature of social media as well as its complex tools by integrating them into a single, logical marketing plan or unit.

What is important is that the final integrated social media marketing entails a coherent, logical set of activities, tools and strategies. Part of this strategy is the development and identification of certain social media tools that can boost an institution's marketing and recruitment efforts.

Among the features suggested by Creatin Marketing (2012) to be integrated with social media strategic tools include the following:

- Social networks: a university may maintain a number of social network accounts from Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.

- Microblog: an official Twitter account may boost a higher institution's image, popularity and reputation. Twitter can be used to update prospective international students of admission tests, new programs, events, etc.

- Podcasting communities- this enables current university students and faculty members to share their opinions about issues and post lectures and notes.

- Virtual tour application: this allows prospective international students to take an online or virtual tour of the institution's physical facilities, plants, gymnasium, classrooms, programs, courses, among others.

- University online forums through social media.
2.7 Social Media engagement by prospective students

Students currently entering colleges and universities are typically considered digital natives, meaning they have spent their whole lives in an environment in which digital communication was expected (Thompson, 2007). They have also been dubbed “the Social-Networking Generation” (Joly, 2007, p. 71), due to their extensive participation in interactive Social media communities. Other statistics concerning students’ use of Social media suggest that they are frequently engaged in social networking activities (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009). Students are increasingly enrolling in universities with the expectation that social media technologies will and should be used to engage them in their educational experiences. When asked about specific types of social media technologies, 72% of prospective university students stated that they would be interested in instant messaging with an admissions counsellor, 64% were interested in reading blogs written by faculty members, and 63% were interested in reading online profiles or blogs written by current students at the institution (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008).

It is important to consider the prospective student’s use of social media, because many are young people. The Pew Internet Project survey of teens and adults reveals that nearly three quarters (73%) of online teens and an equal number (72%) of young adults use social network sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). The survey also reveals that many of the functions that blogging served for teens in the mid-2000s for communicating about their lives and updating their activities for their friends have become central activities on social networking sites. Lenhart (2010) stated that “Microblogging and status updating on social networks have replaced old-style ‘macro-blogging’ for many teens and adults.”
With social media gaining popularity and exerting strong influence on users, recent studies have focused on social networks. Small group interaction using internet messaging amongst teenagers is also investigated by a number of researchers (Grinter & Eldrige, 2003; Ito, 2005). Tweeting, podcasting, and tagging: whether newly invented words or existing words with tweaked meanings, new vocabulary has entered the public discourse. This new jargon represents a growing trend in technology and information sharing that is rapidly altering the way people view, share, and access information. It is especially pervasive on college campuses, which are filled with students who engage with and create these technologies.

International students turn to social media to view online content that will help them decide which college or university is right for them (Morris, 2012). Thus, potential students are more interested in basic facts, such as how to enroll, the amount of tuition, the university's academic record, and how to get a scholarship grant. A 2012 Social Admissions Report reveals that about two-thirds of secondary students turn to social media sites to find colleges and enrolment information (Slideshare, 2012). This study, which surveyed more than 7,000 students, also reveals that 72 percent of potential college students got their prospective universities via social media sites, while 71 percent did their research through their mobile gadgets. Among social networking sites, Facebook remains the most commonly used, as 88 percent used Facebook to search for their prospective colleges. Also, 53 percent of the high school respondents accessed social media sites many times a day. YouTube and Twitter was the second and third most used social media sites, while other social media venues trailed distantly. The ‘value’ that students obtained from using social is that student conversations influenced their university selection. The
conversations were mainly with friends and with students who were enrolled about the university.

Levitz’s (2012) study surveyed more than 2,000 college-bound high school students' on social media usage, mobile usage, and expectations for college. The report reveals over 50% of the surveyed juniors and seniors said social media played a key role in their university decision-making process. In the report university-bound students ranked the social media content and information they valued most were academic information (programs, courses, activities), financial aid / tuition cost, admission process, campus visit, campus life (facilities, environment, etc.) and athletics programmes. The report also reveals that 55 percent of respondents had a difficulty using site navigation to look for prospective colleges, while 52 percent said they viewed college websites using mobile devices. At least 20 percent said they obtain the information they needed via a tablet device (Levitz, 2012).

When it comes to using a Facebook page, most respondents who liked a college's page were expecting to find the following information about admission events and deadlines, information about academic courses and programs, newsfeed updates, relevant content not available elsewhere, interface with page administrators, school admission contact, university videos and photos, interface with other people who liked the page, and other relevant information suited to the user's profile (Morris, 2012).

2.8 Social media marketing and engagement by universities

Social media marketing should be understood as an umbrella term that encompasses all marketing concepts and theories that highlight the value and use of social networking and other Social media sites (Zarella, 2010, p. 1). As already
stated, some of the most popular forms of social media include social networks (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn), websites, microblogs (Twitter), video-sharing sites (YouTube, Vimeo, Hulu), photo-sharing sites and applications (Instagram, Flickr), review sites, news and magazine sites, social bookmarking and voting sites, file-sharing sites, gaming sites and forums, among others.

The indispensable value of social media in marketing and promotional campaign is proved and highlighted by the fact that big brands and multinational companies have been heavily using social media to promote their companies and products. For example, Dell currently owns hundreds of blogs, manages several Twitter accounts, and operates a popular social forum called developerWorks (Zarella, 2010, p. 3). It also optimised the potential of social media with its highly visited IdeaStorm website. This social media technique benefits Dell in terms of securing loyal customers, getting new product ideas from users, and obtaining product feedback.

One of the main differences between social media and traditional media is that social media sites are more accessible and open than the traditional sites. Social media encourages participation, engagement, collaboration and communities. The attractive and unlimited potential of social media to reach out to prospective international students makes social media highly beneficial to higher education institutions seeking to establish relationships with their target market and to boost their communication strategies and marketing techniques. If effectively tapped and designed, social media may help improve a university's brand and increase its credibility (Taylor, 2008). Social media is cost-effective and can reach a large number of international students worldwide at far lower cost than most traditional
media. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter can also augment web traffic to the university website while also helping to improve a university’s image through posts on events, achievements, new programmes.

2.8.1 Social media marketing

Intense competition and other factors such as budgetary cuts force colleges and universities to boost and enhance their recruitment and marketing efforts to attract more international students. However, apart from competition and budgetary factors, there must be other reasons that should pressure colleges and universities to focus on recruitment efforts, like the need to attract the best and the brightest from different parts of the world and the opportunity to reach out to diverse cultures and traditions. In this particular context, social media offers an effective means and opportunity to improve and redesign higher education institutions’ recruitment and marketing strategies and techniques and to adapt to the changing needs, decision-making, and engagement patterns of potential international students. One potential problem is that change is not that easy to introduce and implement in higher education. Thus, it is the responsibility of university administrators and executives to explain to their stakeholders why their institution needs to embrace change and adopt new programs and recruitment strategies.

According to Choudaha (2013), university administrators must be able to weigh down the risk and opportunities associated with the use and implementation of social media as part of their marketing and recruitment process. The implementers need to know why the need to integrated social media into their processes and whether the proposed new scheme was already implemented in the past. According to a study conducted by the British Council (2011), higher education institutions
seeking to recruit international students must be able to effectively tailor social media to their marketing and recruitment campaigns and strategies. The increasing presence and availability of Internet technology and smart gadgets, like smart phones, tablets, browsing device and computers, as well as the increasing use of social media have greatly changed the way millions of international students decide where to study. The British Council warns that colleges and universities that merely respond to this ongoing patterns and trends with traditional marketing methods will surely "miss out". Based on its study, most potential international students have largely abandoned traditional printed instruments, replacing them with Social media applications and processes, such as Facebook, Google, Twitter, and other social media sites and resources. The British Council (2011) study also reveals that the surveyed 127,000 prospective students from 13 countries prefer attending education exhibitions online to attending brick-and-mortar university environments.

Colleges and universities seeking to recruit more international students need to secure resource efficiency and cost effectiveness especially now that most of them face tough competition and decreasing budget. A number of higher education institutions still employ intermediaries such as commissioned agents to promote their school and brand, while a number of universities now saw the opportunity to 'dis-intermediate' through social media, which undeniably provides more credible and cost-efficient interface with potential international students (Choudaha, 2013). Some of the disadvantages of traditional recruitment schemes such as campus fairs and education exhibits include budgetary constraints, lack of resources, time consuming, and they require a lot of preparation. To recruit international students, big colleges and universities need to hire commissioned representatives to go to source countries or conduct university exhibits and fairs abroad. Both recruitment channels require a
lot of budget, money, time and planning.

Realizing the need to penetrate the ever expanding international student market, higher education institutions are now increasing investing more into promotional and marketing campaigns in an "effort to reach students who nowadays exist in an increasingly complex and impenetrable digital landscape" (British Council, 2011). One important aspect of the study reveals that a one-size-fits-all method to social media promotion and recruitment is unlikely to succeed due to the fact that the target market-- international students-- are heavy social media users and technology enthusiasts. Although it is already an established, known fact that most international students are social media netizens, differences in social media use include language preference and which social media sites they frequently visit. Prospective international students in Japan, South Korea and China, for example, use their own official languages and dialects rather than English. Although Facebook and other social media sites are hugely popular to global online users, English is not the lingua franca online. Chinese students prefer to use their own language and are more likely to use Tencent QQ, one of the most popular free instant messaging systems in China. Also, the study found that while many potential international students turn to social media to obtain university information and program offerings and to arrive at a shortlist of university options, personal interaction and consultation with university personnel and trusted advisors still matters when it comes to making a final decision. This is because the final decision-making process that a prospective international student has to make will determine his/her future. "Relying fully purely on digital media to make a life-changing decision-- without having experienced any tangible or concretely affirming evidence-- would certainly amount to a huge leap of faith for a young person," the British Council (2011) study states.
The use of social media in higher education may be influenced by a number of factors, such as student recruitment, university marketing efforts, provision of student portal, university announcement system, communication channel, among others. For instance a university may adopt social media to merely inform its students of its programs and courses as well as upcoming campus events. In this context social media is merely used for information purposes only. But as already stated, social media has an unlimited use and value to educational institutions. Furthermore, millions of students are now hooked on social media due to its popular appeal, academic usefulness, social network capabilities, and ability to reach unlimited number of users. A 2012 survey also reveals that 96 percent undergraduate students are active on Facebook, while 84 percent regularly watch videos on YouTube (Gafni & Deri, 2012). In addition, 20 percent college students have Twitter accounts, while only 14 percent use MySpace.

Social media cannot be ignored when it comes to international student recruitment. However, when using social media tools a university needs to define its goals, activities and expected outcomes. For instance, a university seeking to develop social media tools and implement the same for international student recruitments needs to ask the following questions (Academic Impressions, 2012):

- What institutional priorities and goals are being supported using social media? Is it increasing enrolment rate, increased yield, or financial resources?

- How does social media usage and implementation support other recruitment initiatives to achieve that goal?

- Are there limitations in the technique that social media tools could allow you to deal with?
According to Phang (2013), various university departments may also partake in the online marketing efforts in order to reach a larger audience and to secure a successful recruitment campaign. Among key university departments that can be empowered or authorized to carry out recruitment tasks include admission office, marketing department, alumni office, student body, university outreach office, among others. Phang (2013) identifies the communication tools used by these university outreach offices and departments as social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, Google ads, Photo blog, email, films, newsletters and online educational portals and the university website.

Comprehensive use of social media in international student recruitment does not mean traditional communication and marketing channels and strategies should be ignored or abolished. Still, traditional recruitment and marketing tools may be used to supplement the overall social media campaign. For example, in their efforts to attract Swedish and European students, global universities employed the following offline, traditional recruitment methods (Phang, 2013) that included printed materials distributed during fairs and exhibits, international and local fairs and exhibits, employing as ambassadors to promote the university to international students, lecture programs and forums, academic linkage and collaboration.

The concept of social media effectiveness in student recruitment may depend upon how individual higher education institutions view social media use and its relation to their marketing strategies and techniques. International student recruitment is an expanding global market, as international student mobility significantly increased over the past years. The economic importance of this emerging market is even more highlighted by the intense competition among four major players-- the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada--
which have been losing market share to other countries (Genius Recruiter, 2013). To keep and widen their market share, these top four destination countries embraced visa and immigration reforms and encouraged their higher education institutions to update their recruitment strategies and solutions by using social media.

**Figure 2.12: International student recruitment and global competition**

![Figure showing international student recruitment and global competition](image)

*Source: Genius Recruiter (2013)*

A 2011 study titled 'Student Insight: Online Marketing to a Global Student Audience' found that among the 13 countries with the biggest number of international students, only Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea have high online penetration rates between 70 % and 80 %. Turkey, which also has a high number of outbound students, has a 50 % online penetration rate. The study also found that Facebook will remain the most popular and commonly used social network site; however, the ongoing expansion of Chinese social networks, particularly Tencent QQ with over 600 million registered users, cannot be ignored.
2.8.2 Social Media Engagement

Many higher education institutions use social media as a way to market their services to students. For example, admissions representatives from Buffalo State College are available to chat with potential students via Instant Messenger, and these prospective students can subscribe to new information via the school’s Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed (Thompson, 2007). For these prospective students, Buffalo State College’s commitment to staying abreast of developments in technology and providing students the most up-to-date information maybe a huge selling point. Divisions of Student Affairs at Middlebury College, Mars Hill College, Ithaca College, and the University of Florida have all used Facebook groups and/or pages to market their brand (Joly, 2007; Villano & Gullon, 2009). Graduate programs at the University of Florida are promoted through a Facebook group in which current students and faculty answer questions from prospective students. The university set goals to gain additional applicants, which have been met since this method has been employed (Joly, 2007).

It appears that Social media platforms, especially Facebook, are effective marketing tools, particularly for the current generation of traditionally aged college and university students. The diversity of Social media applications used in universities ranges from blogs (University of Maryland, Georgetown University; Oregon State University, MIT, University of Chicago, Dartmouth); Wikis (Bowdon College); Instant Messaging ( Grandview College, University of South Carolina, Concordia College); Web Conferencing (Purdue University); Electronic Facebooks (Georgetown University); Online Social Services (Georgetown University, Champlain College, Lawrence University); Photo sharing (Creighton University, Simmons College); Skype (Oberlin College). The University of Warwick, UK, has a
MySpace profile that provides university information and brings together current, prospective and past Warwick students (Redecker C., 2008). The Case Western Reserve University, US has adopted a unique recruitment strategy through representation in Second Life using avatars as student ambassadors and offering virtual tours (Shapiro, Gonick, & Schick, 2007).

2.8.3 North Carolina University social media experience

One of the American universities that used social media and thus proved its cost efficiency is the North Carolina State University. To attract and recruit out-of-state and international student, the state university integrated effective social media tools and applications into its existing marketing strategies without addition budget and spending too much resources. The multi-channel recruitment campaign implemented in 2010 utilized a number of social medial tools and platforms, including Facebook event, email messaging, campus events, and printed invitations (Academic Impressions, 2012). The university's current students participated in the event inviting out-of-state students and prospective international students to visit and like the university's official Facebook page.

The email campaign, on the other hand, included the initial touch, directing prospective students to fill-out online application forms, visit the university's admission page (http://admissions.ncsu.edu/apply-join/), or join the Wolfpack. The recruitment team "promoted the custom Facebook tab in several places, including direct mail, admission landing page, university home-page and several online locations. The Facebook tab was built in-house using free tools and basic Web code, but provided a nice vibrant, stylized, on-brand presence inside of Facebook, with clear direct calls to action" (Academic Impressions, 2012). The cost-effective social
media campaign at NCSU yielded positive results. The email campaign led to a 125 percent increase in traffic on the Facebook tab and also saw a click-through rate of more than 60 percent.

2.8.4 University website as a channel for social media

University websites or any corporate websites have marketing functions, and their main purpose is to inform and persuade (Argyriou et al., 2006). The specific functions of websites— or the intended purposes for which they are created— depend upon an academic institution's specific academic goals and objectives. A website's purpose can be to inform people, create awareness, relay benefits, promote products and services, and encourage the public to take certain actions (Strauss & Frost, 2001). Unlike traditional marketing channels (e.g., radio, newspaper, TV, magazine ads), a website can consist of multiple contents and pages and can be customized according to the marketing goals or strategy of the organisation. A good website can thus serve as a vessel that carries all other social media tools and applications, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and other social network sites.

Websites can provide an image in the eyes of its viewers or readers by providing certain types of contents and information associated with the organisation's nature or line of business (Van Rooij, Shahron, & Lemp, 2010). The process of information diffusion is, however, not the only function of a website, as it can also serve as a two-way communication channel by collection information from website viewers, such as applications, enquiries, feedback and suggestions. Today many universities have slowly begun to replace traditional marketing methods, such as printed ads, replacing them with more effective website and Internet marketing campaigns (Hayes, 2007).
Among the information for prospective students that are posted on university websites include academic programs, courses, tuition, admission schedule, scholarship grants, photos, videos, school facilities, prospectus, school history, university achievements, and prominent alumni, among many others. There is no doubt that a college website is one of the most significant recruitment channel's in any higher education institution's communication mix. A website contains or shows the virtual image or picture of the institution, and that image is perceived by any prospective international student looking for specific information and content. Any content, information or photo that a prospective student sees on the university's website or portal can influence his decision-making process. Thus, a university website serves as the virtual window to the actual academic and physical environment of the prospective institution.

### 2.8.5 Independent university recruitment sites

In addition to university websites, social media sites and independent university recruitment sites incorporate numerous novel features that enhance the social media engagement of prospective students as listed in the Table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Recruitment Channel</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Facebook                    | - Updates from college fan pages stream directly into News Feed.  
                              | - Advice and opinions via the fan page wall or discussions tab. |
| Twitter                     | - List feature enables one to organize colleges in which one is interested into a group separate from friends, making it easier to find the information you want when you need it. |
| YouTube                     | - User generated content, College videos & clips.  
                              | - Lectures from a college’s best professors giving you an idea of what the academic culture at a school is truly like. |
| Flickr                      | - Photo host for many of a student’s prospective colleges.  
<pre><code>                          | - Geotagging allows you to view maps of college campuses and surrounding areas to indicate where photos were taken. |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blogs</th>
<th>- More fun to read college news articles.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- RSS makes receiving blog posts a breeze.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Information on interests, what students think of their school, application tips.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIGO</td>
<td>- Filtering student reviews by the type of students making them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Predict My Chances feature; College Connections on Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CampusBuddy</td>
<td>- Built on top of the Facebook platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Join or create a school network - Leverages on official school data, such as official grading records and admissions statistics along with social connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cappex</td>
<td>- What are My Chances calculator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Colleges can pay to create campaigns that search for students who meet their criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CollegeBlender</td>
<td>- Uncensored blogs look at campus life all over the country – views from real students, faculty, alumni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Confidential</td>
<td>- Campus Vibe section lets college seekers fill out visit reports and share photos, videos, first impressions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Prowler</td>
<td>- ChanceMe feature to predict chances of getting in to a college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CollegeWeekLive</td>
<td>- Virtual college fair. Archived video chats and presentations for viewing. Chat with current students and admission reps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communciiversity</td>
<td>- Wikipedia of college media sites. Current students create online identity of school which can be edited by any user.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>StuVu</td>
<td>- Community for college students to share photos, videos and reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Admissions Calculator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University Review</td>
<td>- Simplicity – quick reviews and scorecards for many colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinch</td>
<td>- Part student database and part social media network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Prospective students can freely chat with current students &amp; peers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Brown, A. (n.d.)*

The above examples highlight how the creators (universities) of information respond to the users (prospective students) of information. The subsequent engagement, collaboration and communities represent conversations on the Web that are created by the users that in turn prospective students rely on for information.

In response to the social media phenomenon and the “social networking generation” comprised of prospective students, universities are gathering critical strategic information by listening to what is being said about themselves and their
competitors in the social media world. Social media conversations, blogs, posts, buzz and news represent a different paradigm of information experience, both to universities and to prospective students. It is more complex, more integrated, more community driven than that of traditional media.

Barnes’s (2009) study on social media impact on college admissions in the US highlights that colleges and universities are using social media to recruit and research prospective students actively. A key finding is that 53% of 243 the schools in this study report they monitor the Internet for buzz, posts, conversations, and news about their institutions. This supports the notion of the influence of social media. By monitoring conversations on the Web, universities tailor the ways they reach out to prospective students and so influence their information experience.

There is already overwhelming evidence of university websites capitalising on the social media phenomenon through incorporating prime social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. As the use of social media grows, universities may add on other means of value-adding information experience for prospective students. By way of illustration of the evolutionary information experience paradigm, the following section introduces UNIGO.com, an independent and student driven website. UNIGO.com exemplifies how social media are influencing prospective students’ information experience, as they interact with university information through the activities discussed above – engagement, collaboration and communities.

2.8.6 UNIGO.COM – An independent student-driven university recruitment site

UNIGO (www.unigo.com) is an independent and student driven website that aggregates information from over 2,000 universities in the US and over 250,000
student reviews and 250+ interactive video lessons. It uses social media as well as the website to reach out to students, parents and school counsellors by way of engagement, collaboration and communities. UNIGO is a platform that empowers a current student to create documents and video to represent what university life really is like.

A prospective student can select an area or topic of interest and UNIGO’s search engine then suggests a list of universities based on the criteria selected. Significantly, the ratings for these criteria are determined by current students in colleges and universities. The site incorporates forums and videos which provide insights onto many University related topics; virtual campus tours; ‘real and reliable’ campus reviews are provided by students themselves; and almost everything a student needs to know about a college or university. This virtual university experience provides targeted information for the prospective student to make an informed choice and decision.

Content created by “student journalists” on UNIGO engagement (i.e. communication), collaboration and community building amongst peers (prospective students and college enrolled students). A key differentiator is that the content is created by campus representatives. This is backed by interviews with students and professors and information submitted by students, and is likely to support prospective students’ decision-making.

Through online collaboration, prospective students can make direct contact with current students (Talk to A Current Student) at the selected college or university and enquire about a programme of study or about the university. The Talk to A Current Student Feature personally matches a prospective student with other enrolled
college students who can share similar interests so one can learn more about college life.

Prospective students can also engage with college counsellors and admissions experts who specialize in helping students with the university decision making. The current students, college counselors and admissions experts also represent the online communities where information is shared. Prospective students experience the community aspect of UNIGO through the College Connections feature which is connected to Facebook. The feature helps prospective students to discover which universities friends and family went to.

The Predict My Chances feature enables prospective students to predict their chances of getting admissions into universities. The interface is revolutionary as what the prospective student gains in the end is information on demand. This type of content and data aggregation and predictive analysis probably would not have been possible without social media, in this case, Facebook.

University information customised to the prospective student is made possible through gathering just a limited set of personal information. That makes it possible, for example, for prospective students to see how many other people from their high school are looking at a particular college; contact the author of a review with follow-up questions; select a university by specific criteria set by the prospective student.

Additional features on UNIGO.com include video tutorials that help prospective students to find out how to prepare an application that makes a strong impression at their preferred university. Prospective students also learn where to apply, how admissions office work, how to present grades, impress at interviews. In
addition there is an exhaustive list of education related Q&A’s and information aggregated from various media sources that supplements the decision making process.

### 2.9 Chapter conclusion

Previous studies and literature clearly show that social media can have a significant impact on international students’ decision-making processes. However, there are other research and studies that students’ perceptions, beliefs and views towards higher education can be influenced by both internal and external factors, such as personal motivations, the desire to secure good employment prospects, parental and family influences, social and environmental factors, financial aspects, immigration factors, among others.

While many scholars and researchers strongly recognise the potential of social medial tools in improving, reinforcing international students’ recruitment process, there are those who still believe that traditional communication channels, such as foreign exhibits, educational fairs and campus tours, can effectively complement new marketing methods and strategies. Current trends and global patterns also indicate that there is an increasing use of social media by students, including university-bound students.

The literature review has established that teenagers in general and university bound students are prolific users of social media. Prospective students now have social media information sources to assist in their university and course choice. Studies in the past have established traditional sources of information as being important in the pre-search and search process. Family, peers, friends, agents and others have been important sources in this process. Indeed, university decision
models have also indicated these as key information sources. With the advent of social media, there appears to be another source of university and course information. The potential use of social media for this purpose is supported by user demographics have established the fact that that those of school going age and teenagers are prolific users and very active on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube.

Increasingly, there is strong evidence that prospective students also access social media sites and alternative education sites to seek university course information. This is further supported by the fact that universities are now incorporating social media strategies as a key recruitment channel for international students. Universities are engaging, communicating, forming communities not only on their individual university websites but also through popular social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and beyond through independent student recruitment sites such as UNIGO.COM, CampusBuddy, CAppex, etc. However, while there is no conclusion evidence from previous studies on the dominance of social media over traditional media, the former still represents a potential information source which may grow in popularity in the years to come. The research gap in this case is whether students currently are using social media for university and course selection and decision-making. It also aims to update current university decision making models which do not specifically indicate internet or social media as information sources during the pre-search and search process.
Chapter 3: Research Design

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and justify the methodological processes applied in this research to respond to the research question, sub-research questions and research objectives. The rationale for the research approach, philosophy, purpose, strategy and time horizon adopted in this research are discussed. In addition, there are discussions about the methods that were rejected and such rejection justified. The choice of data collection methods and sampling techniques are discussed and matters concerning reliability are also considered. Furthermore, this chapter exposes the ethical considerations and limitations associated to the research methodology adopted for this research. Ultimately, this chapter enhances replication of the methods of research employed thereby backing up the reliability of this study (Fink, 2003).

3.2 Research Question

The overall design or direction of a study is expressed by its research question or questions (Flick, 2009, p. 98). To be entirely relevant, the research questions must support the goals or objectives of the study. The researcher must clearly define and establish the scope and limits of the research questions because they serve as the basis of the research design.

One good characteristic of a well-defined research question is that it clearly, unambiguously defines and identifies the research topic and the nature of the research endeavor (O'Leary, 2004, p. 29). The main research question for this study undoubtedly satisfies this topical, conceptual requirement. As O'Leary (2004, p. 28-
29) argued, a good, well-defined research question is able to:

- **Define the research topic:** the influence or impact of social media on international students' university decision-making.

- **Define the research endeavor:** the purpose of the study is to explore and investigate the role of social media use in international students' university decision-making process.

- **Define the questions the researcher is mainly interested in:** how do social media influence or impact international students' university decision-making; what are the most commonly used social media sites and channels used by international students; what are the most effective social media sites and marketing techniques to be used to attract and/or recruit international students, etc.

**Table 3.1: Main & Secondary Research Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Research Question</th>
<th>Secondary Research Questions</th>
<th>Research Methodology &amp; Target</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What impact or influence do social media have on international student’s university decision making process? | 1. What social media do international students use to search for a university or course?  
2. Which social media sites influence international students' university decision-making process?  
3. What are the international students' social media usage and preference?  
4. What are the social media sites and channels that can be used by colleges and universities to recruit and attract international students? | Methodology:  
- Survey  
Target Group:  
- International Students |
3.3 Research objectives

The research objectives solidify the relationships between the research problem, question and goals. The rigorous process of defining and designing a clear, concise statement of research objectives is not just a matter of creating a specific statement of the goals involved. As Lank shear (2004) argued, usually there will be no "single definitive set of objectives for a given aim, since the aim might be satisfied by various sets of objectives." This is definitely the case in this study, as the study's fundamental aim is expressed or fortified by a number of research objectives. The explanation for this is that this study is somewhat complicated because it focuses on a number of key areas, namely, international students' perception and social media use, social media marketing, and the impact of social media on international students' university decision-making.

The main research aim is: To investigate how and whether social media impacts or influences international students' university decision-making process. The research objectives that are aligned with the secondary questions are as follows:

1) To determine if international students use social media for university and course selection.

2) To determine if social media influences the university course selection process of potential students.

3) To establish international students social media usage and preference.

4) To identify social media sites and features that universities could engage on and integrate to attract and recruit international students.
3.4 Research hypotheses

If research questions pertain to what the researcher seek to investigate, research hypotheses are the researchers' tentative or presumptive answers to the questions (Maxwell, 2005, p. 69). Its purpose is mainly to indicate the researcher's interest in the given topic and that his goal is to prove or disprove his pre-set assumptions or tentative answers. That is, research hypotheses are the expected results and they serve as the temporary window to the study (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2012, p. 58).

In this study the research hypotheses are as follows:

- **H1**: Social media marketing can effectively influence international students' university decision-making process.

- **H2**: International students turn to social media for university decision-making.

These hypotheses may be verified or disproved by empirical evidence or by the results and findings of this study.

3.5 Research framework

Planning of the actual research to be undertaken after the researcher decides on the overall problem is necessary in order to obtain effective results. Therefore, it is critical that the researcher applies a systematic and scientific mechanism while conducting the research (Rommel, 1964). Additionally, Robson (2002) argues for the need to often question inferences and observations as this is exhibit for healthy scepticism and an understanding of the ethical issues inherent in the research. This
can be best achieved through the adoption of a research framework (Remedy et al., 1998).

The research framework adopted as a guide to addressing the main research question, research strategies and method for this research is the research onion proposed by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2007). The research onion comprises of layers that help in the identification of the key aspects of the research process as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

**Figure 3.1: Research onion indicating research options chosen**

![Research Onion Diagram](image)

*Source: Adapted from Saunders, Lewis., & Thornhill, (2007).*

Saunders et al. (2007) contend that it is imperative to select the research philosophy first as this contains important assumptions about the way in which you view the world. The research philosophy underpins the research strategy and the methods that the researcher chooses as part of that strategy (Saunders et al., 2007,
The application of the research onion to this research can therefore be summarised as follows: The Positivist philosophy was adopted for this study where positivist studies are those that formulate and examine hypothesis and generalisation about a phenomenon from sample. The approach was a Deductive, ‘top-down’ approach i.e. theoretical framework to data gathering to confirm theory. The Data Collection and Data Analysis was conducted through the mono method qualitative survey and through analysing the qualitative data obtained from the survey. The outcome of this research is Basic research.

The research framework conceptualises on the use of social media by prospective students at the pre-search, search and information gathering stages using the existing Hanson and Litten Model of College Choice. This model was selected as it categorised all determinants of choice which appeared in previous studies and assigned each of the categories of determinants to the specific stages of the model. However the Hanson and Litten Model of College Choice does not incorporate current developments in social media, decision-making, marketing. Therefore the research framework as depicted in Figure 2.13 incorporates 2 additional determinants which are i) Prospective student university and course choice activities – social media information sources and traditional information sources, and ii) University social media participation and marketing. This conceptual research framework is subsequently applied to the research methodology and data collection.
The next section presents discussions on the research philosophy and the research options adopted for this study.

3.6 Research approach and strategy

A research philosophy refers to the process of knowledge development in a specific area through specific means (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). Sekaran (1992) argues that this assists in conducting research in a specific way, which “is not based on hunches, experience and intuition alone, but is purposive and rigorous” (p.9). The choice of a research philosophy shows that there is a valid contribution made by the research undertaken to extend knowledge in the general research area.
(Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998). Knox (2004) contends that the relationship between philosophy and the most appropriate research methodology constitutes the source of thought provoking debate. The data collection instrument designed for this study was based on the gaps and issues emerging from the literature review. In addition, the questions were linked back to the main research question and the secondary research questions.

Generally, there are two approaches to research rationale, which could lead to new knowledge acquisition i.e. deductive and inductive reasoning. According to Hyde (2000) the role of the data versus the role of theory in the two approaches creates the main distinction between the two approaches. The deductive approach entails a process of testing theory that stems from an established generalization or theory. Furthermore, the deductive approach seeks to determine whether a theory is applicable to particular examples (Hyde, 2000). Overall, research applying the deductive approach probes theory, develops logical inferences on the basis of the theory and provides such inferences in hypothetical or propositional form. These hypotheses are then tested empirically and presented via generalized conclusion on the basis of falsification or confirmation of the propositions and hypotheses generated (Arlbjørn & Halldórsson, 2002).

On the other hand, the inductive research approach does not require any knowledge related to general literature or framework. Instead, inductive reason involves a process of theory building that begins with observing certain instances and pursuing the establishment of generalizations concerning the phenomenon being investigated (Hyde, 2000). In the initial stages of the inductive research approach data are analysed and the development of theory follows. This is opposition to the
deductive approach, where a researcher probes a theory in an attempt to substantiate a hypothesis on the basis of the probed theory (Bryman, 2008).

Based on various considerations, the current study adopted the deductive research approach. First, the investigation of social media impact on international students’ decision making about a university will not lead to the development of a new theory. Instead, the researcher will focus on verifying the hypotheses developed from the past review of literature. Secondly, similar previous studies (e.g. Maringe, 2006) successfully applied the deductive approach to investigate factors that influence student university choices. Moreover, the researcher’s formulation of hypotheses for testing in this research makes the deductive research approach the most appropriate reasoning approach for this study. This argument receives backing from Easterby-Smith (2002) who contends that the deductive approach is necessary for the purposes of producing hypothesis in the research question. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was chosen as this method allows researchers to have a deeper understanding of the research area by taking into account the perspective of the study population and the context in which they live (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011) while also answering the questions of ‘why’ and ‘how’ (Hennink et al., 2011).

The superiority of one research strategy in comparison to others depends on the context of the research. Consequently, the research question should be the basis for choosing a research strategy. In their analyses, Saunders et al. (2007) discuss seven strategies that include case study, survey, action research, experiment, archival research, ethnography and grounded theory. Upon considerations of the various research strategies proposed by Saunders et al. (2007), the survey strategy was adopted for this study. For instance, several studies of similar context as the current
study (e.g. Keskinen, Tiuraniemi, & Liimola, 2008; Yamamoto, 2006) applied the survey research strategy.

Furthermore, the suitability of the survey in this study suited the adoption of the deductive research approach for this study. According to Saunders et al. (2007) the survey research strategy is normally connected with the deductive research approach. Additionally, surveys enable the collection of large qualitative data amounts, which was necessary in enhancing the generalisability of the findings obtained in this study (Bryman, 2008). When the researcher settled on the current research topic, the relationship between the topic and its international applicability was essential in the choice of the research strategy and surveys offered the best option for the development of the research in a global perspective.

In view of time and budgetary resources, survey strategies are appropriate in ensuring minimal requirements of the same (Saunders, Lewis, & Thronhill, 2007). Since the time and financial resources of this study were limited because the researcher neither solicited nor received any sponsorship to conduct this research, using surveys was most preferable. Apart from this, the use of surveys is rampant in marketing research as mentioned earlier on. In the investigation of the impact of social media on international students’ university decision making, surveys were useful in generating different inputs that potential students use when selecting a course or university.

This research investigated a sample of international students and how social media impacts their university decision making within one point in time. As will be explained later, data for this study were collected through a questionnaire survey at a particular time point.
3.7 Data collection

The first phase of data collection involved critical analysis of previous literature with the aim of generating a set of questionnaire items based on the themes related to the research objective (Creswell, 2009). Before implementing these questions, their essential justification was undertaken with the researcher supervisor and mentor. The second phase entailed the generation of theoretical framework with reference to extant literature in the areas of social media impact on students and the decision making tendencies that students exhibit as a result. The thematic and pattern relations across various literatures informed the working up of hypotheses and the identification of measurements and constructs for the self-administered survey questionnaires through the online Key Survey system.

Therefore the population size for this research is defined as currently enrolled international students undertaking various programmes of study. The current population of international students at the university located in Malaysia is approximately 4,000. Using this number, the sample size using a confidence level of 95% and confidence interval of 6.79 was established as 200 international students. The calculations are illustrated in Table 3.2 below.

**Table 3.2: Confidence interval and sample size calculation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confidence Interval</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Confidence level</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence Interval</td>
<td>6.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: www.surveymonkey.com*
International students were invited to participate in the online survey through the student Intranet portal with information on the survey. No personal or student details were required for the survey thus assuring confidentiality and anonymity. The final response rate achieved was 167 which represented 83.5%. Although the response rate was slightly below 200 respondents, Holbrook et al (2008) suggest that lower response rates do not mean more non response error. The non respondents represent the random subset of a full sample.

The justification of the data collection method, the survey questions and link to the research question and sub-research questions are explained in the next subsection.

3.7.1 Data collection method

The primary data collection method for qualitative data in this study was a survey questionnaire. Maylor & Blackmon (2005) assert that a survey is a beneficial technique in the capturing of facts, behaviours, attitudes or opinions from a wide range of respondents. On the other hand, Saunders et al. (2007) argue that it is worth taking note that there exist different kinds of survey methods. They add that it is important to take into account this when applying survey methods for data collection.

There are two primary streams of questionnaires including interviewer-administered and self-administered. The major distinction between the two streams is the inclusion and exclusion of the interviewer in the administration of the questionnaire. For the interviewer-administered type, face-to-face or verbal contact between the interviewee and the interviewer such as through structured telephone or face-to-face questionnaires or interviews is the norm. On the other hand, the
respondent completes the self-administered type without any assistance from the interviewer (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005).

The self-administered technique is comparatively advantageous especially in the context of the current research. For instance, it is more convenient in terms of cost, time and relative geographical dispersion of the interviewer and the potential respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2007). On the downside, self-administered questionnaires have several shortcomings. For instance, they do not necessarily allow room for clarification in case any is needed. As a result, self-administered questionnaires provide comparatively limited opportunities for collecting additional information (Maylor & Blackmon, 2005). The self-administered questionnaire method was adopted since these limitations were counteracted in the design of the questionnaire by including straightforward close-ended questions, open-ended questions, Likert scales, with options drawn from the literature review chapter.

The survey questionnaire used in this study was based on questionnaires used in a number of previous studies. Demographic attributes were found to affect decision-making strategies among prospective students in various studies (e.g. Govan, Patrick, & Yen, 2006). The first question in this section sought to find out the means through which the students first heard about the respective universities they are enrolled to. Most of the answer options in the first section were drawn from the study conducted by DEST Australia (2000). Various studies (e.g. Licoppe & Smodera, 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakis, 2002; Kozinets, 2002) mainly listed friends and family as the major online communication partners. Christiansen et al. (2003) among other researchers identified communication options for university information and the language of delivery for such information is central to how the students source for and utilise such information. Studies by Moogan, Baron & Harris (1999),
discuss the information search stages and sources of information in the decision-making behaviour of students in higher education. As for social media tools and types, Barnes (2009) states that, the “level of familiarity with social media tools is high [among university students] and translates into usage (p.5). The frequency of communication using any of the social media applications was adopted from the research by Christiansen et al. (2003). Brennan (2001) showed that ethnic diversity affects decisions made by prospective students concerning the choice of university. The survey question types, survey questions and link to these previous studies are described in the next section.

### 3.7.2 Survey question types

The survey questionnaire’s design predominantly features open and closed-ended questions divided into five sections. Dillman (2000) proposed that there are three data variable types that exist when collecting data using questionnaires. They include attribute, behaviour and opinion data. Each of these data variables was considered in the design of the survey questions. However, data constituting behaviour variable types was considerably more. The question types used in this study are the demographic questions; dichotomous questions; multiple choice questions; ranking & rating scale questions and open-ended questions. The scales used in this survey are well established in the many research contexts over the years as described in brief in the previous section. The scales have adequate psychometric properties that have been used in several prior studies and in different context hence valid and reliable. The logic of each of these types of questions is described in the Table 3.3 below.
Table 3.3: Survey question types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic</td>
<td>Demographic questions are an integral part of any questionnaire. They are used to identify characteristics such as age, gender, race, geographic place of residence, etc. Demographic data helps to establish a more accurate picture of the group of persons you are trying to understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dichotomous</td>
<td>This is generally a “Yes/No” question. They are screening questions with the option to branch out to relevant subsequent questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
<td>Consist of three or more exhaustive, mutually exclusive categories. Multiple choice questions can ask for respondents to select anywhere from or more answers. This type of question may include an “other” category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert Rating Scale</td>
<td>Requires a person to rate a particular attribute along a well-defined continuum. They are often used to measure the direction and intensity of attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Ended</td>
<td>The open-ended question seeks to explore the qualitative, in-depth aspect of a particular topic or issue. It gives the respondent an opportunity to respond in more detail and to validate the relevant responses.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: QuestionPro (http://www.questionpro.com)

The questionnaire checklist proposed by Fisher et al. (2004) was used as a guide to establish the wording and arrangement of the questions. The first recommendation the researchers make is that the length of the questionnaire remains short to ensure that respondents complete it in due time without abandoning it. However, Saunders et al. (2007) recommend that the length of a questionnaire be long enough to garner sufficient responses for solving the research questions.

The questionnaire had 31 questions that required an average of 20 minutes to complete. Fisher et al. (2004) also recommend that the design of the questionnaire be appealing. This was considered in terms of arrangement of questions in an order that made it easy for the respondents to follow the transition from one section to another. Finally, it is important that the structure of the questionnaire begins with the easiest to respond-to-questions (Fisher, Buglear, Lowry, Mutch, & Tansley, 2004).
However, the recommendation provided by Athanasiou, Debas & Darzi (2010) that “the questionnaire should start with the basic before complex questions”.

In order to enhance the qualitative data’s reliability and minimise bias sources, the definitions of key terminologies such as traditional information sources; social media information sources; social media profile; and decision making were provided to all respondents in the first page of the questionnaire, before the survey questions. The next section describes the logic employed towards the inclusion of every question.

3.7.3 Survey sections and questions

The questionnaire is divided into five major sections i.e. Section A to Section E. The sections are tailored to collect data related to decision making in terms of demographics about the international student; traditional information sources; social media information sources; general social media use and recommendations for social media use by universities.

Section A – General Information about you. This was the first section of the questionnaire and it dealt with collection of demographic data e.g. country of residence, gender, university course and when students first looked for university course information. Demographic attributes were found to affect decision-making strategies among prospective students in various studies (e.g. Govan, Patrick, & Yen, 2006). Therefore, it was necessary to investigate whether this was applicable in the context of the current study. Data collected through this section was useful in determining whether variation in the three attributes affected the impact that social media had on international students’ decision making.
**Section B – Traditional Information sources.** Most of the answer options in this section were drawn from the study conducted by DEST Australia (1999). The first question in this section sought to find out the means (opinion) through which the students first heard about the respective universities they are enrolled to. It is based on the multiple choice single select choice. Questions 5 to 8 adopted the multiple choice type and question 9 the ranking (ordinal) type. Question 5 advances to seek how the respondents proceeded to seek more information about the university after learning about it. Question 6 sought for data concerned with preference for various sources of information that students consider when settling on a university for a given course. The three questions were developed based on previous studies especially the study by Moogan, Baron & Harris (1999), which discusses the information search stages and sources of information in the decision-making behaviour of students in higher education.

Question 8 dealt with the some of the ways in which students interacted with the university using traditional information sources i.e. through e-mail; telephone; meeting with staff; downloading information from the university website.

Finally, Question 9 asked the respondents about the influence of traditional information sources through which they selected the universities they are enrolled in. The response options to this question included parents, family members, friends, recruitment agents and others. The question created an effective link between how students hear about a university, their preference information mode and whose advice they rely on to actually do the selection.

This question seeks to establish the initial interaction that students had with social media before joining their respective universities. The response options
provided make it possible for the researcher to compare how students adopt social media upon joining university almost shunning away the other information sources.

**Section C – Social Media Information Sources.** This section of the questionnaire was the most extensive as it was central to the research objective. The section comprises of 10 questions addressing familiarity, usage patterns, features, and suggestions related to social media applications. Question 10 inquired about the visit by students on social media. The question was based on the simple logic that the more familiar students are with social media applications, the more likely they were to use them and consequently get influenced by them. Barnes (2009) states that, the “level of familiarity with social media tools is high [among university students] and translates into usage (p.5).

Question 11 sought to identify the type of information that prospective students sought on social media based on their selection in the earlier question. This serves to validate what students look for when to assist in their university and course decision making process. This would assist in drawing inferences concerning the most influential social networks. Question 12 and 13 sought to ascertain whether there was any interaction or contact with staff or students in the initial process of seeking university and course information. And Question 14 then seeks to establish the impact of the personal contact with students or staff. Question 15 and 16 are interlinked as firstly students indicated dependency on either traditional information sources or social media more, responding to the Likert 4 part frequency question, and secondly which of the specific social media tools influenced the university course selection. The open-ended questions 17 & 19, was designed for students to express
their opinion on the influence of and use of social media and university course selection.

The ninth question checked for the frequency of communication using any of the applications as adopted from the research by Christiansen et al. (2003) whereas question 10 closely related to question 9 since it required the respondents to rank the social media applications according to their order of preference. The eleventh question was necessary in garnering explanations as to why the students favoured some applications over others depending on the responses given in question 10. Factors such as ease of use, presence of family and acquaintances and interactivity of the application among other things constituted the response options.

Question 12 was the first question under the usage patterns’ subsection. Responses to this question were relevant in identifying how often students used the various applications on a daily basis. Question 13 was included in order to identify who the students spent their time communicating with in terms of relations and friends. Various studies (e.g. Licoppe & Smodera, 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakis, 2002; Kozinets, 2002) mainly listed friends and family as the major online communication partners. What the students use social media applications for was necessary to this research as a usage pattern and this was covered through question 14.

**Section D – General Social Media Use.** This section predominantly addressed how prospective students use social media generally and the activities and profiles. Questions in this section were multiple choice, dichotomous and Likert 4 point frequency scale (semantic differential). Questions 20 through 26 sourced for attitudinal preferences concerning the engagement of prospective students on social media which included their activity and time spent on social media platforms.
**Section E – University Course Information on Social Media.** The questions in this section were primarily focused on university engagement on social media platforms. The question types used for this purpose were multiple choice, dichotomous (filter) and open-ended questions. Questions 27 through 29 solicited inputs from international students for this purpose as they are the ones who participate actively on social media and so be able to provide suggestions on reaching out and on the more popular and relevant social media sites. Peer recommendations feature strongly where social media is concerned and in this regard Question 30 and 31 asks respondents if they would recommend or would not recommend social media for university selection to their friends.

Questions in this section allowed the student respondents to offer suggestions on how universities should use Social media applications to provide information on their programmes to international students. The questions formed a platform for making recommendations to universities concerning the effective use of Social media in marketing.

**3.7.4 Relationship of survey questions to research objectives**

At the beginning of the Research Design chapter, the research question was stated as ‘What impact or influence does social media have on international students university decision making process?’ In addition, 4 secondary research questions were formulated to support the main research question. The relationship between the survey questionnaire sections and the secondary research questions are detailed in Table 3.4 below.
Table 3.4: Relationship of survey sections to research objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Section</th>
<th>Relationship to research objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section A - General Information about You</td>
<td>To establish country of origin of students responding to the survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section B – Traditional Information Sources</td>
<td>To determine information sources that potential students use to inform university course selection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section C – Social Media Information Sources</td>
<td>To determine the role of social media during their university course selection process of potential students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section D – General Social Media Use</td>
<td>To determine international students use of social media generally and the kind of activities they engage on social media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section E – University Course Information on Social Media</td>
<td>To propose effective social media marketing techniques that can be used to attract prospective international students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.5 Ethics

This research utilised the survey method through the online Key Survey system that is hosted by the QUT. The survey questionnaire was approved by the University Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix A) following the standard application process. The survey was also deemed to be low risk for which approval was obtained. As the survey sample was based at the researcher’s place of work, the Consent to Access Data Subjects was granted and approved (see Appendix B). The online survey included a Participation Information Sheet where anonymity, privacy & confidentiality, consent to participate and complaints were addressed for those participating in the survey (see Appendix C). Finally a generic invitation to participate in the survey was placed at the intranet web link. This also included a statement on confidentiality and anonymity.

3.7.6 Limitations

Arguably, one possible limitation of this research is that data is gathered after an international student has already enrolled. The sample in this case was not limited to international students during their initial or first year of studies. Instead the sample covered international students who are undertaking English language programmes,
Diploma, Bachelor’s Degree and Master Degree programmes. This may give rise to a situation whereby students may have lesser recollection of their university course decision making process. Although demographic data was collected for this survey, the data was not used in the analysis.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents survey findings from international student respondents on demographic, traditional information sources, social media information sources, general social media use and university course information on social media. The data collection was conducted online using Key Survey using the survey questionnaire in Appendix E. The summarised data for 167 respondents and their feedback was very useful in discussing the main study objective and hypothesis. The survey results are presented systematically for each question, firstly illustrated with charts wherever applicable, followed by statistical analysis summary and discussion of the results.

4.2 Survey Responses & Analysis

SECTION A: GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT RESPONDENTS

1.) Which country are you from?

Table 4.1: International student country of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest proportion of international students by country of origin was Indonesia at 12.6% followed by Pakistan at 10.2% while the lowest is 0.6% among several nations as illustrated in the Figure 4.1 below.
2.) *What is your gender?*

**Table 4.2: Gender of respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your gender?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>72.89%</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27.11%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics based on 166 respondents; 0 filtered; 1 skipped.*
Of the respondents 72.5% were male students and 26.9% were female students. One respondent skipped the question as illustrated in the Table 4.2 above and in the statistical analysis.

Table 4.2.1: Statistics – What is your gender?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>72.46%</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26.95%</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipped</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.) Which University course are you studying?

Table 4.3: Respondents university course of study

![Image of university courses response]

Although there was diversity in the courses studied, the majority was represented by 75.4% of respondents who were studying a Bachelors degree course, followed by 12% undertaking a Masters Degree course, 8.4% Diploma course and 4.2% English language.
Table 4.3.1: Statistics - Which university course are you studying now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Masters Degree</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language Programme</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.) When did you first look for University course information?

Table 4.4: When did you first look for University course information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When did you first look for University course Information? (please tick one only)</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When still in High School</td>
<td>37.73%</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After completing High School</td>
<td>47.31%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>14.97%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A majority of the respondents, 47.3%, first looked for University course information after completing high school, 37.1% when still in high school. 15.6% of the respondents who indicated Others, cited a variety of responses and these included :- while working, from friends, after completing degree back home in Sudan, while studying English language course, during foundation course, since O-Levels, after completing college with specialisation, when looking for another University to transfer, after completing Bachelors Degree, after completing Diploma course, during employment, after seven years of employment, when working, information by a friend, in the second year in a University in home county but compelled to shift due to conflict in there, after quitting previous University, after completing University, after completing college,
recommendation from friend, after completing University in home country, after work experience, after finishing level 4 (Bachelors degree).

Table 4.4.1: Statistics - When did you first look for university course information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When still in High School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After completing High School</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION B: TRADITIONAL INFORMATION SOURCES

5.) How did you first hear about your University?

Table 4.5: How did you first hear about your university?

The highest no. of respondents, 22.8%, first heard about their university through friends, followed by Education Exhibition/Fairs (18.5%) and Recruitment agents (15.5%) while the lowest was 0.6% via a foreign embassy. Other traditional information sources include random walk in inquiries, information from English teacher and when searching the website for a University. It appears that
traditional information sources remains popular in the initial university course selection process.

**Table 4.5.1: Statistics - How did you first hear about your university?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Website</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Representative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>97.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>92.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship Agency in my country</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>91.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment Agent</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Traditional Information Sources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>70.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper Advertisement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>68.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Search</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>66.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Embassy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>32.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>31.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Guide/Directory</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Exhibition/Fairs</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.) Which traditional information sources did you use when looking for University course?

**Table 4.6: Traditional source of University information**

[Image of table with data on traditional sources of university information]
The most popular traditional information source as shown in Table 4.6.1 below is University website at 22.8 % as further indicated in the figure. Other traditional sources such as the Education Malaysia Offices were the least explored by respondents at 0.9%.

Table 4.6.1: Statistics - Which traditional information sources did you use when looking for a University course?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 4.5558
Std. Error of Mean: .17869
Median: 3.0000
Mode: 1.00
Std. Deviation: 3.70540
Variance: 13.730
Skewness: .864
Std. Error of Skewness: .118
Kurtosis: -.705
Std. Error of Kurtosis: .235
Range: 12.00
Minimum: 1.00
Maximum: 13.00

7.) What kind of information did you look for in using traditional information sources?

Table 4.7: What kind of information did you look for in using traditional information sources?
Using the traditional information sources, the statistics table below shows that majority of the respondents search University course information. This constitutes 42.09\% . The statistics also show that other source of information is the least used traditional information sources. This is composed of 4.52\% who look for University accreditation and recognition from their country of origin while others compare fees structures for respective courses.

Table 4.7.1: Statistics - What kind of information did you look for in using traditional information sources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>354</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.1441</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Mean</td>
<td>.06170</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.16080</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>1.347</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.962</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.056</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.259</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.) During your University course search, have you contacted or interacted with a University in any of the following ways?

Table 4.8: Ways of contact or interactions with a University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During your university course search, have you contacted or interacted with a university in any of the following ways? (please tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I requested university course information through e-mail</td>
<td>36.59%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spoke to a university staff through telephone</td>
<td>17.07%</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spoke to a university staff at an education exhibition/fair</td>
<td>42.07%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I downloaded university course information from the university website</td>
<td>48.78%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not interact with the university through any of the above</td>
<td>14.63%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interaction</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total # of respondents 167
Statistics based on 164 respondents; 0 filtered; 3 skipped.
The survey statistics in the table below indicate a mode of respondents downloaded course information from University website. These represented 29.6% as illustrated in the table below, which also shows the least used search as others. The other modes of search include respondents who spoke to university staff face-to-face, personally visited some universities, asked former and current students, visited some universities and talked to their staff in person, interacted through agent and those who met staff at the university.

Table 4.8.1: Statistics: During your University course search, have you contacted or interacted with a University in any of the following ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean: 3.0225
Std. Error of Mean: .08473
Median: 3.0000
Mode: 4.00
Std. Deviation: 1.38448
Variance: 1.917
Skewness: -.066
Std. Error of Skewness: .149
Kurtosis: -.852
Std. Error of Kurtosis: .297
Range: 5.00
Minimum: 1.00
Maximum: 6.00

9.) Which of these traditional information sources influenced you most in your decision-making and University course selection?
Table 4.9: Influence of traditional information sources in decision-making and University course selection

The survey statistics on the traditional information sources influencing decision making and choice of University indicated in the table below show a mode of 21.2% from University Website. Newspaper advertisement is the least mode of influence in decision making at 0.5%.

Table 4.9.1: Statistics - Which of these traditional information sources influenced you most in your decision-making and University course selection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Std. Error of Skewness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>397</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.7355</td>
<td>.17293</td>
<td>3.44555</td>
<td>11.872</td>
<td>.636</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| N   | Valid | Median | Mode |                  |          |          |                        |
|-----|-------|--------|------|------------------|----------|----------|                        |
|     |       | 4.0000 | 1.00 |                  |          |          |                        |

| N   | Valid | Missing |                  |          |          |                        |
|-----|-------|---------|------------------|----------|----------|                        |
|     | 397   | 0       |                  |          |          |                        |

Table 4.9: Influence of traditional information sources in decision-making and University course selection
SECTION C: SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION SOURCES

10.) What social media sites did you visit for University course information?

Table 4.10: Social media sites visited for university course information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Site</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>74.86%</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linkedin</td>
<td>2.99%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>8.38%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>22.75%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>24.55%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>2.99%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Social Media sites</td>
<td>10.78%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey statistics in table below indicate that Facebook mode is the most common social site visited for university course information as shown in the table below. The survey shows that Facebook had 49.2% response while Pinterest has no data from respondents. However, other social media sites commonly visited include restricted access to social media Vkontakte, MSN, Yahoo, Skype, Google, and Wikipedia. The survey indicated that some respondents do not believe everything said by social media.
Table 4.10.1: Statistics - What social media sites did you visit for University course information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Std. Error of Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Std. Error of Kurtosis</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.4008</td>
<td>.16768</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.66190</td>
<td>7.086</td>
<td>.600</td>
<td>.153</td>
<td>-.905</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.) What kind of information did you seek using social media sources?

Table 4.11: Information sought using social media sources

The survey statistics table below indicates mode of information sought using social media as university information. The figure below further illustrates this as 26.70% while other information comprising 3% is university updates, lecturers ability and skills, campus facilities, university recognition, pictures and articles as well as fees.
Table 4.11.1: Statistics - What kind of information did you seek using social media sources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>427</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.9415</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Mean</td>
<td>.08348</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.72495</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>2.975</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.540</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.803</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12.) During your university course search, have you contacted or interacted with a University in any of the following ways?

Table 4.12: Ways of contact or interaction with a university

The survey statistics in table below indicate people using University Facebook page as the highest mode. This represents 50.3% as shown in the figure below while following a University on Twitter was the least interaction at 5.1%. Other modes of course search include Gmail, Mail.ru, E-mail, E-mail and phone call, Vkontakte, Internet forums and Yahoo.
Table 4.12.1: Statistics - During your university course search, have you contacted or interacted with a University in any of the following ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Variance</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Std. Error of Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>Std. Error of Kurtosis</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.4743</td>
<td></td>
<td>.12259</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.184</td>
<td>.365</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13.) Did you contact University students or staff to get their opinion on a University course using social media?

Table 4.13: Seeking opinion on university course using social media

The survey established that minority; only 47.3% have contacted University students or staff to get their opinion on a university course using social media.
Table 4.13.1: Statistics: Did you contact University students or staff to get their opinion on a University course using social media?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14.) If your answer to previous questions is yes, did that have an impact on your decision to apply to that University?

Table 4.14: Impact on University decision making

If the answer to the previous questions as yes, the question on whether the contact opinion provided additional information to the student for University course decision established the highest frequency and percentage distribution had a moderate impact at 49.4% while the lowest results had both ‘no impact’ and ‘low impact’ at 14.3%, respectively.
Table 4.14.1: Statistics - It provided me additional information for my University course decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Impact</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Impact</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Impact</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Impact</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.14.1: Impact of social media on university decision making

For the respondents who ever sought opinion on University course using social media, the surveys indicate highest frequency among those who felt ‘moderate impact’ at 44.6% while the lowest frequency is those who felt ‘high impact’ at 16.2% on influencing the University course decision.
Table 4.14.2: Statistics - It had some influence on my University course decision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Impact</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Impact</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Impact</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>44.6</td>
<td>60.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Impact</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.14.2: It had some influence on my University course decision

For the respondents who ever sought opinion on University course using social media, the surveys indicate the highest frequency among those who felt ‘moderate impact’ at 41.0% while the lowest frequency was those who felt ‘no impact’ at 14.1% for the students who got help to make a decision on university choice.
15.) *Think about the information sources you depended most when making your university course decision.*

**Table 4.15: Dependence on information sources when making university course decision**

For the respondents who depend on social media to gather University decisions, the surveys indicate the highest frequency among those who had ‘low dependence’ at 38.7% while the lowest frequency was among those who had ‘high dependence’ at 12.9% for the students who depended on social media information sources more than the traditional information sources.
Table 4.15.1: Statistics - I depended on social media information sources more than the traditional information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Dependence</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Dependence</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>86.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Dependence</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Dependence</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.15: Dependence on social media information sources over traditional information sources

For the respondents who depend on social media to gather University decisions, the surveys indicate the highest frequency among those who had ‘moderate dependence’ at 45.7% while the lowest frequency was composed of students with ‘no dependence’ at 1.8% on traditional information sources than social media sources.
### Table 4.15.2: Statistics - I depended on traditional information sources more than social medial information sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Dependence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Dependence</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>98.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate Dependence</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>87.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Dependence</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 4.15.1: Dependence of traditional information sources over social media sources
16.) Which one of the following social media information sources influenced you most in your university course selection?

Table 4.16: Social media sources that had most influence in university course selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>65.27%</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>14.37%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>10.18%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>10.18%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey on the most influential social media used by students for University course selection established that Facebook is the mode as shown, in the table below at 73.15% and also illustrated in the figure below. MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram were also surveyed but had not data from respondents. Other types of social media include Vkontakte.

Table 4.16.1: Statistics - Which of the following social media information sources influenced you most in your University course selection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.5302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Error of Mean</td>
<td>.22406</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Median</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.73505</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>7.481</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>1.526</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>.866</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.395</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17.) Tell us about how social media helped you in your University course selection and decision.

Table 4.17: How social media helped in University course selection and decision.

Social media has helped students in many ways during their university course selection and decision and these are summarized below according to major themes as identified in the literature review as well as well as other common recurring themes identified by the respondents.

University Course Information

According to the open ended feedback from the surveys, social media provides in depth information about the university and course. The attraction of social media, in particular YouTube, for university course information, was cited by a few students. One respondent specifically stated that, “By watching the video on YouTube I found out that my university is a multicultural university. I was attracted by that as I wanted to know people with different cultures”. Indeed this was echoed by another respondent who quoted, “It’s like they have uploaded many pictures of the university and their students joining their particular courses and even various different videos on YouTube which influenced me to opt for a course at the University”. A respondent prefers social media because it gave up to date information about the university and
its on-goings as well the variety of students currently studying, and so much more. Likewise, other benefits of social media for university course information included very useful description of courses; easy to get information in one place; fastest, easiest, and the cost-effective method in course selection decision; a different way of finding information, and to find additional university information.

**University Activities/University Life**

In terms of university activities and life significantly, many respondents indicated that social media gave them an insight into the happenings in the university. A respondent stated that, “*It helped me to see more of the university life from photos and activities*”. Another response seems to validate this statement where the respondent stated that, “*I was able to see the activities going on in the university which was so international. It helped me a lot to choose a best university!*”  *I could see what was happening at the university that was fun and exciting like student events*. Therefore student activities and student life do appear to be one of the considerations in university course selection. In fact the influence of student activities on social convinced one student to decide on an English language programme at the university and another to gain an insight on what activity to pursue.

**University Facilities**

In terms of University facilities, a prospective international student may not have the opportunity to view the university campus prior to making a decision to enrol. They would therefore need to depend on photos in brochures and websites, virtual tours, and on their friends who are studying at the university. In this context, information on facilities on social media together with reviews may be useful to
prospective international students. Some of the responses attest to this. A respondent noted, “I found that the university has good engineering labs as compared to some other universities. Student reviews were good and if there were any issues or negative remarks, these were negligible”. It is not just the physical facilities on social media but together with activities and photos that had an influence on students. One respondent stated that, “By looking at the pictures, it helped to us to know the environment around the campus”.

**Engagement/Community**

Social media was noted by respondents to be useful in engaging not only with their friends and peers but also with university staff and ex-students or alumni. A respondent said that, “I searched for other people studying my desired course in the University I applied to”. For another respondent “It helped me identify my friends who are attending the university, and getting feedback from them helped me decide which university I wanted to go”. Others also stated that social media helped in connecting them to some of the students from the university; getting in touch with those who were undertaking the same course; obtaining additional information about the subjects for the course; providing an inside view of student life at the university. Even family members have influence on university decision and in this context; one student indicated that, “I noticed the presence of many international students in most of the videos and pictures. But most importantly my sister is who influenced my decision to join the university. According to her personal experience I made a decision of study here”.

Via social media, respondents were able to easily get in touch with university representatives; discuss university course information with students and staff; seeing
dialogs and other questions which other students asked from university staffs or students. This they felt would save one’s personal time as well as that of the university staff. Finally, connecting with ex-students and alumni provided an avenue for one respondent with everything he needed to know about the university course and university life.

Opinions

Aside from tangible information that a prospective student can obtain through social media, it is also very useful in gathering intangible information such as opinions. For one student, “Social media helped me in finding the right choices mainly by asking the admin staff on the university Facebook page, and also by asking my senior that study there as well”. Another respondent indicated that, “It helped me in so many ways, especially when I see their students give their opinion about the school”. A respondent confirmed the ability to check other’s opinion about the university. Various social media posts and opinions of others did matter for a respondent. Via social media, a respondent got to read reviews from other students about the course to take. Finally, social media provided knowledge about university assignments and in making contact with other students.

Others

There are other miscellaneous uses of social media to students seeking decisions about University courses. A respondent confirmed that social media helped very much although the reasons were not stated. A respondent used Google search regarding course selection to know more about the course he was interested to apply for. One respondent recommended talking shows and interviews with the lecturer and students as well as staff on social media. Seeing social media comments, posts,
pictures and videos helped since it gave one respondent an insight of the school's environment and helped to visualise life at the university. Finally, a respondent benefited a lot from social media which provided much news reports and in deciding which course was more appropriate.

**Did not help**

There are instances where social media did not help in University course selection. A respondent confirmed that, "*Social media did not offer much, just affecting about 20% of my final decision*". This was echoed by another respondent who revealed that, "*Social media did not play a big role in my university course decision making*". One respondent did not rely on social websites solely, instead he or she relied on the experience of students as well as recommendations from teachers for university decision making. A respondent did not find help from social media because by that time (2007/08) social media was not that popular as now and most of them did not even exist, so it did not have any influence on course selection. A respondent was honest in stating independence from social media for course selection, but watched a video that had some information about the university in general. Social media did not help a respondent much other than just browsing through the Facebook page for pictures and updates on the university activities. A respondent stated that there was not much information regarding the courses on social media, but information was available on the university website. A respondent choose the university course based on traditional media instead of making decisions based on social media. Other reasons cited by respondents include: did not use any social media in university course search; did not depend on social media; not much help came from social media other than seeing some pictures of the university and if
there were any bad reputations to take into account; did not find it applicable to go through social media at the time;

18. Are there any reasons why you may have not used social media to look for University course?

Table 4.18: Reasons for non-usage of social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for non-usage of social media</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey established that majority of students 76.65% have various reasons for not using social media to look for university course. The reasons are elaborated in the next survey question.

Table 4.18.1: Statistics - Are there any reasons why you may have not used social media to look for University course information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. If your answer to the previous Question is ‘Yes,’ please state the reasons why you may not have used social media to look for a university course.

Table 4.19: Reasons for not using social media for university course selection
Among those who answered yes in the previous question, a number of reasons were cited in this open ended question which is categorised based on the responses provided.

**Reliability and Accuracy of Information**

In terms of reliability and accuracy of information, a respondent preferred the official information based on official websites instead of information on social media. A respondent stated that, “*All the info we get from there may not be very accurate, so I chose to ask my friends who were already studying in the University to get more info about their first-hand experience*”.

A respondent felt that everyone can share their opinion without the university looking back to the opinion and deciding whether to post it or not. This affects trust as accurate answers are needed whereas the information on social media is unreliable or outdated. Some respondents stated that social media information is simply unreliable source. This is reflected in the statement by one respondent, “*I simply don't rely on them, since the information might be not accurate enough to influence the decision*”. With this in mind, any marketing campaign only gives the good side never the bad side, whole picture and feel of a product. A respondent stated that, “*From personal experience and lessons there are possibilities of fake or over exaggerated promotions*”. A respondent was apprehensive that some social media pages are misleading and can change the perception of a potential new admission in a good university. A respondent noted trends which aim at mocking the university via social media as causing a lot of issues by citing examples such as confession pages on Facebook. He cited that, “*Not many social networks have enough content. Some*
pages are misleading and can change the perception of a potential new admission in a good university. Especially the trend which aims at mocking the university is causing a lot of issues such as confession pages on Facebook. Many stories are just hoax”.

Completeness of Information

Additional reasons why some respondents never use social media are because sometimes it does not cover everything. A respondent noted that, “Information could be misleading on the social media such as Facebook”. Yet another respondent stated that there is, “Not enough information on social media about university information or course information”. Sometimes only activities are highlighted and there is not enough course information or content on the university.

University Social Media Engagement

The depth and scale of University engagement via social media has been a major concern for many respondents. A respondent stated that the university was not that active on social network at the time (of application). A respondent state the reason for not using social media as, “Because social media cannot provide the full searching experience like the university's website for example. Adding to that is that there are some universities that do not have any kind of social media interaction or minimal interactions, so not all information needed are available through them”. A respondent claimed that it is easy to control pages on social media and display only the good things about the university. On the other hand, the respondent may want to know the real ranking and recognition of the university from traditional resources.
Traditional Information Sources

The reliance on traditional sources of information is another reason why some may not use social media as much. In the opinion of a respondent, “The traditional sources are better than social media to look for university course information”. Going to the university office directly may enable getting more accurate information on university courses.

Others

There were other miscellaneous reasons why some respondents have not been using social media to search university courses including, lack of interest and no social media account. A respondent did not think of looking at social media at the time of university course application.

Section D: GENERAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

20.) Did you have a social media profile while still in high school?

Table 4.20: Social media profile in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you have a social media profile when in high school? (please tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81.44%</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18.56%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey established that 81.4% of the respondents had social media profiles while in high school compared to now at 93.4%.
Table 4.20.1: Statistics - Did you have a social media profile when in high school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Did you have a social media profile when in high school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>.39476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>1.581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21.) On which social media sites did you have a profile when in high school?

Table 4.21: Social media profile ownership in high school

Table 4.21.1: Statistics - On which social media sites did you have a profile while in high school?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>If the answer for the previous questions is 'yes' on which social media sites did you have a profile while in high school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.5341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.55685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22.) *Do you have a social media profile now?*

**Table 4.22: Social media profile now**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have a social media profile now?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>93.41%</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.59%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.22.1: Statistics - Do you have a social media profile now?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Do you have a social media profile now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>0.2488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>3.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>0.2488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>10.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>0.374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23). On which social media sites do you have a profile now?

Table 4.23: Social media profile ownership now

For respondents who confirmed having social media profiles now, Facebook is the most popular at 28.0%. Pinterest is the least popular now at 0.9%.

Table 4.23.1: Statistics - On which social media sites do you have a profile now?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>If the answer for the previous question is 'yes' on which social media sites do you have a profile now?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.2926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>5.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.49444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>6.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-1.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
24.) *On which social media sites are you active on now?*

**Table 4.24: Social media activity now**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media sites are you active on now? (please select all that apply and answer according to the scale)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>64.84% (86)</td>
<td>36.77% (57)</td>
<td>7.1% (11)</td>
<td>1.29% (2)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>2.27% (1)</td>
<td>4.66% (2)</td>
<td>6.82% (3)</td>
<td>86.36% (58)</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>13.33% (8)</td>
<td>16% (9)</td>
<td>23.33% (14)</td>
<td>48.33% (29)</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>19.28% (16)</td>
<td>24.1% (20)</td>
<td>27.71% (23)</td>
<td>28.92% (24)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>16.22% (18)</td>
<td>32.43% (36)</td>
<td>34.23% (38)</td>
<td>17.12% (19)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>35.94% (46)</td>
<td>39.84% (51)</td>
<td>19.83% (26)</td>
<td>4.69% (6)</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>5.26% (5)</td>
<td>2.63% (1)</td>
<td>10.53% (4)</td>
<td>81.58% (31)</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>36.69% (30)</td>
<td>32.93% (27)</td>
<td>12.2% (10)</td>
<td>18.29% (16)</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The surveys established that students were very active on Facebook as compared to the other social media. MySpace ranked the lowest
Social media sites that students are active on now include: Hi5, Buzznet, Vkontakte, Friendster, and Renren. Additionally, the survey established that there are other social media sites that students are active on now which includes: Tumblr, QQ, Vkontakte, Foursquare, Quora, Path and Line. These are social media sites that are country specific in some instances.
25.) *How much time do you spend per day on these social media applications?*

**Table 4.25: Time spent per day on social media applications**

On the time spent on social media Facebook has the highest frequency of users over two hours daily while MySpace had no response in that maximum sample time spent. The survey further established that Facebook has the highest frequency of respondents among all the time spent categories except in the ‘not applicable’ where MySpace has the highest frequency.
Figure 4.17: Time spent per day on social media per day
26. What kind of activities do you participate on Social Media sites?

Table 4.26: Activities on social media sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create an entry on my social media site, like Facebook</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post comments on a friend’s page or wall</td>
<td>72.44%</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send messages using Instant Messenger (IM)</td>
<td>68.59%</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share and post photos, videos and music</td>
<td>70.51%</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep in touch with family</td>
<td>83.97%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep in touch with friends</td>
<td>91.67%</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for information on computers and mobile phones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for information on services like travel, tourism, airlines</td>
<td>28.21%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for health, fitness and dieting information</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look for the latest fashion trends</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy things online</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read technology, computer and mobile phone news/reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read general news</td>
<td>37.82%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other activities</td>
<td>1.92%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey established that mode activity on social media as keeping in touch with friends at 13.84% while the lowest is other activities at 0.29%.

Table 4.26.1: Statistics - What kind of activities do you participate on Social Media sites?

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>5.8064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>5.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>3.55430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>12.633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>13.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION E: UNIVERSITY COURSE INFORMATION.

27.) How should universities use social media applications to provide information on their programmes to international students?

Table 4.27: University information on social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create blogs and forums for specific university course and education topics</td>
<td>54.22%</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in education related blogs and forums</td>
<td>40.36%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertise on social networks and blogs</td>
<td>51.81%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use photo and video hosting services to show their facilities and activities</td>
<td>74.1%</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and show a sample video lecture on social media sites</td>
<td>60.84%</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create and show a presentation of the university on a social media site</td>
<td>51.21%</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showcase students from my country</td>
<td>51.81%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make course information available through video</td>
<td>32.53%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.21%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost three quarter of the respondents (74.1%) felt the need for universities to exhibit their facilities and activities through photos and video hosting services. More than 50% of respondents in 5 other categories also indicated the need for other modes of information such as blogs, forums, showcasing students.
Table 4.27.1: Statistics - How should Universities use Social Media applications to provide information on their programmes to international students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>695</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.3770</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.0000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.14840</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>4.616</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.093</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-1.022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.185</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>3042.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

28.) How would you expect a university to use social media with prospective students?

Table 4.28: University engagement with prospective students using social media

![Social Media Engagement Table]

The most popular recommendation on university engagement on social media is significantly on university and course information (82%) followed by university events (71%). Overall students felt the need for information as also indicated in the
need to be kept abreast of university events and activities (66%) and to connect with other students (65%).

**Table 4.28.1: Statistics - How would you expect a University to use Social Media with prospective students?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N Valid</th>
<th>710</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.9042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>1.53451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>2.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>-.799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>.183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>2062.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29.) **Which social media would you recommend Universities to use to help students in course selection?**

**Table 4.29: Recommended social media sites for universities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which social media sites would you recommend universities to use to help students in their university course selection? (please tick all that apply)</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>94.01%</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>10.18%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>17.96%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>31.14%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>68.86%</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>25.75%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Social Media</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total # of respondents 167. Statistics based on 167 respondents; 0 filtered; 0 skipped.
Facebook at 94% was an overwhelming favourite recommendation by students for universities to engage on and provide university information. The next social media site recommendation for the same purpose was Youtube (68%) followed by Twitter (31%). In the other social media sites recommendations included localised social media site such as Vkontake.

Table 4.29.1: Statistics - Which Social Media sites would you recommend Universities to use to help students in course selection?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>508</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.9685</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>4.0000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>2.38482</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variance</td>
<td>5.687</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Skewness</td>
<td>.108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
<td>.216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error of Kurtosis</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum</td>
<td>2016.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30.) Would you recommend your friend to use social media to select a university course?

Table 4.30: Recommendation of social media to friends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Would you recommend your friends to use social media to select a university course?</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>74.85%</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.15%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey established that mode of ‘yes’ at 75.5% approval that the respondents would recommend friends to use social media to choose university courses. The Table illustrate the distribution of these findings.

**Table 4.30.1: Statistics - Would you recommend your friend to use Social Media to select University course?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Valid</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

31.) If your answer for the previous Question is Yes, what is the reason for recommending social media?

**Table 4.31: Reason for recommending social media to friends**

Various reasons were provided by the respondents on why they would recommend a friend to use social media to search for a university course and these included: - easy to use an easy to communicate with friends and staff from the university; social media is where the individuals share their personal opinions and these are mostly true; most organisations provide official and trusted information via social media as well.

Social media is a good resource for university information because of accessibility, availability, connectivity (person-to-person, group-to-group), speed and time saving. In depth information regarding course and university was suggested to be available via social media because it is the easiest way to group everyone and to
obtain fast information. It is also more easy and fun because “students mainly use social media for communicating with friends and others”. Moreover, social media enables more interaction and sharing information with my friends.

A respondent stated that social media is the easiest way of communication because through it, “they can gather personal opinions of the students actually studying in that university”. A respondent observed that social media is useful to get true opinion and real stories thorough reading of comments of other students who are already studying at this university. Additionally, “information about universities is already provided through their own channels and the only way to trust the information is through social media interactions”. Some students will try to find negative comments about a university on internet search and thus clarity is easier. Thereafter, if the students are comfortable with the university, they will proceed to the next step which is registration.

Similarly, a respondent cited that youngsters prefer social media to the traditional sorts as it provides higher chance of them actually interacting with information on social networks. It is likely that students will try to find out about the university activities and environment especially if these are related to their course.

A respondent intimated that, “If all information about the university is there on social media, perhaps more people will know about the university because these days’ people spend a lot of their time in social media/networks”. Additionally, more people are using smart phones these days so one of the best ways to keep in touch with people is through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Social media is useful for getting more opinions because people are more Internet dependent now and the way technology is changing people rely more on it.
A respondent would recommend to friends to use social media to help select courses in any university as social media sites, such as Facebook, are used heavily by the younger generation. It would be very convenient if people were given the ability to make decisions between selecting courses while consulting a friend without having to shift through browser windows every time. Additionally, a respondent finds that social media has easier access to gather information. However, “Although a university’s presence on social media makes it easier for students to reach universities, parents need accurate and reliable information”.

Social media has “faster publication, wide coverage, easy to share information which is a good reason that they can get aware of facilities our university is providing to students”. Moreover, they can also suggest their friends and relatives to enrol in a university.

A respondent recommends social media to other students because it will help them to find different kinds of information about education. With social media they can actually see how the university looks like and how the surroundings are. The respondent added that with social media, they can also “See the people of the university whether they have a friendly environment or not. Through social media, one can learn more about the university through testimonies and student reviews, because many are actively using media”. It gives people's point of view about the courses and the university itself and helps one to get a better picture of the university, by asking friends who already attend the university. Access and convenience of sharing of information is also listed as a plus point.

Convenience is a major advantage as most individuals have access to social media in most of their activities. Therefore, universities may extend their reach
through advertisements and thus reach prospective students the world over and so, “The University can cover important matters in few minutes for students or future students and information is easily exposed to people worldwide as compared to traditional modes”. A respondent recommends social media use because it is a good way to read about the fields of that course, and also for watching some videos that describe the facilities or talk about the future of a particular course. Therefore, “It is easier to get information about universities and at the same time communication is much more direct and open and social media helps to spread the information faster”.

Social media is being used for seeing videos chats amongst students and lectures. Event coverage opportunities would broaden one’s mind into better selecting the university and course they would like to take. A respondent expounded further that social media gives information about university and its students and courses by being “interactive, convenient and comprehensive”. A respondent recommends social media so that they “get the opportunity of seeing and asking other students about the university. It has become the easiest way to connect to people”.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the survey findings for both close and open ended questions. 167 international students took part in the surveys and their feedback presented in tables and charts. Overall, the findings has demonstrated the importance, urgency, reliability, connectivity, ease and popularity of various social media in supporting decision making in university course selections and choices. The next chapter will focus on the discussion of the survey data in line with the research question and research objectives.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion related to the survey findings and research hypotheses. The survey analysis from the previous chapter indicates that students recognize the importance of social media in university course choices and for other ad hoc communication purposes. Next, this chapter takes a fine look at these survey findings and puts them in perspective of the research objectives, research hypotheses and the research question.

5.2 Discussion of findings

The first study objective was to determine if international students use social media for university and course selection. Survey findings indicate that social media that have significant following and student profiles include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and other social media. This study literature found that these social media are used for university course recruitment online or for preliminary information search before the prospective students visit the institution in person (Chen & Zimitat, 2006).

The data analysis suggests that students use both traditional information sources as much as they use social media. However it is not evident that one exerts more influence than the other. This finding is in contrast with what one would expect considering the high popularity of social media amongst high school students and teenagers and the prolific use of social media amongst this group. While this discrepancy requires a more thorough investigation, there are a number of possible explanations that can form the basis of a number of hypotheses for future research.
One possible explanation for the low importance of social media as a source of influence for future students could be the lack of relevant content. This is due to the low engagement of such tools by universities as public relation and direct marketing tools. Most internet users expect to see links with corporate blogs, discussion forums or social networking applications like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Delicious, Flickr, and Digg on the web pages they visit. A large majority of universities do not provide online visitors with such options on their home pages and some universities are limiting their attention on social networks like Facebook and Twitter. Lack of exciting and innovative applications, but also lack of other forms of social media like online communities, blogs, forums, and bulletin boards make it difficult to connect with future students. Creating attractive social media applications and connecting with potential students is therefore a major challenge for university marketers. This requires the allocation of resources, a different approach to marketing (from one-to-many to one-to-one), monitoring the social media domain, keeping these applications up-to-date.

The second study objective was to determine if social media influences the university course selection process of potential students. In this study, 19 respondents (24%) indicated that social media had high impact on their university decision making. In addition, 12 respondents (16%) said it had some influence and 17 respondents (22%) felt social media provided additional information. Interestingly, only 21 respondents (13%) depended on social media as an information source as compared to 68 (41%) who depended on traditional information sources. The literature review established that international students use social media to enquire about finance issues, gain information about programs and activities, gather insight about course expectations, understand about other competitive courses and
achieve persuasion to actually enroll in the respective programs (Pimpa, 2003). This research illustrated further on how the students use social media for selecting University to study.

Students use social media for a variety of purposes:- to gauge accessibility after failing to get admission from local Universities (Maringe & Carter, 2007); to explore career prospects and to explore cost issue to determine affordability (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006); to investigate the international University collaboration with other accredited sister institutions (Cheung, Yuen, T.W.W., Yuen, C.Y.M., & Cheng, 2011); to weigh the cultural fitness for study and success in a preferred course (Counsell, 2011). Additionally, research has found that students are more concerned about the learning environment and will most probably investigate the situation by reading comments from others via social media or other online platforms (Chung, Holdsworth, Li & Fam, 2009). There are many instances when family and friends add prospective students to University social media groups or recommend their following to interact with professors or administration assistance for course selection (Bodycott, 2009; Lee & Morrish, 2011).

It is likely that students may have sought to obtain information on other areas such as the university’s facilities, services, events, activities instead of specifically seeking university and course information. Social media may therefore have not been the students’ primary source of university information.

The third study objective was to establish international students’ social media usage and preference. Various literature sources cite studies on international students’ decision making with assistance of social media and networks (Phang, 2012). Evidence of social networks and media influencing students decision making
in University course choices has further been demonstrated by online recommendations from peers, tutors, relatives, pals and sometimes strangers (Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006; Chen & Zimitat, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007).

Additional studies by Mazzarol & Soutar (2002) indicate that international students prefer advice and referrals from the University alumni via social media to share experiences and expectations. This is despite the fact that the students will make the final decision after consulting with other people and accessing various online and traditional sources of information (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Furthermore, Pimpa (2003) established that international students’ decision-making varies with the level of education in consideration. The prospective students can opt for contacting friends and other students in various social media like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Google+, among others. However, if what the international student seeks is about financial support such as scholarships or the university course costs, then the University website is a common attraction (Pimpa, 2003).

The fourth and final study objective was to identify social media sites and features that universities could engage on and integrate to attract and recruit international students. Facebook attracts amongst the highest following amongst social media sites and therefore can be used as a key channel for recruiting international students (Maringe, 2006; Maringe & Carter, 2007). However, some respondents were concerned that the information is not exhaustive for their decision making needs at all times. Indeed the dynamic social media with live updates influence the international students’ decision as the queries and updates occur instantly (Cubillo, Sanchez, and Cervino, 2006).
The challenge for university marketing teams is to find ways to stimulate students and advocates providing comments and reviews in university-sponsored forums or online communities, and also publishing in their own online social networks, blogs, or other forms of social applications. This is a practice already implemented by many businesses, with very positive results on brand awareness, acquisition, and customer loyalty. The simple presence in the social media space is not enough for successful higher education marketing. Recruitment officers should actively and continuously engage the social media in their promotional mix, understand the online behavior of potential students, and accept that the customer is in fact a powerful party. Strong institutional commitment is very important and university marketers must be willing to allocate resources in this form of communication.

Marketing strategies utilising the social media present a promising domain for higher education institutions although higher education institutions are still in the infancy stage of this approach and have a lot to learn. Field experience suggests that the approach to social media channels as communication tools must be different from the traditional mass media. The focus of social media-based marketing should be on two-way communication, dialog and engagement rather than using the social media as broadcasting channels or advertising platforms. While cost reduction and increasing effectiveness can be serious arguments for higher education institutions to engage social media as part of their marketing strategies, such strategies require a redesign of marketing departments and changes in communication approaches: from one-way communication to listening to customer voice and customer engagement. While most higher education marketing departments are not familiar with this type of communication, university management must make a serious effort to restructure and acquire personnel with the right capabilities.
One less visible yet important problem with engaging social media strategies is the very essence of these channels, namely the user generated content. The deployment of such media could expose serious internal problems to the public and disseminate complaints by incumbent students or even personnel to a large scale. Openness is a serious advantage, but also a disadvantage for organisations trying to keep things hidden from public scrutiny. The openness of the social media can therefore mean trouble for some higher education institutions and reputation management must become a part of the marketing agenda. Another weakness of engaging social media strategies can be the need for substantial organisational resources in order to monitor and utilise the online discussion created within such channels.

In this study the first research hypotheses and null hypothesis was established as follows:

**H1**: Social media marketing can effectively influence international students' university decision-making process.

**H0**: Social media marketing cannot effectively influence international students' university decision-making process.

This study established that students are prolific users of social media and engage on a variety of social media for a variety of purposes. Likewise from the literature review, there are countless examples of universities engaging with prospective university students using a variety of strategies. Social media engagement by universities may be at a more advanced level in some countries as opposed to other for example in where this study was conducted. Therefore what this indicates is that the early adoption stage in some countries may lead to more advanced level of social media use for marketing and recruitment and so provide a
useful alternative for university information source that will or could influence university decision-making. This finding is proved by the social media profile ownership during ‘high school’ being lower than ‘now’. This increase in frequency implies the effectiveness of social media in decision process.

Therefore, the alternate hypothesis is coupled with the specific decision needs. \textbf{H1}: Social media marketing can effectively influence international students' university decision-making process is approved while the null hypothesis is disproved. This study established Universities are also likely to use social media to market their courses to International students because they are busy and no time for going to the institutions in person (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

The second research hypothesis and null hypothesis was focused on university decision-making as follows:

\textbf{H2}: International students turn to social media for university decision-making.

\textbf{H0}: International students do not turn to social media for university decision-making.

This study established various social media used for university course decision making. These include Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Twitter, Google, YouTube, Pintrest, Instagram and other social media. This study also established the actual reasons why the international students turn to these social media including university information, courses, sample lectures, student activities and other information. Therefore, the alternate Hypothesis \textbf{H2}: International students turn to social media for university decision-making is verified while the null Hypothesis \textbf{H0} is disapproved.
The research question for this study was “What impact or influence does social media have on international students university decision making process?” Taking into consideration the survey findings and the study objectives and validation of the study hypothesis it may be inferred that social media does have impact and influence on the university and course decision making process. Although the impact or influence does not appear to be overwhelming, based on prolific social media usage, presence on several social media sites, and access to university and course information on university social media sites, it can be concluded that that social media influence generally co-exists with traditional information sources in the university course selection and decision-making process.

5.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the study objectives and hypothesis. Among the study objectives, this study has established that international students prefer and use social media for various purposes. The most popular social media in the academic environment context is Facebook according to the findings. This has also established that international students do use social media for searching the university information, activities, fees, calendars, scholarships, qualification requirements and other ad hoc enquiries. In addition, Facebook is among the leading social media that can be used by universities during recruitment or international students. Finally, among the study objectives, this chapter established that social media are very useful for decision making on university courses because of ease, speed, availability and presence. However, this study also established various grounds where social media has not been helpful to the international student. Overall, such reasons were more on
In terms of hypotheses, the following alternates were proved while their null statements were disapproved.

**H1**: Social media marketing can effectively influence international students' University decision-making process

**H2**: International students turn to social media for university decision-making.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

On the backdrop of increasing student mobility, the lure of students to education hubs aside from the US, UK, Australia, decreasing budgets and funding, many universities globally need to become more competitive to achieve student recruitment goals. The natural response to this is to utilise whatever traditional recruitment channels are available which do come at a cost to the university, both in terms of resources and finances. Choudaha (2013) suggests that, “In this context, social media presents an ideal opportunity by not only balancing institutional control of the communication and admissions process but also adapting to the changing engagement patterns of prospective students. In this context, the collaborative and engaging nature of social media provides a communication platform built on opinions and experiences of students and alumni and thus provides an opportunity to “tame the fundamentally unpredictable and serendipitous nature of word of mouth without losing what makes it so valuable in the first place—its authenticity”. (Zeisser, 2010). The recommendations in this section focus on some of the going beyond what may or already is being done by universities and based on inputs from the study.

6.1 Recommendations

As Universities seek to recruit international students, it is evident that they would now need to move beyond just traditional information sources alone. Social media can provide the global reach, ease of information access and cost efficiency in reaching out to international students. In this context, universities need to have
clarity on the type of international students they target so that congruent information can be available on various social media to satisfy their queries. Apart from the use of social media by students and universities, the key elements of social media as explained in the literature review are engagement, collaboration, communities. In this context, a number of recommendations are made for universities to consider, using examples of how these are being done by some universities.

**Engagement through localisation of social media**

Since international student recruitment involves significant time, resources, processes, and activities, university recruitment offices would need to consider profound understanding of social media tools and processes, local markets, language barriers and differences, and disparities in international student decision-making processes. These inherent disparities are highlighted by cultural and language differences and contexts of countries and may be closed through effective use of social media, which provides highly efficient solutions with its capability to adapt to the expectations and requirements of potential international students rather easily (Choudaha, 2013). Apart from the dominant social media sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Google+, universities should also consider localised social media sites as suggested by some for e.g. Vkontakte (Russia).

The underlying purpose of localisation is to bring products and solutions closer to consumers or end-users by closing or dismantling language barriers and cultural gaps (Singh, 2011, p. 269). For commercial businesses, they need to localise their social media usage and reach as they expand globally to attract more customers and to close language disparities.
As for social media localisation, the goal is to leverage social media that enables the organisation to "create brand communities and crowd-sourcing models, gain consumer insights, enhance product and brand awareness, improve search engine optimisation efforts, reduce customer acquisition and service costs, and optimise overall marketing and communication efforts" (Singh, 2011, p. 270). In the context of international student recruitment, localisation can be achieved by creating local web pages and social network accounts that specifically target prospective students of source countries (Choudaha, 2013). The University of Kentucky College of Arts and Science created localised pages on Chinese websites, such as Renren, Weibo and Sina to recruit potential student applicants and to support faculty exchange and study abroad programs (Choudaha, 2013).

Another institution that embraced social media localisation is the School of Graduate Studies of Canada's Memorial University. The university created a social media online presence on the most visited social networking sites in China, South Korea and Japan. This campaign was accomplished by tapping the services of a graduate student from each source country to help leverage and augment the potential of foreign sites such as Renren, Naver and Mixi in international student recruitment (Choudaha, 2013). For colleges and universities engaged in international student recruitment, social media localisation can result in highly visible online presence in target local markets or source countries, drive higher response rate, and attract and recruit more international students. Localisation is not merely about creating pages and using the local languages of source countries, but also about developing and implementing the right and effective localisation strategies (Heffring, 2012) that includes building the local 'fan' base. This is achieved through encouraging international alumni to become active members or administrators of
localized sites, forums or discussion pages; encouraging prospective international students to collaborate and participate; and utilising social media applications to promote sharing of content and engagement.

**Collaboration with alumni**

Active alumni collaboration is one effective way to connect with international students. Choudaha (2013) noted that prominent international alumni can serve as an effective resource not only for student marketing and recruitment activities, but also in terms of future fund-raising campaigns. International alumni can also serve as excellent and reliable advisor to prospective international students. The problem is many colleges and universities lose contact with their international alumni once they finish their studies. With social media, institutions can reestablish contact with their alumni and encourage them to participate in their international student recruitment process and activities.

One way to effectively tap alumni collaboration is to encourage international alumni to write personal blogs about their campus experiences and how their education helped them achieve their goals. This suggests that universities may need to create a separate page or site intended for international student recruitment. College admission experts then invite and encourage international alumni to write blogs or articles that will be posted on the site or page. The university may also post a list of its prominent international alumni by country that some of their prominent business or political leaders have graduated from their college or university.

Colleges and universities may also solicit financial contributions, donations or help from their international alumni for purposes of international student recruitment. This may be achieved through fund-raising, and the underlying purpose
is to conduct recruitment campaigns in target sources countries. For example, due to not maintaining and updating their database, the University of Massachusetts had difficulty in contacting their former Indian alumni. Instead they turned to social media site LinkedIn which resulted in a higher and more successful contact rate (Makrez, 2011).

Another use of social media for alumni contact and reunion is Skype which the Columbia International University utilised to re-establish contact with its international and U.S. students. Indeed, international alumni can boost an institution international student recruitment process by sharing their stories and by helping in fund-raising campaigns (Bourke, 2000) and as valuable references for prospective international students.

Creating communities

Through social media, universities can create communities for specific topics or subjects which may arise through analysing content that prospective students create through university and course enquiries. These communities could involve university staff, current students and alumni as subject experts to answer specific questions and queries that prospective students raise and specific information that they request in their pursuit of a university and course decision-making process.

Social media analytics

Universities should gather data from the outset to determine what international students need in order to shorten their decision making process. This study established that lack of timely communication is a reason why some prospective international students have yet to embrace social media communication
with a university of interest. Thus, regular follow-up of the students’ queries and post of messages and announcements would be very essential to attract these prospective international students.

At present universities may not be monitoring the usage of or success of social media campaigns, hence the lack information about the success of the social media strategy. Universities should therefore consider using social media analytics to trace and measure the effectiveness of social media in marketing various courses, activities and other general enquiries in regard to international students.

6.2 Future studies

Future studies may gather information and demographics of prospective international students, courses sought, reasons for not enrolling. This would be particularly useful in determining if they are any recurring trends amongst students from different countries and thus help universities strategise and localise their social media strategies accordingly. In addition, future studies could focus on social media analytics. This would provide more in-depth information on social media usage by international students for university decision making and guide universities in their social media and student recruitment strategies.
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Appendix A

Research Ethics Approvals

From: QUT Research Ethics Unit
Sent: Thursday, June 13, 2013 10:36 AM
To: Vijay Paul Reddy; Jason Watson; vpred1@gmail.com
Cc: Janette Lamb
Subject: Ethics Application Approval -- 1300000301

Dear Mr Vijay Paul Reddy

Project Title: Social media influences on international student course selection

Ethics Category: Human - Low Risk
Approval Number: 1300000301
Approved Until: 13/06/2016 (subject to receipt of satisfactory progress reports)

We are pleased to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC) and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

I can therefore confirm that your application is APPROVED.

If you require a formal approval certificate please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available UHREC meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if UHREC raises any additional questions or concerns.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received QUT ethical clearance, the decision to commence and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the QUT ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries.

We wish you all the best with your research.

Kind regards

Janette Lamb on behalf of the Chair UHREC Research Ethics Unit | Office of Research | Level 4  88 Musk Avenue, Kelvin Grove | Queensland University of Technology
Thanks Vijay
The amended questionnaire is approved.

Janette Lamb  •  Research Ethics Administration Officer
Office of Research  •  Queensland University of Technology
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w  http://www.research.qut.edu.au/ethics/
CRICOS No 00213J
Appendix B

Consent to Access Data Subjects

20 May 2013

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Queensland Univ. of Technology
Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia

RE: ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FOR THE PURPOSES OF DATA COLLECTION

We understand that Mr Vijay Reddy has planned to conduct an online survey to fulfill the data collection portion of his QUT Research Programme.

We have no objection to the data collection as the survey conducted will be anonymous and no data will be stored within our systems. A notice will be placed in the respective student intranet system invite students to participate in the survey. A data collection coversheet describing the confidentiality of data will be accessible by all survey participants prior to entering and completing the survey.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Muhammad Anis
Sr Manager, Student Services / Business Development
Appendix C

Participant Information for QUT Research Project

Social Media Influences on International Student Course Selection

QUT Ethics Approval Number 1300000301

Research Team

Principal Researcher: Vijay Reddy vijay.reddy@student.qut.edu.au
Associate Researcher: Dr Jason Watson ja.watson@qut.edu.au

If you have any questions or require further information about the project, please contact the research team members.

Description (What is the purpose of this research?)

International students use many information sources when making their course selection. These sources have traditionally included brochures and prospectuses; friends & family; university website. Increasingly, social media has had a major impact on users, most notably on teens. This research investigates how social media use influences international students in the university search process and in their decision making. The focus of this research is on how international student students make decisions when selecting a course.

Participation (What will I be asked to do?)

You are invited to participate in this project because you are an international student and this research is related to your decision making process in selecting your course of study.

Your participation will involve completing a 21 item anonymous questionnaire that will take approximately 20 minutes of your time. The questionnaire asks you how you made your decision to select your course; the information sources you used and specifically the role and use of social media in selecting your course.

Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary.

Expected benefits (How will I or others benefit?)

Whilst this research will not benefit you directly, you will be assisting universities and prospective students in terms of universities’ use of effective marketing techniques, and enhancement of student-university communication channels via social media sites and channels. This study will also contribute to social media and marketing literature by introducing new social media marketing techniques, and strategies that can be used by universities and further studied and examined by future researchers and scholars.

Risks (Are there any risks involved?)

There are no risks associated with your participation in this project.

Privacy and Confidentiality (Is this survey confidential?)

All responses and comments are anonymous and will be treated confidentially. Your name and personal details are not required in any of the responses.

Any data collected as part of this project will be stored securely as per QUT’s Management of research data policy.

Concerns / complaints (If I have any concerns or complaints about the conduct of the project)

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. However, if you do have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the project you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Unit on +61 7 3138 5123 or email ethicscontact@qut.edu.au. The QUT Research Ethics Unit is not connected with the research project and can facilitate a resolution to your concern in an impartial manner.

Consent to Participate

Submitting the completed online questionnaire is accepted as an indication of your consent to participate in this project.
Appendix D

Invitation to participate in a Survey

Dear International Student

We are pleased to invite you to participate in an online survey on how social media use influences international students in their search for a course and in their decision making.

Your participation will involve completing 31 questions that will take approximately 20 minutes of your time. The questionnaire asks you how you made your decision to select your course; the information sources you used and specifically the role and use of social media in selecting your course. All your responses and comments are anonymous and confidential. Your name, personal details and e-mail are not required in any of the responses. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary.

Please access the survey at this link:

https://survey.qut.edu.au/f/177479/e711/

Thank you very much for your interest and participation.

Yours sincerely,

Vijay Reddy,
Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU)
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dr Jason Watson,
School of Information Systems, Faculty of Science and Engineering,
Queensland University of Technology (QUT),
Brisbane, Australia
Appendix E

Survey Questionnaire

Social Media Influences on International Student University Course Selection

Introduction & Definitions

The focus of this survey is on how international student students make decisions when selecting a course through various information sources and in particular through social media.

Please use these definitions to assist you with completing this questionnaire:

a) Traditional Information Sources - these are information sources that are not social media, for example newspapers, brochures, friends, family, high school counsellors.

b) Social Media Information Sources - such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram.

c) Social Media Profile - Information that you provide on a social media site which includes, for example, your user name, interests, your country of residence, date of birth.

d) Decision making - is the process of selecting a logical choice from available options, for example, when a student selects a university course from the many course choices available.
Section A - General Information about you
These are general questions that will assist us with our research.

1. Which is your country of residence?  

2. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

3. Which university course are you studying now (please tick one only)?
   - English Language Programme
   - Diploma
   - Bachelors Degree
   - Masters Degree

4. When did you first look for course information?
   - When still in High School
   - After completing High School
   - Other ________________________

Section B - Traditional Information Sources
Think back to when you first were trying to select your university course when answering these questions:

5. How did you first hear about your university course? (please tick one only)
   - University Website
   - Internet Search
   - Education Exhibition/Fairs
   - University Representative
   - Recruitment Agent
   - Foreign Embassy
   - Scholarship Agency in my country
   - School Counsellor
   - Family member
   - Friend
   - Newspaper Advertisement
   - Education Guide/Directory
   - Other Traditional Information Sources ..........................................................

6. Which traditional information sources did you use when looking for a university course? (please tick all that apply)
   - University Website
   - Internet Search
   - Education Exhibition/Fairs
   - University Representative
   - Recruitment Agent
   - Foreign Embassy
   - Scholarship Agency in my country
   - School Counsellor
   - Family member
   - Friend
   - Newspaper Advertisement
   - Education Guide/Directory
   - Other Traditional Information Sources ..........................................................
7. What kind of information did you seek using traditional media sources? (please tick all that apply)
- University Information
- Course Information
- Sample Lectures
- Student Activities
- Other Information _____________________________

8. During your university course search, have you contacted or interacted with a university in any of the following ways? (please tick all those that apply)
- I requested university course information through e-mail
- I spoke to a university staff through the phone
- I spoke to a university staff at an education exhibition/fair
- I downloaded university course information from the university website
- I did not interact with the university using any of the above
- Other interaction _____________________________

9. Which of these traditional information sources influenced you most in your decision-making and university course selection? (please rank the top 3 only)
- University Website
- Internet Search
- Education Exhibition/Fairs
- University Representative
- Recruitment Agent
- Foreign Embassy
- Scholarship Agency in my country
- School Counselor
- Family member
- Friend
- Newspaper Advertisement
- Education Guide/Directory
- Other Traditional Information Sources _____________________________

Section C - Social Media Information Sources
Think back to the time when you were seeking course information and tell us how you used social media.

10. Which social media sites did you visit for university course information? (please tick all that apply)
- Facebook
- MySpace
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Google+
- YouTube
- Pinterest
- Instagram
- Other Social Media sites _____________________________

11. What kind of course information did you seek on social media site(s) when searching for a university course? (please tick all that apply)
- University information
- Course information
- University course recommendations
- University course opinions
- Video of university
- Sample lectures
- Other Information _____________________________
12. During your university course search, have you contacted or interacted with a university in any of the following ways? (please tick all that apply)

- [ ] I used a University's Facebook page
- [ ] I followed a university on Twitter
- [ ] I used a university profile on LinkedIn
- [ ] I contacted a university staff using Instant Messaging (IM)
- [ ] I did not interact with the university using any of the above
- [ ] Other interaction ______________________________________

13. Did you contact university students or staff to get their opinion on a university course using social media?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

14. If your answer to Question 13 is Yes, did that have an impact on your decision to apply to that university? (please answer according to the scale provided)

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<td>It helped me make a decision on my university course</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Think about which information sources you depended on most when making your university course decision. (please answer according to the scale provided)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependence</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I depended on social media information sources more than traditional information sources</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I depended on traditional information sources more than social media information sources</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Which of the following social media information sources influenced you most in your university course selection? (please tick one only)

- [ ] Facebook
- [ ] MySpace
- [ ] LinkedIn
- [ ] Twitter
- [ ] Google+
- [ ] Youtube
- [ ] Pinterest
- [ ] Instagram
- [ ] Other Social Media ____________________________

17. Tell us about how social media helped you in your university course selection and decision. (please write your answer)_______________________________________________________________________________________
18. Are there any reasons why you may not have used social media to look for university course information?

☐ Yes
☐ No

19. If your answer to Question 18 is Yes, please state the reason why you may not have used social media to look for a university course. (please write your answer)

Section D – General Social Media use

Think about how you use social media generally and the kind of activities that you engage on social media and answer the questions in this section.

20. Did you have a social media profile when in high school?

☐ Yes
☐ No

21. On which social media sites did you have a profile when in high school? (you may tick more than one)

☐ Facebook
☐ MySpace
☐ LinkedIn
☐ Twitter
☐ Google+
☐ YouTube
☐ Pinterest
☐ Instagram
☐ Other Social Media __________________________

22. Do you have a social media profile now?

☐ Yes
☐ No

23. On which social media sites do you have a profile now? (you may tick more than one)

☐ Facebook
☐ MySpace
☐ LinkedIn
☐ Twitter
☐ Google+
☐ YouTube
☐ Pinterest
☐ Instagram
☐ Other Social Media __________________________

24. On which social media sites are you active on now? (you may tick more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Sites</th>
<th>Very Active</th>
<th>Somewhat Active</th>
<th>Occasionally Active</th>
<th>Not Active</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25. How much time do you spend each day on these applications? (you may tick more than one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Over 2 hours</th>
<th>Up to 2 hours</th>
<th>Up to 1 hour</th>
<th>Up to 30 mins</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MySpace</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google+</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinterest</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Social Media</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26. What kind of activities do you participate on social media sites? (tick all those that apply)
- [ ] Create an entry on my social media site like Facebook
- [ ] Post comments on a friend’s page or wall
- [ ] Send messages using Instant Messaging (IM)
- [ ] Share & post photos, videos and music
- [ ] Keep in touch with family
- [ ] Keep in touch with friends
- [ ] Look for information on computers and mobile phones
- [ ] Look for information on services like travel, tourism, airlines
- [ ] Look for health, diet and fitness information
- [ ] Look for the latest fashion trends
- [ ] Buy things online
- [ ] Read technology, computer and mobile phone news/reviews
- [ ] Read general news
- [ ] Other _______________________________

Section E - University Course Information on Social Media

The questions ask you to reflect on how universities could have helped you further with your course selection process via social media and their websites.

27. How should Universities use social media applications to provide information on their programmes to international students (you may select more than one)
- [ ] Create blogs and forums for specific university course and education topics
- [ ] Participate in education related blogs and forums
- [ ] Advertise in blogs and social networks
- [ ] Use photo and video hosting services to show their facilities and activities
- [ ] Create and host a sample video lecture on social media sites
- [ ] Create and host a presentation of the university on a social media site
- [ ] Showcase students from my country on a video sharing application
- [ ] Make university course information available through video
28. How would you expect a university to use social media with prospective students? (you may select more than one)
   - Information on educational opportunities
   - Information on events through videos, photos
   - Latest university news and activities
   - Ability to connect to other university students
   - Link to university alumni
   - University alerts

29. Which social media sites would you recommend universities to use to help students in their university course selection? (you may select more than one)
   - Facebook
   - MySpace
   - LinkedIn
   - Twitter
   - Google+
   - YouTube
   - Pinterest
   - Instagram
   - Other Social Media

30. Would you recommend your friends to use social media to select a university course?
   - Yes
   - No

31. If your answer for Question 30 is yes, what is the reason for recommending social media? (please write your answer)