

Role of Social Media in Strengthening the Educational Choices in Non-state Higher Education Industry in Sri Lanka

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This study attempts to identify the importance of social media and its impact on educational choices towards a sustainable future. As National university intake in Sri Lanka has become progressively competitive throughout the years, private sector involvement with foreign universities emerged as a domestic option to meet the rising demand of university level education. International Bachelor's degree programmes of top ranked foreign universities are mostly available with high optionality and flexibility which stimulate students' enrolment at peak. Apparently, marketing perspective of private higher educational institutes are different to each other and competition in the market evolve plentiful of information available through various online and offline sources to rate the students' first impression. In contrast, social media is an indispensable tool to promote educational choices of prospective potential students along with parents in less time irrespective of the information seeker's location. Therefore, social media's role in non-state higher education is significant and students' attraction to social media marketing curtail in referring to other information sources in pre-purchase stage of the decision making process. The content analysis of 40 empirical studies on students' choice was used to determine the importance of social media in different countries. Even though, 40% of the studies indicated that 'information sources' are influential, it is comparatively low when compared to other influential factors in selecting a Bachelor's degree. Furthermore, 67.5% of studies have rated social media as influential, out of which 62.5% confirmed university websites are remarkable. Despite, 'open days'(37.5%), 'prospectus' (37.5%) and 'promotional visits' (25%) were rated as other influential sources of information, the level of importance marked for these sources are different. Therefore, it is essential to upgrade the content and quality of information through social media to enhance educational choices. Moreover, the importance of using social media for information gathering can be promoted at open days and promotional visits. However, it is vitally important to arrange all university profiles under the purview of one authority to increase the efficiency of seeking information.

Key words: *Educational choices, Information, Social media, Sri Lanka*