

# SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON UNIVERSITY REPUTATION AND ENROLLMENT: AN EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION OF ONLINE PRESENCE AND STUDENT CHOICES

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**Abstract:** *This study examines the influence of social media on university reputation and enrolment, specifically focusing on private universities in the Klang Valley. As digital communication continues to permeate every aspect of society, higher education institutions must adapt to remain competitive and attract prospective students. The primary objective of this research is to explore the relationship between a university's online presence and students' enrolment decisions. A quantitative survey method was employed, drawing a representative sample of students from private universities in the Klang Valley. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire that assessed students' perceptions of university reputation, social media usage, and the role of online presence in their enrolment choices. Preliminary findings indicate a positive correlation between an institution's social media presence and both its perceived reputation and enrolment rates. The study highlights the significance of effective social media strategies for private universities, emphasizing the need for institutions to leverage digital platforms to enhance their reputation and attract potential students. Further research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of social media on university performance and student success.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, University Reputation, Student Enrollment, Online Presence

## 1. Introduction

In today's digital age, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives, transforming the way we communicate, gather information, and make decisions (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Universities recognize the importance of social media as a powerful tool to interact with their audience and shape their reputation (Kim & An, 2017). A university's reputation plays a crucial role in attracting prospective students, faculty, research funding and partnerships (Pappu & Quester, 2016). It has been recognized that social media can influence

student decisions and may be a gap in understanding of the specific ways in which social media engagement affects student enrollment decisions (Bamberger et al., 2020). However universities are investing in social media strategies, but still lack of comprehensive studies examining the effectiveness of different strategies and platforms in improving the university's reputation (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022).

Therefore, understanding the impact of social media on university reputation and enrollment is paramount. This research aims to empirically examine the relationship between social media presence and university reputation, as well as the impact of social media engagement on student enrollment decisions. By examining the online presence of private universities in the Klang Valley and surveying university students, this study seeks to shed light on the role of social media in shaping student perceptions and decisions.

## **2. University Reputation**

A university's reputation refers to the perception and evaluation of an institution by students, staff and the general public that distinguishes it from other universities (Delgado-Marquez et al., 2013). It encompasses the collective understanding of how the university functions, as well as its external recognition, corporate reputation and identity (Perez and Torres, 2017). A university's reputation represents the institution's past actions and results and reflects its ability to deliver valuable results to various stakeholders (Fombrun et al., 2000; Plewa et al., 2016). The importance of a university's reputation lies in its role as a defining symbol of institutional excellence (Rachmadhani et al., 2018), attracting students, faculty and research investment in the context of globalization (Chen and Esangbedo, 2018). In addition, the reputation of a university plays a crucial role in the decision-making process of students when choosing a university (Khoshtaria, Datuashvili & Matin, 2020). Students see reputation as a key factor and are often willing to invest more in academic programs at reputable institutions (Abbas et al., 2019; Hsieh, 2020; Salter, 2016). Universities also value improving their reputation to ensure long-term sustainability and remain competitive (Plewa et al., 2016). In this regard, the use of social media for student engagement has emerged as a growing trend to build and maintain a long-term reputation (Bonilla Quijada et al., 2021). A positive university reputation can have a variety of effects, including outperforming the competition, fostering student loyalty and retention, and strengthening the institution as a whole. In summary, a university's reputation is a multidimensional concept that influences student decisions, institutional success, and long-term sustainability. Social media platforms offer universities the opportunity to connect with students and improve their reputation in the digital age. (Bonilla Quijada et al., 2021).

### **2.1 Factors Contributing to University Reputation**

Kaushal et al., (2021) stated that university reputation has its key antecedents such as image, perceived quality, perceived value, satisfaction and attachment. While Khoi (2020) added, the model selection of Akaike's Information Criteria (AIC) showed that university reputation was impacted by the six components of the university reputation included: social contributions (SCN), environments (EN), leadership (LE), funding (FU), research and development (RD), and students guidance (SG). Aspects including size, faculty, and students' living condition (salaries and graduation rates) are seen as relevant in the university reputation

measurement scales. (Volkwein & Sweitzer, 2006). The other authors also highlight the following dimensions: emotional engagement, external performance quality, and academic performance quality (Alessandri, Yang, & Kinsey, 2006); leadership, teaching, research, services offered and quality (Brewer & Zhao, 2010). Finally, Vidaver-Cohen (2007) develop a conceptual framework to evaluate reputation in the business school field. Performance, innovation, services, governance, citizenship, and workplace atmosphere are the measurement dimensions she uses in her research.

## **2.2 The Role of Social Media In Shaping University Reputation**

Social media is an important facet of a brand's communication strategy (Owyang et al., 2009). Advertising through social media was done as an afterthought to brands (Eyrich, Padman, and Sweetser, 2008), now social media is a process which can affect brands reputation as well their survival (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Fiaz et al., (2019) also added that using social media for marketing purposes can improve a university's reputation and brand. The more social media marketing activities there are, the more likely it is that students will participate in value co-creation; however, the activities must be enjoyable, engaging, fashionable, and customizable. Value co-creation behaviour improves university brand image and reputation, which is consistent with other studies (Foroudi et al., 2019). Cui et al. (2021) found that an institution's social media presence is positively related to its perceived reputation.

## **2.3 Social Media and Higher Education**

Through the development of Web 2.0, which modifies conventional modes of communication and makes effective and efficient intra- and inter-organizational communications possible through websites, online platforms like Facebook pages, Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs, the current era has brought about a new shift in these modes (Marie Condie et al., 2018; Peruta & Shields, 2017). Students participate in decision-making using various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube channels, based on details about admissions policies, university reputations, and other academic activities (Shields & Peruta, 2019). In the context of higher education institutions, students look to online brand communities like Facebook pages or groups for information about university activities and a competitive edge for admission (Bonilla Quijada et al., 2021). Online brand communities are now used by all higher education institutions for social media marketing and to boost customer involvement.

Higher education practices looking to engage students, Web 2.0 has become standard practice (Plewa et al., 2016). Institutions use vlogs, blogs and newsfeeds to provide live updates as part of their social media marketing (SMM). By integrating emerging approaches such as Social Customer Relationship Management (SCRM) (Dewnarain et al., 2021), traditional practices are changing. SCRM is connected to Web 2.0. Information generation, information distribution and response are the three sub-components of SCRM skills (Trainor et al., 2014). Information production is the specific information generated by consumer interactions on social media platforms, while information dissemination is the sharing of knowledge among peers by customers after the service provider's involvement in a particular topic (Trainor et al., 2014). According to Day (1994), responsiveness is a strategy that enables a company to communicate with and better understand its customers in order to meet their needs. As a result, SCRM capabilities provide a platform for business-customer interaction and increase the reputation of sustainable businesses. When building a brand image, the university should use

some tactics that can influence the image and reputation of the university (Fiaz et al., 2019). First, university social media marketing initiatives should be fun, interactive, and engaging to encourage student participation. Second, the university social media administrators need to create interesting content such as posts, advertisements, and other types of media.

A study by Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles (2013) demonstrated that universities with a higher number of followers, engagement rate, and posting frequency on social media platforms tend to have a better online reputation. Huang et al. (2018) also found that social media metrics, such as likes, shares, and comments, are often used to measure the effectiveness of social media efforts in higher education. According to academic research, there are a number of important characteristics that influence brand post interactions (the amount of likes, comments, and shares). These elements are based on several viewpoints and theoretical frameworks, such as the technology acceptance, user motives and values, psychological factors and attitudes, and post characteristics (Leung & Tanford, 2016).

## **2.4 Effective Social Media Strategies and Platforms in Higher Education**

According to Aman & Hussin (2018), social media has become an important tool for universities to enhance their reputation. Universities use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to connect with their target audience and promote their brand. Aman and Hussin (2018) also mentioned that social media marketing (SMM) is a cost-effective way to advertise and promote the university to a wider audience. SMM also helps universities to engage with their alumni, students, and faculty members. By maintaining a consistent brand image and sharing curated links, universities can attract more customers to view their content and increase their enrollment and revenue. It is important for higher education institution to planning and organizing activities for social media marketing will helps to save time. Thats why social media marketing tools play crucial roles for systematic flow or program and activities. Using the calendar schedule will remind the upcoming activities and avoid redundant activities. (Aman & Hussin, 2018)Evidently, planning and organizing activities for social media marketing is crucial for systematic flow or program and activities. The use of social media marketing tools and a calendar schedule can help universities to save time and be more efficient in their social media marketing efforts. Much of the contributions in the domain of social media content analysis have been centered in depicting content as an end in itself or conducted as far as to relate content type with the amountof engagement, without an instrumental view of the strategic value of content. (Oliveira & Figuero, 2015)

## **2.3 The Influence of Social Media Engagement on Students' Enrollment Decisions**

Compared to their postgraduate peers, prospective students' perception of an institution's brand image is more strongly influenced by their eWOM search activity on social media. In contrast, the direct impact of perceived brand image on enrollment intention is stronger among prospective PhD students. (Nguyen et al., 2020) Perceptions of an institution's brand image have different effects on undergraduate and postgraduate students and their enrollment intentions. Prospective students are more influenced by their online word-of-mouth activities on social media in shaping their perception of an institution's brand image. In contrast, prospective postgraduates are more directly influenced by their perception of brand image in their enrollment decisions. This suggests that institutions should adapt their marketing

strategies and communication channels to effectively engage and attract these diverse student groups. Aeshah et al. (2021) examined the use of social media applications in student decision-making to enroll in colleges. Their finding shows that there is a clearly positive connection between the two. The Nguyen et al. (2020) suggests that the perception of an institution's brand image among prospective undergraduate students is more strongly influenced by their eWOM search activities on social media, while the direct impact of perceived brand image on enrollment intent is stronger among prospective postgraduate students. This implies that institutions should take into account the different preferences and decision-making processes of these student groups and adapt their marketing strategies and communication channels accordingly. The study by Aeshah et al. (2021) further supports this idea, highlighting a significant positive association between the use of social media applications and student decision-making process when enrolling in higher education. Therefore, it is crucial for institutions to understand and use the power of social media in shaping and promoting their brand image to effectively engage and attract both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

#### **2.4 The Role of University Reputation in Shaping Students' Perceptions**

Several authors have proposed that university identification plays a crucial role in bolstering students' university supportive behaviors, as well as a good predictor of alumni brand loyalty. By improving students' perceptions of the university, a university can enhance university rankings, attract excellent students and supportive member of a social unit. The level of brand identification is the factor helping to determine the extent to which a brand shows and boosts consumers identity. (Huong & Huong, 2021)

This emphasizes the importance of university identification in shaping students' supportive behaviors and predicting alumni brand loyalty. By cultivating a positive perception among students, a university can improve its rankings, attract high-caliber students, and foster a supportive community. Brand identification serves as a key determinant of how strongly consumers associate their identity with a brand. Therefore, universities should prioritize efforts to enhance brand identification among their students and alumni, as it can have far-reaching effects on the institution's reputation, student recruitment, and overall success.

#### **2.5 Research Theoretical Model**

The theoretical framework as shown in figure 1.

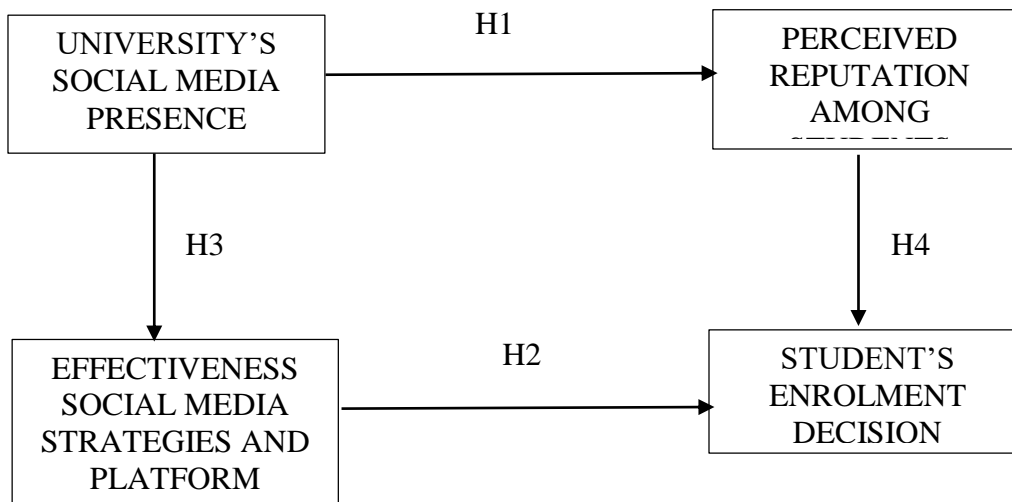


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

### 3. Research Methodology

The research used a quantitative research design to explore the association between the impact of social media and university reputation among private university students in Klang Valley. Seven private universities in the Klang Valley were involved in the research. Data collection took place from January 2023 to March 2023. A carefully selected sample of students from these universities who were active social media users took part in the research. Data was collected via a self-administered online survey questionnaire that covered various aspects such as social media usage, perceived reputation, enrollment decisions, and the effectiveness of social media strategies.

#### 3.1 Demographics

A total of 140 questionnaires were distributed to students from different private universities. After removing outliers and erroneous responses, 126 valid responses were obtained. The demographic profiles of the participants are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Respondents profile (N=126)**

Demographic Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	19-23	101	80.2
	24-28	20	15.9
	29-33	2	1.6
	more than 34	3	2.4
Gender	Male	86	68.3
	Female	40	31.7
Current level of education	Diploma	73	57.9
	Degree	51	40.5
	Master	1	0.8
	Certificate	1	0.8

Field of study or area of specialization	Business, Accounting and Management	116	92.1
	Engineering and Technology	1	0.008
	Information Technology and Computer Science	9	0.07
Household income	Lower-income group Household income is below RM4,850 per month -B40	87	70.7
	Middle-income group Household income between RM4,851 per to RM10,960 permonth-M40	34	27.6
	Upper class Household income exceedsRM10,960 a month - T20	2	1.6
University	UNISEL	104	86
	TAYLOR'S	8	6.6
	UNIKL	1	0.8
	MSU	7	5.8
Frequency of uses social media	Almost constantly, throughout the day	70	55.6
	Several times a day	44	34.9
	Once or twice a day	7	5.6
	Several times a week	3	2.4
	Once or twice a week	1	0.8
	Seldom or never	1	0.8

To test the research hypotheses, structural equation modeling with a partial least squares (PLS) approach was used. Data analysis was performed with SmartPLS 4.0 software (Ringle, Wende, and Will, 2005) using a bootstrapping technique to determine the significance levels of loads, weights, and path coefficients (Ramayah, Yeap, and Ignatius, 2013). Based on the two-stage analysis method recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the validity and quality of the measurement model was first examined and then the relationships shown in the structural model were evaluated.

### 3.2 Measurement Model Estimation

Prior to testing the hypothetical model, the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the measurement model were assessed. The analysis results are presented in Table 2. It is observed that all loadings exceeded the threshold of 0.70, as suggested by Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2013). Moreover, the average extracted variance (AVE) for all constructs surpassed the threshold of 0.5 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), and the composite reliability scores (CR) were all above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2013). These findings indicate the achievement of convergent validity. The discriminant validity test results, presented in Table 3, adhere to the recommended criteria set by Fornell and Cha (1994) and Fornell and Larcker (1981). The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) in Table 3 shows that none of the HTMT criteria exceed the threshold of 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2014), confirming the presence of discriminant validity. The loadings of all constructs in Table 4 meet the criterion, further affirming the achievement of discriminant validity.

Table 2. Measurement model\

Construct	Item	Loading	AVE	CR
<b>UNIVERSITY'S SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE (USMP)</b>	A2_1	0.781	0.744	0.916
	A3_1	0.865		
	B1_1	0.885		
	C2_1	0.892		
	C3_1	0.883		
	D3_1	0.863		
<b>EFFECTIVENESS SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGIES AND PLATFORM (ESMS)</b>	J1_1	0.927	0.877	0.938
	J2_1	0.962		
	K1_1	0.919		
<b>PERCEIVED REPUTATION AMONG STUDENTS (PR)</b>	E1_1	0.872	0.814	0.944
	F2_1	0.892		
	G2_1	0.912		
	G3_1	0.910		
	H1_1	0.925		
<b>STUDENT'S ENROLMENT DECISION(CED)</b>	O1_1	0.939	0.875	0.954
	O3_1	0.942		
	P1_1	0.948		
	R1_1	0.913		

Table 3. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	<b>ESMS</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>SED</b>	<b>USMP</b>
ESMS				
PR	0.847			
SED	0.719	0.793		
USMP	0.757	0.825	0.763	

Table 4. Cross loading

	ESMS	PR	SED	USMP
A2_1	0.542	0.557	0.493	0.781
A3_1	0.544	0.643	0.559	0.865
B1_1	0.616	0.642	0.573	0.885
C2_1	0.642	0.715	0.707	0.892
C3_1	0.602	0.682	0.673	0.883
D3_1	0.716	0.762	0.714	0.863
E1_1	0.671	0.872	0.702	0.692
F2_1	0.728	0.892	0.692	0.719
G2_1	0.710	0.912	0.651	0.674
G3_1	0.749	0.910	0.650	0.682
H1_1	0.727	0.925	0.702	0.741
J1_1	0.927	0.716	0.546	0.613



J2_1	0.962	0.754	0.631	0.686
K1_1	0.919	0.757	0.729	0.694
O1_1	0.586	0.691	0.939	0.671
O3_1	0.698	0.735	0.942	0.716
P1_1	0.653	0.727	0.948	0.671
R1_1	0.622	0.664	0.913	0.657

### 3.3 Structural Model Estimation

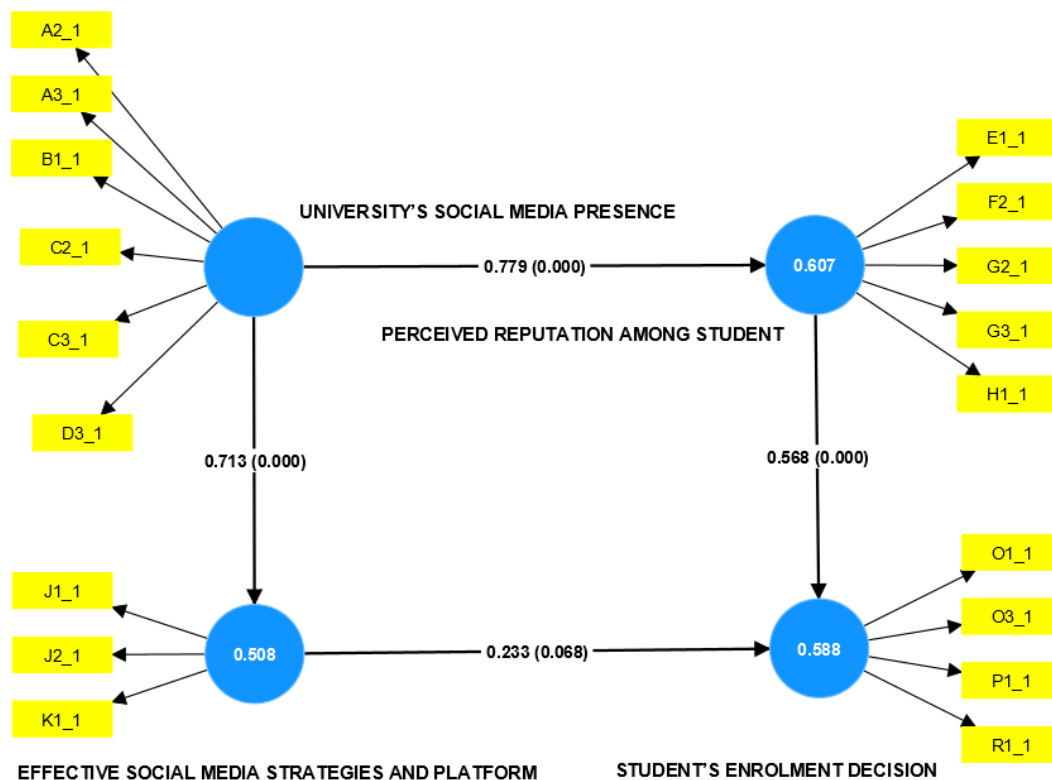


Figure 2. Structured model

Table 6. Results of the hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	Regression Path	Effect Type	Co-efficient	t-test	Decision
H1	USMP ->PR	Direct	0.779	0.000	Support
H2	ESMS ->SED	Direct	0.233	0.068	Not Supported
H3	USMP ->ESMS	Direct	0.713	0.000	Supported
H4	PR ->SED	Direct	0.568	0.000	Supported

To estimate the structural model, a bootstrapping procedure was performed with 5000 resamples to generate the t-values. Figure 2 shows the structural model, while Table 6 presents the results of the hypothesis test. As shown in Figure 2 and Table 6, there is a positive relationship ( $\beta=0.779$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) University social media presence and perceived reputation among student, explaining a 60.7% variance. Effective social media strategies and platform was also positively associated with student's enrolment decision, but not statistically significance ( $\beta=0.233$ ,  $p>0.01$ ), explaining a 58.8% variance. Thus H2 are not supported. University's social media presence show positive relationship and statistically significance with effective social media strategy and platform ( $\beta=0.713$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), explaining 50.8% variance. While, perceived reputation among students also show positive relationship and statistically significance with student's enrolment decision ( $\beta=0.568$ ,  $p <0.00$ ), explaining 58.8% variance .Therefore H1,H3, and H4 are supported. Since H2 not supported, we can conclude that the mediation effect is statistically not significant.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of the study reveal important insights into the relationship between university social media presence, perceived student reputation, effective social media strategies and platforms, and student enrollment decisions. Measurement model analysis confirmed the reliability and validity of the constructs, as all loads exceeded the recommended threshold and convergent validity was achieved (Hair et al., 2013). The discriminant validity test showed that the constructs had distinct characteristics as the mean extracted variance (AVE) was higher than the correlations between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Fornell & Cha, 1994). Furthermore, the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of the correlations (HTMT) was below the threshold, indicating sufficient discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2014). When analyzing the structural model, the results indicate a significant positive correlation between the presence of the university in social media and the perceived reputation among students. This result suggests that a strong social media presence can positively influence students' perceptions of a university's reputation (A. Artemova, 2020).). However, the association between effective social media strategies and platforms and student enrollment decisions was not statistically significant. This implies that while effective social media strategies and platforms play a role in shaping student perceptions, they may not directly impact their enrollment decisions (Y Ahmadi, 2019). In addition, the study found a positive and significant association between university social media presence and effective social media strategies and platforms. This suggests that universities with a strong social media presence are more likely to use effective strategies and platforms to engage with their target audience (K Jamil et al., 2020). Furthermore, perceived reputation among students showed a positive and significant association with student enrollment decision, suggesting that positive reputation may influence student decision to enroll in a particular university (R Rybnicek & R Königsgruber, 2019).

In summary, this study underlines the importance of the presence of universities in social media for the perception of reputation among students. A strong social media presence can have a positive impact on students' perceptions of a university's reputation (S Rahman et al., 2020). However, the study found no direct association between effective social media strategies and platforms and student enrollment decisions. Nonetheless, effective social media strategies and platforms play a role in enhancing a university's reputation, which in turn influences student enrollment decisions. These findings have implications for universities in Klang Valley and beyond, underscoring the importance of maintaining a strong and engaged network social

media presence. Universities should focus on using social media platforms to effectively communicate their strengths, achievements and unique offerings to potential students (J Vanek et al., 2018). In this way, universities can improve their perceived reputation and attract students to enroll. Future research may examine additional factors that may influence the relationship between social media presence and enrollment decisions, allowing for a fuller understanding of the dynamics involved in university reputation and student decisions.

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