

Influence of social media on study abroad decision of college students: An empirical evidence from Surat

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I.INTRODUCTION

Digital technology's quick development has drastically changed how people access, distribute, and use information. Particularly among young adults and college students, social media platforms have become effective communication tools that impact attitudes, opinions, and decision-making processes. Aspirants use social media platforms (SMPs) for personal, professional, and academic reasons.

Indian college students' desire to continue their study abroad has increased significantly. Owing to international exposure, employment prospects, and better earning potential, nations like the US, Canada, UK, Australia, and Germany have emerged as popular travel destinations.

Students and global institutions can communicate through social media for various reasons; like, providing details about universities and courses, sharing real-life experiences and student testimonies, providing virtual tours of the campus, putting career and placement results on display, and fostering aspiration and peer influence.

II.ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Digital platforms that allow users to produce, distribute, and exchange content within online communities and networks are referred to as social media. They enable real-time interaction, multimedia exchange, and interactive communication between people and organisations.

In contrast to traditional media, social media is distinguished by different factors like content created by users, two-way dialogue, personalization based on algorithms, and worldwide accessibility.

Digital Platforms and Study Abroad Decisions

Each platform supports different types of information and influences students in various ways.

Social networking platforms (Instagram, Facebook) are highly visual and interactive. Universities use these platforms to share information like campus photos and virtual tours, student testimonials, cultural activities, and scholarship announcements.

Students explore these platforms to understand campus life, diversity, accommodation, and co-curricular opportunities.

Video Sharing Platforms like YouTube provide information regarding university vlogs, "Day in the life" videos, visa process explanations, cost of living breakdowns, and accommodation reviews.

Professional Networking Platforms like LinkedIn is helpful in checking alumni profiles, analysing job placements, exploring internship opportunities, connecting with current students or graduates, and eventually evaluating return on investment (ROI) and career growth prospects. Further, messaging platforms like WhatsApp share information through university applicant groups pertaining to country-specific student groups, visa guidance communities. These groups provide real-time updates, document checklists, and emotional support.

Additionally, discussion forums like Quora, and Reddit provide insights on university rankings and reputation, safety and cultural adjustment, part-time job opportunities, and academic pressure. Since responses often come from current students or alumni,

the information is perceived as more authentic than official promotions.

Global patterns show how students look for information and decide whether or not to study overseas. Due to improved access to information and worldwide opportunities offered on social media platforms, more students are opting to study overseas. In order to draw in international students, universities are concentrating more on developing a strong online presence. Institutions can highlight their academic capabilities and campus life through social media branding. Students' opinions and choices are greatly influenced by the personal experiences that education influencers and student vloggers share on social media sites like YouTube and Instagram. These days, a lot of colleges host webinars, live Q&A sessions, and online open days to reach students anywhere.

In India, more students are pursuing higher education overseas due to rising income levels and greater professional awareness. Indian students depend increasingly on websites like YouTube and Instagram to examine student experiences, school tours, and ratings of universities. Before choosing a university, students utilize LinkedIn to assess alumni career routes, job placements, and networking opportunities. Social media is now the main source of educational information for college students in India due to the country's ubiquitous smartphone use and reasonably priced internet access.

III.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Social media platforms (SMPs) positively support aspirants by easing information search and enhancing engagement with host institutions (He, 2024) adaptation. Zartashya (2025) reports that platforms such as WeChat and Instagram significantly shape students' perceptions and choices. The research reflects UTAUT2 (Venkatesh et al., 2012) variables like performance expectancy (P. Exp.), hedonic motivation, and social influence, as students trusted relatable online experiences more than traditional marketing messages.

Jacob and Agrawal (2024) found that SMPs provide cost-effective communication and improve students' access to institutional information. Jayadeva (2024)

explored how Indian students use SMPs while planning international education in Germany. Haldorai et al. (2017) identified scholarships, institutional reputation, SMPs, and country image as major determinants influencing Indian students. Wang et al. (2015) report that family, peers, and professors strongly influence students' decisions. Rekhter (2017) showed that students relied on SMPs for academic insights, cultural understanding, and post-graduation opportunities.

Research Objectives and Questions

Research Objective 1: To analyse the impact of education level on Performance Expectancy (P. Exp.) , Information Value, Habit, Trust, Behavioural Intention (B. Int.) , and Use Behaviour (U. Beh.) regarding social media platforms for study abroad decisions.

RQ1: Is there a significant difference in Performance Expectancy (P. Exp.) across different education levels?

RQ2: Is there a significant difference in Information Value across different education levels?

RQ3: Is there a significant difference in Habit across different education levels?

RQ4: Is there a significant difference in Trust across different education levels?

RQ5: Is there a significant difference in Behavioural Intention (B. Int.) across different education levels?

RQ6: Is there a significant difference in Use Behaviour (U. Beh.) across different education levels?

Research Objective 2: To examine the difference in Effort Expectancy (E. Exp.) between male and female respondents regarding the use of social media platforms for study abroad decisions.

RQ7: Is there a significant difference in Effort Expectancy (E. Exp.) between male and female respondents?

Research Objective 3: To study the influence of age groups on Social Influence (S. Inf.) related to social media platforms for study abroad decisions.

RQ8: Is there a significant difference in Social Influence (S. Inf.) across different age groups?

Research Objective 4: To analyse the difference in Use Behaviour (U. Beh.) between male and female respondents regarding social media platforms for study abroad decisions.

RQ9: Is there a significant difference in Use Behaviour (U. Beh.) between male and female respondents?

Variables under Study

The modified UTAUT2 Model framework is used in this study to categorize variables into independent, dependent variables. These factors aid in comprehending how social media affects college students' choices to pursue study abroad.

The elements that affect or forecast the use of SMPs in decision- making about studying abroad are as follows:

- Performance Expectancy (P. Exp.): Perceived usefulness of social media in making better study abroad decisions.
- Effort Expectancy (E. Exp.): Ease of SMPs.
- Social Influence (S. Inf.): Impact of peers, family, and influencers.
- Information Value: Quality and reliability of information available.

The variables as affected by the independent factors are listed below:

- Use Behaviour (Use Beh.): Actual use of social media for study abroad research.
- Student Satisfaction (St. Satisf): Level of satisfaction after using social media information.

Research Hypotheses

H1	There is no significant difference in Performance Expectancy across different education levels.
H2	There is no significant difference in Effort Expectancy between male and female respondents.
H3	There is no significant difference in Social Influence across different age groups.
H4	There is no significant difference in Information Value across different education levels.
H5	There is no significant difference in Habit across different education levels.
H6	There is no significant difference in Trust across different education levels.
H7	There is no significant difference in Behavioural Intention across different education levels.
H8	There is no significant difference in Use Behaviour between male and female respondents.
H9	There is no significant difference in Use Behaviour across different education levels.

Research Design

In order to thoroughly investigate the impact of SMPs on college students' choice for global study programs, the current study combines an exploratory and descriptive research approach.

The focus of the research design comprises:

1. Recognizing the use of SMPs for studying abroad, including how they search for information, use platforms, and make decisions.
2. Evaluating the impact of important factors on (B. Int.), including (P. Exp), (E. Exp.), (S. Inf.), enabling situations, information value, investigating the use of SMPs and how it affects student satisfaction.

Since not much work has been identified in the Indian scenario, exploratory research is employed in the early stages of the study to obtain deeper insights. This

method aids in developing a conceptual framework, recognizing pertinent variables, and comprehending new trends.

Exploratory research in this study comprises a thorough analysis of existing research on SMP use and study-abroad choices, the identification of important concepts such as digital literacy, social influence, performance expectations, and trust, and the examination of how students use SMPs for learning and their preferences and usage patterns.

College students' traits and behaviour are methodically described using descriptive research, which also looks at the connections between variables found during the exploratory stage.

The following justifications are offered to substantiate the claim:

- Clear problem definition and comprehension are aided by exploratory inquiry.
- Measurement and analysis of the specified variables are aided by descriptive research.
- When combined, they offer both quantitative validation and qualitative comprehension.

As a result, the integrated research methodology guarantees a thorough and methodical approach to examining how social media affects aspirants' choices for global programs, increasing the validity and reliability of the results.

College students make up the study's target group since they are the main users of SMPs and are quite likely to look into study abroad options. College students are a good demographic to examine how social media affects study abroad choices because they use digital platforms in abundance.

Convenience sampling method is used as respondents are chosen based on ease of access. The study focuses on college students who are active users of SMPs, and interested in study abroad-related content.

The researcher initially approached known students and peers, who further shared the questionnaire within their networks.

Sample Size Determination

Inclusion Criteria:

- College students currently pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate studies
- Students who are active users of social media
- Students who are aware of or interested in studying abroad

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals who are not college students
- Students who do not use social media
- Respondents unaware of study abroad opportunities

Understanding students' real behaviour, interests, and views on using social media to make study abroad decisions is made easier with the use of primary data.

Sample Selection

College Name	Sample Size
AURO University	22

B.R.C.M College	38
V.N.S.G.U.	48
S.R.L. Institute of Management	35
Total	143

Initially, the questionnaire was shared with a larger group of students through personal contacts and peer networks. Follow-ups were conducted to improve the percentage of response.

- Testing theories
- Analysing the connections between independent, and dependent factors.
- Ensuring the authenticity and accuracy of the findings

Thus, a dependable and methodical approach to the research is ensured by the use of a structured questionnaire, pilot testing, and data analysis tools.

Ethical Considerations

This study collects and analyses data in accordance with important ethical guidelines.

1. **Voluntary Participation:** It is entirely voluntary to participate in the study. There is no coercion or pressure on respondents to complete the poll.
2. **Data Confidentiality:** Every piece of information gathered from responses is kept completely private. No third party is given access to personal information, including names, contact details, or identities. The information is exclusively utilized for scholarly research.
3. **No Information Misuse:** The information gathered is only utilized for study-related research and analysis. It is not abused, tampered with, or put to any unethical or profit-driven use. The results are accurately and truthfully conveyed.
4. **Knowledgeable Consent:** Before taking part, respondents are made aware of the study's objectives. In order to make sure they understand how their data will be used; their consent is obtained.

Research Gap

1. **Absence of Local or India-Specific Context**

The majority of current research focuses on nations that differ greatly from India in terms of

socioeconomic circumstances, educational systems, and cultural influences, such as China, the United States, and Europe. Factors like family engagement, financial restraints, and knowledge levels play a distinct significance in the Indian context, particularly in towns like Surat or inside Gujarat.

Gap: Research that focuses on Indian college students is desperately needed because their decision-making styles may be very different from those of other countries.

2. Insufficient Attention to College Students (UG/PG)

Numerous studies include a variety of demographics, including young people in general, working professionals, and high school students. Nonetheless, the most pertinent group actively choosing to study abroad is college students, both undergraduate and graduate.

Gap: To better understand the unique motives, difficulties, and decision-making processes of today's college students, a targeted study is needed.

- Gap between the intended and actual decisions
Due to psychological, social, or financial obstacles, limited number of aspirants express a desire to study abroad actually follow through on it.

Gap: Studies ought to look at the reason for this disparity and whether social media contribute to closing or widening this disparity.

The UTAUT2 Model, along with other elements like digital literacy and trust, forms the basis of the study's organised methodology. A thorough grasp of the study problem is ensured by combining all data collected vide exploratory and descriptive research. This approach examines the role of SMP's on students of global education programs.

IV.DATA ANALYSIS

To commence, the screening question was asked as follows:

Do you use social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube, etc.)?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	139	97.2	97.2	97.2
	No	4	2.8	2.8	100.0
	Total	143	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Use social media platform

Interpretation: The data shows that social media usage is almost universal among respondents, with 97.2% actively using platforms like Instagram and YouTube, while only a very small portion (2.8%) do not. Hence SMPs are highly relevant medium for influencing aspirants' behaviour and decisions.

The Factor-wise Analysis is as follows:

One Way ANOVA between Performance Expectancy and Education Level

H₁: There is no significant difference in Performance Expectancy across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Performance Expectancy (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6.061	2	3.031	2.784	.065
Within Groups	152.418	140	1.089		
Total	158.479	142			

Table 2: Performance Expectancy and Education Level

Interpretation: Although there is a slight variation in mean scores, it is not statistically significant, suggesting that education level does not significantly

influence students' perception of the usefulness of social media.

T-Test between Effort Expectancy and Gender

H₂: There is no significant difference in Effort Expectancy between male and female respondents.

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Effort Expectancy (Mean Score)	Male	68	3.4265	1.07643	.13054
	Female	75	3.7333	.72752	.08401

Independent Samples Test									
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower Upper
Effort Expectancy (Mean Score)	Equal variances assumed	6.700	.011	-2.013	141	.046	-.30686	.15240	-.60815 -.00557
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.977	115.978	.050	-.30686	.15523	-.61432 .00059

Table 3: Expectancy and Gender

Interpretation: Female respondents show a slightly higher mean score than males, suggesting that they find social media easier to use for accessing study abroad information.

One Way ANOVA between Social Influence and Age
H₃: There is no significant difference in Social Influence across different age groups.

ANOVA					
Social Influence (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	.722	3	.241	.288	.834
Within Groups	115.984	139	.834		
Total	116.706	142			

Table 4: Social Influence and Age

Interpretation: This indicates that age does not significantly affect the influence of peers or SMPs on students' study abroad decisions.

One Way ANOVA between Information Value and Education Level
H₄: There is no significant difference in Information Value across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Information Value (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.083	2	6.042	7.496	.001
Within Groups	112.833	140	.806		
Total	124.916	142			

Table 5: Information Value and Education Level

Interpretation: Aspirants from different educational backgrounds perceive the value of social media information differently when making study abroad decisions.

One Way ANOVA between Habit and Education level
H₅: There is no significant difference in Habit across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Habit (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	12.403	2	6.201	5.819	.004
Within Groups	149.206	140	1.066		
Total	161.608	142			

Table 6: Habit and Education level

Interpretation: Aspirants from different educational backgrounds differ in their habitual use of social media for study abroad information.

Trust and Education Level

H₆: There is no significant difference in Trust across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Trust (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.198	2	3.599	4.352	.015
Within Groups	115.781	140	.827		
Total	122.979	142			

Table 7: Trust and Education Level

Interpretation: Aspirants from different educational backgrounds differ in their level of trust in social media for study abroad information.

Behavioural Intention and Education Level

H₇: There is no significant difference in Behavioural Intention across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Behavioural Intention (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.799	2	2.399	2.320	.102
Within Groups	144.810	140	1.034		
Total	149.608	142			

Table 8: Behavioural Intention and Education Level

Interpretation: Education level does not significantly influence students' intention to use social media for study abroad decisions.

Use Behaviour and Gender

H₈: There is no significant difference in Use Behaviour between male and female respondents.

Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Use Behaviour (Mean Score)	Male	68	3.5147	1.11292	.13496
	Female	75	3.5867	.93134	.10754

Independent Samples Test									
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper

Use Behaviour (Mean Score)	Equal variances assumed	3.058	.083	-.421	141	.675	-.07196	.17107	-.41016	.26624
	Equal variances not assumed			-.417	131.202	.677	-.07196	.17257	-.41334	.26941

Table 20: Use Behaviour and Gender

Interpretation: Gender does not significantly influence how frequently students use social media for study abroad purposes.

Use Behaviour and Education Level

H₉: There is no significant difference in Use Behaviour across different education levels.

ANOVA					
Use Behaviour (Mean Score)					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.788	2	4.394	4.439	.014
Within Groups	138.569	140	.990		
Total	147.357	142			

Table 9: Use Behaviour and Education Level

Interpretation: Students from different educational backgrounds differ in how frequently they use social media for study abroad purposes.

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V.CONCLUSION

SMPs popular information source for students thinking about studying overseas. The majority of students regularly use platforms to obtain pertinent information, indicating a significant presence of digital influence on decision-making.

According to the investigation, students' perceptions are positively influenced by various factors. Aspirants are also inclined to utilize social media for these kinds of decisions, according to behavioural intention and actual usage behaviour.

Further, age and gender have little bearing on the majority of the factors. Factors including information value, habit, trust, and use behaviour are significantly influenced by education level.

This implies that students' perceptions and usage of SMPs vary depending on their educational background.

In conclusion, SMPs are very important in moulding the aspirant's decision to study abroad, however not all demographic categories are equally affected.

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