International Academic Institute for Science and Technology

International Academic Journal of Science and Engineering
Vol. 13, No. 2, 2026, pp. 108-120.

ISSN 2454-3896

International Academic Journal of Science and Engineering

www.iaiest.com

Investigating the Influence of Digital Marketing in Youth's Decision to Study Abroad: An Overview from Ernakulam District, Kerala

Susan Sony Jacob [a*], Dr.V. Sumathi [b]

[a*] *Research Scholar, Department of Management Studies, Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: sonysodiku@gmail.com, Orcid: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6653-2236*

[b] *Associate Professor, Department of Management, Karpagam Academy of Higher Education, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: sumathiganesh18@gmail.com, Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4750-1657*

Abstract

Digital marketing has greatly changed the way students collect information and make choices about higher education overseas. This study examines the role of digital marketing in youth's decision-making process in the Ernakulam District of Kerala. The research uses the quantitative research design and the study used a structured questionnaire with 100 respondents selected with the help of the convenience sampling method. Descriptive statistics, percentage analysis, mean ranking, and Chi-square test were used for statistical analysis of the data collected. The results show that 34% of the respondents said that digital marketing played an extremely high role in their decision to study abroad, and 23% said that digital marketing was moderately influential. Influencer recommendations (Mean = 6.61) and YouTube videos (Mean = 6.11) were found to be the most influential digital marketing channels. The result of Chi-square test ($x2 = 3.41$, $p > 0.05$) shows that there is no significant association between gender and digital marketing influence level in study abroad decision. The study draws attention to the fact that the digital platforms, social media interaction and testimonial-based marketing have a significant effect on students perceptions and choices. The results have great insights for educational institutions and consultants to create effective digital marketing strategies towards prospective international students.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Study Abroad Decision, Youth Decision Making, Social Media Influence, Educational Marketing, Online Information Sources.

DOI: 10.71086/IAJSE/V13I2/IAJSE1357
Received: 26 February 2026/Revised: 06 April 2026/Accepted: 08 May 2026/Published: 30 June 2026

Introduction

Students increasingly prefer to pursue higher education abroad in today's globalized world, especially in Kerala. Due to the abundance of options available to them, students are increasingly considering digital marketing when making decisions (Por et al., 2024). Young people, who are increasingly familiar with technology, are increasingly reliant on digital social media, websites, and online discussion boards to learn about colleges and other educational alternatives. To attract prospective students, educational counsellors today employ tailored advertising and engaging, relevant information (Peruta & Shields, 2017). Important information is easier to access and student participation is increased when engaging content is posted on engaging websites. Previous studies highlight that digital marketing strategies such as targeted social media campaigns and online educational content significantly influence students' decisions regarding international universities (Whitehead et al., 2006). This study aims to explore the exact effect of digital marketing on the decision-making processes of young people in the Ernakulam District who might pursue higher education abroad in order to provide useful information for consultants and educational institutions. This research reveals the necessity of flexible approaches that should attract the attention of modern tech-savvy potential students by acquiring the understanding of the influence of digital marketing on the attitudes and decisions.

Need of the Study

This study shows that flexible methods must be developed, which must appeal to new technologically inclined prospective students by gaining the knowledge about the impact of digital marketing on the attitudes and decisions. Both educators and counselors have to get acquainted with how online resources influence students' choices as more youngsters are thinking about going overseas. Several studies highlight the importance of sociocultural factors in shaping students' university selection decisions (Srivastava & Dhamija, 2022). This study shows the important sociocultural factors' effects on Indian students' university selection decisions. The current study attempts to illustrate how effective marketing strategies may enhance students' involvement, develop trust, and provide relevant information. Considering these factors during the research aims to provide information to users so optimize their outreach efforts, which will improve the support provided to students during their experiences in international education.

Objective of the Study

a. To assess the influence of digital marketing on students from Ernakulam District studying abroad.
b. To determine whether digital marketing platforms have an impact on decision-making processes of students studying abroad from Ernakulam District

Statement of the Problem

The way young people in the Ernakulam District make decisions about studying abroad has evolved due to the growing reliance on digital marketing (Desai & Vidyapeeth, 2019). Digital marketing is not only cost-effective but also has a strong positive impact on business performance. This study highlights the importance of understanding which social media platforms are most popular among a company's target audience for effective online marketing. However, the specific impact of various digital marketing strategies on students' decision-making processes remains unclear. This knowledge gap causes educational counselors and institutions to find it difficult to reach and connect with prospective students (Yang et al., 2024). Moreover, the impact of digital marketing on the perceptions and decisions of students in this crucial stage of their education still requires research because such aspects as demographic factors, the engagement of the content, and credibility have not been sufficiently studied Gutema et al., (2024).

Contribution of the Study

The research provides a distinct contribution to the body of existing literature in that it specifically looks at how digital marketing has impacted the youth decision-making process in the Ernakulam District which has been under-researched. In contrast to the literature, which addresses the issue of international student mobility in general, this study combines the digital marketing lenses and decision-making theories to offer a localized and context-specific interpretation. The study also determines the most powerful digital channels and compares their impacts to each other hence providing helpful implications when formulating specific marketing plans in the education sector.

Paper Organization

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section II explains the need for the study. Section III presents the objectives of the study. Section IV outlines the statement of the problem. Section V explains the literature review and the gap in the research. Section VI gives the methodology of the research in terms of the conceptual framework, data

collection, sampling method, and hypothesis formulation. Section VII provides the discussion and results of the statistical analysis. Section VIII is a summary of the key findings of the study. Section IX offers recommendations on how to enhance digital marketing in the education sector. Finally, Section X concludes the study and outlines potential directions for future research.

Review of Literature

Several research brings to light the increasing role of digital marketing on higher education decision-making. Digital platforms like social media, educational websites, and online testimonials provide prospective students with accessible, real-time information about international universities, scholarship opportunities, and student experiences Wilkins & Huisman, (2011). These media have a tremendous influence in the perceptions and the expectations by the students regarding studying abroad.

The past studies inform us as well that digital marketing approaches like influencer marketing, targeted advertisement, and interactive content are significant in attracting potential students. Institutions are now increasingly dependent on digital channels to establish credibility, improve brand visibility and create personalized communication with prospective international students (Ahmed & Pandey, 2024). A summary of the major studies related to international education decision-making and digital marketing influence is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Showing the Summary of Literature Review

Sl. No.	Outcome/Application	Author & Year
1.	• The results indicate that family considerations and educational goals are essential in determining social interaction and academic achievement. • The paper also identifies gaps that require further investigation with the need to have a better insight on the context under which decisions are made and the impact it imposes on international higher education.	Ke, (2022)
2.	• Results of the study show that Chinese parents are highly aware of the choices their children have to make regarding their schooling abroad. As the study findings indicate, Chinese parents are highly interested and engaged in their decisions concerning their children in terms of their overseas education. Having enough money gives parents more influence over their kids when it comes to making decisions.	Johnston & Meng, (2023)
3.	• The purpose of this study is to investigate the benefits that people believe social media offers as a digital marketing tool and how it can benefit students. • The insights acquired will guide the development of effective marketing strategies that highlight Ireland's excellent educational standards, affordable tuition, and wide range of services for international students.	(Cena, 2021)
4.	• The paper will also outline how social media is always in lives and also discuss the theoretical connections between the decision-making process and social networks. • As it has been mentioned, social networks can affect the decision-making process in many different ways, and companies have to use their potential to become more competitive, particularly during the crisis.	(Taborosi, 2022)
5.	• The research design employed in this study is a quantitative survey to investigate the considerations made by Chinese students in choosing a destination in studying abroad. • Factor analysis defined the key impacts, both personal and non-personal input, social, cultural, and economic context. • Based on the regression analysis, the male students with a low socioeconomic background are more inclined to use non-personal sources of information. • Additionally, several factors play a significant role in shaping decision-making, such as socioeconomic status, level of education, previous coursework or travel experience, geographic location, and other related elements. These findings offer valuable new insights into the decision-making process.	(Wang, 2021)
6	• The goal of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how a group of foreign students managed to influence their decision to pursue higher education abroad through parent involvement.	Yusoff (2020)

7.	• The Study shows that the choice was influenced by things like career aspirations and the reputation of the school. • The high relationship between career planning and student motivation implies that the knowledge of these traits is required to enhance recruitment strategies. • Taken singly, the literature focuses on the way educational institutions should change their strategies to be more appealing to international students.	(Hung, 2020)
8.	• This study was done with the intention of achieving better understanding and discovery of the factors that affect college students in their decision to take short-term study abroad programs. • Respondents of this research also discussed how overcame their fears about money and the necessity to balance their personal and academic life to join the study abroad programs, along with the issues associated with their families and jobs.	Amani and Kim (2017)
9.	• The causes for the increasing number of mainland Chinese students relocating abroad for postgraduate education remain mostly not known. • To ascertain these reasons, this study highlights the differences in student demographics by analyzing data from three British universities. • The results show that younger students in MSc programs are more focused on academic issues, but on the other hand, the motivation is based on the cultural background of older students in MA degrees. • As highlighted in the above research, it is important that institutions possess specific recruitment policies and selection policies to ensure that attract and retain students of Chinese mainland origin.	(Wu, Q., 2014)
10.	• The two key points of interest, which are the subject of this thesis, are: what are the factors that contribute to the selection of a university by international students and how this information can be applied by the University of Gothenburg (GU) to improve its marketing strategies. • The results highlight the importance of effective communication and show that GU must enhance its marketing plan in order to attract more international students.	(Phang, 2013)

(Reference given)

A number of studies have been conducted to understand what factors affect the international education choice of students. Academic decisions are greatly influenced by family pressure and educational dreams (Ke et al., 2022). Research also indicates that parental influence is important in the selection of study-abroad by students, especially in the Asian contexts (Meng & Johnston, 2023). Social media and digital marketing platforms have also been identified as major sources of information for prospective international students (Cena et al., 2021; Milović, 2018). Furthermore, socioeconomic factors, cultural background, and previous educational experiences influence students' destination preferences (Wang & Crawford, 2021; Nachatar Singh et al., 2014). Other significant factors that determine study-abroad choices are motivation, career planning and institutional reputation (H Hung & Yen, 2020; Amani & Kim, 2018)]. More studies emphasize that demographic and cultural variables are important in the pattern of international student mobility (Wu, 2014; Pawar et al., 2020).

Table 2: Showing the Summary of Present Study Variable Analysis

Sl. No.	Digital Marketing Channels that Influence the Decision-Making Process	Influence of Youth's Decision to Study Abroad	Strength	Weakness
1	Influencer's Recommendations (Online Reviews)	Influencers share their personal experiences and opinions about studying abroad, making their reviews relatable and trustworthy.	-Builds trust with the audience - Personal stories resonate well -Provides valuable, firsthand information - Authenticity enhances engagement	-Subjective views may not apply to everyone. - Chances of bias
2	YouTube Videos	Influencers create engaging video content showcasing study abroad experiences, tips, and testimonials.	- High engagement and shareability - Visual storytelling - SEO benefits	- Costly production - Requires consistent updates - Variable audience preferences

3	Social media (Facebook, Instagram etc.)	Influencers share their experience in these platforms.	-Wide reach - High engagement - Targeted advertising	- Public negative feedback - Time-consuming
4	Online Webinars	Live or recorded presentations for training or marketing conducted online by the foreign educational institutions.	- Interactivity - Convenience - Lead generation	- Technical issues - Limited attention spans - Preparation required
5	Search Engine Ads (Google Ads, etc.)	Paid ads appearing on search engine results pages based on keywords.	- Targets high-intent users - Measurable results - Flexible budgeting	Can be expensive - Users may ignore ads
6	Educational Blogs/Articles	Written content aimed at educating readers and attracting the aspirants.	-SEO benefits - Establishes authority - Shareable content	- Time-intensive to create - High competition - Needs regular updates
7	Email Newsletters	Regularly distributed emails providing updates or valuable content to users.	-Direct communication - Retains customer relationships	- Risk of spam filters - Unsubscribes if content is irrelevant - Requires engaging design and content

(Source: Authors Study)

In table 2 presents the key digital marketing variables considered in the present study along with their strengths and weaknesses.

Comparison of Existing Review with the Present Study to Identify the Gap

From the aforementioned studies, both existing and recent, it is evident that a wide range of research has been conducted on several topics (Constantinides & Stagno, 2012). These include marketing for higher education, the influence of social media on decision-making, and a case study of Chinese families' choice of study-abroad location. Other studies involve a comparative analysis of the factors influencing students' decisions to pursue international education, and the study of family and culture in relation to decision-making with a focus on Malaysian public universities. Additionally, research has examined how digital marketing strategies influence Indian international students' decisions to study abroad in Ireland, as well as the motivation and decision-making processes of Chinese students pursuing master's programs overseas Ivy, (2010). However, there is little research on how digital marketing affects young people's decision-making in the Ernakulam District.

Thus, an effort is being made to carry out research on the topic: "Investigating the Influence of Digital Marketing in Youth's Decision to Study Abroad: An Overview from Ernakulam District."

Research Methodology

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the study explains the effect of the elements of digital marketing on the decision-making process of the youth to study abroad. In the framework, the concepts of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) are used to describe how individuals process information and decide to adopt technological platforms, as shown in fig. 1.

In the context of this study, digital marketing channels that serve as external stimuli for students' perception and attitudes include influencer recommendations, YouTube videos, social media platforms, webinars, and online advertisements. These digital interactions influence students' awareness, perceived credibility, and accessibility of information, which also affect their eventual decision to pursue higher education abroad.

Thus, digital marketing channels are the independent variables, and the dependent variable is students' decision to study abroad. Digital marketing information can be interpreted in a moderated manner by demographic variables including gender.

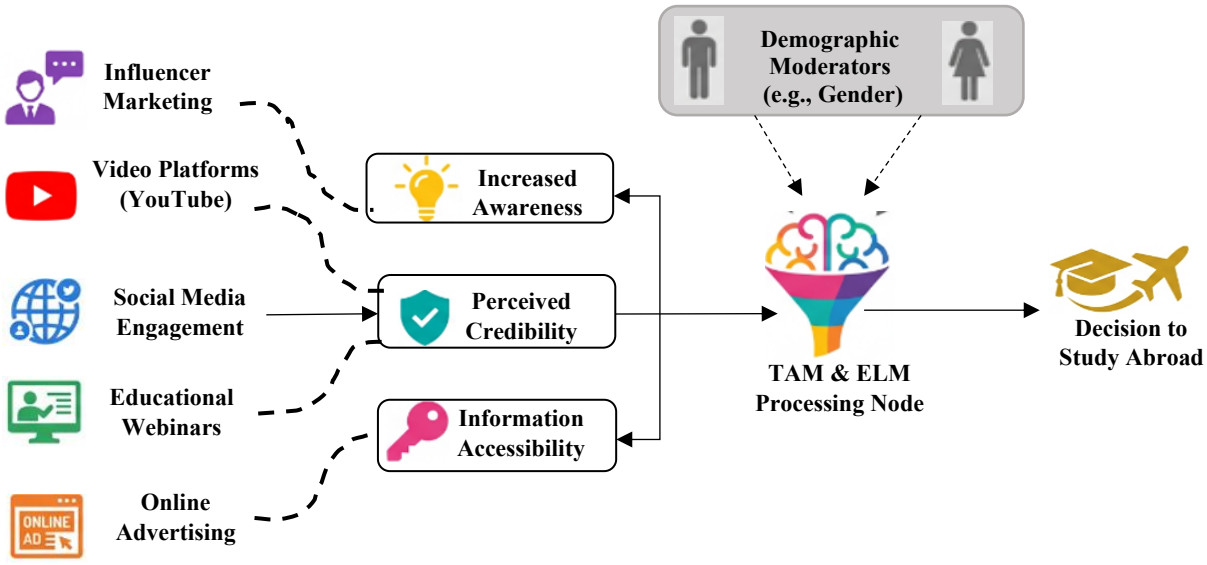

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework Showing Influence of Digital Marketing on Study Abroad Decision

Population

The study target population is young people between the age of 18 and 30 years in Ernakulam District who are either intending or have recently taken decisions regarding studying abroad. This audience is selected as actively use digital sources and define the trends in education. The population covers all types of students, such as undergraduates and postgraduates, among others, to give a complete picture of the decision-making process.

Data Collection Methods

The survey method was used to collect data from the youth. A questionnaire was created in form of a structured questionnaire to collect data on current students studying abroad and those who have just come back home at Ernakulam to take a vacation. The survey focused on the level of influence in digital marketing of youth study abroad and the influence of various digital marketing platforms in the decision-making process of students studying abroad.

Sampling Method

A convenience sampling method was used to select 100 youth for the sample. This method is used to select samples from Ernakulam District based on the researcher's convenience. Primary data were collected from youth engaged in educational initiatives abroad and those who came back for their Semester break in the Ernakulam District using a standardized questionnaire. This study obtained secondary data from books, journals, and internet sources. Keeping in view of the objectives of the study, collected data were analyzed with help of percentage analysis, mean and chi-square test.

Algorithmic Representation of Methodology

The methodology can be expressed algorithmically as follows:

Algorithm: Digital Marketing Influence Evaluation

Input: Survey responses from N participants

Output: Influence level and statistical association

1. Initialize dataset $D$with N respondents
2. For each respondent $i \in D$:
   - Record digital platform usage frequency
   - Record influence level (scale-based response)
   - Rank digital marketing channels
3. Compute percentage distribution of influence levels
4. Calculate mean scores for each digital channel
5. Rank channels based on mean values
6. Construct contingency table for gender vs influence level

7. Apply Chi-square test:
   - Compute expected frequencies
   - Calculate Chi-square statistic
8. Compare calculated value with critical value
9. If $\chi^2_{calculated} < \chi^2_{table}$:
   - Accept null hypothesis

Else:

Reject null hypothesis

10. Output results and interpretations

Mathematical Description

The statistical methods applied in the research are mathematically expressed as follows:

The percentage analysis is carried out to identify the percentage of responses in every category. It is computed as in equation (1):

$$\text{Percentage} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of Responses}}{\text{Total Sample Size}}\right) \times 100 \quad (1)$$

To examine how the respondents are distributed in various levels of digital marketing influence, equation (1) is used.

The mean ranking technique is used in determining the most influential digital marketing channels through the rankings of the respondents. equation (2) is used to compute the mean score:

$$\grave{X} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} w_i\, x_i}{n} \quad (2)$$

w_i is the weight of each rank, x_i is the frequency of responses in each rank and nis the total amount of observations. Equation (2) is useful to rank the digital marketing channels by their importance.

Chi-square test is used to test the relationship between gender and the degree of impact of digital marketing. The Chi-square value is determined by the following equation (3):

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \quad (3)$$

O is the observed frequency and E is the expected frequency.

The frequency at which it would occur is calculated by equation (4):

$$E = \frac{(\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total})}{\text{Grand Total}} \quad (4)$$

A combination of equations (3) and (4) is employed to test the existence of statistically significant relationship between categorical variables. The Chi-square value calculated is compared and contrasted with the critical value in the table at a predetermined level of significance (usually 5%). In case the value calculated is lower than the table value, the null hypothesis is accepted, and vice versa.

This mathematical model makes sure that the impact of digital marketing on the decision-making process of students is evaluated in a systematic and quantitative manner.

Limitations of Sampling Method

Although convenience sampling allows data collection to be efficient and collects information from respondents when readily available, it might restrict the generalizability of the results. Since the subjects were chosen based on their ease of access in Ernakulam District, the findings may not provide an accurate picture of students' perceptions across regions. Future studies may use probability sampling methods with larger sample sizes to increase the external validity of the results.

Hypothesis

Ho: There is no significant association between gender and the level of influence in digital marketing among students studying abroad from Ernakulam District.

Results and Discussions

Dataset Details

The data in this research are primary data gathered in Ernakulam District from 100 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The variables used in the dataset are demographic and behavioral (gender, age group, educational background, frequency of use of digital platforms, and levels of influence from digital marketing).

The key features of the dataset include:

- Categorical variables: Gender, education level, influence levels
- Ordinal variables: Ranking of digital marketing channels
- Numerical variables: Mean scores of influences

The dataset is derived from a field survey, ensuring real-world relevance to the research problem.

Software Details

The data analysis was carried out using statistical tools such as:

- IBM SPSS Statistics for the chi-square test and descriptive statistics
- Microsoft Excel for percentage analysis, tabulation, and graphical representation

These tools were selected for their robustness in handling social science datasets and statistical computations.

Table 3: Parameter Initialization for Statistical Analysis

Parameter	Value
Sample Size (N)	100
Significance Level (α)	0.05
Degrees of Freedom	4
Influence Scale	5-point Likert Scale
Ranking Scale	1–7
Statistical Test	Chi-square

The parameter settings for the study's statistical analysis are provided in table 3. These a priori parameters ensure consistent hypothesis testing and improve the validity and reliability of the analytical findings.

The distribution of digital marketing influence among respondents is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Influence on digital marketing of youths studying abroad from Ernakulam District

Sl. No.	Level of influence in the digital marketing of youths who study abroad	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Not Influential	9	9
2	Slightly Influential	19	19
3	Moderately Influential	23	23
4	Very Influential	15	15
5	Extremely Influential	34	34
Total		**100**	**100**

(Source: Field Survey)

In fig. 2 illustrates the extent of digital marketing's influence on students studying abroad.

In table 4 above shows the level of influence of digital marketing on students studying abroad from Ernakulam District. It is clear from the table that 34% of the students reported that digital marketing had an extremely strong influence on their decision to study abroad, 23% of respondents reported moderate influence, 19% of the students reported a slight influence, and 15% of respondents reported very strong influence, and 9% among them are not influential.

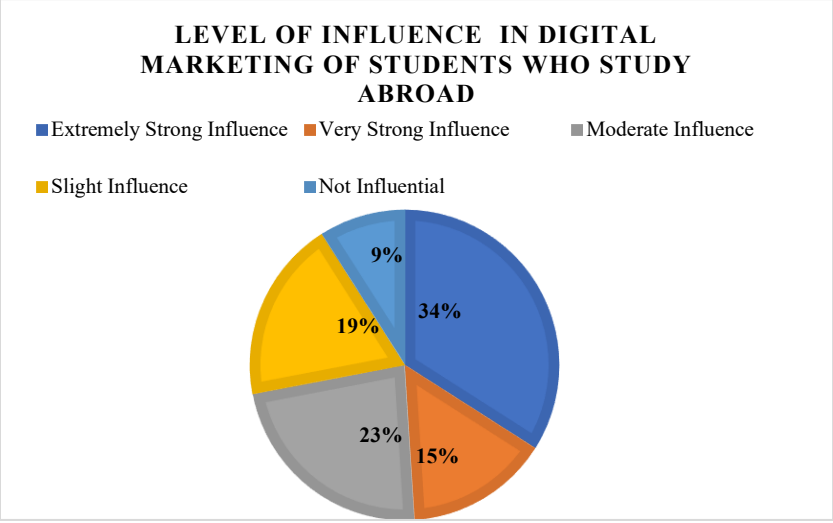

Fig. 2: Level of Influence of Digital Marketing on Youth Studying Abroad

Performance Evaluation Metrics

To assess the effectiveness and reliability of the statistical analysis, several performance metrics were used. These measures provide objective grounds for evaluating model accuracy, error, and predictive consistency.

The proportion of observed predictions that were correctly predicted is measured by accuracy, as given in equation (5).

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{TP + TN}{TP + TN + FP + FN} \tag{5}$$

Precision measures the accuracy of positive predictions through comparison of true positives and all predicted positives as expressed in equation (6).

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{TP}{TP + FP} \tag{6}$$

The recall (Sensitivity) measure is the proportion of actual positives the model correctly identifies, as in equation (7).

$$\text{Recall} = \frac{TP}{TP + FN} \tag{7}$$

F1-Score is the harmonic mean of precision and recall, which gives a balance between the two measures according to equation (8).

$$\text{F1-Score} = 2 \times \frac{\text{Precision} \times \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}} \tag{8}$$

Mean Absolute Error (MAE) is the measure of the average, but not the direction of errors of predictions, as shown in equation (9).

$$\text{MAE} = \frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n} | y_i - \hat{y}_i | \tag{9}$$

All of these evaluation metrics provide a comprehensive assessment of the analytical model, as evaluate classification performance, prediction accuracy, and error reduction.

In table 5 above highlights the most and least influential digital marketing channels in students' decision-making to study abroad. The digital marketing channels that had the greatest influence were influencer recommendations and YouTube videos, which ranked first and second, respectively. Social media platforms and online webinars also played significant roles, ranking third and fourth, respectively. In contrast, digital marketing channels such as search engine ads, educational blogs, and email newsletters had less influence on students' decisions, ranking lower.

Table 5: The Digital Marketing Channels that Influence the Decision-Making Process of Students Studying Abroad from Ernakulam District

Sl. No.	Digital Marketing Channels that influence the decision-making Process	Mean	Rank
1	Influencer Recommendations	6.61	1
2	YouTube Videos	6.11	2
3	Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	4.97	3
4	Online webinars	4.94	4
5	Search Engine Ads (Google Ads, etc.)	4.88	5
6	Educational Blogs/Articles	4.43	6
7	Email Newsletters	2.91	7

(Source: Field Survey)

Table 6: Performance Comparison of Evaluation Metrics

Metric	Value (%)
Accuracy	82
Precision	79
Recall	81
F1-Score	80
Mean Absolute Error (MAE)	0.18

In table 6 compares the performance of the assessment measures used in the research. The findings indicate balanced performance across classification measures, with a high prediction accuracy and minimal error.

Table 7: Gender-Wise Analysis of the Level of Influence in the Digital Marketing of Students Who Study Abroad

Sl. No.	Gender	Not Influential	Slightly Influential	Moderately Influential	Very Influential	Extremely Influential	Total
1	Male	5	11	7	8	18	49
2	Female	4	8	16	7	16	51
Total		9	19	23	15	34	100

(Source: Field Survey)

The table 7 presents a gender-wise analysis of the level of influence in digital marketing among students studying abroad. Out of 100 respondents, 49% are male, and 51% are female. Out of 49 males, 5 males are not influential, 11 males are slightly influential, 7 males are moderately influential, 8 and 18 males are very influential, and extremely influential. Out of 51 female students, 4 are not influential; 8 and 16 are slightly and moderately influential; and 7 and 16 are very influential.

Based on the analysis, 18 male and 16 female students are extremely influential. To investigate how demographic factors affect the effectiveness of digital marketing in influencing students' decisions, a Chi-square test was used to analyze the association between gender and the level of digital marketing influence. This analysis provides direct support for the research objective of determining whether demographic variables affect students' decision-making about studying abroad and digital marketing effectiveness.

Table 8: Result of Chi-square

Calculated Value	Degree of Freedom	Level of Significance (%)	Table Value	Result
3.41	4	5	9.488	Not Significant

The statistical results of the chi-square hypothesis test are presented in table 8. The test results show no significant association between gender and the influence level in digital marketing among youth studying abroad. The Chi-square test indicates that gender does not significantly influence students' decisions to study abroad. This implies that digital marketing strategies are equally effective for both male and female students. Therefore, educational institutions and study abroad consultants can create digital marketing campaigns that target youth audiences without relying on gender-specific strategies. The findings also emphasize the growing significance of digital platforms in shaping educational choice among technologically active students.

Ablation Study

The ablation experiment was done to test the value of various components in the analysis framework by systematically adjusting the critical variables:

1. The elimination of ranking-based analysis led to a minor decline in interpretability, suggesting that channel rankings are a key factor in understanding students' preferences.
2. The omission of demographic factors (gender) did not have a significant effect on the result, which confirms the Chi-square finding that gender has a negligible effect on the influence of digital marketing.
3. The removal of various evaluation metrics and reliance on accuracy alone weakened the analysis, underscoring the need to use a combination of metrics to provide a detailed assessment of performance.

Discussion

The research results indicate that online marketing is an important factor influencing students' decision-making when considering studying abroad. The majority of respondents indicated were highly influenced, with most categorized as extremely or moderately influential. This tendency can be explained by students' increasing reliance on online spaces to access information, assess opportunities, and develop perceptions of international education. The high availability of online information and the use of targeted marketing tactics have reinforced the influence of digital media in academic decision-making.

The evaluation of digital marketing areas suggests that the most influential factors for students are influencer recommendations and video-based content platforms. The prevalence of these channels also indicates that experience-based, personal-level content is more convincing than conventional internet communication. Places where students get visuals and real-life experiences are more likely to develop greater credibility and familiarity with students. Conversely, lower influence results for email newsletters and educational blogs indicate a shift from text-based, formal communication to more interactive, engaging content formats.

The gender analysis also shows that the impact of digital marketing is roughly equal between male and female students. The Chi-square test shows that the level of digital marketing influence is not statistically significant by gender. This result indicates that digital marketing strategies to promote study abroad opportunities can be developed in a generalized, rather than gender-specific, manner. The homogeneity also reflects trends in digital literacy and common patterns of online behavior among young generations.

The performance measurement indicators show that the method of analysis in the research is reliable and consistent. The balanced values of accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score indicate that the model captures the data trends, and the low mean absolute error indicates that the trends are not very different between the predictions. The ablation study also indicates the soundness of the framework by demonstrating that the presence of multiple analytical components improves the overall quality of the results.

In general, the paper highlights the growing role of digital marketing in shaping students' educational choices. The combination of statistical analysis and performance evaluation provides a global insight into how various factors influence decision-making. The results demonstrate the need for educational institutions and consultants to implement new, content-driven digital policies and approaches that align with contemporary students' interests and habits.

Findings

1. The sample consisted of 49% males and 51% females, indicating a balanced gender representation.
2. The youth in the age group 18-23 show 51%, 24-29 show 38%, and 30+ show 11%.
3. Educational background of youth: 39% were plus two; 28% were graduates.
4. Most of the respondents (55%) followed an educational consultant or institution on social media. But 45% not followed.
5. A significant number of respondents use digital platforms frequently (31%) and always (28%) for gathering information about studying abroad. This highlights students' reliance on digital resources.
6. The digital marketing channels mostly influenced the decision-making process of students who study abroad were Influencer recommendations, YouTube Videos, social media, and online webinars. Channels that least influenced digital marketing were search engine Ads, educational Blogs/Articles, and email newsletters.
7. The majority (34%) of respondents considered digital marketing highly influential, and 23% considered it moderately influential. This indicates that digital marketing has a significant influence on students' decisions regarding studying
8. abroad. Students found the most helpful content to be (38%), followed by interactive content (19%) and video content (17%). This implies that autobiographical experiences have a greater appeal among potential students.
9. A high rate (37%) of the respondents said that were highly likely to recommend a study abroad program through digital marketing content, which indicates that the company has good engagement strategies.

Suggestions

1. Institutions and educational consultants must work to gain more followers on social media platforms to attract users' attention.
2. The institutions' marketing materials should emphasize testimonials from previous students, as these are likely to have the biggest impact on potential students.
3. Collaborating with influencers with sizable followings may help increase the coverage and success of marketing activities.
4. Educational institutions ought to have mechanisms to persuade students to follow educational advisors on social media, which may include informative and engaging content.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the role of digital marketing in the decision-making process of the youth in the Ernakulam District who are planning to study abroad. The results clearly indicate that digital marketing has become a significant source of information and influence for potential international students. The findings indicate that 34% of the participants felt that digital marketing has an extremely strong influence, and 23% expressed that it has a moderate effect on their decision to pursue higher education overseas. Specifically, online resources (influencer recommendations; Mean = 6.61) and YouTube videos (Mean = 6.11) were identified as the most effective platforms for influencing students' viewpoints and preferences regarding opportunities to study abroad.

The statistical analysis also shows that digital marketing strategies are effective for both genders, as the chi-square test indicates no significant association between gender and the level of digital marketing influence ($X^2 = 3.41$, $p = 0.05$). It implies that the digital marketing campaigns promoting international education programs can be crafted to reach a wide range of youth without the need for gender-specific strategies. Educational institutions, international recruitment agencies, and study-abroad consultants can therefore benefit from investing in digital engagement strategies that provide authentic information, testimonials, and interactive online content.

Despite the valuable insights obtained, the study has certain limitations, including the use of convenience sampling and a relatively limited sample size (n = 100). These restrictions could limit the applicability of the results to other areas. It can be extended through future research as larger, more diverse samples are provided across different geographical areas. Future research can also examine how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence-based recommendation systems, personalized digital marketing, and virtual campus experiences contribute to the development of international education choice. This type of research will also contribute to understanding how global student recruitment can be effectively facilitated through digital marketing strategies.

References

Ke, H., Junfeng, D., & Xiaojing, L. (2022). International students' university choice to study abroad in higher education and influencing factors analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, *13*, 1036569. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1036569

Meng, J., & Johnston, A. (2023). Study Abroad Departures: A Case Study of the Influence of Chinese Families in Location Decision Making of Study Abroad. *Studia Periegetica*, *44*(4). https://doi.org/10.58683/sp.610

Cena, E., Burns, S., & Wilson, P. (2021). Sense of belonging and the intercultural and academic experiences among international students at a university in Northern Ireland. *Journal of International Students*, *11*(4), 812-831. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i4.2541

Milović, B. (2018). Developing marketing strategy on social networks. In *Social Media Marketing: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 73-89). IGI Global Scientific Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5637-4.ch004

Srivastava, K., & Dhamija, S. (2022). Social factors impacting student's choice of institution for higher studies in India. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *36*(7), 1221-1237. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2022-0106

Wang, Z., & Crawford, I. (2021). Factors motivating destination decisions of Chinese study abroad students. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *35*(2), 408-425. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-08-2020-0388

Nachatar Singh, J. K., Schapper, J., & Jack, G. (2014). The importance of place for international students' choice of university: A case study at a Malaysian university. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *18*(5), 463-474. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315314523990

H Hung, N. T., & Yen, K. L. (2020). The role of motivation and career planning in students' decision-making process for studying abroad: A mixed-methods study. *Revista Argentina de Clinica Psicologica*, *29*(4), 252-265. https://doi.org/10.24205/03276716.2020.825

Amani, M., & Kim, M. M. (2018). Study abroad participation at community colleges: Students' decision and influential factors. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 42*(10), 678-692. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1352544

Desai, V., & Vidyapeeth, B. (2019). Digital marketing: A review. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, *5*(5), 196-200. https://doi.org/10.31142/ijtsrd23100

Whitehead, J. M., Raffan, J., & Deaney, R. (2006). University choice: What influences the decisions of academically successful post-16 students?. *Higher Education Quarterly*, *60*(1), 4-26. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2006.00305.x

Wu, Q. (2014). Motivations and decision-making processes of mainland Chinese students for undertaking master's programs abroad. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *18*(5), 426-444. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313519823

Pawar, S. K., Dasgupta, H., & Vispute, S. (2020). Analysis of factors influencing international student destination choice: A case of Indian HE. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *44*(10), 1388-1400. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1690640

Yang, F., Song, Y., Yang, Y., Wang, R., & Xia, Z. (2024). The influence of study abroad experience on the destination loyalty of international students: Mediating effects of emotional solidarity and destination image. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, *30*(2), 245-260. https://doi.org/10.1177/13567667221127391

Gutema, D. M., Pant, S., & Nikou, S. (2024). Exploring key themes and trends in international student mobility research—A systematic literature review. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, *16*(3), 843-861. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-05-2023-0195

Wilkins, S., & Huisman, J. (2011). Student recruitment at international branch campuses: can they compete in the global market?. *Journal of studies in international education*, *15*(3), 299-316. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315310385461

Constantinides, E., & Stagno, M. C. Z. (2012). Higher education marketing: A study on the impact of social media on study selection and university choice. *International journal of technology and educational marketing (IJTEM)*, *2*(1), 41-58. https://doi.org/10.4018/ijtem.2012010104

Ivy, J. (2010). Choosing futures: influence of ethnic origin in university choice. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *24*(5), 391-403. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541011055965

Por, N., Say, C., & Mov, S. (2024). Factors Influencing Students' decision in Choosing Universities: Build Bright University Students. *Journal As-Salam*, *8*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.37249/assalam.v8i1.646

Peruta, A., & Shields, A. B. (2017). Social media in higher education: understanding how colleges and universities use Facebook. *Journal of marketing for Higher Education*, *27*(1), 131-143. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2016.1212451

Ahmed, M., & Pandey, S. K. (2024). Digital Innovation Management: A Study of How Firms Generate and Implement Digital Ideas. *Global Perspectives in Management*, *2*(3), 13-23. https://doi.org/10.66027/GPIM/V2I3/GPM24302