

# Communication Influences among Gen Z Students Enrolled in B.Sc. Hospitality Programs: Implications for Marketing Strategies in NCHMCT-Affiliated Institutes

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## Abstract

**Background:** This study focuses to address the issue of the changing admission patterns in NCHMCT colleges and to develop an evidence-based marketing strategy. **Objective:** This research investigates the communication influences affecting the enrolment decisions of Generation Z students within NCHMCT-affiliated hospitality institutes in India. **Methodology:** Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional design with a sample of 409 students chosen through purposive sampling method. Research has included different IHM across India (i.e. Mumbai, Hyderabad, Silvassa etc) affiliated by NCHMCT. The study evaluates the impact of digital, interpersonal, and institutional communication channels with the help of a self-administered structured questionnaire consisting 23 close-ended questions. Jamovi has been used as a data analysis tool. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis has been run to analyse the data. **Results:** Descriptive and correlation analyses reveal that while digital platforms are essential for initial awareness, institutional communication credibility and experience-based content—such as placement data and student testimonials—are the strongest predictors of enrolment decision satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.581$ ). Results demonstrate that Gen Z students prioritize authenticity and transparency over traditional promotional messaging. The findings suggest that while interpersonal influences from family and peers remain significant in the Indian context, institutional trust acts as the primary decisive factor. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that hospitality institutes must adopt an integrated marketing strategy that balances digital reach with high-credibility, outcome-oriented content to optimize recruitment. These insights provide an effective framework for administrators to enhance institutional positioning in an increasingly competitive educational marketplace.

**Keywords:** Generation Z, hospitality education, enrolment decisions, NCHMCT, communication channels, communication content, institutional credibility

## Introduction

Recovering from covid-19 hospitality industry in India has seen unrepresented growth in very level. To support that growth well maintained educational frame-work is needed to create skilled professional workforce. In India, the National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT) serves as the apex regulatory body, overseeing hospitality education through affiliated institutes

offering Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) programs in Hospitality and Hotel Administration. As enrollment competition intensifies among educational institutions, understanding the communication preferences and decision-making processes of prospective students becomes paramount for developing effective marketing strategies (Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Generation Z, defined as individuals born approximately between 1997 and 2012, represents the first truly digital-native cohort, having never experienced life without internet connectivity and mobile technologies (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). The gen Z has high digital literacy, shorter attention span, biasness towards visual communication (Turner, 2015). Gen Z's look for information through multiple channels such as digital platform, peer network and official institutional platforms. That's how this generation is very different than the previous one's in college selection process (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2019).

The proliferation of digital communication platforms has fundamentally restructured how prospective students discover, evaluate, and select educational institutions (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011). Official websites, social media platforms, virtual tours, student reviews and even influencer driven marketing has become the new norms in driving enrollment decisions (Rutter et al., 2016). Simultaneously, traditional interpersonal communication through family consultations, peer recommendations, and educational counselors continues exerting significant influence, particularly within collectivist cultural contexts prevalent in Indian society (Quintal et al., 2012).

Understanding the effectiveness of different communication channels can help in crafting a comprehensive and efficient marketing strategy. NCHMCT-affiliated institutes have their own regulatory and operational standards to ensure the quality of education. These institutes competition set also includes a bunch of private and international hospitality institutes and vocational training providing hotels (Baum, 2019). Effective communication strategies in terms of selecting correct communication channels have high value while addressing Gen Z information preferences. This research employs rigorous quantitative methodologies to measure communication influence patterns, test theoretical hypotheses, and derive actionable insights supporting evidence-based marketing strategy formulation tailored to contemporary student recruitment challenges in hospitality education.

This study addresses critical knowledge gap by systematically examining communication influences that effects Gen Z student's Enrolment decisions in B.Sc. Hospitality Management Program within NCHMCT affiliated institutes. By identifying important communication

channels, content types and other influencing factors, this research will try to provide evidence-based foundation for developing targeted marketing strategy for the NCHMCT colleges. These findings will offer practical implication for institutional administrators, marketing strategists and policy makers to optimize recruitment effectiveness and enhance enrollment outcomes in competitive educational marketplaces.

Generation Z, constituting individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents the first cohort to mature entirely within digitally saturated environments, fundamentally shaping their cognitive processes, communication preferences, and decision-making behaviors (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). As a digital native Gen Z students navigate through multiple platforms, consuming information through abbreviated formats and prefer visual communication (Turner, 2015). Research by Twenge (2017) reveals this generation exhibits heightened individualism coupled with pragmatic career orientations, seeking educational pathways offering clear professional trajectories and tangible skill development.

Empirical studies examining Gen Z college selection processes reveal multifaceted decision-making frameworks incorporating rational evaluation, emotional resonance, and social validation (Galan et al., 2015). Gen Z students do extensive pre-purchase research consulting on an average 7.4 different information sources before final enrollment decisions (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2019). Critically, Gen Z demonstrates reduced tolerance for inauthentic messaging, gravitating toward transparent communication that acknowledges institutional limitations alongside strengths (Fromm & Read, 2018). Their heightened social consciousness influences educational choices, with sustainability practices, diversity commitments, and ethical positioning significantly affecting institutional attractiveness (Schwieger & Ladwig, 2018).

Digital communication platforms have revolutionized higher education marketing, enabling personalized, interactive, and cost-effective student engagement at unprecedented scales (Peruta & Shields, 2017). Institutional websites function as central information repositories, with usability, content comprehensiveness, and mobile optimization significantly influencing perceptions of institutional quality and technological sophistication (Constantinides & Zinck Stagno, 2011).

The effectiveness of specific digital channels varies considerably based on communication objectives and audience segments. Rutter et al. (2016) identified that social media platforms excel at generating awareness and fostering emotional connections, while institutional websites prove superior for detailed information provision and rational evaluation support. Search engine optimization and paid digital advertising enable targeted reach to prospective students actively seeking hospitality education information (Kimmons et al., 2017). Video content, particularly virtual campus tours, student testimonial compilations, and day-in-the-life narratives, generates substantially higher engagement rates compared to textual content, aligning with Gen Z visual consumption preferences (Belch & Belch, 2018).

Empirical evidence shows that digital communication effectiveness has strong relationship with the content authenticity, the frequency of consistency and interactive element related with the same. Student generated content including peer review, ex-student's testimonials almost always create significantly higher credibility and acceptability of the information among prospective students (Galan et al., 2015). Among Gen Z student's mobile optimization is a non-negotiable factor with 73% of the students primarily accessing data through their mobile phones they also responsive design and quick loading (Pew Research Center, 2018).

Despite digital proliferation, interpersonal communication channels retain substantial influence on educational decision-making, particularly within collectivist cultural contexts characterizing Indian society (Quintal et al., 2012). Parental input represents arguably the most significant interpersonal influence, with familial expectations, financial considerations, and intergenerational career aspirations shaping program selection (Pimpa, 2005). A 2017 study by Ahmad and Buchanan reveals that family consultations is still an important factor in Asian context. Prospective students look for family approval before choosing educational institutes. Peer influence also makes a difference through recommendation and informal networking on social media and also through observational learning (Dennis et al., 2016). Peer communication has a strong credibility advantage because of the similarity in age and motivation of the sender and the receiver of the information and this also give an insider's prospective that is not available in official channels (Brown et al., 2007). Educational counselors, make an impact too. However, the importance of them in personal level is less compared to family influence

despite providing specialized knowledge and understanding regarding hospitality educational programs, career trajectory and institutional reputation (McDonough, 2005).

Institutional communication encompasses official messaging through admissions offices, faculty interactions, campus visit experiences, and formal information sessions (Piróg, 2014). The credibility of institutional communication significantly influences prospective student perceptions, with transparency, consistency across channels, and evidence-based claims enhancing trust. Research demonstrates that prospective students evaluate institutional credibility through multiple signals including website professionalism, responsiveness to inquiries, faculty credentials, and alignment between promised and delivered experiences during campus visits (Wilkins & Huisman, 2015).

Despite extensive scholarship examining higher education marketing and student recruitment, significant research gaps persist regarding communication influences specific to Gen Z in Indian hospitality education contexts. Existing literature mostly focuses on Western educational systems, potentially limiting applicability to culturally distinct contexts where collectivist values, family decision-making structures, and economic considerations operate differently (Shanka & Quintal, 2012).

Furthermore, quick technological evaluation and shifting media consumption pattern in our society have made it mandatory to update our understanding of Generation Z behavior, rather than depending on earlier studies based on previous generations. Digital transformation in educational marketing has taken a path of accelerated growth after Covid-19 Pandemic. Existing research often examines communication channels in isolation rather than investigating the factors in a comprehensive manner.

#### **Hypotheses:**

H1: Digital communication channels have a significant influence on Gen Z students' awareness and understanding of B.Sc. Hospitality programs.

H2: Interpersonal communication channels significantly influence Gen Z students' enrolment decisions.

H3: Institutional communication credibility has a significant positive impact on enrolment decision satisfaction.

H4: Communication influence significantly predicts enrolment decision satisfaction among Gen Z students.

#### Objectives:

- To identify the key communication channels (digital, interpersonal, institutional) that influenced Gen Z students' awareness and understanding of B.Sc. Hospitality programs.
- To analyze the type of communication content (e.g., testimonials, placement information, campus exposure, social media content) that was most influential during the enrolment decision-making process.
- To derive evidence-based implications for developing effective marketing communication strategies for NCHMCT-affiliated institutes.

### Methodology

**Research Design:** The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The research is cross-sectional and retrospective, as data are collected at a single point in time from currently enrolled students reflecting on pre-admission communication experiences.

**Locale:** The data has been collected from different IHM across India affiliated by NCHMCT including the cities with strong multicultural background such as of Mumbai, Hyderabad and also from cities i.e. Ahmedabad, Bhubaneshwar and Silvassa.

**Sampling Design:** Target Population in this case was Gen Z students (approximately 17–22 years old) currently enrolled in B.Sc. Hospitality programs at NCHMCT-affiliated institutes in India. Non-probability sampling method-purposive sampling method was used for this study. Students were approached directly with self-administered structured questionnaire for their responses. The final analysis is based on 409 valid responses, with no missing data, ensuring robustness for statistical interpretation.

**Tools and Technique:** This research is taking a quantitative approach as the primary method. However, Limited open-ended questions are used to enrich interpretation. This approach allows: Measurement of communication influence, statistical testing, evidence-based strategy development. Variables of the study included- Independent Variables (Communication Influences, Digital Communication Channels, Interpersonal Communication Channels, Institutional Communication

Channels, Communication Content). Dependent Variable (Enrolment Decision Satisfaction). Primary Data was collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire consisting 23 close-ended questions using a 5-point Likert scale and 2 open-ended questions. Google form has been used as a tool for data collection.

**Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis:** Jamovi has been used for statistical analysis (The jamovi project, 2024). Descriptive Statistics i.e. mean and standard deviation. Reliability Analysis through Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha \geq 0.70$  acceptable). Pearson's correlation Analysis. Multiple Regression Analysis to test predictive influence on enrolment satisfaction.

### Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the quantitative analysis conducted to examine the influence of communication factors on enrolment decision satisfaction among Gen Z students enrolled in B.Sc. Hospitality programs at NCHMCT-affiliated institutes.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Profile of Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	248	60.6
	Female	161	39.4
Institute Type	Central IHM	371	90.7
	State IHM	34	8.3
	Private IHM	4	1
Year of Study	First Year	157	38.4
	Second Year	31	7.6
	Third Year	221	54
School Background	State Board	188	46
	CBSE	170	41.6
	ICSE	45	11
	International Board	6	1.5

*Note.* N = 409 respondents.

**Table 2**

*Descriptive Analysis of the Independent Variables (Objective 1 & 2)*

Variable	N	Missing	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Digital Communication Channels	409	0	3.47	0.862	1.00	5.00
Interpersonal Communication Channels	409	0	3.20	0.988	1.00	5.00
Institutional Communication Channels	409	0	3.05	1.016	1.00	5.00
Communication Content Influence	409	0	3.58	0.843	1.00	5.00
Institutional Communication Credibility	409	0	3.57	0.977	1.00	5.00
Enrolment Decision Satisfaction	409	0	3.60	1.011	1.00	5.00

*Note.* M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Descriptive statistics indicate that all communication-related variables recorded mean scores above the neutral midpoint, suggesting an overall positive perception of communication influences among respondents. Communication content influence (M= 3.58, SD= 0.843) and institutional communication credibility (M= 3.57, SD= 0.977) emerged as the most influential factors, followed by digital communication channels (M= 3.47, SD= 0.862). Enrolment decision satisfaction also recorded a relatively high mean score (M= 3.60, SD= 1.011), indicating that students were generally satisfied with their enrolment decisions.

These findings provide initial support for objectives 1 and 2, highlighting the importance of both communication channels and communication content in shaping students' awareness, understanding, and decision-making processes.

These findings are in line with study of Galan et al (2015) stating the gen Z's the incorporation of rational evaluation, emotional resonance, and social validation in finalizing educational institutions. Similarly, the findings of Fromm and Read (2018) about Gen Z focusing on transparent communication and Schwieger & Ladwig study from the same year highlighting the factor of social consciousness influences educational choices, also matches with our

findings of the importance of both communication channels and communication contents.

**Table 3**

*Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire*

Construct / Section	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Digital Communication Channels	4	0.769	Acceptable to good internal consistency
Interpersonal Communication Channels	4	0.784	Acceptable to good internal consistency
Institutional Communication Channels	4	0.856	Very good reliability
Communication Content Influence	6	0.852	Very good reliability
Institutional Communication Credibility	3	0.851	Very good reliability
Enrolment Decision Satisfaction	3	0.884	Excellent reliability

*All constructs demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70.*

**Table 4**

*Pearson's Correlation Analysis (Communication Channels)*

Correlation Matrix H1-H3 preliminary support		Digital Communication Channels	Interpersonal Communication Channels	Institutional Communication Channels
Interpersonal Communication Channels	Pearson's r	0.429***	—	—
	df	407	—	—
	p-value	<.001	—	—
Institutional Communication Channels	Pearson's r	0.381***	0.506***	—
	df	407	407	—
	p-value	<.001	<.001	—
Enrolment Decision Satisfaction	Pearson's r	0.439***	0.460***	0.549***
	df	407	407	407
	p-value	<.001	<.001	<.001

*Note.* \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

**Table 5**

*Pearson's Correlation Analysis (Communication Content & Credibility)*

		Communication Content Influence	Institutional Communication Credibility
Institutional Communication Credibility	Pearson's r	0.662***	—
	df	407	—
	p-value	<.001	—
Enrolment Decision Satisfaction	Pearson's r	0.681***	0.694***
	df	407	407
	p-value	<.001	<.001

Note. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among communication influence variables and enrolment decision satisfaction, thereby providing preliminary support for H1, H2, and H3.

The results reveal significant positive correlations among all communication channels, indicating that digital, interpersonal, and institutional communication sources function in a complementary manner rather than in isolation. Digital communication channels were significantly correlated with interpersonal communication channels ( $r = 0.429$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and institutional communication channels ( $r = 0.381$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Institutional communication channels also showed a strong positive relationship with interpersonal communication channels ( $r = 0.506$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

With respect to enrolment outcomes, digital communication channels exhibited a moderate positive correlation with enrolment decision satisfaction ( $r = 0.439$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that digital platforms significantly enhanced students' awareness and understanding of B.Sc. Hospitality programs, thereby supporting H1. Interpersonal communication channels were also positively correlated with enrolment decision satisfaction ( $r = 0.460$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that advice and recommendations from peers, family members, and alumni played a meaningful role in influencing enrolment decisions, supporting H2.

Institutional communication channels demonstrated a stronger positive association with enrolment decision satisfaction ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), highlighting the importance of official institutional sources such as websites, admission counsellors, and campus visits.

Further analysis revealed particularly strong relationships involving communication content and institutional credibility. Communication content influence was strongly correlated with institutional communication credibility ( $r = 0.662$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that transparent and experience-based content enhances trust in institutional communication. Moreover, communication content influence ( $r = 0.681$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and institutional communication credibility ( $r = 0.694$ ,  $p < .001$ ) both exhibited strong positive correlations with enrolment decision satisfaction. These findings provide strong empirical support for H3 and directly address objective 2. Present findings are in line of Piróg (2014) and Oplatka (2016) in the terms of the importance of quality of messaging.

**Table 6**

*Linear Regression (Model Fit Measures)*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>
1	0.762	0.581

Note. Models estimated using sample size of  $N = 409$ .

$R = 0.762$ , indicates a strong positive relationship between the set of predictors and enrolment decision satisfaction.  $R^2 = 0.581$ , indicates about 58.1% of the variance in enrolment decision satisfaction is explained by the predictors in the model.

**Table 7**

*Linear Regression (Model Coefficients)*

Enrolment Decision Satisfaction at 95% Confidence Interval							
Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	P	Stand. Estimate	Lower	Upper
Digital Communication Channels	0.08567	0.0453	1.8917	0.059	0.07303	0.00286	0.1489
Interpersonal Communication Channels	0.00414	0.0431	0.0959	0.924	0.00404	0.07883	0.0869
Institutional Communication Channels	0.10580	0.0428	2.4734	0.014	0.10632	0.02182	0.1908
Communication Content Influence	0.38049	0.0623	6.1114	<.001	0.31707	0.21508	0.4191
Institutional Communication Credibility	0.40650	0.0467	8.7105	<.001	0.39259	0.30399	0.4812

Note. SE = Standard Error.

To test the predictive influence of communication factors on enrolment decision satisfaction, multiple regression analysis was conducted. The regression model was found to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and explained approximately 55–60% of the variance in enrolment decision satisfaction ( $R^2 = 0.55\text{--}0.60$ ), indicating a strong model fit. This result provides empirical support for H4, confirming that communication influences significantly predict enrolment decision satisfaction among Gen Z students.

So the composite finding of the study in terms of the Hypothesis testing are as follows: H1 was supported, as digital communication channels significantly influenced awareness, understanding, and enrolment satisfaction. H2 was supported, with interpersonal communication channels significantly influencing enrolment decisions. H3 was strongly supported, as institutional communication credibility demonstrated a strong positive impact on enrolment decision satisfaction. H4 was supported, with communication influence variables collectively predicting enrolment decision satisfaction.

These gives the answer to objective 3. As institutional communication credibility has come up as the most important factor in enrolment decision followed by communication content. Hence, it can be stated that trust in the quality of institution's evidence-based messaging system plays critical role in final decision making. Other than institutional communication channels, digital and interpersonal communication channels were significant factors, their relative influence was comparatively lower when other variables were controlled for, suggesting that these channels primarily function as awareness and validation mechanisms rather than final decision determinants.

These finding are supported by Galan et al. (2015) that shows empirical evidence of the effectiveness of digital communication, consistency of the communication channel. Importance of digital communication channels mentioned in hypothesis 1 is in line with Pew Research Center's (2018) study stating 73% of Gen Z students retrieving admission related information through smartphones, hence through digital media.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has provided empirical evidence that enrolment decisions of the Gen Z students are directed by multidimensional communication channels. A single source

doesn't have control over this. The descriptive and correlational data has proved that digital communication channels play quite important role in increasing the awareness of the students. It also helps to build the initial understanding of the academic program. This finding matches with the previous studies on factors directing Gen Z behaviour related to higher education choices. However, the results of the regression analysis have revealed that while digital communication channels are important, these alone don't direct the final choice of the students related to enrolment decisions. Also, peer and Alumni review has significant impact on final enrolment decisions. This interpersonal communication channels are consistent with previous studies about impact of social influence and word of mouth theories.

Finally, the influence of communication content on determining the enrolment decision is the biggest finding of the study. Evidence based content such as student testimonials, placement outcomes, visual representation of campus life and internship exposure options increases the credibility of the institution and enhance the chances of decision satisfaction. Institutional communication credibility has come up as the strongest factor for enrolment decision satisfaction. The credibility associated with NCHMCT affiliation, realistic communication and consistency between pre admission information and post admission experience has significantly enhanced student's confidence in the decisions.

Based on empirical findings the following recommendations can be proposed: Institutes need to develop integrated communication strategies that are in line with digital interpersonal and institutional messaging ideas to ensure consistency across different channels and different NCHMCT affiliated colleges. A shift from promotional to informational communication that focuses on transparency, campus placement data and real-life student experience is a better idea to do education marketing. Student created content including testimonials, practical class related videos and day to day college life related videos to increase authenticity of the informational material. It is very important to continuously monitor the effectiveness of different communication channels through feedback mechanism and actual admission data to enhance the effectiveness of future marketing strategies.

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