

World Conference on Research in Teaching and Education

12 - 14 June 2026

Tokyo , Japan

The Influence of Social Media Content on Graduate Application Intention in Sino-Foreign Cooperative Higher Education

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Abstract

Social media has become an important source of information in higher education recruitment, as prospective students rely on digital content to evaluate university quality, credibility, and future value before making application decisions. In Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China, this issue is particularly important because students also judge international identity, institutional reputation, cultural hybridity, and the authenticity of student experience. Guided by the Elaboration Likelihood Model, this study examines how firm-generated content, user-generated content, and university brand image influence on the undergraduate students' intention to apply for graduate study, with a focus on Wenzhou-Kean University. Using a quantitative survey design, the study measured perceptions of official social media content, user-generated content, university brand image, and intention to apply. The instruments were examined for reliability, and correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to assess relationships and the independent predictive role of each factor. The findings show that social media content and brand image are closely connected to application intention. User-generated content and university brand image emerged as especially meaningful predictors, suggesting that authenticity, trust, peer experience, and perceived institutional value play central roles in digital recruitment. In contrast, official university content appears useful for building awareness and providing structured information, but its independent predictive role becomes weaker when peer-based content and brand image are considered together. This study contributes to digital recruitment and student choice research by highlighting institutional communication and student-centered social media narratives. Practically, universities should strengthen digital storytelling, integrate student voices into recruitment strategies, and build a credible brand image.

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Keywords: Digital Recruitment; University Brand Image; User-Generated Content; Firm-Generated Content; University Branding