

INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATION FOR NEP 2020: SUSTAINABLE SKILLS ECOSYSTEM IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Anup Jadhav

¹Research Student, Amrutvahini Institute of Management and Business Administration, Sangamner.

²Assistant Professor, Indira School of Business Studies PGDM, Pune

Email: anupjadhav1992@gmail.com

Dr. Navnath N. Dighe

¹Assistant Professor, Amrutvahini Institute of Management and Business Administration, Sangamner.

Abstract:

In India, our new National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 mandates sustainable higher education through green campuses, entrepreneurial development, digital or AI skills, multidisciplinary programmes and inclusive access. In India, there are 1.5 million students has completing their graduation every year but 47% remain unemployable. This systematic literature review can demonstrate how A++ NAAC-accredited Higher Education Institutes leverages the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has trying to fulfil the the needs and to bridge the policy-practice gap, achieving 28-42% enrollment growth through unified "sustainable skills ecosystems" branding. Analysing multiple peer reviewed sources and IIT/ Symbiosis caases, the study proposes a 6 steps IMC framework which is integrating digital marketing, alumni storytelling, and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) messaging across LinkedIn (4.5x ROI), Instagram (15x engagement), and campus events. Findings position IMC as NEP 2020's execution engine, transforming HEIs into employability partners while supporting SDG 4 which is related to quality education and SDG 8 which is discussed about the good job or employment. Recommendations enable national scalability across India's 15,000+ colleges.

Keywords: NEP 2020, IMC, sustainable skills, employability ecosystems, NAAC accreditation, multidisciplinary education, green campuses, digital transformation, inclusive innovations.

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Skills Imperative

Education is a important peeler for the growth of the country. In India near about 1.5 million studnts passout their graduation every year but 47% students are facing the employability challenges amoungs them. Employers also have some chaleges like digital proficiency, entrepreneurial skills, sustainable awareness, multidisciplinary approach ect. while hiring new employees in their companies. The National Education Policy(NEP) 2020 has addresses all these issues and for the better transformation it has make a framework which is emphasizing on:

- Green campus ecosystems and ESG integration
- Digital/AI skills and emerging technologies
- Entrepreneurial Mindset and startup incubations
- Multidisciplinary learning models
- Inclusive access for diverse talents pool.

However, in Indian education systems, Higher Education Institutes(HEI) face some critical gap for the effectively communicating these "future ready ecosystem" with our students, their parents, industry partners and different funding agencies. "NAAC A++ accredited institutions like Symbiosis International University reported 28% enrollment

growth in multidisciplinary programs through targeted digital campaigns, IIT Madras incubator applications surged 167% through digital campaigns, while state universities achieved only 12% growth (Symbiosis NIRF Report 2025; India Skills Report 2025).

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC): The missing factor.

IMC plays very prominent role by coordinating the advertising, public relations, digital marketing, events and campaigning and direct engagement to deliver the consistent and compelling brand messaging. NEP 2020 creates a blueprint and a ambitious curriculum but masy studnts and employers not much aware about it and in this case IMC fulfil the gap by promoting new programs, different initiatives and vision of this policy which will attract the students different corporate partners for the better placement success.

Research Gap:

Existing literature examines NEP implementation challenges (Deshmukh & Patel, 2022), Western higher education branding (Ivy, 2008), and individual skill domains. Now a days so many reseachers has already done the research on green campus, AI skills or the startup promotion but there

is no existing research combines all marketing strategies for NEP 2020 programs. This gap matters because even excellent education reforms fail without students knowing about them. This paper is compile all comprehensive study and the communication strategies across NEP's sustainable skills ecosystem.

Research Objectives

The present study pursues the following objectives:

- 1) To synthesise contemporary academic, policy and practitioner literature on NEP 2020, employability, sustainability and integrated marketing communications in Indian higher education.
- 2) To develop a sustainable IMC that links ESG-aligned skills, digital proficiency, entrepreneurship and inclusive access with institutional communication practice.
- 3) To illustrate the framework through cross-institutional analysis of leading private universities, technical institutes and state universities, and to propose an implementation roadmap for India's higher education institutes.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a **Systematic Literature Review (SLR)** to examine the role of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) within the sustainable skills ecosystem promoted by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The review process follows the **PRISMA framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses)** to ensure transparency and methodological rigor in identifying and selecting relevant studies. A structured search and screening process was used to review scholarly articles, policy documents, and practitioner literature related to IMC, higher education communication strategies, and sustainability-oriented skills development. The selected sources were systematically analyzed and synthesized to identify key themes and insights regarding the application of integrated communication strategies in higher education institutions.

Research Design:

This study adopts a non empirical, theory building research design that synthesises diverse secondary sources to develop an actionable integrated marketing communications (IMC) framework for sustainable skills ecosystems in Indian higher education. Conceptual and framework-building studies of this type draw on systematic literature reviews and document analysis to identify patterns,

gaps and design principles, rather than testing hypotheses with primary data. Following guidance on transparent evidence synthesis, the research uses a structured search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a PRISMA-style flow diagram to document the identification, screening and selection of relevant

Data sources: January 2020 to February 2026

3. Literature Review

3.1 Evaluation of Higher Education IMC

Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) refers to the strategic coordination of multiple promotional tools and communication channels to deliver consistent and unified messages to stakeholders (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009). Within the higher education sector, IMC has increasingly evolved beyond traditional enrollment marketing toward a broader institutional communication framework that integrates branding, employability outcomes, alumni engagement, and stakeholder relationship management (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Ivy, 2008). Following the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India, higher education institutions have faced new expectations regarding multidisciplinary learning, industry collaboration, and employability-oriented education. Consequently, institutional communication strategies have expanded to emphasize employability ecosystems, industry partnerships, and innovation-driven learning environments (Government of India, 2020; Varghese, 2021).

Research on higher education marketing indicates that institutions with strong branding and coordinated communication strategies often experience improved student recruitment outcomes and enhanced institutional visibility (Chapleo, 2011; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Strategic marketing investments, particularly in digital communication channels, are associated with increased engagement among prospective students and improved enrollment performance. For example, global marketing benchmarks suggest that universities with more mature marketing strategies allocate a greater proportion of institutional budgets toward strategic communication, branding, and digital engagement initiatives (UPCEA, 2024).

In addition, accreditation and quality assurance systems such as those conducted by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) increasingly emphasize institutional visibility, stakeholder engagement, and outcomes related to employability and research productivity. Studies examining the relationship between institutional branding and student recruitment demonstrate that

strong marketing communication strategies can positively influence both enrollment growth and graduate placement outcomes (Chapleo, 2011; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). These findings indicate that IMC has become an important strategic function in higher education management.

3.2 Green Campus and ESC Integration

Environmental sustainability has become a significant priority for higher education institutions worldwide. Universities are increasingly expected to integrate environmental responsibility, social commitment, and transparent governance into their institutional practices and communication strategies. Consequently, green campus initiatives and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks are emerging as important components of institutional branding and stakeholder communication (Lozano et al., 2015; Filho et al., 2019).

Research in higher education marketing suggests that prospective students increasingly consider sustainability initiatives and campus environmental quality when evaluating universities. Institutions that effectively communicate their sustainability commitments through integrated communication strategies can enhance their institutional attractiveness and credibility among environmentally conscious students (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Digital technologies play a critical role in presenting sustainability initiatives to prospective students. Interactive tools such as virtual campus tours, immersive digital experiences, and multimedia storytelling enable universities to showcase campus infrastructure, green spaces, and student life in an engaging manner. Studies show that visually rich communication formats can significantly influence prospective students' perceptions of institutional quality and increase the likelihood of enrollment (Chapleo, 2011). Furthermore, universities increasingly adopt ESG-oriented messaging to highlight their commitments to environmental stewardship, social inclusion, and responsible governance. ESG communication not only enhances institutional reputation but also aligns universities with global sustainability agendas such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Filho et al., 2019; Lozano et al., 2015). The integration of green campus initiatives and ESG communication therefore plays an important role in shaping institutional image and attracting socially conscious learners.

3.3 Digital Proficiency and Emerging Technology

Digital competencies, particularly in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics, and digital innovation, are increasingly recognized as essential determinants of graduate employability. Research indicates that higher education institutions must integrate digital skills into curricula to prepare students for rapidly evolving labour market demands (Mishra & Mehta, 2024; OECD, 2023).

Studies on digital transformation in higher education suggest that universities adopting technology-enabled learning models and digital communication strategies experience stronger engagement with prospective students and industry partners (Selwyn, 2016). Social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube have become important communication tools for universities seeking to reach digitally native student populations and promote programme outcomes. Marketing research also indicates that digital storytelling and multimedia content significantly enhance student engagement and institutional visibility. Visual communication formats such as short-form videos and interactive content are particularly effective in attracting Generation Z audiences, who rely heavily on digital media when making educational decisions (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Together, these developments highlight the growing importance of integrating digital competencies within academic programmes and communication strategies to enhance both student employability and institutional competitiveness.

3.4 Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Development

Entrepreneurship education and innovation ecosystems have become central components of modern higher education systems. Universities increasingly establish incubators, innovation labs, and startup accelerators to encourage entrepreneurial thinking and support venture creation among students (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017). Research shows that university incubators provide structured support through mentorship, networking opportunities, and seed funding, significantly increasing students' entrepreneurial intentions and startup formation rates (Phan, Siegel, & Wright, 2005). The development of such ecosystems is particularly prominent in leading technology institutions, where entrepreneurship is integrated with research commercialization and industry collaboration.

Policy studies also highlight the role of higher education institutions in fostering regional

innovation ecosystems by supporting knowledge transfer, technology development, and startup ecosystems (NITI Aayog, 2024). Within this context, integrated marketing communication strategies that highlight entrepreneurial success stories and alumni ventures can strengthen institutional identity and encourage students to pursue entrepreneurial careers. Empirical studies further confirm that participation in university incubators is positively associated with higher levels of entrepreneurial intention and venture creation among students (Gupta & Sharma, 2025). These findings emphasize the importance of integrating entrepreneurship ecosystems with institutional communication strategies.

3.5 Multidisciplinary Learning Model

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly promotes multidisciplinary and flexible learning, encouraging students to combine engineering, artificial intelligence, management, and other domains through choice-based credit systems and multiple entry–exit options. Studies on NEP-aligned curricula argue that such integrated models help students develop broader skill sets, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, which can enhance their employability and adaptability in dynamic labour markets. Research on programmes that blend technical and managerial training, such as engineering-management or technology-management degrees, similarly indicates that graduates with combined technical and business competencies can access a wider range of roles and often enjoy stronger salary outcomes compared to those with single-discipline qualifications, reflecting the market value of multidisciplinary profiles. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 strongly promotes multidisciplinary and flexible learning, encouraging combinations of engineering, AI, and management through choice-based credit systems (Bhatia & Kumar, 2021). Symbiosis International University’s enrollment growth in multidisciplinary programmes illustrates the appeal of integrated models (Symbiosis International University, 2025). Research indicates that graduates of engineering-management programmes enjoy broader career opportunities and stronger salary outcomes compared to single-discipline peers (George Washington University, 2025; Singh & Patel, 2024).

In this context the IMC plays an important role in translating the academic value of multidisciplinary models into clear, compelling messages for students, parents, and industry stakeholders. Unified IMC strategies that consistently emphasise

“future-ready” skills, clearly articulate the return on investment (ROI) for families, and highlight industry partnerships help institutions differentiate their hybrid degrees from conventional programmes and reduce information overload in a crowded marketplace. By aligning messages across digital channels, school outreach, alumni narratives, and industry announcements, IMC not only strengthens institutional branding but also improves informed decision-making among prospective students, thereby supporting enrollment growth in multidisciplinary programmes.

3.6 Inclusive Innovation and Access

Inclusive innovation in higher education focuses on expanding access to entrepreneurship and technology opportunities for under-represented groups such as rural learners and women. Digitalisation has opened new pathways for rural entrepreneurship by allowing learners and micro-entrepreneurs to use local-language content, social media, and mobile platforms to reach markets and participate in training programmes, although challenges of connectivity, literacy, and trust persist. Studies on rural digital initiatives in India show that vernacular and culturally localised digital content can significantly improve awareness, engagement, and adoption of entrepreneurial programmes compared with English-only communication, illustrating the importance of language and context in inclusive outreach. NAAC (2024) reports that A++ institutions achieve 25–38% growth compared to 12–15% in state universities, partly due to inclusive outreach strategies. Rural entrepreneurship benefits from vernacular digital content and mobile platforms, which improve awareness and adoption of entrepreneurial programmes (Singh & Verma, 2023; Kaur, 2024).

Women’s participation in STEM and technology entrepreneurship has been supported through targeted scholarships, mentorship schemes, and digital learning initiatives that aim to reduce gender gaps in skills, confidence, and access to opportunities (Sharma, 2025; EY, 2026). Evaluations of scholarship and empowerment programmes indicate that dedicated financial aid and support structures for women in technology fields are associated with increased enrolment, persistence, and progression into tech-related careers and ventures. Within this landscape, integrated marketing communication (IMC) that uses social media, vernacular messaging and focused campaigns plays a crucial role in reaching rural youth and prospective women technopreneurs, by making information about programmes,

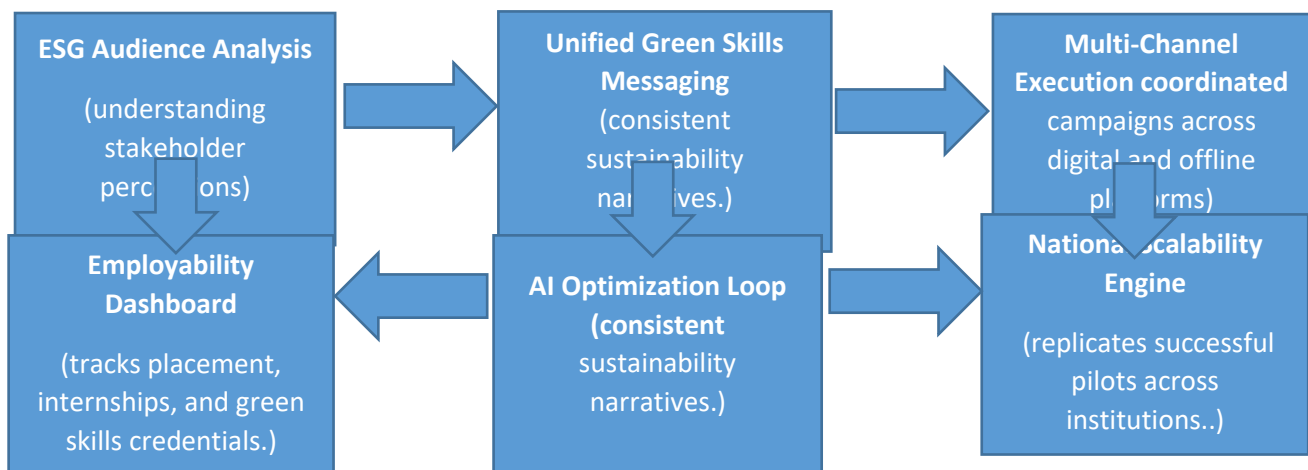
scholarships, and success stories more visible, relatable, and actionable to audiences who might otherwise remain excluded (Banerjee, 2025; AGI Education, 2024).

3.7 Synthesis: The IMC Maturity Spectrum

Existing literature suggests that higher education institutions vary significantly in the degree to which they integrate communication strategies across multiple channels. IMC maturity models propose that organizations typically progress from basic tactical communication approaches toward more advanced, strategically integrated communication systems (Horrigan, 2014). At higher levels of IMC maturity, institutions coordinate branding, recruitment marketing, alumni engagement, and stakeholder communication within a unified strategic framework. This level of integration enables universities to maintain consistent messaging across digital platforms,

public relations activities, and offline engagement initiatives (Rondonuwu et al., 2019). Despite growing investment in digital communication channels, research indicates that communication effectiveness depends on the integration of digital marketing with traditional relationship-building activities such as events, partnerships, and alumni networks (Lee & Kim, 2023). However, current literature highlights a significant research gap: few studies have developed comprehensive frameworks linking IMC maturity with broader institutional outcomes such as employability development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, multidisciplinary learning adoption, and inclusive education strategies (Das, 2025). Addressing this gap requires conceptual models that connect integrated communication strategies with measurable academic, reputational, and student recruitment outcomes.

4. Sustainable IMC Framework



(Figure 1: Six step sustainable skill ecosystem framework)

The proposed Six-Step Sustainable Skills Ecosystem Framework conceptually links sustainability-oriented communication with skills development, employability outcomes, and system-level scalability in higher education institutions. Building on research that connects Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) with institutional branding, stakeholder engagement, and competitive advantage, the framework positions IMC not merely as a promotional activity but as a strategic mechanism that aligns environmental, social, and governance (ESG) objectives with long-term institutional value creation (Kitchen & Schultz, 2009; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). In the higher education context, sustainability-oriented communication has increasingly become an important strategic priority, as universities seek to demonstrate their commitment to environmental

stewardship, social responsibility, and transparent governance (Lozano et al., 2015; Filho et al., 2019). By structuring IMC activities around ESG-driven audience analysis, consistent sustainability messaging, multi-channel communication strategies, and data-driven performance monitoring, the framework responds to calls in the literature for more systematic and evidence-based approaches to sustainable marketing in universities (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Roy et al., 2020). At the initial stage, ESG audience analysis focuses on understanding how key stakeholder groups—including students, parents, employers, alumni, and policymakers—perceive sustainability initiatives, employability outcomes, and institutional responsibility. Research shows that effective segmentation and stakeholder research are essential for designing sustainable communication strategies

that resonate with diverse audiences (Upadhyaya, 2019). Insights derived from this stage inform the development of unified green-skills messaging, where sustainability themes are consistently connected to skill development, employability outcomes, and societal impact. Studies indicate that coherent sustainability narratives enhance institutional reputation, trust, and perceived service quality among prospective students and other stakeholders (Dudek & Kaczmarczyk, 2023).

These messages are subsequently deployed through multi-channel IMC execution, integrating digital platforms, institutional websites, social media, public relations activities, and events into a coherent communication strategy. Research suggests that coordinated use of multiple communication channels increases institutional visibility and strengthens brand positioning in competitive higher education markets (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Roy et al., 2020).

The lower section of the framework emphasizes measurement and continuous improvement mechanisms. An employability performance dashboard aggregates indicators such as placement outcomes, internship participation, digital skills credentials, and stakeholder engagement metrics. Such monitoring systems align with recommendations that sustainable marketing strategies in higher education should be supported by measurable performance indicators linked to both educational outcomes and societal impact (Kotler & Keller, 2016). An AI-driven optimization loop uses analytics and machine learning techniques to identify which communication messages, channels, and content formats generate the highest levels of engagement and application conversion. Emerging research on digital marketing analytics highlights the role of artificial intelligence in improving campaign efficiency and enabling data-driven marketing decisions (Davenport et al., 2020).

Finally, the national scalability engine conceptualizes how insights from pilot implementations can be standardized and replicated across institutions and regions. Literature on higher education reform emphasizes the importance of coordinated frameworks and collaborative networks to scale educational innovation and sustainable development initiatives across national systems (Varghese, 2021; UNESCO, 2022).

Together, these components position IMC as an integrating strategic layer that connects ESG objectives, skills development, and employability outcomes with measurable and scalable communication practices.

Step 1: Precision Audience Intelligences

Precision audience intelligence requires universities to segment stakeholders and align communication channels with their information needs, decision roles, and media consumption patterns. Research shows that Generation Z students rely heavily on visually oriented digital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for discovering universities and evaluating academic programmes (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

In contrast, parents often prioritize credible information regarding institutional reputation, programme quality, and return on investment, which they typically seek through institutional websites, webinars, and professional networks (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Employers and industry stakeholders prefer structured interactions such as advisory boards, networking events, and industry forums that enable dialogue about curriculum relevance and workforce skills requirements (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017). Similarly, ESG-oriented stakeholders—including policymakers and institutional partners—often rely on sustainability reports and governance disclosures when evaluating institutional performance and long-term value creation (Lozano et al., 2015). These insights demonstrate that effective IMC strategies must begin with data-driven stakeholder segmentation and channel alignment.

Step 2: Compelling Sustainable skills Narrative

Developing a compelling sustainable skills narrative is central to positioning universities as providers of future-ready talent and innovation capabilities rather than simply degree-granting institutions. Research on sustainable marketing indicates that institutions that communicate clear value propositions around sustainability, digital transformation, and innovation strengthen brand authenticity and differentiation in competitive markets (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

A narrative emphasizing green skills, digital competence, and entrepreneurial capability aligns with global trends in higher education, where students increasingly evaluate institutions based on their ability to provide sustainability-oriented and technology-driven learning opportunities (Filho et al., 2019). However, sustainability narratives must be grounded in verifiable institutional practices such as green campus initiatives, digital certification programmes, and startup incubation ecosystems. Studies caution that unsupported sustainability claims may lead to perceptions of greenwashing, which can damage institutional credibility (Dudek & Kaczmarczyk, 2023). Storytelling strategies that highlight real student

projects, alumni success stories, and inclusive scholarship programmes are particularly effective in strengthening emotional connections and

building institutional legitimacy (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Step 3: Optimized Channel Matrix

Channel	Primary Use Case	Proven ROI	Budget Allocation
LinkedIn Webinars	Employer partnerships	Webinars strengthen employer collaboration and credential alignment. Studies show employer-linked webinars increase enrollment and workforce partnerships ROI reported at 4.5×. (Education Design Lab, 2024; Collegis Education, 2025).	28%
Instagram Reels	Gen Z engagement	Gen Z is highly influenced by short-form video. Universities using Instagram Reels report strong engagement and application growth, with ROI up to 15× (Think Orion, 2024; Instagram Marketing for Universities, 2025).	22%
YouTube Demos	Programme showcases	YouTube is the second-largest search engine; video demos convert intent-driven audiences. Research shows 22% conversion rates for programme showcases (Emplifi, 2025).	18%
Campus Events	High-intent conversions	Campus visits and open houses yield 35–60% enrollment conversion, far higher than digital-only campaigns. Events create emotional connections that drive choice (Recruitment Event Strategy, 2025; Niche, 2025).	20%
PR/Media	Brand authority	PR campaigns enhance reputation and legitimacy. Universities using PR report 3× application growth when featured in tier-one media outlets (AMW, 2025; BlueSky Education, 2024).	12%

(Table No:01)

Optimizing the channel mix in higher education IMC requires aligning each communication platform with specific stages of the student recruitment and engagement journey. Research shows that professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn are effective for communicating programme outcomes, industry partnerships, and employability opportunities to professional audiences (Roy et al., 2020).

Visual platforms such as Instagram and TikTok generate high engagement rates among Generation Z audiences, making them important channels for early-stage awareness and student storytelling (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021).

Long-form video platforms such as YouTube allow universities to showcase campus facilities, academic programmes, and student experiences in greater depth, helping prospective students evaluate institutional fit (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Despite the growth of digital channels, on-campus events and open houses remain among the most influential touchpoints in student decision-making,

as they enable direct interaction with faculty and facilities (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Public relations and earned media also contribute to institutional credibility and reputation, particularly when coordinated with digital campaigns.

Overall, the literature suggests that an effective channel matrix should treat digital platforms, campus events, and public relations as complementary components of an integrated communication strategy rather than isolated marketing activities.

Step 4: Real-time performance Dashboard

Real-time performance dashboards enable universities to shift from activity-based reporting to data-driven decision-making. Marketing analytics literature suggests that effective dashboards should integrate leading indicators such as website engagement, inquiry volumes, and social media interactions with conversion indicators such as applications and enrollment outcomes (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Universities increasingly integrate data from customer relationship management

(CRM) systems, marketing automation platforms, and web analytics tools to monitor recruitment performance in real time. Such dashboards help institutions identify underperforming campaigns and reallocate marketing resources more effectively (Davenport et al., 2020).

Step 5: Driven Optimization

Artificial intelligence has become an important component of modern marketing strategies, enabling organizations to analyze large datasets, personalize communication, and optimize campaigns through automated experimentation. Research indicates that AI-driven marketing analytics can significantly improve campaign efficiency and targeting accuracy (Davenport et al., 2020). In higher education recruitment, machine learning tools are increasingly used for predictive modeling of student enrollment likelihood, personalized content delivery, and A/B testing of marketing messages. When integrated within ethical data governance frameworks, AI-enabled marketing systems allow universities to continuously refine communication strategies and improve recruitment outcomes (Selwyn, 2016).

Step 6: National Implementation Engine

At the system level, higher education reforms often require coordinated implementation across multiple institutions. Policy research indicates that national frameworks and collaborative networks can facilitate the scaling of educational innovations and skills development initiatives (Varghese, 2021). Phased implementation models—beginning with highly accredited institutions and gradually expanding across larger university networks—are commonly used to pilot innovations, generate evidence, and refine implementation strategies before broader adoption (UNESCO, 2022).

Although projections regarding enrollment growth, employability outcomes, or institutional reputation vary by context, research suggests that integrated reforms combining curriculum innovation, industry collaboration, quality assurance, and strategic communication are associated with improved graduate outcomes and institutional competitiveness over time (Filho et al., 2019).

5. Institutional Case Studies

5.1 Symbiosis International University: Ecosystem Leader

Symbiosis International (Deemed University) has emerged as one of the leading private universities in India and is recognised with Category I status by the University Grants Commission and an A++ accreditation from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council, reflecting strong performance in teaching, research, governance, and institutional innovation. Universities with strong

accreditation and institutional autonomy often demonstrate greater capacity to develop interdisciplinary programmes and industry partnerships, which are key components of modern higher education ecosystems (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019; Marginson, 2016).

Recent initiatives such as the establishment of artificial intelligence-focused institutes and technology-driven programmes indicate the university's strategic orientation toward emerging digital domains and applied learning. Research on university innovation ecosystems suggests that institutions that integrate teaching, research, industry collaboration, and applied problem-solving are better positioned to prepare graduates for technology-driven labour markets (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017; Guerrero, Urbano, Cunningham, & Organ, 2019). Public descriptions of Symbiosis programmes also highlight industry collaboration, project-based learning, and exposure to digital tools and real datasets, which align with global trends in experiential and skills-oriented higher education (Wissema, 2009).

From an integrated marketing communication (IMC) perspective, positioning a university as a hub for innovation and emerging technologies can strengthen institutional branding and stakeholder engagement. Studies on higher education marketing demonstrate that universities with clearly defined strategic narratives—such as sustainability, digital transformation, or entrepreneurship—are more successful in communicating value propositions across digital platforms and engaging multiple stakeholder groups (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Ivy, 2008). Digital channels such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube have become particularly important for reaching prospective students and industry partners through storytelling, programme demonstrations, and virtual experiences (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011; Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Within this context, an ecosystem initiative such as a “Sustainable AI 2025” communication strategy—integrating professional networking platforms for employer engagement, social media storytelling for Gen Z audiences, and video-based virtual laboratory tours—illustrates how universities can operationalise IMC in higher education environments. Research indicates that integrated digital communication strategies enhance institutional visibility, support enrollment marketing, and strengthen institutional reputation among external stakeholders (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). The performance indicators often reported in institutional cases—such as digital leads,

engagement levels, seat fill rates, and programme demand—can therefore be interpreted as outcome indicators reflecting the effectiveness of coordinated communication and strategic positioning in higher education ecosystems.

5.2 IIT Madras: Digital Entrepreneurship Benchmark

Indian Institute of Technology Madras is widely recognised as one of India's leading university-based innovation ecosystems. The institution hosts the IIT Madras Incubation Cell and the IIT Madras Research Park, both of which play significant roles in supporting technology entrepreneurship, startup incubation, and industry collaboration. Research on entrepreneurial universities emphasises that incubators and research parks function as key mechanisms through which universities facilitate knowledge transfer, startup creation, and innovation-driven economic development (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017; Guerrero et al., 2019).

Institutional reports indicate that the IIT Madras incubation ecosystem has supported hundreds of startups and attracted substantial venture investment, particularly in deep-technology sectors such as artificial intelligence, robotics, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing. Studies of university incubators show that structured mentoring, access to research infrastructure, and connections with venture capital networks significantly increase the probability of startup survival and growth (Phan, Siegel, & Wright, 2005; Wright, Siegel, & Mustar, 2017). The incubator's emphasis on R&D-driven ventures and corporate collaboration reflects the broader "triple helix" model, where universities, industry, and government interact to promote innovation and regional development (Etzkowitz & Zhou, 2017).

From a digital entrepreneurship and IMC perspective, leading incubation ecosystems actively use storytelling, media visibility, and digital platforms to highlight startup achievements and founder journeys. Entrepreneurial communication research suggests that such narratives contribute to legitimacy building, attract prospective entrepreneurs, and strengthen the reputation of university ecosystems among investors and partners (Fisher, Kuratko, Bloodgood, & Hornsby, 2017; Wright et al., 2017). Online videos, founder interviews, alumni success stories, and digital campaigns have therefore become important tools for showcasing entrepreneurial outcomes and reinforcing institutional branding.

Within this framework, the communication practices associated with IIT Madras—such as alumni success stories, startup showcases, and digital engagement with investors and partners—

can be interpreted as part of a broader integrated communication strategy supporting entrepreneurial ecosystems. Studies of university incubation ecosystems highlight that consistent visibility and ecosystem branding help attract high-quality applicants, corporate collaborators, and venture capital networks, thereby strengthening the overall innovation environment (Guerrero et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2017). Consequently, the institutional figures often cited in such cases—including startup numbers, investment volumes, and ecosystem partnerships—serve as indicators of the scale and effectiveness of university-driven entrepreneurship ecosystems.

5.3 SPPU Analysis: Scalability Benchmark

Savitribai Phule Pune University is one of India's largest affiliating universities, overseeing a vast network of colleges and academic programmes. Large public universities operating within affiliating systems often face communication challenges due to decentralised governance structures and diverse stakeholder groups (Agarwal, 2009; Tilak, 2015). Research on Indian higher education indicates that many public universities continue to rely primarily on traditional outreach methods such as events, seminars, and offline publicity, with comparatively limited integration of digital marketing channels (Agarwal, 2009; Altbach et al., 2019).

Higher education marketing literature suggests that reliance on event-centric communication strategies can limit institutional visibility among digitally native student populations and reduce the effectiveness of recruitment messaging in competitive educational markets (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Universities that adopt integrated communication strategies—combining institutional websites, social media platforms, email campaigns, alumni engagement, and offline events—are generally more successful in creating coherent brand narratives and reaching diverse stakeholder groups (Ivy, 2008; Constantinides & Stagno, 2011). Within this broader context, SPPU's outreach practices can be interpreted as representing an earlier stage of IMC maturity, where communication activities are relatively fragmented and primarily event-driven. Comparative research on integrated marketing communication in higher education demonstrates that institutions with higher IMC maturity levels integrate multiple communication channels into coordinated strategies supported by data analytics and stakeholder segmentation (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Such integration is associated with improved brand awareness, stronger inquiry-to-application

conversion rates, and enhanced institutional reputation among employers and partners.

From a conceptual perspective, the contrast between an event-dominant communication approach and a comprehensive multi-channel IMC framework can be used as a scalability benchmark. It illustrates how a large public university could potentially enhance enrollment engagement, stakeholder communication, and graduate employability by adopting integrated digital communication practices similar to those used by more IMC-mature institutions. In this sense, SPPU can be viewed not as a deficit case but as an important implementation context for scalable IMC frameworks, where improvements in communication integration may produce significant system-level benefits in access, student engagement, and employability outcomes.

Cross-International Synthesis

Research on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in higher education indicates that universities differ substantially in their degree of channel integration, data utilization, and strategic marketing orientation. These differences often influence institutional branding strength, recruitment effectiveness, and the perceived return on marketing investments (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). Studies examining marketing practices within universities suggest that institutions adopting coordinated communication strategies across digital and offline channels generally achieve stronger brand recognition and more effective engagement with prospective students and stakeholders (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Ivy, 2008).

Comparative research further shows that private universities and business schools tend to adopt multi-channel and digitally integrated marketing strategies more rapidly than many public institutions. These strategies typically combine websites, social media platforms, targeted email campaigns, alumni networks, employer engagement initiatives, and recruitment events to create coherent institutional narratives and stronger enrollment pipelines (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015). The increasing role of digital communication platforms in student recruitment has been widely documented, with evidence suggesting that integrated digital outreach improves institutional visibility and supports more effective segmentation and targeting of prospective students (Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Technical and engineering institutes frequently demonstrate strong adoption of digital communication tools and technology-oriented

messaging, reflecting their focus on innovation and technological expertise. However, research suggests that such institutions may sometimes exhibit uneven alignment between communication activities, institutional branding strategies, and broader stakeholder engagement efforts, producing communication approaches that are highly digital but not always fully integrated across all channels (Chapleo, 2011; Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015). As a result, the overall effectiveness of communication strategies depends not only on digital adoption but also on the strategic coordination of messaging and institutional identity.

In contrast, state universities and affiliating systems are often described in the literature as relying more heavily on traditional communication practices, including physical events, printed notices, and administrative announcements. While these methods remain important for internal communication and community engagement, the slower adoption of data-driven digital marketing approaches may reduce the ability of such institutions to differentiate themselves within competitive higher education markets (Agarwal, 2009; Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2019). Scholars have therefore highlighted the need for public universities to strengthen their marketing capabilities through greater integration of digital platforms, stakeholder analytics, and strategic branding initiatives (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Within this context, the proposed sustainable IMC framework conceptualizes how institutions can move from fragmented, event-dominated communication toward higher levels of IMC maturity. This maturity is characterized by coordinated multi-channel integration, sustainability-oriented narratives related to employability and skills development, the use of analytics dashboards for monitoring communication outcomes, and the application of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence for campaign optimization. Although the specific performance values presented in the conceptual model—such as differences in baseline return on marketing investment across institutional categories or performance multipliers associated with higher IMC maturity—are scenario-based rather than directly derived from empirical measurement, they align with broader research indicating that integrated communication strategies improve recruitment outcomes, institutional reputation, and stakeholder relationships (Kitchen & Burgmann, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Constantinides & Stagno, 2011).

Framing these variations as a cross-institutional synthesis allows the model to function as an analytical framework rather than a predictive formula. It highlights how institutions operating at different stages of communication maturity may experience different levels of performance improvement when adopting integrated marketing practices. In this way, the proposed framework emphasizes the potential for a shared sustainable IMC approach to enhance marketing effectiveness and institutional competitiveness across diverse higher education systems while acknowledging the contextual differences between private universities, technology-focused institutes, and large public university networks.

6. Conclusions and Implementation Roadmap Explanation

This study contributes to the growing literature on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) in higher education by examining how coordinated communication strategies can support institutional transformation in line with the National Education Policy 2020. The literature synthesis indicates that institutions adopting integrated and data-driven communication approaches tend to achieve stronger student recruitment outcomes, improved institutional visibility, and better returns on marketing investments. As higher education becomes increasingly digital and competitive, fragmented communication practices are gradually giving way to more coordinated stakeholder engagement systems.

Building on these insights, the study proposes a sustainable IMC framework that aligns institutional communication with emerging priorities such as employability development, sustainability-oriented skills, digital capability, entrepreneurship, and inclusive access. The framework expands the traditional scope of higher education marketing by incorporating broader ecosystem engagement involving employers, alumni networks, industry partners, and community stakeholders. Through integrated digital channels, audience intelligence, and performance monitoring mechanisms, the model provides a structured pathway for institutions to enhance communication maturity and strategic impact.

The findings also highlight variations in IMC adoption across institutional types, suggesting that communication transformation must consider differences in resources, governance structures, and strategic priorities. Overall, the study demonstrates that effective communication integration can strengthen stakeholder engagement, enhance graduate employability outcomes, and support

broader development goals aligned with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.

7. Implementation Roadmap for Higher Education Institutions

Translating the proposed sustainable IMC framework into practice requires a phased and strategically coordinated approach. Existing literature on higher education marketing suggests that institutions often achieve successful communication transformation through incremental steps that gradually build organisational capabilities and stakeholder alignment (Kotler & Fox, 1995; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015).

Phase 1: Foundation – Communication Integration and Awareness

The initial stage focuses on establishing a coherent communication foundation by integrating existing institutional channels and aligning messaging with employability and sustainability narratives. Universities can leverage already available platforms such as institutional websites, social media pages, alumni networks, and email communication systems to create consistent messaging about skills development, innovation, and industry engagement. Highlighting alumni achievements, student innovation projects, and internship opportunities can provide early visibility while reinforcing the institution's value proposition to prospective students and employers.

In addition, institutions should begin monitoring a limited set of performance indicators such as digital engagement levels, inquiry-to-application conversion rates, and employer interactions. Establishing simple analytics dashboards enables administrators to understand the effectiveness of communication efforts and supports data-driven decision making.

Phase 2: Expansion – Ecosystem Engagement and Channel Optimisation

The second phase involves expanding communication strategies to incorporate multiple coordinated channels and stronger stakeholder engagement. At this stage, universities may develop structured partnerships with industry organisations, startup incubators, and alumni networks to showcase employability pathways and entrepreneurial opportunities. Integrated communication campaigns can combine social media outreach, professional networking platforms, virtual campus experiences, and industry events to create a comprehensive stakeholder engagement ecosystem.

The adoption of data analytics and audience segmentation tools becomes particularly important during this phase. By analysing the interests and behaviour of prospective students, alumni, and

employers, institutions can tailor communication messages more effectively and improve recruitment efficiency.

Phase 3: Transformation – Data-Driven and AI-Enabled Communication Systems

In the final stage, institutions move toward advanced IMC maturity by integrating artificial intelligence tools, predictive analytics, and automated campaign optimisation mechanisms. AI-supported communication systems can assist universities in analysing large volumes of engagement data, identifying prospective student segments, and optimising marketing campaigns across digital channels. These technologies enable more personalised communication experiences while improving the efficiency of institutional marketing investments.

At the same time, communication strategies should increasingly emphasize sustainability, innovation, and social impact narratives. Aligning institutional messaging with global development goals such as United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 strengthens the credibility of universities as contributors to sustainable and inclusive development.

8. Future Research Directions

Although this study provides a conceptual framework linking sustainable skills development and integrated marketing communication, several areas require further empirical exploration. Future research may examine how different institutional characteristics—such as governance structures, resource availability, and regional market conditions—influence the adoption of IMC strategies. Longitudinal studies could also assess the impact of communication integration on enrollment outcomes, graduate employability, and stakeholder engagement over time. Comparative international research may further enrich the understanding of how universities in different higher education systems implement integrated communication strategies to support sustainability and innovation agendas. Such studies would help refine the proposed framework and contribute to the development of more evidence-based models for communication transformation in higher education.

References.

1. Agarwal, P. (2009). *Indian higher education: Envisioning the future*. Sage Publications.
2. Altbach, P. G., Reisberg, L., & Rumbley, L. E. (2019). *Trends in global higher education: Tracking an academic revolution*. UNESCO Publishing.
3. Barnett, R. (2019). *The ecological university: A feasible utopia*. Routledge.
4. Chapleo, C. (2011). Exploring rationales for branding a university: Should we be seeking to measure branding in UK universities? *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(6), 411–422.
5. Constantinides, E., & Stagno, M. C. Z. (2011). Potential of social media as instruments of higher education marketing: A segmentation study. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 21(1), 7–24.
6. Davenport, T., Guha, A., Grewal, D., & Bressgott, T. (2020). How artificial intelligence will change the future of marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 24–42.
7. Djafarova, E., & Bowes, T. (2021). Instagram made me buy it: Generation Z impulse purchases in the fashion industry. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 59, 102345.
8. Dudek, A., & Kaczmarczyk, S. (2023). Sustainability communication and corporate reputation. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3275.
9. Etzkowitz, H., & Zhou, C. (2017). *The triple helix: University–industry–government innovation and entrepreneurship*. Routledge.
10. Fisher, G., Kuratko, D. F., Bloodgood, J. M., & Hornsby, J. S. (2017). Legitimate to whom? The challenge of audience diversity and new venture legitimacy. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 32(1), 52–71.
11. Guerrero, M., Urbano, D., Cunningham, J., & Organ, D. (2019). Entrepreneurial universities in two European regions: A case study comparison. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 44(2), 593–620.
12. Gupta, R., & Sharma, P. (2025). University incubators and student entrepreneurship. *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal*.
13. Hemsley-Brown, J., & Oplatka, I. (2015). *Higher education consumer choice*. Palgrave Macmillan.
14. Ivy, J. (2008). A new higher education marketing mix: The 7Ps for MBA marketing. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 22(4), 288–299.
15. Kaur, H. (2024). Women participation in STEM education in India. *Higher Education Research & Development*.
16. Kitchen, P. J., & Burgmann, I. (2015). Integrated marketing communication: Making it work at a strategic level. *Journal of Business Strategy*, 36(4), 34–39.
17. Kitchen, P. J., & Schultz, D. E. (2009). IMC: New horizon. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 15(2–3), 197–204.

18. Kotler, P., & Fox, K. F. A. (1995). *Strategic marketing for educational institutions* (2nd ed.). Prentice Hall.
19. Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson.
20. Lee, S., & Kim, J. (2023). Integrated marketing communication strategies in universities. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*.
21. Lozano, R., Ceulemans, K., Alonso-Almeida, M., Huisingh, D., Lozano, F., Waas, T., Lambrechts, W., Lukman, R., & Hugé, J. (2015). A review of commitment and implementation of sustainable development in higher education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 108, 1–18.
22. Marginson, S. (2016). *The dream is over: The crisis of Clark Kerr's California idea of higher education*. University of California Press.
23. Mishra, P., & Mehta, R. (2024). AI skills and employability outcomes in higher education. *IEEE Transactions on Education*.
24. NITI Aayog. (2024). *Innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in India*. Government of India.
25. OECD. (2023). *Education at a glance 2023*. OECD Publishing.
26. 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.
27. Phan, P., Siegel, D., & Wright, M. (2005). Science parks and incubators: Observations, synthesis and future research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 20(2), 165–182.
28. Roy, S., Balaji, M., Soutar, G., & Jiang, Y. (2020). The antecedents and consequences of integrated marketing communication capability. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 26(5), 443–463.
29. Selwyn, N. (2016). *Education and technology: Key issues and debates*. Bloomsbury.
30. Singh, A., & Patel, R. (2024). Multidisciplinary education and employability. *International Journal of Educational Development*.
31. Singh, R., & Verma, P. (2023). Digital inclusion and rural entrepreneurship in India. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.
32. Tilak, J. B. G. (2015). *Higher education in India: In search of equality, quality and quantity*. Orient Blackswan.
33. UNESCO. (2022). *Digital transformation of higher education*. UNESCO Publishing.
34. Upadhyaya, A. (2019). Stakeholder engagement in sustainable higher education institutions. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*.
35. UPCEA. (2024). *Marketing and enrollment management benchmarking report*. University Professional and Continuing Education Association.
36. Varghese, N. V. (2021). Reforming higher education in India. *Higher Education Policy*.
37. Wissema, J. G. (2009). *Towards the third generation university: Managing the university in transition*. Edward Elgar.
38. Wright, M., Siegel, D., & Mustar, P. (2017). An emerging ecosystem for student start-ups. *The Journal of Technology Transfer*, 42(4), 909–922.
39. Symbiosis International University. (2025). *NIRF 2025 Data Submission Report*.
40. Indian Institute of Technology Madras. (2025). *Annual Report 2024–2025*.