Stakeholder-Centric Information Disclosure on Private University Websites: A Comparative Study of Southern and Western Zones of India

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Abstract

This study examines the extent and pattern of stakeholder-centric information disclosed on the websites of 32 private universities across the Southern and Western regions of India. Using a structured content analysis and Chi-square statistical tests, the study evaluates the visibility of information related to prospective students, current students, parents, and staff. The findings reveal minimal zone-wise differences in individual stakeholder categories, but a highly significant disparity in overall stakeholder prioritisation. Prospective students and parents receive the greatest emphasis, while current students and staff are comparatively underrepresented. The results highlight an institutional tendency to prioritise external-facing stakeholders linked to admissions and visibility, underscoring the need for more balanced and inclusive communication practices in private university websites.

Keywords
Content Analysis; Websites; Stakeholders Priority; Prospective Students.
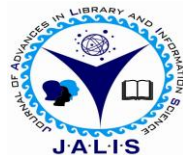
1. Introduction

University websites serve as primary digital gateways, communicating institutional identity, academic offerings, and support services to diverse stakeholder groups. In the evolving landscape of higher education, the quality, depth, and accessibility of online information have become essential markers of transparency, accountability, and competitiveness. Stakeholders, including prospective students, current students, parents, and staff, rely heavily on institutional websites to make informed decisions about admissions, academic choices, welfare provisions, and career development.

In India, private universities in different regions may adopt varied information disclosure strategies influenced by regional priorities, governance models, and market competition. Understanding these patterns is crucial for assessing institutional responsiveness and identifying gaps in stakeholder engagement. This study presents a comparative and consolidated analysis of stakeholder-centric information across private universities in the southern and Western regions of India, providing insights into their communication priorities and transparency practices.

2. Literature Review

University websites function as key communication channels that shape stakeholder perceptions and support institutional visibility. Studies consistently show that prospective students rely heavily on the clarity, structure, and accessibility of websites when making admission decisions. Ford (2011) found that well-organized academic and admissions information strongly influences student choice, while Bozyigit and Akkan (2014) and Buyukdogan and Hasan (2014) reported that universities frequently prioritize promotional and marketing-oriented content to attract applicants. These studies suggest that private institutions treat their websites as competitive branding tools, often emphasizing visibility and recruitment outcomes.

Research also highlights variations in how universities address the needs of different stakeholder groups. Mierzecka and Suminas (2018) emphasised that current students and academic users seek functional, service-driven information rather than promotional content, pointing to gaps in stakeholder alignment. Additionally, Tang and Ding (2023) demonstrated that content strategies differ across

cultural and institutional contexts, revealing that universities strategically curate information to shape identity and audience engagement. Collectively, the literature indicates a tendency to prioritise external-facing stakeholders, underscoring the need to examine how private universities balance stakeholder-specific information on their websites.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to analyse and compare stakeholder-centric information disclosure on private university websites. The objectives are as follows:

- To examine the extent of stakeholder-centric information disclosed on the websites of private universities in the Southern and Western zones of India.
- To compare the disclosure patterns across key stakeholder groups: prospective students, current students, parents, and staff, between the two regions.
- To confirm whether significant differences exist in stakeholder-related information disclosure.
- To identify which stakeholder groups receive higher or lower priority in the merged dataset of 32 private universities.

4. Hypothesis

The following hypothesis has been formulated for the study.
H_1: There is a significant difference in the emphasis given to different stakeholder groups in the website disclosures of private universities in Southern and Western India.

5. Methodology of the Study

This study focuses on analysing stakeholder-centric information disclosed on the official websites of private universities of the Southern and Western regions of India recognised by the University Grants Commission. The scope includes four major stakeholder groups- prospective students, current students, parents, and staff; and evaluates the extent, transparency, and consistency of information provided for each group. A total of 32 private universities (11 from the Southern zone and 21 from the Western zone established before 2015) were examined. The study employs content analysis and statistical techniques, including Chi-square tests to identify regional differences and overall prioritisation patterns in website disclosures. The findings aim to offer insights into digital transparency practices and stakeholder communication strategies in Indian private higher education.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 6.1 Comparison *of Current Student Priorities Across the Southern and Western Zones*

Categories	Variables	Southern Zone n= 11	Western Zone n=21
Academic Programs	1	11 (100)	21 (100)
Academic Calendar	1	10 (91)	15 (71)
Research and Development Cell	1	9 (82)	11 (52)
Fee structure	1	8 (73)	15 (71)
Scholarships/Fellowships	1	7 (64)	17 (81)
Hostel information	1	10 (91)	17 (81)
Campus Harmony & Wellbeing	8	49 (56)	92 (55)
Library Services (Offline, Online & Research)	28	99 (32)	136 (23)
News, Events / Campus Activities	2	22 (100)	36 (86)
Circular and Notices	1	6 (55)	11 (52)
Announcements	1	6 (55)	9 (43)
Total	**46**	**237 (47)**	**380 (39)**

Table 6.1 compares the disclosure of current-student–centric information on private university websites in the Southern (n = 11) and Western (n = 21) zones. Both regions show full disclosure for Academic Programs (100%). The Southern zone reports higher visibility in Academic Calendar (91% vs 71%), Research and Development Cell information (82% vs 52%), and News & Events (100% vs 86%). Meanwhile, Western universities show stronger disclosure for Scholarships/Fellowships (81% vs 64%). Categories such as Hostel Information and Campus Harmony & Wellbeing remain largely similar across the two regions.

The Chi-square test result (χ^2 = 7.67, *p* = 0.006, *df* = 1) indicates a statistically significant difference between the Southern and Western zones in the overall pattern of current-student information disclosure. This means the observed variations are not due to chance. Southern universities tend to emphasise academic processes, research support, and event-related communication, whereas Western universities prioritise financial-support information such as scholarships. These differences suggest distinct regional approaches to addressing the informational needs of current students.
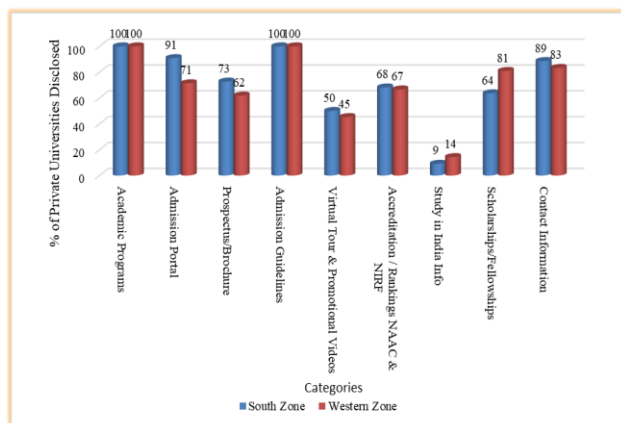

Figure 6.1 *Comparison of Prospective Student Priorities Across the Southern and Western Zones*

Figure 6.1 presents a comparison of prospective-student–centric information across private universities in the Southern (n = 11) and Western (n = 21) zones. Both regions provide full disclosure for key items such as Academic Programs and Admission Guidelines. Minor variations appear across other categories: the South reports higher in providing online Admission Portal, while the West shows stronger disclosure for Prospectus/Brochure and Scholarships. Contact Information remains consistently highlighted in both zones.

A Chi-square test (χ^2 = 0.44, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.51) indicates no significant difference in the overall disclosure patterns between the two regions websites. Although the South leans more toward procedural transparency and the West emphasizes promotional and financial-support content, these differences are not statistically meaningful. Overall, both zones demonstrate a largely uniform approach to presenting essential information for prospective students.

Table 6.2 *Comparison of Parent Priorities Across the Southern and Western Zones*

Categories	Variables	Southern Zone n= 11	Western Zone n=21
Fee Structure & Refund Policy	2	12 (55)	25 (60)
Hostel Details	1	10 (91)	17 (81)
Campus Harmony & Wellbeing	8	49 (56)	92 (55)
Reservation Roster	1	0	2 (10)
Annual Reports	1	8 (73)	12 (57)
Achievements	1	7 (64)	11 (52)
Placement	1	11 (100)	21 (100)
Total	**15**	**97 (59)**	**180 (57)**

Table 6.2 compares parent-oriented information disclosed on private university websites in the Southern (n = 11) and Western (n = 21) zones. Both regions show full disclosure of Placement Information (100%). The South reports higher visibility in Hostel Details (91% vs 81%) and Annual Reports (73% vs 57%), while the West shows slightly stronger disclosure for Fee Structure & Refund Policy (60% vs 55%) and Reservation Roster (10% vs 0%). Overall disclosure patterns remain largely comparable across zones.

A Chi-square test (χ^2 = 0.12, *p* = 0.73, *df* = 1) indicates no significant difference between the Southern and Western zones in parent-centered information disclosure. Although minor variations exist, such as the South providing more institutional reporting and the West offering slightly more procedural details, these differences are not statistically meaningful. The findings highlight a uniform approach to addressing parents' informational priorities across universities in both regions.
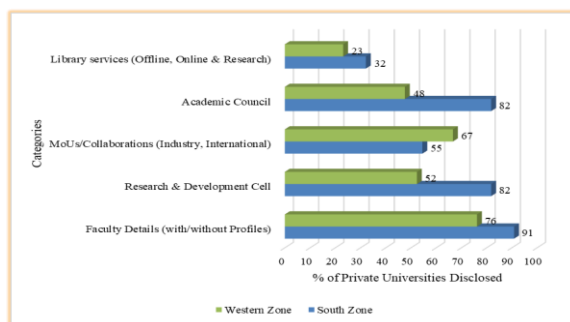
Figure 6.2 *Comparison of Faculty Priorities Across Southern and Western Zones*

Figure 6.2 compares the disclosure of faculty-related information on private university websites in the Southern and Western zones of India. Overall, the Southern zone shows higher visibility across all categories, including Faculty Details (91% vs 76%), Research & Development Cell (82% vs 52%), MoUs/Collaborations (55% vs 67% for West, where West performs slightly higher), Academic Council (82% vs 48%), and Library Services (32% vs 23%). The pattern indicates that Southern universities consistently provide more comprehensive faculty-centric information, with the exception of MoUs, where Western universities lead marginally. The Chi-square test result ($χ^2 = 9.41$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.002$) shows a statistically significant difference between the two zones in faculty-related information disclosure. This confirms that the variation is not due to chance and reflects meaningful regional differences. Southern universities appear to prioritise transparency in academic governance, research support, and faculty profiles, whereas Western universities demonstrate comparatively lower disclosure levels in these areas. The findings suggest that the South places stronger emphasis on academic credibility and faculty visibility, resulting in a markedly higher level of faculty-oriented information on university websites.
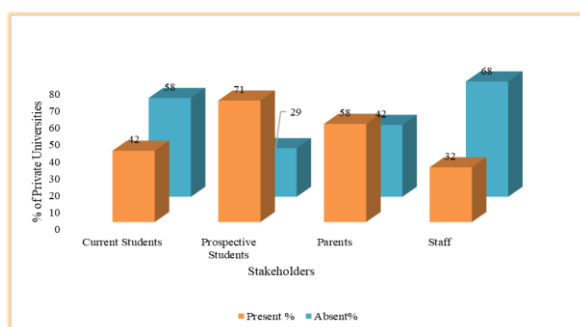

Figure 6.3 *Overall Stakeholder Emphasis in Southern and Western Region Private Universities Websites*

Figure 6.3 presents the overall prioritization of stakeholder-centric information across 32 private universities in the Southern and Western regions of India. The results show substantial variation in the visibility of information across the four stakeholder groups. Prospective Students receive the highest emphasis, with 71% of relevant information disclosed, followed by Parents (58%). Current Students receive comparatively lower attention at 42%, while Staff receive the least priority, with only 32% of staff-related information disclosed and a substantial 68% remaining absent.

The Chi-square test ($χ^2 = 233.38$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that these variations are statistically significant. Because the p-value is below 0.001, hence the hypothesis is accepted, indicating that stakeholder groups differ significantly in the amount of information made available to them. The ASR values reinforce this: Prospective Students (ASR = 12.07) and Parents (ASR = 6.05) are significantly over-represented, whereas Current Students (ASR = -3.10) and Staff (ASR = -10.01) are significantly under-represented. This confirms a clear prioritisation pattern across universities.

7. Findings of the Study

The comparative analysis of websites of private universities in the Southern and Western zones of India reveals distinct patterns in stakeholder-oriented information disclosure. Across individual stakeholder groups, Southern universities consistently exhibit higher disclosure in academic, research, and governance-related categories, while Western universities show slightly stronger emphasis on promotional and financial-support information such as scholarships and brochures. Despite these minor variations, Chi-square results for most stakeholder groups (except faculty) indicate no statistically significant zone-wise differences, suggesting broadly similar approaches across regions.

However, the overall stakeholder-level comparison demonstrates a highly uneven prioritisation pattern. Prospective Students and Parents receive significantly greater attention in website disclosures, as shown by their high presence percentages (71% and 58%, respectively) In contrast, Current Students and Staff are clearly under-represented, reflected in their lower disclosure levels (42% and 32%). The Chi-square test ($χ^2 = 233.38$, $p < 0.001$) confirms that these differences are statistically significant, indicating a

strong institutional bias toward stakeholders related to admissions, enrolment, and external perception.

8.   Conclusion

The study concludes that private universities in Southern and Western India adopt a generally consistent yet uneven approach to stakeholder-focused communication. Although zone-wise differences are minimal across most categories, the overall prioritisation clearly favours Prospective Students and Parents, positioning these groups as the primary audience for institutional communication. In contrast, Current Students and particularly Staff receive considerably lower visibility, indicating gaps in support, transparency, and internal stakeholder engagement.

Given the scarcity of studies that examine multiple stakeholder groups simultaneously and the near absence of regional comparisons within the Indian private higher education context, this research contributes a unique perspective to the literature. By highlighting uneven stakeholder prioritisation, the study reveals structural communication imbalances and opens new avenues for improving transparency and digital engagement across universities. Addressing these disparities can strengthen institutional accountability, enhance student experience, and improve staff involvement, resulting in a more balanced and inclusive stakeholder communication environment.

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