

## Communicating about options for Higher Education: which channels do students use and which do they prefer?

Study conducted by Ghent University's Master in Multilingual Business Communication, in conjunction with the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), Antwerp (1 May 2025)

*In an increasingly complex and competitive educational landscape, effective communication is essential in guiding students through the wide range of Higher Education options. Understanding how students engage with, perceive, and prefer to receive information about postgraduate pathways is critical not only for improving institutional support services but also for ensuring that students make informed, confident decisions about their academic and professional futures.*

*Ghent University's Master in Multilingual Business Communication, in collaboration with the Institute of Tropical Medicine (ITM), Antwerp, are pleased to announce the results of their investigation into communication practice and preferences of Belgian Higher Education Students with regard to postgraduate education options.*

*The Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp offers a variety of courses in tropical medicine, international public health and global one health for professionals from around the world.*

The investigation combined extensive qualitative and quantitative study:

- 17 in-depth interviews with bachelor and master students in nursing studies, midwifery, medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmaceutical studies and biomedical studies
- Focus groups with 8 ITM students
- Survey of 256 Belgian higher education students in the medical domain

In terms of communication practice the results show that Belgian Higher Education students report using a variety of sources to gather information about further education options.

- **Online sources** dominate as the primary means of gathering information, with 85% of respondents consulting online brochures and educational institution websites, followed closely by 76% visiting the website of their current educational institute.
- **Personal networks** also play a significant role, as 48% of students rely on friends and family, while 43% use social media.

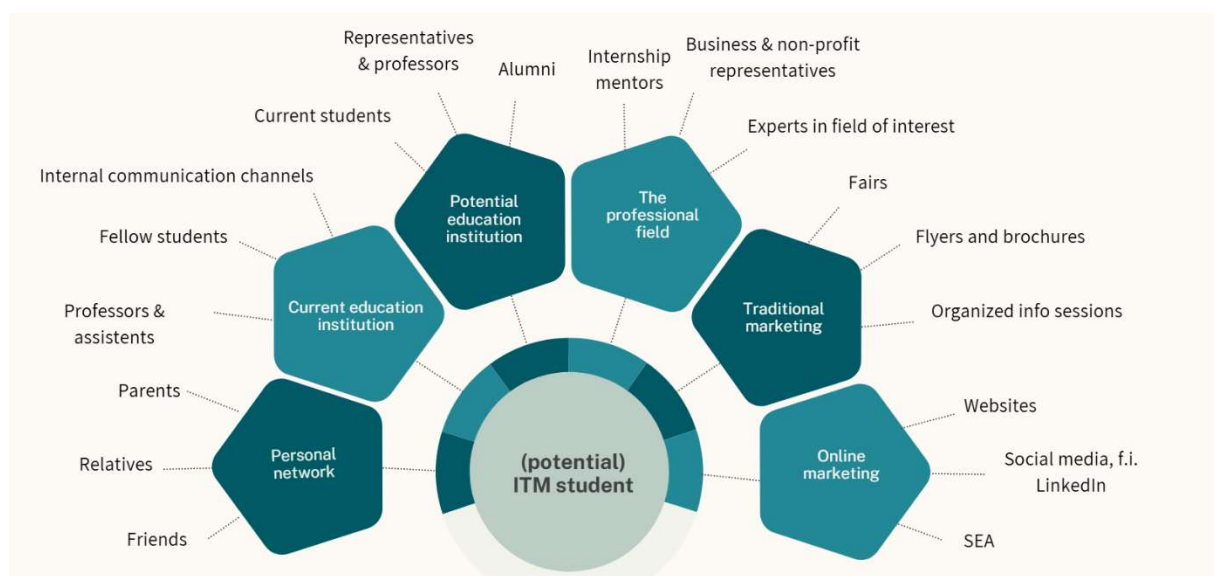
- Traditional methods, such as **information fairs** (41%) and **personal conversations with teachers or study counselors** (32%), remain relevant too.
- More specialized sources, such as **career and study choice coaches** (6%) and **alumni** of potential programs (9%), are much less utilized.

These findings suggest that students predominantly use easily accessible digital information while also drawing on direct personal input from their immediate academic and social circles.

As for preferred communication sources (how students believe they can be most effectively reached), the following are reported to be key influencers: alumni, experts, traineeship supervisors, programme coordinators, guest lecturers.

- The majority of respondents identified "**Presence at education fairs**" as the most effective, with 57% rating it as "Very Effective" and 32% as "Rather Effective".
- The second most popular response was through students' current educational institute, where respondents believed that **guest lectures** by the school of further education's representatives and mentions through internal communication channels would be highly effective.
- Promotion by **alumni or current students** is considered "Very Effective" (30%) or "Rather Effective" (50%).
- **Institutional social media pages, study choice platform and website** are viewed as moderately effective, followed by **paid advertisements on social media, campaigns on traditional social media channels, and the distribution of brochures/flyers**.

The following influencer mapping visual captures the complexity of the higher education communication arena.



Based on the perceived gap between practice and preferences, it is recommended that schools for further education explore the potential of in-person testimonials, including event-based marketing with professional associations.

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