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(Research Article)

From Enquiry to Enrolment: A CRM-Based Funnel Analysis of Admission Conversion in a Private Engineering College in Pune, India

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ABSTRACT

Engineering colleges invest heavily in generating student enquiries, yet the share of enquiries that culminates in enrolment is rarely measured stage by stage. This study examines the enquiry-to-admission funnel of a private engineering college in Pune, Maharashtra, using aggregate Customer Relationship Management records for the 2026–27 admission cycle, complemented by participant observation of lead-management operations during a 62-day internship. A descriptive–analytical design combines multiplicative funnel decomposition, Wilson score confidence intervals, a stage-sensitivity analysis and a chi-square goodness-of-fit test. Of 200,000 enquiries, 177 resulted in confirmed admissions, an overall conversion of 0.09 5 (95 % confidence interval 0.08–0.10). Outreach (50.0 %) and tele-calling connection (40.0 %) performed comparatively well, whereas only 3.75 per cent of connected leads were qualified as interested, making qualification the binding constraint of the funnel. Once qualified, 11.8 per cent of leads enrolled. Sensitivity analysis shows that a one-percentage-point gain at the qualification stage would raise admissions by about 27 %, more than ten times the effect of an equal gain in outreach or connection. Admissions across eight branches departed significantly from uniformity ($\chi^2 = 25.17$, df = 7, $p < 0.001$, Cohen's w = 0.38), with electronics and computer science engineering over-represented and the specialised artificial-intelligence programme under-represented. The findings shift managerial attention from enquiry volume to conversation quality and support a minimum data standard, lead scoring and a stage-wise conversion dashboard for admissions teams.

Keywords: *admission funnel; customer relationship management; enrolment management; lead conversion; higher-education analytics; engineering colleges; India*

I. INTRODUCTION

Private engineering colleges in India compete for a finite pool of applicants in a market where prospective students routinely shortlist several institutions and programmes before committing. To stay visible, colleges now generate enquiries at scale through paid digital campaigns, outreach events, aggregator lists and walk-in registrations, and most of these leads are stored in a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. The volume of enquiries has therefore become an easy and widely reported indicator of recruitment effort. Volume, however, is not the outcome that sustains an institution: what matters is how many enquiries become enrolled students, and at which point in the journey the rest are lost.

An enquiry is only the first step of a multi-stage decision process. Between the first contact and the final admission, a lead must be reached, engaged in conversation, qualified as genuinely interested, counselled and converted. Each of these transitions can leak. CRM in higher education has been discussed mainly as a tool for strengthening student–institution relationships and integrating information [1], [2], while research on college choice has explained why students select an institution [3]–[5]. A separate stream has examined how digital and social-media marketing shapes enquiries and enrolment decisions [6]–[8], and data-mining studies have attempted to predict enrolment from student-level records [9]. What remains thin is stage-level evidence drawn from the operational

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CRM data that admissions teams actually hold, particularly for engineering colleges in India, and analysis that converts such evidence into a clear priority for managerial action.

This paper addresses that gap through a funnel analysis of the 2026–27 admission cycle at Nutan Maharashtra Institute of Engineering and Technology (NMIET), Talegaon Dabhade, Pune. It is grounded in a 62-day internship in which the first author worked inside the lead-management process: segregating paid and outreach leads, allocating calling data to departments, tele-calling prospective students, digitising handwritten enquiry records and preparing daily and weekly calling reports. Three research questions guide the study. **RQ1:** What are the overall and stage-wise enquiry-to-admission conversion rates? **RQ2:** Which stage is the binding constraint, and how sensitive are admissions to improvement at each stage? **RQ3:** Are confirmed admissions distributed uniformly across the college's eight engineering branches?

The study makes three contributions. First, it provides a transparent, stage-decomposed account of a real admission funnel with interval estimates rather than single point figures. Second, it introduces a simple sensitivity lens showing that, in a multiplicative funnel, the same percentage-point improvement yields very different admission gains depending on where it is made, which turns a descriptive finding into a ranking of managerial priorities. Third, it specifies a minimum CRM data standard and an implementation roadmap that would allow the hypotheses that could not be tested in this cycle to be tested in the next. The remainder of the paper reviews related work (Section II), describes the methodology (Section III), reports the results (Section IV), discusses their implications and limitations (Section V) and concludes with directions for future research (Section VI).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW / RELATED WORK

Four streams of work inform the present study: CRM in higher education, models of student college choice and the enrolment funnel, digital lead generation, and admissions analytics. Table 1 synthesises these streams and positions the present study against them.

A. Customer Relationship Management in Higher Education

Seeman and O'Hara [1] argued that CRM principles and information systems developed in commercial settings can be transferred to education to manage the student–school relationship across its life cycle, from prospect to alumnus. Payne and Frow [2] proposed a strategic CRM framework built on five cross-functional processes: strategy development, value creation, multichannel integration, information management and performance assessment. For admissions, the last two processes are decisive, because a CRM can only support decisions if stage outcomes are recorded consistently and reviewed against targets. Much of the higher-education CRM literature, however, concentrates on adoption and relationship quality rather than on measuring how enquiries progress to enrolment.

B. Student College Choice and the Enrolment Funnel

Chapman [4] modelled college choice as the joint outcome of student characteristics and external influences, including the institution's own communication with prospective students. Hossler and Gallagher [3] described choice as a three-phase process of predisposition, search and choice, in which the institution's interaction with a student is most influential during search, when a broad set of options is narrowed to a choice set. Kotler and Fox [10] translated this process into the marketing language of an enrolment funnel that moves from prospects to enquirers, applicants, admitted students and enrolled students. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka [5], reviewing two decades of university-choice research, observed that most studies examine the factors behind the decision rather than the process by which an institution's actions move a student through it. The funnel view adopted in this paper operationalises the search-to-choice transition as the stage at which a connected lead becomes a qualified, interested lead.

C. Digital Lead Generation and Admissions Analytics

Digital channels have become the main source of enquiries for many institutions. In a structural-equation study of engineering colleges in India, Amrutha et al. [6] found that content marketing, social-media use and online-reputation management strongly influenced students' enrolment decisions, whereas e-mail marketing and virtual campus tours had smaller effects. Tran et al. [7] examined how universities can use social media for student acquisition, and Cingillioglu et al. [8] reviewed the expanding literature on social-media marketing for student recruitment. These studies explain how enquiries are generated, but they rarely follow those enquiries to final admission. At the other end of the pipeline, Ab Ghani et al. [9] developed a data-mining model to predict enrolment in a higher-education institution, illustrating the potential of predictive analytics; such models, however, depend on rich student-level records that routine admissions CRM data frequently lack.

D. Research Gap

Taken together, the literature leaves three gaps that this paper addresses: (i) CRM studies emphasise adoption over stage-wise conversion measured from operational data; (ii) college-choice studies explain decisions but not

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where institutional processes lose prospective students; and (iii) predictive studies presuppose data quality that many colleges have not yet achieved. A descriptive, stage-decomposed analysis of real funnel data, combined with an explicit data-readiness agenda, is therefore a necessary bridge between CRM practice and predictive admissions analytics.

Table 1. Synthesis of related work and positioning of the present study.

Research stream	Representative work	Typical evidence	Limitation for this context
CRM in higher education	[1], [2]	Conceptual frameworks, adoption studies	Little stage-wise conversion measurement
College choice and enrolment funnel	[3]–[5], [10]	Choice models, surveys, reviews	Explains decisions, not process leakage
Digital lead generation	[6]–[8]	Surveys, SEM, systematic reviews	Seldom traced to final admission
Admissions analytics	[9]	Data-mining prediction models	Requires rich student-level data
Present study	—	Operational CRM funnel and admission records	Aggregate data; one institution, one cycle

III. METHODOLOGY

The study follows a descriptive–analytical design. The descriptive component quantifies the distribution of leads and admissions; the analytical component decomposes conversion by stage, estimates its precision, evaluates the sensitivity of admissions to stage-level improvement and tests the distribution of admissions across branches.

A. Research Design and Setting

NMIET is a private engineering college in Talegaon Dabhade, in the Pune district of Maharashtra, offering eight undergraduate engineering programmes. The quantitative analysis is complemented by participant observation gathered during an internship from 5 June to 5 August 2026 (62 calendar days, 43 working days). Observation covered the full lead-management cycle shown in Fig. 1: segregation of leads from paid sources by department, allocation of general and outreach leads for tele-calling, conversion of handwritten enquiry details into spreadsheets, daily recording of calling outcomes, identification of interested students, weekly reporting to senior staff, and digital-marketing support for search-engine and social-media optimisation. This first-hand exposure informs the interpretation of the funnel in Section V.

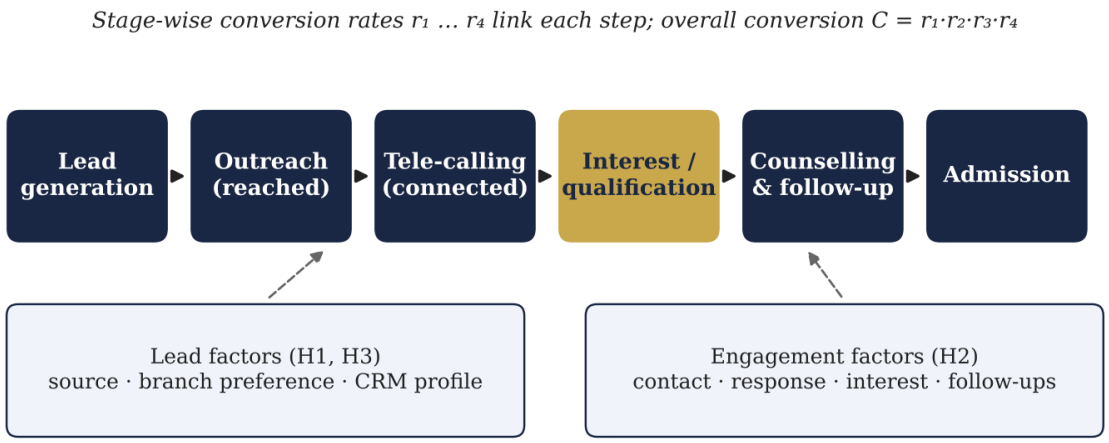


Figure 1. Conceptual framework: the CRM-based enquiry-to-admission funnel and the lead and engagement factors hypothesised to influence stage-wise conversion. The highlighted stage is the qualification step examined in detail in Section IV.

B. Data, Variables and Ethics

Two aggregate, anonymised datasets for the 2026–27 admission cycle were extracted from the institution's admission records on 10 September 2026 and cross-checked against the available admission reports [13]: (i) lead counts at five funnel stages, and (ii) the distribution of 177 confirmed admissions across eight branches. Operational definitions of the stages are given in Table 2. No personally identifiable student information was used, and the analysis was conducted with the permission of the host institution. Lead-level fields such as lead source and follow-up count were not available in a structured, anonymised form for the full cycle.

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Table 2. Operational definitions of funnel stages.

Stage (k)	Definition used in this study	Count (N_k)
0. Enquiry	Any student lead recorded in the CRM or enquiry registers during the cycle	2,00,000
1. Reached out	Lead allocated and attempted through calls, messages or outreach	1,00,000
2. Connected	Two-way tele-calling conversation completed with the student or parent	40,000
3. Interested	Lead qualified as genuinely interested and recorded for counselling and follow-up	1,500
4. Admitted	Admission confirmed in institutional records	177

Three hypotheses were formulated from the framework in Fig. 1. **H1:** lead source is associated with admission conversion. **H2:** follow-up frequency is associated with admission conversion. **H3:** admissions differ across engineering programmes. Because lead-level source and follow-up fields were unavailable, H1 and H2 could not be tested in this cycle; they are retained as an explicit data agenda (Section V-D). H3 is tested as a goodness-of-fit hypothesis on the branch-wise admission counts.

C. Analytical Procedure

Let N_0 denote total enquiries and N_k the number of leads reaching stage k (k = 1, …, 4). The stage conversion rate, the overall conversion rate and the number of leads lost at each stage are defined as:

$$r_k = N_k / N_{k-1} \quad \text{……(1)}$$

$$C = N_4 / N_0 = r_1 \cdot r_2 \cdot r_3 \cdot r_4 \quad \text{……(2)}$$

$$L_k = N_{k-1} - N_k \quad \text{……(3)}$$

Ninety-five per cent confidence intervals for each proportion were computed with the Wilson score method [12], which remains accurate for proportions close to zero such as the overall conversion rate. Because admissions $A = N_0 \cdot r_1 r_2 r_3 r_4$ are the product of the stage rates, an absolute improvement Δr_k at stage k, all other rates held constant, changes admissions by

$$\Delta A_k = A \cdot (\Delta r_k / r_k) \quad \text{……(4)}$$

Equation (4) shows that the same percentage-point improvement is worth most where the existing stage rate is lowest; it is used to rank the stages by managerial leverage. For H3, a chi-square goodness-of-fit test compared observed branch admissions O_i with the expected count $E_i = 177 / 8 = 22.125$ under equal distribution:

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma\,(O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i\,, \quad w = \sqrt{(\chi^2 / N)}\,, \quad z_i = (O_i - E_i) / \sqrt{E_i} \quad \text{……(5)}$$

The effect size w was interpreted against Cohen's benchmarks of 0.10 (small), 0.30 (medium) and 0.50 (large) [11], and the standardised residuals z_i identify which branches drive any departure from uniformity ($|z_i| > 1.96$). The test was conducted at the 5 per cent level of significance with 7 degrees of freedom.

IV. RESULTS

A. Overall and Stage-wise Conversion (RQ1)

Table 3 and Fig. 2 present the funnel for the 2026–27 cycle. Of 2,00,000 enquiries, 177 resulted in confirmed admissions, an overall conversion rate of 0.089 per cent (95 per cent CI 0.076–0.103). Expressed differently, the college needed about 1,130 enquiries, 226 connected conversations and 8.5 interested leads to secure one admission.

Table 3. Enquiry-to-admission funnel with stage conversion rates and 95 per cent Wilson confidence intervals.

Stage	Leads (N_k)	% of enquiries	Stage conversion r_k	95% CI of r_k	Leads lost (L_k)
Enquiries	2,00,000	100.00	—	—	—
Reached out	1,00,000	50.00	50.00%	49.78–50.22	1,00,000
Connected	40,000	20.00	40.00%	39.70–40.30	60,000
Interested	**1,500**	**0.75**	**3.75%**	**3.57–3.94**	**38,500**
Admitted	177	0.09	11.80%	10.26–13.53	1,323

The stage rates reveal a sharply uneven funnel. Outreach covered half of all enquiries and two in five of those reached were connected in conversation. The qualification step is the outlier: only 3.75 percent of connected leads were recorded as interested, meaning that 96.25 per cent of completed conversations ended without qualification. In absolute terms the first two stages shed more leads, but those losses largely reflect coverage and contact capacity; the qualification stage is where leads that had already been reached and spoken to were lost, and it has by far the lowest conversion rate. Once qualified, leads converted at 11.80 per cent, more than three times the qualification rate. The narrow confidence intervals confirm that these differences are not artefacts of sampling variability.

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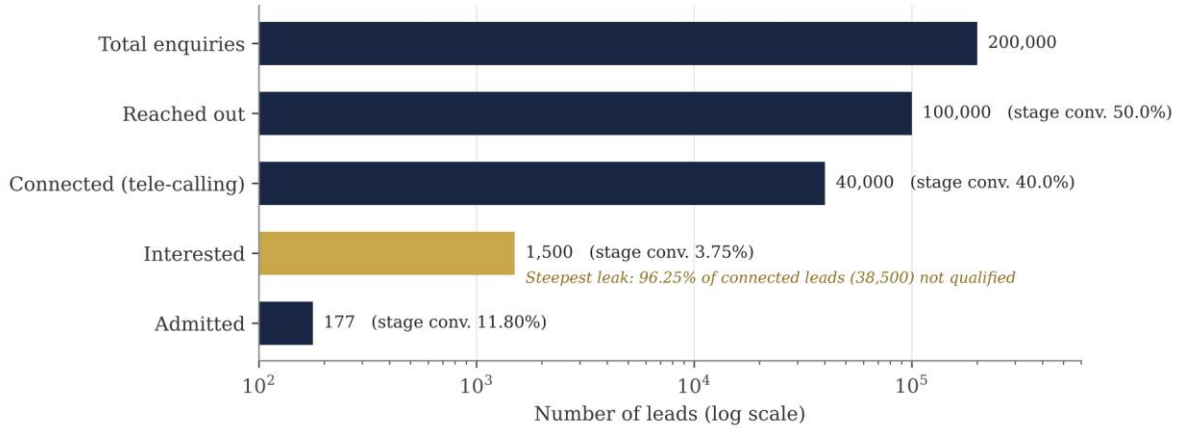


Figure 2. Enquiry-to-admission funnel for the 2026–27 cycle (logarithmic scale). The qualification stage, highlighted, has the lowest stage conversion rate.

B. Sensitivity of Admissions to Stage Improvement (RQ2)

Applying (4), Table 4 and Fig. 3 compare the admission gain from an identical one-percentage-point improvement at each stage. Raising the reach or connection rate by one point adds only 3.5 and 4.4 admissions respectively (about 2 per cent). The same improvement at the qualification stage adds 47 admissions, a 26.7 per cent increase, roughly eleven times the effect of improving reach and three times that of improving the close rate. Scenario analysis reinforces the point: lifting qualification from 3.75 to 5 per cent would raise admissions from 177 to about 236 (+33 per cent), and combining this with a close rate of 15 per cent would yield about 300 admissions (+69 per cent) from the same enquiry base, without generating a single additional lead.

Table 4. Admission gain from a one-percentage-point improvement at each stage (other stages held constant).

Stage improved	Current r_k	Improved r_k	Projected admissions	Gain	Relative gain
Reach	50.00%	51.00%	180.5	+3.5	+2.0%
Connect	40.00%	41.00%	181.4	+4.4	+2.5%
Qualification (interest)	**3.75%**	**4.75%**	**224.2**	**+47.2**	**+26.7%**
Close (admission)	11.80%	12.80%	192.0	+15.0	+8.5%

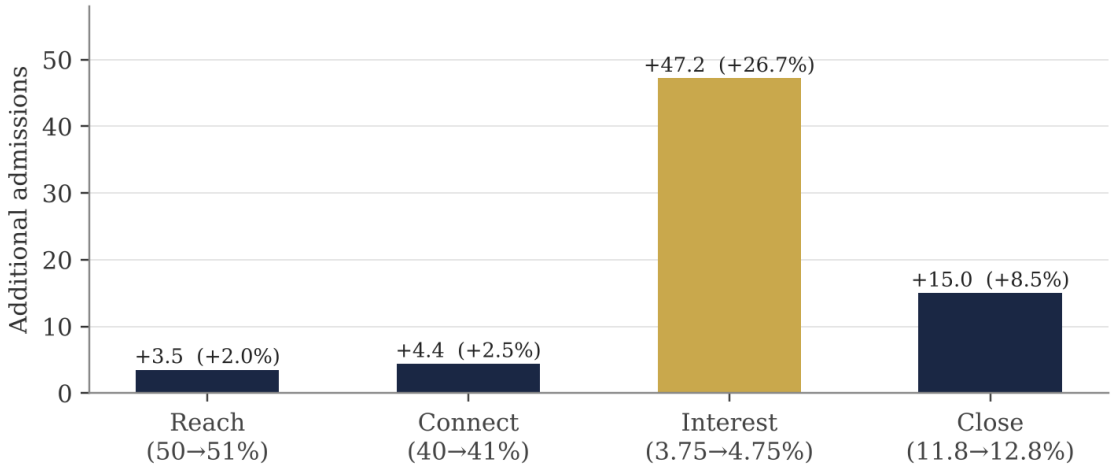


Figure 3. Additional admissions from a one-percentage-point improvement at each funnel stage, computed with Equation (4).

C. Distribution of Admissions across Branches (RQ3)

Table 5 and Fig. 4 show how the 177 admissions were distributed across the eight branches. Electronics and Telecommunication (E&TC, 34) and Computer Science and Engineering (CSE, 33) led, followed by Artificial Intelligence and Data Science (AIDS, 26) and Computer Engineering (CE, 25); together these four branches accounted for two-thirds (66.7 per cent) of admissions. CSE (Artificial Intelligence) recorded the fewest admissions (9).

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Table 5. Branch-wise admissions and chi-square goodness-of-fit test against uniform distribution.

Branch	Observed (O_i)	Share (%)	Expected (E_i)	$(O_i - E_i)^2 / E_i$	Std. residual z_i
Electronics & Telecommunication	34	19.21	22.13	6.37	+2.52
Computer Science & Engineering	33	18.64	22.13	5.35	+2.31
AI & Data Science	26	14.69	22.13	0.68	+0.82
Computer Engineering	25	14.12	22.13	0.37	+0.61
Mechanical Engineering	19	10.73	22.13	0.44	−0.66
Electronics & Communication	17	9.60	22.13	1.19	−1.09
Information Technology	14	7.91	22.13	2.98	−1.73
CSE (Artificial Intelligence)	9	5.08	22.13	7.79	−2.79
Total	**177**	**100.00**	**177.00**	**$\chi^2 = 25.17$**	—

The calculated statistic $\chi^2 = 25.17$ exceeds the critical value of 14.07 at df = 7 ($p = 0.0007$), so the hypothesis of equal distribution is rejected and H3 is supported. The effect size $w = 0.38$ is medium by Cohen's benchmarks [11]. Standardised residuals indicate that the departure is driven by over-representation of E&TC ($z = +2.52$) and CSE ($z = +2.31$) and under-representation of CSE (Artificial Intelligence) ($z = -2.79$); the remaining branches lie within the range expected under uniformity.

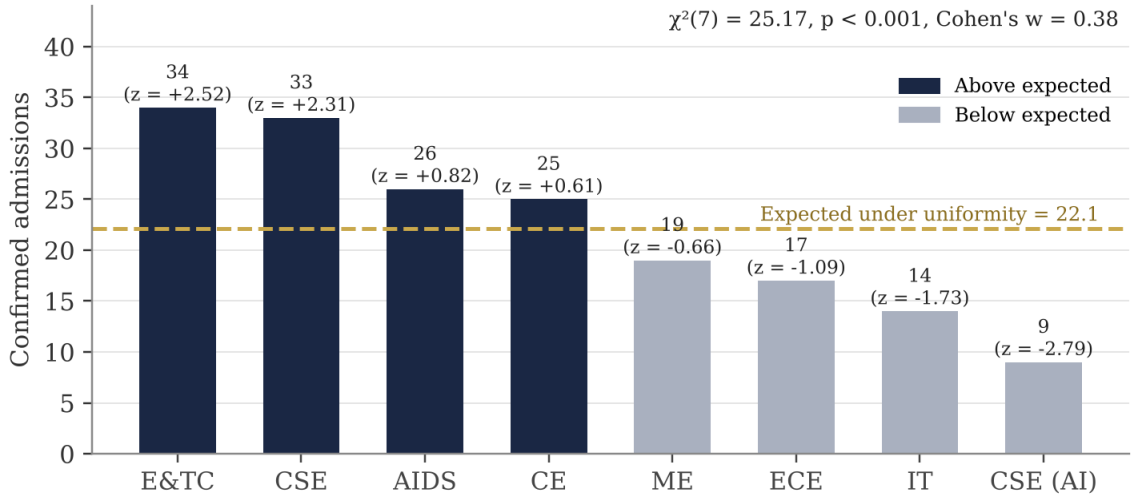


Figure 4. Confirmed admissions by branch against the uniform expectation (dashed line), with standardised residuals.

V. DISCUSSION

A. The Bottleneck Is Conversation Quality, Not Enquiry Volume

The central finding is that NMIET's funnel is constrained at qualification. The institution was able to reach half of its enquiries and to hold conversations with 40,000 prospective students, yet fewer than four in a hundred of those conversations produced a qualified lead. In terms of the Hossler–Gallagher model [3], this is the point at which a student either admits the institution into a choice set or drops it; the tele-calling conversation is therefore not an administrative contact step but the institution's principal moment of influence during search. The sensitivity analysis gives this observation a managerial edge: because funnel stages multiply, effort spent on the weakest stage is worth an order of magnitude more than the same effort spent on generating or reaching more leads.

Two explanations, not mutually exclusive, are consistent with the data. The first is lead quality: a large enquiry base assembled from paid campaigns, outreach lists and general data, some of it transcribed from handwritten registers, is likely to contain many low-intent or misdirected contacts. The second is process quality: calls handled by staff with varying scripts and limited programme information, under pressure to cover large allocations, may fail to surface or build interest. The internship observation that leads were repeatedly re-segregated to identify 'good data' suggests that both mechanisms were at work. The present data cannot separate them, which is precisely why lead-source tagging and outcome coding (Section V-D) are the most valuable next steps.

The 11.8 per cent close rate among qualified leads indicates that counselling and follow-up are comparatively effective once genuine interest exists. Improving this stage remains worthwhile, since a one-point gain adds about 15 admissions, but the larger opportunity lies upstream.

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B. Programme Demand and Capacity

The concentration of admissions in E&TC and CSE is consistent with strong student demand for electronics- and computing-related programmes, and the presence of AIDS among the top four suggests that data-centred programmes are also attracting students. The low count for CSE (Artificial Intelligence) is notable given the same demand trend; possible explanations include the programme's recency, lower visibility in counselling conversations, overlap with AIDS and CSE in students' minds, or a smaller sanctioned intake. Because the uniform expectation ignores differences in intake capacity, the chi-square result describes the composition of admissions rather than branch-wise conversion efficiency. A fairer test, recommended for the next cycle, would compare admissions with intake-proportional expectations and with branch-tagged enquiry counts.

C. Managerial Implications

The findings support a shift from volume-based to conversion-based admissions management. Table 6 converts the evidence into an implementation roadmap, ordered by expected leverage.

Table 6. Implementation roadmap for conversion-focused admissions management.

Action	Owner	Timeline	Success indicator
Structured qualification script and programme briefs for tele-callers; call-quality reviews	Admissions head; tele-calling team	2–4 weeks	Connected-to-interested rate rises from 3.75% toward 5%
Lead scoring (high / medium / low) on responsiveness, programme fit and engagement	CRM manager	2–4 weeks	Higher qualification rate among top-scored leads
Mandatory CRM fields: source, programme, call outcome, interest, follow-up date and count, status	CRM manager	1 month	≥ 95% of active leads complete
Follow-up standard with next-action date for every interested lead	Admissions team	2–4 weeks	≥ 95% of interested leads have a scheduled action
Standard reason codes for non-conversion (fees, location, programme, competitor, no response)	Admissions head	1 month	≥ 90% of lost leads coded
Weekly stage-wise conversion dashboard by source and programme	CRM team; management	1–2 months	Used in weekly admissions reviews

D. Limitations and Data Agenda

The study has four principal limitations. First, the data are aggregate counts, so the association of lead source and follow-up with conversion (H1 and H2) could not be tested, and individual-level predictors could not be modelled. Second, the analysis covers one institution and one admission cycle, which limits generalisation; funnel shapes may differ across colleges, regions and years. Third, stage definitions depend on how staff recorded outcomes; inconsistent coding of 'interested' could inflate or deflate the qualification rate. Fourth, the sensitivity analysis assumes that stages are independent, whereas in practice better qualification might admit marginal leads with a lower close rate; the projections should therefore be read as upper-bound indications of leverage rather than forecasts. Each limitation maps directly onto an action in Table 6, so that the next cycle can produce the lead-level data needed for formal testing.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper analysed the enquiry-to-admission funnel of a private engineering college using operational CRM and admission records. Of 2,00,000 enquiries, 177 resulted in admissions (0.09 %). Outreach and connection performed comparatively well, but only 3.75 % of connected leads were qualified as interested, making qualification the binding constraint. Because funnel stages multiply, a one-percentage-point gain at this stage would raise admissions by about 27 %, roughly eleven times the effect of an equal gain in outreach. Admissions were also unevenly distributed across branches ($\chi^2 = 25.17$, $p < 0.001$, $w = 0.38$), led by E&TC and CSE. The overarching message for admissions managers is that the quality of the first meaningful conversation, not the number of enquiries, is the most powerful lever available to them.

Future work should use lead-level CRM data across three to five admission cycles to test the effects of lead source and follow-up intensity, estimate branch-wise conversion against intake capacity, and develop and validate a lead-scoring or enrolment-prediction model using cross-validation and calibrated performance measures. Linking marketing spend to admissions by channel would permit a return-on-investment analysis, and a survey of admitted and non-admitted applicants would capture decision factors that CRM systems do not record. Replication across engineering colleges in Maharashtra and elsewhere in India would establish whether qualification is a general bottleneck in the sector or a feature of the institution studied.

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