**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to compare and contrast Internet marketing communication tools used to accomplish key marketing goals between European Union higher education institutions (HEIs) and non-EU HEIs, such as in the case of Poland and Ukraine.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In the article, the authors used the literature review method to justify the importance of implementing HEI marketing strategy based on marketing communications with Internet users, and thus to justify the relevance of the chosen research topic. Based on the literature review, the authors identified the goals of HEI advertising campaigns on the Internet (branding, recruitment of students, site traffic increase and subscription of Internet users to the university newsletter) and substantiated the analytical study of the two countries. The survey conducted by the authors allowed them to form their conclusions, the validity of which is based on the interpretation of the indicators calculated in the analytical section.

**Findings –** The hypothesis that the focus of HEI Internet marketing communications, recruitment of students, is universal regardless of the country of origin is proven. There are also no significant differences in Internet marketing communication tool use that is “simpler” and cheaper. University marketing managers widely use Internet advertising tools, but they have difficulty implementing public relations and sales promotion tools. Internet marketing communication is an important component of HEIs’ marketing strategies, thus, comparing EU and non-EU HEIs informs future strategies.

**Practical implications –** The results of this research are of interest to HEIs that seek to improve the adaptation of their marketing communication strategy to meet the conditions of digitalisation and to strengthen their competitive foothold within the market. Also, the findings can help HEI marketing staff members to improve marketing communication tools used to build and maintain relationships with their online customers.

**Originality/value –** This study highlights the similarities and differences in approach to Internet marketing communications among EU (Poland) and non-EU HEIs (Ukraine). In conducting a thorough review of research, as well as a survey of 185 HEI marketing staff members, the paper offers insight into the approach HEIs of varying cultural backgrounds take to Internet marketing communications and online recruitment.

**Keywords:** Internet marketing tool, Comparative analysis, Higher education institution, Marketing communication