(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Diving deep into digital footprints: A comparative analysis of social media engagement in Indonesian Universities

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Abstract

In the context of globalization and rapid technological advancements, higher education plays a pivotal role in achieving success in today's competitive job market. Indonesia has witnessed a significant growth in its university sector, with approximately 3,107 higher education institutions as of 2022. This proliferation of universities has intensified competition among them, prompting the need for effective strategies to attract students. Some universities have garnered exceptional reputations due to their long-standing operations and highly effective educational approaches, leading to high achievements among their alumni. However, other universities are actively working to enhance their branding and appeal to prospective students. Research indicates that two key factors influence students' choice of higher education institution: the attributes of the institution and its marketing efforts. Social media has emerged as a crucial tool for universities to enhance their branding, offering a cost-effective means to reach a broad audience and increase engagement. The widespread use of social media in Indonesia, with 191.4 million users in 2023, presents an opportunity for universities to enhance their branding and engage with prospective students. This study aims to analyze the Instagram accounts of the top 4 universities in Indonesia according to the QS World University Rankings to understand their engagement and activities. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights into university branding strategies through social media activities.

Keywords: University Branding; Instagram Strategy Content; Engagement Rate; Social Media.

1. Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, higher education has become increasingly important and widely recognized as the key to achieving success in a competitive job market. In Indonesia, the growth of universities has experienced significant increase in the last few decades. Currently, Indonesia has around 3,107 higher education institutions as of 2022 [1].

With the high number of universities in Indonesia today, students have many choices to choose universities that suit their interests and goals, making the competition among universities in the academic world increasingly fierce. Therefore, it is important for these universities to think about strategies on how to compete effectively. Some universities have gained outstanding reputations because they have been operating for a long period and have implemented highly effective educational methods, which are reflected in the high achievements of their alumni [2]. As a result, many people are naturally interested in continuing their studies at these universities. However, there are also some universities that work hard to build their branding to attract the interest of prospective students [3]. This statement is also supported by a study stating that there are 2 factors that influence students' choice for a higher education institution: Higher education attributes and The marketing effort made by higher education institutions. This indicates that universities need to think about strategies to improve their branding. One step that can be taken is by utilizing the use of social media [3].

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Social media is an essential component of a university's marketing strategy, offering an efficient and cost-effective way to reach a large audience and increase followers and interactions. This is particularly crucial in the competitive landscape of higher education. Through social media, universities can showcase their history, programs, scholarships, awards, relevant information, student activities, and other content, which can help attract prospective students [4].

Furthermore, the utilization of social media is burgeoning. In Indonesia, the total count of internet users has surged to 204.7 million, marking an increment of 2.1 million users from the preceding year, 2022. This widespread availability of the internet has resulted in a substantial upsurge in social media users in Indonesia, reaching 191.4 million in 2023. Approximately 68.9% of Indonesia's populace actively engages with social media platforms, reflecting a growth of 12.6% in 2023 compared to 2022. Instagram emerges as the foremost social media platform among Indonesian users, with 84.80% actively participating [5].

With such high social media usage, universities can leverage this opportunity to enhance their branding and interaction with prospective students and the wider community. However, universities need to understand how they can improve their branding through the use of social media.

Therefore, this research will analyze the Instagram accounts of the top 4 universities in Indonesia based on the QS World University Rankings to determine their engagement and activities. This analysis will help identify the factors influencing the engagement of the university's Instagram account audience. Consequently, this research is expected to contribute new knowledge to university branding strategies through social media activities.

Table 1 below lists some previous studies on the use of social media for university branding.

Table 1 Previous Research

No.	Title	Years / Methods / Country	Result
1	Social Media Strategy to Improve Brand Image: in the Context of Students' Decision Making	2021/Quantitative/Indonesia	This study demonstrates that university social media can aid prospective students in making decisions about their desired university. The presence of social media can make it easier for prospective students to access information. The study also suggests that the presentation and detail of the information provided are crucial factors [6].
2	Social Media Marketing in Higher Education Institutions	2020/Systematic review/Hungary	This study explains that social media plays an important role in creating interaction between current students and prospective students. Communication through social media can create a positive image that is attractive to prospective students [7].
3	Information Dissemination and Interactions in Higher Education Social Media Posts	2020/Quantitative/UK	This research investigates the quantitative relationship between the frequency of posts through one of the university's social media accounts, the type of information posted on social media, and interactions on the posts of one of the university's social media accounts. This study explains that posts that create connections with users through personal stories or achievements of students, alumni, and university employees tend to generate higher interactions than posts that use clear marketing tactics [8].
4	University Branding: Using Social Media Tools in Higher Education Marketing	2021/Quantitative/Romania	This research states that university branding is crucial due to the increasing competitiveness in the academic world. The relationship between marketing and education is bidirectional. Marketing serves as a tool to promote education, while the educational foundation

			and socio-cultural context contribute to creating brand identity [9].
5	Analysis off Instagram Social Media Use In Campus Marketing	2021/Quantitative/Indonesia	This study aims to understand prospective students' views on the use of social media. The results of the study indicate that social media has a crucial role in creating engagement for prospective consumers, including in higher education marketing. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the implementation of marketing strategies in universities by integrating the use of social media as a strategy to gain market share in increasingly tight competition [10].

2. Methodology

This scientific article was created using qualitative research methods with a case study approach and supplemented by secondary data. The sample to be tested in this study comprises the Instagram accounts of the top 4 universities in Indonesia based on the QS World Ranking. The research utilizes processed data from a social media analytics tool, specifically Instrack app.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Overview Top 4 University Instagram Account in Indonesia

Table 2 Overview Top 4 University Account in Indonesia

University	Followers Count	Following Count	Engagement Rate
A	1,039,280	163	0.57%
B	495,581	135	0.44%
C	330,082	218	0.59%
D	421,187	188	2.15%

The table above shows the number of followers, number of accounts followed, and engagement rate of four different universities: University A, B, C, and D. University A has the highest number of followers, which is 1,039,280, following 163 accounts with an engagement rate of 0.57%. Despite having the most followers, their engagement rate is relatively low compared to other universities. University B has 495,581 followers and follows 135 accounts with an engagement rate of 0.44%, which is the lowest among the four universities. University C has 330,082 followers and follows 218 accounts with an engagement rate of 0.59%. This engagement rate is slightly higher than University A and B, even though they have fewer followers. University D has 421,187 followers and follows 188 accounts with an engagement rate of 2.15%. This is the highest engagement rate among the four universities, indicating that although they do not have as many followers as University A, they have more active and engaged followers. From this data, it can be concluded that the number of followers does not always correlate with the engagement rate. Universities with fewer followers can have a higher engagement rate, as demonstrated by University D.

3.2. Weekly Post

In addition to the data on the number of followers, number of accounts followed, and engagement rate, the table above also shows the weekly posting frequency of four different universities: University A, B, C, and D. University A posts 5 times per week. With this frequency, they managed to attract 1,039,280 followers with an engagement rate of 0.57%. Although their posting frequency is relatively high, their engagement rate is still considered low. University B has the highest posting frequency, which is 9 times per week. With 495,581 followers and an engagement rate of 0.44%, it can be seen that despite posting frequently, the engagement rate of their followers remains low. University C posts 3 times per week. They have 330,082 followers with an engagement rate of 0.59%. Although their posting frequency is lower

than University A and B, their engagement rate is slightly higher. University D posts the least, only 2 times per week. However, with 421,187 followers, they have the highest engagement rate at 2.15%. This indicates that a low posting frequency does not prevent them from having highly engaged followers. From this data, it can be concluded that posting frequency does not always correlate with engagement rate. Universities that post less frequently can actually have a higher engagement rate, as demonstrated by University D. This highlights the importance of content quality and relevance in increasing follower engagement.

Table 3 Weekly Post

University	Per Week
A	5
B	9
C	3
D	2

3.3. Top of Post

Table 4 Top of Post

University	Like Count	Comment Count	Content
A	395	60	Information about online webinars.
B	114	40	Welcome message to new students.
C	143	554	Information about scholarships. In this post, the admin opens up questions through comments, allowing users to ask about the scholarship through comments.
D	487	1,251,943	Information about the upcoming job expo. The requirement to participate in the job expo held by the campus is to like, share in your Instagram story, and comment with the reason for attending.

The table above displays data regarding the number of likes, number of comments, and the type of content posted by four different universities: University A, B, C, and D. University A received 395 likes and 60 comments on a post containing information about an online webinar. This indicates that informative content about educational events receives a fairly good response from their followers, although not very high. University B received 114 likes and 40 comments on a post welcoming new students. Although this type of content is more personal and welcoming, the level of interaction in terms of likes and comments is relatively low compared to other universities. University C posted information about scholarships and opened up questions through comments, receiving 143 likes and 554 comments. This shows that content involving direct interaction with followers, such as inviting them to ask questions, can encourage a high level of engagement, especially in the number of comments. University D received 487 likes and 1,251,943 comments on a post containing information about an upcoming job expo. This post required users to like, share it in their Instagram story, and comment on the reasons for attending the job expo. This strategy was highly effective in encouraging interaction, as evidenced by the very high number of comments. From this data, we can see that content types that encourage direct interaction and provide incentives to followers (such as requirements to attend the job expo) tend to result in much higher levels of engagement. Meanwhile, informative content without a call to action may not generate a significant number of comments, although it still receives a decent number of likes. This highlights the importance of content strategies that actively engage followers to enhance engagement.

4. Conclusion

Based on the presented data analysis, it can be concluded that the level of follower engagement on social media is not only determined by the number of posts, but also by the quality and type of content posted. Content that encourages

direct interaction, such as questions or invitations to give opinions, tends to have a higher level of engagement than purely informative content. Therefore, as a suggestion, universities may consider diversifying the types of content posted, including more personal, informative, and engaging content that involves direct interaction with followers. Additionally, encouraging active interaction from followers, such as inviting them to ask questions, give opinions, or participate in quizzes, can be an effective strategy to increase engagement levels. Analyzing the types of content that are most successful in triggering interactions, as well as tracking the performance of posts regularly, can also help universities continuously improve their content strategies and strengthen follower engagement on social media platforms.

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