Research Paper   Open Access

LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION MARKETING: A CONTENT ANALYSIS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT : In this research, content strategies in social media for marketing purposes are examined within the context of higher education by reviewing an Islamic private university located in Jember Regency, Indonesia. The data collection period was from January to December 2024. Through qualitative interviews with five internal informants of the campus and TikTok and Instagram posts published within the defined timeframe, relevant data was gathered. Results showed that marketing contains the highest proportion of all three content types (64.58%) along with information and event postings. While TikTok had a lower engagement rate, it proved beneficial in terms of reach as compared to Instagram, which had a higher level of interaction. Effectiveness measures included likes, comments, shares, instagram and tiktok engagements as well as new enrollments from the targeted demographic. Major setbacks faced were minimal budget allocated to advertisements, shifts in social media algorithms for advertisement placement prioritizing interdisciplinary collaboration. This emphasizes strategically curating and adaptive institutional identity based targeting trends on social media in academics.

KEYWORDS : digital marketing, social media, higher education, content strategy, content analysis

I.   INTRODUCTION

The development of technology significantly impacts every domain including education (Singh, 2021). Social media is now one of the most preferred channels of communication for institutions, especially during student recruitment drives aimed at the younger generation (Haleem et al., 2022; Szymkowiak et al., 2021), (Mukosa et al., 2022). It is not only informational but serves as a branding and marketing vehicle for the organization as a whole. With regard to Indonesia's high ranking in social media usage with 191 million active users which constitutes 73.7% of the population in 2024 (as cited by National Radio News), there is a growing expectation from educational institutions to digitally engage through audience-fitted content strategies that are relevant and captivating.

The point of other research works has been geared towards enhancing institutional image and visibility through social media platforms and Ramadanty et al. (2020) showed how significant user interaction increased from strategies focusing on video content and/or events compared to static information based content. In another study focused on content classification using editorial models, it was shown that such an approach permits more defined strategic structures making measurable outcomes feasible (Oliveira & Figueira, 2015). Moreover, Garcia et al., (2021) noted that the consistency and relevance of issued content tangentially impacts the success of digital marketing campaigns. While these works are foundational, many studies still center around broad overarching strategies without delving into the specific defining elements of effective content strategies tailored to higher education institutions in Indonesia.

There is a notable gap in evaluating the substance and structures of social media highlighted by educational institutions for marketing purposes. Most earlier works have been based on surveys or qualitative case studies, but there has not been any attempt to systematically employ content analysis to identify optimal and strategic posting schedules for engagement and awareness culminating content types, frequencies, formats, and times. There is increasingly greater reliance on social media platforms devoid of understanding successful content frameworks poses significant hindrance towards crafting targeted marketing efforts (Rosário & Raimundo, 2021). Furthermore, due to Indonesia's rich cultural diversity coupled with unique market segmentation demands more contextualized data driven approaches.

In this context, this research aims to perform a comprehensive examination of the social media content strategies utilized by higher education institutions in Indonesia particularly in Jember Regency applying a content

analysis approach. Content analysis is appropriate in this case because it can offer some degree of efficiency, impartiality, and quantifiability regarding the social media driven messages issued by the institutions under study (Krippendorff, 2018). Since the study's objectives include evaluation of content type, format, frequency of posting as well as timing of posts, content analysis serves to contextualize these communication aspects within a framework grounded on evidence from social media data. Through longitudinal post analysis on these platforms over a year, this study seeks to present an empirical snapshot depicting the dynamic nature of digital marketing activities within higher education. This research primarily aims to assist education related institutions actively engage social media by designing effective and responsive digital communication strategies tailored to target audience behavior during and after the course of investigation.

Social Media Marketing in Higher Education Institutions

Today marks social media's emergence as a vital channel for interaction between service providers and clients. Social Media Marketing (SMM) has been defined in various ways including using offers through new Syllabuses for advertisement on popular themes preferred MSME with best numbers students. Social Media Marketing Management (SMM) is concerned with the conversations and interactions that occur between customers and producers regarding a specific product or service, advertising, and usage experiences (Dwivedi et al., 2021). This definition underlines the need, at minimum, to ask users to provide feedback about the services offered. Within higher education (IHE), social media serves as a tool for managing relationship with the scholarly community (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Social media as a strategy has become an essential component of marketing in higher education institutions, not limited to one directional communication but including two directional interaction and digital engagement relevant to the users (Górska, 2024), (Erlissa et al., 2022).

Strategic action frameworks developed by these organizations should be aligned with their missions and vision; involve all interested parties or stakeholders; and socio balance the institutional needs and transactional demands within a dialogic social semiotic ecosystem (Oliveira & Figueira, 2015). Garcia et al., (2021) also indicated that applying social media content marketing strategies enhanced engagement along with expanding reach and reinforcing understanding of institutional objectives among the academic community. In the Indonesian setting, Ramadanty et al., (2020) noted that video and event content dominated the strategic focus of IHEs' social media activities; furthermore, publishing during daytime hours was optimal for engagement. Additionally, they pointed out that connecting the various media outlets to the intended objectives is crucial for achieving impact. Therefore, social media has now emerged as a critical tool for enhancing the competitive edge of higher education institutions (HEIs). A broader reach can be gained through active participation in advertising campaigns with wider audience engagement and alumni involvement (Salem, 2020). The use of social media in higher education is growing rapidly, and universities are working to build their online presence through various media platforms, including social networks and instant messaging applications (Datsenko et al., 2020). Health education also utilizes social media to provide material to students (Vizcaya-moreno, 2020).

II. METHODS

Research Design

A qualitative content analysis was employed in this study to understand marketing strategies through Instagram and TikTok posts of one of the largest private Islamic universities in Jember Regency. This form of analysis enables interpretation of texts and images from the researcher's viewpoint chambers or lenses, as described (Cohen et al., 2007). Applying qualitative content analysis means treating communication whether written, spoken, or visual as something that can be systematically studied in detail (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). We employ content analysis to evaluate the social media output (Instagram and TikTok) posted by the university within January - December 2024 timeframe. The focus is on three aspects: content classification (information-based, advertisement based, event specific, testimonials), format type creation (image-based, video based or carousel), publishing temporal designation. The aim is to isolate digital communicative frameworks alongside content elements designed for bolstering user interaction inventible patterns (Garcia et al., 2021).

Alongside content analysis, this study utilized semi-structured interviews with five informants from the university's public relations or marketing departments. These participants were chosen purposefully due to their prominent roles in managing the institution's social media profiles. The interviews focused on overarching themes like branding and content development, goals of digital marketing, issues related to social media management, and the evaluative metrics for success employed by the institution.
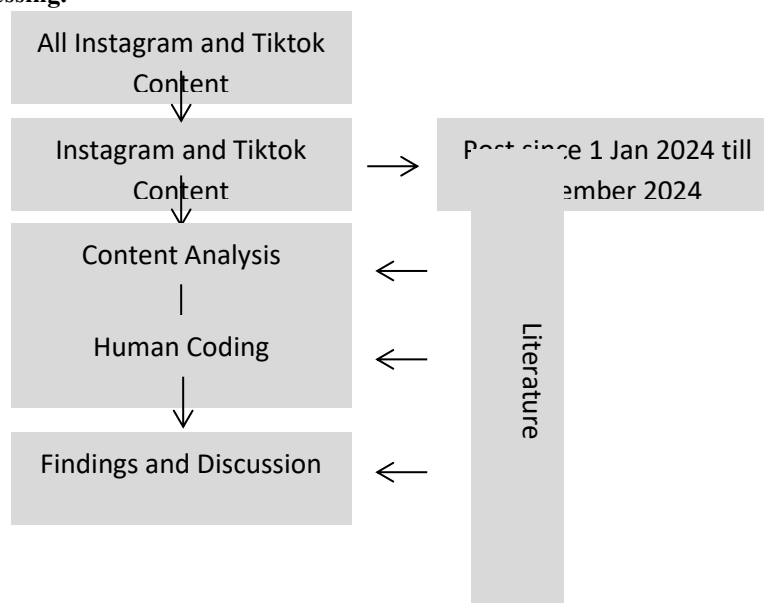
Subjects and the Procedure for Data Collection

The subject of research is one of the biggest Islamic private universities located in Jember Regency. The scope of research includes Instagram and TikTok as two social media platforms owned and managed by the

university. Instagram and TikTok were selected because they are currently the most pervasive social media networks in Indonesia relative to other platforms like Facebook, YouTube, or others which are less popular among the demographic target audience. Semi-structured interviews served as additional data to complement findings from content analysis of the university's social media. All five interviewees included two from marketing, two who worked as content creators, and one from IT.

There are multiple steps in this specific process of gathering information. In this instance, the researcher has made Instagram and TikTok posts from a specific university for the entire year of 2024. They were collected using a combination of searching, filtering, and manual methods in parallel with conducting semi-structured interviews which also took place face-to-face. The objectives were outlined to participants beforehand, ensuring informed consent was given. Recording devices were used during the discussions only after receiving consent.

Table 1. Data Processing.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ All Instagram and Tiktok    │
│ Content                     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Instagram and Tiktok        │   →    │ Post since 1 Jan 2024 till│
│ Content                     │        │ ember 2024                │
└─────────────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐        
│ Content Analysis            │   ←    
└─────────────────────────────┘             L
              │                              i
┌─────────────────────────────┐        t    e
│ Human Coding                │   ←    e    r
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              ↓                              t
┌─────────────────────────────┐             u
│ Findings and Discussion     │   ←    r    e
└─────────────────────────────┘
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Source: Adapted from (Mehmood et al., 2022), (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004)

Data Processing

With one of the largest Islamic private universities located in Jember East Java exercised Instagram and TikTok in 2024 through social media serving as data retrieval tools, the focus pivoted to data processing and analysis relevant to the research. Understanding particular goals like defining marketing characteristics or social media content strategies took primary focus alongside institutional effectiveness regarding digitally supported frameworks.

The qualitative content analysis method developed by Cohen et al (2007) and Krippendorff (2018) guided the analytical process. The procedure started with the manual coding of each upload in accordance to analytic categories: content type (informational, promotional, event-related) and content format (image and video). Each post was captured by the text that described it (caption) and by its visual component (image or video).

Table 1. Types of Content

Content Type	Platform		Total	Upload Percentage (%)
	IG	Tiktok		
Information	5	4	9	18.75%
Promotion	15	16	31	64.58%
Event	4	4	8	16.67%
Total	**24**	**24**	**48**	**100%**

The coding process was performedaplyby individual researchers specializing in that field so that every consideration elated the intended meaning could be taken into account which is the reason why human coding was used, as highlighted by Song et al. (2020). To illustrate this, consider a video post depicting some seminar activity containing the phrase "Join us for our next event." This captures how an 'event' coded as 'video' would be represented.

After coding all the available data, classification and tabulation were performed to determine the frequency and distribution of content types. To find patterns within the most common type of content used and the overarching formats, trends were assessed through a descriptive analysis. Additionally, engagement metrics (when applicable), including likes comments and shares were analyzed alongside content type to assess any correlations between them.

Table 2. Total and Engagement Rate of a Social Media Account

No	Platform	Date	Content types	Content Format	Likes	Comment	Save	Share	ER (%)
1.	Instagram	06/01/2024	Promotion	Picture	556	7	8	-	4,05
2.	Tiktok	12/01/2024	Promotion	Video	490	1	2	0	0,07
3.	Instagram	23/01/2024	Event	Picture	89	0	16	-	0,74
4.	Tiktok	22/01/2024	Event	Video	3186	20	7	49	0,49
5.	Instagram	05/02/2024	Promotion	Picture	394	5	17	-	3,00
6.	Tiktok	12/02/2024	Promotion	Video	115	0	4	2	0,02
7.	Tiktok	14/02/2024	Promotion	Video	61	0	3	1	0,10
8.	Instagram	16/02/2024	Promotion	Picture	349	0	10	-	2,55
9.	Instagram	01/03/2024	Information	Picture	118	0	1	-	0,84
10.	Instagram	06/03/2024	Promotion	Picture	744	6	95	-	5,99
11.	Tiktok	20/03/2024	Event	Video	199	11	2	7	0,03
12.	Tiktok	27/03/2024	Event	Video	2183	0	72	8	0,34
13.	Instagram	01/04/2024	Event	Picture	563	14	60	-	4,52
14.	Instagram	06/04/2024	Information	Picture	100	0	9	-	0,78
15.	Instagram	17/04/2024	Promotion	Picture	192	0	4	-	1,39
16.	Instagram	30/04/2024	Promotion	Picture	417	9	43	-	3,33
17.	Tiktok	14/05/2024	Information	Video	1826	1	65	19	0,28
18.	Instagram	15/05/2024	Event	Video	222	4	4	-	1,63
19.	Tiktok	15/05/2024	Event	Video	597	0	11	9	0,09
20.	Instagram	30/05/2024	Information	Video	95	0	29	-	0,88
21.	Instagram	10/06/2024	Promotion	Video	429	2	38	-	3,33
22.	Instagram	13/06/2024	Promotion	Picture	433	2	12	-	3,18
23.	Tiktok	13/06/2024	Promotion	Video	1332	25	81	36	0,22
24.	Tiktok	16/06/2024	Information	Video	4411	4	88	14	0,70
25.	Instagram	08/07/2024	Promotion	Video	378	21	6	-	2,90
26.	Instagram	09/07/2024	Event	Picture	227	0	26	-	1,80
27.	Tiktok	10/07/2024	Promotion	Video	2149	0	45	45	0,33
28.	Tiktok	16/07/2024	Information	Video	1560	10	51	3	0,24
29.	Instagram	01/08/2024	Information	Picture	24	0	19	-	0,30
30.	Instagram	07/08/2024	Promotion	Picture	843	15	7	-	6,13
31.	Tiktok	08/08/2024	Information	Video	3223	3	102	14	0,50
32.	Tiktok	25/08/2024	Promotion	Video	5372	6	75	13	0,81
33.	Instagram	02/09/2024	Promotion	Picture	746	5	47	-	5,70
34.	Instagram	12/09/2024	Event	Video	647	1	5	-	4,63
35.	Instagram	19/09/2024	Information	Video	397	12	22	-	3,06
36.	Tiktok	19/09/2024	Promotion	Video	89	0	1	4	0,01
37.	Instagram	05/10/2024	Promotion	Picture	229	4	6	-	1,70
38.	Instagram	14/10/2024	Information	Picture	126	15	0	-	1,00
39.	Instagram	16/10/2024	Promotion	Video	67	21	46	-	1,00
40.	Instagram	23/10/2024	Promotion	Video	168	37	0	-	1,50
41.	Instagram	12/11/2024	Event	Video	367	6	19	-	2,80
42.	Instagram	21/11/2024	Promotion	Video	627	10	29	-	4,72
43.	Tiktok	21/11/2024	Promotion	Video	1277	5	20	10	0,20
44.	Tiktok	25/11/2024	Promotion	Video	1191	2	22	1	0,20
45.	Tiktok	11/12/2024	Promotion	Video	111	2	1	12	0,02
46.	Instagram	12/12/2024	Promotion	Picture	892	12	97	-	8,00
47.	Instagram	27/12/2024	Information	Picture	418	19	29	-	3,30

TOTAL	40.229	317	1.356	247	88,47%

Lastly, the findings from content analysis were combined with results from the semi-structured interviews. This step was completed in order to check accuracy between public relations/marketing strategies outlined by the university's social media team and monitored post patterns that actually appeared on the university's social media pages. The outcome illustrated a holistic view of strategic social media utilization by higher education institutions in relation to marketing amid technological evolution.

Table 3 Demographic data of participants

No	Name (Initial)	Gender	Age (Years)	Service as a University	Degree
1	Kr	Female	28	5 years	Bachelor's degree
2	Fr	Female	24	2 years	Bachelor's degree
3	Dn	Male	22	3 years	Bachelor's degree
4	Sl	Male	20	2 years	Bachelor's degree
5	As	Male	21	2 years	Bachelor's degree

Table 4 Research questions

Question
1. What is the main purpose of the university in using social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok?
2. What types of content are usually uploaded, and why are those content types chosen?
3. What indicators are used to evaluate the success of social media content?
4. How does the university ensure that the content aligns with its target audience (e.g., prospective students)?
5. What are the main challenges faced in managing the university's social media, and how are they addressed?

Findings and Discussion

1.   Strategic Objectives of Social Media Use In Higher Education Marketing

The Islamic private university in Jember showcased that Instagram and TikTok serve as multifunctional tools for strategic implementation. In addition to documenting and communicating internally, social media serves several other purposes for the institution. It helps in shaping the institutional image of the university as well as marketing it to prospective students at large. This was demonstrated with interviews conducted from members of the university's marketing office:

Participant 5:
"Social media also functions as a channel to inform the university's reputation, promote academic services and facilities, and introduce the campus to the broader public, especially prospective students." (As, interview June 27, 2025)

Participant 4:
"The main purpose of using Instagram and TikTok is to document campus activities. But beyond that, social media also serves to communicate the university's reputation, promote its services and facilities within its community as well as outwards into a wider community – especially looking forward towards future students. We also aim to strengthen relationships with current and alumni students, partners, and even members of the public". (Sl. interview June 27 2025)

Participant 3:
"The primary goal is to enhance campus image branding which have risen in importance during recent years for higher education institutions globally. Academic and non-academic information targeting younger audiences like Gen Zs and Millennials are shared through social media too. They can also be used for two-way communication and are great promotional tools for student

recruitment campaigns and other events happening on/around the campus." (Dn interview June 27 2025)

The adoption of digital platforms exemplifies a shift in the marketing of higher education as an institution's online presence becomes critical, particularly during the rivalry between public and private universities. Interviews also highlighted social media's role in relationship management with stakeholders such as alumni and institutional partners who can be instrumental in augmenting the institution's reputation, expanding its network, and enhancing visibility.

These insights are consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of social media for building both emotional branding and rational connections with prospective students during recruitment periods, especially within highly competitive contexts (Górska, 2024). Thus, the university's social media policy was formulated to fit the strategic duality of metacommunication serving both mediated institutional and transactional interaction.

2. Content Typologies and Rationale for Selection

Based on data from participant observations, promotional content appears to dominate social media communication at the university (64.58%), followed by informational content (18.75%) and event related content (16.67%). This choice reflects more than just aesthetics; it is grounded in regard to audience engagement appeal concerning message delivery impact.

> Participant 5:
> "Posts like flyers, announcements, or campus milestones are selected as they capture attention and serve a dual purpose as a digital archive for the university." (As, interview, June 27, 2025)

> Participant 2:
> "Testimonials from alumni are also regarded as educational content. These posts are perceived to be more genuine and relatable compared to other marketing materials." (Fr, interview, June 27, 2025)

The sharp segmentation strategy and audience insight coupled with the target market's understanding of digital habits is attested by content diversity. This lends credibility to Oliveira & Figueira (2015) contention that effective strategies for social media content rely on equal parts guidepost editorial (informative and educational) and advertorial (promotional) materials.

While quantitatively promotional content takes center stage in the university's strategy, there remains an equally prominent effort to integrate within its framework information, emotion, function, or all three viewed isnerted within a cohesive digital communication ecosystem. It reveals an evolution towards intention-driven social media content management within higher education.

3. Effectiveness Indicators and Engagement Patterns of Social Media Content
The university's marketing team evaluated the achievement of goals while considering digital metrics for Instagram social accounts, including likes, comments, shares, saves, follower count, and more direct interactions such as DMs and registrations.

> Participant 1:
> "To measure content success we gauge engagement via likes and shares as well as overall audience growth through followers. We track student registrations stemming from social media which is met with positive feedback from the audience. Together these indicators form a comprehensive evaluation of our current social media strategy." (Kr, interview June 27 2025)

> Participant 2:
> "Usually evaluation is conducted on the basis of likes and shares coupled with saves and comments. Other factors such as reach or impressions are also taken into consideration as well as follower count ,and also submissions through the link in bio. Sentiment analysis of comments plays a crucial role in evaluating too." (Fr, interview June 27 2024)

The above statements illustrate that the respondents do not only use engagement numbers in assessing outcome effectiveness but also take into account links between specific content pieces and enrollment figures for the institution.The data provided empirically support this claim; for example, posts having the highest engagement rate (ER) were promotional image content posted on Instagram such as the one dated December 12, 2024 where an ER of 8.00% was reached. In comparison to the Instagram posts, TikTok videos like the

informational post on June 16, 2024, had high views (4,411 viewers) but relatively low engagement (0.70%). This indicates that TikTok allows users to achieve a wider reach compared to Instagram which requires more user interaction and audience connection. These findings support Ramadanty et al. (2020), who have stated that content strategies should be adjusted for different platforms. To sum up, content impact evaluation must consider qualitative factors in addition to count based metrics and context specific considerations.

4. Operational and Managerial Challenges in Social Media Marketing

The university faces a number of technical, strategic and psychosocial problems while managing social media profiles. One of the most pressing concerns is rivalry from other private or public universities and changes in algorithms and digital trends at lightning speed.

Participant 4:
"The biggest challenge in managing campus social media is the competition between universities… so we have to stand out more uniquely." (Sl, interview, June 27, 2025)

Participant 5:
"The pace of trends is really fast… Maintaining the university's image is also crucial.Soevery piece of content must comply with campus rules and limitations." (As, interview, June 27, 2025)

Within the university, there are problems such as limited team size, poor inter unit collaboration, and problems in sourcing content from faculties or other departments. Developing editorial calendars and fostering better collaboration between different units is one way to tackle these issues.

Participant 2:
"Running these social media accounts brings numerous challenges such as an inadequate workforce, content consistency, managing limited human resources at work, among others. To rectify this problem bears down executing rigorous training sessions alongside revising crisis management procedures." (Fr, Interview, June 27th 2024)

Participant 3:
"The most difficult part is ensuring that all of the material we post on our channels is both engaging and uniform across the board. Getting materials from other departments can be a challenge at times. Moreover, upholding university ethics and reputation remains a top priority for trend sensitive institutions makes things more challenging. We respond to this set of challenges by curing them with SOPs alongside editorial plans while maintaining agile coordination with cross-functional whips on top of trusting our adaptive creative teams. Flexibility also means responding actively to evaluations." (Dn, interview with me June 27 2025)

The above discussed challenges illustrate the fact that controlling social media presence in an educational setup goes beyond simple administration; it is fundamentally strategic integration steers away from institutional policy towards creativity shaped by contextual adaptability blended with ever-shifting digital landscapes. This complements Garcia et al., (2021) who state that the integrations of unit collaboration, institutional backing, and ongoing outcome metrics fundamentally influence success in digital marketing for higher education.

III.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this research, it was found out that Instagram and TikTok are social media platforms which have turned out to be important tools in the digital marketing arsenal for higher education institutions. Social media is used not only for information dissemination and documenting events but also for institutional image building, engaging interactions, active recruitment of prospective students globally as well as enhancing global visibility. The predominant strategies are content-centric such as promotional, informational and testimonial posts strategically designed with great visuals meant to resonate with Gen Z consumers mainly.

Nonetheless, there are operational issues faced by the institutions like changes in algorithms, shortage of staff or personnel, and inter-departmental coordination problems. These clearly point out the need for comprehensive planning which is well-structured yet adaptable to ensure proper execution of data-driven social media strategy management so as to make certain that these approaches work within the fast-moving world of technology without restrictions.

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