



Exploring X usage and engagement strategies in higher education: A comparative study of Pakistani and Malaysian universities

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the effectiveness of social media strategies, specifically on X (formerly Twitter), as utilised by universities in Pakistan and Malaysia to engage with their student bodies. By employing content analysis via NVivo 14 for social media managers' interview data and Python for analysing university student questionnaire responses, the research offers a dual perspective on university social media usage. It reveals a general consensus on the effectiveness of visual elements and the platform's role in university marketing, but points to a gap in content engagement and authentic campus culture representation. The comparative analysis between NUST (Pakistan), LUMS (Pakistan) and Universiti Malaya (Malaysia) demonstrates varied strategic emphases, with NUST adopting a broad, thematic approach and UM focusing on announcements and visual storytelling. The findings suggest that universities should tailor their social media content to more accurately reflect campus life and encourage interactive communication. This research provides a foundation for enhancing social media strategies in higher education, highlighting the importance of visual content, authenticity, and interactivity in fostering student engagement and strengthening university branding online.

Keywords: *University social media strategy, student engagement, content analysis, visual storytelling, cross-cultural comparison*

¹ Twitter Inc. has replaced its iconic bird logo with a new 'X' emblem, as announced by CEO Elon Musk in July 2023

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a vital tool in the strategic arsenal of higher education institutions, enabling them to enhance visibility, engage stakeholders, and promote their identity and values (Agil et al., 2022; Ambran et al., 2024; Junco, 2012; Roslan et al., 2022). As universities increasingly adopt platforms like X to connect with their audiences, understanding the dynamics of student engagement becomes crucial (Davis III et al., 2012). This research explores the utilisation and impact of social media, specifically platform X, in fostering engagement and interaction among students at prominent universities in Pakistan and Malaysia. By examining how content and communication strategies affect student perceptions and interactions, this study builds on existing literature (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) to offer deeper insights into the effective use of social media in higher education marketing and engagement.

The landscape of higher education (HE) is being transformed by the influence of social media marketing and the overarching frameworks of digital capitalism, as evidenced by recent scholarly investigations. Perera et al. (2023) asserted that social media marketing empowers prospective students by facilitating collaborative information gathering about higher education institutions and enhancing their brand equity. Their empirical research, encompassing a survey of 936 undergraduates from Sri Lanka and Vietnam, revealed that social media marketing significantly impacts the brand equity of higher education institutions by augmenting brand credibility. Notably, the study underscores a comparative insight where Vietnamese students exhibit a greater concern towards brand credibility influenced by social media marketing activities in the formation of brand equity more than their Sri Lankan peers.

Concurrently, Williamson (2021) delved into the pervasive influence of “platform capitalism” and “surveillance capitalism” on higher education. This critique highlights the integration of data-driven competitiveness within universities, with Pearson at the forefront, leveraging online platforms and data analytics to spearhead global education reform. By positioning itself as a market authority, Pearson epitomises the alignment of university missions with the interests of digital capitalism, indicating that digital platforms are central to HE reforms aimed at reconciling public university missions with the private objectives of digital capitalism. This convergence of social media marketing and digital capitalism is reshaping the higher education landscape, signifying a pivotal shift towards aligning educational institutions with market-driven imperatives and digital transformation strategies. Recent analyses have underscored the significance of social media as a pivotal platform for university promotional strategies, particularly given the substantial engagement of young adults with these platforms. Maresova et al. (2020) have illuminated that individuals aged 16 to 24 dedicate approximately two and a half hours daily to social media use, highlighting an opportune window for universities to enhance their promotional endeavours and tailor their recruitment efforts towards this digital realm.

Further exploration by Marie Condie et al. (2018) revealed that social media’s role extends beyond mere promotion, serving dual functions within the academic environment. Specifically, content generated by university-affiliated learning communities is instrumental in fulfilling both educational and marketing objectives. The adoption of a diversified communicative strategy on platforms such as X enables both students and faculty to cultivate a sense of professional identity and authority within their respective fields. This is achieved through the creation and dissemination of original content that engages a broad spectrum of stakeholders and fosters interactive dialogue within and beyond their immediate academic circles. Consequently, the incidental and increasingly deliberate

participation of academic members in social media marketing activities not only augments their identification with their institution but also acts as a dynamic representation of the university's brand. This evolving landscape underscores the strategic potential of social media in bridging promotional activities with educational engagement, thereby enhancing the visibility and appeal of academic institutions in the digital age.

The advent of social media has ushered in a transformative era for higher education institutions, emphasising its critical role in enhancing institutional reputation and facilitating global outreach, as identified by Yücel and Yücel (2022). This digital platform enables universities to engage seamlessly with both prospective and current students, while also opening avenues for novel projects, collaborations, and scientific inquiries with partners across the globe. In a related study, Maresova et al. (2020) observed a significant trend regarding content preferences on social media; images emerged as the most frequently posted and engaged with type of content. This observation corroborates the notion that visual content inherently possesses a greater capacity to capture audience attention compared to textual posts alone. Such insights underline the pivotal function of social media in expanding the educational landscape, where visual content plays a key role in engaging and connecting diverse global audiences, thereby reinforcing the strategic importance of these platforms in the modern educational paradigm.

The study conducted by Orgilés-Amorós et al. (2024) provides insightful observations into the progressive dynamics of marketing communication strategies employed by Spanish universities, underscoring a paradigm shift towards the integration of social networks. This research emphasised the strategic selection of topics and content as a critical element for amplifying engagement levels within these digital platforms. It is evident from their analysis that there is a growing acknowledgment among Spanish higher education institutions regarding the pivotal role of social media in fostering engagement. By carefully curating content that resonates with their audience, universities are able to significantly enhance the effectiveness of their marketing communications. This trend not only reflects the changing landscape of digital marketing in the educational sector but also highlights the importance of adopting innovative approaches to maximise the potential of social networks. In essence, the findings from Orgilés-Amorós et al. (2024) illustrate the evolving nature of marketing strategies in higher education, marking a decisive move towards leveraging social media to strengthen university engagement and visibility.

Research questions

Despite widespread use of social media in higher education, there remains a notable gap in understanding its impact on student engagement across different cultural contexts. Studies typically emphasise broad communication strategies without deeply analysing how visual content specifically affects student perceptions, particularly in diverse settings like Pakistan and Malaysia (Greenhow & Askari, 2017; Junco, 2012). This research addresses this gap by examining the effectiveness of visual social media strategies in enhancing university branding and student engagement in these distinct cultural environments. Therefore, the present study aims to answer the following research questions;

RQ1. How do visual elements on university social media profiles influence student engagement and perceptions on X?

RQ2. How do social media managers in Pakistan and Malaysia use X to boost audience engagement and *marketing for universities*?

Research objectives

This research aims to explore the influence of visual content on university students' engagement and perceptions of their institution's social media presence, with a particular focus on Pakistan and Malaysia. By examining the impact of images, graphics, and logo design on platforms like X, the study intends to uncover how these visual elements affect students' views of their university's identity and values. Additionally, it will investigate the strategies social media managers employ to captivate university audiences and boost marketing effectiveness. The objective is to identify successful tactics that resonate across diverse cultural contexts, thereby enhancing the understanding of how visual content contributes to student engagement and shapes perceptions of educational institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The integration of social media within higher education systems has been a focal point of recent scholarly discourse, particularly concerning student engagement and institutional branding. According to Junco (2012), social media platforms such as X offer a unique avenue for educational institutions to foster interaction and community among students. This interaction is not just limited to social connectivity but extends to academic engagement and support, which are crucial for student retention and satisfaction. Visual content on social media, including images and videos, plays a critical role in enhancing engagement. As noted by Greenhow and Lewin (2019), visual elements can convey complex information in an accessible and appealing manner, often transcending linguistic barriers and fostering a more inclusive educational community.

Scott and Stanway (2015) articulated the growing adoption of social media within the higher education realm as a pivotal educational resource, aimed at nurturing community bonds and enhancing student engagement in an era where digital platforms are seamlessly woven into the fabric of everyday life for digital natives. Complementing this perspective, Clark et al. (2017) observed the transformative impact of social media's ascending prominence on the consumer marketing domain, an evolution that extends to the methods by which educational institutions cultivate relationships with their stakeholders. Their research underscores a direct correlation between student engagement with their universities on social media platforms and the enrichment of perceived relationship quality, with an amplified effect observed when students connect with their university across multiple social media channels. This discourse underscores the integral role of social media as a bridge between educational institutions and their constituents, fostering a nuanced understanding and appreciation of the dynamic interplay between digital engagement and relationship building within the academic sector. Thus, the collective insights from these studies highlight the critical function of social media in reinforcing the educational experience through enhanced relational dynamics.

Maresova et al. (2020) explained the prevailing trend among universities to utilize social media as a conduit for disseminating the latest institutional news, with particularly high engagement seen in posts highlighting specific research achievements or individual student success stories. Additionally, these platforms serve as venues for universities to honour the legacies of distinguished researchers through tribute posts, thereby appealing to the emotional engagement of their audience. Complementarily, Alim and Abdulrahman (2022) embarked on a comprehensive examination of X content from 33 Saudi Arabian universities, categorising 750 posts from both private and public institutions for content

analysis. Their findings revealed a predominant focus on informative content devoid of personal opinions. Notably, the content analysis differentiated between the types of universities; private institutions frequently posted about university events, while public universities leaned towards general advertisements. A noteworthy observation was the more frequent mention of employer engagement in the posts of private universities, suggesting a strategic emphasis on career-oriented initiatives. However, the study also indicated a gap in the dissemination of content related to knowledge and technology transfer, highlighting an area for potential enhancement in university communication strategies. This comparative analysis of social media usage by universities underscores the strategic role these digital platforms play in shaping the public perception and engagement of academic institutions, emphasising the need for a balanced content strategy that incorporates both institutional achievements and contributions to knowledge and technology sectors.

Yücel and Yücel (2022) advocated for the strategic enhancement of universities' global stature through the orchestration and worldwide promotion of international cultural events, utilizing platforms such as X to achieve this end. They proposed that universities, perceived as corporate entities in this context, could benefit from establishing additional social media accounts dedicated to posting in foreign languages, thereby broadening their international reach. Furthermore, they suggested an increased emphasis on disseminating scientific research findings through social media channels, coupled with a diversification and enrichment of posted content to augment the accounts' impact. The duo underscores the importance of curating content that resonates with and is valued by the universities' extensive follower base, positing that interaction is fostered by posts recognised as valuable across the social media ecosystem. Conversely, they cautioned against the proliferation of content perceived as lacking value, as it may diminish the effectiveness of the social media presence. This perspective highlights the delicate balance required in managing social media content to maximise engagement and interaction, thereby leveraging these digital platforms to elevate the international profile of universities.

Shah and Cox (2017) highlighted the transformative capacity of social media platforms like X within the academic realm, particularly focusing on how scholars incorporate X into their research activities. Their investigation revealed how academics derive substantial benefits from engaging with X as a platform for scholarly communication, encompassing the creation, utilization, and dissemination of academic information. This engagement is reflected in the information-seeking behaviours of academics, which are intrinsically linked to networking and collaboration, fundamental aspects of scientific practice. Similarly, del Rocío Bonilla et al. (2020) proposed that experts in higher education marketing should forge stronger and more coherent communication strategies. Such strategies are crucial for cultivating deeper and more meaningful connections with stakeholders. Collectively, these studies underscore the pivotal role of strategic social media use in enhancing academic collaboration and stakeholder relationships within the higher education sector.

Orgilés-Amorós et al. (2024) observed that the landscape of higher education institutions (HEIs) has evolved significantly over recent years, with a marked shift towards embracing marketing strategies. Initially lagging behind in Europe and Spain, the integration of marketing methodologies has now emerged as an indispensable component for HEIs. This shift is driven by the necessity to remain competitive within an evolving socio-economic environment and to adeptly navigate the complexities introduced by the advent of the University 2.0 paradigm. Thus, the transition towards a marketing-oriented approach within HEIs is not merely a trend but a strategic adaptation to the demands of contemporary education and its future direction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research utilised a mixed-methods approach to explore how visual content on social media influences university students' engagement and perceptions in Malaysia and Pakistan. Quantitative data were gathered from 109 students across Universiti Malaya, Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), and the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) using a structured questionnaire. All participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, ensuring ethical compliance.

For the qualitative analysis, online interviews were conducted via Teams and audio-recorded with social media managers from NUST and Universiti Malaya, after obtaining detailed consent. Insights from the social media manager at LUMS were not included as they were unavailable for an interview. Instead, LUMS University provided written responses to the interview questions via their official email. These interviews focused on strategies for engaging audiences and crafting effective visual content. Content analysis was employed to systematically examine the text from these interviews involving methodological coding and categorising of text to identify themes, patterns, and relationships (Krippendorff, 2018). The data was initially processed with automatic coding in NVivo 14, followed by a meticulous manual review to ensure accuracy and relevance to the research objectives (see Table 1).

Python libraries such as Pandas for data manipulation, NumPy for numerical analysis, and Matplotlib for data visualization played a crucial role in analysing the questionnaire responses. This comprehensive methodological framework, combining both quantitative and qualitative data, allowed for a thorough investigation of the impact of visual elements on student engagement and perception across different cultural landscapes, adhering to rigorous ethical standards throughout the research process.

Table 1. Participants' demographics

University	Total Participants (Students)	Rationale for the Study	Social Media Managers
NUST (Pakistan)	33	• Google Forms shared with students • Both undergraduate and postgraduate • Male and female participants	1 manager, interviews via Teams, audio-recorded
LUMS (Pakistan)	34		1 manager, written responses via official email
Universiti Malaya (Malaysia)	42		1 manager, interviews via Teams, audio-recorded

The inclusion of students from both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as a mix of male and female participants, provided a diverse sample that enhances the understanding of social media engagement across different demographic groups. International students from various countries participated in the study at Universiti Malaya, adding further diversity and breadth to the insights gathered. This demographic mix allows the study to comprehensively assess how visual content influences student engagement and perceptions in a multi-cultural academic setting.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis of survey

This research employed a quantitative analysis to unravel university students' interactions with and perceptions of social media platforms, specifically focusing on X. Through a Python-based analytical framework, the study meticulously processed survey data from students across three diverse universities, shedding light on their engagement patterns, the perceived efficacy of visual content, and the platform's role in university communication strategies. The insights derived from this analysis aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the digital landscape in academic environments (see Figure 1).

Checking University Profiles (Q1): A significant portion of students (34.86%) never checked university profiles, with 41.28% doing so rarely. This suggests a low engagement level with university content on X.

Effectiveness for Marketing (Q2): A majority (44.04% agree, 5.5% strongly agree) viewed X as an effective platform for university marketing, indicating a positive perception of its utility for outreach.

Impact of Visual Elements (Q3 & Q4): Visual elements in posts (53.21% find impactful, 19.27% very impactful) and the design of university logos (58.72% find impactful, 22.02% very impactful) were considered highly significant in capturing attention and representing university identity.

Representation of Campus Culture (Q5): Responses were more varied, with 39.45% agreeing that content accurately represents campus culture, suggesting room for improvement in content authenticity.

Engagement with Student Achievements (Q6): A considerable number of students were likely (42.2%) or very likely (16.51%) to engage with posts showcasing student achievements, highlighting the value of student-focused content.

Responsiveness to Concerns/Feedback (Q7): The importance of universities responding to concerns or feedback on X was acknowledged (49.54% important, 31.19% very important), emphasising the need for interactive communication.

Influence on Perception of Academic Reputation (Q8): A strong majority (64.22% agree, 16.51% strongly agree) believed that university posts influence their perception of the university's academic reputation and ranking.

Relevance of Event Announcements (Q9): Event announcements and updates were considered relevant (55.05%) or very relevant (14.68%), indicating that such content is valued by students.

Sharing or Reposting Content (Q10): There was a tendency towards not sharing or rarely sharing university content (35.78% never, 33.03% rarely), suggesting a need for more engaging or share-worthy content.

The bar charts in Figure 1 visually represent the distribution of responses for each question, providing a clear overview of the survey findings.

The analysis of university students' engagement and perceptions regarding their institutions' social media presence on platform X has revealed a multifaceted landscape of interactions and impressions. Despite the widespread adoption of social media for university marketing and outreach, a notable segment of the student population engages infrequently with university profiles on X. This finding underscores a significant opportunity

for universities to innovate and invigorate their social media strategies to foster greater student interaction and engagement (see Figure 1).

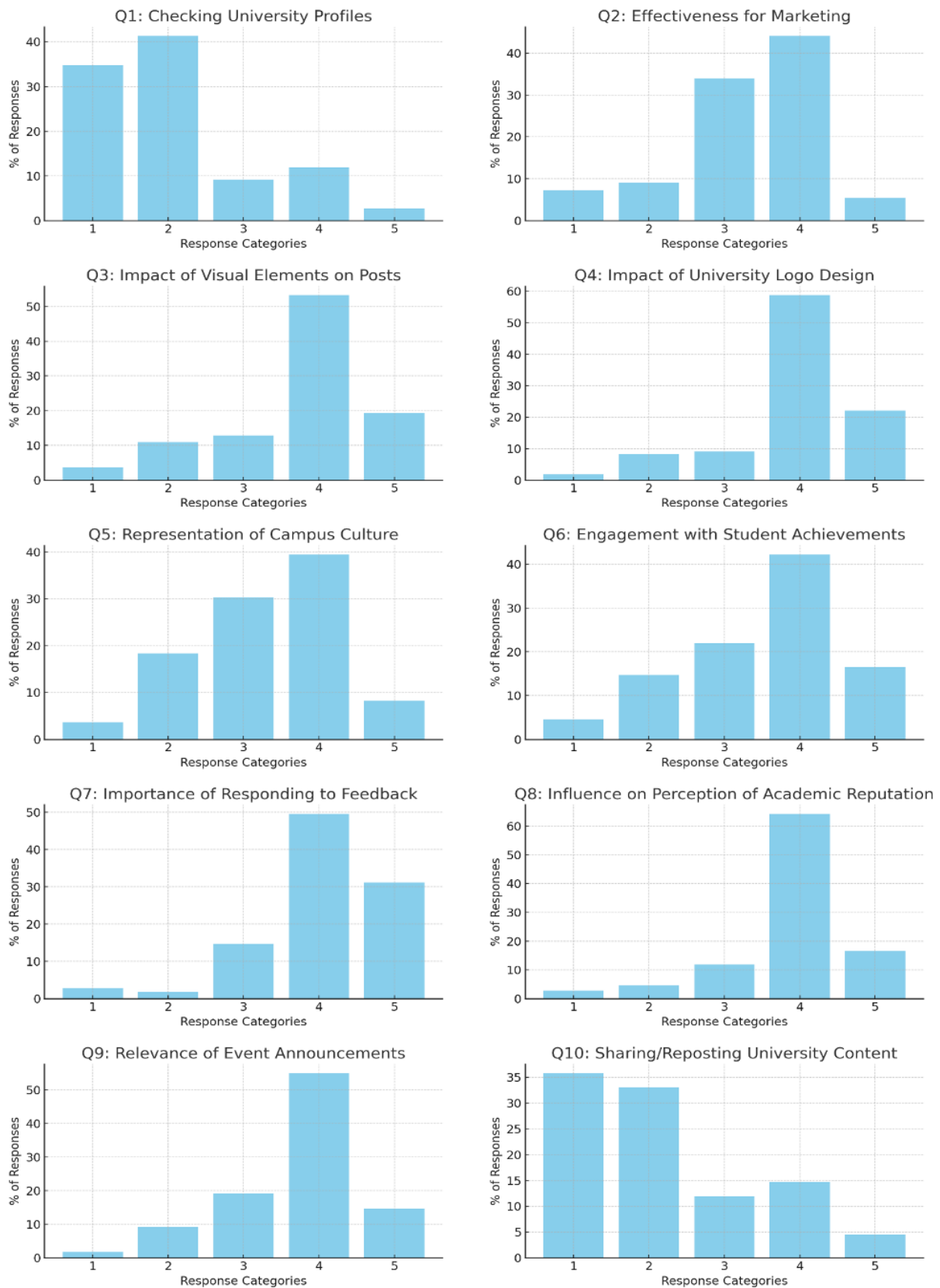


Figure 1. Visual representation of responses

Conversely, the data reflects a generally positive stance on the efficacy of X as a marketing tool for universities. Many students recognised the platform's value in promoting university-related content, suggesting that while engagement levels may vary, the overall perception of social media as a viable channel for university marketing remains high. This positive perception is further bolstered by the high impact attributed to visual elements within social media posts. Students overwhelmingly agreed that both the creative use of visuals in posts and the aesthetic design of university logos play crucial roles in attracting attention and effectively conveying the university's identity and ethos.

However, when it comes to the representation of campus culture on X, opinions diverged. The split in student perceptions highlights an area ripe for improvement, with a call for more authentic and relatable content that accurately mirrors the vibrancy and diversity of campus life. This suggests that universities could benefit from a more nuanced approach to content creation, one that closely aligns with students' expectations and experiences of campus culture.

Another key insight is the value placed on posts celebrating student achievements. Such content not only resonates with the student body but also acts as a catalyst for engagement, underscoring the importance of recognising and showcasing student success on social media platforms. Additionally, the importance of responsiveness cannot be overstated; students value when their feedback or concerns on X are acknowledged and addressed, emphasising the need for universities to cultivate interactive and responsive online communities.

The influence of social media on students' perceptions of academic reputation and ranking is also significant, with a majority of participants believing that university posts on X affect their view of the institution's academic standing. This highlights the platform's role not just in engagement but in shaping perceptions of academic excellence and prestige.

Event announcements and updates were deemed relevant by students, indicating an appetite for content that keeps them informed about university happenings and opportunities to engage with the campus community offline. Conversely, the tendency towards minimal sharing of university content points to a potential gap in creating content that resonates strongly enough with students to motivate them to share it within their networks.

Leveraging Python's data analysis capabilities, this exploration into students' engagement with universities on social media offers valuable insights into the dynamics of digital communication and the strategic use of visual content. It not only reaffirms the significance of digital engagement in the academic sphere, but also illuminates areas where universities can enhance their social media practices. By focusing on creating more engaging, authentic, and interactive content, universities have the opportunity to strengthen their online presence, foster a more engaged student community, and enhance their overall brand perception on platforms like X.

Content analysis of interviews

In the rapidly evolving landscape of digital communication, universities are increasingly turning to social media platforms like X to enhance their branding and marketing efforts. This analysis delves into the strategic use of X by two prominent universities, NUST University and Universiti Malaya (UM), to understand how they navigate the complexities of digital branding. Employing NVivo 14 for automatic coding, this study identified distinct thematic content areas within the social media strategies of both institutions. Through a detailed examination of these themes, this analysis aims to uncover the nuances of each university's approach to social media marketing, highlighting the strategic choices made and their potential implications for brand engagement and perception.

NUST University employs a multifaceted social media strategy, as evidenced by the 15 coded content themes ranging from admissions to strategic objectives. This broad thematic range suggests an intent to appeal to a wide audience base, including potential students, current students, and alumni. The themes of “admissions” and “programs” indicate a focus on showcasing the university’s academic offerings, a crucial aspect of university branding. Similarly, the “audience” and “particular audience” themes reflect an effort to tailor content to specific groups, enhancing relevance and engagement. Strategic objectives, branding, and the feedback loop themes underscore a proactive approach to brand management, where ongoing engagement and adaptation play key roles (see Figure 2).

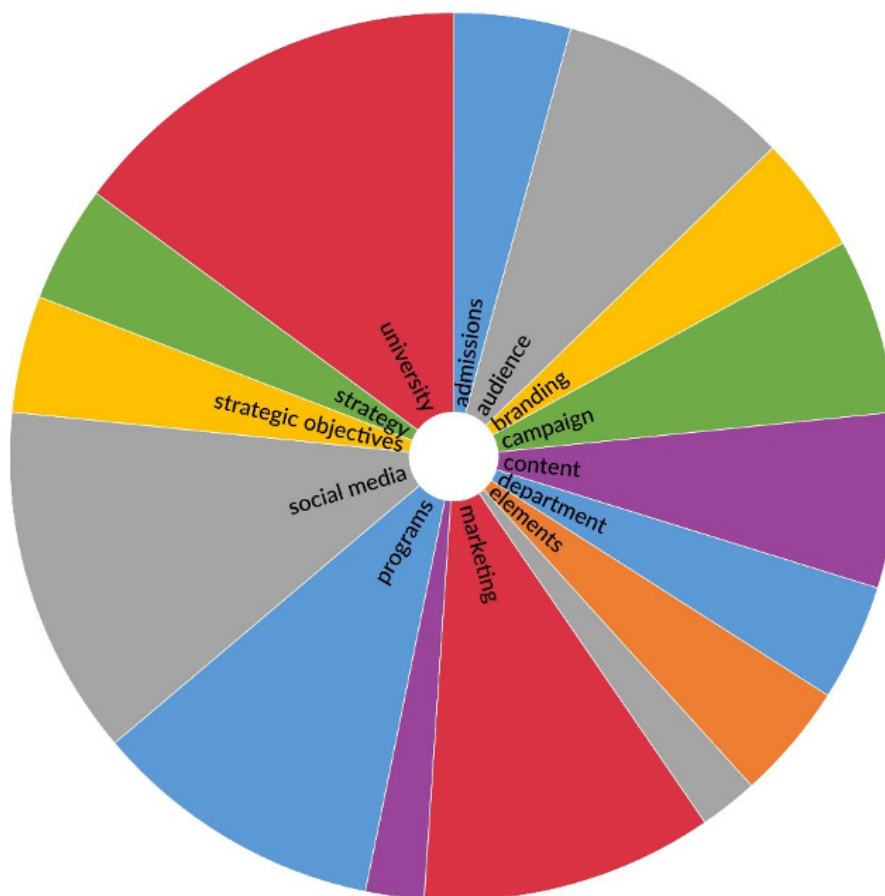


Figure 2. NUST interview codes

Conversely, Universiti Malaya (UM) presents a more streamlined approach, focusing on 12 themes predominantly centred around announcements, the communication office, and visual elements. This strategy emphasises the role of timely information dissemination and the visual appeal in engaging the community. The prominence of the “announcement” and “official event announcement” themes indicates a prioritisation of keeping the university community informed and engaged with campus events and achievements. The “communication office” theme suggests a centralised model for social media management, aimed at ensuring consistency and coherence in messaging. Meanwhile, “visual elements” highlights the importance of aesthetic and narrative in connecting with the audience, potentially catering to a visually driven user base on platforms like X (see Figure 3).

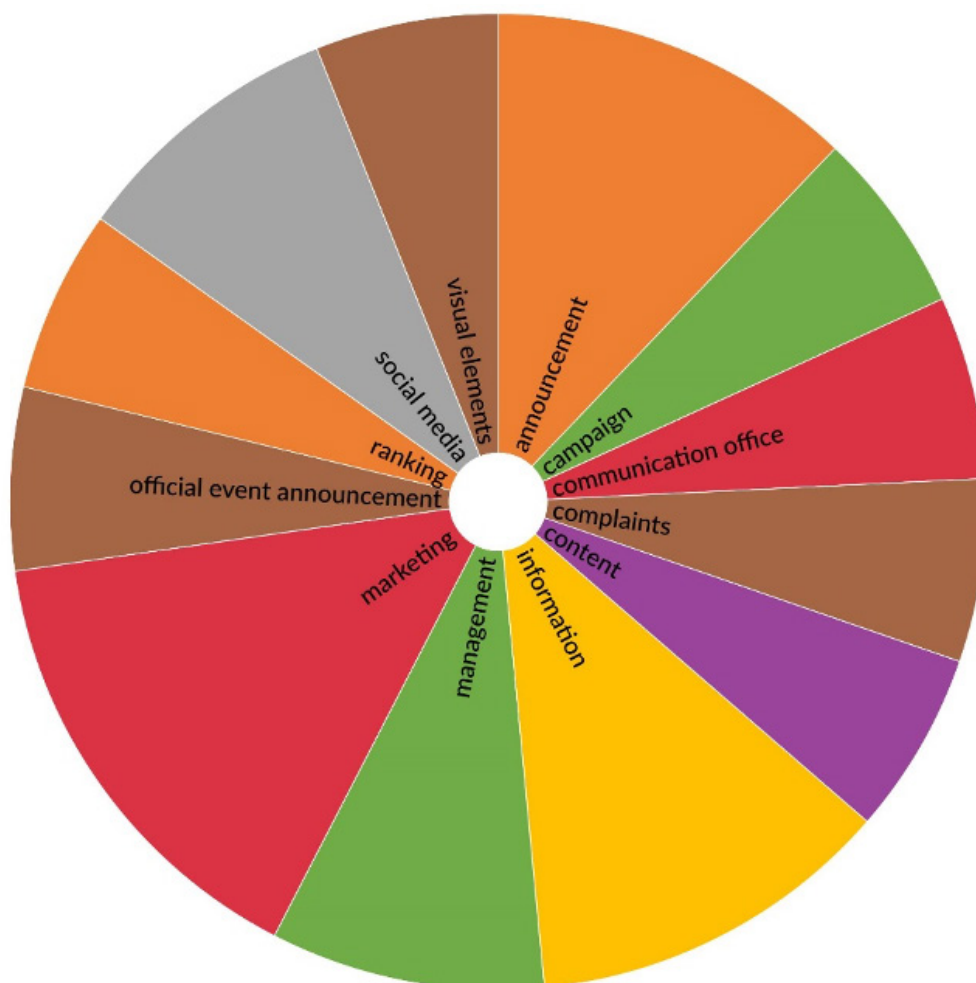


Figure 3. UM interview codes

The thematic analysis reveals contrasting approaches between NUST and UM in utilising X for university branding. NUST's broad thematic scope suggests a comprehensive strategy aimed at highlighting various facets of university life, from academic programs to strategic visions. This approach may be particularly effective in building a multifaceted university brand that appeals to diverse stakeholder groups, offering a holistic view of the university's offerings, values, and strategic direction.

In contrast, UM's strategy appears to be more focused, with a clear emphasis on information dissemination, event promotion, and visual engagement. This focused approach, particularly the heavy reliance on announcements and visual storytelling, may serve to foster a sense of community and immediacy among followers, making the university's social media presence a go-to source for news and updates.

Reflecting on the distinct social media strategies of NUST, LUMS, and UM, each university's approach can be analysed through their respective thematic pie charts. The chart for LUMS, coded using NVivo 14, highlights a comprehensive strategy that incorporates various dimensions of social media management. These dimensions include structuring strategy, platforms, presence, content, digital channels, information, audience, and brand. This indicates a meticulous approach where each aspect—from strategic planning and content creation to audience engagement and branding—plays a crucial role in forming a holistic online presence (see Figure 4).

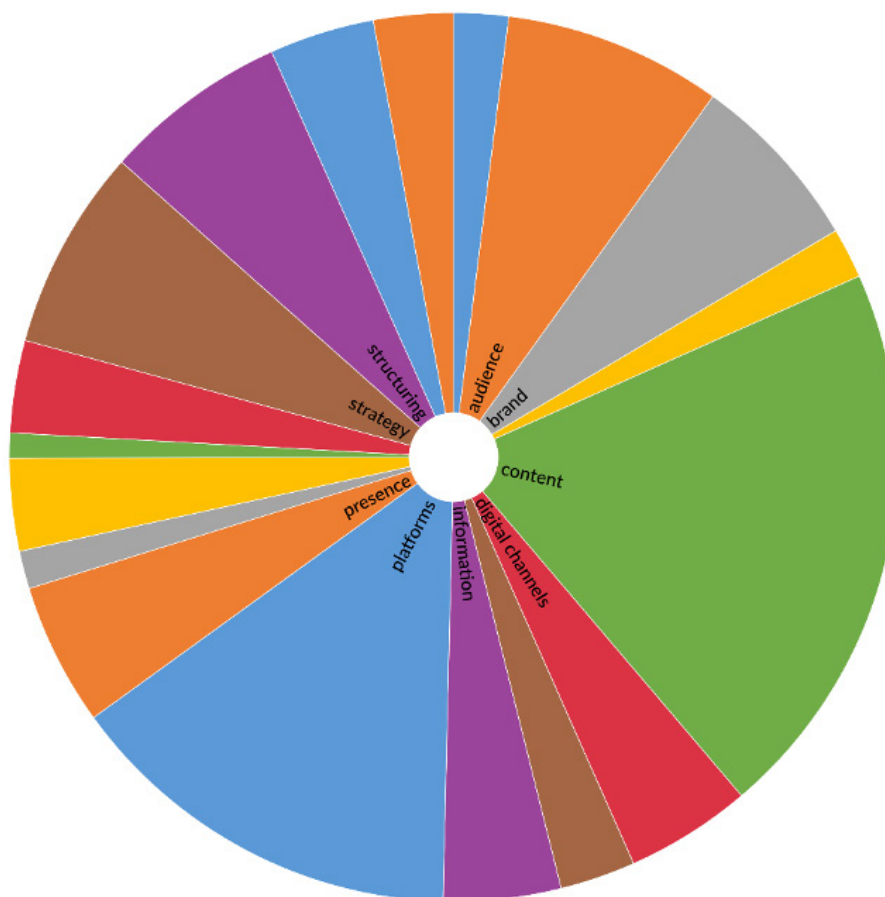


Figure 4. LUMS interview codes

The strategy includes careful planning and structuring to meet specific communication goals, selecting appropriate social media platforms to effectively reach and engage with the student population, and maintaining a consistent presence online. Content remains a central theme, indicating a focus on the type and quality of material shared, which is essential for capturing the attention of the audience and fostering engagement. Additionally, the use of digital channels is optimised to ensure efficient content distribution, while the type of information shared varies from educational content to university news and student activities.

Audience analysis is crucial, showing efforts to understand and target specific demographics to enhance interaction and community building. Branding efforts through social media are also highlighted, aiming to enhance the university's identity and values. Overall, the analysis from the interview suggests that LUMS employs a comprehensive, multi-faceted social media strategy that not only focuses on logistical aspects of platform management but also emphasizes strategic elements such as audience engagement and brand positioning. This well-rounded approach is instrumental in enhancing the university's digital presence and interaction with its community, providing a solid foundation for ongoing refinement and improvement of social media practices to better serve the student body and uphold the university's brand in the digital space.

The thematic analyses of social media strategies at LUMS, Universiti Malaya (UM), and NUST reveal distinct approaches tailored to their unique institutional goals and audiences. LUMS demonstrates a well-rounded strategy focusing on structuring strategy, platforms, presence, content, digital channels, information, audience, and brand. This

comprehensive method indicates a commitment to engaging a diverse audience through varied and high-quality content, supported by a strategic use of digital platforms to ensure effective communication and consistency across different media.

In contrast, UM's strategy places a heavy emphasis on announcements, the communication office, and visual elements, suggesting a centralised approach that prioritises direct communication and timely updates. The focus on official announcements and the communication office points to a preference for structured and controlled messaging, likely aimed at maintaining clarity and authority in university communications. The importance given to visual elements reflects a strategic choice to engage the community through compelling and aesthetically appealing content.

Meanwhile, NUST's strategy highlights themes such as admissions, branding, content elements, and strategic objectives, pointing towards an external-facing approach with a strong emphasis on recruitment and university branding. The focus on admissions and university transitions indicates a strategy that not only aims to attract new students but also to assist them during their transition to university life, leveraging social media as a key tool in these processes.

Comparing these strategies, LUMS and UM both focus on nurturing their existing community but differ in their execution; LUMS adopts a varied and dynamic approach to engage its audience, while UM employs a more controlled and announcement-driven strategy. On the other hand, NUST's focus is more on leveraging social media for prospective student engagement and strategic branding, demonstrating a clear orientation towards growth and external communication.

This varied use of social media underscores the adaptability of digital platforms in meeting diverse institutional needs, from community engagement and information dissemination at LUMS and UM to strategic marketing and student recruitment at NUST. Each university's approach is reflective of its priorities and the specific role that social media plays in achieving its broader communication and marketing objectives.

DISCUSSION

The survey analysis reveals a complex view of student engagement with university profiles on the social media platform X, highlighting both the strengths and areas for improvement. Students generally recognise the platform's effectiveness as a marketing tool, particularly emphasising the significant role of visual content in capturing attention and conveying the essence of the university's identity. Despite these positives, a crucial gap is identified: the content, while engaging, often does not authentically represent campus life, which is vital for fostering deeper connections and encouraging active sharing and interaction among students. This gap suggests an important opportunity for universities to refine their social media strategies, with a focus on creating content that resonates with the student experience.

Exploring the specific strategies of NUST, Universiti Malaya (UM), and LUMS reveals diverse approaches tailored to their unique institutional needs and audience expectations. NUST's strategy incorporates a wide array of themes to showcase the university's multifaceted character and strengths, aiming to engage a broad cross-section of the student body. Conversely, UM's strategy leverages focused announcements and visual storytelling, emphasizing the power of direct communication and the appeal of visual elements.

LUMS takes a holistic approach, balancing between strategic content dissemination and fostering community engagement. Their strategy incorporates various themes such as

platforms, presence, content, and audience interaction, indicating a nuanced understanding of the digital ecosystem. LUMS' use of comprehensive feedback mechanisms and its commitment to engaging content production suggests a proactive approach to social media, designed to both attract and retain student interest effectively. All universities, despite their distinct strategies, recognise the importance of maintaining feedback loops with their audience. This acknowledgment underscores the necessity for responsive and adaptive communication channels that can evolve based on real-time student feedback and engagement metrics.

The findings underscore the indispensability of tailored content and strategic foresight in optimising social media as a conduit for university branding and marketing. Emphasising authentic representation of campus culture, visually engaging content, and interactive communication are crucial for crafting a social media presence that not only attracts but also significantly connects with the student community. This study provides a detailed roadmap for universities like NUST, UM, and LUMS as they seek to bolster their social media engagement and, by extension, strengthen their connection with the student body through platform X.

CONCLUSION

This study provides insights into how university students interact with social media, focusing on a specific platform named X. It shows that while students appreciate the use of visual content and quick responses from universities on social media, they also want content that more accurately reflects what it is like to be a part of their university community. These findings suggest that universities have a great opportunity to improve how they connect with students online by making their content more engaging and authentic.

Looking to the future, this research opens the door for more studies on how different types of social media content can better grab students' attention and get them to participate more. It also suggests that looking at student interactions on a variety of social media platforms can help universities understand the best ways to communicate with their students online. Additionally, further research using interviews or focus groups could give deeper insights into why students engage with their universities on social media the way they do. As universities continue to explore the best ways to use social media for marketing and engagement, this study offers a solid starting point and encourages ongoing discussion on the best strategies for connecting with students in the digital world.

Implications of the research

The research delineates significant implications for higher education institutions striving to enhance student engagement through social media. By revealing the critical role of authentic, visually engaging content that resonates with the student experience, the study underscores the potential for universities to significantly amplify their social media effectiveness. This suggests that by aligning their content strategies with the genuine aspects of campus life and maintaining a responsive communication channel, universities can foster a more engaged and connected student community. Contributions of this research extend to providing actionable strategies that universities can implement to harness the power of social media effectively, thereby transforming mere visibility into meaningful interaction. This study not only contributes to academic discourse on digital engagement in higher education but also serves as a practical guide for institutions aiming to optimise their social media presence and foster a vibrant online community.

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