

# Social Media Marketing at Islamic Higher Education: Reactions, Posts, and Brand Post Contents

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## Abstract

Social media have used by Higher Education Institution (HEI) for marketing communication and promotion purpose. Thus, some studies show that social media as a marketing tool in universities has not been widely practiced in predominantly Muslim countries. This paper aims to show Islamic universities in Muslim countries in various regions use social media as marketing tools, with focus on platforms utilization, engagement with users, and content analysis based on brand post categories. The data collected from the number of social media followers, reactions, and posts from top 12 Islamic universities in Muslim countries based on rank released by UniRank in 2021 and analyse with the software FanpageKarma. The time frame (2021) was chosen because the pandemic Covid-19 at that time has risen the social media usage by users. This papers also offers information about content analysis for social media posts on Instagram and Facebook, and describe it based on the experience brand posts, brand community, and brand resonance.

**Keywords:** brand post categories, higher education institution, Islamic universities, social media marketing

## 1. Introduction

The utilization of social media for marketing purposes in universities has become increasingly common in recent times. This paper explores how Islamic higher education in Muslim countries in various regions use social media as a marketing tool. Islamic universities also face competition in attracting new students amid the declining trend in the number of applicants due to the pandemic. This condition is exacerbated because universities face competition from fellow universities in obtaining quality (Maresova et al., 2020; Peruta et al., 2013; Poulouva & Klímová, 2019). Indeed, according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings (2023), no universities from Muslim-majority countries are ranked within the top 100 universities. The closest university is King Abdulaziz University, ranked 101. Consequently, the competition to attract high-quality students becomes even more challenging for Islamic universities, considering that there are more general universities ranked higher.

On general, based on Pew Research Center (2016) report, the average duration of education for Muslims worldwide is only 5.6 years, indicating that a majority do not have access to basic education. Only 8% of the global Muslim population attains higher education, compared to 16% among non-Muslims. This report indicates that Islamic higher education has a relatively smaller market niche compared to general universities. Additionally, they also have to compete with general universities in attracting new students. Therefore, Islamic universities face greater challenges in recruiting new students.

Papers related to social media marketing in higher education have been discussed in several studies, such as how the impact of social media marketing on the number of applicants (Kuznetsov et al., 2016; Neagu et al., 2020; Shrestha et al., 2019). Social Media Marketing also affects students' engagement with university positively (Bolat & O'Sullivan, 2017; Chauhan & Pillai, 2013; Clark et al., 2017; Irfan et al., 2018), especially on posts with specific content and type (Peruta & Shields, 2018; Soares et al., 2022). Not only improving the engagement level, but social media marketing also positively correlates to the students' perceived education quality of a university, which moderated students' satisfaction level (Demircioglu et al., 2021). Social media marketing also increases the university brand (Fiaz et al., 2019), attracts international students (Paranawithana et al., 2020), and promotes higher education.(Cohen & Salaber, 2015; Cordero-Gutiérrez & Lahuerta-Otero, 2019).

Research on social media marketing in Islamic universities has received limited attention, thus this paper aims to fill the gap in existing studies. There were several works or research on social media marketing in Islamic higher universities, using the analytical tools. For example, Alotaibi & Muramalla (2015) works discuss about the urgency for universities on Saudi Arabia to maximize their social media strategy. The data only limited on the number of Likes on facebook, followers on Twitter, tweets, views on YouTube, and members in LinkedIn from Top 5 Universities.

Assad (2015) explains about the descriptive content analysis in the Emirates college of Technology's official group in Facebook within Fall 2011 to Summer 2015. There were 483 items were analysed to explore the type of extra-curricular activities being posted, the way content was displayed, and student's type of interactions. (Srivastava & Rauta, 2017) analyse how the three types of education institution - federal, local, and foreign - operated in Uni Emirates Arab using Naive Bayes Algorithm tools. the results depict the positive response, institutions and universities should also use social media for other activities (including support research activities, social cause) rather than only updates of events and activities. Social media can also be used as a feedback tool by these universities as a real time communication medium, which will certainly the two-way interaction.

## 2. Literature Review

### A Brief about Defining Islamic Higher Education Institution

How to define the Islamic Higher Education Institution? One simple definition is the education institution operated in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries (Haq & Tanveer, 2020). Another literature give more conceptual definition. Badawi stated the Islamic university as an academic institution that is committed both to spreading religious belief, *da'wa*, and to advancing the practical sciences and learning the languages of the West. There are some contemporary Muslim thinkers who believe that it would be possible to create an Islamic university that organizationally integrates advanced science with their authentic culture. That this kind of integration will be made possible if Islam itself opens up, and holds out the prospect of a promising future – not only for Muslims, but for the entire world (cited in Haggai, 2014)

Another literature define Islamic Higher Education into micro level and macro level. In micro term, Islamic Higher Education is a business form carried out to transfer or channel knowledge, values, and skills based on Islamic teachings from a teacher to students in order to form a whole Muslim person. This definition is about learning process, in which teachers and students are collaborated and the materials supported with learning media used. Meanwhile in macro term Islamic Higher Education also includes history, challenges, and institutions (Bahrowi, 2022).

Sometimes, Islamic higher education not only teach about Islam or religious studies, but the also general studies. For example, in Indonesia, several state-owned Islamic higher education broaden their scope to various disciplines such as such as philosophy, history, language, religion, anthropology, sociology, economics, politics, biology, informatics, and management, in order to give their graduate students more opportunities to get a job. Previously, the curriculum about religious studies dominates by the normative sciences, while the general sciences can direct students to ways of thinking and approaches that are more empirical and contextual seem to be inadequate (Gumanti et al., 2023)

### Social Media as Marketing Tools for Islamic Higher Education Institution

Social media has gained significant attention as a marketing and branding tool for nonprofit organizations and higher education institutions. However, limited research has focused on the strategies employed by social media professionals in managing accounts in the higher education sector. This literature review aims to provide a systematic analysis of existing studies related to social media marketing in Islamic universities. By synthesizing findings from multiple studies, this review seeks to highlight the significance of social media marketing in this specific context and offer insights for practitioners and organizations (Alfonzo, 2021).

Extensive research has explored the role of social media marketing in higher education institutions, examining various aspects such as content strategy, customer engagement, promotional implications, and platform utilization. For example, Wong et al. (2022) conducted a study on mobile social media marketing adoption among digital natives, emphasizing the impact of network relationship properties and social influence properties on innovation adoption intention. Taecharungroj (2017) explored how universities in the USA and Thailand utilize Facebook to engage their audiences, categorizing different types of Facebook posts. Shields and Peruta (2019) examined the role of social media in prospective students' decision-making process and provided suggestions for social media managers to optimize recruitment strategies. Bolat and O'Sullivan (2017) employed a netnographic approach to analyze student-generated social media data and its influence on higher education marketing and branding efforts. Vrontis et al. (2018) focused on the value of social media in international student recruitment in Lebanese higher education institutions. Kuznetsov et al. (2016) proposed a method for evaluating university attractiveness using social media data to optimize marketing efforts. Kumar and Nanda (2019) investigated the integration of social media in various processes of higher education institutes and proposed a framework for successful social media campaigns. Brech et al. (2017) explored the impact of community size and update frequency

on fan engagement for universities using social media. Finally, Qi and Mitra (2016) examined the challenges and opportunities of marketing university curricula through social media, emphasizing the need for effective communication between universities and their audiences.

Despite the extensive research on social media marketing in various countries, its adoption and utilization in predominantly Muslim nations, particularly in the context of Islamic universities, remain underexplored. Alotaibi and Muramalla (2015) highlighted the need for effective social media strategies in Saudi Arabian higher education institutions. The data only limited on the number of likes on Facebook, followers on Twitter, tweets, views on YouTube, and members in LinkedIn from Top 5 Universities. Assad (2015) explains about the descriptive content analysis in the Emirates college of Technology's official group in Facebook within Fall 2011 to Summer 2015. There were 483 items were analysed to explore the type of extra-curricular activities being posted, the way content was displayed, and student's type of interactions. Srivastava & Rauta (2017) analyse how the three types of education institution - federal, local, and foreign - operated in Uni Emriates Arab using Naive Bayes Alorythm tools. the results depict the positive response, institutions and universities should also use social media for other activities (including support research activities, social cause) rather than only updates of events and activities. Social media can also be used as a feedback tool by these universities as a real time communication medium, which will certainly the two-way interaction.

Another works focuses on users perspectives in using higher education official social media account. Sadek (2021) survey towards 399 students from 17 private and national universities in Egypt shows that firm generated content and user generated content have a significant positive direct impact on students' online brand experience. Especially the user generated content like other fellow users opinioins, feedback and comment, have the bigger impact in developing students' online brand experience, compared with the videos images and posts that are generated by university.

Still on Egypt country, Bassyouny (2021)found although social media was the last source of information the majority of students resorted to while selecting their college, they used social media to watch short videos about students' life, activities, campus tours and dorms. The data analysis of several studies shows that future students rank the social media last in a list of information channels that influence their choice of a study and university. The students stated that they rely completely on social media platforms to gather information about any university. They all agreed that universities' websites are too complicated for them and they feel they are done to address grown-ups. They do not even trust the universities' social media accounts to get credible evaluation of the university and help them in the choice process. All of them trusted the reviews, advice and recommendations of their Facebook friends as the most credible, honest source of information regarding universities' study and examination systems, degree of difficulty, attendance policy, quality education and value of its certificate.

Furthermore, recent studies have investigated the influence and benefits of social media marketing in higher education. Cingillioglu, Gal and Prokhorov (2023) introduced the algorithmic document sequencing (ADS) method to connect key findings from various articles, providing valuable insights for marketing professionals in Islamic universities to develop effective social media marketing strategies. Song et al. (2023)found that social media engagement positively influences relationship quality, brand image, and brand loyalty in higher education marketing. Perera, Nayak and Nguyen (2022) demonstrated the impact of social media marketing on brand equity, emphasizing the role of brand credibility. Mohseni and Titkanloo (2022) highlighted the positive effects of social media marketing activities on brand identity, perceived value, and satisfaction, ultimately impacting students' intentions in pursuing higher education. Shukla and Bhasin (2022) identified key factors influencing reachability and engagement on social media platforms for Indian universities. John, Walford and Purayidathil (2022) explored the persuasion process in social media marketing, while Soares et al. (2022) analyzed consumer engagement in firm-generated content on Facebook in the context of Brazilian higher education institutions. Collectively, these studies provide valuable insights and strategies for Islamic universities to effectively utilize social media marketing for brand development, relationship building, and student engagement.

From the aforementioned studies, it is evident that discussions related to social media marketing in Islamic universities during the pandemic are still limited. To address this research gap, the present study aims to explore how social media can be effectively utilized as a marketing tool at Islamic universities across different regions of the world. The study will categorize social media posts based on Tafesse and Wien (2017a) framework, which includes 12 brand post categories such as emotional brand posts, functional brand posts, educational brand posts, brand resonance, experiential brand posts, current events, personal brand posts, employee brand posts, brand community, customer relationship, cause-related brand posts, and sales promotion.

### **3. Method**

#### **Research design**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and compare the activities and content of Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube created by the official social media of 12 of the world's best Islamic universities based on UniRank. In monitoring

and collecting social media activity from selected universities, a social media analysis tool called Fanpage Karma is used. Fanpage Karma is a social media software web monitoring tool that helps discover the most important topics and trends in any industry using data from social media. The fanpage karma was chosen because it can provide precise data presentation as well as provide data comparisons from several accounts at once. As the best social media marketing software, Fanpage Karma helps researchers collect data and analyze engagement on social media accounts that are the subject of research.

Crawling data begins by using the analyze feature to input the names of social media accounts to be examined. After that, the data retrieval time range is set to match the expected duration. Automatically, data from each account will be presented, starting from those related to engagement rate, data related to the timing of posting content, and the best content with the highest engagement rate within the specified time duration.

The data that Fanpage Karma has collected is then exported in an XLS file. After that, the data will be processed, analyzed, and categorized into tables according to the type of social media platform. From the data categorization, initial data will be obtained from the number of followers, content, and overall engagement. After the content analysis of each social media is complete, the data is ready to be presented. It can be seen how the comparison of the use and interaction of each social media platform.

Content analysis is conducted by selecting the top posts with the highest Engagement Rate (ER). ER is the total interaction created between the uploaded content and the audience. Engagement rate is an essential keyword in measuring the performance and success of social media content. Engagement rate (ER) is a crucial metric for measuring content on all social media platforms. Apart from being an indicator of the success of content, engagement rate can also measure the impact of social media content on its audience. The measurement of engagement rate for each type of social media is undoubtedly different. On Instagram and Facebook, ER is calculated from the total interactions that appear (like, comment, save, share) divided by real followers multiplied by 100%. The higher the ER, it can be said that the more appropriate/exciting content is presented to the audience who are followers of the account. The scope with the highest ER indicates that it managed to get the most likes, shares, comments, and views among other content in the stated period. The more interactions you get, the more the content is liked by the audience and the more popular it is on social media platforms. In addition, the analysis was also conducted on the content from February 2020-February 2021.

Data collection was carried out on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube social media accounts from the UniRank version of the best Islamic university in the world by collecting data on selected content and user interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely February 2020-February 2021. The population in this study is the best Islamic university version of UniRank in 2021. Unirank tries to rank the best Islamic universities to answer the popularity of Islamic universities from its website. Some of the criteria used by UniRank include universities in its ranking, among others: the university has been accredited by a national or local accreditation body, the university organizes several types of education levels ranging from undergraduate to postgraduate, master or doctoral levels). Finally, universities included in the Unirank ranking implement a direct or face-to-face teaching and learning system. The samples taken were the best Islamic universities in the world in five regions: Southeast Asia, the Asian Subcontinent (South Asia), Middle East, North Africa, and Eurasia. Each area is taken from 1-2 countries with two universities with the highest ranking on UniRank. The selection of two universities from each country was selected based on the university's management, whether the university is managed by the government or private. Thus, 12 universities from six specified countries represented five different regions, as follows: Al-Azhar University & Cairo University from Egypt; Universitas Islam Negeri Malang & Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang from Indonesia; Universiti Islam Antar Bangsa Malaysia & Al-Madinah International University from Malaysia; University of Punjab & Riphah International University from Pakistan; University of Business and Technology & Umm Al-Qura University from Saudi Arabia; Suleymen Demirel University & Karadeniz Teknik University from Turkey.

### **Limitations of the Data**

Data time frame only in 2021, during the Pandemic Covid-19, because in this period there was a decline in the number of applicants to universities. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2021) reported a 3.2% decline in enrollment in 2021 compared to 2020. According to the report, when combined with last year's drop in enrollment, there was a 6.5% decline in enrollment compared to pre-pandemic, the most significant fall in the past 50 years ago. Meanwhile, lower-middle-income countries reported a decline in applicants by up to 20% (UNESCO National Commissions, 2021). Especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in applicants (Dickler, 2020; Struck, 2020), especially from private universities (Trissanti, 2020). Universities must adjust marketing strategies to deal with consumer decision-making patterns experiencing behavioral shifts due to the pandemic (Mason et al., 2021). Therefore, the pandemic has driven the need for digitalization to adapt to various changes in the behavior of prospective applicants.

**4. Results and Discussion**

Results divided on two parts: (1) platform utilization and customer engagement, and (2) content strategies. The platform utilization and customer engagement shown by numbers of followers, reactions, and posts of Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube official channel. On the content strategies categories by brand post categories framework (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). The sample of content strategies chosen form HEI’s official social media posts that have the most likes and comments.

The best Islamic universities in the world actively use various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Each university uses at least two of the four social media platforms. Only Al-Azhar University does not have an account on this platform on Twitter. In contrast, for other platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, two universities do not use the social media platform, such as Cairo University and Al Azhar University. Facebook is not used by the University of Business and Technology and Umm Al Qura University, and Punjab and Umm Al Qura University do not use Youtube. The absence of accounts on several types of social media platforms seems to be part of the strategy at each university in reaching its audience. It is proven that even though they only have a few social media platforms, some universities can optimize the use of these platforms, shown by the high number of fans. For example, at universities in Egypt, Al Azhar, and Cairo University, although they do not have Instagram social media accounts, their Facebook accounts have a very high number of followers, up to 600 thousand more followers. Likewise, Umm Al Quro University, which does not use the Facebook and YouTube platforms, appears to have an astonishing number of followers on the Twitter platform, reaching 322 thousand more followers.

**Platform Utilization and Engagement with User**

As shown in the table 1, Cairo University ranks the highest for Facebook fans and has a vast number of fans (645,919). Next is the University of Punjab, with 559,589 followers, Riphah University with 355,014 followers, and Al Azhar University with 143,971 fans. The achievement of fans from the four universities' Facebook is very high compared to other universities, which only reach tens of thousands of fans. As for the Instagram platform, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang is the university with the most fans with 79,101 followers, followed by Suleyman Demirel University in second place with 32,437.

The first rank with the highest number of Twitter fans on the Twitter platform is Umm Al Quro University with 322,699, followed by the University of Punjab (60,405). The university with the highest number of YouTube fans for youtube is the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, with 37.7 thousand fans. Next is the University of Muhammadiyah Malang (37.7K), followed by the State Islamic University of Malang (11.9K). The number of youtube fans achieved by these two universities far outperforms other universities, which only have Youtube fans ranging from seven hundred to seven thousand fans.

Table 1. Numbers of Followers, Reactions, Posts All Platform

University	Regional	State	Facebook					Instagram					Twitter					YouTube				
			F	R	N	R/F	R/N	F	R	N	R/F	R/N	F	R	N	R/F	R/N	F	R	N	R/F	R/N
Cairo University	North Africa	Egypt	645.919	57.438	703	0,09	81,7	0	0	0	0	0	7.526	695	486	0,09	1,43	6.890	3.900	114	0,57	34,21
Al-Azhar University	North Africa	Egypt	143.971	2715	29	0,02	93,62	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	701.000	2.693	69	0,00	39,03
Universitas Islam Negeri Malang	South East Asia	Indonesia	16.939	2562	41	0,15	62,49	29.049	269.978	252	9,29	1071	22.145	1115	237	0,05	4,70	119.000	11.066	304	0,09	36,40
Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang	South East Asia	Indonesia	9.931	41.332	521	4,16	79,33	79.101	888.221	516	11,2	1721	17.231	10.607	1182	0,62	8,97	377.000	41.190	114	0,11	361,32
Universiti Islam Antar Bangsa Malaysia	South East Asia	Malaysia	53.563	82.574	600	1,54	137,6	14.442	111.406	389	7,71	286	14.960	41.547	1188	2,78	34,97	5.110	6.749	161	1,32	41,92
Al-Madinah International University	South East Asia	Malaysia	34.589	62.266	500	1,80	124,5	1.428	843	81	0,59	10,4	3.210	0	0	0	0	2.670	190	71	0,07	2,68
University of Punjab	South Asia	Pakistan	559.589	387.099	500	0,69	774,2	19.905	65.347	145	3,28	451	60.405	47.544	764	0,79	62,23	0	0	0	0	0
Riphah International University	South Asia	Pakistan	166.443	62.108	343	0,37	181,1	20.920	180	2	0,01	90	1.826	0	0	0	0	778	46	6	0,06	7,67
University of Business and Technology	Middle East	Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0	25.914	24.080	446	0,93	54	12.891	3.287	1211	0,25	2,71	910	19	2	0,02	9,50
Umm Al-Qura University	Middle East	Saudi Arabia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	322.699	85.041	1985	0,26	42,84	0	0	0	0	0
Suleymen Demirel University	Eurasia	Turkey	22.964	12.280	552	0,53	22,25	32.437	90.562	138	2,79	656	30.990	36.557	473	1,18	77,29	444.000	2.655	12	0,01	221,25
Karadeniz Teknik University	Eurasia	Turkey	6.971	2.249	77	0,32	29,21	6.602	15.289	120	2,32	127	12.514	9.583	103	0,77	93,04	267.000	170	25	0,00	6,80
<b>Total</b>			<b>1.660.879</b>	<b>712.623</b>	<b>3.866</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.586</b>	<b>229.798</b>	<b>1.465.906</b>	<b>2.089</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>4.468</b>	<b>506.397</b>	<b>235.976</b>	<b>7.629</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>1.924.358</b>	<b>68.678</b>	<b>878</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>761</b>
<b>Average</b>			<b>138.407</b>	<b>59.385</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>19.150</b>	<b>122.159</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>42.200</b>	<b>19.665</b>	<b>636</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>160.363</b>	<b>5.723</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Min</b>			<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Max</b>			<b>645.919</b>	<b>387.099</b>	<b>703</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>79.101</b>	<b>888.221</b>	<b>516</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1.721</b>	<b>322.699</b>	<b>85.041</b>	<b>1.985</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>701.000</b>	<b>41.190</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>361</b>
<b>Std Deviaton</b>			<b>224.405</b>	<b>107.558</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>22.385</b>	<b>253.780</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>89.837</b>	<b>27.189</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>235.025</b>	<b>11.682</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>112</b>

(Data collection period 1 February 2020-1 February 2021)

**F=follower/subscriber, R= total reactions (likes, comments, shares), N=total number of posts, R/F: Reaction per followers, R/N : Reaction per posts**

Different countries give a different pattern to the number of fans on each platform. Universities in Egypt and Pakistan have extraordinarily high fans on Facebook accounts. In contrast, Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, tend to have high fans on YouTube and Instagram platforms. For the Twitter platform, the highest fans are in Saudi Arabia. This difference in the number of fans can show which platforms are most actively used by each university according to the audience's characteristics in the country where the university is located. For this reason, in the next section, each university's social media content's performance statistics and the content will be analyzed by platform type.

Of the 12 universities that became the research object, only ten used the Facebook platform. It can be seen that there is a positive relationship between the active management of Facebook's social media (Table 1). The more content you post, the higher your total reactions, comments, and shares. The higher responses to the post, the greater the chance for an account to get many fans. This positive association can be seen in Cairo University, University of Punjab, University Islam Antar Bangsa Malaysia, and Al-Madinah International University. With a high number of posts in a year (around 500-700 content), the total reactions obtained are pretty high compared to other universities that do not regularly post. Even high fans can be less influential if they are not accompanied by many posts. As happened at Al Azhar University, even though the number of fans reached more than 140 thousand, with a low total number of posts (only 29 posts a year), the engagement rate obtained from the total reactions was also down.

Another interesting phenomenon is seen in statistical analysis on the Instagram platform. Of the 9 identified Instagram social media accounts, a trend similar to Facebook. Social media accounts with a high number of followers do not guarantee the resulting high engagement rate. However, the activeness in managing and creating content on Instagram can increase the number of comments, likes, and shares. Evidence from the University of Muhammadiyah Malang reveals the highest number of posts, positively impacting the high number of total reactions. It occurs in university Instagram accounts such as the Official University Islam Antar Bangsa Malaysia account, Universitas Islam Negeri Maliki Malang, and the Süleyman Demirel University account, which received high total reactions due to many posts. However, this trend does not seem to apply to the @ubt\_edu account, an Instagram account from the University of Business and Technology in Saudi Arabia, with a relatively high number of posts (446) but low total reactions (24,080). It occurs because the administrator decides to deactivate the comment column on all its posts. As a result, the number of comments obtained is 0, resulting in low total reactions. Deactivation of the comment column is an option that every account on Instagram can choose, which is generally motivated by several things. For example, the comment column can be used to write hate speech, comments that are not good can impact the image of the organization, comments that contain inappropriate information will confuse social media users, and so on.

For the Twitter platform, statistical data shows that 11 best Islamic university twitter accounts were detected, but 2 of the 11 accounts were not managed at all. It can be seen from the number 0 in the column for the number of posts and the total number of reactions at the University, namely Al Madinah University in Malaysia and Riphah University in Pakistan. Both of them are recorded to have Twitter accounts and get thousands of followers, but during the period 1 February 2020 - 1 February 2021, they did not conduct any activity on these accounts. The average number of posts on this platform is higher than other platforms; this could be due to Twitter posting that allows only writing without images. The characteristics of each different platform can affect the management and the feedback obtained from the audience.

From the statistical explanation on each of the platforms above, it can be seen that two platforms are most actively used by the best Islamic universities in the world are Facebook and Instagram. For this reason, to get a clearer picture of the content uploaded on each account, in this section, the author analyzes the 5 top post content (content with the highest engagement rate) in each account by focusing on the analysis on Facebook and Instagram platforms. The study was challenge 12 categories of social media concept by (Tafesse & Wien (2017).

**Content analysis strategy**

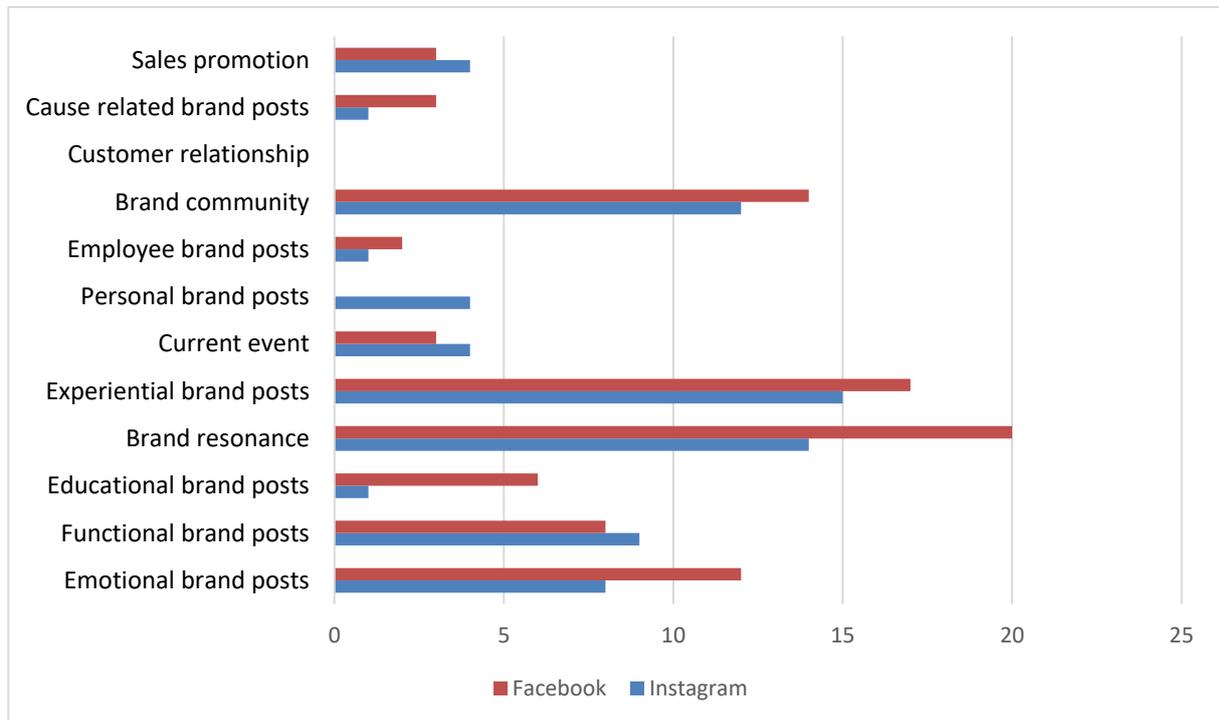


Diagram 1. Content Analysis Top Islamic University in Facebook & Instagram

From the 41 top posts taken from 9 Instagram accounts of the world's best Islamic universities, positions are dominated by photo and video content types. Based on the analysis conducted, the most widely used category on Facebook is the Experiential Brand posts category. This category has the highest number of posts, 15 of 41 seats. The category that stimulates the audience's sense of sight or hearing seems to dominate the content in several universities such as the University in Turkey Süleyman Demirel university and Karadeniz University, universities in Pakistan such as the University of Punjab and Riphah University and Al-Madinah International University in Malaysia. In this category, generally, university posts show photos of buildings and campus facilities that are deserted without any activities amid the covid 19 pandemic. Photos with captions that cause longing for the campus to evoke sensory students and staff by providing visual sensory stimulations about memories of campuses that couldn't be visited during the COVID-19 pandemic were favored by Instagram audiences with high likes on each post.

Another post category that also gets high numbers in the top posts of the world's best Islamic university instagram content is Brand resonance. The category that emphasizes the identity of a brand that displays a logo, history, and slogan is ranked second in the category that often appears in the top posts with 12 posts. From posts that fall into the brand resonance category, they generally provide stories related to the university's history and bring out other university identities such as logos and symbols. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it seems that postings featuring university identities are one of the most sought-after contents, one of which is because they serve as a communication bridge between universities and their audience. Another category that also raises the issue of pride in the display of achievements and achievements from universities seems to be enough to attract the audience's attention on the Instagram platform. It can be seen from the Functional Brand Posts category, which is also found in much existing content. In addition, content that uses this category is also used to provide updated information regarding the performance of universities and services during the pandemic, such as graduation ceremonies, new student admissions, and new student orientation periods, which are carried out online and offline.

To delve deeper into how brand post categories are carried out in the content of the top 12 Islamic universities, the researcher conducted content analysis on the top 5 posts on Instagram and Facebook platforms:

**A. Instagram**

**1) Experiential brand posts:**

Experiential brand posts evoke sensory and behavioral responses from consumers by incorporating relevant brand cues. This type of content focuses more on employing sensory brand cues, which can be visual,

auditory, gustatory, or behavioral, such as physical actions and embodied performances. Experiential content that receives a high response includes those that involve sensory elements, such as visual aspects of the campus and its surroundings. Photos showcasing the beauty of every corner of the buildings, gardens, or other campus facilities remind the audience of the experiences that arise when accessing those places. For example, the content on Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi's Instagram account. A screenshot of the content shows a corner of the university's garden displayed in different seasons. The same corner, but captured in different seasons, shows the visual differences of the garden. The garden looks lush and green in spring, yellowish with scattered leaves in autumn, covered in white snow in winter, and fresh and green again in summer. The photo captures the audience's hearts by reminding them of activities that may have been done in the garden and evokes longing for the facilities within the campus among students, staff, faculty, or even alumni. This is evidenced by the high reactions, with a total of 2929 likes and shares.

Similar actions are also taken by Karadeniz Technical University. The post showing the campus during the fall season with yellowing leaves on the ground evokes the audience's visual sensory. The visual displayed about the quiet corners of the campus, left behind by its inhabitants, creates a longing for the campus. Quite different from Süleyman Demirel University, which uses a single post feature and focuses on photo editing to include several images in one post, the post at Süleyman Demirel University is packaged with a carousel feature that asks its audience to swipe to see the numerous photos in the post. This approach, emphasizing visual sensory, also received a fairly high response with a total of 623 shares and likes.

## 2) Brand community:

Brand community brand posts are aimed at promoting and strengthening the brand's online community. These posts aim to recruit new members into the community, expanding the brand's community base, and promoting active participation among existing members to intensify the brand community's vibrancy. The main goal of these community-oriented brand posts is to foster engagement and member identification with the brand community.



An example of this type of brand post is taken from the most liked content on the University of Punjab, Pakistan's Instagram account. This content received 1307 likes, 65 shares, and 65 comments, showing the process of recruiting new students for master's and doctoral programs at the university. Recruiting new members to the brand's community is one of the variations of this type of brand post. This variant typically exposes fans to the brand's expanded network of online and offline communities and encourages them to join these 'new' communities. Recruiting new members to the university becomes one of the aims to make the brand's community larger.



The text describes a variant of a brand community that aims to enhance community participation by driving active engagement among existing members. This is achieved by acknowledging members, such as mentioning their names or tagging them in brand posts, and by using or soliciting their content (user-generated content). An example of this occurred on the Instagram account of UBT University of Business and Technology in Saudi Arabia, where they tagged a student who had graduated from the university. This tagging strategy was successful in driving active participation and engagement from the member, as evidenced by a high number of likes and comments on the post, totaling 354 likes on the @ubt\_edu account.

**B. Facebook**

1) Experiential brand posts:

Experiential brand posts, as previously explained, focus not only on what appeals to the audience's senses but also on how the brand conveys events. Brand events such as sponsored events, product launches, and live events provide consumers with direct, experiential access to the brand. While Instagram's experiential brand posts are dominated by visual content that evokes the audience's senses, on the Facebook platform, experiential brand posts take a different approach. This can be seen in the posts by Riphah International University on Facebook. The post about a competition held during quarantine garnered significant attention from the audience. The content, with 3383 shares, features four posters for the Quarantine Online Community Competitions 2020, inviting the audience to participate in vlogs & blogs, articles, community teaching, and donation drive competitions. The experiential brand post category emphasizes "the moment of pleasure" and the experiential value of the focal brand (Puto & Wells, 1984; Taylor, 1999). Experiential brand posts use sensory, embodied, and event-based brand cues to make the brand experientially accessible by linking it to specific consumer experiences. These brand posts portray the brand as a key enabler of delightful consumer experiences. Therefore, experiential brand posts represent a powerful message strategy for brands to create a rich and authentic brand experience on social media.



Riphah International University

27 Apr 2020 · 🌐

...

Register Yourself for Quarantine Online Community Competitions 2020.

An initiative of the Student Services Department of Riphah International University. Here is your chance to spend quality time with friends and community while still maintaining proper social distancing.

Four competitions to participate in, choose the one or many that you think explores your talents in the best way. Winners will receive cash prizes and a chance to feature their work on Riphah International University's Social Media Profiles. Join the Competition and Community Work by visiting: [www.bit.ly/riphahssd](http://www.bit.ly/riphahssd)

Use this free time in lock-down to do good this Ramadan 🤲



2) Brand resonance

Brand resonance posts are brand posts that focus on the brand's promise and identity. These posts emphasize key aspects of brand identity, such as brand image, brand personality, brand association, and branded products. One variant of this type of content is brand posts that celebrate brand heritage. This variant highlights the historical contributions and accomplishments of the brand. This type of content seems to stand out in Facebook posts, especially on the Universiti Islam Antar Bangsa Malaysia account. Content that showcases photos of the university buildings and congratulatory messages on anniversaries demonstrates how the brand is resonated through its brand identity, such as photos of the buildings and the university logo. The content that captures the audience's attention for IIUM brand has received a positive response with 1220 likes and shares.



IIUM  
20 May 2020 · 🌐

...

Happy 37th Anniversary IIUM!

Alhamdulillah, today on 20th May 2020 we celebrate IIUM's 37th anniversary. Here's to more years of truly life-changing education and research and here's to 37 years of Leading The Way. May our Garden of Knowledge and Virtue continue to progress beyond expectations.

#IIUM2020 #LeadingTheWay #IIUM37thAnniversary



Eleven out of twelve categories appear in the top 41 Instagram account posts of the world's best Islamic universities. One category that doesn't appear at all is the customer relationship category. Categories related to testimonials, feedback, and reviews from customers about the products and services provided do not seem to get the attention of all universities.

The category at the top on the Instagram platform does not seem much different from the top category on the Facebook platform. Suppose the three categories that get the most numbers on Instagram are experiential brand posts, brand resonance, and brand community. In addition, the categories that appear the most from the Facebook platform are Brand Resonance, followed by Experiential Brand Posts in second place and Brand Community in third place.

Based on the analysis results, it can be seen that this is one of the reasons for the content on the Instagram and Facebook platforms on the accounts of some of the world's best Islamic universities that look identical. It happens because these two platforms allow being connected to upload the same content on both platforms. What also happened on the two media was how content in the Brand Community category was quite popular, ranked third for Facebook, and ranked second for Instagram. Content that is included in the Brand Community category is content that fosters a sense of community identification and engagement with a brand. In the university accounts studied, content in the Brand Community category provides an approach for students and prospective students to remain engaged even though conditions must force lecture activities to be carried out online.

Another interesting phenomenon is that of the 12 categories of social media, ten categories appear on the Facebook platform. The two categories that did not appear were Personal Brand Posts and Customer Relationships. Suppose the Customer Relationship category focuses on feedback from customers, in this case students who feel the facilities and services provided by the university. In that case, the Personal Brand Posts category is a category that makes personal preferences and experiences from customers the center of the content provided. Content that contains this category relatively raises the individual meanings of those who initiate intensely private conversations with customers. These two categories that are significantly related to customers do not seem to be the content favored by the world's best Islamic University Facebook audience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 5. Conclusion

Social media has become a platform widely used by universities in conveying information and communicating with their audience during the covid 19 pandemic. It is also applied to the best Islamic universities globally, which actively use various social media, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. Of the 12 universities studied, each university uses at least two of the four social media platforms above. Activeness in managing social media is one of the keys to achieving high feedback in every social media. The more content you post, the higher your total reactions, comments, and shares. Higher the responses to the post, the greater the chance for an account to get an increased number of fans.

From the content analysis conducted on the top post content on the Instagram and Facebook platforms, there are similar symptoms where three content categories dominate. The three categories are Experiential Brand Post, Brand Resonance, and Brand Community. Experiential Brand Posts, with the highest number of content categories, present content that stimulates the audience's sensory and behavioral responses by using photos or videos related to campus conditions amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Of the 12 content categories used, several categories are not visible in the top post, such as the Personal Brand Post and Customer Relationship categories. The absence of these two categories in the full post indicates that both categories are not much in demand by the audience, especially in content that emerged during the covid 19 pandemic.

Based on the analysis obtained, Islamic universities need to continue to manage social media to communicate policies and campus activities to their audiences. For marketers at universities, content with categories that appear a lot in top posts on university accounts can increase engagement on university social media. Policymakers can also consider the positive relationships shown in the statistical data to decide which platforms the strategies need to be implemented and adapted to the audience's characteristics where the university is located. For researchers, social media is a very dynamic platform and goes both ways. It is crucial to look at the development of a social media strategy from the university's perspective as a producer of existing content and from the audience's point of view as the party that significantly influences content success. For this reason, further research can be carried out related to how to analyze perceptions of the university's social media audience on the content that has been created to find out the response qualitatively from the audience side.

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## Authors contributions

- Mrs Nadia Wasta Utami was responsible for study design, data analysis, and writing in finding and analysis section.
- Mr Rizqi Anfanni Fahmi was responsible for writing the foreword/background and literature review section.
- Mr Narayana Mahendra Prastya was responsible for the literature review, proofread, and editing the manuscript.
- All authors read and approved the final manuscript and all author agrees about the authorship, with Mrs Utami become the first and corresponding author, Mr. Fahmi become the second author, and Mr Prastya become the third author.

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