

Strategic Social Media Management for Strengthening University Branding: Evidence from a Muhammadiyah University in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT: Social media has become an important strategic instrument for strengthening university branding; however, the application of the Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage (SOME) framework as an integrated managerial process in higher education remains underexplored. This study examines how Universitas Ahmad Dahlan strategically manages its Instagram content to strengthen institutional branding through the SOME framework. A qualitative case study design was employed involving four key informants from the university's Public Relations Division. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and Instagram content observation, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model supported by open, axial, and selective coding in ATLAS.ti 9. The findings indicate that effective university social media branding is achieved through four interconnected organizational capabilities: strategic orientation (Share), operational capability (Optimize), adaptive governance (Manage), and relational capability (Engage). Together, these capabilities form an integrated managerial cycle that aligns strategic planning, content development, performance evaluation, and stakeholder engagement to support sustainable university branding. This study extends the SOME framework by conceptualizing social media branding as an integrated managerial model for higher education and offers a practical framework for universities seeking to develop systematic and sustainable digital branding strategies.

Keywords: branding, content management, instagram, social media, university promotion

ABSTRAK: Media sosial telah menjadi instrumen strategis penting dalam memperkuat university branding. Namun, penerapan kerangka Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage (SOME) sebagai proses manajerial yang terintegrasi dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi masih belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Universitas Ahmad Dahlan mengelola konten Instagram secara strategis untuk memperkuat institutional branding melalui kerangka SOME. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan melibatkan empat informan kunci dari Divisi Humas Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, analisis dokumen, dan observasi konten Instagram, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang didukung oleh open, axial, dan selective coding melalui ATLAS.ti 9. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengelolaan media sosial yang efektif untuk membangun university branding diwujudkan melalui empat kapabilitas organisasi yang saling terhubung, yaitu orientasi strategis (Share), kapabilitas operasional (Optimize), tata kelola adaptif (Manage), dan kapabilitas relasional (Engage). Keempat kapabilitas tersebut membentuk siklus manajerial yang terintegrasi dengan menyelaraskan perencanaan strategis, pengembangan

konten, evaluasi kinerja, dan keterlibatan pemangku kepentingan untuk mendukung penguatan university branding secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini memperluas penerapan kerangka SOME dengan mengonseptualisasikan pengelolaan media sosial untuk university branding sebagai model manajerial yang terintegrasi dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi serta menawarkan kerangka praktis bagi perguruan tinggi dalam mengembangkan strategi digital branding yang sistematis dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: *branding, manajemen konten, Instagram, media sosial, promosi universitas.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has transformed the way institutions communicate and interact with the public. In Indonesia, internet penetration has reached more than 210 million users, positioning social media as one of the most widely used channels for obtaining information, exchanging knowledge, and shaping public perceptions (Annur, 2022; APJII, 2022). Among the various platforms available, Instagram stands out because of its strong visual orientation, accessibility, and capacity to support interactive engagement through feeds, stories, reels, and hashtags (Muntazzahra & Rachmawati, 2023; Wijayanti, 2021). These features make Instagram a strategic tool for universities seeking to strengthen visibility and institutional reputation.

Branding in higher education plays an essential role in building public understanding, trust, support, and cooperation toward an institution (Yulianita, 2007). Ideally, university branding is formed through consistent messaging, strong identity construction, and meaningful engagement with stakeholders. Contemporary branding perspectives emphasize the importance of narrative strength, emotional resonance, and user experience within digital environments, not merely visual identity (O'Sullivan et al., 2024). As social media increasingly becomes a primary information source for prospective students and parents, universities must develop professional and strategic digital communication practices to remain competitive.

In practice, however, effective use of Instagram for educational branding continues to face several challenges. Previous research highlights issues such as limited human resources, inadequate digital skills, inconsistent content production, irregular posting schedules, and low audience reach (Irrianda, 2021; Puspita et al., 2022; Rabiulyfani & Salma, 2022). These problems hinder digital brand visibility and weaken institutional credibility. This gap between the ideal function of social media as a branding instrument and its actual implementation illustrates the need for a deeper understanding of how universities manage their digital content. Poorly managed content leads to fragmented messages, declining engagement, and a less competitive digital presence.

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), a leading Muhammadiyah higher education institution with excellent accreditation and strong national rankings, maintains a highly active Instagram presence with more than 75,000 followers and daily uploads as a result of effective brand activation (See Table 1 and Figure 1).

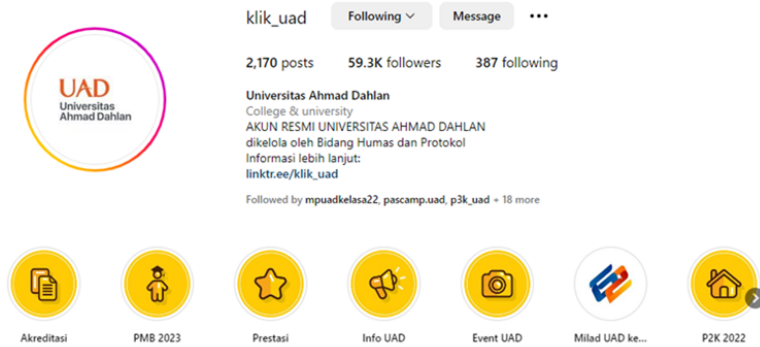


Figure 1. Instagram's Biography of UAD

Table 1. Brand activation strategi of UAD

Stage	UAD Implementation
Media Analysis	UAD utilizes alternative media to counter emerging issues and expands the functions of its social media platforms in a massive and coordinated manner.
Social Media Trinity	UAD adopts a more intensive strategy by leveraging social media platforms that appeal to millennial audiences, particularly Instagram.
Integrated Strategy	UAD's content primarily focuses on campus introduction and return-flow content to strengthen institutional visibility.
Sources of Content	UAD introduces the green building concept of the KPT UAD as a new trademark that reflects a modern, futuristic, and eco-friendly campus identity.
Implementation and Measurement	UAD enhances media exposure by highlighting achievements such as rankings in national private university assessments conducted by the Ministry of Education.

Despite this visibility, there has been no specific study that examines how UAD's Instagram content is managed in relation to strengthening university branding (Rasyid & Tunggal, 2022).



Figure 2. Circular model of SOME

Understanding how Instagram contributes to university branding is increasingly important in today's competitive higher education environment. Effective branding requires strategic planning, audience analysis, message optimization, systematic performance monitoring, and sustainable engagement. These principles align with key aspects of social media management, which include community building, information sharing, accessibility, and credibility (As' ad & Alhadid, 2014; Fandy, 2016). Together, these elements determine how institutions construct their reputations and communicate their identities to the public. To explain how these dynamics operate, this study applies the SOME model developed by Luttrell (2018), which consists of four components: Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage (See Figure 2).

The Share component addresses how institutions identify audiences and select platforms. The Optimize component focuses on improving content quality, message clarity, and visual strategy. The Manage component involves monitoring performance indicators, traffic, and alignment with institutional goals. The Engage component emphasizes interaction, responsiveness, and relationship-building with stakeholders.

Despite the rapid expansion of research on digital marketing, strategic communication, and university branding (Pawar, 2024; Rahmawan, 2026; Tran et al., 2026), empirical applications of the SOME framework within higher education remain limited, particularly in non-commercial educational institutions operating in developing digital ecosystems. Existing studies have predominantly conceptualized social media as a promotional channel and digital marketing instrument, with greater emphasis placed on branding outcomes, audience engagement, and platform effectiveness than on the managerial processes through which universities strategically govern social media for institutional branding (Lavandera et al., 2026; Pietrzak et al., 2025; Yaping et al., 2023). Furthermore, existing university branding studies have primarily examined branding antecedents, communication strategies, stakeholder perceptions, and branding outcomes, whereas relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how these activities are operationalized as an integrated managerial process within higher education institutions (Ahmed & ÇEKİRDEKÇİ, 2025; Berndt & Pantelic, 2025; Foroudi et al., 2020). These limitations reveal both a contextual gap and a theoretical gap in the existing literature. While social media branding frameworks have been widely developed in commercial settings, their underlying managerial assumptions may not fully reflect the realities of higher education institutions, which operate under distinct communication objectives, stakeholder configurations, and institutional missions (Chapleo, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

The novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing the SOME framework as an integrated managerial process for university branding within higher education. Theoretically, this study contributes by demonstrating how the four dimensions of the SOME framework collectively support institutional branding through an integrated social media management process.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Miles et al., 2014). A case study approach was selected because the research aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of how a university manages its Instagram content as part of its branding strategy. This approach enables the researcher to explore processes, practices, and contextual factors that shape the institution's digital communication activities.

The research was conducted at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), a Muhammadiyah university in Yogyakarta known for its active and strategically managed social media presence. Data collection took place between August and November 2023. Participants consisted of individuals directly involved in managing UAD's Instagram account: the Head of Public Relations and Protocol, social media strategists, designers, analysts, and administrative staff. These participants served as primary data sources because of their central role in planning, producing, and evaluating Instagram content for institutional branding, as follows in Table 3 below.

Table 2. Role of the participant

Participant Code	Position	Role
N1	Head of Public Relations and Protocol	Oversaw institutional branding strategy, supervised social media governance, and provided strategic insights into communication planning and decision-making.
N2	Social Media Strategist	Responsible for content planning, audience segmentation, campaign development, and performance evaluation of Instagram branding activities.
N3	Graphic Designer	Responsible for visual content production, brand identity implementation, and creative design aligned with institutional branding guidelines.
N4	Admin/ Social media operator	Managed daily Instagram operations, including content publishing, audience interaction, comment and direct message management, and platform monitoring.

Two techniques were used to collect data: semi-structured interviews and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to gather insights into content decision-making, workflow, branding objectives, and audience engagement strategies. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of the study. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted. Participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential, and all interview data were anonymized during analysis and

reporting. Documentation included reviewing content planning sheets, meeting notes, Instagram statistical reports, and the public-facing Instagram account. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide developed based on the four dimensions of the SOME framework, namely Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage. The guide consisted of open-ended questions that explored participants' experiences in planning, producing, managing, and evaluating Instagram content for institutional branding. Additional probing questions were used to clarify responses and obtain richer descriptions when necessary. Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes, was conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with participants' permission, and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model (2014), which comprises four iterative stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview transcripts and documents were coded using ATLAS.ti 9 to identify patterns and themes. Interview transcripts and supporting documents were managed and coded using ATLAS.ti 9 to facilitate systematic data organization, retrieval, and analysis. Within the data reduction stage, qualitative coding was conducted following the coding procedures proposed by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), consisting of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

During open coding, the data were examined line by line to identify meaningful concepts related to social media management and university branding. These initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories during axial coding by identifying conceptual relationships across participants' responses and documentary evidence. Finally, selective coding was undertaken to integrate these categories into overarching themes. The resulting themes were then interpreted through the lens of Luttrell's SOME framework and organized into the four analytical dimensions of Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage, enabling the empirical findings to be systematically connected with the study's conceptual framework and explaining how Instagram-based social media management contributes to institutional branding.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from different informants, while technique triangulation consisted of validating data across interviews and documentation. These procedures strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured that interpretations were supported by consistent evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Share: Goal Setting, Audience Identification, and Platform Selection

The findings indicate that UAD's Instagram management begins with clearly defined communication goals centered on institutional branding and soft selling. Participants consistently described branding as the primary purpose of the university's Instagram activities. The Head of Public Relations explained, "The Public Relations Division is responsible for building the Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

brand, both externally and internally. Everyone in the division understands that one of their primary responsibilities is to strengthen UAD's branding." This view was reinforced by another participant, who stated, "The main objective of Instagram management is to build the UAD brand."

Beyond branding, Instagram also serves as an indirect promotional medium for prospective students. One participant explained, "We focus on producing engaging content, particularly for prospective students." This soft-selling approach is reflected in storytelling content, student experience features, and visual narratives highlighting the university's academic strengths and campus life.

Audience identification emerged as another key element of the Share component. Participants consistently identified three primary audience groups, namely prospective students, current students, and parents. One participant noted, "Approximately 50% of our Instagram content targets current and prospective students, 30% is intended for internal audiences, and the remainder is directed toward external institutions." Another participant emphasized, "Our primary audience is clearly prospective students." Participants also recognized parents as an increasingly important stakeholder group, with one informant observing, "More and more parents are now actively using Instagram."

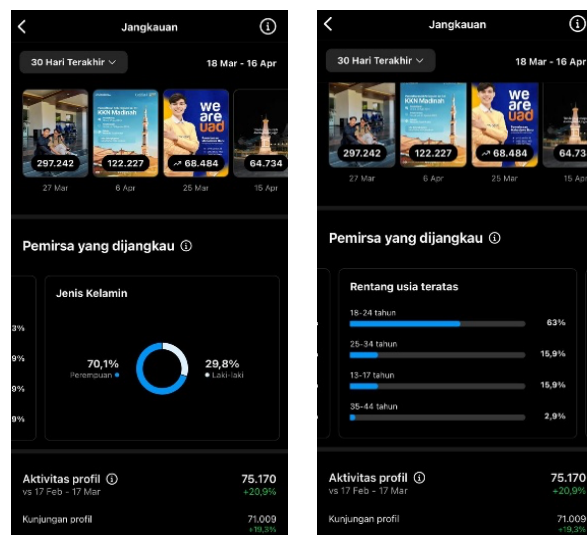


Figure 3. Audience demographics based on Instagram's insights

Figure 4 further supports these findings. Instagram Insights indicate that the dominant audience falls within the 18–24-year age group, closely matching the university's primary recruitment target. These audience characteristics influence decisions regarding content style, visual presentation, and communication tone.

Platform selection was likewise identified as a strategic consideration within the Share stage. Participants consistently regarded Instagram as the university's primary communication platform because of its effectiveness in disseminating institutional branding messages. One participant stated, "At present, Instagram remains the most effective platform for communicating UAD's branding." Another added, "Every educational institution has its own strategy, but for us, Instagram remains our primary platform." Internal survey findings further reinforced this perception, with one participant reporting that "Approximately 66.7% of students obtain university information through social media, particularly Instagram."

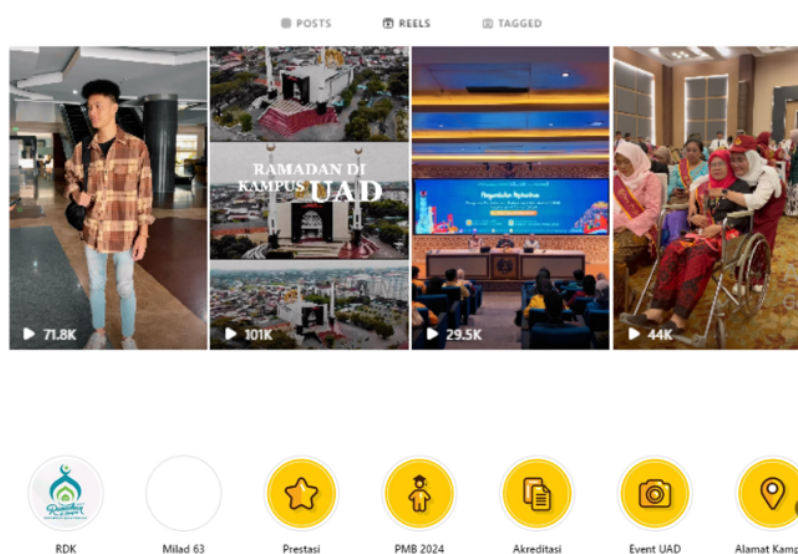


Figure 4. Overview of UAD's Main Instagram Feed Layout

The findings suggest that the Share component at UAD consists of three interconnected practices: establishing branding-oriented communication goals, identifying and segmenting strategic audiences, and selecting Instagram as the university's primary communication platform. These practices provide the strategic foundation for subsequent content optimization, performance management, and audience engagement activities.

Optimize: Content Planning, Production Workflow, and Resource Support

The findings indicate that the Optimize component is reflected in a structured yet adaptive content management process encompassing content planning, production, and resource utilization. Content planning begins with informal brainstorming sessions and routine team discussions to identify ideas that align with institutional branding objectives. Participants explained that content ideas are often inspired by emerging social media trends while remaining relevant to the university's identity. As one participant stated, "Content ideas usually originate within our team. When a topic becomes popular, we look for ways to make it relevant to UAD." Another participant added, "We first identify what is currently trending, then evaluate whether it fits UAD's identity before developing the content."

Planning activities are further supported by systematic benchmarking. Participants reported regularly monitoring content published by leading universities, government agencies, and other established institutional accounts to identify effective communication styles and emerging content formats. One participant explained, “Many of our references come from well-established accounts, such as major universities and government ministries.” This benchmarking process helps ensure that UAD's content remains relevant, competitive, and aligned with current digital communication practices.

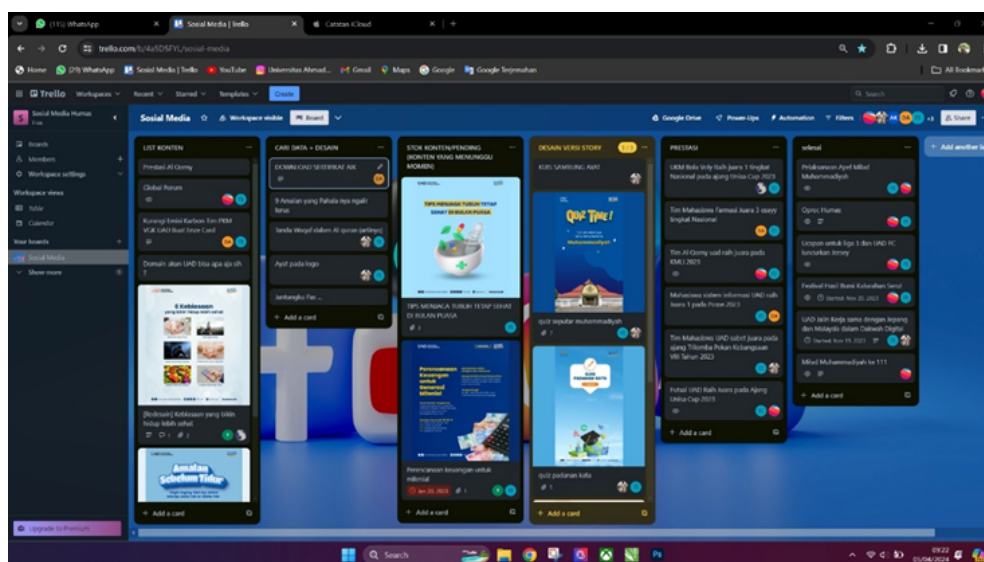


Figure 5. Example of Content Planning Board (Content Canvas / Ideation Format)

Content production follows a collaborative yet flexible workflow involving script development, graphic design, copywriting, and caption preparation. Rather than relying on rigid production procedures, participants emphasized flexibility while maintaining consistency with institutional branding standards. As one participant noted, “Our workflow is not overly formal. We prioritize flexibility as long as the final output meets our quality standards.” Particular attention is given to visual consistency, with another participant emphasizing, “Every design should remain consistent with UAD's visual identity, including its colors and overall style.”

The production process also incorporates continuous trend adaptation. Participants described regularly monitoring viral content formats and selectively modifying them to suit the university's institutional identity. One participant explained, “When a trend emerges, we evaluate which aspects can be adopted and then modify them to fit UAD.” Rather than replicating popular content directly, the team adapts trending formats to communicate academic values while preserving the university's professional image, as seen in figure 7.



Figure 6. Example of trend-based content adaptation

Collaboration emerged as another important aspect of the Optimize component. Participants described content production as a collaborative process involving both internal and external stakeholders. Internally, the Public Relations Division coordinates with faculties, student organizations, and event committees to obtain timely information and visual materials. One participant explained, “For major events, we usually coordinate with faculties or organizing committees to obtain photographs and supporting information.” Externally, the team also collaborates with photographers, videographers, and, when appropriate, social media influencers to enhance content quality and broaden audience reach.

The findings further indicate that institutional resource support contributes substantially to content optimization. Participants emphasized that adequate funding, professional equipment, and competent human resources enable the division to maintain efficient content production. As one participant noted, “Fortunately, funding and equipment have been adequately provided.” Another participant highlighted the team's specialized expertise, stating, “Our team consists of competent personnel, including specialists in graphic design, analytics, and social media administration.” These resources enable the division to maintain both production quality and workflow efficiency.

Optimization also extends to caption development and message refinement. Participants explained that captions are carefully adjusted to balance clarity, audience engagement, and institutional identity. One participant stated, “Captions are important. They should not be too long or overly formal, but should instead be adapted to the intended audience.” In practice, captions frequently incorporate storytelling techniques, motivational expressions, and campus-specific terminology to improve readability while reinforcing the university's branding messages.

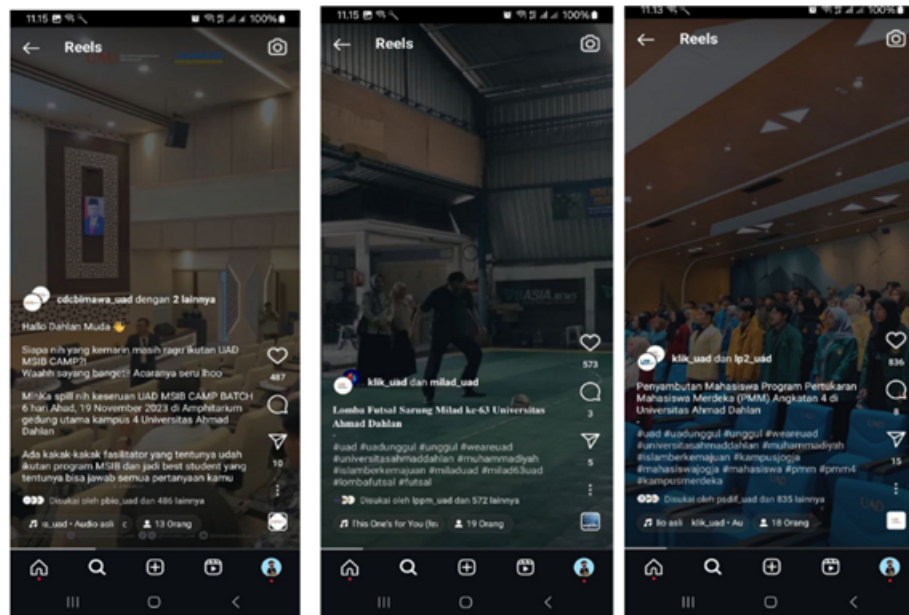


Figure 7. Content Optimization Example (Caption + Visual Branding Alignment)

The Optimize stage demonstrates UAD's efforts to refine content through structured planning, adaptive trend usage, flexible production, collaborative coordination, and strong institutional support. These practices ensure that posted content remains visually consistent, contextually relevant, and aligned with the university's branding direction.

Manage: Performance Monitoring, Evaluation Practices, and Strategic Adjustments

The findings indicate that the Manage component is characterized by continuous performance monitoring and systematic evaluation to ensure that Instagram activities remain aligned with the university's communication objectives. Participants consistently described Instagram Insights as the primary tool for monitoring content performance, including reach, engagement, content interactions, and follower growth. One participant explained, "We monitor Instagram Insights to identify which posts achieve the highest reach and engagement, and these metrics become the basis for our evaluation." Another participant added, "Someone monitors the statistics every day, allowing us to identify which content performs well and which requires improvement."

Performance monitoring is complemented by regular evaluation meetings in which the social media team reviews the effectiveness of published content and identifies areas requiring adjustment. One participant stated, "We usually conduct weekly or monthly evaluations to determine which content is effective and which has less impact." These evaluation sessions inform subsequent decisions regarding content development, posting schedules, and creative approaches, enabling the team to continuously refine its communication strategy.

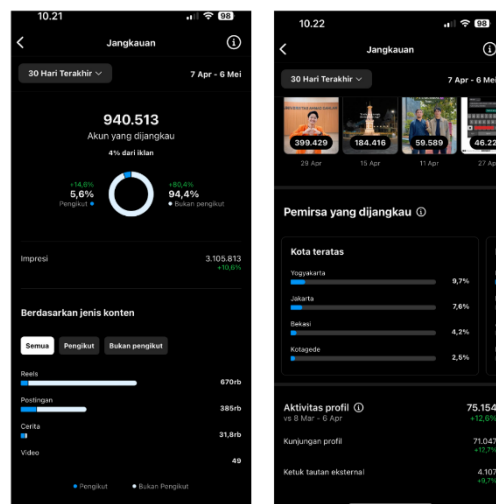


Figure 8. Example of Instagram Insights Used in UAD's Evaluation Process

Management practices also extend to audience responsiveness. Participants explained that direct messages, comments, and tagged posts are monitored continuously to ensure timely responses to audience inquiries and concerns. One participant stated, "The administrator continuously monitors direct messages and comments to ensure that every inquiry receives a prompt response." This ongoing interaction was considered essential for maintaining a positive institutional image and strengthening communication with stakeholders.

Performance management is further supported by complementary evaluation mechanisms beyond platform analytics. Participants reported conducting informal internal surveys to better understand students' information needs and content preferences. One participant explained, "We occasionally conduct informal surveys to understand what students need and what they expect from UAD's Instagram content." The findings from these surveys are subsequently used to refine content planning and improve the relevance of future posts.

Management activities also involve institutional oversight. Participants noted that university leaders regularly observe the performance of the official Instagram account and provide feedback on published content. As one participant explained, "University leaders usually appreciate content that successfully attracts public attention, and this serves as additional motivation for our team." Such organizational support reinforces accountability while encouraging continuous improvements in communication quality and branding consistency.

Beyond internal monitoring, participants described external recognition as an additional indicator of performance. Achievements reflected in institutional rankings, media exposure, and public appreciation are considered evidence of successful communication practices. One participant remarked, "Our media exposure can be seen through rankings and the recognition we receive, which also serves as an important form of evaluation." These external achievements complement internal performance metrics and provide further motivation for continuous improvement.

The findings demonstrate that the Manage component encompasses continuous performance monitoring, audience responsiveness, complementary evaluation mechanisms, institutional oversight, and external performance recognition. Together, these interconnected practices enable UAD to maintain a data-informed, adaptive, and strategically aligned approach to Instagram management while supporting its institutional branding objectives.

Engage: Audience Interaction, Responsiveness, and Relationship Building

The findings indicate that the Engage component is characterized by continuous audience interaction, responsiveness, and relationship-building practices designed to strengthen the university's digital presence. Participants consistently emphasized that maintaining timely communication with followers constitutes an essential aspect of Instagram management. One participant explained, "Administrators continuously monitor direct messages and comments to ensure that every inquiry receives a response and nothing is overlooked." This demonstrates that responsiveness is regarded not merely as a customer service activity but as an important mechanism for maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders.

Participants further described responsiveness as extending beyond answering questions to providing information, clarifying inquiries, and directing users to appropriate university units. One participant noted, "Whenever questions arise, we try to respond as quickly as possible so that our audience feels acknowledged." Prompt responses were consistently perceived as an expression of the university's digital hospitality, helping to foster trust and reinforce institutional credibility.

Engagement also involves encouraging audience participation through user-generated content. Participants explained that posts tagging the university are frequently acknowledged through reposts or direct responses. As one participant stated, "Whenever someone tags UAD, we usually repost or respond so they feel appreciated." Such practices strengthen students' sense of belonging while simultaneously expanding the university's organic visibility on Instagram.

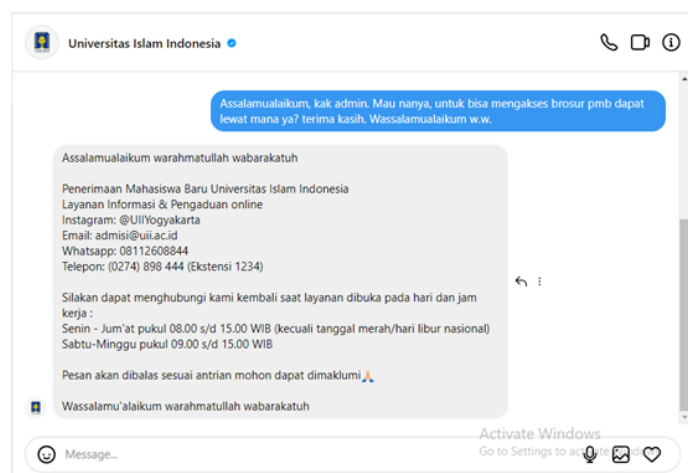


Figure 9. Example of audience interaction through comments and direct messages

Beyond reactive communication, participants described several proactive engagement strategies aimed at increasing audience participation. Interactive Instagram features, including polls, question boxes, and reaction stickers, are regularly incorporated into Stories to stimulate two-way communication. One participant explained, "We often use interactive Story features so that audiences actively participate rather than simply viewing our content." These interactions also provide immediate feedback regarding audience interests and preferences.

Participants additionally emphasized the importance of communication ethics and content moderation. Sensitive issues, misinformation, and inappropriate comments are monitored continuously to safeguard the university's reputation. One participant explained, "We have to be cautious when dealing with sensitive comments or issues. If something has the potential to harm the institution, we respond immediately." This moderation process contributes to maintaining a constructive communication environment while protecting institutional credibility.

Engagement is further supported by consistent posting practices. Participants noted that maintaining a regular posting schedule encourages sustained audience interaction and improves content visibility. As one participant stated, "Consistency is important because regular posting encourages our audience to interact more actively." Consequently, content schedules are strategically organized to maximize audience participation throughout the week.

Participants also recognized that these engagement practices contribute directly to the university's public image. One participant observed, "Many people say that UAD's administrators are highly responsive, and that has become a positive image for the university." This finding suggests that sustained interaction not only strengthens relationships with followers but also reinforces perceptions of UAD as a responsive and student-centered institution.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Engage component integrates responsive communication, audience participation, proactive interaction, ethical moderation, and consistent communication into a continuous relationship-building process. Together, these practices strengthen stakeholder engagement while supporting UAD's broader institutional branding objectives.

Discussion

The figure 11 was obtained through a systematic qualitative data analysis process. Research data derived from interviews, observations, and documentation were first transcribed and organized according to the respective data sources. The researcher then conducted coding to identify emerging themes, categories, subcategories, and relationships among concepts. The codes were subsequently grouped based on similarities in meaning and their relevance to the research focus. The next stage involved analyzing relationships among the codes to map conceptual connections. The resulting relationships were then visualized using qualitative data analysis software, producing the network/concept map presented in the figure. Finally, the visualization was reviewed and interpreted in accordance with the research findings.

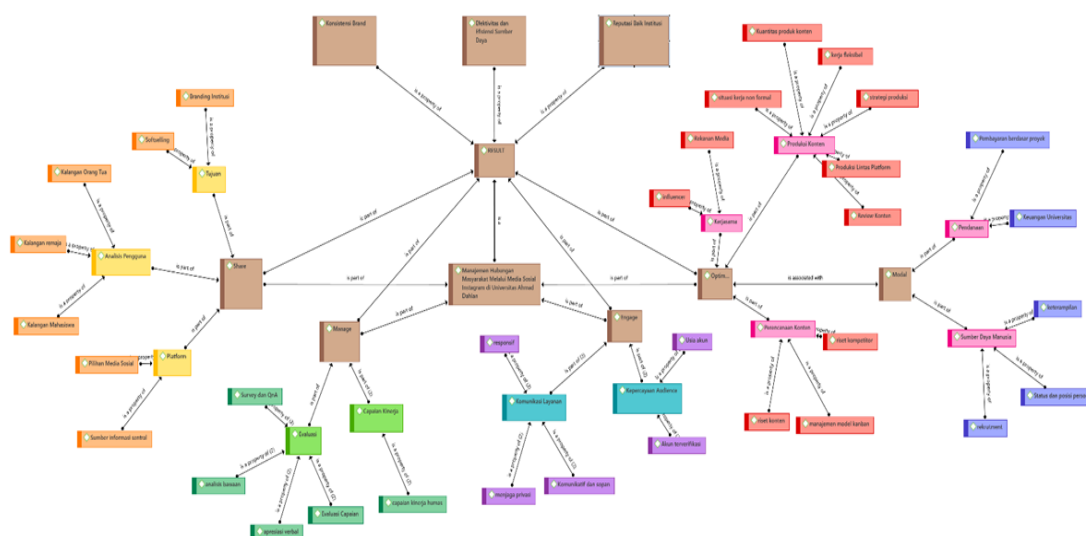


Figure 10. Visualization of the management of social media in UAD

Share: Strategic Goal Alignment, Audience Segmentation, and Platform Determination

The findings indicate that the Share dimension extends beyond the dissemination of institutional information and serves as the strategic foundation of university social media management. At UAD, branding objectives, audience segmentation, and platform selection were not treated as independent activities but as mutually reinforcing managerial decisions that guided subsequent content development, performance evaluation, and stakeholder engagement. This suggests that effective university branding begins with a clear strategic orientation in which communication goals determine both the intended audiences and the most appropriate digital platforms for institutional communication (Efendi & Ismail, 2025; Чернявська, 2025).

These findings are broadly consistent with previous studies emphasizing that successful university branding requires coherent communication strategies and audience-centered digital engagement (Capriotti et al., 2024; Galioto, Pedone, Vantarakis, Tavares, et al., 2025). Existing research has highlighted the importance of aligning branding objectives with institutional communication and selecting appropriate social media platforms to enhance institutional visibility and stakeholder awareness (Eriani et al., 2025). However, whereas previous studies have primarily discussed these elements as separate components of digital marketing or strategic communication, the present findings demonstrate that they function as an integrated managerial process in which strategic decisions made during the Share stage influence the implementation of subsequent branding activities.

A distinctive characteristic of the present study is the broader stakeholder orientation observed within the Indonesian higher education context. Unlike many international studies that primarily position prospective students as the principal target of university branding (Bamberger et al., 2020), UAD simultaneously recognizes current students and parents as strategic audiences. This broader audience configuration reflects the organizational characteristics of

Indonesian private universities, where institutional reputation is shaped not only through student recruitment but also through family involvement, community expectations, and long-term institutional trust (Jati et al., 2021). Consequently, audience segmentation serves both promotional and relational purposes within the university's communication strategy.

Theoretically, these findings contribute to the application of the SOME framework by demonstrating that the Share dimension should be understood as a strategic managerial capability rather than merely an initial communication activity. In the context of higher education, Share establishes the strategic direction that governs subsequent processes of content optimization, performance management, and stakeholder engagement. This interpretation expands the application of the SOME framework beyond its predominantly commercial orientation by positioning strategic communication as the organizing mechanism through which institutional branding is systematically developed within universities (Al Yahyaei & Al Senani, 2025; De Villiers et al., 2025).

Optimize: Content Planning, Creative Production, Media Convergence, and Resource Strengthening

The findings suggest that the Optimize dimension represents the operational capability through which institutional branding strategies are translated into effective social media content. Rather than focusing solely on improving the visual quality of posts, optimization at UAD encompasses a coordinated process of content planning, creative production, benchmarking, trend adaptation, and resource utilization. This indicates that optimization is not merely a technical activity but a strategic process that transforms branding objectives into communication outputs capable of reaching and engaging targeted audiences (Calina, 2025).

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that effective digital branding requires systematic planning, creative content development, and continuous adaptation to audience preferences and platform dynamics (Eriani et al., 2025). Existing research has demonstrated that content quality, visual consistency, and storytelling contribute significantly to institutional branding and online engagement (Kumar T.P et al., 2026). However, the present study extends these findings by illustrating how optimization is achieved through the integration of planning, benchmarking, production workflows, and institutional resource management rather than through isolated content creation activities. This integrated perspective highlights optimization as an organizational process rather than an individual creative function.

An important contextual characteristic identified in this study is the adaptive integration of contemporary social media trends with the institutional identity of an Indonesian private university. While studies conducted in commercial settings frequently encourage rapid adoption of trending content formats to maximize visibility (Nguyen et al., 2025), UAD selectively modifies these trends to ensure consistency with academic values, institutional reputation, and organizational identity. This balancing process reflects the distinctive

communication environment of higher education institutions, where maintaining institutional credibility is as important as increasing audience engagement. Furthermore, optimization is supported by collaborative coordination among public relations staff, faculty, student organizations, and external creative partners, demonstrating that effective university branding depends on organizational collaboration rather than individual content creators alone (Yuan et al., 2026).

Theoretically, these findings broaden the application of the SOME framework by conceptualizing Optimize as an organizational capability that operationalizes strategic communication through coordinated planning, creative execution, and institutional resource integration. In the higher education context, optimization should therefore be understood not simply as improving content quality but as the managerial mechanism through which branding strategies are translated into coherent, consistent, and contextually appropriate digital communication. This interpretation reinforces the proposition that effective university branding emerges from integrated organizational processes rather than isolated communication activities (Omeraki & Ahmed, 2025).

Manage: Monitoring Analytics And Measuring Audience Response

The findings indicate that the Manage dimension functions as an adaptive governance mechanism through which social media activities are continuously monitored, evaluated, and refined to maintain alignment with institutional branding objectives. Rather than treating performance measurement as a routine reporting activity, UAD utilizes digital analytics, internal evaluation meetings, stakeholder feedback, and institutional oversight to support evidence-based decision-making. This suggests that social media management in higher education extends beyond content publication toward an iterative process of organizational learning, where communication strategies are continuously adjusted in response to performance outcomes and stakeholder expectations (Kwamboka, 2024; Stathopoulou et al., 2019).

These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the importance of performance monitoring and data-driven evaluation in improving organizational communication and digital branding effectiveness (Dorofyeyev et al., 2026). Existing research has demonstrated that social media analytics provide valuable information for measuring audience engagement, communication effectiveness, and institutional visibility (Bhatt et al., 2025). However, the present study expands this perspective by demonstrating that performance management in higher education involves not only quantitative platform metrics but also qualitative organizational processes, including internal coordination, leadership feedback, and complementary stakeholder evaluations. Consequently, managerial decisions are informed by multiple sources of evidence rather than relying exclusively on platform-generated analytics.

An important contextual characteristic emerging from this study is that performance evaluation is embedded within the university's governance structure rather than being delegated solely to social media administrators. Institutional

leaders actively monitor communication performance, provide strategic feedback, and recognize successful branding initiatives, thereby reinforcing organizational accountability and continuous improvement. This finding differs from many commercially oriented social media management studies, where evaluation is typically driven by marketing indicators and customer conversion metrics (Samarth & Tandan, 2025). In contrast, the findings suggest that universities evaluate communication performance using broader institutional indicators, including organizational reputation, stakeholder trust, and public recognition, reflecting the distinctive governance structure of Indonesian higher education institutions (Mahbubi et al., 2025; Țițu & Flucsă, 2014).

Theoretically, these findings broaden the application of the SOME framework by conceptualizing the Manage dimension as an adaptive governance capability rather than merely a performance monitoring function. Within higher education, management activities facilitate continuous organizational learning by integrating digital analytics, institutional feedback, and strategic decision making into an ongoing improvement cycle. This interpretation reinforces the argument that effective university branding depends not only on producing high-quality content but also on the organization's capacity to evaluate, adapt, and refine its communication strategies over time. Consequently, the Manage dimension serves as the mechanism that connects operational implementation with long-term institutional branding sustainability (Figueiró et al., 2022; Giraldo-Giraldo et al., 2025).

Engage: Relationship Building and Institutional Trust

The findings indicate that the Engage dimension functions as a relational capability through which universities cultivate long-term relationships with stakeholders rather than merely increasing online interaction. At UAD, engagement extends beyond responding to comments and direct messages by emphasizing responsiveness, audience participation, ethical communication, and sustained interaction. These practices suggest that engagement is not simply an indicator of social media activity but a strategic process through which institutional trust, credibility, and stakeholder commitment are continuously developed (Galioto et al., 2025).

These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that active interaction and two-way communication strengthen stakeholder engagement and enhance institutional reputation in digital environments (Bayraktar et al., 2025). Existing research has demonstrated that timely responses, user-generated content, and interactive platform features contribute positively to audience participation and relationship quality (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). However, the present study extends these findings by illustrating that engagement within higher education is not solely intended to increase visibility or interaction metrics. Instead, engagement functions as a relationship-building process in which communication practices reinforce institutional legitimacy, strengthen stakeholder trust, and sustain long-term organizational reputation.

A distinctive contextual characteristic identified in this study is the emphasis placed on communication ethics and institutional responsibility throughout audience interactions. Unlike commercially oriented organizations that frequently prioritize customer acquisition and marketing conversion, UAD approaches engagement as part of its educational and institutional mission. Responsiveness is therefore accompanied by careful moderation of sensitive issues, protection of institutional credibility, and communication practices that reflect academic values and organizational integrity. This finding suggests that social media engagement within Indonesian higher education is shaped not only by platform dynamics but also by institutional norms, public accountability, and broader educational responsibilities (Hermita et al., 2023).

Theoretically, these findings broaden the application of the SOME framework by conceptualizing the Engage dimension as a relational capability that sustains institutional branding through continuous stakeholder interaction and trust development. Within higher education, engagement should therefore be understood as an ongoing governance process that integrates responsiveness, participation, ethical communication, and relationship maintenance rather than merely a strategy for maximizing audience interaction. This perspective reinforces the proposition that sustainable university branding depends not only on attracting public attention but also on maintaining meaningful and trustworthy relationships with diverse stakeholder groups over time (Yuan et al., 2026).

Toward an Integrated Managerial Process of University Social Media Branding

The findings of this study demonstrate that the SOME framework should not be understood as four independent managerial dimensions but as an integrated managerial process through which universities systematically develop and sustain institutional branding. Rather than operating sequentially or in isolation, the four dimensions are interconnected and continuously reinforce one another. Strategic communication objectives established during the Share stage provide direction for content optimization, which subsequently informs performance monitoring and strategic adjustments during the Manage stage. The insights generated through continuous evaluation then strengthen stakeholder interaction and relationship building during the Engage stage, while feedback obtained through engagement informs subsequent communication planning. Consequently, social media branding emerges as a continuous organizational learning cycle rather than a linear communication process (Capriotti et al., 2023).

Based on these findings, this study advances an integrated managerial model of university social media branding (Figure X). The circular configuration of the model illustrates the iterative nature of institutional communication, where each managerial capability continuously influences and strengthens the others. Unlike conventional applications of the SOME framework that frequently describe Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage as separate functional components, the proposed model conceptualizes them as interdependent organizational capabilities that collectively support sustainable university branding. Within this model, Share functions as the strategic orientation capability, Optimize represents

the operational capability that translates strategy into communication outputs, Manage serves as the adaptive governance capability responsible for organizational learning and strategic refinement, and Engage functions as the relational capability through which institutional trust and stakeholder commitment are continuously developed.

The proposed model contributes theoretically by extending the application of the SOME framework beyond its predominantly commercial orientation into the context of higher education. Rather than emphasizing isolated communication activities, the model demonstrates that social media branding within universities is fundamentally an integrated managerial process shaped by institutional governance, organizational collaboration, continuous evaluation, and stakeholder relationships. This process-oriented perspective provides a more comprehensive conceptual explanation of how higher education institutions strategically manage social media to strengthen institutional branding in digitally connected environments (Omeraki & Ahmed, 2025; Sarder & Mustaqeem, 2024).

From a practical perspective, the proposed model offers a systematic managerial framework that may guide university communication offices in planning, implementing, evaluating, and continuously improving social media branding strategies. By integrating strategic planning, operational execution, adaptive management, and stakeholder engagement into a continuous managerial cycle, universities may strengthen both institutional visibility and long-term organizational reputation while maintaining alignment with their educational mission and institutional values.

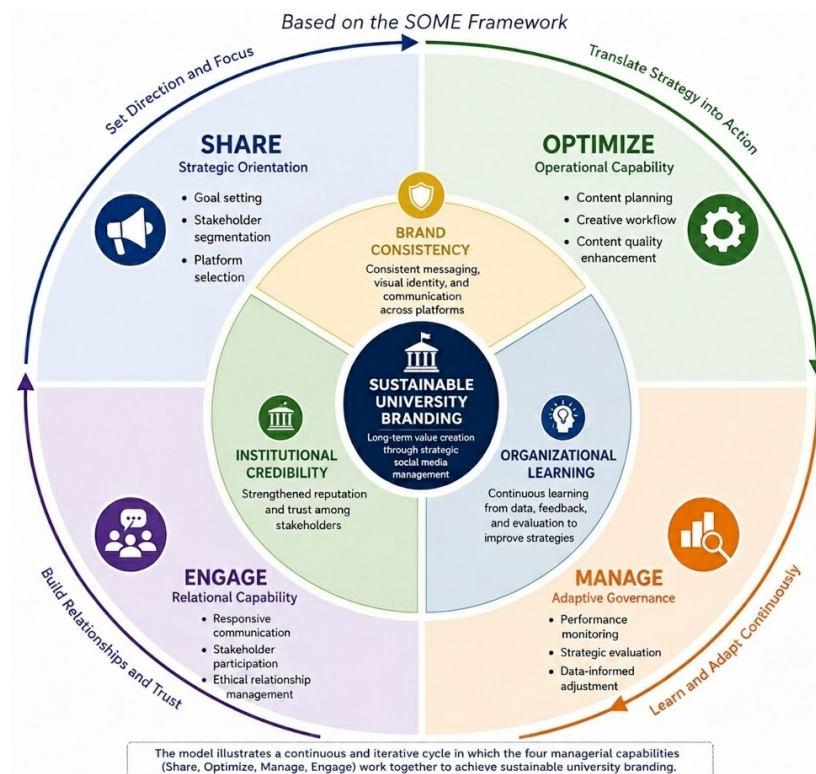


Figure 11. Model of An Integrated Managerial Model of University Social Media Branding

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that effective university social media branding should be understood as an integrated managerial process rather than a series of isolated communication activities. Drawing upon the SOME framework, the findings reveal that the four dimensions of Share, Optimize, Manage, and Engage function as interconnected organizational capabilities that collectively support sustainable university branding. Share provides the strategic orientation for institutional communication, Optimize translates branding strategies into coordinated content production, Manage facilitates adaptive governance through continuous evaluation and organizational learning, and Engage strengthens institutional trust through sustained stakeholder relationships. Together, these dimensions operate as a continuous managerial cycle that enables universities to systematically develop and sustain institutional branding through social media.

The proposed integrated managerial model extends the application of the SOME framework from its predominantly commercial orientation to the higher education context by conceptualizing social media branding as an interconnected organizational process rather than a collection of communication functions. This perspective contributes to university branding scholarship while offering a practical framework for communication offices to align strategic planning, content optimization, adaptive performance management, and stakeholder engagement in developing sustainable institutional branding.

This study is limited to a single case study conducted at one Muhammadiyah university and focuses exclusively on Instagram as the primary social media platform. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within their specific organizational and cultural context. Future studies may validate and refine the proposed model through comparative research involving different types of higher education institutions, multiple social media platforms, and diverse national contexts. Quantitative or mixed-method approaches are also recommended to examine the relationships among the proposed organizational capabilities and their contribution to sustainable university branding.

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