

**Social Media Marketing in Public and Private Universities in Kazakhstan: A
Comparative Case Study**

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Dear:

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This letter now confirms that your research project titled “*Comparative Analysis of Social Media Marketing Strategies in Public and Private Universities*” has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

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Abstract

Social Media Marketing in Public and Private Universities in Kazakhstan: A Comparative Case Study

This study examines how public and private universities in Kazakhstan conceptualize and implement social media marketing (SMM), how their strategies converge and diverge, and how these patterns can inform more effective communication frameworks in higher education. Situated within the context of globalization, marketization, and digital transformation, the research addresses a gap in existing literature, which is largely dominated by Western and quantitative approaches. A qualitative comparative case study design was employed, involving semi-structured interviews with university staff and undergraduate students, as well as analysis of institutional documents and official websites. The study is guided by Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory, enabling interpretation of both shared practices and institutional variation. The findings reveal that both public and private universities treat social media as a central communication channel and demonstrate convergence in platform use, particularly Instagram, as well as in the growing importance of visual and video-based content. However, significant differences emerge in strategic orientation, platform logic, content formats, and communication style. The private university adopts a more market-oriented and recruitment-driven approach, emphasizing opportunities, partnerships, and student experience, while the public university prioritizes institutional integrity, formal communication, and representation of academic achievements. Student-generated content and perceived authenticity play a critical role in shaping engagement and trust across both contexts. The study concludes that SMM functions not merely as a promotional tool but as a strategic institutional practice shaped by both field-level pressures and resource dependencies. The study recommends that universities develop integrated SMM frameworks that combine centralized strategic oversight with flexible

student-centered content production, including platform-specific communication plans and structured student ambassador or co-creation programs. The findings contribute to theory by integrating institutional and resource-based perspectives and offering practical implications for developing more context-sensitive, student-centered, and strategically aligned SMM frameworks in Kazakhstan and similar higher education systems.

Аңдатпа

Қазақстандағы мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттердегі әлеуметтік желілердегі маркетинг: салыстырмалы жағдайлық зерттеу

Бұл зерттеу Қазақстандағы мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттердің әлеуметтік желілердегі маркетингті (SMM) қалай түсінетінін және жүзеге асыратынын, олардың стратегияларының ұқсастықтары мен айырмашылықтарын, сондай-ақ бұл үрдістердің жоғары білім беру жүйесінде тиімді коммуникациялық модельдерді дамытуға қалай ықпал ететінін талдайды. Зерттеу жаһандану, нарықтандыру және цифрландыру жағдайында жүргізіліп, қазіргі әдебиеттердегі батысқа бағытталған және сандық зерттеулердің басымдығынан туындайтын олқылықтарды толықтыруды мақсат етеді. Зерттеу барысында сапалық салыстырмалы жағдайлық зерттеу әдісі қолданылды: университет қызметкерлерімен және студенттермен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбаттар жүргізіліп, институционалдық құжаттар мен ресми сайттар талданды. Теориялық негіз ретінде неоинституционалдық теория және ресурстық тәуелділік теориясы пайдаланылды, бұл ортақ тәжірибелер мен институционалдық айырмашылықтарды түсіндіруге мүмкіндік берді. Нәтижелер көрсеткендей, екі типтегі университеттер де әлеуметтік желілерді негізгі коммуникация арнасы ретінде қарастырады және платформаларды қолдануда, әсіресе Instagram-да, сондай-ақ визуалды және бейне контенттің маңыздылығының артуында ұқсастықтар байқалады. Дегенмен, стратегиялық бағыт, платформаларды қолдану логикасы, контент форматтары және коммуникация стилі бойынша айырмашылықтар анықталды. Жекеменшік университет нарыққа бағытталған, талапкерлерді тартуға негізделген стратегияны ұстанып, мүмкіндіктерді, серіктестіктерді және студенттік тәжірибені көрсетеді, ал мемлекеттік университет институционалдық беделге, ресми коммуникацияға және академиялық жетістіктерді көрсетуге басымдық береді. Екі

жағдайда да студенттер жасаған контент пен шынайылық қабылдауы аудиторияның сенімі мен қатысуына маңызды әсер етеді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде SMM тек жарнамалық құрал емес, институционалдық қысымдар мен ресурстық тәуелділікке негізделген стратегиялық тәжірибе екені анықталды. Зерттеу университеттерге орталықтандырылған стратегиялық басқаруды икемді, студентке бағытталған контент өндірумен үйлестіретін, сондай-ақ платформаға тән коммуникациялық жоспарлар мен құрылымдалған студенттік амбассадорлық немесе бірлесіп контент жасау бағдарламаларын қамтитын интеграцияланған SMM жүйелерін әзірлеуді ұсынады. Зерттеу теориялық тұрғыда маңызды үлес қосып, Қазақстан және ұқсас білім беру жүйелері үшін тиімді, контекстке бейімделген SMM модельдерін әзірлеуге практикалық ұсыныстар береді.

Аннотация

Маркетинг в социальных сетях в государственных и частных университетах

Казахстана: сравнительное кейс-исследование

Данное исследование направлено на изучение того, как государственные и частные университеты Казахстана концептуализируют и реализуют маркетинг в социальных сетях (SMM), в чем проявляются сходства и различия их стратегий, а также каким образом эти особенности могут способствовать разработке более эффективных коммуникационных моделей в системе высшего образования. Исследование проводится в контексте глобализации, маркетингизации и цифровой трансформации и восполняет существующий пробел в научной литературе, которая преимущественно сосредоточена на западных и количественных исследованиях. В работе используется качественный сравнительный кейс-метод, включающий полуструктурированные интервью с сотрудниками университетов и студентами, а также анализ институциональных документов и официальных сайтов. Теоретическую основу составляют неoinституциональная теория и теория ресурсной зависимости, что позволяет объяснить как сходства, так и различия в институциональных практиках. Результаты показывают, что как государственные, так и частные университеты рассматривают социальные сети как ключевой канал коммуникации, демонстрируя схожесть в использовании платформ, особенно Instagram, а также в растущей роли визуального и видео-контента. Вместе с тем выявлены существенные различия в стратегической ориентации, логике использования платформ, форматах контента и стиле коммуникации. Частный университет ориентирован на рынок и привлечение абитуриентов, акцентируя внимание на возможностях, партнерствах и студенческом опыте, тогда как государственный университет делает упор на институциональную легитимность, официальную коммуникацию и демонстрацию академических

достижений. Пользовательский контент и восприятие аутентичности играют важную роль в формировании доверия и вовлеченности в обоих случаях. В целом исследование показывает, что SMM выступает не просто как инструмент продвижения, а как стратегическая институциональная практика, формируемая внешними давлениями и ресурсной зависимостью. Исследование рекомендует университетам разрабатывать интегрированные SMM-стратегии, сочетающие централизованное стратегическое управление с гибким, ориентированным на студентов созданием контента, включая платформо-специфические коммуникационные планы и структурированные программы студенческих амбассадоров или совместного создания контента. Полученные результаты вносят вклад в теорию и предлагают практические рекомендации для разработки более адаптированных и эффективных SMM-стратегий в Казахстане и аналогичных образовательных системах.

Table of Contents

Author Agreement	ii
Declaration.....	iv
Ethical Approval	v
CITI Training Certificate	vi
Acknowledgments.....	vii
Abstract	viii
Аңдатпа	x
Аннотация.....	xii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem.....	4
Purpose of the Research.....	5
Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study	6
Definition of Terms.....	8
Thesis Outline	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	12
Marketing in Higher Education	12
<i>From Traditional to Digital Marketing</i>	13
Social Media Marketing in Higher Education	13
<i>Strategic Adoption and the Shift Toward Digitalization</i>	13
<i>Content, Engagement Patterns, and Storytelling Strategies</i>	14
<i>Market Mavens</i>	16
Public and Private Universities comparison	16
<i>Institutional strategy priorities</i>	17
<i>Programme portfolios</i>	17
<i>Student perceptions of quality and trust</i>	17
<i>Resources and competitive positioning</i>	18
<i>Digital communication practices</i>	18
Social Media Marketing in Kazakhstani Higher Education	19
Research Gaps.....	21
Theoretical Framework.....	22
Summary	24
Chapter 3: Methodology	26

Research design	26
Cases/Rationale.....	27
Sampling and Participants.....	28
Data collection tools	29
Procedure	31
Data Analysis.....	32
Ethical considerations	36
Positionality	38
Summary	39
Chapter 4: Findings.....	41
Introduction to findings.....	41
What are the social media marketing strategies of public and private universities?	42
The case of Private University	42
<i>Organizational Structure and Resource</i>	42
<i>Platform Strategy</i>	43
<i>Content Formats</i>	45
<i>Communication Style and Tone</i>	46
<i>Content Themes</i>	47
<i>Engagement</i>	48
<i>Visual Branding</i>	49
<i>Posting Frequency</i>	50
The case of Public University	50
<i>Organizational Structure and Resource Support</i>	50
<i>Platform Strategy</i>	51
<i>Content Formats</i>	52
<i>Communication Style and Tone</i>	53
<i>Content Themes and Messaging</i>	54
<i>Engagement Strategy</i>	55
<i>Visual Branding Strategy</i>	56
<i>Posting Frequency and Campaign Timing</i>	57
How do social media marketing strategies differ and are similar at public and private universities? (RQ2)	58
<i>Strategic Orientation and content</i>	58
<i>Organizational Structure</i>	59
<i>Platform Strategy</i>	60

<i>Content Formats</i>	61
<i>Communication Style</i>	62
<i>Student Participation and User-Generated Content</i>	62
<i>Authenticity</i>	63
How can the insights from this comparative analysis inform the development of more effective SMM frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan? (RQ3)	64
<i>Strategic Alignment Between Communication and Institutional Goals</i>	64
<i>Developing Structured but Flexible Communication Teams</i>	65
<i>Integrating Multi-Platform Communication Strategies</i>	66
<i>Prioritizing Video-Based and Visually Engaging Content</i>	66
<i>Encouraging Student Participation in Content Creation</i>	67
<i>Enhancing Transparency</i>	68
<i>Toward a Context-Sensitive SMM Framework for Kazakhstani Universities</i>	68
Summary	69
Chapter 5: Discussion	70
Introduction.....	70
<i>Strategic Orientation of Social Media Marketing</i>	71
<i>Platform Strategy and Communication Logic</i>	73
<i>Content Formats</i>	75
<i>Student-Generated Content</i>	77
<i>Authenticity, Trust, and Institutional Credibility</i>	78
<i>Communication Style, Language, and Institutional Positioning</i>	80
Summary	82
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	84
Introduction.....	84
Summary of Key Findings	84
Implications for Social Media Marketing Frameworks in Kazakhstani Higher Education.	86
Limitations and Future Research	87
Summary	90
References.....	91
Appendix A: AI Declaration Form	99
Appendix B: Informed consent form for staff participants.....	100
Appendix B: Қызметкерлерге арналған ақпараттық форма	102
Appendix B: Форма информационного согласия для сотрудников.....	104
Appendix C: Consent form for students	106

Appendix C: Студенттерге арналған ақпараттық форма	108
Appendix C: Форма информационного согласия для студентов	110
Appendix D: Invitation letter for staff	112
Appendix D: Қызметкерлерге арналған шақыру хаты	113
Appendix D: Пригласительное письмо для сотрудников	114
Appendix E: Invitation letter for students	115
Appendix E: Студенттерге арналған шақыру хаты	116
Appendix E: Пригласительное письмо для студентов	117
Appendix F: Interview protocol for staff	118
Appendix F: Қызметкерлерге арналған сұхбат хаттамасы	119
Appendix F: Интервью-протокол для сотрудников	120
Appendix G: Interview protocol for students	121
Appendix G: Студенттерге арналған сұхбат хаттамасы	122
Appendix G: Интервью-протокол для студентов	123
Appendix H: Interview coding	124

Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis introduces the research topic, the use of social media marketing (SMM) as a strategic communication tool in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan, with a focus on public and private universities. This chapter outlines the background of the study, identifies the research problem, and presents the study's objectives and research questions. It also discusses the significance of the research and its potential contributions to academic and practical understanding of institutional social media use. The chapter concludes with a summary that connects these elements and sets the stage for the subsequent chapters.

Background of the Study

In the twenty-first century, globalization and digital transformation have significantly reshaped the roles and operations of higher education institutions (HEIs). Universities today compete not only within national systems but also in international markets, where reputation, visibility, and stakeholder engagement have become essential components of institutional success (García-Rodríguez & Gutiérrez-Taño, 2021). Digital technologies have become central to these processes, influencing how universities manage communication, deliver educational services, and position themselves in increasingly competitive environments (OECD, 2022).

As higher education systems worldwide adopt more market-oriented models, universities face increasing pressure to attract students, diversify revenue streams, and demonstrate societal relevance (Pietrzak et al., 2025). Marketization has encouraged institutions to strengthen their external profiles, expand industry partnerships, and develop entrepreneurial capabilities to enhance sustainability and competitiveness (Hein, 2025; Salem, 2020). These transformations align with the broader shift toward the “entrepreneurial university,” where teaching, research, and external engagement are

integrated to support innovation and economic development (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). Within this model, universities commonly pursue fee-based programmes, industry collaborations, corporate sponsorships, and commercially oriented research centres to secure financial resilience (Hein, 2025; Salem, 2020). Although such practices originated in highly marketised systems such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and China, they have increasingly diffused across Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe (Hein, 2025; Pietrzak et al., 2025).

Digital transformation has accelerated these trends. The expansion of AI, data analytics, and social platforms has reshaped how institutions interact with prospective and current students, alumni, and employers, making digital communication a core dimension of institutional identity (Pawar, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated these changes, as universities moved online and relied heavily on digital platforms to sustain engagement and communication (Kuzhabekova, 2020; Pawar, 2024; Salem, 2020). As a result, social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a key strategic tool that allows universities to build brand visibility, communicate their values, and engage audiences through interactive and personalized formats (Peruta & Shields, 2017). Compared with traditional marketing, SMM supports real-time feedback, peer-to-peer influence, and more authentic representations of the student experience (Pietrzak et al., 2025). However, research on SMM remains heavily concentrated in on Western contexts. (Pawar, 2024).

In digital environments, engagement is not driven only by institutional announcements but by content that aligns with users' motivations, such as informational clarity, relatable narratives, and relationship-oriented communication that supports identification and trust (Khan, 2017). For universities, this implies that SMM effectiveness depends on how institutions design content strategies, interaction practices, and storytelling formats that resonate with audience expectations and platform norms.

Kazakhstan represents an important case in this regard. Since independence, the country has pursued simultaneous modernization and market liberalization.

(Shaldarbekova, 2025). National initiatives such as the Digital Kazakhstan program (2017) aim to strengthen digital infrastructure and promote innovation, while recent government priorities emphasise accelerated digital transformation, including the integration of AI into public services and education (Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017).

Digitalization has become a strategic national priority: in his 2025 address, President Tokayev reiterated the goal of transforming Kazakhstan into a fully digital state within five years, identifying artificial intelligence as a key driver of this vision (Administration of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2025). Today, Kazakhstan hosts 122 higher education institutions, more than 40% of which are privately owned, contributing to a diverse and competitive landscape (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2025).

In this environment, strategic communication and digital visibility have become increasingly important for attracting students and maintaining institutional reputation (García-Rodríguez & Gutiérrez-Taño, 2023). Public universities often emphasise national mission, research contribution, and institutional legitimacy, while tuition-dependent private institutions tend to adopt more flexible and market-oriented strategies that prioritise branding, student experience, and employer engagement (Hein, 2025). Social media plays a central role in these strategies, enabling universities to reach younger audiences, communicate programme offerings, and differentiate themselves in a crowded market.

Despite these developments, scholarly research on social media marketing in Kazakhstani higher education remains limited. Existing studies highlight technical challenges and general behavioural trends, but rarely examine how public and private institutions differ in their digital communication strategies or how market and governance pressures shape their approaches to SMM (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025).

Understanding these dynamics is increasingly important as Kazakhstan seeks to internationalize its universities, expand English-medium programs, and strengthen global partnerships.

In sum, the intersection of globalization, marketization, and digital transformation has made strategic, digitally mediated communication an essential aspect of modern higher education.

Statement of the Problem

Although social media marketing (SMM) has become central to university branding globally, existing research remains heavily concentrated in Western and English-speaking contexts. Systematic reviews by Pawar (2024) and Pietrzak et al. (2025) show that most studies examine universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, with a strong focus on platform-based engagement. This geographical imbalance limits understanding of how social media strategies function in non-Western higher education systems, where institutional environments, regulatory frameworks, and market dynamics differ. The need for context-specific research is particularly relevant in Kazakhstan, where universities operate within a hybrid system combining state regulation and increasing market competition. However, existing studies in Kazakhstan primarily focus on website performance or general digital adoption rather than strategic social media branding (Zarubina et al., 2024; Abuova et al., 2021).

Another limitation concerns the lack of comparative research between public and private universities. These institutional types differ in governance structures, funding models, and accountability pressures, which may shape communication priorities and branding strategies (Salem, 2020; Hein, 2025). Public universities often balance state mandates and reputational responsibilities, whereas private institutions typically rely more heavily on recruitment and market positioning. In hybrid systems such as Kazakhstan,

where publicly funded institutions coexist with tuition-dependent private universities, these differences may significantly influence social media communication. Yet, comparative evidence examining how institutional type shapes SMM strategies remains limited.

A further gap relates to how effectiveness is conceptualized and measured. Existing studies predominantly rely on engagement indicators such as likes, shares, comments, and follower growth (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025). While these metrics provide descriptive insights, they offer limited understanding of deeper outcomes such as brand positioning, student perceptions, or enrollment decisions. As a result, current research provides only partial insight into how social media communication contributes to broader institutional goals.

These conceptual limitations are reinforced by methodological patterns in the field. The literature is dominated by short-term quantitative and descriptive designs focusing on platform analytics (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025). Such approaches restrict understanding of institutional decision-making, stakeholder interpretations, and context-specific dynamics. The absence of qualitative and comparative studies limits the ability to examine institutional logics and strategic communication practices. Therefore, a qualitative comparative study of public and private universities in Kazakhstan is needed to address these gaps and provide context-sensitive insight into social media marketing in higher education.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to explore and compare how public and private universities in Kazakhstan employ social media marketing. Although social media platforms have become central to how higher education institutions communicate with prospective and current students, little is known about the specific strategies used in the

Kazakhstani context and how they may differ across public and private institutions.

Beyond describing practices, this study aims to examine how institutional type, governance structures, and resource capacities shape social media communication logics within a transitional higher education system. By adopting a comparative qualitative approach, the research seeks to generate context-sensitive insights that can inform more effective and strategically grounded SMM frameworks for universities operating in similar hybrid environments.

Research Questions

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the social media marketing strategies of public and private universities?
2. What are the similarities and differences of social media marketing strategies at public and private universities?
3. How can the insights from this comparative analysis inform the development of more effective SMM frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan?

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it addresses a clear empirical and contextual gap in understanding how public and private universities in Kazakhstan employ social media marketing (SMM) within an evolving and partially marketized higher education landscape. Although SMM has received growing scholarly attention globally, existing research remains heavily concentrated in Western contexts and often lacks comparative perspectives that account for institutional diversity and governance structures (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025). By focusing on Kazakhstan, a hybrid system where state regulation coexists with increasing market competition, this study contributes context-specific evidence from a region that remains underrepresented in higher education marketing research.

Academically, the study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it offers comparative insights into how institutional type (public versus private) shapes communication logics, strategic priorities, and resource allocation in social media marketing. Prior research suggests that institutional governance and funding structures influence marketing practices (Salem, 2020; Hein, 2025), yet empirical studies rarely examine these dynamics through qualitative, context-sensitive comparisons. Second, by adopting a qualitative case study design, the research moves beyond descriptive engagement metrics and platform analytics, which dominate the field (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025), to explore how students interpret institutional communication and how social media practices align with broader institutional strategies. Third, the study contributes theoretically by integrating Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory within a combined analytical framework. Neo-Institutional Theory explains how universities adopt similar social media practices in response to coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures within the higher education environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), while Resource Dependence Theory highlights how institutions strategically use communication to secure critical resources such as student enrollment, reputation, and funding. Together, these perspectives provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media marketing as both institutionally shaped and strategically motivated. Practically, the study provides university marketing teams in Kazakhstan and comparable emerging markets with evidence-based recommendations for designing effective, culturally appropriate, and ethically grounded SMM strategies. As universities increasingly compete for students in a digital environment, social media has become central to recruitment, reputation-building, and stakeholder engagement (Peruta & Shields, 2017). However, without context-sensitive insights, institutions risk replicating global trends that may not align with local audience expectations or institutional capacities. By

comparing institutional approaches, the findings offer actionable guidance on segmentation, authenticity, transparency, organizational workflows, and evaluation practices. These insights can support more strategic decision-making, strengthen institutional credibility, and improve alignment between digital communication and student experience, ultimately influencing recruitment outcomes and long-term brand equity.

Definition of Terms

To ensure conceptual clarity and analytical consistency, this study adopts specific definitions of key terms central to the investigation of social media marketing (SMM) in higher education. As the literature on digital communication and branding often uses overlapping or context-dependent terminology, clarifying these concepts is necessary to establish a shared understanding of how they are applied within this research. The following definitions reflect how these terms are operationalized in the study and how they relate to institutional communication practices, student perceptions, and broader marketing frameworks in higher education context.

Authenticity. The perception that online content genuinely represents an institution's identity and community. Authentic communication fosters trust and emotional connection with audiences (Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Behavioral Engagement. The observable actions of users on social media, such as liking, sharing, commenting, or following that indicate interaction and connection with an institution's content ((Ruangkanjanases, Sivarak, Wibowo, & Chen, 2022).

Brand Equity. The perceived value and reputation of a university's brand as held by students and stakeholders, encompassing awareness, trust, and loyalty toward the institution (Sadyk & Islam, 2022).

Credibility. The extent to which university communication is viewed as trustworthy, reliable, and professional, influencing audience confidence and willingness to engage (Perera, Nayak, & Nguyen, 2022)

Stakeholder Engagement. The process through which universities build and maintain relationships with internal and external audiences, such as students, alumni, employers, and partners through communication and value exchange (Kotler, 2001).

User-Generated Content (UGC). Media created and shared by students, alumni, or other audiences, such as reviews, testimonials, or videos that reflect their authentic experiences and contribute to the university's online image (Perera et al., 2022).

Thesis Outline

This thesis is organized into six chapters, each contributing to a comparative understanding of social media marketing (SMM) practices in public and private universities in Kazakhstan.

Chapter 1 has introduced the study by presenting the background and context, identifying the research problem, objectives, and questions, and explaining the significance and structure of the research.

Chapter 2 reviewed key theoretical and empirical literature on marketing, digital transformation, and SMM in higher education. It discussed the evolution of marketing, the adoption of digital strategies by universities, the Kazakhstani context, generational and ethical considerations, and concludes by outlining the research gaps and the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Chapter 3 details the research design and methodology. It explained the case selection, sampling strategy, data collection instruments, and analysis procedures, while also addressing ethical considerations and researcher positionality.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, organized around the research questions. It describes social media marketing strategies in each institutional case and provides a comparative analysis of similarities and differences between public and private universities, followed by implications for SMM frameworks in Kazakhstan.

Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature and theoretical framework. It interprets patterns of convergence and divergence using Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory and connects the results to existing research on higher education marketing and digital communication.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by summarizing key findings, outlining theoretical and practical implications, acknowledging limitations, and suggesting directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the theoretical and empirical scholarship relevant to social media marketing (SMM) in higher education. It begins by outlining the evolution of marketing within higher education and the shift from traditional to digital communication practices. The chapter then examines research on social media marketing strategies, engagement patterns, storytelling approaches, and peer influence in university branding. A comparative perspective on public and private institutions is subsequently introduced, followed by a review of existing research on SMM within the Kazakhstani context. The chapter concludes by identifying key conceptual and methodological gaps and presenting the theoretical framework guiding the study.

Marketing in Higher Education

Marketing is widely recognized as a strategic activity focused on identifying, communicating, and delivering value to relevant stakeholders. Kotler (2001) defines marketing as the process of anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably, while the Chartered Institute of Marketing (2019) emphasizes its managerial role in creating mutual value for organizations and consumers. Traditionally, marketing theory has relied on the “4 Ps” framework product, price, place, and promotion, as a structured approach to reaching target audiences (Kotler, 2001).

In the higher education context, these elements acquire specific institutional meanings. The “product” refers not only to educational programs, but also to teaching quality, research reputation, and institutional prestige. “Price” includes tuition fees, scholarships, and the perceived return on investment of education. “Place” extends beyond physical campus spaces to include online delivery, hybrid models, and international partnerships. “Promotion” encompasses a wide range of communication activities, including advertising, public relations, branding initiatives, and, increasingly, social media

marketing. As higher education systems have become more competitive and market-oriented, marketing has shifted from a peripheral function to a strategic necessity for institutional sustainability and visibility.

From Traditional to Digital Marketing

Historically, universities relied primarily on one-way mass communication strategies, such as printed brochures, education fairs, and direct mail campaigns (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Although these approaches were effective for raising awareness, they offered limited personalization, interactivity, and feedback mechanisms. The rapid advancement of digital technologies fundamentally transformed this landscape. Digital marketing now enables real-time communication, detailed audience analytics, targeted outreach, and continuous engagement through websites, search engines, and mobile platforms (Doyle, 2011).

Moreover, digital strategies are often more cost-efficient than traditional promotional channels, allowing institutions to reach broader audiences with comparatively lower expenditure (Nuseir & El Refae, 2021). As global competition for prospective students intensified, digital visibility became essential for institutional relevance and competitiveness (Thaichon & Ferm, 2021). Rather than functioning as isolated campaigns, digital platforms now facilitate continuous, multi-platform engagement throughout the student decision-making journey (Carrasco Gubernatis, 2024). Within this broader transformation, social media marketing (SMM) has emerged as a central mechanism for branding, recruitment, and community-building in higher education.

Social Media Marketing in Higher Education

Strategic Adoption and the Shift Toward Digitalization

Early research indicates that although social networks were widely used by students, universities were initially slow to adopt them strategically. Institutional accounts

often functioned as basic awareness tools with limited influence on students' decision-making processes (Constantinides & Stagno, 2011). This early stage of adoption revealed a gap between student digital behavior and institutional communication practices, highlighting the need for more interactive, student-centered approaches.

The expansion of marketization in higher education further accelerated the strategic adoption of social media. As institutions increasingly competed for students, funding, and global recognition, social media became integrated into broader branding infrastructures rather than serving as an auxiliary communication channel (Pietrzak et al., 2025). Universities began developing coherent visual identities across platforms, employing consistent colour schemes, logos, and design elements to strengthen recognition and institutional coherence (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2021).

At the same time, rising information saturation among prospective students required more innovative and targeted communication strategies to ensure differentiation (Robinson, 2023). Institutions responded by experimenting with enhanced digital tools, such as virtual campus tours and immersive multimedia experiences, which extend traditional marketing into interactive digital environments (Missaghian & Pizarro Milian, 2021). As prospective students increasingly prioritize programme flexibility, accreditation, and institutional credibility, maintaining a strong and trustworthy online presence has become central to reputation-building and recruitment (Nuseir & El Refae, 2021).

Content, Engagement Patterns, and Storytelling Strategies

Recent scholarship highlights that narrative design is central to effective social-media marketing in higher education. Visual and narrative-driven posts, meaning content that tells a short, relatable story rather than simply presenting information, such as student “day-in-the-life” videos or personal experience videos consistently outperform

administrative or purely informational posts in generating engagement (Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Beyond format, engagement is shaped by the perceived value and social meaning of content. Prior research suggests that audiences engage more strongly with content that provides useful information, offers entertainment, or strengthens relationships and belonging, drivers that translate in higher education into program clarity, student-centered storytelling, and community-building communication (Andoh-Quainoo, 2020). This also explains the growing influence of user-generated content (UGC): peer narratives and student-created materials frequently function as credible social proof, shaping institutional image and perceived authenticity more persuasively than formal promotional messaging (Khan, 2017). Therefore, universities' SMM strategies should be evaluated not only by visual coherence or posting intensity but also by how well content aligns with audience motives, trust formation, and participatory dynamics.

Authentic, portrait-centred storytelling strengthens students' sense of identification with the institution (Garcia et al., 2021), while achievement- and emotion-oriented posts attract significant interaction among leading global universities (Maresova et al., 2020). Excessive posting frequency, however, may reduce engagement, suggesting that quality outweighs volume (Peruta & Shields, 2017).

Despite technological advances, some universities continue to rely on monologic, informational communication. Capriotti and Zeler (2023) show that certain institutions favour controlled visibility over dialogic exchange, limiting opportunities for genuine interaction. This pattern extends to video-based recruitment content: Fritz and Smith (2024) find that contemporary YouTube recruitment videos typically follow formulaic, expository templates that idealise student life while marginalising academic realities. Such

portrayals risk creating unrealistic expectations for applicants, underscoring the need for more authentic and distinctive storytelling within higher-education marketing.

Market Mavens

In addition to institutional content, peer-generated communication has become a defining feature of contemporary SMM. Students, alumni, and micro-influencers increasingly act as co-creators of university brands through reviews, personal experience videos, and creative participation (Perera et al., 2022). These forms of user-generated content often hold greater persuasive power than official institutional messages, functioning as credible social proof that influences prospective students' attitudes and choices (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022).

The role of peer influence is further illuminated by research on “market mavens.” Robinson (2023) describes these individuals as highly engaged, altruistic, and confident students who actively disseminate information, advise peers, and facilitate word-of-mouth communication. In today's saturated information environment, such figures can significantly amplify institutional messaging, particularly on social-media platforms. Cross-national evidence demonstrates that credible, emotionally resonant communication whether institutional or peer-generated enhances brand equity, trust, and behavioral intention, thereby shaping students' perceptions and decision-making (Perera et al., 2022; Sánchez Garza et al., 2024; Potelwa et al., 2025).

Public and Private Universities comparison

Differences between public and private universities are rooted in institutional type, which shapes governance structures, funding models, strategic priorities, and communication approaches (Othman & Othman, 2014; Naidu & Derani, 2016). Public universities are typically shaped by historical mandates, public accountability, and state regulation, whereas private universities operate in more market-oriented environments and

prioritize competitiveness, responsiveness, and student recruitment. These structural differences influence institutional logics, stakeholder expectations, and strategic behavior, including communication and branding practices. The literature identifies several key dimensions through which public–private differences can be understood.

Institutional strategy priorities

Universities operate under increasing pressure from globalization, funding constraints, and competition for students. Evidence suggests that public and private institutions respond differently to these pressures. Public universities often prioritize stability, institutional continuity, and preservation of established legitimacy, while private universities tend to adopt a more adaptive and market-oriented logic, using strategic initiatives to signal relevance and competitiveness (Othman & Othman, 2014; Dattey et al., 2014). Regulatory environments further intensify these distinctions. Dattey et al. (2014) show that private universities may experience stronger isomorphic pressures, coercive, normative, and mimetic, pushing them to demonstrate compliance and legitimacy more visibly than public institutions.

Programme portfolios

Differences in programme portfolios also shape institutional positioning. Rabossi (2011) highlights that private institutions have historically concentrated in demand-responsive, lower-cost fields, whereas public universities often maintain broader and more resource-intensive portfolios. These differences influence how institutions frame their attractiveness to prospective students and communicate institutional value.

Student perceptions of quality and trust

Student perceptions further reinforce sectoral distinctions. Naidu and Derani (2016) found that public university students associate quality primarily with research reputation and academic credibility, while private university students evaluate quality through service-

related and managerial dimensions. This service-oriented logic aligns with market-driven positioning strategies and may translate into communication emphasizing responsiveness, employability, and student experience. Trust represents another dimension where sectoral differences emerge. Borges et al. (2016) found higher reported trust levels among private university students compared to those in public institutions, linking trust to perceptions of fairness, ethical conduct, and staff concern for students. Meanwhile, Othman and Othman (2014) demonstrate that public institutions may focus more strongly on internal stakeholders and continuity-based legitimacy, whereas private institutions emphasize external visibility and outreach.

Resources and competitive positioning

Financial flexibility may also influence communication strategies. Private institutions often possess greater discretionary resources, enabling investment in facilities, branding, and student services, which can reinforce competitive positioning (Nuseir & El Refae, 2021). These differences suggest that legitimacy and reputation function as survival resources across both sectors, but the direction of strategic effort differs: public universities may invest more in institutional continuity, while private institutions emphasize external stakeholder engagement and reputational signaling.

Digital communication practices

These structural differences become particularly visible in digital communication. Empirical research indicates that private universities often demonstrate greater responsiveness and interactivity on social media platforms. Nguyen, Tran, and Baker (2021) report higher levels of engagement among private universities in Vietnam, while Valerio-Ureña et al. (2020) show that private and higher-ranked universities maintain broader platform coverage and stronger visual coherence in North America. Institutional priorities are often reflected in communication practices, as annual reports and public

messaging reveal stakeholder orientation and strategic positioning (Othman & Othman, 2014; Dattey et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2021).

Overall, the literature suggests that public–private differences in social media marketing are structurally embedded in institutional logics. Public universities tend to rely more on inherited legitimacy and academic credibility, whereas private institutions prioritize responsiveness, visibility, and engagement-oriented practices. Consequently, variations in social media marketing strategies reflect deeper organizational constraints and incentives rather than purely stylistic choices.

Social Media Marketing in Kazakhstani Higher Education

Kazakhstani universities operate within a rapidly developing yet structurally uneven higher education environment. Regional analyses demonstrate significant disparities in enrollment rates, institutional concentration, and student distribution, with Almaty and Astana functioning as dominant educational hubs (Nurgaliyeva & Nygymetov, 2023). The concentration of universities and students in major metropolitan areas intensifies competition for prospective applicants, thereby increasing the strategic importance of marketing and digital visibility. In contrast, regions experiencing declining enrollment and shrinking student populations may face greater recruitment pressure, potentially requiring more proactive digital outreach strategies to sustain demand.

Within this uneven structural landscape, digital marketing capacity also varies. Differences in funding structures and institutional resources suggest that universities in financially stronger regions may be better positioned to invest in professional digital teams, paid advertising, and high-quality visual content production (Nurgaliyeva & Nygymetov, 2023). As a result, regional inequality may translate into unequal digital visibility and brand dominance within the national higher education ecosystem.

Against this backdrop, empirical research on digital promotion in Kazakhstani business universities reveals persistent weaknesses in online infrastructure. Comparative web-analytics studies show that many institutional websites suffer from low technical performance, limited mobile optimisation, and restricted international reach (Zarubina et al., 2024). High bounce rates indicate that users often leave after viewing a single page, suggesting that key recruitment information is not sufficiently visible or immediately accessible. Rather than functioning as dynamic marketing platforms, many university websites continue to operate as static information catalogues with outdated design and minimal interactivity (Abuova et al., 2021).

Zarubina et al. (2024) further demonstrate that search traffic remains a primary driver of visibility, particularly through long-tail queries and voice-search patterns, while social media remains underutilised as a structured traffic channel. Although platforms such as Instagram and YouTube are highly relevant for Generation Z audiences, their integration into coherent conversion pathways is often weak. Scholars therefore emphasise the importance of strengthening website usability, integrating chatbots and interactive tools, and linking social-media campaigns directly to programme pages in order to build a more integrated digital ecosystem (Abuova et al., 2021).

Audience-behaviour research reinforces these findings. Kazakhstani young users respond most strongly to short-form video, visual storytelling, and peer-generated content, reflecting broader global trends in micro-attention consumption (Duissebayeva & Nurtai, 2024). TikTok and Instagram dominate among users aged 18–30, while Facebook maintains relevance among older audiences. Segmentation studies suggest that creativity-oriented users engage more with trend-driven and humorous content, whereas trust-oriented audiences prefer credible institutional messaging and peer recommendations.

Sectoral differences are also evident in communication style. Public universities tend to rely on centrally controlled, reputation-oriented narratives that emphasise tradition, institutional mission, and legitimacy. Private institutions, by contrast, generally demonstrate greater flexibility and youth-oriented positioning, adopting interactive formats and faster content cycles, although they may lack systematic analytical evaluation of digital performance (Filipov, 2020). Similar patterns are observable across other Kazakhstani sectors, where social-media adoption is widespread but long-term strategic planning remains underdeveloped (Filipov, 2020; Abuova et al., 2021). Research additionally indicates that culturally relevant and participatory communication, including bilingual posts, localized imagery, and visible recognition of student contributors, strengthens perceived brand quality and loyalty (Sadyk & Islam, 2022).

Taken together, these findings suggest that social media marketing in Kazakhstan's higher education sector is shaped not only by global digital trends but also by regional structural inequalities, institutional resource differences, and evolving audience expectations. Universities therefore operate within a competitive digital environment where strategic integration of website optimisation, search visibility, and socially embedded communication practices becomes increasingly central to recruitment and brand positioning.

Research Gaps

Across the existing literature, several gaps remain evident. First, platform bias persists: most studies focus on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter/X, while rapidly growing video-first platforms such as TikTok and YouTube remain comparatively underexplored (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025). Second, geographical imbalance continues, research is heavily concentrated in Anglophone contexts. Third, communication asymmetry remains widespread, as universities continue to prioritise one-way informational posts over

dialogic, interactive engagement despite having the technical capacity to do so (Capriotti & Zeler, 2023). Finally, comparative analyses of public and private institutions are scarce, especially outside Western contexts.

Despite these limitations, empirical findings consistently identify emotional storytelling, human-centred imagery, visual coherence, and authentic user participation as the most effective drivers of engagement and loyalty (Garcia et al., 2021; Perera et al., 2022; Sánchez Garza et al., 2024). Quantitative studies also show that social-media marketing enhances brand equity (Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022; Potelwa et al., 2025). Existing comparisons further indicate that private universities often adopt more agile and innovative digital strategies, whereas public institutions emphasise informational transparency and legitimacy (Alexa et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2021).

However, very little is known about how institutional type shapes social-media marketing strategies in Central Asian contexts, including Kazakhstan. Although existing studies highlight technical limitations and general behavioural patterns, they rarely examine public–private differences or consider how governance structures, organisational culture, and market pressures influence digital-marketing practices. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how public and private universities in Kazakhstan conceptualise and implement social-media marketing within broader processes of digital transformation and marketization.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Neo-Institutional Theory (NIT), specifically the concept of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), to explain how public and private universities in Kazakhstan shape and implement their social media marketing strategies. Neo-Institutional Theory views organizations as open systems that must respond to pressures from their external environment in order to secure legitimacy, resources, and

long-term survival. In higher education, universities operate within a shared institutional field shaped by state regulations, professional norms, and competitive dynamics, all of which influence communication practices and branding strategies.

Institutional isomorphism describes the process by which organizations within the same field become increasingly similar over time. Three types of isomorphic pressures are particularly relevant to this study.

Coercive pressures arise from government regulations, accreditation requirements, and formal accountability standards that influence how universities present information and maintain transparency.

Normative pressures stem from professional standards in marketing and communication, where social media managers adopt globally recognized “best practices,” visual identities, and content formats.

Mimetic pressures emerge when universities imitate the digital strategies of more successful or reputable institutions, especially under conditions of uncertainty and competition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Neo-Institutional Theory is particularly suitable for this study because social media marketing in higher education is not only a strategic choice but also an institutional expectation. Universities operate within a shared environment where digital visibility, engagement, and responsiveness have become markers of legitimacy. As a result, institutions often adopt similar communication practices in order to align with professional norms, stakeholder expectations, and sector-wide trends.

While Neo-Institutional Theory helps explain why universities may converge in their social media practices, it does not fully account for variation across institutional types. To address this limitation, the study also draws on Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Resource Dependence Theory argues that organizations are

constrained and shaped by their dependence on external resources, such as funding, students, partnerships, and governmental support. Because different institutions rely on different resource streams, their strategic behavior may vary accordingly.

In the context of higher education, private universities are often more tuition-dependent and therefore may prioritize recruitment-driven communication strategies to secure financial sustainability (Nuseir & El Refae, 2021). Public universities, by contrast, may rely more heavily on state funding and thus face stronger regulatory and legitimacy-based pressures. These differences in resource dependence may influence how universities allocate marketing resources, how aggressively they pursue digital branding, and how responsive they are to student audiences online.

By combining Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory, this study is able to examine not only why social media strategies converge across universities (due to shared institutional pressures), but also why they diverge (due to differences in funding structures, governance models, and resource dependencies). This integrated framework provides a more comprehensive explanation of how institutional type shapes social media marketing practices in Kazakhstan's hybrid higher education system.

Summary

This chapter reviewed theoretical and empirical literature on social media marketing in higher education. It outlined the shift from traditional marketing to digital and social media communication, and examined research on strategic adoption, content and engagement patterns, storytelling practices, and peer-generated content in university branding. The chapter also discussed differences between public and private universities, showing how institutional type shapes strategic priorities, resource structures, and communication approaches. A review of the Kazakhstani context highlighted the limited research on strategic social media marketing in higher education.

Based on this review, key gaps were identified, including the dominance of Western contexts, limited comparative and qualitative studies, and insufficient attention to institutional type in Kazakhstan. To address these gaps, the chapter introduced a theoretical framework combining Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory to explain both convergence and divergence in university social media practices. This framework provides the foundation for the methodological approach presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate how public and private universities in Kazakhstan conceptualize and implement social media marketing (SMM) strategies. Given the study's focus on institutional strategies, organizational structures, and student perceptions, a qualitative, comparative case study design was selected to provide in-depth, context-sensitive insights. The chapter describes the research design, case selection rationale, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and procedures for thematic analysis. It also addresses ethical considerations and researcher positionality to ensure transparency, credibility, and reflexivity in the research process.

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design to explore how social media marketing (SMM) strategies are conceptualized and implemented in higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the research seeks to understand institutional logics, organizational processes, and student interpretations rather than to measure frequency or engagement metrics. Qualitative research enables in-depth exploration of meanings, experiences, and decision-making processes that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Given that the study investigates how institutional type shapes communication practices and how students perceive authenticity, responsiveness, and usefulness, a qualitative design allows for contextualized and nuanced analysis.

A case study methodology was selected because it facilitates detailed examination of contemporary phenomena within real-life settings, especially when boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social media

marketing strategies are embedded within broader institutional structures, governance systems, and resource conditions. Therefore, examining them in isolation from organizational context would limit analytical depth. The case study approach enables the researcher to analyze institutional documents, digital platforms, and stakeholder perspectives within their natural setting, generating a holistic understanding of strategy formation and implementation.

The study employs a comparative case study design involving two contrasting institutional types within Kazakhstan's higher education system: a private university with a specialized focus on innovation and applied sciences, and a large public university with a broad disciplinary profile and a long-standing national role in education and research. Comparative case studies are particularly useful when the aim is to identify both similarities and differences across cases and to examine how structural conditions influence organizational behavior (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, comparison enables analysis of how institutional type, funding structures, governance models, and resource dependencies shape social media marketing practices.

By juxtaposing a tuition-dependent private institution with a state-funded public university, the design allows for exploration of how institutional pressures (as explained by Neo-Institutional Theory) and resource dependencies (as explained by Resource Dependence Theory) influence strategic communication choices. The comparative design thus strengthens analytical rigor by enabling cross-case synthesis and theory-informed interpretation rather than single-case description.

Cases/Rationale

The research was conducted at two higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. The first institution was a private university specializing in technology and innovation. It was a relatively young institution with a tuition-driven model and a strong focus on

preparing graduates for careers in IT, engineering, and related applied sciences. The university was known for its modern infrastructure, international collaborations, and emphasis on digital skills.

The second institution was a large public university offering a wide range of academic programs across the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and technical fields. As a state-funded institution, it played a significant role in national higher education and research and was widely recognized for its academic tradition and broad student enrollment.

Both institutions maintained official online platforms and communication channels used to promote their programs and institutional branding to students and the wider public. To protect confidentiality, the institutions were not identified by name in the research report. Instead, they were referred to as “Private University” and “Public University.”

Sampling and Participants

This study employed purposive sampling, which was appropriate in qualitative research when participants were deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two main groups of participants were included: university staff and students.

Staff participants were selected based on two criteria: (a) employment in the Department of Marketing and Public Relations or an equivalent office, and (b) direct involvement in planning or implementing social media marketing activities at the institutional level. In total, two staff members were recruited, one from the public university and one from the private university, depending on their role description, availability, and willingness to participate.

Student participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) enrollment in the first or second year of undergraduate studies at the selected universities, and (b)

diversity across majors to capture a range of perspectives. In total, nine students were recruited across the two institutional cases.

At the private university, two participants were enrolled in software engineering, one in IT management, and one in mathematical and computational sciences. At the public university, one participant was enrolled in informatics and robotics, two in biology-related programmes, and two in pedagogy and Russian language and literature. Across the sample, five students were in their first year and four in their second year of undergraduate study. The sample included both male and female students, with all public university participants being female. The majority of participants were from major urban centres, including Astana and Almaty, and demonstrated active engagement with social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram.

Early-year undergraduates were purposively sampled, as prior research indicated that social media use tended to be higher among undergraduates than among more senior students (Gonzalez & Deng, 2021). In total, 9 students were recruited across the two cases, balancing diversity with feasibility for in-depth qualitative analysis.

Data collection tools

Semi-structured interviews were used with both staff members and students to collect in-depth qualitative data and to allow flexibility in questioning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open-ended questions enabled participants to share experiences freely while keeping discussions aligned with the research aims. Interviews lasted no more than one hour, were audio-recorded with permission, and participants were allowed to skip any question or withdraw at any time.

Two interview protocols were applied. The full interview protocols are provided in the Appendix. The staff interview protocol examined how social media marketing strategies were designed and implemented at the institutional level. Questions addressed

platform prioritization (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, YouTube, and emerging platforms), content planning processes, approval structures, distribution workflows, resource allocation, challenges, and approaches to performance evaluation. For example, participants were asked: *“Which social media platforms does your university prioritise, and what factors influence these choices?”* and *“How is responsibility for planning, creating, and approving social media content organised within your institution?”*. Two staff participants were interviewed: a media manager at the Private University (PrM1) and a press office representative at the Public University (PuM1). These interviews provided institutional perspectives on strategy, governance, capacity constraints, and success indicators.

The student interview protocol explored how students engaged with university social media, what content formats they perceived as useful or authentic, and how institutional communication influenced their expectations and decisions. Students were asked about their most-used platforms, the types of posts they noticed (e.g., announcements, achievements, events, opportunities, student stories), their preferences for video versus static formats, perceptions of tone (formal vs student-centered), responsiveness of official accounts, and the extent to which social media reflected “real student life.” For example, students were asked: *“What types of posts from your university catch your attention most?”* and *“Did social media play a role in your decision to study at this university? If yes, how?”* In total, nine students participated (Private University n = 4; Public University n = 5), enabling comparison of student experiences across the two institutional cases. The full staff and student interview protocols were provided in the appendix.

In addition to interviews, selected institutional documents and official university websites were reviewed as supplementary contextual resources. These materials were not

treated as primary data sources but were used to support and contextualize interpretations derived from interview findings.

The review included publicly available institutional strategy documents (e.g., development programs), official university websites. The purpose of this supplementary review was to understand how universities formally articulated their strategic priorities, institutional identity, and communication positioning, and to examine whether these formal narratives aligned with or contrasted participants' accounts.

The website review focused on general structural features such as program presentation, visibility of student life, integration with social media platforms, and accessibility of institutional information. Observations were recorded in the form of reflective analytical notes rather than formal coding procedures.

This supplementary material supported triangulation by providing contextual insight into institutional self-representation and communication logic. However, the primary empirical evidence of the study remained the semi-structured interviews with staff and students.

All reviewed materials were publicly accessible, and no confidential documents were collected. Institutional anonymity was preserved throughout the analysis.

Procedure

Participants were recruited after site access had been granted through university staff acting as gatekeepers, a common approach in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Relevant institutional representatives distributed invitation letters to potential participants via official university email accounts. The invitation included a brief description of the study and the researcher's contact information so that interested individuals could reach out directly.

Individuals who expressed interest received an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their rights as participants. They were given time to review the information and ask questions before providing written consent. Signed consent was obtained either electronically (via email) or in person prior to the commencement of the interview.

Recruitment emphasized that participation was entirely voluntary and unrelated to academic standing or professional evaluation. No incentives were provided.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at times and in formats convenient for participants (either face-to-face or online). Each interview lasted no more than one hour. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded; in cases where recording was not preferred, detailed notes were taken. Participants were reminded that they could skip any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Following the completion of interviews, audio recordings were transcribed, and transcripts were prepared for thematic analysis. In addition to interviews, publicly available institutional documents and official university websites were reviewed as supplementary contextual resources. Where applicable, non-confidential materials voluntarily shared by staff were also considered. Observations from these materials were recorded in the form of analytical notes to support interpretation of interview findings. Data collection was conducted following ethics approval and was completed prior to analysis. All collected data were securely stored in accordance with institutional ethical guidelines.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach aimed at identifying patterns, meanings, and key themes within the interview transcripts. This method was appropriate for exploring subjective experiences and institutional

strategies in depth and was particularly well-suited for a comparative case study design (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was conducted in two stages: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. First, each institutional case was analysed separately in order to identify its internal communication logic, dominant social media practices, and key patterns in participant perceptions. Second, the themes emerging from each case were compared across the two institutions to identify similarities, differences, and broader institutional trends.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim to preserve the meaning and context of participants' responses. Interviews were conducted in the language preferred by participants (Kazakh, Russian, or English). Where interviews were conducted in Kazakh or Russian, they were translated into English for analysis. This process allowed attention to be paid not only to content, but also to tone, emphasis, and participant meaning-making.

The thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework and combined deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding was informed by the research questions and the theoretical framework, particularly concepts related to institutional pressures, legitimacy, resource constraints, and strategic communication. Inductive coding allowed themes to emerge directly from the participants' accounts and from context-specific patterns that were not fully anticipated in advance.

The coding process moved from raw interview extracts to initial codes, then to broader categories, and finally to higher-level themes. For example, in the private university case, statements such as "*Instagram is the main priority platform*" (PrM1) and "*I check Instagram more often because visual content is easier*" (PrS1) were initially coded as platform priority, visual accessibility, and student media habits. These were later grouped into the broader category of platform use, which contributed to the final theme

of platform differentiation. Similarly, comments describing Telegram as a space for “academic and work-related communication” and as a “direct connection with the university administration” (PrS1; PrS2) were coded as functional communication, administrative connection, and informational channel, and then grouped under the category of operational platform role.

A similar process was used for content and communication style. For instance, the statement “*video content receives the highest engagement*” (PrM1) was coded as video engagement, while student remarks such as video content helping them “*better immerse themselves in others’ experiences*” (PrS1) were coded as immersive content and preference for short-form video. These codes were later grouped into the category of preferred content formats, which informed the theme of content orientation and format preferences. In the public university case, extracts such as “*most university content is formal and more informational, rather than entertaining*” (PuS3) and comments that social media often functions “more as a report” than as timely communication (PuS1) were coded as formal communication, retrospective posting, and informational communication style. These codes were grouped under broader categories related to institutional messaging and later contributed to the theme of institutional communication logics.

The analysis also included coding for issues of trust and authenticity. For example, the private university student’s comment that a response felt “very generic” and “template-based” (PrS1) was coded as impersonal communication and low authenticity. Similarly, public university students’ remarks about outdated dormitory images and a mismatch between online representation and actual experience (PuS1; PuS4) were coded as representation gap, expectation-reality mismatch, and authenticity concern. These codes were later grouped into the broader theme of trust and expectation gaps.

During the within-case analysis, each university was examined separately in order to identify its own internal patterns. In the private university case, codes relating to innovation, opportunities, partnerships, student visibility, and recruitment cycles were grouped into categories indicating a more market-oriented and recruitment-driven communication strategy. In the public university case, codes relating to formal tone, achievement-focused messaging, event-based planning, and centralised approval structures were grouped into categories indicating a more institutionally oriented and legitimacy-driven communication approach. This stage allowed each university's communication logic to be understood on its own terms before any direct comparison was made.

After these case-specific patterns had been established, a cross-case analysis was conducted. At this stage, categories and themes from the two universities were systematically compared to identify areas of convergence and divergence. For example, both institutions showed the central importance of Instagram, student preference for short-form video, and the growing influence of student-generated content. However, the cases differed in the degree of platform segmentation, tone, responsiveness, and the extent to which student voices were formally incorporated into institutional communication. This comparative process formed the basis for answering the second research question and for developing implications for more effective SMM frameworks in response to the third research question.

Institutional documents and official university websites contributed to the analysis as supplementary contextual sources. These materials were not treated as primary data in the same way as interviews and were not subjected to full thematic coding. Instead, they were reviewed alongside emerging interview themes to support interpretation and triangulation. For example, interview data from the private university repeatedly emphasised innovation, digital transformation, industry partnerships, and future-oriented

opportunities. These patterns were reinforced by strategy documents and website materials that positioned the university as an AI-oriented and technologically advanced institution. Likewise, interview data from the public university highlighted formal, achievement-oriented, and mission-driven communication, which was consistent with strategy documents and website sections emphasising academic credibility, public mission, institutional history, and official events. In this way, documents and website materials helped confirm and contextualise interview-based findings rather than generate themes independently.

The final themes that emerged from the analysis included platform differentiation, content orientation and format preferences, language and accessibility, student-generated content, institutional communication logics, strategic goals of social media presence, trust and expectation gaps, and implications for more effective SMM frameworks. Together, these themes provided the basis for answering the research questions and for interpreting how institutional type shapes social media marketing practices in Kazakhstani higher education.

Ethical considerations

Ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data protection guided all stages of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although complete anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed in qualitative case studies, every effort was made to protect participants' identities and minimize potential risks. Data collection was started after ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Education.

No personal identifiers, such as names, email addresses, or job titles, appeared in transcripts, analytical notes, or the final thesis. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym (e.g., PrS1- PrS4, PuS1- PuS5, PrM1, PuM1), and the institutions were described only in

general terms (e.g., “Private University” and “Public University”). Any potentially identifying details in quotations were paraphrased where necessary to prevent recognition of individuals or institutions, consistent with qualitative research ethics guidelines (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

All research data were managed in accordance with Nazarbayev University’s ethical and data-protection policies. Audio recordings were stored on a password-protected device accessible only to the researcher and were deleted after transcription verification. Transcripts, coding files, and analytical notes were stored in encrypted, password-protected digital folders. The key linking participant identities to pseudonyms was stored separately from the research data. Signed consent forms were stored securely and separately from digital materials. In line with institutional policy, research materials were retained securely for the required retention period and were scheduled for permanent deletion thereafter.

The study involved minimal risk; however, it was acknowledged that some participants might have felt uncomfortable sharing critical opinions. Staff participants might have been concerned that institutional critiques could be traced back to them, while student participants might have feared potential implications for their academic standing. These risks were mitigated through strict confidentiality procedures, anonymization, voluntary participation, and clear communication that participation had no academic or professional consequences. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, consistent with ethical standards in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Although no direct material benefits were provided, participants were given the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with institutional social media practices. At a broader level, the study contributed to the limited scholarship on higher education

marketing in Kazakhstan by offering comparative insights into public and private institutional communication strategies. The findings aimed to inform more ethical, transparent, and student-centered social media marketing practices in higher education contexts.

Positionality

As a second-year master's student and an assistant to a senior marketing manager at a university in Kazakhstan, I brought both academic and professional perspectives to this research. My experience in supporting institutional marketing campaigns, including content planning, audience targeting, and platform management, provided practical insight into how social media strategies were developed and implemented within higher education contexts. This background enhanced my ability to understand institutional communication processes and interpret social media marketing (SMM) practices in a nuanced manner.

At the same time, qualitative research acknowledges that the researcher is not a neutral instrument of data collection, but an active participant in meaning-making (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I therefore recognized that my professional proximity to university marketing practices could introduce potential bias. Having previously worked within a marketing team, I might have been inclined to sympathize with institutional constraints, resource limitations, or internal communication logics. To mitigate this risk, I adopted a reflexive stance throughout the research process, as recommended in qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This included maintaining reflective notes, critically examining my assumptions, and consciously prioritizing participants' perspectives over my own interpretations during analysis.

My generational position as a member of Generation Z also shaped my understanding of digital culture and social media engagement. As both a researcher and a digital native, I was familiar with the communicative norms, platform dynamics, and

content formats that resonate with student audiences. While this familiarity facilitated interpretation of student accounts, I remained attentive to the possibility of over-identification with student perspectives. Reflexive practices were therefore used to ensure analytical balance.

Importantly, I had no formal affiliation with either of the selected case institutions at the time of the study. This supported a degree of analytical distance and reduced potential conflicts of interest. The purpose of the research was not to evaluate or endorse specific institutions, but to examine how public and private universities navigated the structural, institutional, and resource-related conditions shaping their social media marketing strategies.

In sum, my dual perspective functioned both as an analytical resource and as an ethical responsibility. Consistent with qualitative research principles, reflexivity was treated as an ongoing process aimed at ensuring transparency, credibility, and interpretive rigor (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Summary

This chapter described the study's qualitative comparative case study design exploring social media marketing (SMM) in one public and one private Kazakhstani university. Using purposive sampling, participants include 2 marketing staff and 9 students. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, then examined using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) combining deductive and inductive coding. Ethical standards ensured voluntary participation, anonymity, and secured data handling in line with NU policy. The researcher's dual role as student and marketing assistant was acknowledged to maintain reflexivity and minimize bias.

Overall, this methodology enables a rich, ethical, and context-sensitive comparison of how public and private universities implement SMM strategies in Kazakhstan. The next

chapter presents the findings of the study, based on the analysis of interview data and supported by institutional documents.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction to findings

This chapter reports findings from interviews conducted in two institutional cases: a private university and a public university in Kazakhstan. It addresses the three research questions guiding the study: **(1)** what social media marketing strategies are used by public and private universities in Kazakhstan, **(2)** how these strategies differ and overlap across institutional types, and **(3)** how insights from this comparison can inform more effective social media marketing frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

Participants included private university students (n = 4; PrS1- PrS4), public university students (n = 5; PuS1- PuS5), a private university media manager (PrM1), and a public university press office representative (PuM1). The student participants represented 1-2 academic years and study programs within their institutions and reflected diverse patterns of social media use and engagement with university communication.

The two institutional cases represent different organizational contexts within Kazakhstani higher education: a private technology-oriented university and a public pedagogical university. Both institutions maintain active social media presence across multiple platforms but operate under different strategic priorities, resource structures, and communication traditions.

University A is a medium-to-large public university with an estimated student population of fewer than 10000 students. It offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs, primarily in education, humanities, and social sciences. Instruction is mainly delivered in Kazakh and Russian, with limited use of English in selected programs. The institution primarily serves domestic students and is oriented toward preparing professionals for the education sector and public service. As a publicly funded university, its activities are shaped by national education policies, formal administrative

structures, and institutional regulations. Its communication and positioning emphasize academic credibility, social responsibility, and professional training.

University B is a relatively young private university with a smaller student population, estimated at approximately 5,000 students. It focuses on a more specialized set of programs, particularly in technology, digital innovation, and applied fields. Instruction is primarily delivered in English, with additional use of Russian and Kazakh in selected contexts. The university primarily targets students seeking career-oriented education and opportunities in rapidly developing sectors. As a private institution, it operates in a competitive environment and places strong emphasis on innovation, industry collaboration, and digital transformation. Its communication strategies are more flexible and market-oriented, supporting student recruitment and institutional visibility.

In addition to interviews, the analysis incorporates institutional documents and publicly available materials, including university development strategies and official website content. These documents were used to contextualize interview findings and to identify how institutional priorities and communication strategies are formally articulated.

The university development programs outline key priorities related to academic development, research capacity, and international collaboration, while also identifying institutional strengths and challenges. Such documents provide insight into how university leadership frames institutional identity and strategic positioning, which helps interpret the communication patterns observed in social media content.

What are the social media marketing strategies of public and private universities?

The case of Private University

Organizational Structure and Resource

The findings indicate that the private university's SMM activities are supported by a small but specialized internal media team. According to the media manager, the team

responsible for social media production includes “an SMM specialist, a videographer, a designer, and occasionally interns” (PrM1). The media manager coordinates this team and oversees content creation across several platforms, while also handling external communications with mass media and internal administrative documentation.

Content ideas are developed collaboratively within the team, yet “*final approval is given by my administrative supervisor,*” (PrM1), indicating a hierarchical decision-making process. Although the team maintains “*a broader media plan covering six months to a year for major projects,*” the participant explained that there is “*no strict short-term content calendar,*” because many posts are requested urgently by different departments (PrM1). As a result, content production often adapts to immediate institutional needs rather than strictly following a pre-planned schedule.

In terms of resources, the university allocates financial support for media activities, as “*there are budgeted resources for media work and cooperation with external media,*” (PrM1). However, the participant noted that budgets are planned “*a year in advance,*” which can limit flexibility when unexpected communication needs arise. In addition, professional development opportunities for marketing staff remain limited, although they may be available upon request (PrM1). The media manager also identified organizational challenges, particularly bureaucracy and frequent content requests from different departments, which reduce time for creative planning.

Platform Strategy

Interview data suggest that the private university employs a multi-platform strategy in which platforms serve different institutional purposes and audiences. Instagram was consistently positioned as the primary platform. The media manager explained that “*Instagram is the main priority platform,*” largely because it aligns with the everyday media habits of “*students and prospective applicants,*” and offers diverse content options

(PrM1). Instagram was framed as the platform for easier consumption of visual content; one student explicitly noted, *“I check Instagram more often because visual content is easier,”* (PrS1, PrS3). One student noted that *“university posts appear a lot in the feed”*, which still allows the institution to remain visible in students’ everyday scrolling routines (PrS2).

For most students (n = 3) Telegram emerged as a parallel channel with a more functional, informational role (PrS1, PrS2, PrS3). Students described Telegram as the main space for *“academic and work-related communication,”* where university-related chats and updates are centralized (PrS1). One participant emphasized that Telegram creates *“a direct connection with the university administration,”* including mentors and group leaders, framing it as a communication infrastructure rather than a marketing-only channel (PrS2). This suggests that Telegram functions as an operational channel supporting internal communication and timely updates.

Beyond Instagram and Telegram, the university maintains a presence on TikTok and YouTube, each linked to specific strategic functions. According to PrM1, TikTok is used more for *“entertainment-oriented content,”* while YouTube supports *“longer, more informative videos,”* and is used actively for interviews and academic-oriented materials (PrM1). The inclusion of multiple platforms indicates an attempt at cross-platform integration, with Instagram central and other platforms supporting recruitment, engagement, and information distribution in complementary ways.

The document analysis also confirms the university’s broader orientation toward digital communication and technological infrastructure. The development strategy highlights the implementation of a *“Digital University ecosystem integrating educational, administrative, and service processes”* and outlines a transition toward a *“smart university model supported by a unified digital ecosystem”* (University Strategy of Development,

2026 – 2030, p.10). Such strategic emphasis on digital transformation helps explain the university's strong presence across multiple digital platforms and its investment in online communication channels.

Content Formats

Across interviews, video formats were repeatedly linked to stronger performance and higher student interest, implying that the university's strategy prioritizes short-form audiovisual communication. The media manager stated directly that "*video content receives the highest engagement*". Students echoed this preference, noting that video helps them understand experiences more vividly and quickly. For instance, PrS1 explained that video content "*helps me better immerse myself in someone's experience,*" particularly when the content reflects student life and personal journeys.

At the same time, students described the continued importance of structured informational formats within Instagram. Carousels were valued for clarity and narrative sequencing, with PrS1 highlighting a preference for "*Instagram carousels with short text,*" because they create "*a storytelling effect.*" The data also suggest that text design and post covers play a gatekeeping role in whether students open and later retrieve information: PrS2 emphasized that when "*the cover has no title,*" posts become difficult both to notice and to find later. In this sense, even within an overall shift to video-first engagement, static design decisions shape accessibility and visibility.

User-generated and student-produced materials were also present in the private university's format ecosystem. PrM1 described active collaboration with students and noted that the team reposts content when students tag the university. In addition, the university occasionally works with "*bloggers or influencers for specific events,*" although this appears to be a supplementary rather than central content practice (PrM1).

Communication Style and Tone

Findings indicate that the private university balances institutional formality with attempts to adopt a more student-centered tone, particularly during key recruitment periods. The media manager reported experimenting with new channels and informal engagement techniques, including posting humorous prompts on Threads and using memes connected to the application process to provoke interaction (PrM1). This points to an intentional shift toward conversational strategies and platform-native informality, at least in selected contexts.

However, student accounts also revealed concerns about tone authenticity and responsiveness, especially in situations involving critique. PrS1 described messaging the university with negative feedback and receiving a reply that felt “*very generic*,” and “*template-based*,” “*almost as if it was AI-generated*,” which created a negative impression and suggested emotional distance in institutional voice during conflict (PrS1). Students also noted variation in response styles: positive reactions were described as quicker, while responses to negative feedback were perceived as slower and more uniform (PrS1).

Language was discussed as part of communication strategy by at least one participant, indicating that multilingual posting can shape engagement pathways. One participant explained their reading habits across languages: “*On our university pages captions are always in English, Russian, and Kazakh and I read all three languages... as long as it’s informative and meaningful*.” (PrS3). Also, PrS2 reported reading Russian first when content appears in multiple languages, arguing that “*for engagement... many people will read Russian first*,” even if the order of languages is influenced by policy expectations (PrS2).

Content Themes

Most students (n = 3) emphasized the importance of practical and opportunity-related information (PrS1, PrS2, PrS4). The private university's content themes, as described by participants, clustered around opportunities, partnerships, institutional development, and student experiences. Students frequently mentioned content connected to academic mobility, conferences, competitions, and exchange programs. PrS1 recalled a post about an academic mobility competition because "*all the requirements were clearly explained,*" (PrS1). Similarly, PrS2 stated that posts about opportunities are especially important because "*you don't want to miss those opportunities,*" framing the account as a channel for academic and career advancement signals.

Partnership narratives and institutional prestige messaging were also salient. PrS3 reported strong interest in posts about memorandums with "*big projects and companies,*" viewing them as evidence of future "*perspectives,*" and benefits for students (PrS3). PrS2 similarly described being drawn to posts about well-known global programs (e.g., internationally recognized collaborations), because such announcements felt like "*new information,*" and strengthened the university's credibility (PrS2). At the same time, student-centered storytelling emerged as a desired and partially implemented theme: PrS1 highlighted enjoyment of posts where students share experiences, especially international students speaking about campus and professors (PrS1).

According to the university development strategy, the institution explicitly positions itself as a technology-driven educational hub. The strategy states that the university "*positions itself as a source of future IT education, IT innovations, and the IT industry*" (University Strategy, 2026 – 2030, p.11). Furthermore, the document emphasizes the university's ambition to become "*an international center of competencies setting standards in education, science, and innovation by 2030*" (University Strategy, 2026 –

2030, p.15). These strategic priorities reinforce the strong emphasis on innovation, partnerships, and career opportunities that students described in their accounts of social media content. The strategy also emphasizes the development of advanced technological competencies. It identifies as a priority the transformation of the university into “*a leading center in the field of artificial intelligence*,” with AI integrated into both educational and administrative processes (University Strategy, 2026 – 2030, p.15).

A similar emphasis is visible on the university’s official website, where the homepage presents the institution as an “*AI-oriented University 5.0*” and highlights innovation infrastructure, industry collaborations, and student research initiatives. These elements reinforce the opportunity-oriented messaging identified in participants’ descriptions of social media content (University Website).

Engagement

Engagement strategies in the private university case include both interactive content design and relationship-based visibility practices. The media manager described intentional efforts to “*comment under posts to remain visible to students*” and to repost student-generated content when tagged (PrM1). Such actions reflect a community-building approach in which the university is not only broadcasting but also maintaining presence within student networks.

From the student side, interaction is often passive through likes, while shares happen mainly when the student is personally featured (PrS1). However, there is evidence that interpersonal ties increase engagement: PrS2 noted that seeing “*familiar faces*” motivates likes and comments (PrS2). This indicates that engagement is also relational and identity-based.

Students also described engagement as connected to information clarity and navigability. When information is difficult to retrieve later (e.g., needing to scroll through

many posts), the platform becomes less effective as a service tool (PrS1). This suggests that engagement strategy includes not only interaction (likes/comments), but also how the account is structured to support repeated use and trust.

The development strategy similarly highlights high levels of student involvement in institutional activities. For example, the document notes that the university organizes “*more than 100 student events annually*” and that thousands of students participate in student development initiatives and leadership structures (University Strategy, 2026 – 2030, p.12).

Website materials similarly emphasize student participation within the institutional ecosystem. The student government section presents students as active contributors to university development and innovation, listing leadership structures, committees, and election outcomes. This representation supports the participatory communication logic described by interview participants and legitimizes the use of student-generated content within social media communication (University Website).

Visual Branding

Visual branding appears to be treated as a strategic asset in the private university case. PrS1 described the university’s visual style as “*consistent and well-designed*,” suggesting that the institution invests in maintaining a coherent visual identity across posts (PrS1). Several participants emphasized that visual presentation influences both comprehension and credibility. For example, PrS2 highlighted the importance of clear post covers and structured design elements. She criticized posts where “*the cover has no title and it’s just a random photo*,” explaining that such visuals make it difficult to immediately understand the purpose of the post and later locate the information when needed (PrS2). This indicates that visual design functions not only as branding but also as an information-navigation tool for students.

Posting Frequency

The findings show that posting patterns and campaign timing are shaped by both strategic cycles and institutional workflow constraints. PrM1 described a seasonal orientation, noting that during admission periods the main goal becomes recruitment, while during the academic year the focus shifts toward reputation and engagement maintenance (PrM1). Student accounts also align with this pattern: PrS2 recalled that during spring (admission season) there were “*many videos and posts,*” and described that active social media at that time made the university “*look very attractive for applicants*” (PrS2). This indicates that campaign intensity increases during recruitment months, consistent with market-facing institutional priorities.

PrS2 explained that when students managed Instagram, “*especially summer and until mid-September,*” the content was “*very good, informative, sometimes funny,*” whereas later, when “*the administration took over,*” it became less engaging (PrS2). This suggests that posting rhythm and quality are influenced not only by campaign timing but also by internal workflow and content ownership.

The case of Public University

Organizational Structure and Resource Support

Social media communication at the public university is centrally coordinated through the University Press Office, which oversees institutional messaging and ensures alignment with broader communication policies. According to the Head of the Press Office, the role involves “*implementing the institution’s information policy and shaping its public image,*” as well as ensuring “*consistency, regularity, and stylistic coherence of content across social media and official platforms,*” (PuM1). The planning and approval process follows a structured institutional framework. Content is published “*in accordance with the university’s event plan,*” (PuM1). In addition, creative posts are scheduled around

“public holidays, special events, and various academic processes such as examination periods” (PuM1). This suggests that the university’s social media workflow is strongly connected to the academic calendar and institutional event planning, reflecting a coordinated and policy-driven communication approach.

In terms of resources, the university possesses basic technical infrastructure for content production. The press office reported that “*the university is equipped with photo and video equipment necessary for conducting social media marketing activities,*” (PuM1). However, human resources remain a key limitation. The main operational challenge identified by the participant is “*a shortage of qualified specialists,*” which may affect the scope and speed of content production (PuM1). Despite this constraint, the press office continues to maintain regular communication output across platforms

Platform Strategy

Findings indicate that the public university follows a centralized multi-platform strategy with Instagram positioned as the primary public-facing channel. The Head of the Press Office (PuM1) identified Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram as priority platforms, explaining that Instagram and TikTok are selected due to their “*large and active audiences,*” and algorithmic reach, while Telegram is used for publishing news and maintaining interaction.

Students confirmed Instagram’s centrality. PuS1 described Instagram as the platform she checks “*very often*” because information appears quickly and visually. PuS2 similarly noted that most official announcements are posted on the primary Instagram page. However, students also follow additional accounts such as youth organizations and student clubs, suggesting that the university ecosystem includes both official and semi-autonomous pages (PuS1, PuS3).

TikTok emerged as particularly influential in recruitment contexts. PuS1 and PuS5 reported encountering student-generated TikTok videos before enrolling, which significantly shaped their perception of the university. PuS1 stated that student-made TikToks about scholarships and dorm life “*changed my mind,*” about where to apply. This suggests that while Instagram remains institutionally central, TikTok functions as an influential perception-building platform, particularly among applicants.

Telegram appears to play a secondary but structured role. Students are subscribed to faculty-specific or departmental Telegram channels (PuS3), using them primarily for academic updates rather than marketing exposure.

Content Formats

The public university’s content formats are largely characterized by a combination of static informational posts and short-form video content. According to PuM1, institutional news, achievements, and event announcements constitute the core of published materials. Creative content is added “*regularly*” to maintain interest, but the foundational format remains news-oriented. Students consistently emphasized a preference for short videos, particularly Reels and TikTok-style content. PuS1 described reels as “*more dynamic and emotional,*” enabling her to understand events she could not attend. PuS2 and PuS3 also highlighted the importance of short, visually engaging videos over long-form recordings, noting that lengthy videos or text-heavy posts reduce attention. Despite the increasing importance of video, students observed that much official content remains formal and static. PuS3 stated that most university content is “*formal and more informational, rather than entertaining,*” particularly on the official account. This challenge is also acknowledged in the university’s development program. The SWOT analysis notes that the institution’s “*educational programs do not sufficiently respond to the interests of Generation Z and Alpha*” (Development Program, 2023–2029, p.14).

Although this statement refers primarily to academic programs, it also helps explain students' perceptions that the university's social media communication sometimes appears overly formal and insufficiently adapted to the expectations of younger digital audiences.

Several students ($n = 2$) argued that content often becomes retrospective rather than timely. One student articulated this concern in detail: *"Announcements about events are often published after the events have already taken place... As a result, social media sometimes functions more as a report rather than as a tool for timely communication. The tone feels impersonal and formal, and the content mainly consists of text and images,"* (PuS1)

Student-generated content emerged as a powerful complementary format. PuS1 and PuS4 explicitly noted that unofficial or student-run pages feel more engaging and authentic than the main institutional account. In some cases, students reported trusting student-created content more than official publications (PuS4).

Communication Style and Tone

The communication style of the public university is predominantly formal, structured, and institutional. PuM1 emphasized ensuring *"consistency, regularity, and stylistic coherence,"* across platforms, reflecting a controlled and policy-aligned tone. Students frequently described official posts as *"formal"* (PuS1, PuS3, PuS4), particularly in comparison to student-led content.

Language use is a defining feature of communication style. PuS2 explicitly stated, *"Language is very important for me, I prefer posts in Kazakh,"* indicating that language choice affects engagement. PuS3 observed that most content is published in Kazakh, with occasional Russian posts, positioning Kazakh as the dominant communicative medium. At the strategic level, PuM1 recommended *"maintaining the purity of the Kazakh language,"*

as part of strengthening institutional presence, reinforcing language as both communicative and symbolic.

PuS1 described official responses as “*polite and professional*,” yet also characterized posts as impersonal. Some students expressed a desire for more humor and informal tone, suggesting that stylistic rigidity may limit relational closeness.

The values-oriented character of the university’s communication is also reflected in official strategic documents. The development program describes the institution as “*an intellectual platform that develops leaders capable of managing change in a rapidly changing world*” and defines its mission as “*the formation of leaders who are able to create, develop, and disseminate advanced knowledge and values in the field of education for the benefit of the country and the world*” (Development Program, 2023–2029, p.17).

Content Themes and Messaging

The dominant content themes at the public university center on institutional achievements, academic events, official meetings, and historical milestones. Students confirmed that posts often focus on conferences, meetings with public figures, academic competitions, and achievements (PuS3, PuS5). International partnerships and guest lecturers were also frequently mentioned as attractive themes (PuS2, PuS5). Such content reinforces academic credibility and institutional prestige. However, several students indicated that everyday student life is underrepresented. PuS1 argued that social media functions more as “*a report*,” after events rather than as a real-time communication tool. PuS4 and PuS3 noted that stress, dormitory realities, and less glamorous aspects of student life are rarely shown, creating a “*filtered version of reality*”. Thus, messaging prioritizes institutional success and formal activity coverage, with comparatively less emphasis on informal, everyday experiences.

The document also highlights the goal of “*developing a sustainable research environment for high-quality research conducted by faculty and students,*” as well as increasing the university’s participation in international research collaborations and academic partnerships (Development Program, 2023–2029, p.17). In addition, the program identifies “*integration of the university into the global educational space*” and the expansion of international cooperation as strategic priorities. These institutional objectives are further reflected in the university’s ambition “*to increase representation in international rankings and international accreditation of educational programs*” (Development Program, 2023–2029, p.17), which aligns with the strong presence of conferences, official meetings, and institutional achievements in social media posts.

Similar patterns appear on the university’s official website, where large sections are devoted to institutional history, governance structures, academic councils, accreditation materials, and official events. News sections frequently highlight conferences, academic competitions, and meetings with public figures, reinforcing the achievement-oriented and institutional messaging described by interview participants (University Website).

Engagement Strategy

Engagement in the public university case is structured but moderately interactive. PuM1 reported measuring engagement through reach, views, subscriber growth, likes, comments, and shares. However, no specialized analytics tools are used. Students described frequent liking, reposting, and emoji reactions, particularly when supporting friends (PuS2, PuS4). PuS1 reported actively commenting and reposting because she feels “*proud,*” and wants others to see her university. This indicates that emotional affiliation contributes to engagement behaviors. Response practices were generally described as polite and formal. PuS1 and PuS3 reported receiving clear, professional answers, although response speed was characterized as average. PuS4 mentioned at least one instance of no

response, requiring in-person clarification. Thus, while responsiveness exists, consistency may vary.

The university assesses effectiveness of posts through “*audience reach, number of content views, subscriber growth dynamics, and audience engagement such as likes, comments, and shares,*” (PuM1). However, the media manager noted that the team does “*not currently use specialized social media analytics tools to evaluate performance,*” (PuM1).

The website’s digital interaction tools also reflect a structured communication logic. Although the site includes a chatbot and links to social media platforms, these functions primarily operate as contact or information channels rather than interactive engagement spaces. This design supports the interview findings that digital communication remains institutionally managed and moderately interactive (University Website).

Visual Branding Strategy

Visual branding in the public case is marked by consistency and recognizable identity. PuS3 described a “*specific color scheme and cover design,*” that distinguishes the university from others. Visual branding in the public case is marked by consistency and recognizable identity. PuS3 described a “*specific color scheme and cover design,*” that distinguishes the university from others. PuM1 also emphasized the importance of maintaining “*consistency, regularity, and stylistic coherence of content across social media and official platforms,*” indicating that visual presentation is aligned with broader institutional communication goals (PuM1). Students acknowledged the presence of professional production during major events; as PuS5 explained, “*professional photographers and videographers are usually involved only during large-scale events,*” whereas everyday content is often recorded using smartphones (PuS5).

Transparency in visual representation also emerged as an important issue. PuS1 described a mismatch between the images presented online and her actual experience after enrollment. She explained that “*almost all photos represent only the main campus,*” which led her to assume she would study there, while in reality she was assigned to a different campus. A similar concern was raised regarding dormitory representation: although dormitory photos were available online, “*they were outdated and did not reflect the actual conditions,*” which created a discrepancy between expectations and reality (PuS1).

These concerns are also echoed in the development program, which identifies “*insufficient equipment of modern laboratories, sports facilities, and coworking zones for students*” and “*overcrowding of the university, shortage of classroom space, and shortage of dormitory places*” as institutional weaknesses (Development Program, 2023–2029, p.14).

Posting Frequency and Campaign Timing

Students generally described the public university as active on social media. PuS2 noted that the university “*posts very often and stays active,*” which increases trust and makes the institution appear more reliable. At the same time, perceptions of posting intensity varied. PuS4 suggested that excessive posting can feel overwhelming, explaining that “*when the university posts too frequently, it feels overwhelming,*” and that fewer but higher-quality posts may be more effective.

Content timing also appears closely tied to institutional schedules and official communication practices. According to PuM1, content is published “*in accordance with the university’s event plan,*” while communication often reflects key announcements and directives from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (PuM1).

Recruitment timing also plays an important role in social media visibility. Several students described encountering university content during the application period. For

example, PuS1 explained that she began seeing many student-generated TikTok videos about scholarships and campus life before applying, which “*increased my interest in applying to this university.*” Similarly, PuS5 reported first discovering the university through TikTok while searching for higher education options and later following its Instagram account before deciding to enroll. These accounts suggest that social media activity during recruitment periods plays a significant role in shaping prospective students’ perceptions and enrollment decisions.

How do social media marketing strategies differ and are similar at public and private universities? (RQ2)

Strategic Orientation and content

Both universities treat social media as an important channel for institutional visibility and communication with prospective and current students. In both cases, social media platforms contribute to shaping the public image of the institution and providing information about academic opportunities, events, and student activities. Media manager of public university commented, “*building and strengthening the university’s public image, ensuring transparency, broadly covering activities related to teacher education is our objective,*” (PuM1). Students from both universities also indicated that online content plays a role in forming first impressions about a university, particularly during the period when applicants are exploring higher education options (PrS1, PrS2, PuS1, PuS5). One student reported, “*Social media felt like the ‘face’ of the university,*” (PuS2). This can be reinforced by PrS3’s comment, “*Social media created the image of the university,*”(PrS3).

Despite these similarities, the underlying strategic orientation differs. The private university approaches social media more directly as a recruitment and competitiveness tool, emphasizing opportunities, industry partnerships, innovation, and career development (PrS2, PrS3, PrS4). This orientation also reflects broader institutional priorities articulated

in the university's development strategy, which highlights technological innovation, digital transformation, and industry collaboration as core strategic directions (University Strategy of Development, 2026 - 2030). Social media communication in this case is therefore closely aligned with attracting prospective students and highlighting the institution's technological and professional advantages.

The public university, by contrast, uses social media primarily as a channel for institutional communication and representation. Its content is more closely linked to official information flows, academic events, and institutional achievements, reflecting a stronger focus on maintaining institutional credibility and public legitimacy rather than explicitly promoting competitiveness in the higher education market (PuS3, PuS5). This orientation corresponds with the university's development program, which emphasizes academic leadership, research development, and the dissemination of educational values (Development Program, 2023 - 2029).

Organizational Structure

In both universities, social media communication is formally integrated into institutional structures rather than managed informally. Dedicated personnel or units are responsible for coordinating content production, managing institutional accounts, and ensuring that communication aligns with broader university priorities (PrM1, PuM1). In both cases, decision-making processes also involve hierarchical approval structures that regulate what type of content can be published.

However, the organizational arrangements differ. The private university relies on a small, specialized media team with clearly defined creative roles, which allows greater flexibility in content production and platform experimentation (PrM1). The structure supports faster adaptation to social media trends and enables the team to experiment with different formats and communication styles.

In contrast, the public university manages social media through a centralized press office that prioritizes consistency and alignment with institutional communication policy (PuM1). This structure results in more standardized communication practices and a stronger emphasis on institutional messaging, which corresponds with the broader communication logic reflected in the university's strategic documents emphasizing institutional identity and public representation (Development Program, 2023 - 2029).

Platform Strategy

Both institutions maintain a presence across multiple social media platforms and recognize the importance of reaching audiences through different digital channels. Instagram functions as the central platform in both cases, serving as the primary space for publishing university-related content and maintaining regular contact with students and applicants (PrS1, PrS3, PuS1, PuS2). As one student responded, *"I mostly use Instagram. It is the only platform I regularly use to follow university-related content,"* (PuS5). Other platforms, such as TikTok and Telegram, complement Instagram by supporting additional forms of communication.

Nevertheless, the way platforms are used differs between the two universities. In the private university case, different platforms tend to serve clearly differentiated functions. Instagram focuses on visual storytelling and engagement, TikTok emphasizes short-form entertainment and recruitment-oriented content, YouTube provides longer informational videos, and Telegram supports operational communication with students (PrS1, PrS2, PrS3). This diversified ecosystem also reflects the university's broader emphasis on digital transformation and technological infrastructure articulated in its development strategy (University Strategy of Development, 2026 - 2030).

In the public university case, platform functions are less clearly segmented. Instagram remains the main channel for institutional communication. (PuS3, PuS5).

TikTok contributes to visibility and recruitment, but its influence is often linked to student-generated rather than officially produced content (PuS1, PuS4). As a result, the private university demonstrates a more segmented and strategically differentiated platform ecosystem, whereas the public university relies on a more centralized and informational digital presence.

Content Formats

Students from both universities demonstrate similar preferences regarding content formats. Short-form video content, especially reels and TikTok-style videos, is perceived as more engaging and accessible than long textual posts or static announcements (PrS1, PrS3, PuS1, PuS2, PuS5). PuS4 directly shared that but “*After seeing many TikToks about my current university, along with positive reviews, I decided to apply here,*” (PuS4). Visual design, clarity of presentation, and concise information are important factors influencing whether students notice and interact with content.

The institutions differ, however, in how strongly these preferences are reflected in their communication practices. The private university integrates short-form video and visually dynamic formats more extensively into its content strategy, using them to highlight student experiences, institutional partnerships, and opportunities for professional development (PrS1, PrS2, PrS3). The public university continues to rely more heavily on informational posts and formal announcements related to academic events, conferences, and official meetings (PuS3, PuS5). Although visual content is present in both cases, the private university appears more responsive to contemporary digital media consumption patterns, while the public university maintains a more traditional information-oriented communication style.

Communication Style

Both universities aim to maintain a professional tone in their social media communication, reflecting the formal character of higher education institutions. Content in both cases also attempts to balance informational value with engagement, particularly when addressing prospective students and the wider public.

At the same time, differences emerge in the degree of informality and audience orientation. The private university demonstrates a stronger tendency to adopt conversational and student-oriented communication styles, occasionally incorporating humor, informal language, and interactive elements in order to increase engagement (PrS1, PrS2). The public university's communication style remains more formal and institutionally framed, emphasizing professionalism and consistency over experimentation (PuS1, PuS3, PuS4). As a result, the private university's communication style appears more aligned with the informal norms of contemporary social media culture, whereas the public university prioritizes institutional authority and official representation.

Student Participation and User-Generated Content

In both cases, student-generated content plays an important role in the broader social media environment surrounding the university. Students frequently engage with or produce their own content related to campus life, events, and personal experiences. Such content contributes to shaping perceptions of the university, particularly among prospective applicants (PrS1, PrS2, PuS1, PuS4).

The difference lies in how formally this participation is incorporated into institutional communication. The private university appears to integrate student involvement more deliberately into its social media practices, including collaboration with student pages and reposting user-generated content (PrS2, PrS3). In the public university case, student-created content tends to exist alongside official accounts rather than being

systematically incorporated into them (PuS1, PuS4). As a result, student voices contribute to the communication ecosystem in both contexts, but their integration into official strategies appears more structured in the private university.

Authenticity

Students from both universities indicated that social media representations of campus life often emphasize positive experiences, achievements, and active student communities (PrS1, PrS2, PuS1, PuS4). For example, PrS4 mentioned that “*Social media mostly shows successful side of the university,*” (PrS4). This selective representation is common in institutional communication and reflects the desire to present the university in a favorable light.

Nevertheless, students from both institutions also identified discrepancies between online representations and their everyday experiences (PrS2, PuS1). According to PuS4, “*There were noticeable differences between how the dormitory was shown and the actual conditions,*” (PuS4). In both cases, some aspects of university life are less visible on official social media channels, including routine academic challenges or infrastructural limitations. These gaps suggest that maintaining authenticity and transparency remains an important challenge for institutional social media communication across both sectors.

Overall Comparative Patterns

Overall, the comparison demonstrates that public and private universities in Kazakhstan share several common characteristics in their social media strategies, including the use of multiple platforms, the central role of Instagram, and the increasing importance of visual and video-based communication. Both institutions recognize social media as an important tool for communicating with students and enhancing institutional visibility.

At the same time, important differences emerge in how social media is integrated into institutional strategy. The private university demonstrates a more flexible, marketing-

oriented approach that prioritizes recruitment, innovation-oriented messaging, and adaptation to digital communication trends. The public university adopts a more centralized and institutionally oriented approach, emphasizing informational communication, academic legitimacy, and the representation of institutional achievements. These differences reflect broader distinctions between market-driven and institutionally regulated communication logics within higher education systems.

How can the insights from this comparative analysis inform the development of more effective SMM frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan? (RQ3)

The comparative analysis of public and private university cases provides several insights that can inform the development of more effective social media marketing (SMM) frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan. These insights highlight structural, strategic, and communicative factors that influence how universities interact with digital audiences and shape institutional reputation.

Strategic Alignment Between Communication and Institutional Goals

One key implication concerns the need to align social media strategies more explicitly with institutional objectives. In the private university case, social media communication was closely connected to recruitment cycles and institutional competitiveness, emphasizing opportunities, partnerships, and career pathways (PrM1, PrS2, PrS3). As one student mentioned, *“I want to understand what perspectives we will have in the future,”* (PrS2). This approach allowed social media to function not only as an informational tool but also as a mechanism for attracting prospective students.

In contrast, the public university’s social media strategy was more strongly integrated with institutional communication policy and public image management (PuM1). Media manager of the public university explained that *“The university’s social media platforms primarily publish institutional news, achievements at international and national*

levels, and event announcements” (PuM1). While this approach ensures consistency and credibility, it may limit the visibility of student-centered content and opportunities that prospective applicants often seek (PuS1, PuS4). As one participant noted, *“I think the university should add more creative and student-oriented video content.”* (PuS4). And another participant shared similar response, *“When I see students like me achieving something, it feels motivating and more relatable,”* (PuS1). These differences suggest that effective SMM frameworks should combine both orientations: maintaining institutional credibility while also strategically highlighting opportunities and student experiences that influence recruitment decisions.

Developing Structured but Flexible Communication Teams

Another important insight relates to organizational structures supporting social media communication. The private university case demonstrated the advantages of a specialized media team capable of producing diverse content formats and adapting to digital trends (PrM1). At the same time, internal bureaucratic processes and frequent requests from different departments sometimes constrained creative planning.

In the public university case, social media management was centralized within a press office, which ensured consistent messaging but limited flexibility in responding to emerging digital communication trends (PuM1). As public manager noted, *“I would also give the marketing team more creative freedom and expand the team by hiring additional staff,”* (PuM1). Both managers of public and private university mentioned the problems with time for creativity, *“Major challenges include bureaucracy, which consumes time and reduces creative flexibility,”* (PrM1, PuM1). These findings suggest that effective SMM frameworks should balance institutional coordination with creative autonomy. Universities may benefit from establishing interdisciplinary communication teams that combine

strategic oversight with specialized roles in content production, digital engagement, and platform management.

Integrating Multi-Platform Communication Strategies

The findings also indicate that universities should develop more clearly differentiated platform strategies. Both institutions maintain a presence across multiple platforms, but their communication ecosystems vary in terms of how clearly different platforms serve specific functions.

The private university case demonstrates the advantages of assigning distinct roles to different platforms, such as using Instagram for visual storytelling and engagement, TikTok for short-form content targeting applicants, and Telegram for operational communication with students (PrS1, PrS2, PrS3). The public university case shows that while multi-platform presence exists, platform functions are often less clearly differentiated and remain focused primarily on information distribution (PuS3, PuS5).

An effective SMM framework should therefore conceptualize social media platforms as an integrated ecosystem in which different channels serve complementary communication purposes rather than simply replicating the same content across platforms.

Prioritizing Video-Based and Visually Engaging Content

Across both institutional contexts, students consistently expressed a strong preference for short-form video content and visually structured posts (PrS1, PrS3, PuS1, PuS2). Video formats such as reels and short videos allow universities to communicate information quickly while also conveying the atmosphere of campus life and student experiences. According to one student, “*When I see videos of student clubs, happy students, teamwork - it makes the university feel alive,*” (PrS3). And another student expressed interest in Reels format, “*Reels feel more dynamic and emotional,*” (PuS2).

However, the comparative analysis suggests that not all institutions fully adapt their communication practices to these preferences. While the private university actively integrates video-based storytelling and visually dynamic content formats (PrS1, PrS2), the public university continues to rely more heavily on informational posts and static announcements (PuS3, PuS5). One student directly stated that “*there is little entertaining or trend-based content,*” (PuS5).

These findings indicate that effective SMM frameworks should place greater emphasis on multimedia storytelling, particularly formats that combine concise information with visual narratives about student life, academic opportunities, and institutional initiatives.

Encouraging Student Participation in Content Creation

Another key implication concerns the role of students as active contributors to digital communication. In both cases, student-generated content significantly influenced how universities were perceived by prospective applicants and current students (PrS2, PuS1, PuS4). As one participant said, “*Personal stories make content stronger,*” (PrS4). Student-created videos and posts often appeared more authentic and relatable than official institutional communication.

The private university case demonstrates a more systematic integration of student voices into institutional communication through collaborations and reposting user-generated content (PrS2, PrS3). One student reported that “*Universities should invite different students to participate in content creation,*” (PrS3). In the public university case, student-created content also plays an influential role, but it often develops independently through unofficial pages and personal accounts (PuS1, PuS4).

These findings suggest that SMM frameworks should formally incorporate student participation into communication strategies. Structured student ambassador programs,

collaborative content production, and partnerships with student organizations may enhance authenticity and strengthen engagement with younger audiences.

Enhancing Transparency

Finally, the analysis highlights the importance of authenticity and transparency in institutional communication. Students from both universities noted that social media content often emphasizes positive aspects of university life while underrepresenting everyday challenges or practical realities (PrS2, PuS1). PrS2 explained, “*Many first-year students get disappointed because the reality is very different from what they imagined,*” (PrS2). This is reinforced by the PuS1 words, “*Greater transparency... would help future students make more informed decisions when applying,*” (PuS1). Although promotional messaging is common in institutional communication, significant discrepancies between online representation and real experiences may weaken trust.

Effective SMM frameworks should therefore aim to present a more balanced portrayal of university life, including academic challenges, learning processes, and diverse student experiences. Such transparency can strengthen credibility and help prospective students form more realistic expectations about the university environment.

Toward a Context-Sensitive SMM Framework for Kazakhstani Universities

Overall, the comparative findings suggest that effective SMM frameworks for higher education institutions in Kazakhstan should integrate several key elements: strategic alignment with recruitment and institutional goals, flexible organizational structures for content production, differentiated multi-platform communication ecosystems, strong emphasis on video-based storytelling, systematic student participation, and greater transparency in representing university life. By combining these elements, universities can move beyond purely informational communication toward more dynamic, interactive, and

audience-centered digital strategies that reflect the expectations of contemporary students and applicants.

Summary

This chapter presented the key findings from the comparative case study of one public and one private university in Kazakhstan. The findings show that both institutions recognize social media as an important tool for visibility, communication, and engagement, with Instagram, short-form video, and visual content playing central roles in both cases. However, the private university demonstrates a more flexible, recruitment-oriented, and market-driven SMM strategy, while the public university follows a more centralized, formal, and institutionally oriented communication approach.

Overall, the chapter shows that effective SMM frameworks for Kazakhstani higher education should combine institutional credibility with student-centered storytelling, platform-specific communication, creative flexibility, student participation, and greater transparency. These findings provide the basis for the next chapter, which discusses the results in relation to the theoretical framework and existing literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study examined how public and private universities in Kazakhstan conceptualize and implement social media marketing (SMM), how their strategies converge and diverge, and what these patterns reveal about institutional practice. The findings indicate that SMM is not simply a technical communication function or a promotional activity. Rather, it operates as a strategically significant institutional practice through which universities negotiate legitimacy, stakeholder visibility, organizational identity, and competition. Interpreted through Neo-Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) and Resource Dependence Theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), the findings suggest that social media practices are shaped by two simultaneous dynamics. First, both institutions experience similar field-level pressures that encourage convergence in digital communication practices. Second, differences in institutional funding structures, governance arrangements, and strategic priorities produce divergence in how these practices are interpreted and implemented.

In this sense, the discussion moves beyond describing which platforms universities use or which content formats students prefer. Instead, it interprets these patterns as evidence of deeper institutional processes. Neo-Institutional Theory is especially useful for explaining why organizations within the same field adopt similar practices over time. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe this process as institutional isomorphism, meaning that organizations become alike because they respond to similar pressures in their environment. These pressures may be coercive, when they arise from formal regulation and expectations of accountability; normative, when they emerge from professional standards and shared ideas of best practice; or mimetic, when organizations imitate models perceived as successful or legitimate under conditions of uncertainty. Resource

Dependence Theory complements this perspective by explaining why organizations that appear similar at the surface level may still behave differently in strategic terms. Because universities depend on different resources and external actors, they adapt their communication in ways that support survival, legitimacy, and competitive positioning. Together, these frameworks make it possible to understand SMM not as a neutral tool, but as an institutional response to both shared pressures and uneven dependencies.

Strategic Orientation of Social Media Marketing

Prior research suggests that universities increasingly rely on social media to maintain visibility, engage prospective students, and shape institutional image in competitive higher education environments (Peruta & Shields, 2017; Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025). Scholarship also shows that private universities tend to be more market-responsive and outward-facing, whereas public institutions are shown to emphasize legitimacy, continuity, and institutional authority (Dattey et al., 2014; Hein, 2025; Othman & Othman, 2014; Salem, 2020).

The present findings support this broad pattern, but also refine it. Both public and private universities in this study treated social media as a central communication channel, which indicates a shared recognition that SMM has become a normalized and expected part of higher education communication. At the same time, their strategic orientation differed. The private university emphasized opportunities, innovation, partnerships, employability, academic mobility, and future career prospects, whereas the public university emphasized institutional achievements, official events, conferences, guest lectures, and formal communication aligned with university planning and ministerial direction.

This pattern can first be interpreted through Neo-Institutional Theory. The shared adoption of SMM reflects institutional isomorphism, as both universities operate within a

common higher education field in which active digital presence, visibility, and engagement are increasingly expected markers of legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Within this broader isomorphic process, normative pressures appear especially important, because social media has become part of the professionalized script of what a contemporary university is expected to do. Universities are not simply choosing SMM because it is useful; they are also responding to the expectation that a legitimate institution should be visible, accessible, and digitally active. There is also a mimetic element, since universities facing uncertainty about how best to communicate with younger audiences may imitate practices already associated with successful or modern institutions. In this sense, both institutions appear similar because they are responding to the same field-level expectations about what a contemporary university should look like.

However, similarity at the level of adoption does not mean similarity at the level of purpose. Here Resource Dependence Theory is more useful. This theory begins from the assumption that organizations depend on external environments for critical resources, such as students, funding, partnerships, and legitimacy, and therefore adapt strategically to manage uncertainty and secure those resources. The private university, being more dependent on student recruitment and competitive differentiation, uses social media to communicate value and attract applicants. The public university, operating within a more stable framework of public legitimacy and administrative accountability, uses social media primarily to reinforce institutional standing and credibility. In this sense, the private university's SMM is more recruitment-oriented and future-facing, while the public university's SMM is more representational and legitimacy-oriented.

This interpretation is reinforced by Collins et al. (2024), who show that students evaluate universities not only through academic quality, but also through broader value cues such as scholarships, career opportunities, safety, and infrastructure. It is also

supported by Jain et al. (2023), who argue that stakeholders assess universities through internal cues such as benefits and opportunities, and external cues such as brand image and digital visibility. Taken together, these studies help explain why the private university's communication strategy places such strong emphasis on opportunities and partnerships. In theoretical terms, these communication choices can be understood as attempts to manage resource vulnerability by signaling future value to prospective students and other stakeholders. The public university, in contrast, appears less vulnerable to immediate recruitment uncertainty and therefore more strongly oriented toward preserving its legitimacy and institutional authority. Thus, the divergence in strategic orientation reflects not simply stylistic variation, but different forms of organizational dependence and different institutional responses to environmental pressure.

Platform Strategy and Communication Logic

Existing literature shows that universities increasingly maintain multi-platform digital presences in order to remain visible and engage different audiences (Pawar, 2024; Pietrzak et al., 2025; Valerio-Ureña et al., 2020). Instagram, in particular, has become central to higher education communication because of its visual and interactive affordances (Peruta & Shields, 2017). Research also suggests that private institutions often demonstrate greater flexibility and responsiveness in platform use (Nguyen et al., 2021).

The findings of this study align with that literature, but also extend it. Both institutions maintained a presence across several digital platforms and both prioritized Instagram, which indicates another area of convergence. This shared reliance on multi-platform visibility suggests that digital presence itself has become normalized.

Neo-Institutional Theory helps explain this shared pattern through the concept of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Universities are operating in a field where digital visibility is increasingly taken for granted as part of legitimate institutional

practice. Within this process, mimetic pressures are especially relevant, because institutions may imitate highly visible platform strategies already associated with modern, successful, or student-centered universities. Normative pressures also matter, as communication professionals increasingly treat multi-platform presence as a standard practice. To a lesser extent, coercive pressures may also be present where institutions are expected to demonstrate transparency, public accessibility, and responsiveness through official channels. In the current higher education environment, absence from major platforms may signal irrelevance or institutional backwardness. Simply being present across platforms has become part of what is expected of a legitimate contemporary university.

Yet the logic of platform use differed. The private university used platforms with clearer functional segmentation. Instagram served as the main visual engagement platform, Telegram functioned as an operational and informational communication tool, TikTok was linked more closely to entertainment and recruitment, and YouTube supported longer and more formal content. The public university also used multiple platforms, but platform roles were less differentiated and remained more strongly tied to general information dissemination and institutional visibility.

This difference is best interpreted through Resource Dependence Theory. A university that depends more heavily on student attraction and competitive differentiation has stronger incentives to tailor communication channels to different audiences and functions (Hein, 2025). In that sense, the private university's platform strategy reflects a stronger need to optimize communication in support of recruitment and visibility. By contrast, the public university's more centralized approach suggests that platforms are treated less as differentiated engagement environments and more as extensions of institutional broadcasting. In RDT terms, the private institution responds to a more

uncertain and competitive resource environment, which makes strategic segmentation more necessary.

Supporting literature helps deepen this interpretation. Research on Kazakhstani universities suggests that many institutions maintain online channels without fully integrating them into coherent communication ecosystems (Zarubina et al., 2024; Abuova et al., 2021). Jain et al. (2023) further argue that digitalization increases the complexity of stakeholder relationships and requires universities to manage multiple relationship touchpoints. Seen in this light, the private university's more differentiated platform ecology may reflect a stronger orientation toward managing varied stakeholder interactions, while the public university's model remains closer to a unified institutional communication system. Thus, platform strategy should be understood not only in terms of where universities are present, but in terms of how they assign communicative purpose to each channel and how those choices reflect deeper institutional dependencies.

Content Formats

Previous research consistently shows that younger audiences respond more positively to concise, visual, emotionally engaging, and narrative-driven communication (Andoh-Quainoo, 2020; Duisebayeva & Nurtai, 2024; Peruta & Shields, 2017). Studies in higher education similarly suggest that visual storytelling and student-centered content often generate stronger engagement than formal or text-heavy administrative posts (Garcia et al., 2021; Maresova et al., 2020).

The findings of this study strongly support this literature. Students across both institutions expressed clear preferences for short-form videos, reels, TikTok-style content, and visually structured posts. This common preference represents another area of convergence and suggests that student expectations are shaped by broader platform norms rather than by one institution alone.

Neo-Institutional Theory helps explain why both universities increasingly acknowledge such formats (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Once short-form video and visual storytelling become normalized as effective digital communication, universities face isomorphic pressure to adapt if they wish to remain relevant and credible. Here again, normative pressures are especially visible, because these formats become embedded in shared ideas of effective practice. Mimetic pressures may also encourage adaptation, as universities imitate the communication styles of institutions perceived as successful in engaging students. In this sense, the legitimacy of communication no longer depends only on what is said, but also on whether the format itself appears current and recognizable within dominant platform cultures.

However, the degree of adaptation differed. The private university incorporated such formats more systematically into its communication strategy, while the public university continued to rely more heavily on static informational communication. This divergence is better explained through Resource Dependence Theory. For the private university, adapting content to audience preferences directly supports student attraction and competitiveness. For the public university, communication remains more strongly tied to formal information provision and institutional representation, which reduces the immediate pressure to fully transform content practices. In other words, the same field-level expectation produces different strategic responses because the organizational risks of not adapting are different.

Supporting literature on student behavior strengthens this interpretation. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2021) argue that student engagement is shaped not only by messages themselves but by whether communication fosters identification with the institution. Gibbs et al. similarly show that students highly value relational bonding and being treated as individuals. These studies help explain why students in the present research responded

more strongly to content featuring real student experiences, familiar faces, and emotionally resonant situations. Their preferences were not merely aesthetic; they reflected a desire for recognition, relational accessibility, and the ability to imagine themselves within the institution. Thus, content format should be understood not only as a communication choice but as a mechanism through which universities either facilitate or limit student connection, identification, and belonging. The theoretical implication is that institutional adaptation to digital format is not neutral; it shapes the relational quality of communication itself.

Student-Generated Content

Prior research shows that peer communication and user-generated content often hold greater persuasive power than official institutional messaging, especially in higher education decision-making (Khan, 2017; Perera et al., 2022; Ruangkanjanases et al., 2022). Collins et al. (2024) similarly found that word-of-mouth remains one of the most influential sources of information for students choosing a university.

The present study supports these findings. In both cases, students described peer-created TikToks, student pages, and informal online narratives as highly influential in shaping how they viewed the university before and after enrollment. This is an important point of convergence: both universities operate within a digital environment in which student voices matter significantly.

Neo-Institutional Theory helps explain this shared condition. In a field where peer voice has become normalized as a marker of authenticity and relevance, universities cannot easily ignore student-generated content, even if they do not fully control it. This reflects another dimension of institutional isomorphism, where the communication field itself changes and institutions must respond. Student voice has become part of the environment of legitimate communication, not simply an external or optional addition.

At the same time, the institutions differed in how they responded to its importance. The private university incorporated student-generated content more actively into official communication strategies, while the public university allowed it to coexist alongside formal institutional communication without fully integrating it. This divergence is best explained through Resource Dependence Theory. Because student participation and peer advocacy can strengthen recruitment and visibility, the private institution has stronger incentive to mobilize these informal communicative resources strategically. The public university, by contrast, appears less dependent on such peer-based persuasion and therefore less inclined to systematically integrate it.

Supporting literature helps illuminate the implications of this pattern. Jain et al. (2023) argue that stakeholder voices can enhance trust, engagement, and value co-creation when they are integrated meaningfully and ethically. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2021) further suggest that participation is strengthened when students identify with the institution. These studies help explain why peer-created content may do more than attract attention; it can also make the institution appear more socially recognizable, sincere, and approachable. Still, the key explanation remains institutional. The universities differ in how they use peer communication not because one simply “understands authenticity better,” but because they operate under different dependencies, priorities, and strategic imperatives. Student-generated content should therefore be understood not only as a trend, but as a resource whose value varies according to institutional position.

Authenticity, Trust, and Institutional Credibility

Previous research shows that university marketing often constructs idealized representations that do not fully reflect everyday institutional reality (Fritz & Smith, 2024). Research on brand authenticity in higher education further argues that authenticity depends

less on polished image construction and more on alignment between institutional promise and actual experience (Girardin et al., 2023).

The findings of this study support both arguments. Students in both institutions described discrepancies between what social media portrayed and what they later encountered in practice, especially regarding facilities, dormitories, and everyday student life. This indicates another area of convergence: both institutions foreground positive achievements, active student life, and institutional strengths.

Universities are incentivized to present themselves in ways that align with socially desirable images of success, activity, and relevance. In other words, idealization is not simply a communication error; it is structurally encouraged by the institutional field. This can also be connected to the idea that organizations often conform symbolically to what is valued in their environment. Positive and aspirational representation becomes part of how institutions demonstrate that they belong to the category of the active, successful, and student-oriented university (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

However, the stakes of this idealization differ. Resource Dependence Theory helps explain why the private university may be especially motivated to emphasize attractive and opportunity-rich representations, since persuasive visibility directly supports recruitment. Yet when such representations diverge too far from reality, they may undermine trust and weaken communicative credibility. In RDT terms, efforts to secure resources may also create reputational risks when projected value is not matched by lived experience.

Supporting literature clarifies why this matters. Girardin et al. (2023) identify the “service gap” between brand message and actual experience as a major threat to perceived authenticity. John and De Villiers (2020) argue that trust depends partly on whether institutions deliver what they implicitly promise. Jain et al. (2023) similarly emphasize that relationship quality depends on trust, communication, commitment, and service quality.

These studies help explain why students reacted critically to representation gaps in the present research. Still, the explanatory core remains institutional. Universities are not misrepresenting themselves simply because they misunderstand authenticity; they are navigating competing pressures to appear attractive, legitimate, and successful within constrained organizational realities. Authenticity in SMM is therefore not merely a stylistic issue. It is a structural issue shaped by the relationship between institutional aspiration, communication pressure, and lived student experience.

Communication Style, Language, and Institutional Positioning

Comparative research suggests that public and private universities often differ in communication style, with private institutions tending to adopt more flexible and audience-oriented approaches, while public institutions maintain more formal and institutionalized forms of communication (Othman & Othman, 2014). Research on communication also suggests that language choice and localized imagery influence stakeholder engagement and institutional perception (Sadyk & Islam, 2022).

The findings of this study support these patterns. Both universities retained a degree of professionalism and coherence, indicating convergence in the expectation that universities must communicate in credible and institutionally appropriate ways.

Neo-Institutional Theory helps explain this shared emphasis on professionalism. As higher education organizations, both institutions must preserve legitimacy, seriousness, and coherence in public communication. This reflects normative expectations within the field about how universities should sound and present themselves. Even when institutions experiment with new formats, they remain constrained by the need to communicate as credible universities.

At the same time, the institutions diverged in tone and linguistic strategy. The private university was more likely to experiment with humor, student-centered tone, and

informal engagement strategies, whereas the public university maintained a more formal, structured, and policy-aligned voice. Resource Dependence Theory helps explain this difference. Because the private university depends more strongly on student recruitment and visibility, it has greater incentive to experiment with relatability and audience appeal. The public university's legitimacy, by contrast, is tied more closely to authority, public accountability, and established academic identity (Dattey et al., 2014; Hein, 2025).

Language use further deepens this interpretation. In the public university case, Kazakh functioned not only as a communication medium but also as a marker of institutional identity and national orientation. In the private university case, multilingual communication reflected a more flexible and internationally oriented strategy. These differences cannot be reduced to simple audience targeting. Rather, they reflect broader institutional positioning. The public university communicates as a nationally rooted institution aligned with public educational values, whereas the private university communicates as a more globally oriented and market-responsive actor.

Supporting literature offers further insight here. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2021) suggest that communication perceived as sincere is especially influential in strengthening student identification. This is relevant because tone and language likely shape whether students see the university as trustworthy, approachable, and aligned with their own identity. However, the core explanation remains institutional: communication style and language policy are shaped by different legitimacy obligations and strategic dependencies. Thus, tone and language are not merely presentation choices; they are part of how institutions position themselves within Kazakhstan's social, cultural, and educational landscape.

Summary

Overall, the findings demonstrate that social media marketing in Kazakhstani higher education is shaped by both institutional convergence and strategic divergence. Similarities between the public and private universities are best explained by Neo-Institutional Theory, which shows how shared field-level pressures produce comparable digital forms, such as multi-platform presence, visual branding, and attention to video-based communication. In particular, the concept of institutional isomorphism helps explain why universities facing similar environments come to resemble one another through coercive, normative, and mimetic pressures. Differences are better explained by Resource Dependence Theory, which shows how variation in resource environments, governance arrangements, and strategic priorities shapes the purpose and implementation of those forms.

Supporting literature on student behavior, authenticity, word-of-mouth, engagement, and relational quality deepens interpretation, especially in explaining how students respond to institutional communication. Collins et al. (2024) reinforce the importance of value cues and word-of-mouth in student choice. Gibbs et al. show the importance of individual recognition and relational bonding. Girardin et al. explain why authenticity and service alignment matter. Naheen and Elsharnouby (2021) clarify the role of identification in participation and engagement. Jain et al. (2023) frame higher education communication as part of a broader relationship ecosystem. However, these bodies of literature do not replace the primary explanatory frameworks. Rather, they clarify the stakeholder consequences of practices whose institutional roots are best explained through NIT and RDT.

Taken together, the study suggests that SMM in this context is neither a purely technical tool nor a neutral communication channel. It is a site where universities perform

legitimacy, pursue visibility, manage dependence, and negotiate relationships with students and other stakeholders. The public and private institutions appear similar at the level of digital presence because they face similar institutional pressures, but they differ in communicative purpose because they depend on different resources and serve different strategic imperatives. This dual dynamic is what makes SMM analytically valuable for understanding contemporary higher education in Kazakhstan.

The next chapter presents the overall conclusion of the study by summarizing the key findings and their theoretical and practical implications for social media marketing in Kazakhstani higher education. It also outlines the main limitations of the research and proposes directions for future studies to further develop understanding of digital communication practices in evolving higher education contexts.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This study set out to examine how public and private universities in Kazakhstan conceptualize and implement social media marketing (SMM), how their strategies converge and diverge, and how these insights can inform more effective SMM frameworks within a hybrid higher education system. By adopting a qualitative comparative case study design, the research addressed a clear gap in the literature, which remains dominated by Western, quantitative, and platform-centric studies that overlook institutional logics, stakeholder interpretation, and contextual dynamics.

Summary of Key Findings

The findings demonstrate that social media marketing in Kazakhstani higher education is characterized by both convergence and divergence across institutional types.

At the level of convergence, both public and private universities recognize social media as a central communication channel. They maintain multi-platform presence, prioritize Instagram, and increasingly acknowledge the importance of visual and video-based content. Students across both institutions display similar preferences for short-form, engaging, and visually structured content, and both cases highlight the growing influence of student-generated content in shaping institutional image.

These similarities reflect broader field-level dynamics. As suggested by Neo-Institutional Theory, universities operate within a shared institutional environment where digital visibility, engagement, and responsiveness have become expected markers of legitimacy. Through processes of institutional isomorphism, particularly normative and mimetic pressures, universities adopt similar communication practices in order to align with professional standards and perceived successful models.

However, significant divergence emerges in how these practices are interpreted and implemented.

The private university adopts a more market-oriented and recruitment-driven approach to SMM. Its communication emphasizes opportunities, partnerships, employability, and future career prospects. Platform use is more strategically differentiated, content formats are more aligned with student preferences, and student-generated content is more actively integrated into official communication.

In contrast, the public university adopts a more institutional and legitimacy-oriented communication logic. Its social media emphasizes academic achievements, official events, and formal communication aligned with institutional planning and public accountability. Platform use is more centralized, content remains more informational, and student-generated content operates largely outside formal institutional strategy.

These differences are best explained through Resource Dependence Theory. Because private universities are more dependent on student recruitment and competitive positioning, they adopt more adaptive, audience-oriented, and engagement-focused communication strategies. Public universities, operating within more stable structures of state support and institutional legitimacy, face less immediate pressure to transform communication practices and therefore maintain more formal and centralized approaches.

Across both cases, additional findings highlight important dynamics related to authenticity, engagement, and communication effectiveness. Students value relatable, student-centered content and respond strongly to peer-generated narratives. At the same time, both institutions face challenges related to authenticity, as discrepancies between online representations and lived experiences may weaken trust and credibility. These patterns indicate that SMM is not only a communication tool but also a site where institutional expectations, student perceptions, and organizational constraints intersect.

Implications for Social Media Marketing Frameworks in Kazakhstani Higher Education

The findings of this study provide several insights that can inform the development of more effective social media marketing frameworks for universities in Kazakhstan. First, social media strategies should be more explicitly aligned with institutional objectives. The private university demonstrates how digital communication can support recruitment by highlighting opportunities, partnerships, and student achievements. At the same time, the public university illustrates the importance of maintaining institutional credibility and consistent messaging. An effective SMM framework should therefore integrate both approaches, combining strategic promotion with reliable institutional communication.

Second, universities may benefit from developing more flexible organizational structures for digital communication. Specialized media teams, as observed in the private university case, enable faster adaptation to social media trends and facilitate the production of diverse content formats. However, effective communication also requires institutional coordination and clear approval procedures. Future frameworks should therefore balance creative autonomy with strategic oversight.

Third, the results highlight the importance of differentiated multi-platform communication ecosystems. Rather than simply replicating identical content across platforms, universities should assign specific functions to each channel. For example, Instagram may support visual storytelling, TikTok may target prospective students through short-form video, and Telegram may function as an operational communication channel for current students.

Fourth, universities should prioritize visual storytelling and short-form video content. As demonstrated by student responses in this study, video formats provide a more engaging

and immersive way to communicate university experiences. This observation corresponds with existing research emphasizing the effectiveness of narrative-based digital communication (Peruta & Shields, 2017; Maresova et al., 2020).

Finally, institutions should more actively incorporate student voices into their communication strategies. Student-generated content not only increases engagement but also strengthens authenticity and trust among prospective applicants. Such approaches are consistent with relationship marketing perspectives, which emphasize that long-term stakeholder engagement emerges through trust, communication, and shared value creation between institutions and their audiences (Jain et al., 2023). Structured student ambassador programs, collaborative content initiatives, and partnerships with student organizations could therefore enhance the credibility and relatability of institutional communication.

Overall, the findings suggest that effective social media marketing in higher education requires a balanced combination of institutional credibility, strategic promotion, participatory communication, and platform-specific storytelling. By adopting such integrated approaches, universities in Kazakhstan may strengthen their digital visibility, improve student engagement, and enhance their competitiveness in an increasingly digital higher education landscape.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the research is based on a limited number of institutional cases. The study focuses on one public and one private university, which allows for an in-depth comparative analysis but limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could expand the number of institutions examined in order to capture a broader range of

institutional contexts and communication strategies across the higher education sector in Kazakhstan.

Second, the study relies primarily on qualitative interview data and document analysis. While these methods provide rich insights into perceptions and institutional strategies, they do not measure the quantitative effectiveness of social media content. Future studies could incorporate social media analytics, engagement metrics, or large-scale content analysis to examine how different communication strategies influence audience behavior.

Third, the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as alumni, parents, admission office were not included. Expanding the range of participants could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how different audiences interpret and respond to institutional social media communication.

Another limitation concerns the rapidly evolving nature of social media platforms. Digital communication environments change quickly, with new platforms and content formats emerging continuously. As a result, the strategies observed in this study may evolve over time as universities adapt to new technologies and audience expectations.

Future research could build on this study by extending both its empirical scope and theoretical contributions. First, comparative studies across a larger number of universities in Kazakhstan and Central Asia would allow researchers to examine whether the observed pattern of convergence in digital forms and divergence in strategic communication is consistent across different institutional and regional contexts. Such research could further test and refine the explanatory power of Neo-Institutional Theory and Resource Dependence Theory in the field of higher education marketing.

Second, future studies could adopt mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to examine how different SMM strategies influence measurable outcomes such as

engagement, trust, and student decision-making. Building on the finding that students value authenticity and peer-generated content, researchers could investigate the relationship between content type (e.g., institutional vs. student-generated) and audience response across platforms. This would provide more precise evidence of what constitutes effective digital communication in higher education.

Finally, given the rapid evolution of digital platforms, longitudinal studies could investigate how universities adapt their communication strategies over time in response to changing technologies, platform affordances, and audience expectations. Such research would be particularly valuable in understanding how institutional pressures and resource dependencies interact dynamically in shaping digital transformation in higher education.

Overall, addressing these research directions would contribute to a deeper understanding of how higher education institutions can develop more effective, transparent, and student-centered digital communication strategies in rapidly changing digital environments.

This study has been particularly meaningful both academically and professionally. As a junior SMM specialist, engaging with this research allowed me to move beyond viewing social media as a set of tools or content formats, and instead understand it as a strategic and institutional practice shaped by organizational priorities, constraints, and stakeholder expectations. The findings challenged my initial assumptions about “effective” communication by showing that success is not only defined by engagement metrics, but also by alignment with institutional identity, authenticity, and long-term relationship building. Overall, this thesis has strengthened my perspective as both a researcher and practitioner, encouraging a more reflective, strategic, and context-sensitive approach to social media marketing in higher education.

Summary

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social media marketing in Kazakhstani higher education is not a neutral or purely technical activity. It is an institutional practice shaped by the interaction of field-level pressures and organizational dependencies.

Universities adopt similar digital forms because they operate within a shared environment that defines legitimate communication practices, yet they use these forms differently depending on their strategic priorities and resource conditions.

By revealing this dual dynamic of convergence and divergence, the study provides a more nuanced understanding of how higher education institutions navigate digital communication in a hybrid system. Social media emerges not simply as a marketing tool, but as a space where universities construct identity, manage legitimacy, and negotiate relationships with stakeholders.

As Kazakhstan continues to advance its digital transformation and internationalization agenda, understanding these dynamics becomes increasingly important. More strategically aligned, context-sensitive, and student-centered SMM practices can play a key role in strengthening institutional competitiveness, credibility, and engagement in the evolving global higher education landscape.

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Appendix A: AI Declaration Form



Thesis Title: Social media marketing in public and private universities in Kazakhstan: A
comparative case study

Declaration of the Use of Generative AI

I hereby declare that I have read and understood NUGSE's policy concerning appropriate use of AI and composed this work independently (please check one):

☒ with the use of artificial intelligence tools, or

☐ without the use of artificial intelligence tools.

(If you have used AI tools as defined in the GSE policy document, please complete the rest of this form.)

During the preparation of this thesis/examination, I used ChatGPT to brainstorm ideas, for proofreading, editing.

I also declare that I

☒ am aware of the capabilities and limitations of AI tool(s),

☒ have verified that the content generated by AI systems and adopted by me is factually correct,

☒ am aware that as the author of this thesis I bear full responsibility for the statements and assertions made in it,

☒ have submitted complete and accurate information about my use of AI tools in this work, and

☒ acknowledge that there may be disciplinary consequences if I have not followed NUGSE's guidelines regarding appropriate AI use.

Name: Moldir Shoimanova

Signature:

Date: 26.04.26

Appendix B: Informed consent form for staff participants

Title of the study

Comparative Analysis of Social Media Marketing Strategies in Public and Private Universities.

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on social media marketing in higher education in Kazakhstan. The aim is to compare strategies used in public and private universities. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will last about 45–60 minutes and will be held either in person or online, depending on what is most convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. These recordings will be transcribed and then deleted once the transcripts are checked. Only anonymized quotes may appear in the final thesis.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take no more than one hour.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. Some participants may feel slight discomfort when discussing university practices or sharing personal opinions. These risks will be minimized by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, allowing participants to skip questions, and giving them the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study include the opportunity to share your experiences and perspectives on university social media. Your input may help universities in Kazakhstan improve their social media marketing practices. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work,

Supervisor: Dr. Alper Calikoglu

alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the GSE Research IREC subcommittee at gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Қызметкерлерге арналған ақпараттық форма

Зерттеу жұмысының тақырыбы

Мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттердегі әлеуметтік желідегі маркетинг стратегияларын салыстырмалы талдау

СИПАТТАМА:

Сізді Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру саласындағы әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингке қатысты зерттеуге қатысуға шақырамыз. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қолданылатын стратегияларды салыстыру. Қатысуға келіссеңіз, Сізбен сұхбат жүргізіледі. Сұхбат шамамен 45–60 минутқа созылады және Сізге ыңғайлы форматта бетпе-бет немесе онлайн өткізіледі. Сіздің рұқсатыңызбен сұхбат аудиоға жазылады. Жазбалар мәтінге түсірілгеннен кейін жойылады. Диссертацияда тек анонимді дәйексөздер ғана қолданылады.

ӨТКІЗІЛЕТІН УАҚЫТЫ: Сіздің қатысуыңыз бір сағаттан аспайды.

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫНА ҚАТЫСУДЫҢ ҚАУІПТЕРІ МЕН АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ:

Бұл зерттеуге байланысты қауіптер аз. Кейбір қатысушылар университет тәжірибелері туралы айтуда немесе жеке пікірлерін бөлісуде аздап қолайсыздық сезінуі мүмкін. Бұл қауіптер анонимділік пен құпиялылықты қамтамасыз ету, қатысушыларға сұрақтарды өткізіп жіберу мүмкіндігін беру және кез келген уақытта ешқандай салдарсыз зерттеуден шығу құқығы арқылы азайтылады.

Бұл зерттеудің ықтимал пайдалы нәтижелері университеттің әлеуметтік желілеріне қатысты өз тәжірибеңізбен және көзқарастарыңызбен бөлісу мүмкіндігі. Сіздің пікірлеріңіз Қазақстандағы университеттердің әлеуметтік желідегі маркетинг тәжірибесін жетілдіруге көмектесуі мүмкін. Зерттеуге қатысуыңыз немесе қатыспауыңыз Сіздің жұмысыңызға әсер етпейді.

ҚАТЫСУШЫНЫҢ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ:

Егер Сіз берілген формамен танысып, зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті түрде екенін хабарлаймыз. Сонымен қатар, қалаған уақытта айыппұл төлемей және сіздің әлеуметтік жеңілдіктеріңізге еш кесірін тигізбей зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Зерттеу жұмысына мүлдем қатыспауыңызға да толық құқығыңыз бар. Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін.

БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:

Сұрақтарыңыз: Егер жүргізіліп отырған зерттеу жұмысының процесі, қауіп мен артықшылықтары туралы сұрағыңыз немесе шағымыңыз болса, келесі байланыс құралдары арқылы зерттеушінің магистрлық тезисі бойынша жетекшісімен хабарласуыңызға болады.

Жетекші: PhD, доктор Альпер Чалыкоглу
alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Дербес байланыс ақпараттары: Егер берілген зерттеу жұмысының жүргізілуімен қанағаттанбасаңыз немесе сұрақтарыңыз бен шағымдарыңыз болса, Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары Білім беру мектебінің Зерттеу Комитетімен көрсетілген байланыс құралдары арқылы хабарласуыңызға болады: электрондық поштамен gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға келісіміңізді берсеңіз, берілген формаға қол қоюыңызды сұраймыз.

- Мен берілген формамен мұқият таныстым;
- Маған зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты мен оның процедурасы жайында толық ақпарат берілді;
- Жинақталған ақпарат пен құпия мәліметтерге тек зерттеушінің өзіне қолжетімді және мәлім болатынын толық түсінемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта ешқандай түсініктемесіз зерттеу жұмысына қатысудан бас тартуыма болатынын түсінемін;
- Мен жоғарыда аталып өткен ақпаратты саналы түрде қабылдап, осы зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға өз келісімімді беремін.

Қолы: _____ Күні: _____

Appendix B: Форма информационного согласия для сотрудников

Название исследования

Сравнительный анализ стратегий маркетинга в социальных сетях в государственных и частных университетах.

ОПИСАНИЕ:

Вас приглашают принять участие в исследовании, посвящённом использованию социальных сетей в сфере высшего образования в Казахстане. Цель исследования – сравнить стратегии, применяемые в государственных и частных университетах. Если Вы согласитесь участвовать, Вам будет предложено пройти интервью. Интервью займёт около 45–60 минут и будет проведено в очном формате или онлайн в зависимости от того, какой вариант удобнее для Вас. С Вашего разрешения интервью будет аудиозаписано. Записи будут расшифрованы, после чего удалены. В итоговой диссертации могут быть использованы только анонимизированные цитаты.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ:

Ваше участие займёт не более одного часа.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА:

Риски, связанные с данным исследованием, минимальны. Некоторые участники могут почувствовать лёгкий дискомфорт при обсуждении практик университета или выражении личного мнения. Эти риски будут сведены к минимуму за счёт обеспечения анонимности и конфиденциальности, предоставления участникам права пропускать вопросы и возможности выйти из исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий.

Ожидаемые преимущества от участия включают возможность поделиться своим опытом и мнением об использовании социальных сетей университетом. Ваш вклад может помочь университетам Казахстана улучшить практику маркетинга в социальных сетях. Ваше решение участвовать или отказаться от участия в исследовании никак не повлияет на Вашу занятость.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКА:

Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без штрафных санкций и без потери социального пакета, который Вам предоставляли. В качестве альтернативы можно не участвовать в исследовании. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы: Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с руководителем магистерского тезиса исследователя:

Руководитель: PhD, доктор Альпер Чалыкоглу
alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил(а) представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будет иметь только исследователь;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Appendix C: Consent form for students

Title of the study

Comparative Analysis of Social Media Marketing Strategies in Public and Private Universities.

DESCRIPTION: You are invited to participate in a research study on social media marketing in higher education in Kazakhstan. The aim is to compare strategies used in public and private universities. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview. The interview will last about 45–60 minutes and will be held either in person or online, depending on what is most convenient for you. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. These recordings will be transcribed and then deleted once the transcripts are checked. Only anonymized quotes may appear in the final thesis.

TIME INVOLVEMENT: Your participation will take no more than one hour.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: The risks associated with this study are minimal. Some participants may feel slight discomfort when discussing university practices or sharing personal opinions. These risks will be minimized by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality, allowing participants to skip questions, and giving them the right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The benefits which may reasonably be expected to result from this study include the opportunity to share your experiences as a student engaging with university social media. Your input may help universities better understand how students experience and respond to social media marketing. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your grades at university.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS: If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work,

Supervisor: Dr. Alper Calikoglu

alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Independent Contact: If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the GSE Research IREC subcommittee at gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Студенттерге арналған ақпараттық форма

Зерттеу жұмысының тақырыбы

Мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттердегі әлеуметтік желідегі маркетинг стратегияларын салыстырмалы талдау

СИПАТТАМА:

Сізді Қазақстандағы жоғары білім беру саласындағы әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингке қатысты зерттеуге қатысуға шақырамыз. Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қолданылатын стратегияларды салыстыру. Қатысуға келіссеңіз, Сізбен сұхбат жүргізіледі. Сұхбат шамамен 45–60 минутқа созылады және Сізге ыңғайлы форматта бетпе-бет немесе онлайн өткізіледі. Сіздің рұқсатыңызбен сұхбат аудиоға жазылады. Жазбалар мәтінге түсірілгеннен кейін жойылады. Диссертацияда тек анонимді дәйексөздер ғана қолданылады.

ӨТКІЗІЛЕТІН УАҚЫТЫ: Сіздің қатысуыңыз бір сағаттан аспайды.

ЗЕРТТЕУ ЖҰМЫСЫНА ҚАТЫСУДЫҢ ҚАУІПТЕРІ МЕН АРТЫҚШЫЛЫҚТАРЫ:

Бұл зерттеуге байланысты қауіптер аз. Кейбір қатысушылар университет тәжірибесі туралы айтуда немесе жеке пікірлерімен бөлісуде аздап қолайсыздық сезінуі мүмкін. Бұл қауіптер анонимділік пен құпиялылықты қамтамасыз ету, сұрақтарға жауап бермей өту мүмкіндігі және кез келген уақытта ешқандай салдарсыз зерттеуден шығу құқығы арқылы азайтылады.

Бұл зерттеуге қатысудың ықтимал пайдасы – студент ретінде университеттің әлеуметтік желілерін пайдалану тәжірибеңізбен бөлісу мүмкіндігі. Сіздің пікірлеріңіз университеттердің студенттердің әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингті қалай қабылдайтынын және оған қалай жауап беретінін жақсырақ түсінуіне көмектесуі мүмкін. Зерттеуге қатысуыңыз немесе қатыспауыңыз Сіздің үлгеріміңізге немесе бағаларыңызға еш әсер етпейді.

ҚАТЫСУШЫНЫҢ ҚҰҚЫҚТАРЫ:

Егер Сіз берілген формамен танысып, зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға шешім қабылдасаңыз, Сіздің қатысуыңыз ерікті түрде екенін хабарлаймыз. Сонымен қатар, қалаған уақытта айыппұл төлемей және сіздің әлеуметтік жеңілдіктеріңізге еш кесірін тигізбей зерттеу жұмысына қатысу туралы келісіміңізді кері қайтаруға немесе тоқтатуға құқығыңыз бар. Зерттеу жұмысына мүлдем қатыспауыңызға да толық құқығыңыз бар. Сондай-ақ, қандай да бір сұрақтарға жауап бермеуіңізге де әбден болады. Бұл зерттеу жұмысының нәтижелері академиялық немесе кәсіби мақсаттарда баспаға ұсынылуы немесе шығарылуы мүмкін.

БАЙЛАНЫС АҚПАРАТЫ:

Сұрақтарыңыз: Егер жүргізіліп отырған зерттеу жұмысының процесі, қауіп мен артықшылықтары туралы сұрағыңыз немесе шағымыңыз болса, келесі байланыс құралдары арқылы зерттеушінің магистрлық тезисі бойынша жетекшісімен хабарласуыңызға болады.

Жетекші: PhD, доктор Альпер Чалыкоглу
alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Дербес байланыс ақпараттары: Егер берілген зерттеу жұмысының жүргізілуімен қанағаттанбасаңыз немесе сұрақтарыңыз бен шағымдарыңыз болса, Назарбаев Университеті Жоғары Білім беру мектебінің Зерттеу Комитетімен көрсетілген байланыс құралдары арқылы хабарласуыңызға болады: электрондық поштамен gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға келісіміңізді берсеңіз, берілген формаға қол қоюыңызды сұраймыз.

- Мен берілген формамен мұқият таныстым;
- Маған зерттеу жұмысының мақсаты мен оның процедурасы жайында толық ақпарат берілді;
- Жинақталған ақпарат пен құпия мәліметтерге тек зерттеушінің өзіне қолжетімді және мәлім болатынын толық түсінемін;
- Мен кез келген уақытта ешқандай түсініктемесіз зерттеу жұмысына қатысудан бас тартуыма болатынын түсінемін;
- Мен жоғарыда аталып өткен ақпаратты саналы түрде қабылдап, осы зерттеу жұмысына қатысуға өз келісімімді беремін.

Қолы: _____ Күні: _____

Appendix C: Форма информационного согласия для студентов

Название исследования

Сравнительный анализ стратегий маркетинга в социальных сетях в государственных и частных университетах.

ОПИСАНИЕ:

Вас приглашают принять участие в исследовании, посвящённом использованию социальных сетей в сфере высшего образования в Казахстане. Цель исследования – сравнить стратегии, применяемые в государственных и частных университетах. Если Вы согласитесь участвовать, Вам будет предложено пройти интервью. Интервью займёт около 45–60 минут и будет проведено в очном формате или онлайн в зависимости от того, какой вариант удобнее для Вас. С Вашего разрешения интервью будет аудиозаписано. Записи будут расшифрованы, после чего удалены. В итоговой диссертации могут быть использованы только анонимизированные цитаты.

ВРЕМЯ УЧАСТИЯ:

Ваше участие займёт не более одного часа.

РИСКИ И ПРЕИМУЩЕСТВА:

Риски, связанные с данным исследованием, минимальны. Некоторые участники могут почувствовать лёгкий дискомфорт при обсуждении практик университета или выражении личного мнения. Эти риски будут сведены к минимуму за счёт обеспечения анонимности и конфиденциальности, предоставления участникам права пропускать вопросы и возможности выйти из исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий.

Ожидаемые преимущества от участия включают возможность поделиться своим опытом как студента, взаимодействующего с социальными сетями университета. Ваш вклад может помочь университетам лучше понять, как студенты воспринимают и реагируют на маркетинг в социальных сетях. Ваше решение участвовать или отказаться от участия в исследовании никак не повлияет на Ваши оценки в университете.

ПРАВА УЧАСТНИКА:

Если Вы прочитали данную форму и решили принять участие в данном исследовании, Вы должны понимать, что Ваше участие является добровольным и что у Вас есть право отозвать свое согласие или прекратить участие в любое время без штрафных санкций и без потери социального пакета, который Вам предоставляли. В качестве альтернативы можно не участвовать в исследовании. Также Вы имеете право не отвечать на какие-либо вопросы. Результаты данного исследования могут быть представлены или опубликованы в научных или профессиональных целях.

КОНТАКТНАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ:

Вопросы: Если у Вас есть вопросы, замечания или жалобы по поводу данного исследования, процедуры его проведения, рисков и преимуществ, Вы можете связаться с руководителем магистерского тезиса исследователя:

Руководитель: PhD, доктор Альпер Чалыкоглу
alper.calikoglu@nu.edu.kz

Независимые контакты: Если Вы не удовлетворены проведением данного исследования, если у Вас возникли какие-либо проблемы, жалобы или вопросы, Вы можете связаться с Комитетом Исследований Высшей Школы Образования Назарбаев Университета, отправив письмо на электронный адрес gse.irec@nu.edu.kz.

Пожалуйста, подпишите данную форму, если Вы согласны участвовать в исследовании.

- Я внимательно изучил(а) представленную информацию;
- Мне предоставили полную информацию о целях и процедуре исследования;
- Я понимаю, как будут использованы собранные данные, и что доступ к любой конфиденциальной информации будет иметь только исследователь;
- Я понимаю, что вправе в любой момент отказаться от участия в данном исследовании без объяснения причин;
- С полным осознанием всего вышеизложенного я согласен принять участие в исследовании по собственной воле.

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Appendix D: Invitation letter for staff

Dear [Name/Colleagues],

My name is Moldir Shoimanova, and I am a second-year MSc student in Educational Leadership at Nazarbayev University. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting a study on how universities in Kazakhstan use social media marketing. The study aims to explore and compare the strategies employed in public and private institutions.

I would like to invite you to take part in this study. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview last no more than one hour, either in person or online at a time convenient for you. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. All information will remain strictly confidential, and no names or identifying details will be used in the research report.

Participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without any consequences. Your insights will make an important contribution to understanding social media marketing practices in higher education.

If you are interested, please contact me for further details. You will then receive a consent form to review before deciding. Should you have any questions or require clarification, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

With warm regards,

Moldir Shoimanova

MSc in Educational leadership: *Higher education*

Nazarbayev University, *Graduate School of Education*

Phone number: 8708 324 36 64

Email: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix D: Қызметкерлерге арналған шақыру хаты

Құрметті [Аты-жөні/Әріптестер],

Менің есімім Мөлдір Шойманова, мен Назарбаев Университетінде «Білім беру көшбасшылығы» мамандығы бойынша магистратураның екінші курс студентімін. Магистрлік диссертациям аясында Қазақстан университеттерінде әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингтің қалай қолданылатынын зерттеп жатырмын. Зерттеудің мақсаты – мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қолданылатын стратегияларды зерделеп, салыстыру.

Сіздерді осы зерттеуге қатысуға шақырғым келеді. Қатысуға келіссеңіз, Сізбен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбат жүргізіледі. Сұхбат ұзақтығы бір сағаттан аспайды және Сізге ыңғайлы уақытта бетпе-бет немесе онлайн түрде өткізіледі. Сіздің келісіміңізбен сұхбат аудиожазбаға жазылады. Барлық ақпарат қатаң құпия сақталады, зерттеу есебінде аты-жөніңіз немесе басқа жеке мәліметтер көрсетілмейді.

Қатысу ерікті түрде жүзеге асады, және Сіз кез келген уақытта ешқандай салдарсыз зерттеуден бас тарта аласыз. Сіздің ой-пікірлеріңіз жоғары білім беру саласында әлеуметтік желідегі маркетинг тәжірибесін тереңірек түсінуге маңызды үлес қосады.

Егер қызығушылық танытсаңыз, маған хабарласыңыз. Содан кейін Сізге шешім қабылдаудың алдында танысып шығу үшін келісім нысаны жіберіледі. Егер сұрақтарыңыз туындаса немесе қосымша түсініктеме қажет болса, менімен байланысуға тартынбаңыз.

Осы шақыруды қарастырғаныңыз үшін алғыс айтамын.

Ізгі тілекпен,

Мөлдір Шойманова

Магистратура студенті, «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық: Жоғары білім»

Назарбаев Университеті, *Жоғары білім беру мектебі*

Телефон: 8 708 324 36 64

Электрондық пошта: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix D: Приглашительное письмо для сотрудников

Уважаемый(ая) [Имя/Коллеги],

Меня зовут Мольдир Шойманова, я студентка второго курса магистратуры по программе «Образовательное лидерство» в Назарбаев Университете. В рамках своей магистерской диссертации я провожу исследование о том, как университеты в Казахстане используют маркетинг в социальных сетях. Цель исследования – изучить и сравнить стратегии, применяемые в государственных и частных университетах.

Я хотела бы пригласить Вас принять участие в данном исследовании. Если Вы согласитесь, Вам будет предложено пройти полуструктурированное интервью продолжительностью не более одного часа. Интервью может пройти в очном формате или онлайн в зависимости от того, как будет удобнее Вам. С Вашего согласия интервью будет аудиозаписано. Вся информация останется строго конфиденциальной, и в исследовательском отчёте не будут упомянуты имена или иные идентифицирующие данные.

Участие является полностью добровольным, и Вы вправе отказаться от него в любой момент без каких-либо последствий. Ваши ответы внесут важный вклад в понимание практики маркетинга в социальных сетях в сфере высшего образования.

Если Вы заинтересованы, пожалуйста, свяжитесь со мной для получения более подробной информации. Затем Вы получите форму согласия для ознакомления перед принятием решения. Если у Вас возникнут вопросы или потребуется разъяснение, пожалуйста, не стесняйтесь обращаться ко мне.

Благодарю Вас за рассмотрение данного приглашения.

С уважением,

Мольдир Шойманова

Студентка магистратуры по программе «Лидерство в образовании: *Высшее образование*»

Назарбаев Университет, Высшая школа образования

Телефон: 8 708 324 36 64

Электронная почта: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix E: Invitation letter for students

Dear Students,

My name is Moldir Shoimanova, and I am a second-year MSc student in Educational Leadership at Nazarbayev University. As part of my thesis research, I am conducting a study on how universities in Kazakhstan use social media marketing. The study aims to explore and compare the strategies employed in public and private institutions.

I would like to invite you to take part in this study. If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview last no more than one hour, either in person or online at a time convenient for you. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded. All information will remain strictly confidential, and no names or identifying details will be used in the research report.

Participation is voluntary, and your decision to participate will not affect your grades or standing at the university. By sharing your experiences, you can help universities better understand how students engage with social media and how social media marketing practices in higher education might be improved.

If you are interested, please contact me for further details. You will then receive a consent form to review before deciding. Should you have any questions or require clarification, please do not hesitate to reach out to me.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Moldir Shoimanova

MSc in Educational leadership: *Higher education*

Nazarbayev University, *Graduate School of Education*

Phone number: 8708 324 36 64

Email: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix E: Студенттерге арналған шақыру хаты

Құрметті студенттер,

Менің есімім – Мөлдір Шойманова, мен Назарбаев Университетінде «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық» магистратурасының екінші курс студентімін. Магистрлік диссертациям аясында Қазақстан университеттерінде әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингтің қалай қолданылатынын зерттеп жатырмын. Зерттеудің мақсаты – мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қолданылатын стратегияларды зерделеп, салыстыру.

Сіздерді осы зерттеуге қатысуға шақырамын. Қатысуға келіссеңіз, Сізбен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбат жүргізіледі. Сұхбат ұзақтығы бір сағаттан аспайды және Сізге ыңғайлы уақытта бетпе-бет немесе онлайн өткізіледі. Сіздің келісіміңізбен сұхбат аудиожазбаға жазылады. Барлық ақпарат қатаң құпия сақталады, зерттеу есебінде аты-жөніңіз немесе жеке мәліметтер көрсетілмейді.

Зерттеуге қатысу ерікті түрде жүзеге асады және шешіміңіз Сіздің үлгеріміңізге немесе университеттегі мәртебеңізге еш әсер етпейді. Өз тәжірибеңізбен бөлісу арқылы университеттердің студенттердің әлеуметтік желілермен қалай жұмыс істейтінін жақсырақ түсінуіне және жоғары білімдегі әлеуметтік желідегі маркетинг тәжірибесін жетілдіруіне көмектесесіз.

Егер қызығушылық танытсаңыз, маған хабарласыңыз. Содан кейін Сізге шешім қабылдаудың алдында танысып шығу үшін келісім нысаны жіберіледі. Егер сұрақтарыңыз туындаса немесе қосымша түсініктеме қажет болса, менімен байланысуға тартынбаңыз.

Осы шақыруды қарастырғаныңыз үшін алғыс білдіремін.

Ізгі тілекпен,

Мөлдір Шойманова

Магистратура студенті, «Білім берудегі көшбасшылық: Жоғары білім»

Назарбаев Университеті, *Жоғары білім беру мектебі*

Телефон: 8 708 324 36 64

Электрондық пошта: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix E: Приглашительное письмо для студентов

Уважаемые студенты,

Меня зовут Мольдир Шойманова, я студентка второго курса магистратуры по программе «Лидерство в образовании» в Назарбаев Университете. В рамках своей магистерской диссертации я провожу исследование о том, как университеты в Казахстане используют маркетинг в социальных сетях. Цель исследования – изучить и сравнить стратегии, применяемые в государственных и частных университетах.

Я приглашаю Вас принять участие в данном исследовании. Если Вы согласитесь, Вам будет предложено пройти полуструктурированное интервью продолжительностью не более одного часа. Интервью может пройти в очном формате или онлайн в зависимости от того, как будет удобнее Вам. С Вашего согласия интервью будет аудиозаписано. Вся информация останется строго конфиденциальной, в исследовательском отчёте не будут упомянуты имена или другие идентифицирующие данные.

Участие является добровольным, и Ваше решение участвовать никак не повлияет на Ваши оценки или положение в университете. Поделившись своим опытом, Вы сможете помочь университетам лучше понять, как студенты взаимодействуют с социальными сетями, и как можно улучшить практику маркетинга в высшем образовании.

Если Вы заинтересованы, пожалуйста, свяжитесь со мной для получения подробной информации. Затем Вы получите форму согласия для ознакомления перед принятием решения. Если у Вас возникнут вопросы или потребуется разъяснение, пожалуйста, не стесняйтесь обращаться ко мне.

Благодарю Вас за рассмотрение данного приглашения.

С уважением,

Мольдир Шойманова

Студентка магистратуры по программе «Лидерство в образовании: *Высшее образование*»

Назарбаев Университет, Высшая школа образования

Телефон: 8 708 324 36 64

Электронная почта: moldir.shoimanova@nu.edu.kz

Appendix F: Interview protocol for staff

Introductory

1. Could you describe your role at the university and your main responsibilities related to social media?
2. How long have you been working in this position?

RQ1. What social media marketing strategies are currently used by public and private universities in Kazakhstan?

3. Which social media platforms does your university prioritize, and what factors influence these choices?
4. What types of content or campaigns do you use most frequently, and why do you think they are effective for your audience?
5. Are there any collaborations or partnerships you use to expand your reach on social media (e.g., with student ambassadors, alumni, or external figures such as influencers, bloggers)?
6. How is responsibility for planning, creating, and approving social media content organized within your institution?

RQ2. How do these strategies differ or overlap between public and private universities?

7. How would you describe the main goals or objectives of your university's social media activities?
8. What resources or support are available for social media marketing, and how do these influence what can realistically be done?
9. What challenges does your institution face in managing social media marketing, and how do you address them?
10. If you could change or improve one thing about your university's social media strategy, what would it be?

RQ3. How can social media marketing be used effectively at higher education institutions?

11. What indicators do you use to evaluate whether your social media activities are successful?
12. Can you share an example of a post or campaign that you feel worked particularly well, and why?

Closing/ Reflection

13. Based on your experience, what recommendations would you make for universities in Kazakhstan to strengthen their social media presence?

Appendix F: Қызметкерлерге арналған сұхбат хаттамасы

Кіріспе сұрақтар

1. Сіз университеттегі өз рөліңізді және әлеуметтік желілерге қатысты негізгі міндеттеріңізді сипаттап бересіз бе?
2. Осы қызметте қанша уақыт жұмыс істеп келесіз?

Зерттеу сұрағы 1 (RQ1). Қазақстандағы мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттер қазіргі уақытта қандай әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингтік стратегияларды қолданады?

3. Сіздің университетіңіз қай әлеуметтік желілерге басымдық береді және бұл таңдау қандай факторларға байланысты?
4. Сіздер қандай контент түрлерін немесе кампанияларды жиі қолданасыздар және оларды аудитория үшін тиімді деп ойлауыңыздың себебі неде?
5. Әлеуметтік желілерде көбірек аудиторияға жету үшін сіздер қандай да бір әріптестік немесе серіктестікті пайдаланасыздар ма (мысалы, студент-амбассадорлармен, түлектермен немесе блогерлер, инфлюенсерлер сияқты сыртқы тұлғалармен)?
6. Сіздің оқу орныңызда әлеуметтік желі контентін жоспарлау, дайындау және бекіту жауапкершілігі қалай ұйымдастырылған?

Зерттеу сұрағы 2 (RQ2). Бұл стратегиялар мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қалай ерекшеленеді немесе ұқсас келеді?

7. Сіздің университетіңіздің әлеуметтік желідегі негізгі мақсаттары қандай деп сипаттар едіңіз?
8. Әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингке қандай ресурстар немесе қолдау көрсетіледі және олар нақты мүмкіндіктерге қалай әсер етеді?
9. Сіздің университетіңіз әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингті жүргізуде қандай қиындықтарға тап болады және оларды қалай шешесіздер?
10. Егер университетіңіздің әлеуметтік желідегі стратегиясын өзгертуге немесе жетілдіруге мүмкіндік болса, нені өзгертуді қалар едіңіз?

Зерттеу сұрағы 3 (RQ3). Жоғары оқу орындарында әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингті тиімді қолдануға қалай болады?

11. Әлеуметтік желідегі жұмыстарыңыздың сәттілігін бағалау үшін қандай көрсеткіштерді қолданасыздар?
12. Сіз өзіңіз сәтті өтті деп есептейтін пост немесе кампанияға мысал келтіре аласыз ба, және неліктен ол тиімді болды деп ойлайсыз?

Қорытынды / Рефлексия

13. Өз тәжірибеңізге сүйене отырып, Қазақстандағы университеттерге әлеуметтік желідегі беделін нығайту үшін қандай ұсыныстар берер едіңіз?

Appendix F: Интервью-протокол для сотрудников

Вводные вопросы

1. Могли бы Вы описать свою роль в университете и основные обязанности, связанные с социальными сетями?
2. Как долго Вы работаете на этой должности?

RQ1. Какие стратегии маркетинга в социальных сетях в настоящее время используются государственными и частными университетами Казахстана?

3. Какие социальные сети Ваш университет считает приоритетными и какие факторы влияют на этот выбор?
4. Какие виды контента или кампаний Вы используете чаще всего и почему считаете их эффективными для своей аудитории?
5. Используете ли Вы сотрудничество или партнёрства для расширения охвата в социальных сетях (например, со студенческими амбассадорами, выпускниками или внешними лицами инфлюенсерами, блогерами)?
6. Как в Вашем университете организован процесс планирования, создания и утверждения контента для социальных сетей?

RQ2. Чем отличаются или в чём совпадают эти стратегии в государственных и частных университетах?

7. Как бы Вы описали основные цели или задачи социальных сетей Вашего университета?
8. Какие ресурсы или поддержка предоставляются для маркетинга в социальных сетях и как они влияют на то, что Вы можете делать на практике?
9. С какими трудностями сталкивается Ваш университет при ведении маркетинга в социальных сетях и как Вы их решаете?
10. Если бы у Вас была возможность изменить или улучшить что-то в стратегии Вашего университета по социальным сетям, что бы это было?

RQ3. Как можно эффективно использовать маркетинг в социальных сетях в высших учебных заведениях?

11. Какие показатели Вы используете для оценки успешности деятельности в социальных сетях?
12. Можете ли Вы привести пример поста или кампании, которые, на Ваш взгляд, были особенно успешными, и объяснить почему?

Заключение / Рефлексия

13. Основываясь на Вашем опыте, какие рекомендации Вы могли бы дать университетам Казахстана для укрепления их присутствия в социальных сетях?

Appendix G: Interview protocol for students

Introductory

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself, what program and year you are in?
2. Which social media platforms do you use most often in general?
3. Which university social media accounts do you follow (Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, etc.)?

RQ1. What social media marketing strategies are currently used by public and private universities in Kazakhstan?

4. What types of posts from your university catch your attention most?
5. How often do you see or interact with your university's posts on social media?
6. Do you find the information you need easily on your university's social media?

RQ2. How do these strategies differ or overlap between public and private universities?

7. Did social media play a role in your decision to study at this university? If yes, how?
8. Do you feel the university's social media shows real student life and campus experiences, or is it more promotional?
9. How do your friends at other universities describe or share their universities' social media? Do you notice any differences compared to yours?

RQ3. How can social media marketing be used effectively at higher education institutions?

10. Have you ever given feedback or asked questions through social media? If yes, how was the response?
11. What could your university do to make its social media more helpful or attractive for students like you?

Closing / Recommendations

12. If you could give one piece of advice to improve university social media in Kazakhstan, what would it be?

Appendix G: Студенттерге арналған сұхбат хаттамасы

Кіріспе сұрақтар

1. Өзіңіз туралы қысқаша айтып бересіз бе: қай бағдарламада және қай курста оқисыз?
2. Жалпы қай әлеуметтік желілерді жиі қолданасыз?
3. Университеттің қандай әлеуметтік желідегі ресми парақшаларына жазылғансыз (Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, т.б.)?

RQ1. Қазақстандағы мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қандай әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингтік стратегиялар қолданылады?

4. Университетіңіздің қандай жазбалары/посттары сіздің назарыңызды көбірек аударады?
5. Университетіңіздің әлеуметтік желідегі жазбаларын/посттарын қаншалықты жиі көресіз немесе оларға реакция жасайсыз?
6. Университетіңіздің әлеуметтік желілерінен қажет ақпаратты оңай таба аласыз ба?

RQ2. Бұл стратегиялар мемлекеттік және жекеменшік университеттерде қалай ерекшеленеді немесе ұқсас келеді?

7. Әлеуметтік желілер Сіздің осы университетті таңдауыңызға әсер етті ме? Егер иә болса, қалай?
8. Сіздің университеттің әлеуметтік желілері университеттің шынайы студенттік өмірі мен кампус тәжірибесін көрсетеді деп ойлайсыз ба, әлде көбірек жарнамалық сипатта ма?
9. Басқа университеттерде оқитын достарыңыз өз университеттерінің әлеуметтік желілері туралы не дейді немесе оларды қалай сипаттайды? Сіздікімен салыстырғанда айырмашылық бар ма?

RQ3. Жоғары оқу орындарында әлеуметтік желідегі маркетингті тиімді қолдануға қалай болады?

10. Сіз әлеуметтік желілер арқылы кері байланыс берген немесе сұрақ қойған кезіңіз болды ма? Егер иә болса, жауап қалай болды?
11. Сіздің ойыңызша, университеттің әлеуметтік желісі студенттер үшін пайдалырақ немесе тартымдырақ болуы үшін не істеуі керек?

Қорытынды / Ұсыныстар

12. Егер Сіз Қазақстандағы университеттердің әлеуметтік желілерін жақсарту үшін бір кеңес бере алсаңыз, ол қандай болар еді?

Appendix G: Интервью-протокол для студентов

Вводные вопросы

1. Расскажите немного о себе: на какой программе и на каком курсе Вы учитесь?
2. Какими социальными сетями Вы пользуетесь чаще всего?
3. На какие официальные аккаунты университета в социальных сетях Вы подписаны (Instagram, TikTok, Telegram и др.)?

RQ1. Какие стратегии маркетинга в социальных сетях в настоящее время используют государственные и частные университеты Казахстана?

4. Какие публикации университета чаще всего привлекают Ваше внимание?
5. Как часто Вы видите или взаимодействуете с постами университета в социальных сетях?
6. Легко ли Вы находите нужную информацию в социальных сетях университета?

RQ2. Чем отличаются или в чём совпадают эти стратегии в государственных и частных университетах?

7. Повлияли ли социальные сети на Ваше решение поступить в этот университет? Если да, то каким образом?
8. Считаете ли Вы, что социальные сети университета отражают реальную студенческую жизнь и опыт на кампусе, или они носят больше рекламный характер?
9. Как Ваши друзья из других университетов описывают или делятся социальными сетями своих университетов? Замечаете ли Вы различия по сравнению с Вашим университетом?

RQ3. Как можно эффективно использовать маркетинг в социальных сетях в высших учебных заведениях?

10. Приходилось ли Вам оставлять отзывы или задавать вопросы через социальные сети? Если да, то каким был ответ?
11. Что, на Ваш взгляд, университет мог бы сделать, чтобы его социальные сети были более полезными или привлекательными для студентов, таких как Вы?

Заключение / Рекомендации

12. Если бы Вы могли дать один совет для улучшения социальных сетей университетов Казахстана, что бы это было?

Appendix H: Interview coding

Student of Private Uni – Number 1

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself, what program and year you are in?

Participant:

My name is _____. I am a second-year student at _____, majoring in Software Engineering. In addition to my studies, I work as a product manager at an AI start-up.

2. Which social media platforms do you use most often in general?

Participant:

The platform I use most often is Telegram, because all my academic and work-related communication happens there. At our university, Telegram is the main channel for both study and work chats.

Instagram is the second most frequently used platform, as I use it to communicate with friends and post personal content.

In third place are WhatsApp and LinkedIn. I mainly use WhatsApp to communicate with relatives, while LinkedIn is used to follow professional news, publications, and updates from colleagues.

3. Which university social media accounts do you follow (Instagram, TikTok, Telegram, etc.)?

Participant:

I follow my university's accounts on Telegram and Instagram. I check Instagram more often because visual content is easier to perceive than text.

I do not actively follow the university on LinkedIn, as I find it less engaging. I am also subscribed to other universities' accounts, such as Nazarbayev University, and occasionally follow other local or international universities if they appear in my recommendations.

RQ1. What social media marketing strategies are currently used by public and private universities in Kazakhstan?

4. What types of posts from your university catch your attention most?

Participant:

I mainly pay attention to posts that provide useful and relevant information. For example, a post announcing a competition for academic mobility stood out to me because all the requirements were clearly explained.

I also really like posts where students share their personal experiences. One of my favourite posts featured an international student talking about their experience studying at the university, professors, and campus life. I enjoy content based on real student experiences rather than purely informational announcements.

In terms of format, I prefer video content because it helps me better immerse myself in someone's experience. I also like Instagram carousels with short text on the slides, as they create a storytelling effect.

5. How often do you see or interact with your university's posts on social media?

Participant:

I see my university's posts quite regularly on Instagram. I usually like most posts as long as they do not contain negative or inappropriate content.

I have shared university posts when I was personally featured in photos. In general, I interact with content passively through likes, rather than comments, unless the post directly concerns me.

6. Do you find the information you need easily on your university's social media?

Participant:

Basic information, such as how to apply or general announcements, is easy to find because it is usually saved in highlights.

However, when I need more specific information, for example about how a competition was organised in previous years, it becomes much harder to find. In such cases, I have to scroll through many posts, which is not very convenient.

RQ2. How do these strategies differ or overlap between public and private universities?

7. Did social media play a role in your decision to study at this university? If yes, how?

Participant:

Social media played an indirect role in my decision. My choice was influenced more by reviews and opinions shared by other students, especially my friends.

I also watched YouTube reviews where students shared their experiences at the university. These videos helped me understand what studying there would be like. Instagram and YouTube influenced my perception the most, especially content that showed real student life and honest reviews.

8. Do you feel the university's social media shows real student life and campus experiences, or is it more promotional?

Participant:

Some content does show real student experiences, especially posts where students talk about their personal journeys. However, overall, the content still feels quite promotional.

While the visual style is consistent and well-designed, it sometimes feels more like content from a college or even a high school rather than a university. I think the content could be more mature and reflect real university life more deeply.

9. How do your friends at other universities describe or share their universities' social media? Do you notice any differences compared to yours?

Participant:

Most of my friends study at Nazarbayev University or other public universities. I do not notice major differences in content strategy overall, as most universities seem to follow similar trends.

However, Nazarbayev University often uses professional filming and higher-quality visuals, which makes their content look more prestigious. When students are reposted by their university, they usually feel proud because of the large audience and high-quality presentation. Compared to that, reposts from my university feel more neutral.

RQ3. How can social media marketing be used effectively at higher education institutions?

10. Have you ever given feedback or asked questions through social media? If yes, how was the response?

Participant:

Yes, I once gave negative feedback through direct messages. I felt that one post had sexist elements, particularly in how students were selected for filming. I expressed my concerns to the university.

The response I received was very generic and felt template-based, almost as if it was AI-generated. This left a negative impression.

In general, responses to positive comments are usually quick, while responses to negative feedback take longer. Most replies feel quite uniform, although sometimes the tone feels more human.

11. What could your university do to make its social media more helpful or attractive for students like you?

Participant:

I would like to see more humour and irony in the content, including the ability to laugh at oneself. Showing only a polished image does not feel authentic.

More personal stories would make the content more engaging—for example, stories of professors, international students, activists, or everyday student experiences.

I also think universities should focus more on quality rather than quantity or chasing trends. Platforms like YouTube and LinkedIn should be used more actively, especially for educational and research-related content.

Closing / Recommendations

12. If you could give one piece of advice to improve university social media in Kazakhstan, what would it be?

Participant:

Universities should prioritise quality over quantity and trend-following. Social media

should not only promote achievements but also share meaningful educational and research content.

Universities should invest in mature, authentic storytelling that reflects real university life, while also using platforms like YouTube and LinkedIn more strategically to build trust and credibility.

Table 1. Example of Coding Process: Private University

Research Question	Raw Data Extract	Initial Code	Category	Theme
RQ1.	“Instagram is the main priority platform” (PrM1)	platform priority	platform use	platform strategy
RQ1	“I check Instagram more often because visual content is easier” (PrS1)	visual accessibility	student media habits	platform strategy
RQ1	“Telegram is the main space for academic and work-related communication” (PrS1)	functional communication	operational platform role	platform strategy
RQ1	“TikTok is used more for entertainment-oriented content” (PrM1)	entertainment-oriented platform use	platform-specific purpose	platform strategy
RQ1	“Video content receives the highest engagement” (PrM1)	video engagement	content effectiveness	content orientation and format preferences
RQ1	“Video helps me better immerse myself in someone’s experience” (PrS1)	immersive content	preferred formats	content orientation and format preferences
RQ1	“Captions are always in English, Russian, and Kazakh” (PrS3)	multilingual posting	linguistic accessibility	language and accessibility