VAMK

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INSTAGRAM CONTENT MARKETING

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Case: Vaasa University of Applied Sciences

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ABSTRACT

As part and parcel of daily lives, social media has transformed the higher education landscape in general, and in particular, the student journey. Among those social channels, Instagram possesses several potentials for institutions to create content for their campus communities. Therefore, the objective of this study is to create a one-year Instagram content marketing plan in the case of Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK).

The thesis carried out secondary research through literature reviews, books, reports and reliable Internet references. Primary research was conducted through interviews with a representative at VAMK that contributed to the final outcomes.

In the theoretical framework, a general explanation of social media, social media marketing, and its application in higher education was first introduced. The thesis then described the concept of content marketing, social content, and its integration into the student journey. It was followed by a brief on the platform of Instagram and its features to generate content in the higher education setting.

In empirical research, the thesis analyzed the Instagram of VAMK and conducted interviews with an Instagram executive at the university to gain in-depth insights on the goals and practices of VAMK.

The research results consist of a proposal of an Instagram editorial calendar in 2021 and proposals for other Instagram features that include different illustrations and templates created by the author.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the research background, an objective with an outline of the thesis, and the case company. The research background briefly discusses the rise in social media use in the higher education landscape and the potentials of Instagram as a content marketing platform in this sector. The research objective with the outline framework is identified then. By the end of the chapter, a short introduction of the case company is presented.

1.1 Research Background

Living in a digital world where the number of active social media users has passed the 3.9 billion mark in July 2020 (Hootsuite 2020a), individuals are continuously connected through mobile devices. With the arising widespread of social media use, this becomes an essential tool for marketing and communication in the public sector and the higher education landscape in particular. As stated in the 2019 Social Campus Report conducted by Hootsuite, 98% of schools surveyed using social media across campus, tertiary education institutions of all shapes and sizes are embracing it to connect with students along the student journey.

Among the social network platforms, Instagram, which has been developed as an extension of Facebook with a focus on audio-visual effects, experiences an exponential growth during recent years. With an upsurge of 95% in brand value in 2019, then 47% in 2020, Instagram has emerged as a top-rising platform for posting content for connection, sharing, and self-expression (Kantar 2020). This achievement has resulted from the constant reinvention of its platform (HubSpot & Mention 2020). Starting as a photo-sharing app, it has extended to different types of content creation such as photos, videos, live videos, Stories, IGTV, and the most recent is Reels. In the context of tertiary education, there has been a growth in the use of Instagram since 2017, as more students shift toward Instagram from Snapchat (Hootsuite 2019). Therefore, the platform possesses numerous potentials to provide creative content in the higher education setting.

1.2 Research Objective and Research Outline

As mentioned in the Research Background part, the universal use of social media with the rising popularity of Instagram as a content marketing platform has become a key

component in the institutional landscape. Consequently, it is necessary for campus practitioners to deploy social networks and particularly in this research, Instagram, as effective marketing and communication channels, and tailor the most relevant content for their community. Acknowledging that the content marketing plan is unique in each campus community and based on a different student journey, this thesis focuses on one specific case of a higher education institution for more in-depth insights. The chosen institution is Vaasa University of Applied Sciences (VAMK), Finland, where the author pursues her Bachelor.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to design a one-year Instagram content marketing plan for Vaasa University of Applied Sciences. The goal of this is to attract and engage with the VAMK campus community on Instagram, and to increase the brand awareness of the university.

The main question is how to utilize Instagram to create a content marketing plan for VAMK. The answer firstly is grounded by the theoretical part that explains the general concept of content marketing and the basics of Instagram. The empirical part will then analyze and build a content editorial plan in the case of VAMK. In specific, the theoretical framework is presented in **Figure 1**.
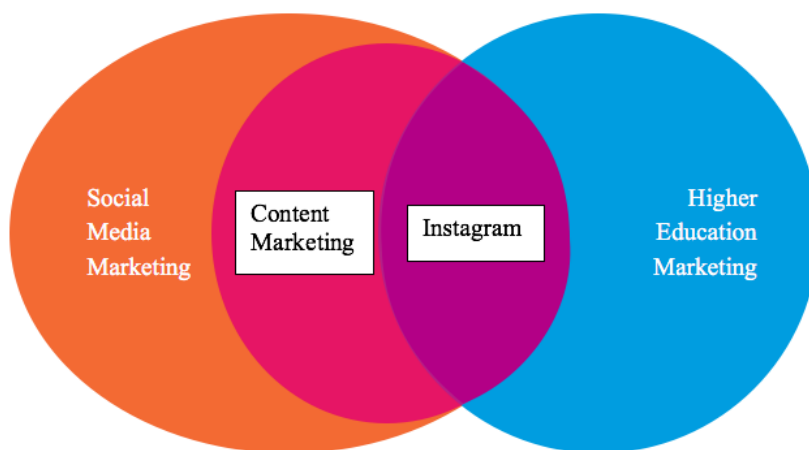
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework by the author.

As Instagram is a social media channel specialized in creating visual content, the literature part firstly explains social media marketing and its role in the sector of higher education. Secondly, the concept of content marketing with its application in the institutional

landscape is discussed. It is then followed by a description of Instagram and its various features to generate content.

Based on the theoretical knowledge and the support from an Instagram Executive at VAMK, the empirical part gathers and analyzes insights from the Instagram execution of the university. Following this step, a draft of the Instagram content editorial plan is presented to the responsible Instagram Executive at VAMK. Adjustments will then be made to complete the final version of the content plan. Finally, a brief on the evaluation and recommendations for further research are indicated at the end of this study.

1.3   Case Company

Vaasa University of Applied Sciences, VAMK, started its operations in the city of Vaasa, Finland on 1 August 1996, which is now a multidisciplinary and international university providing education in Finnish and English. The university has technology, business, and social services and health care disciplinary units, an administrative unit, and the MUOVA design centre. The campus community consists of 201 personnel and 3210 bachelor and master students, including 463 part-time students. Fostering an international environment, VAMK offers three different degree programs in English, attracts 350 foreign degree students coming from 45 different countries and 90 incoming exchange students around the world (VAMK 2020).

As stated in the vision and mission, VAMK aims to become an interesting and creative partner. Alongside this, it bridges the gap between students and the practical world of work. The four characteristics that the university describes itself on the main website are "working life-driven", "sense of community", "international", and "energetic".

Regarding official marketing channels, VAMK promotes the online presence via its website and social media channels, namely, Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Among those, the university launched its official Instagram account in 2014. More specific practices and insights on its Instagram will be discovered in Chapter Five, which lay the foundation for a content plan tailored to the campus experiences at VAMK.

2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The second chapter provides a closer look into social media, social media marketing, and its application in the higher education sector. This chapter begins with a literature review on social media, diverse networking sites, and a brief on online user behaviors. Following this, the opportunities for social media marketing are highlighted. The study then presents an outlook on its implication for higher education practice at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Social Media

2.1.1 Social Media Channels

Social media is defined as a group of Internet-based applications that are built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, 61). Based on this general definition, Kaplan and Haenlein classified social media by two key elements, which are media research (social presence, media richness) and social processes (self-presentation, self-disclosure). Consequently, the six social media categories were distinguished as collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds, as shown in **Figure 2**.

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Low	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 2. Six Social Media categories by Kaplan & Haenlein.

Among those six groups, Facebook has been the most popular social media platform worldwide, with more than 2.6 billion monthly active users (Statista 2020a), which represents a dominance for the category of social networking sites in the digital world. Deep dive into this group of social networks, it was defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd &

Ellison 2007, 211). Within the diverse ecology of social platforms today, the leading social networks are the ones that offer multiple languages and enable users to reach others regardless of geographical, political, and economic borders. Based on the data collection of Statista (2020), the most popular social networks display a considerable number of user accounts or strong user engagement. This ranking of the leading sites by the number of active users is provided in **Figure 3**.
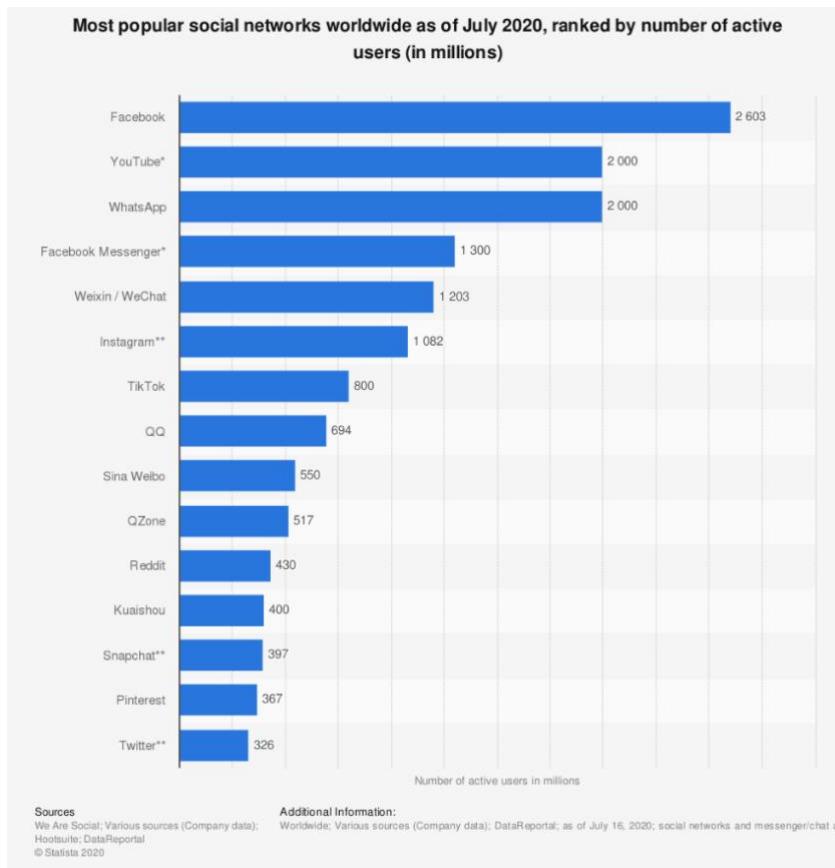
Figure 3. Social networks ranked by number of users by Statista.

The chart illustrates that the largest user-platform is Facebook, as mentioned, which was also the first one to surpass 1 billion registered accounts. As a sixth-ranked, Instagram achieved this milestone in June 2018 with 1 billion active user accounts (Statista 2020a, TechCrunch 2018a).

2.1.2 Social Media User Behaviors

Given the tremendous exposure of cyberspace, online user behaviors are of critical interest for executives to make sense of the social media ecology today. As unveiled in the Digital 2020 Report by Hootsuite, the annual growth in the total number of social

media users is 10.5%, which equals 376 million people. Also, the report points out that 99% of social media users accessing via mobile phones. With an unprecedented degree of disruption in mobile devices, the growth may substantially scale-up in the upcoming years, with around 4.41 billion social media users in 2025 (Statista 2020b).

Diving into the online behaviors of the users aged 16 to 64, they are reported to spend on an average of 2 hours 22 minutes per day on social media. More specifically, the age group from 16 to 24 years old leads the ranking with a daily time spent of 2 hours 53 minutes, in which the female group takes 3 hours 12 minutes a day. This outcome proves that each generation consumes a different amount of time online because the motivations and living conditions are varied for each age group.

In specific, research conducted by GlobalWebIndex ranked the top five reasons for using social media among four generations in 2020, as uncovered in **Figure 4**. Noticeably, this survey was carried out throughout the pandemic of COVID-19 until June 2020. For this reason, it also embodies the post-COVID shift in attitudes of digital consumers towards social media.
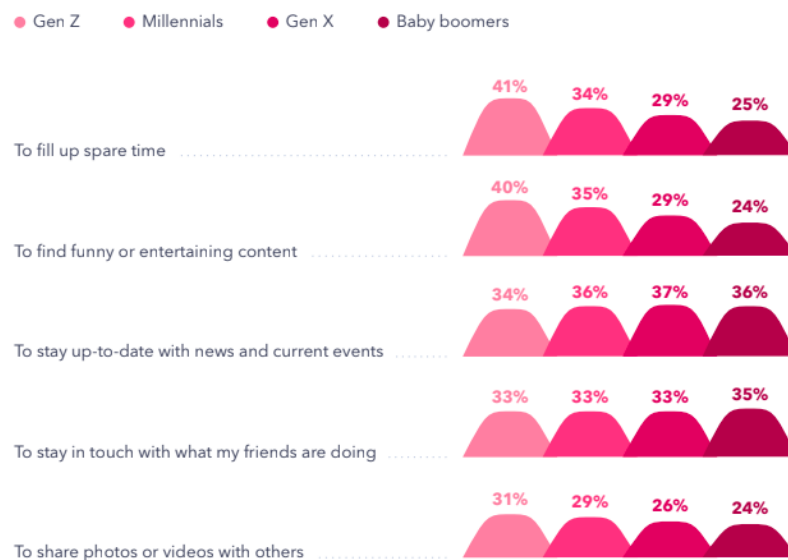
Figure 4. Reasons of Social Media usage of 4 generations by GlobalWebIndex.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there have been many noticeable trends in social media participation among different age demographics. Overall, while the young generation emphasizes filling up their spare time with entertaining content, all of the older counterparts focus on keeping up with the latest news and events through social media.

This insight implied that the pandemic has accelerated a global habit of reading news updated on social platforms, which is an arising trend observed from a majority of digital consumers.

In contrast, the two online experiences of connecting with friends and sharing photos or videos have decreased gradually as the purposes for using social media in recent years. This shift highlights that online consumers tend to use the social space to consume content rather than connecting and sharing. However, the lockdown during the pandemic appears to breathe some life back into the more social facets of social sites by connecting people across borders to communicate and socialize with each other (GlobalWebIndex 2020). The social media landscape during this period, therefore, has facilitated the growth in video-based platforms such as Tiktok and Zoom to connect their users worldwide. These insights provide implications for social media executives to publish accurate information updates and promote more interactions with their community in the future.

Besides the aforementioned social usage, 42% of the Internet users stated that they search for a brand online through social channels (Hootsuite 2020a). This number would open up more opportunities for brands to promote their online presence and reach their target audience through social media.

2.2 Social Media Marketing

2.2.1 Traditional Marketing and Social Media Marketing

Given a digital universe where society communicates online, it is inevitable that brands incorporate social media into their marketing mix to interact with their consumers. The term Social Media Marketing is defined as "the utilization of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that have value for an organization's stakeholders" (Tuten & Solomon 2017). To tackle the frontier of social media marketing, it is perceived as a complement to the traditional marketing methods, enables brands to reach achievable objectives. These objectives listed by Tuten and Solomon are across a range of marketing activities that include promotion and branding, customer service, relationship management, retailing and commerce, and marketing research. Based on their research on the top priorities for businesses using social media marketing, 46.1% of marketers ranked brand awareness and brand building as the most critical goal (2017).

Besides traditional marketing channels for promotion and branding, there are several emerging communication forms for brands to utilize social media marketing and extend their media coverage. Generally, marketers distribute brand messages through three main types of media, including paid, owned, and earned media. In the cyberspace, paid media is no longer limited to traditional broadcasting channels, its options now range from Search Engine Marketing (SEM), ads, paid influencers, to sponsored content on social sites, and so forth. Similarly, brands leverage owned media with more brand-owned social networks besides corporate websites and blogs. Regarding earned media, the forms of Word-of-mouth (WOM) communication and publicity are expanded into online conversation, reviews and ratings, search ranking, and virtual engagement of likes, shares, comments on social networks. By these various forms, brands would acquire more media coverage to reach and generate attention towards their target audience. (Tuten & Solomon 2017.)

In comparison to traditional marketing methods, social media marketing offers two-way communication with more interactions with consumers. Taking a step back to understand traditional marketing, it focuses on push messaging, a one-way communication delivered to the target audience, using a large dose of broadcast and print media to reach a mass audience. This results in minimal opportunities for interaction and feedback between consumers and the firm, and boundary spanners (employees who interact directly with customers) mediate these dialogues. Since the existence of social media, the culture of marketing has transformed into an informal one focused on the belief that customers are in control. Digital consumers nowadays obtain information, discuss, contribute, collaborate, and share with brands and with each other. Therefore, the prevalence of social media channels drives more interaction and engagement throughout the online experience between customers and firms. (Tuten & Solomon 2017.)

Along with traditional vehicles, social media techniques enable brands to perform an integrated marketing plan across a customer journey. This engagement journey of four stages demonstrates the process of transforming an audience into a customer. Taking this roadmap into account, the effects of synergies from both methods allow brands to deliver promotional messages and influence consumer attitudes through the relevant channel at all touchpoints. A description of how social media and especially Instagram, would

complement the other marketing efforts throughout a student journey will be presented in Chapter Three.

2.2.2 Social Media Marketing Trends

Taking a closer look at the evolvement of social media marketing in 2020, there are several trends that worth keeping an eye on. The CMO surveys conducted in collaboration with Deloitte, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, and the American Marketing Association (AMA) generate several valuable insights on the importance of social media marketing before and after the wake of the COVID19 pandemic. It was anticipated in the report in February 2020 that social media spending would rise by 62% over five years, across all industries and company sizes (2020a). During the pandemic, the contribution of social media toward company performance spiked dramatically at 74% growth and constituted 23.2% of the marketing budget (2020b), as revealed in **Figure 5**. Noteworthy, the pandemic also altered the purpose of using social media among marketers. The significant lift in social media usage was reported to build brand awareness and to attract and retain customers much more often than for market research and other purposes.

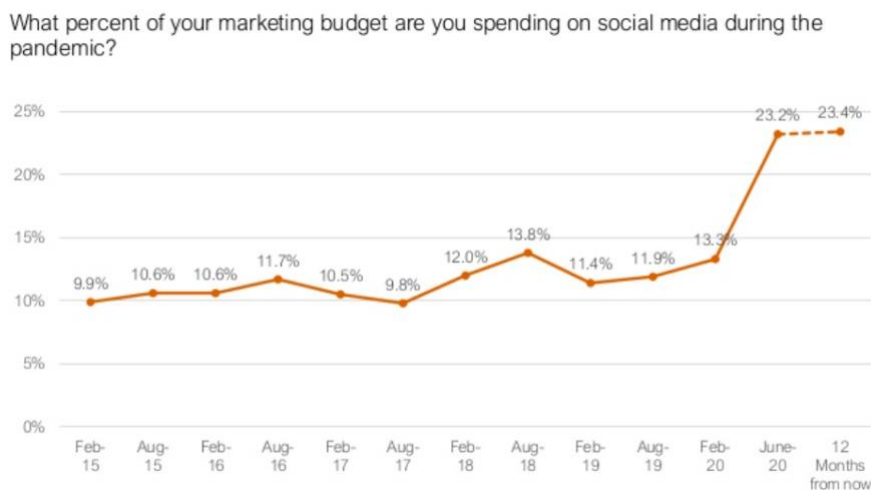Figure 5. Social Media expenditure from 2015 to 2020 by The CMO Survey.

Across all social channels, there have been several trends observed in social media tactics. In this new decade, it was reported that 74% of global marketers keep actively investing in social media marketing, with the predominance of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (HubSpot 2020). Drawn from this research survey of HubSpot, building private groups

helps to increase engagement over time. Since groups facilitate more specific dialogue and support user search, the right audience to connect with are found there.

Apart from this trend, social listening has become the top tactic that marketers implement in social media strategy. By listening to the audience, brands would obtain insights on how to resonate and foster dedicated communities for them. This insight underscores a necessity for brands to generate meaningful one-on-one interactions with their online audience, instead of using social as a broadcast communication channel (King 2020). In response to this, how higher education organizations adopt social to embrace these trends will be discussed briefly in the next part.

2.3 Higher Education Social Media Marketing

More than half of the world population are using social media, and nowhere is the use of it more evident than in the higher education practice (Hootsuite 2020a; Rowan-Kenyon, Martínez Alemán, Gin, Blakeley, Gismondi, Lewis, McCready, Zepp & Knight 2016). The invention of Facebook initially aimed to connect students at Harvard University, and its usage has expanded rapidly since 2004. What began at one university for one group of students has stretched to other platforms and extended to include virtually all communities over the world (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 13). As Martínez Alemán & Wartman (2009) pointed out, Facebook appealed to college campuses with a desire for sharing information and building communities. In the late 2000s, the niche user of Facebook was described as a "developmentally distinctive" and "bounded community" that was compatible with the college campus. (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 24; Martínez Alemán & Wartman 2009, 20-21.)

With an ever-evolving expansion of social media, this has become a key in the higher education landscape, shaping individual and group behavior and campus culture. It has been a critical interest for tertiary education scholars and practitioners to understand how students use social media to engage with the campus community and to enhance their college experiences (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 1). This understanding allows organizations to employ social media to connect and communicate effectively with their current and prospective students as well as other stakeholders. Consequently, academic institutions could deploy social channels to enhance the online presence for marketing and branding and to engage with their campus community.

It is widely confirmed that social media has now been a strategic area of focus campus-wide (Hootsuite 2019). In a recent survey that Hootsuite carried out with 530 professionals at universities responsible for the social media strategy and execution, 68% of executive teams bought in, and 64% of schools aligning social with their strategic plan and institutional mission (2019). More specifically on the Social Campus report by Hootsuite (2019), the top three social media goals are a clearly defined social media strategy, a deeper understanding of students through monitoring social activity, and measurement of return on investment from social efforts. To achieve these goals, universities worldwide deal with several difficulties in the lack of cross-departmental collaboration, budget, and team members for social media management (Hootsuite 2020). Therefore, leading institutions need to seek the best operational practices to improve efficiency and embrace social trends to connect with their students.

Focusing on how to boost student engagement, especially with the target audience nowadays are digital natives, schools adopt social media to touch every part of the student journey (Hootsuite 2019). In specific, social adoption is used at every engagement touchpoint throughout the campus experience, from grabbing the attention of prospective to guiding students through admission procedures, keeping them engaged on campus, and fostering alumni relations. Along with this student journey, an integrated social content marketing would resonate with them at every touchpoint during their digital experience. Therefore, this places high importance on the concept of content marketing and how to incorporate it into the higher education landscape, which will be presented in the next chapter.

3 SOCIAL CONTENT MARKETING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The third chapter presents a basic understanding of content marketing with a focus on social media content and an outlook on social content through a student journey. Firstly, this chapter starts with a description of the general concept of content marketing. The second sub-chapter introduces social media content and its different formats. In the last sub-chapter, the thesis discusses the adaptation of social content into the student journey in the higher education setting.

3.1 Content Marketing

Cited to the Content Marketing Institute, content marketing is "a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action" (Content Marketing Institute n.d.)

Content marketing is the foundation of the marketing strategy, contributing to the success of organizations of any type and size. From a recent survey of HubSpot (2020), roughly 60% of marketers described content marketing as "very important" or "extremely important" to the overall strategy, with 70% of global marketers actively investing in it. The vital role of content marketing benefits enterprises to increase sales, save costs, and nurture a lasting relationship with loyal customers (Content Marketing Institute n.d.). On top of that, a trustworthy from customers is built on high-quality and impactful content that resonates with them. Stemming from this reason, how brands create and distribute content in a way that is perceived as valuable to the audience will determine the business success (Perricone 2020).

As marketing is impossible without content, quality content is an inseparable part of all marketing forms (Content Marketing Institute n.d.). Those refer to social media marketing, Search Engine Optimization (SEO), Public Relations (PR), Pay-per-click (PPC), inbound marketing, and content strategy. These marketing efforts overlap and complement each other to deliver the main message to the relevant audience.

Depending on the audience and resources, companies decide on the content distribution, an integral part of content strategy. Content distribution is defined as a process of "sharing, publishing, and promoting" content through various channels and media

formats (Decker 2019). Based on the three main types of media, owned, earned, paid, as mentioned in Chapter Two, more specific content distribution channels are included. **Figure 6** demonstrates the overlap of these channels and their role in the big picture (HubSpot 2019).
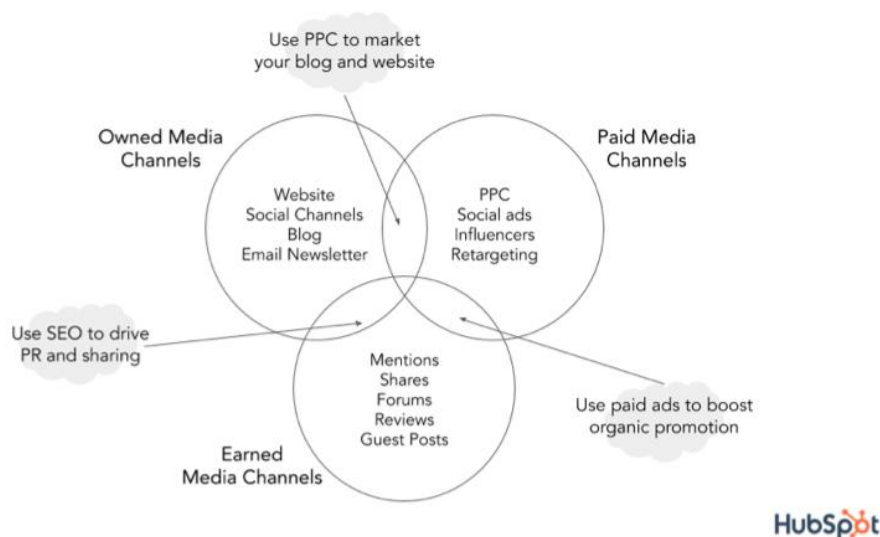
Figure 6. Three Content Distribution Channels by Hubspot.

Each of the distribution channels requires distinct tactics and content types to formulate a relevant content marketing plan. As the thesis goal aims to generate an Instagram content marketing plan, the following sub-chapter presents a deep dive into the content crafted on social media.

3.2   Social Media Content

Social media plays an essential role in content creation and distribution among businesses. Social media content has been the highest-performing type for building awareness and securing, nurturing, and converting leads (Content Marketing Institute & Marketing Profs 2019). Drawn from a recent survey of HubSpot in 2020, Facebook has been the primary distribution channel for content, followed by the company website, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn (2020). The growing social media consumption worldwide leads to a rapid influx of content on these social platforms. Take Instagram as a prime example, where the platform has an approximation of 1.020 photos uploaded in a second and 347.222 stories created in a minute (Internet Live Stats 2020; Statista 2020c). With this enormous amount of content to consume, it is a challenge for brands to

leave a mark on the audience. To overcome this, every piece of content needs to integrate the brand storytelling and align with a defined goal in the customer journey.

3.2.1   Brand Storytelling and User-Generated Content

The power of storytelling is to create an alignment between business and customers based on empathy. In general, stories contain indices such as locations, actions, attitudes, problems, characters, etc. that evoke empathy in the listener (Woodside 2010) and help the story being recalled (Schank 1999). As the audience, they are provided with a theme to initiate conversations with brands and with each other, leading their own experiences to fit into the brand story (Escalas 2004). Consequently, telling stories is implicit to build awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and provide meaning to the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012). The technique of storytelling, therefore, allows brands to make a human connection with their prospects.

Evolving along with the social media phenomenon, a new concept of storytelling has emerged, which is User-Generated Content (UGC). In the past, the story content, production, and distribution had been dominated by the brand owner (Brown, Kozinets & Sherry 2003) just until the prevalence of social media came into place. These commonplaces reward more networks, relations, and interactions between brands and consumers, leading to the co-creation of both parties (Deighton & Kornfeld 2009). After users generate their content of the text, images, photos, and reviews, brands would share those content widely through their social networks and other marketing channels, especially, Instagram which is a primary sharing platform among brands (Newberry 2019).

Viewing this marketing effort under the perspective of consumers, users are 2.4 times more believably to perceive UGC as more authentic than branded content (Business Wire 2019). Also drawn from the same research, UGC was stated to impact significantly on the purchasing decisions of roughly 80% of consumers (2019). Therefore, this marketing tactic empowers brands to promote authenticity, build trust, and drive customer purchases (Newberry 2019). Nevertheless, while offering compelling evidence of brand perceptions and attributes, not all of UGC may be endorsed by brand owners. Considering this, they need to navigate their brand content through the consumer-generated ones to ensure that

those stories remain as close as possible to their desired story. (Singh & Sonnenburg 2012.)

With the brand stories that need to touch the audience, it is inevitable for brands to fill relevant and attractive pieces of content into each stage of the customer journey. Thus, different types of content formats on social media will be briefly introduced.

3.2.2 Content Formats

In content marketing, brands need to determine the content types that effectively resonate with the target audience, while achieving their business goals. Throughout the customer journey, various content formats should be considered to deepen the connection with the audience at each stage. Acknowledging this necessity, Smart Insights designed a Content Marketing Matrix (CMM) in 2012 to assist marketers in the idea generation process, with its latest version in 2020 is shown in **Figure 7** (Smart Insights 2020).
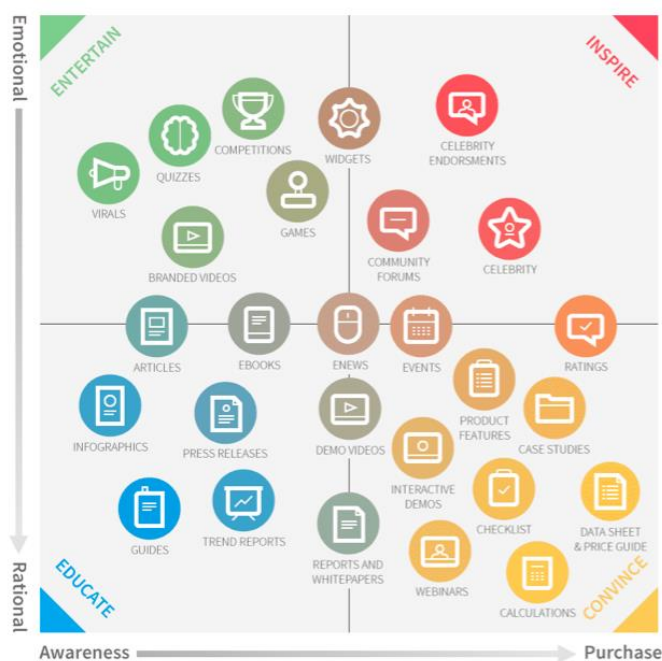
Figure 7. Content Marketing Matrix by Smart Insights.

Cited from Dave Chaffey on the description of the CMM, this planning tool helps marketers audit their content marketing assets and advance the content ideation (Smart Insights 2020). In practice, it supports brainstorming content ideas along with a marketing funnel, to generate leads, nurture prospects, encourage sharing, and transform backlinks for SEO. As a content mapping tool, it is structured based on two key dimensions leading

to the purchase decision of consumers. While the horizontal axis shows the awareness through to purchase conversion funnel, the vertical axis illustrates the emotional to rational content engagement formats. Based on the target audience and the business goals aligning the customer journey, selected content formats would ease to optimize the content marketing plan.

Among various forms of media, video and photo have been the most popular ones used in social media and content marketing. In the social media marketing landscape, the survey of Hubspot indicated that photo and imagery posts demonstrate a higher engagement level than the other forms (2020). Additionally, marketers prefer producing videos for promotion and brand storytelling. (HubSpot 2020).

Alongside standard videos, the emergence of newer formats also attempts to hold onto the growing audience of video enthusiasts. The wave of widespread video and live content has been popular before and even more after the pandemic, particularly among young consumers who embraced virtual events as a joyful alternative (GlobalWebIndex 2020). As reported from the Global Web Index (2020), the future of live streaming is promising, with 23% of global consumers expecting to keep the habit of watching more videos post-outbreak. Additionally, the social media landscape has been shaken up lately with the explosive growth of TikTok, a short-format video app. It boasts over 800 million monthly active users, with a whopping 69% of users who are 16-24 years old (Hootsuite 2020b). The meteoric rise of this platform is perceived as an invaluable insight into the future of social content, culture, and collaboration. However, the biggest threat to its growth is the other social networks and particularly, Instagram (Hootsuite 2020b). All in all, there has been a variety of offerings in digital content ranging in various social platforms.

3.3 Social Media Content Through Student Journey

With the ubiquitous use of social media, academic institutions incorporate social into every step of the student journey. Starting from building awareness with prospective students, higher education professionals employ social to guide them through the admission process, engage them during the campus experience, and nurture an alumni community. Becoming an inseparable tool to connect with students at each stage, social is utilized as a crucial engagement touchpoint along the university journey. (Hootsuite 2019.)

3.3.1 Awareness

In the first stage, the institution boosts its online presence to build awareness with prospective students. To achieve this, it is worth understanding the behaviors and perspectives of students when searching online and selecting potential schools. The aim of them is to determine where to apply, so the role of social media at this stage is to pursue them answering this question.

The literature review of McCready and Knight in the book Social Media in Higher Education stated that in the initial search, students seek factual details, including academic program listings, rankings, cost, application procedures, and admission counselor contacts (2016, 35). The authors also emphasized that in this research phase, official university websites dominate as both the most frequently used and the most reliable electronic medium for finding information and answering questions. A recent report on Digital Admissions (2020) indicated that whereas 92% of students agreed that the website was more important than social media, two-thirds still used social channels in their research. Among those responses, while 17% perceived these sources as "extremely influential", 61% agree that they were at least "somewhat influenced" by their social research (mStoner & TargetX 2020). This behavior places high importance on social media during the searching phase.

As students progress to make enrollment decisions, social is utilized to gain insight into the likelihood of personal fit at each institution (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 36). The impression is built on the social content, which demonstrates a greater sense of the campus culture and community, with various social life experiences and the people they could anticipate encountering on campus (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 36). Given the interactive functions of social channels, universities may facilitate interaction between prospects and current students and alumni to help to shape their impression of the campus experiences. Through images, virtual tours, and student takeovers, social media enables schools to share a glimpse into campus life with inspiring snapshots featuring the campus, facilities, communities, and social opportunities attendees can get involved in (Sehl 2020).

It is noticeable that the prospective candidates not only consume the university-owned content but also check the social accounts of enrolled students to round out the impression

of the institution (mStoner & TargetX 2020). This behavior results from the perception that the content generated by near-peers in age would be more authentic than the institutional messages (mStoner & TargetX 2020). Once the prospects narrow down their options, they have a greater incentive to interact with those college social accounts. In specific, 60% liked or followed a school on social media in their consideration set, as uncovered in the 2017 Social Admissions Report conducted by Chegg, The National Research Center for College & University Admissions (NRCUA), and Target X in 2017.

Acknowledging the expectations and behaviors of prospective students, the admission officers would adopt social to enhance their recruitment strategies correspondingly (mStoner & TargetX 2020). As indicated in the Social Campus Report 2019 by Hootsuite, 82% of social media leaders reported running targeted campaigns to build awareness, and 66% considered listening and monitoring public sentiment. These tactics allow them to gather data, learn what their students value the most, and identify which target should be the focus of their strategic engagement efforts. Therefore, in alignment with the overall marketing plan, the social content should showcase the campus experiences in an authentic and engaging way, preferably through the lens of the enrolled students, providing insights for prospects to view the institution as compatible.

3.3.2   Recruitment

In the recruitment stage, admission officers may harness the potentials of social media to support their prospects in completing the application and the enrolment process. Based on a study on preferred admission contacts within prospective students, conducted by Chegg and STAMATS, social media were preferable to remind deadline, confirm the submitted application, and used after being admitted (Chegg et al. 2017), as shown in **Figure 8**.

Preferred Contact at Each Stage
Q: What are your preferred methods of being contacted by a school in these stages of the application process?
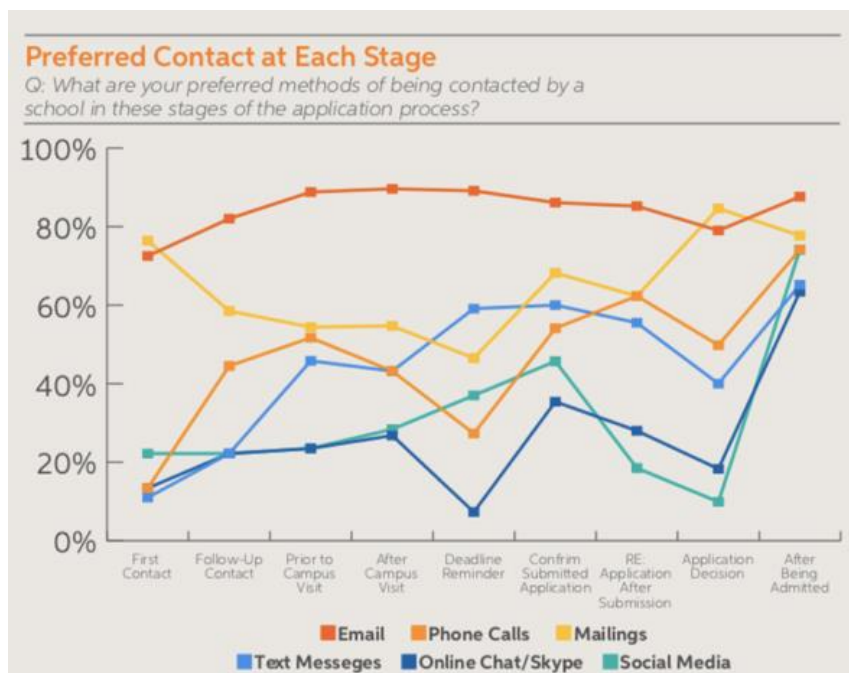
Figure 8. Preferred contact during application process by Chegg et al.

Considering the concerns of prospective students when encountering this phase, the hindrances come from different application requirements and submission deadlines. The research by Harvard University Center for Education Policy Research figured out that the admissions process is the pain-point leading up to 40% of prospective students drop out before school starts (Daugherty 2012). By simplifying the processes and transferring the information as a step-by-step guideline into social content, recruiters could guide them through the admission procedures at a fingertip on social media.

Given the expansion of digital enrollment activities, social media could fit in the recruitment toolkit as an interactive communication channel. Regarding the recent student recruitment activities, a report on The Impact of The Coronavirus on Global Higher Education (2020) has provided valuable insights into this sector. It was carried out by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a company specializing in the analysis of worldwide higher education institutions. In response to an urgent health problem, global organizations have placed more importance on digital events, digital marketing, and qualified one-to-one with online meetings (QS 2020). Regarding this, there are possibilities to promote these recruitment activities as well as to interact with prospective candidates through various digital means, including social networking sites. Each social platform could be adapted to serve various communication purposes, to conduct a live stream, a real-time Question, and Answer (Q&A) session, to set up and reply to a poll on Facebook or Instagram.

In complementing the enrolling marketing efforts, universities would reach out to the applicants directly through sponsored content, with a message tailored to where they are in the process. By delivering a customized message, the receipt of it may come along with a pleasant attitude among potential applicants. Drawn from a survey of Chegg and STAMATS, there is a higher possibility that the students react positive rather than negative towards sponsored content on their social networks, especially, Instagram achieved one-third of respondents with a positive reaction (Chegg et al. 2017). In correspondence to the current practices among organizations, 77% of social media leaders run targeted campaigns to attract students in the recruiting phase (Hootsuite 2019).

Since the outbreak of COVID19, digital advertising on social media in the higher education sector has also adapted to specific changes. In specific, the expenditure on educational advertising has surged to promote more online program recruitment from global institutions, including Facebook advertising (Ezarik 2020; Kivvit 2020). Along with this change, while the ads depicting campuses are deemphasized, career advancement becomes the most common message conveyed in advertisements (Ezarik 2020; Kivvit 2020).

Therefore, regardless of the communication channels, the content in recruitment marketing should respond to the ongoing trends in the higher education landscape and resonate with the prospective students at all stages, from the first contact to after admission.

3.3.3 Engagement

Woven into the fabric of campus experiences, social media integration aims to boost student engagement throughout the academic journey. Based on several works of literature, Gin and Zepp stated that social media influence the way students perceive, participate in, experience, and engage with campus activism (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 77). Not only deepening relationships with individual students, but the institutions embedding social media also expect to nurture its community development, gauge student sentiments, promote networking, and to exhibit appropriate online behavior (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 83; Junco 2014).

Within the modern setting of higher education, digital spaces facilitate opportunities for the school to connect with their students despite the distance. The interconnection is

provided through real-time social updates whether the student is at home or different campuses, across various study programs, under normal or even pandemic circumstances. One of the potential approaches to leverage this connection is through user-generated content, where the authentic campus experiences are shown through the lens of the community. Universities could repost this content to get it featured in their official social channels, or to organize social contests to push the students crafting their content. These tactics help to bridge the connections with the whole campus community, between departments and students, as well as the enrolled students and the prospective ones (Sehl 2020.)

The most common campus social initiatives that professionals have incorporated to engage the students are uncovered in the Social Campus Report 2019 of Hootsuite. On top of the widely used tactics, 92% of professionals **sharing school news and promoting events** on social media. Accordingly, the regular updates on recent activities within the internal community or with external partners lets the school set the tone of its campus culture in a lively and aspiring way. Furthermore, the promotion of the accomplishments by faculties, lecturers, and students fosters a social image with a prestigious reputation. This tactic enhances the external relations by demonstrating that the institution would welcome and support the prospective students and partners as parts of its campus community. Consequently, the online presence reflects its mission and values, which helps to represent the educational environment that it attempts to cultivate (Sehl 2020).

Besides updating school-related news, institution staffs monitoring social media environments to **manage crisis communications** accounted for 62% (Hootsuite 2019). This practice is imperative to the crisis response procedure to both collect information and to correct misinformation; meanwhile, sharing information publicly through social channels indicates that the institution is not avoiding discussion about an incident (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 93). For instance, Binghamton University announced its 12 actions taken to address sexual harassment in its community through an Instagram post, which is shown in **Figure 9**.

Figure 9. Instagram of Binghamton University.

In dealing with a global crisis, it is worth observing how institutions worldwide connect and reassure their students during the pandemic, which is shown in The Impact of The Coronavirus on Global Higher Education (2020) conducted by QS. While the majority of schools use email to communicate coronavirus updates with 87%, almost half also utilize social media to connect with students (QS 2020). Since clear communication is of paramount importance during a crisis, the message in social content should offer the most reassurance to students (QS 2020). As in the pandemic case, more than half of the students ranked the advice "The best way to protect yourself from the coronavirus is to regularly wash your hands" as the most reassuring statement expected from their universities (QS 2020). Other advisories schools may update for their audience consist of the mask policies, physical distancing requirements, local precautions (Sehl 2020). In response to a global issue, the public voice of universities and colleges may have more influence on their audience. Given the uncertainty that individuals facing, particularly students, in this case, they may not only expect the official crisis response from institutions but also obtain real-time updates through their college social media (Sehl 2020).

Besides school-related updates and crisis communications, **responding to customer service inquiries** is a part of building student engagement, adopted by 57% of institutional marketers (Hootsuite 2019). Regarding this, the messaging on social platforms would be utilized to communicate with the students. As mentioned in the social media trends among users, the growing demand for private conversation is also relevant in the setting of higher education. This trend motivates schools to adjust their communication strategies for personalized engagement and deploy Artificial Intelligence (AI) to scale the approach (Hootsuite 2019). By acknowledging the common student concerns about the campus facilities, healthcare, accommodations, and so forth, the institution would briefly address the necessary information through social posts. In complement to this, it is possible to highlight the most frequent Q&As in their social media profile, for example, the Instagram Story.

The journey to endeavor the students with engaging content motivates schools to **consider the social concerns** of their digital audience, frequently expressed through social media movements. Since the rise of social media, there has been a new form of protest or advocacy for a cause that spreads out through social channels, known as social media activism (Reid & Sehl 2020). With hashtag as a central role in mobilizing the movements, several viral campaigns emerge, ranging from the environmental to societal issues of gender, racial, sexual orientation, and the most recent campaign is #BlackLivesMatter in 2020 (Reid & Sehl 2020).

Institutions ought to acknowledge the correlation between the college-aged population, social media, and social movements. Social media empower the students to freely express and explore the limits of their identity (racial, sexual orientation, gender, and so forth) within the confines of relatively safe digital spaces (Junco 2014). Thus, college students find social channels to be constructive in coordinating political movements, to be a platform to promote advocacy, and to bring attention to perspectives regarding individual-political views (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 78). Considering this as a part of the educational development, student affairs academics may promote the interpersonal growth of college-aged students on online platforms (Junco 2014; Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 79)

As a top trend predicted to dominate social media in 2021 (HubSpot & Talkwalker 2020), audiences and especially, young people will be more socially conscious and aware of how

brands tackle global issues. Along with the increasing social media usage among the youth, 46% of millennials expect brands to take a stand towards a societal problem, followed by 42% of the younger generation, as Kantar found (Christie 2020). From a brand messaging standpoint, academic organizations may also be confronted with taking concrete actions in the educational movements to initiate changes.

Since the researches on social media content from organizations towards societal issues is limited, the role in engaging student activism appropriately needs further attention among professionals. To make sense of this, social leaders may listen to their community and respond to relevant social movements promptly by crafting authentic and relevant content to their institutional values (Sehl 2020). For instance, the Aalto University in Finland shows their support towards gender equality during the time of the Helsinki Pride Week and the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia on its Instagram channel. **Figure 10** illustrates both mentioned Instagram posts.

Figure 10. Instagram of Aalto University.

To sum up the engagement phase, the institution marketers may generate the content through sharing news, promoting events, managing crisis communications, and responding to customer inquiries. On top of that, building content based on social listening and responding to the concerns of college-aged students would leverage the engagement of the campus community.

3.3.4 Advocacy

At the end of the student journey, colleges and universities may maintain a consistent relationship with its graduates to build institutional advocacy by leveraging its social media content. Concerning the alumni relation, their public voice could influence both the prospective candidates and the university. With the campus experiences in completing a degree, former students could share their authentic insights into the social life, teaching quality, employment opportunities, and so forth. Through sharing, the predecessors can empathize with the future applicants and even reassure their parents, thus, become a reliable and trustworthy information source. In correlation to this, the positive attitude and commitment of alumni could impact brand awareness, marketing, and fundraising opportunities. Within the modern age, crafting social content allows universities to integrate alumni relations as a part of its brand advocacy.

By greasing the wheels of social media, institutions improve their alumni engagement through tailored content for this specific group. In making meaningful connections with them, it is noteworthy that the alumni are another target audience that consists of groups from different fields graduating each year. As a result, the network building may require a consistent basis and various sorts of content to resonate with them.

Regarding this, it is recommended for schools to analyze surveys to uncover essential demographics on their location, jobs, working sectors and to monitor keywords or hashtags specialized for its group (Carter 2020). Taking the alumni preferences into account, the content generated in numerous social channels may catch the attention and resonate with the alumni relevantly. For the preference of visual content on Instagram, the tactic of sharing UGC entailed a personal story with pictures from an alumnus that would evoke nostalgia from the campus community. Not only crafting social content to enhance alumni relations, more than 70% of professionals in the field also promote alumni events (Hootsuite 2019). This helps to foster topical exchanges, networking, and collaboration between both consistently.

In addition to the alumni involvement, several universities use social content as a lever for its higher education fundraising. Alumni giving is considered crucial to the funding of public institutions, with 47% of social leaders conducted fundraising campaigns on social media (Hootsuite 2019). While this is common in the US due to a decrease in

governmental financial aid, alumni involvement in Europe occurs more often in the form of non-monetary 'membership' with voluntary contributions (Snijders, Wijnia & Rikers 2019). Therefore, social content may encourage and give the former students an insight into how their contributions could impact the future of their university. Beyond financials, social fundraising campaigns facilitate opportunities for alumni to become active advocates, adding an invaluable show of support and comradery (Carter 2020).

By reaching a broader social audience, the campaign operations for student projects, scholarships, research, and social changes would extend to crowdfunding campaigns. The capitalization of digital media and storytelling elements may accelerate the efficacy of crowdfunding initiatives on social platforms. For instance, the Ice Bucket Challenge was a viral sensation with a huge success in fundraising for research of the Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) Association in 2014. The attribution of this initiative was the former Boston College baseball player Pete Frates, who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 2012. The incorporation of a "challenge" to be shared on various social networks led to more than 115 million dollars was raised, with over 17 million people posting videos online (Trejos 2017). This success represents the possibilities of crowdfunding efforts in a higher education setting, as widespread engagement has the potential for a significant boost in fundraising. (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 85.)

To summarize the social content in the phase of building advocacy, universities aim to strengthen its alumni relationship through tailored content. Generating content is based on alumni preferences from various social channels to resonate with them the most. The alumni engagement opens opportunities for universities to gain alumni involvement in voluntary contributions or digital fundraising campaigns. The flexibility in engaging elements of social content would initiate a viral sensation that reaches a worldwide digital audience and empowers strong brand advocacy.

With the implications on the role of social media content in complementing the campus experience throughout the student journey, the next chapter provides a more in-depth understanding of the platform of Instagram and its potentials to leverage student engagement.

4   INSTAGRAM CONTENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The fourth chapter focuses on the basics of Instagram and its features for content creation in the higher education landscape. This chapter opens with a short introduction to Instagram, its metrics, and its strengths over other social sites. The second sub-chapter presents fundamental elements for business content. Following this is the brief on the most innovative features to create content on the platform. In the final sub-chapter, the focus is on the utilization of Instagram in educational institutions.

4.1   About Instagram

Instagram (IG) is a free photo and video sharing app available on iPhone and Android (Instagram 2020). Founded in 2010 as a mobile photo-sharing application, it enabled users to share pictures and videos exclusively for iOS (the operating system of Apple). In 2012, Facebook acquired IG, then released an Android and desktop version of it and has grown steadily since (Jessen 2018). With over one billion monthly active users since 2018, this visual-centric platform has become one of the biggest social media sites, which surpassed the social giants of Twitter and LinkedIn (TechCrunch 2018a). Significantly, reaching a milestone of 25 million active business profiles already since 2017, IG has been a social media marketing tool for various kinds of organizations (Instagram Business 2017).

As a network of young users, IG represents a tremendous opportunity for brands to approach this target group. According to Statista, over two-thirds of the global IG user population is younger than 34 years old, with a dominance of the age group between 25 and 34 years old (2020d). Also, Facebook reported that Instagrammers under the age of 25 spend 32 minutes per day on the platform, whereas the older spend 24 minutes (Business of Apps 2020). During this time staying online, more than 200 million Instagrammers visit at least one business profile per day, as claimed by Instagram Business (2017). These statistics show that brands not only have opportunities to improve their online presence but also possibly connect to a substantial audience size on IG.

In specific to the organic growth, the total audience size of the 50 high-profile brands was 31.2% bigger on Instagram than Facebook, drawn from a recent report of Socialbakers in 2020. Uncovered from the same analysis, engagement on IG is significantly stronger than

Facebook, with 18.7 times more interactions. In addition, an average image on IG achieves 23% more engagement (BusinessofApps 2020), even though Facebook has twice more monthly active users.

Based on the comparison, one of the most crucial and proving metrics for IG is engagement. It allows marketers to know whether their content reaching the right audience and is considered relevant to them. Correspondingly, the engagement rate is the golden Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of brand awareness, with more than 80% of businesses emphasize it as the most crucial metric. In general, engagement refers to the number of interactions a user has with social content, usually comes in the form of likes and comments. However, it has extended to include the number of views, shares, and direct messages as IG has evolved and launched new products such as Stories, IGTV, and Reels (Hubspot & Mention 2020). Consequently, this leads IG to be a far more effective platform in terms of engagement. (Hubspot & Mention 2020.)

In earning engagement on social platforms, posting time is one of the decisive factors to maximize opportunities for content interactions. The peak times leading to more content interaction vary among social channels, target audiences, and the purposes across different sectors. In gaining more insights on this, Sprout Social analyzed data based on more than 20.000 pieces of content from its customer base to uncover the times with the most and least frequently engaged with, broken out by platform and industry, as shown in **Figure 11** (2020a).
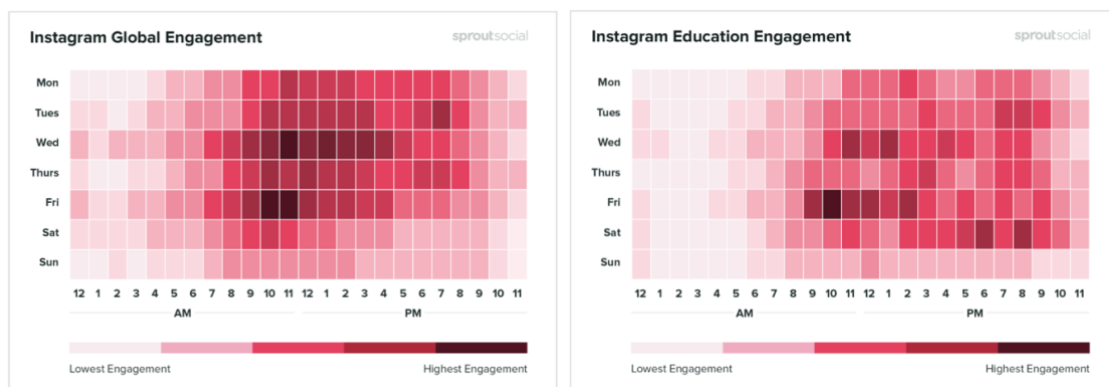

Figure 11. Instagram posting times by Sprout Social.

Taking a look into the Instagram global engagement in Figure 11, the best times to post is on Wednesday at 11 a.m. and Friday from 10 to 11 a.m. Furthermore, the most consistent engagement rate can is between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m., from Monday to Friday. For educational institutions, Saturday is considerably more active to interact with audiences on IG. With an attempt for the most consistent engagement, the suitable time slots are on Wednesday, Friday, or Saturday, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (Sprout Social 2020a). In complement to this analysis, the posting schedule would also depend on the most active times of the IG followers observed by each account.

As the second most logged-in social media site for daily use, IG is projected to grow its user base over the coming years (Pew Research Center 2019; Sprout Social 2020b). This speedy expansion over a decade stems from its appealing visual, consistent emphasis on user experience, and continuously advancing new content features.

4.2   Instagram Branded Content

4.2.1   Post Types

There are three main types of Instagram posts, including photos, videos, and photo carousels. As these are permanent content on IG Feed, they would have obtained more completed data analysis than the newly added ones such as Stories, IGTV, Live, and Reels. Regarding the distribution of content types among brands, images made up a majority of about 69%, followed by carousels with 15.9% and slightly below it, videos with 15.5%. However, the carousel has been the most engaging format in terms of organic interactions for brands, indicated in **Figure 12** by Socialbakers in 2020.
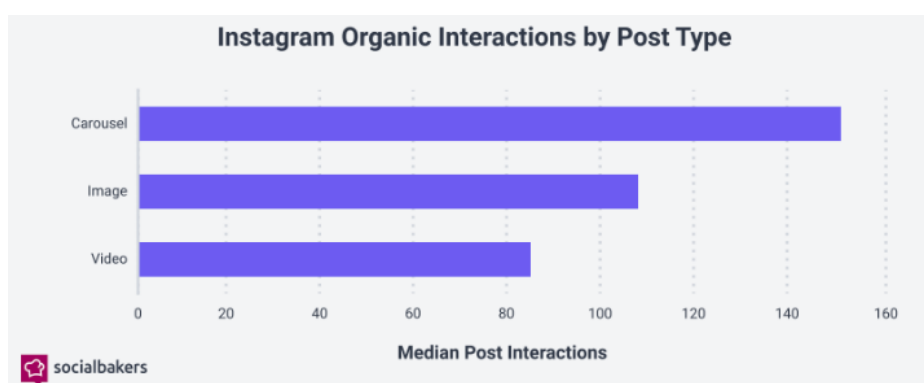

Figure 12. Instagram organic interactions by post type by Socialbakers.

Cited from the report of Socialbakers, the carousel has consistently outperformed the other two content types over the last 15 months, reached a peak of 150.5 median post interactions. Furthermore, the carousel leads to high engagement across all industries, revealed in the 2019 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report by Rival IQ. To explain this, not only brands can combine both photos and videos into carousels, but they could also engage and earn more impressions from a new user viewing the post. Furthermore, carousels allow sharing a post of informational and detail-dense content within ten images, which facilitates storytelling and breaking down detailed information into digestible bites (Chacon 2020).

Following the current trends in video content, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the future of video and live content is even more promising after the pandemic (GlobalWebIndex 2020). Alongside standard video clips, IG sensed the opportunities and expanded its offerings for fresher formats of Stories, IGTV, Instagram Live, and the most recent, Reels, which will be briefly presented in this thesis. These features facilitate more opportunities for brands to update real-time content and interact with their growing video enthusiasts.

4.2.2 Content Interests

According to a survey that Facebook conducted with 21,000 IG users, there are three key insights on the content interests that brands would connect with their IG audience. In general, Facebook indicated that "interesting content that resonates impacts more than brand names" in catching attention (2019).

First and foremost, the most preferred characteristics that the audience expects in IG content are entertaining (55%), authentic (54%), and creative content (53%). Across all markets, these characteristics orientate brands to give the headway to experiment and play more with the creative direction of their posts. In specific to light and entertaining content, Instagrammers frequently seek funny videos and memes on the platform. Significantly, this new content is spreading out widely as a fun way to engage with communities and is predicted to become a way of communication in the upcoming year (Talkwalker 2020).

Secondly, Instagrammers pursue their interests through branded content. As Facebook indicated, 91% of Instagrammers follow at least one of their enthusiasm. Even though the top categories people look for are travel (45%), music (44%), and food and drink (43%), they not only dive deeper into their passions but also prefer exploring new ones. The

eagerness to learn more drives them to connect with a community and get inspiration from the people and businesses associated, which motivates them to search for the content of their interests from brands. Thus, brands take this advantage to exploit their messaging, copy, and creativity to get people immersed in personal interests, tying the content to what delights their audience further than their products and services.

Thirdly, keeping up with events is an effective way to spark conversations with Instagrammers. Concerning cultural events, these are occasions when people watch for online updates on reactions, opinions, and behind-the-scenes content from the people and brands they follow. In consequence, this online habit offers an ideal opportunity for brands to get them engaged with localized content.

Therefore, a piece of fun, authentic, and creative content with direct communications from brands would be more valuable than a beautifully produced one. Together with these characteristics, content tapping into cultural events and personal interests has the potential to foster stronger relationships with Instagrammers. (Facebook 2019.)

4.2.3 Hashtag

Originally introduced on Twitter, hashtags gradually gained mainstream popularity across other social giants such as Facebook, Reddit, and undoubtedly, Instagram. On IG, they are typically included in the captions or comments of a post as a way to categorize content topics, and to add context to a post. Essentially, the audience would follow and utilize these keywords to search for related posts. As a consequence, the techniques in using hashtags could effectively expose the content to new IG audiences who care about a certain topic or niche.

Since hashtag use quickly spread out among social consumers, brands capitalized on this effectiveness and tailored 'branded hashtags' to support audience recognize their branded posts (HubSpot & Mention 2020). As a prime example, #shareacoke from Coke not only helped audience explore its specific branded content more easily, but also encouraged its community to produce free, user-generated content. Concerning the correlation between number of hashtags and engagement per post, HubSpot found that including more than six hashtags may decrease the engagement (HubSpot & Mention 2020).

By observing the hashtag trends in the scale of popularity and engagement, brands are able to identify the content reference among IG audience. Well-known as a platform for visual and lifestyle, most popular IG hashtags express this spirit, with the top three in 2019 including #love, #photography, and #instagood. However, brands may take a risk of becoming crowded out in high demand topics by these popular ones. Also, these were prone to be more generic than the most engaging hashtags. On top of this ranking, #tbt or Throwback Thursday is claimed to be a specific one that users typically add to photos from 'back in the day'. This indicates that Instagrammers adore nostalgia, leading this hashtag to get higher engagement than others (HubSpot & Mention 2020). In addition to this, nostalgia marketing is among top 10 social media trends predicted to engage with audience in 2021, according to a recent research conducted by Hubspot and Talkwalker (2020).

These observations underline an importance for brands to steer away from highly popular, generic hashtags and seek the specific ones that are relevant to their niche. In particular, unique branded and campaign hashtags are useful for promoting a new product or upcoming event and inspiring its community (HubSpot & Mention 2020).

4.3   Instagram Features

With the latest investments in more off-feed features, like IGTV, Stories, the Explore page, and Shopping, Instagram attempts to make its user experience all-encompassing (Sprout Social 2020b). The platform embraces the trends in new video formats with Stories, IGTV, and Reels, which will be briefly discussed in this section.

4.3.1   Stories

Launched in August 2016, Instagram Stories has been a game-changing feature that allows users to upload photos or videos which disappear after 24-hours. Rolling out this powerful feature, IG doubled the number of daily active users from its rival, Snapchat, in less than two years (HubSpot & Mention 2020). Noticeably, over 500 million Instagrammers update Stories every day, and one-third of the most viewed IG Stories are from businesses (Instagram 2020).

The success behind this 15-second video diary feature motivates brands to discover the usage behavior and trends among IG users. Due to the habit that the feed is more familiar

with viewing regular updates from brands, users appreciate Stories with interactive features, as a Facebook survey revealed (2009). Those elements are typically polls, Q&As, and raw or unpolished content in Stories that bridges the community together, and an example of its usage is shown from the IG account of the Harvard Business School in **Figure 13**.
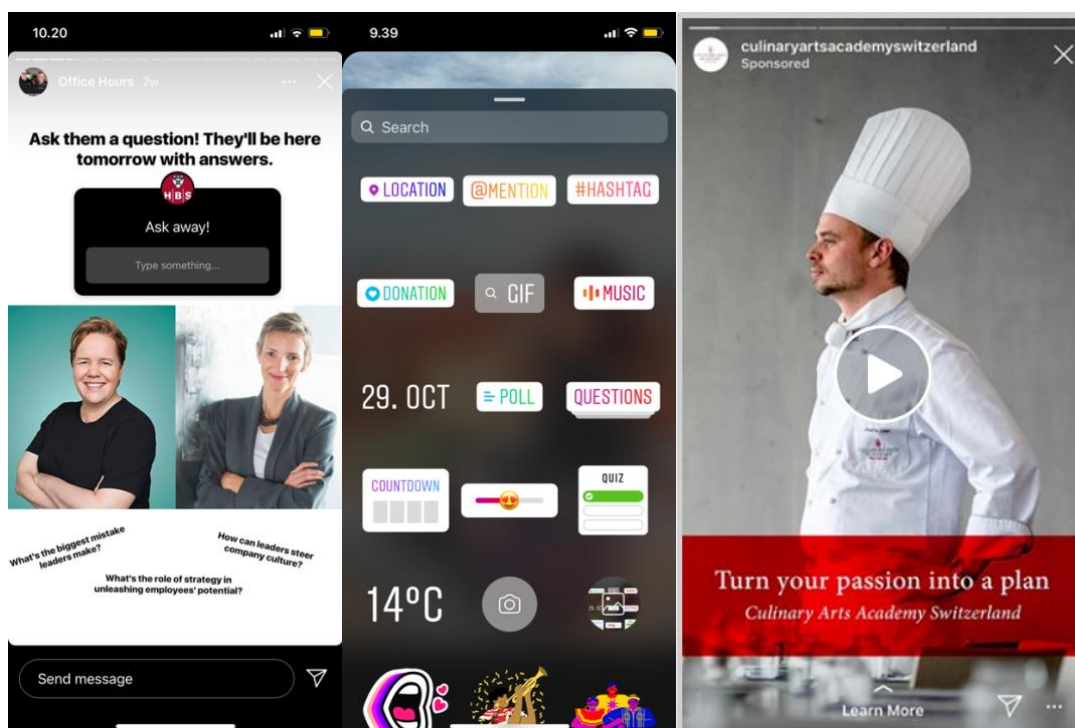

Figure 13. Screenshots of examples on Instagram Stories.

In addition to these interactive forms, brands may integrate elements (**Figure 13**) such as shoppable stickers, emojis, swipe-up links, and ads to boost sales and conversion. IG Business revealed that the Swiss Education Group gained a 2.7 times higher click-through rate for the ads in IG Stories, compared to ads in feed, shown in **Figure 13** (Instagram Business n.d.). A survey conducted by HubSpot and Mention among users uncovered that 67% of users surveyed have 'swiped up' on the links in branded Stories (2020). This same survey demonstrated another evidence for its engagement was that 36% of users have interacted with a branded Stories through likes, comments, and share. These statistics indicate that IG offers interactive features for businesses to adopt and leverage engagement with their consumers through branded Stories.

In general, it is noteworthy that IG Stories are expected to be spontaneous, authentic, and imperfect, to imply the brand culture and values beyond its business. Thus, brands may

consider incorporating features to interact and convert the interests of the audience into actions (HubSpot & Mention 2020).

4.3.2 Stories Highlights

In parallel with the regular Stories that vanish after 24 hours, Instagram presented Stories Highlights to be permanently available on the profile. Each highlight is similar to a curated collection of Stories, which enables followers to discover the content of specific topics at any time. Stories Highlights live front-and-center on each profile, in between the bio description and the Instagram grid.

Due to its prime location, brands would take advantage of it to introduce and showcase the most valuable content for new visitors. Function as a navigation of a website, brands may feature their ephemeral content in an order that directs users to view the content, such as the latest campaigns or products, news, an interactive "about" to introduce the organization, testimonials, and so forth. **Figure 14** is an example of how Instagram for Business arranges its highlights with the use of emojis as the titles.
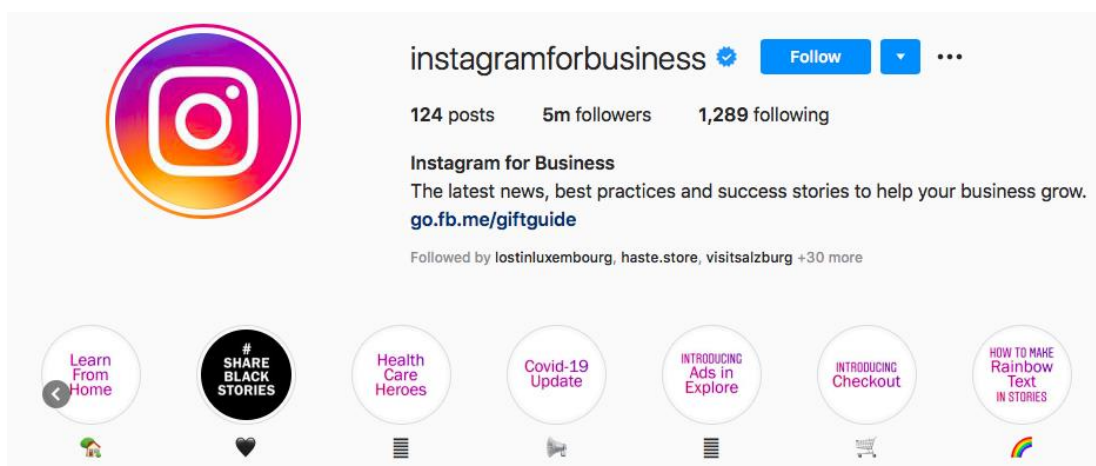

Figure 14. Stories Highlights of Instagram for Business.

Not only the content categories are influential, but the highlight covers that match the branded color theme would also complement the overall look. As a visual-based platform, a curated Instagram aesthetic would grab the attention of Instagrammers and encourage them to tap into relevant highlights to learn more about that brand. An example from Boston University would describe how they utilize the highlight covers and categories to design an eye-catching profile, as shown in **Figure 15**.
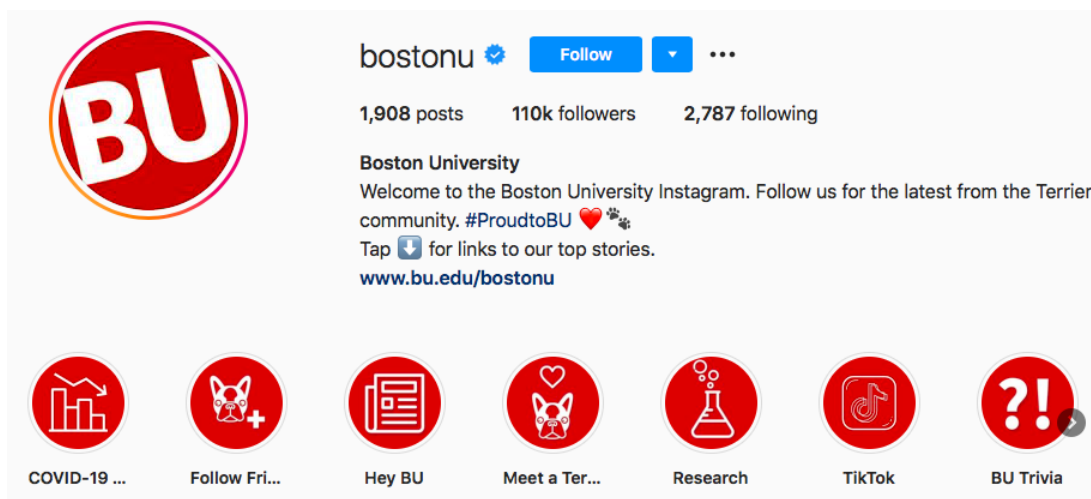
Figure 15. Stories Highlights on the Instagram of Boston University.

As complementary for IG Stories, the Highlights urge brands to be strategic in telling the audience their Stories. The investment in a well-organized directory of selected content and a branded signature outlook would help the audience to recognize the brand image.

4.3.3   IGTV

With the success of micro-videos of Stories, Instagram then extended its offerings to a longer video format in June 2018, known as Instagram TV (IGTV). As a standalone app and accessible from Instagram, IGTV enables users to upload 10-minute long videos and up to an hour in length for verified users. Until 2019, creators can post one-minute previews of their IGTV videos on the main feed to enhance the discoverability; meanwhile, to catch the attention of the audience without a necessity to download the app. Recently, Instagram introduced the IGTV series feature, which allows creators to produce a regular series of videos released on a consistent cadence. (Tien & Tran 2020.)

IGTV holds several advantages worth the efforts for brands to explore. Initially, its design fits savvy smartphone owners, with the form of vertical videos that is familiar with the habit when using smartphones. Not only optimized for phone viewing, but it also benefits users uploading videos through their mobile devices (Digital Marketing Institute n.d.). Nevertheless, there has been a relatively slow adoption of IGTV among brands due to their concerns around the high costs and time investment required to produce long-form social videos (TechCrunch 2018b).

Building an attractive IG video channel requires the content curation of brands to match the form of a series and skillful techniques in video production. Depending on the industry, several ideas to conduct branded IGTV would aim to produce tutorial videos, host a Q&A session, go behind the scenes, stream an event, and to host a talk show. Since entertaining, authentic, and creative content are critical to foster engagement in IG, the videos aim to bridge the connection and build trust between the audience and brands. For instance, NASA uploaded a live Q&A with Astronauts that attracted over 1.8 million views on this IGTV, as shown in **Figure 16**. Another example is the IGTVs of Boston University, in which they provide insights into the campus life, vlogs from its students, and other useful university tips, as illustrated in **Figure 16**.
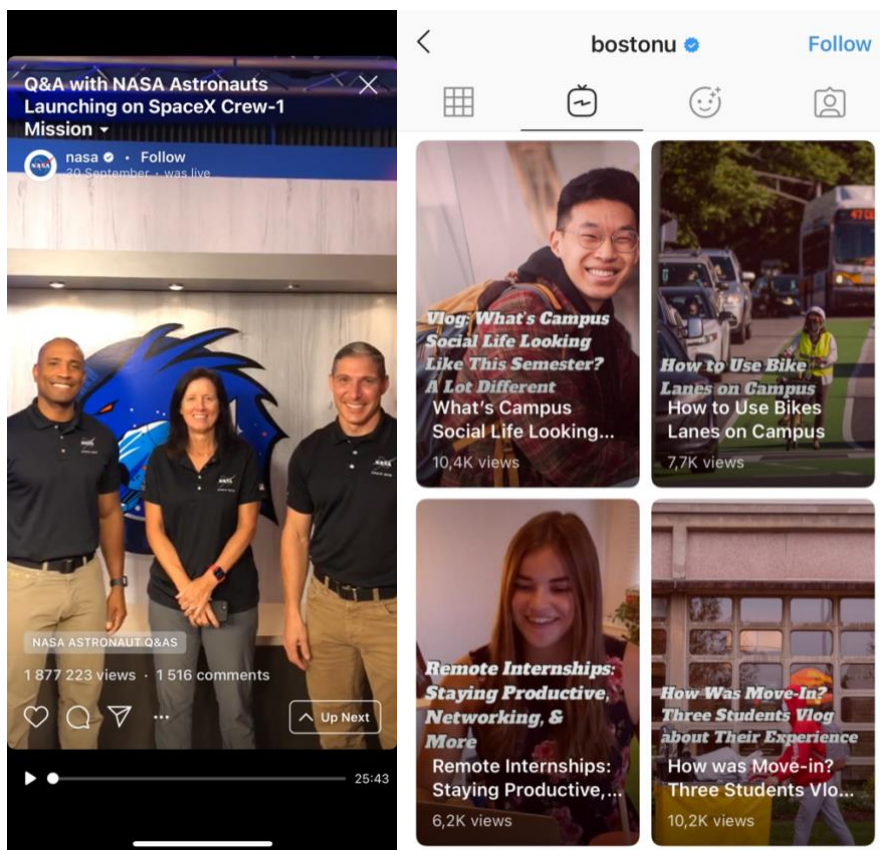

Figure 16. Screenshots of examples on IGTVs.

Apart from the content ideas, impressive videos may also require technical skills in video production, to present a catchy hook, to make the design fit into the feed and signature of brands, to customize a cover photo, to use relevant hashtags, and so forth. (Tien & Tran 2020.)

Taking the pros and cons of IGTV into account, the business would consider its video production in the social media marketing strategy. In the first attempt, brands can promote the video through cross-channel and adapt the format into different platforms of Youtube, IGTV, and Facebook. This approach may help them to save time and effort within limited resources and to examine the reach and engagement with video enthusiasts in various social channels.

4.3.4 Reels

Continuing the successful adoption of Stories, a key feature of Snapchat, into Instagram, the platform then set its sights on TikTok with the release of Reels in August 2020. This new feature allows IG users to create short, fun, and engaging video-based content. Instagrammers can record 15 to 30-second clips set to music and share them to their Stories, the main feed, and the new Reels tab on their profile. For the audience, Reels are not only available in the Explore feed, but there is a button on the main IG navigation bar, which opens another feed tailored for them watching Reels videos in full screen. By promoting the visibility of this latest feature, IG spurs its active users to browse and share Reels more often. With 500 million people opening Stories and Explore each month, this feature is predicted to attract a significant user base who is no longer leaving Instagram to create the signature type of content on TikTok (Hootsuite 2020b).

Among digital consumers, fun and informal ephemeral format have become a new direction in social media content, in which Reels is born to immerse its IG users in this trend. When searching for light and entertaining content, it is common for social consumers to share funny videos on Tiktok (48%) and Instagram (42%) to their social channels and other messaging platforms (GlobalWebIndex 2020). This user behavior raised a fresh demand for entertainment to be absorbed in various social channels. As a competitive platform, IG quickly adapts its offerings to be packed with various audio-visual effects and to generate captivating and authentic content quickly. The latest feature of Reels fills the gap between IGTV- a series-based with high-quality content and Stories- a collection of informal and spontaneous moments, but it provides a longer shelflife than 24-hour.

Even though still in its initial stage, Reels offers opportunities for brands to catch the trend of ephemeral content and leverage audience engagement. The reflection on a more

human side rather than a perfectly-produced picture would resonate with the audience, thus, building genuine relationships with them. Reels benefits business to drive sales and conversion through the showcase of their products in a quick motion and under different angles. By quickly incorporating this feature, every single 15-second Reel of Louis Vuitton (@louisvuitton) has gone viral, with an average of 5 million views, and one example is shown in **Figure 17**.

Another idea is to share educational content that utilizes the niche of each business and bring in more practical values for their community. As for schools, it is possible to present a quick campus tour, present tips and tricks at numerous spots around the university or even the city, and to provide useful tutorials for students. Take the London School of Economics (@londonschoolofeconomics) as an example, they introduced a Welcome Pack for both new and returning students after a wave of COVID-19 through a short 15-second Reel, as in **Figure 17**.
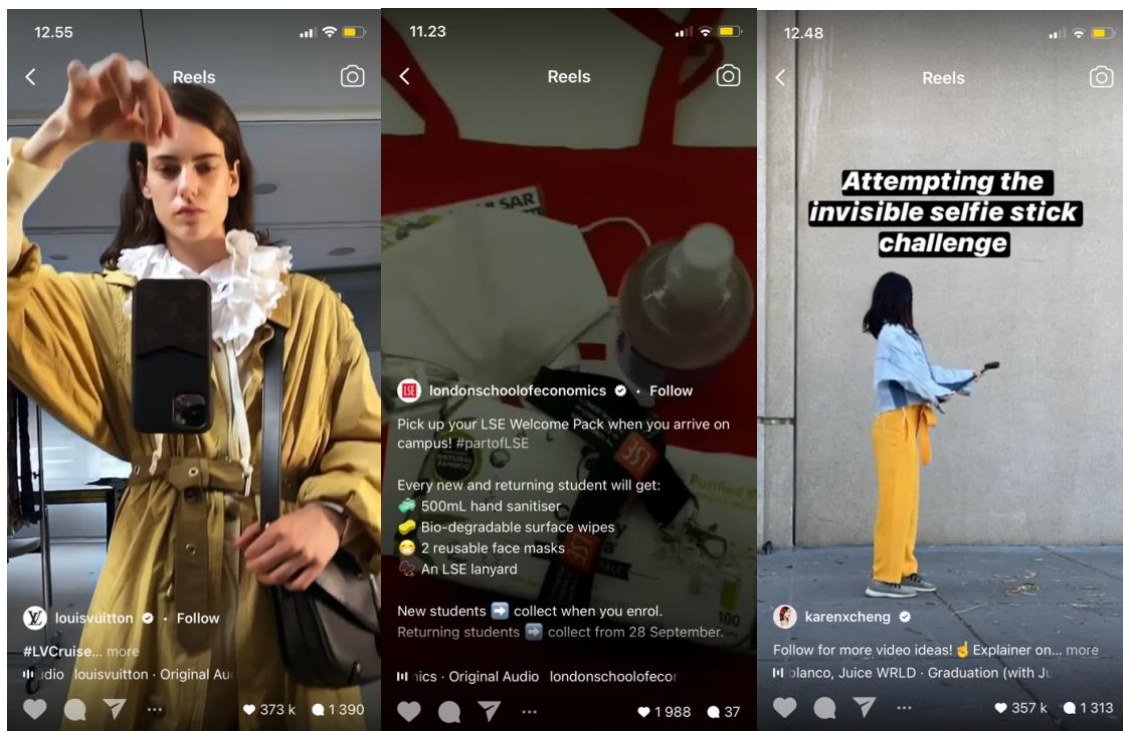

Figure 17. Screenshots of examples on Instagram Reels.

It is noticeable that the entertaining videos on TikTok would quickly go viral among its community, which facilitates influencers to grow their followers at high speed as well. Similarly, the algorithm behind Reels would be built up to accelerate the virality of its amusing videos. As for brands, becoming a trendsetter when it comes to new features or tools would be challenging. As a starting point, they could watch out for relevant trends in social platforms, to learn and get inspiration from the top creators, and then craft catchy content for their community. An example of a creative director setting various viral content in Reels is Karen Cheng (@karenxcheng), who makes videos for brands and attracts followers through her Reels that show tips and tricks in filming short videos. A 15-second tutorial of her on the challenge of using an invisible selfie stick gained over 10.5 million views, as shown in **Figure 17**.

Even though there has not been any in-depth analytics on Instagram Reels, but the massive views in the mentioned examples may imply that it is a space for brands and businesses to share creative content and get their audience engaged. On top of that, Reels offer insights on the industry trends for brands to understand their IG community.

4.3.5   Augmented Reality (AR) Filters

Instagram offered AR filters in Stories in 2017 when it launched its face filters. Alongside the growing popularity of Stories, IG upgraded its AR offerings to a new level with the release of Spark AR Studio. In August 2019, this platform opened for all creators to build their own AR filters experiences. Until today, everyone is capable of customizing AR filters for IG Stories, and examples of the AR filters on Instagram are shown in **Figure 18** (Instagram 2017).

Figure 18. AR Filters on Instagram Stories.

In a recent report on Social Media Trends in 2020, Ogilvy indicated that total brand immersion through experiences and technology has become mainstream. In specific, their survey demonstrated that 90% of respondents anticipated that by 2025, immersive technologies like AR would be as ubiquitous as mobile devices. Although created by users and not brands in this instance, this phenomenon clearly outlines the potential of the AR lens in brand campaigns as a method to get the audience engaged with branded content. (Ogilvy 2020.)

Even though custom AR filters are relatively new and quite complex tools that not every brand has experimented with it yet, staying ahead of the curve may worth the efforts to be outstanding in a competitive platform. In particular, the custom AR filters would reflect a unique tone of brands, thus, leaving a mark on the audience. To emphasize the brand identity, the AR stimulations could incorporate the color theme, logo, or mascot of brands to leverage its awareness. Adding this playful element to Stories is also an interactive way to get exposed to new users. They would try on the filters and then share Stories to their followers, therefore, enable these AR elements to keep reaching more follower base (Olafson 2020). **Figure 19** presents two examples of the AR filters from Binghamton University (@binghamtonu) and the London School of Economics (@londonschoolofeconomics).
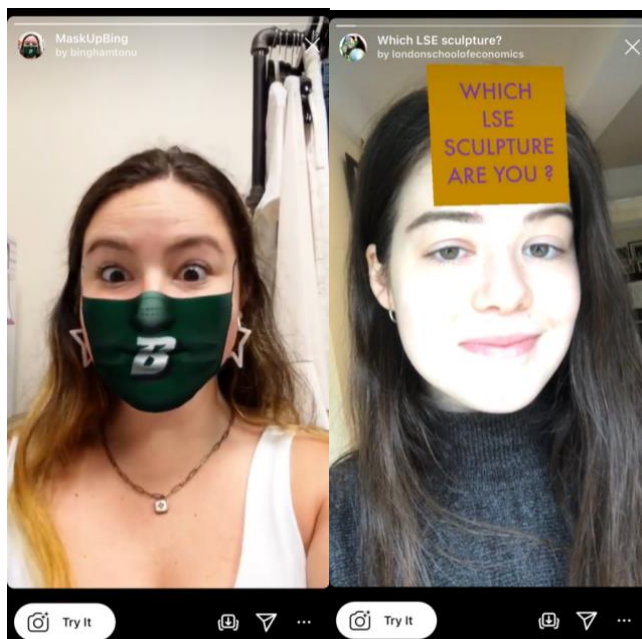

Figure 19. Examples of Custom AR Filters.

4.4 Instagram Content in Higher Education

Given the ubiquitous social media usage in the higher education landscape, Instagram has several potentials for an institution to leverage its engagement within the campus community.

4.4.1 Instagram Engagement in Higher Education

Regarding the audience, the main target of universities and colleges is Generation Z (Gen Z), which refers to the young born after 1996, also known as digital natives (Hootsuite 2019). Among this student population, Instagram has gained popularity due to its engagement through distinctive expressions of creativity and documentation of life events throughout college (Rowan-Kenyon et al. 2016, 76). As one of the fastest-growing social media platforms, IG is embedded into the daily life of Gen Z with the highest frequency compared to the use of other channels, as the Business Insider survey showed as in Figure 20 (2019).
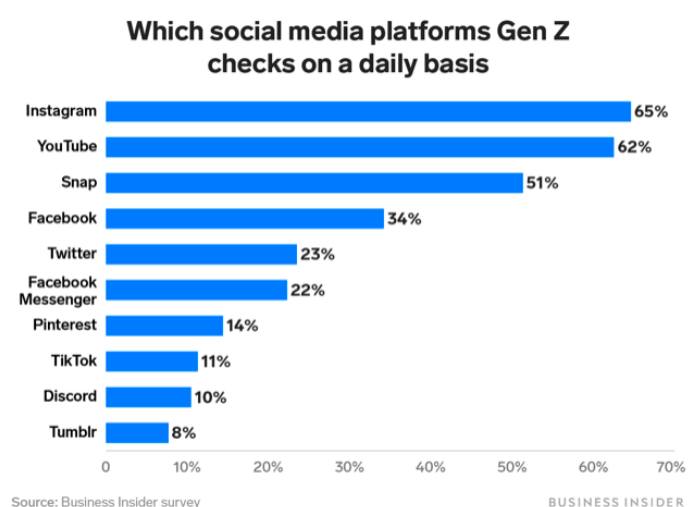

Figure 20. Social Media platforms Gen Z checks on a daily basis by Business Insider.

As a result of this social participation among students, higher education is the top industry that has gained the highest engagement rate in its IG content, according to the 2020 Social Media Industry Benchmark Report conducted by Rival IQ. This research was based on the most crucial metrics of 1.800 brands across 12 top industries and compared 150 brands in each sector. It demonstrated that brands in higher education achieved an average per-post engagement rate of 3.96%, which is significantly higher than the median across all industries, with only 1.6%, as shown in **Figure 21** (Rival IQ 2019).

Average engagement rate per post on Instagram

The median across all industries is **1.60%**

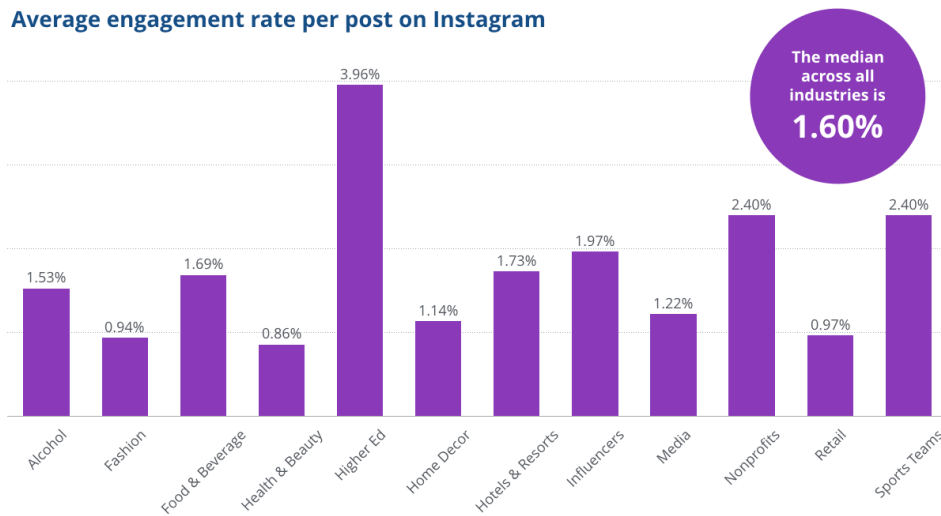| Industry	Rate
Alcohol	1.53%
Fashion	0.94%
Food & Beverage	1.69%
Health & Beauty	0.86%
Higher Ed	3.96%
Home Decor	1.14%
Hotels & Resorts	1.73%
Influencers	1.97%
Media	1.22%
Nonprofits	2.40%
Retail	0.97%
Sports Teams	2.40%

Figure 21. Average Instagram engagement rate across 12 industries by Rival IQ.

In comparison to the other social giants within this sector, IG surpassed Facebook and Twitter in terms of user engagement rate, drawn by Rival IQ. With the consistently lower post volumes on IG than the other two in the education context, the photo-sharing platform successfully maintains its high engagement rate with only minimal posts, demonstrated in **Figure 22**. Moreover, organizations also switched the efforts from Snapchat to IG due to the inability to measure engagement in Snapchat and more students spending time on IG (Hootsuite 2019).

Average Posts Per Day

f 1.08, Instagram 0.49, Twitter 1.78

Average Engagement Rate Per Post

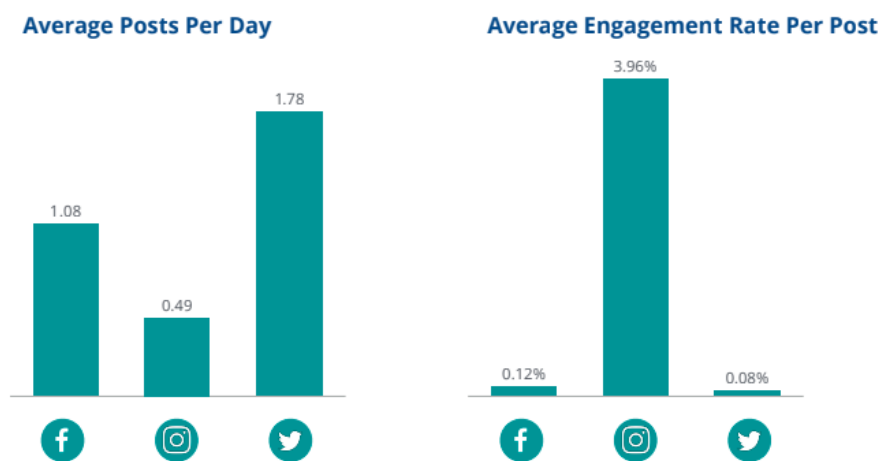f 0.12%, Instagram 3.96%, Twitter 0.08%

Figure 22. A comparison between Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in the Higher Education industry by Rival IQ.

To boost the engagement level across the social platform, and to address the declining rate in Facebook and Twitter, more than half of institutions (58%) planned to increase paid advertising in 2020 (Hootsuite 2019). As indicated in the Social Campus Report

2019, the majority of the growing ad spend has been up to 12% from 2017, focusing on targeted campaigns to attract prospective students. Noteworthy, both Facebook and Instagram were chosen as the top platforms for advertising spend in higher education. Alongside this investment, the expenditure on headcount and technology is also expected to escalate.

4.4.2 Instagram Content in Higher Education

Taking a deep dive into Instagram content, practitioners would obtain more insights into selecting the post types and understand the trends among the student population.

In the higher education settings, carousels and images maintain as effective post types on IG that is similar to the global audience reference, as mentioned in the previous section. Apart from the high-performing post types, the top hashtags with proven effectiveness among institutions also indicate the well-performing content topics in the campus community. Taking a look into the most engaging hashtags, the posts related to dogs and holidays were surprisingly on top of the ranking in 2019, as shown in **Figure 23**.
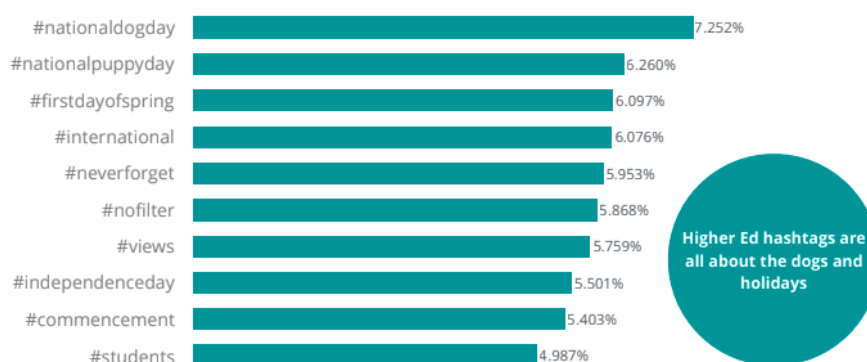

Figure 23. Top hashtags by engagement rate in the higher education sector by Rival IQ.

Another trend observed among universities is the student-generated content that boosts organic engagement. Particularly, the practice of student-takeover social channels has been more popular that experienced an increase of 11% since 2017. In addition to this approach, while the central social media team may concentrate more on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn to showcase research initiatives and innovations, the student-led Instagram account would better resonate with the same-age target audience (Hootsuite 2019). Perceiving the benefits in lower-cost, more authentic videos and Stories that

students produce, many schools adopted this practice and also gained a higher user engagement (Hootsuite 2019).

This chapter provides the relevance between Instagram and the practices of global universities to engage with their campus communities. These insights ground a basis to deploy the platform and fit into the campus communities at VAMK. The next chapter uncovers the Instagram of VAMK and its usage patterns for content creation.

5   INSTAGRAM CONTENT FOR VAMK

The fifth chapter presents the overall look on the official Instagram account of VAMK and a content analysis based on a collection of the most well-performing posts. The first sub-chapter describes the basis of VAMK Instagram with its objectives, the visual theme, and the current practices of the responsible team. This understanding grounds for a content analysis on the languages, post types, and content topics in the following sub-chapter.

5.1   Official VAMK Instagram

Starting an Instagram account in 2014, the main goal of VAMK is to showcase the life of students and the education that the university offers, primarily for new student candidates interested in the University of Applied Sciences (UAS) level of education. The secondary goal is to build and strengthen the community of current students (Turunen 2020).

The official VAMK Instagram (@vamkofficial) currently possesses 1.170 posts, 2.788 followers, and follows 233 other users. In the main website, VAMK describes itself as working life-driven, sense of community, international, and energetic, which are the characteristics expected to be reflected through its Instagram as well. **Figure 24** presents the IG profile of VAMK.
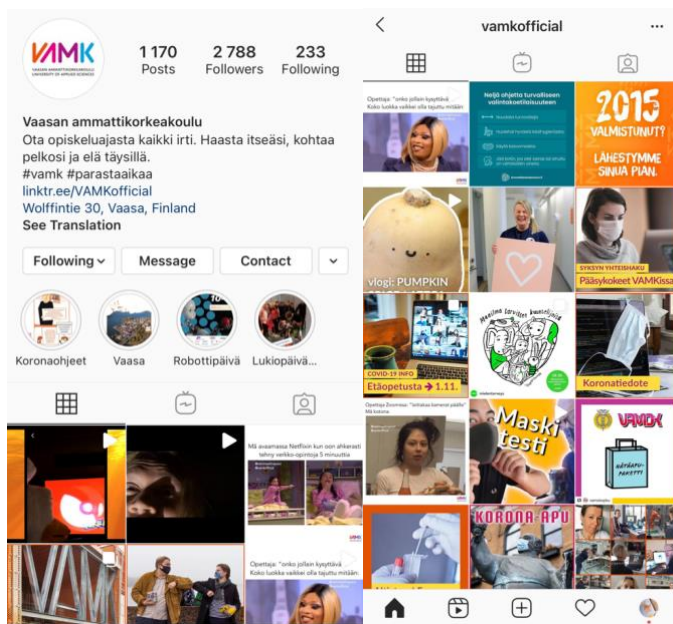
Figure 24. The official Instagram of VAMK.

Since Instagram is a visual platform, the color theme and a signature outlook would boost the visibility of a business profile. Not an exception, VAMK also designs the IG feed following its principle of color usage, as in **Figure 25**.

Figure 25. Graphic guidelines of VAMK.

When scrolling through the IG feed of VAMK, the brand colors are integrated into pictures in various ways. The color theme is designed as a background for text-based graphic posts and to outline the grid of some imagery posts. Besides, the design of the slogan (Figure 26) is applied in the titles for many images and videos. Thus, the color used in these elements may strengthen the branded visual effects of VAMK on IG.

However, due to its brightness, the predominant use of these colors in graphic design may affect the overall look and decrease the effectiveness in visual expression, which will be discussed in the next sub-chapter.

About the marketing team, the brainstorm and content creation for Instagram are conducted by two to three people. While Anssi Turunen, a Digital Marketing Executive at VAMK, takes the main responsibility on the Instagram feed in 2020, the other colleague posts most of the IG Stories. There are also two vloggers with one meme-creator support the team, who are students at VAMK. The vloggers produce Youtube videos and provide preview clips to publish on Instagram. Concerning social media marketing efforts, VAMK may reuse the same content on different platforms due to a limited human resource (Turunen 2020).

5.2   VAMK Instagram Content Analysis

5.2.1   Languages

The use of languages directly influences the communication with the target audience through captions, hashtags, and overall comprehensiveness. As a Finnish university that fosters an international environment and also attracts students from over the world, providing social content in both Finnish and English is necessary. In case the post is only targeted to call for applicants to join Finnish degree programs, offering the text in the local language is understandable. Otherwise, captions below general posts are recommended to be written consistently in both languages. If there is a text entailed in images, it is crucial to utilize the carousel to upload another picture with translation. Similar to the voice-over videos, offering subtitles would enhance the experiences for a broader audience, including both Finnish and English-speaking communities. Given the function of auto-translation below each post by Instagram, it would prevent an optimized user experience by grammar errors and an unnatural tone of voice, thus, possibly lead to a lower engagement.

Under the languages, branded hashtags play a vital role in driving student-generated content on Instagram. As stated in Chapter Four, the recommendation for each post is to include around 5 or 6 hashtags. Among those, whereas two are unique branded, the others would be closely relevant to describe the content. About VAMK, the two branded hashtags are #vamk and #parastaaikaa, which appear on top of the IG profile, as in Figure

25. However, not all posts have been found to insert these hashtags, whereas #vamk is available in 51 posts, #parastaaikaa is in 40 posts among the 100 latest posts (VAMK Instagram). A frequent usage would benefit brands to monitor its performance through social campaigns, to promote contests or giveaways, and to join the conversation of the audience. By increasing the use of signature hashtags, the university could encourage more student-generated content from its international community.

Recently, VAMK also promotes activities to engage with its alumni through IG content. As a target audience belongs to the campus community, it is necessary to add a hashtag into specific content, future events, and campaigns tailored for this group. Since the alumni community also includes English-speaking and Finnish students, it is recommended to select one general hashtag such as #vamksalumni and possibly, a second one written in Finnish. Consequently, this boosts the students to explore more related content and activities through the hashtag and fosters more UGC that features the university.

5.2.2   Post Types

VAMK integrates the three main post types in its Instagram feed, including images, carousels, and videos, with a majority of the first one. The indication of user interaction within these post types is built on an analysis of the most recent 100 posts, which provides insights into the latest content reference during the last four months. This analysis grounds on the effectiveness of the content topics, types, and visual elements in the posts, which will be briefly discussed.

Out of those 100 latest posts, the top 10 with the highest engagement were selected. Based on the explanation of Instagram engagement mentioned in Chapter Four, the calculation of likes and comments with the help of Ingramer, is used as the indicator in this case (Ingramer 2020). Within the top 10, **Figure 26** provides the screenshots of six posts, whereas the other four are memes that are the same content type as one of the six representatives.
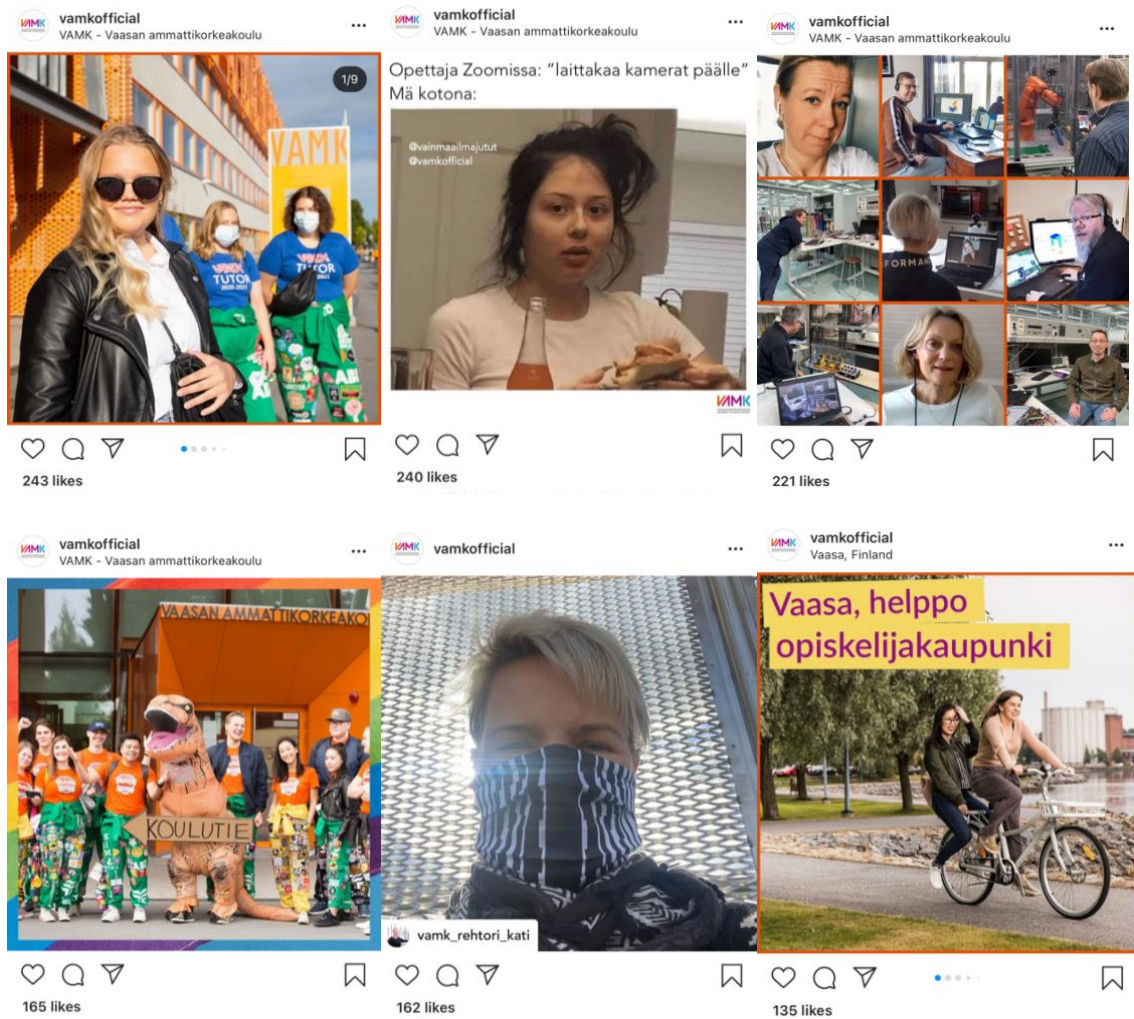
Figure 26. The most engaging Instagram posts of VAMK.

Considering the post types in terms of engagement, in general, the use of images gains high interactions with the campus community. However, the most engaging post is found to be a carousel that captures various moments of students starting their first day at VAMK. Besides, a layout that integrated nine pictures of the teachers to celebrate the International Teachers' Day also achieved a high ranking in engagement. Also, the carousel to introduce the city of Vaasa is a high-performing one. These present the potential of using carousels to showcase different moments of the campus community,

especially during special occasions. Apart from images and carousels, the use of videos is still limited when it comes to user interactions on IG.

5.2.3 Content Topics

Following the analysis in post types, it is necessary to acknowledge the most interactive content topics within the audience. Every week, VAMK aims to publish one post in news updates, one for entertainment, and one or two educational pieces of content to introduce a degree program, ranging from 3 to 5 posts per week.

Among the mentioned topics, entertaining content has received consistently high engagement each week, with 4 out of 10 most engaging posts are memes created by a student at VAMK. This outcome may indicate that the student-led social content is relevant to the same-age audience, especially to pursue entertainment. In addition to the reach of this specific content type, the creator may consider providing an English translation as well. This experiment could get the engaging content exposed to all of the campus community, thus, boost the engagement rate of it. As mentioned in Chapter Four, memes are one of the emerging communication trends on social media. However, the overuse of memes could also affect the professionalism and academic reputation of an institution if the other education topics are not updated frequently. Therefore, VAMK could post memes around twice a month during the school year and refresh the recreational content with quizzes or competitions that are related to the university and its campus community.

Besides the performance of entertaining content, there are two key insights in the engagement of the news and educational categories. It is noticeable that most of the top engaging posts feature people belong to the community of VAMK, including students, staff, teachers, and even the Rector of the university (Figure 26). Thus, the consideration of visual materials may enhance the authenticity and bridges the connection with the audience, especially during the period of distance learning and teaching. In contrast, the posts that only contain a big-sized text featured in an orange background, one of the themed colors, demonstrate lower engagement than the other pictures with the elements related to the campus community, as in **Figure 27**.

Figure 27. Theme colors of VAMK in different Instagram posts.

Nevertheless, the amount of posts that feature members of the VAMK community is limited when compared to the overall Instagram grid (Figure 25). This limitation has resulted from a lack of institutional staff responsible for collecting content materials and maintaining social media sites. Not an exception, this obstacle is also among the top three challenges for tertiary education institutions in social media management, as mentioned in Chapter One. Consequently, it is worth noticing that the dominant use of graphic design may be less engaging than the human-centric pictures. Acknowledging this, the university could encourage its students to generate content such as to update on their distance learning or to share experiences during a new online semester. Thus, the authenticity and human connection expressed through visual elements would lead the content in news and education topics to resonate more with the audience on the IG channel.

In conclusion, the content that accentuates authentic moments of the campus community would reach higher effectiveness in audience interaction. Through the emphasis on institutional cultures, VAMK would achieve its goals to inspire potential applicants and to form a close connection with its current students. Nevertheless, the lack of team members for Instagram management and execution brings about a hindrance in content creation, design, and the usage of other IG features, especially during the pandemic time.

6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to underline the main results of the research. The highlights are the proposals for VAMK Instagram content to achieve the thesis goal. An evaluation and recommendations for further research are stated in the final sub-chapter.

6.1 A Proposal of Instagram Editorial Plan 2021

The first proposal is an Instagram Editorial Plan in 2021 that covers one-year content to post on the IG feed of VAMK. The monthly content marketing focus of the university, which is shared by Turunen at VAMK, is the basis to craft the content on IG.

Following the current practices, the main topics to post on the IG feed are news, education, and entertainment. However, due to the unpredictability of global news and university-related updates, this plan proposes two posts per week with a focus on educational and entertaining content that publishes on Wednesday and Friday. This schedule is based on the global analysis mentioned in Chapter Four and the insights gained from the IG of VAMK. **Figure 28** shows an example of the IG editorial plan in January 2021.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Jan-21						
Application for international degree programmes. Showcase Finnish degree programmes						
				1	2	3
				Stories: New Year Resolution		
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Get ready for the Application period			Stories: CTA Application link **1st day of the Application**	Quizz: How many nationalities of VAMK students		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
Stories:"Students tell" & link to the website Carousel: Instructions to apply/ Checklist		Stories: Q&A on the application process		Stories: Countdown Application Day Meme		
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
Stories: Q&A on the application process Countdown 2 days left	Stories: Remind 1 day left	Stories: Remind last day to apply **Last day of the Application**		Thank you to all applicants		
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
		Students share hybrid-learning experiences (Business students)		Stories: Checklist Tips: Mental Health during Winter		

Figure 28. Proposal of an IG editorial plan in 2021 by the author.

All content in the calendar is created by the author, whereas the template inspiration is from My Tran (2016). The full version is available at this link. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nbBvfogU7_UVXJfsWMWW5RzrNZZUeGs XCdTkLlQjFHs/edit?usp=sharing.

6.2 Proposals for Other Instagram Features

The IG editorial plan also suggests the utilization of **IG Stories** that creates an engagement touchpoint between brands and digital consumers, cited in Chapter Four. Because IG Stories are real-time updates that mainly showcases spontaneous and authentic moments, this plan only suggests general ideas get connected with the audience during special occasions. Some examples of IG Stories created by the author are in the Appendices.

Alongside IG Stories, the arrangement of **Highlights** is a strategic approach for brands to tell their stories. In the case of VAMK, this tool provides opportunities to save Stories and organize those into various topics that are critical to the campus community.

Furthermore, an investment in the highlight covers would also complement a branded visual outlook. **Figure 29** presents the current Stories Highlights of VAMK and a suggestion to offer more general categories with a brand color look, designed with Canva.
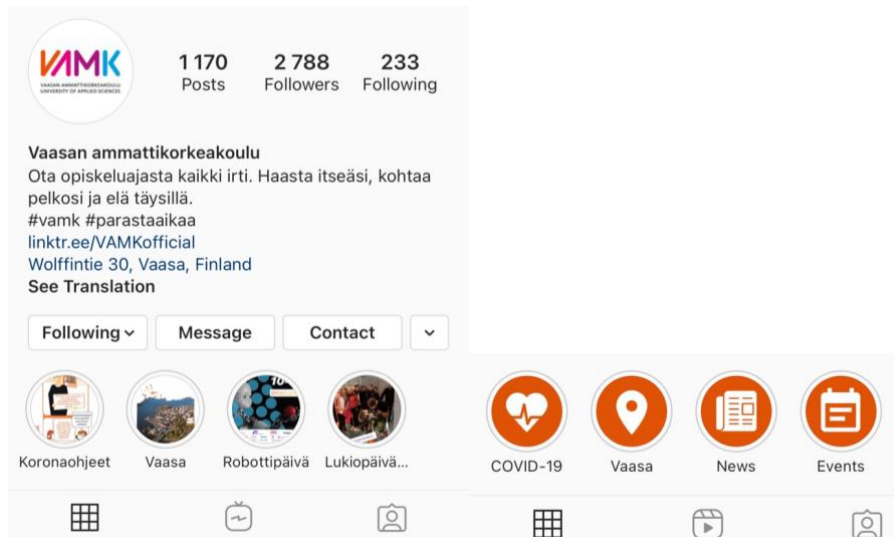

Figure 29. Proposal of Stories Highlights of VAMK

Regarding the other optional features, VAMK may consider producing its vlogs on Youtube and IG feed as a series-based to publish on IGTV as well. This approach would be beneficial at the first stage to optimize the video content and promote them in cross-marketing channels. Within a limitation in the members to execute the IG plan, the utilization of Reels and custom AR filters may require more investment in time and efforts to leverage the user engagement.

6.3 Evaluation and Recommendations

The findings in this thesis are up-to-date and insightful to tackle the frontier of social media ecology in the higher education landscape. The references used are mostly new, including several reports in 2020 that indicated the latest updates on the impact of the global COVID-19 crisis into this sector and its target audience. Many IG snapshots and social practices from universities worldwide are collected to observe the ongoing as well as trends in the future. Significantly, the thesis process has been a dedication of self-study, with a devoted amount of time to research and deep dive into the practices of social media content creation.

The validity is guaranteed in the context of VAMK. Anssi Turunen believed that the content calendar is "very good" overall, which follows the general plan nicely and provides some very good ideas, for example, mental health tips during winter. The team will return to this calendar when the upcoming year progresses.

For further recommendations, there are several fields in need of more in-depth research on the integration of social media into the tertiary education setting. Regarding this thesis topic, there is a limitation to find recent reviews on the utilization of each IG feature in academic institutions. The observation of the current practices from global universities reveals that they are dealing with the challenges to improve operational efficiency when embedding social tools. Therefore, the author would recommend a list of topics below to deploy social media effectively:

- The effects on the integration of social media tools with a centralized Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system in higher education.
- Return on Investment (ROI) on the Instagram of higher education institutions
- The effectiveness of student-led Instagram among universities
- The utilization of informal ephemeral content formats on Instagram in the higher education industry
- The responses of educational institutions towards social media movements

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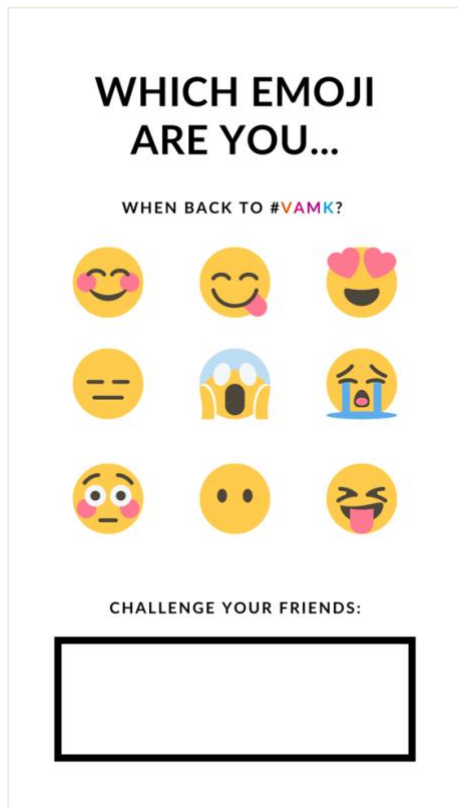
APPENDIX 1

This or That
VAMK'S CANTEEN EDITION

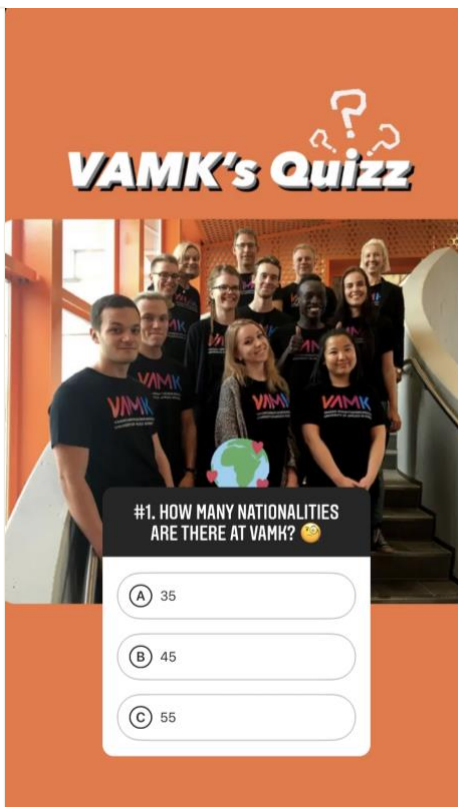|	
Coffee	Cacao
Milk	Tea
Banana Bread	Panini
Cupcake	Brownie
Musli	Yogurt
Dark Chocolate	White Chocolate
Banana	Apple
Protein Bar	Nut-mix

My New Year's Resolutions:

Created by Tran Nguyen

WHICH EMOJI ARE YOU...
WHEN BACK TO #VAMK?

CHALLENGE YOUR FRIENDS:

VAMK's Quizz

#1. HOW MANY NATIONALITIES ARE THERE AT VAMK?

(A) 35
(B) 45
(C) 55