

Content Strategy and Audience Engagement: A Semiotic Analysis of Private Universities in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The advancement of digital technology has compelled higher education institutions to adapt their communication strategies in response to the shifting media consumption habits of younger generations. TikTok, a highly popular short-form video platform among Generation Z, has emerged as a strategic medium for universities to build their digital presence and enhance institutional branding. This study aims to examine content strategies and audience engagement on the official TikTok accounts of five private universities in Indonesia: Telkom University, Swiss-German University, Bina Nusantara University, Pelita Harapan University, and the Islamic University of Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach and social semiotic analysis, the research explores how visual and narrative elements in TikTok content are constructed to shape institutional identity and foster audience interaction. The findings indicate that authentic portrayals of student life, paired with visual styles that align with current digital trends, significantly enhance user engagement. Amid the increasing competition in the higher education sector, these findings underscore the importance of strategic visual communication in creating emotional connections with digital audiences and reinforcing institutional relevance on social media platforms.

Keywords: TikTok, content analysis, semiotics, private university, engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, content has become a form of communication, particularly on social media platforms like TikTok. For higher education institutions, the ability to capture the attention of audiences, particularly those seeking prospective students, through engaging content is crucial for building brand identity and enhancing the institution's image (Dali. M & Aziz. A, 2023). Social media platforms like TikTok now play a crucial role in reaching younger generations, especially Generation Z, who are accustomed to fast-paced, interactive, and entertaining visual content (Pratama & Setiawan, 2023). In this context, higher education institutions, especially private universities, are required to be able to package their institutions content in social media and attractively in order to compete and remain relevant amidst the rapid flow of digital information.

The use of TikTok social media by educational institutions is not merely for entertainment, but also as a communication strategy that plays a role in shaping the institution's image, increasing visibility, and strengthening emotional connections with prospective students (Putri & Hidayat, 2022). The content produced by universities not only showcases the campus atmosphere or academic activities but also incorporates symbols, values, and representations that reflect the institution's identity. However, academic research on these strategies remains limited, particularly in the context of semiotics and audience engagement on the TikTok platform.

This study aims to analyze the content strategies used by five private universities in Indonesia through the TikTok platform, as well as assess the level of audience engagement with the content presented by five private universities in Indonesia, namely Telkom University (TelU), Bina Nusantara University (BINUS), Swiss German University (SGU), Pelita Harapan University (UPH), and the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII), each of which has unique communication characteristics and images on social media. TelU and BINUS were chosen as representatives of private universities that have more than 20,000 followers on their TikTok accounts.¹. SGU was chosen as a representative of international universities, while UPH and UII are representatives of religious universities.

This study uses a qualitative approach with an observational method of video uploads published on the official TikTok accounts of the five universities over a certain period. This study uses an analysis of meaning in content strategy, with the social semiotic theory developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006),. Through a multimodal approach in this study to understand how meaning is constructed through TikTok content. In the current era of digital communication, especially on platforms like TikTok, messages are no longer conveyed only through words or written text, but through a combination of visuals, audio, text, movement, and expression. The focus of the analysis lies in how the visual strategies they design to create audience interaction, as well as how social meaning is constructed through a combination of text, images, audio, and movement modes.

Several previous studies have discussed the role of social media in enhancing university branding and reaching prospective students.(Hidayat & Yuliana, 2021; Nugroho & Lestari, 2020). However, most of these studies focus more on quantitative engagement metrics, and few have examined visual meaning in depth through a semiotic approach. Therefore, this study presents a new contribution to digital communication studies by combining a social semiotic approach and qualitative analysis of visual content. The novelty of this research lies in the application of social semiotic theory to analyze universities' visual communication strategies on TikTok, a topic that has not been widely studied in Indonesia. Furthermore, this research contributes to our understanding of how visual narratives constructed by educational institutions can foster more meaningful and strategic audience engagement. (Susanto & Arifin, 2023). It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference for managers of educational communication institutions, especially private universities, in designing content that is effective, relevant, and in accordance with the characteristics of today's digital audience.

2. METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with the analytical methodology of Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic theory. This approach was chosen to allow researchers to deeply explore the meaning of the visual communication practices taking place on each university's official TikTok account and understand how these strategies impact audience interactions and responses.

The social semiotic theory developed by Kress and van Leeuwen continues to serve as a robust theoretical framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed through visual elements in digital communication practices. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2021),

¹ Account accessed : 08 July 2025, 14.00 GMT+7

visual structures such as color, layout, framing, and gaze direction function as components of a "visual grammar" that systematically produces meaning, as if visual elements themselves are capable of communicating (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

In the context of social media, Zappavigna and Logi (2024) provide a phenomenological analysis of the interplay between emojis and textual elements in TikTok comment sections. Their study explores how semiotic relationships between emojis and language contribute to what they term *ambient affiliation* a symbolic form of social attachment formed through paralinguistic digital symbols. This research is particularly relevant as it integrates social semiotic theory with visual communication practices on a platform that thrives on user-generated content and interaction. Additionally, Purbasari (2021) demonstrates the applicability of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar framework by analyzing Diesel's "Be Stupid" print advertisement. Her study illustrates how the three metafunctions representational, interpersonal, and compositional operate simultaneously to construct the advertisement's visual narrative. This kind of analysis reinforces the value of social semiotic theory in understanding visual strategies used in institutional communication and public campaigns.

Therefore, Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic theory remains not only relevant to the analysis of traditional visual media, but also highly applicable to contemporary platforms like TikTok. In such multimodal environments, visual elements and user interactions jointly shape audience engagement. By applying this theoretical framework, the present study investigates how private university accounts employ visual content strategies to construct brand identity, foster digital interpersonal relationships, and enhance audience engagement critical components for success on platforms such as TikTok.

The research objects in this study are the official TikTok accounts of five private universities: Telkom University (TelU), Bina Nusantara University (BINUS), Swiss German University (SGU), Pelita Harapan University (UPH), and the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII). These five institutions were selected because they have high digital visibility, are active in producing content on the TikTok platform, and demonstrate a diversity of communication strategies that can be analyzed in depth. The data collection technique was through documentation, namely the researcher studied the documentation without directly engaging with the account managers or audiences. Documentation was carried out on video content uploaded during the research period, by recording visual elements such as narratives, colors, visual expressions, symbols, and the formatting conveyed. In addition, the researcher also collected interaction data such as the number of likes, comments, and the number of content shares to assess the level of audience engagement.

In analyzing the data, this study employed the social semiotic theory of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) with a multimodal approach. Through this theoretical approach, the study explored how private universities' TikTok visual content strategies were designed to capture audience attention, strengthen the institution's image, and build emotional and social engagement. In the context of social media, especially platforms like TikTok, this approach is highly relevant because communication occurs in the form of text, visuals, audio, and movement.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Use of Social Media by Private University in Indonesia

Social media has become an important part of the communication strategy of campuses in Indonesia, especially private universities. Social media is not only used to convey academic information, but has become the main space for campuses to introduce themselves, build interactions, and establish closer relationships with students and prospective students. (Farhat et al., 2021). This has encouraged various universities in Indonesia to show their existence on various social media platforms.

Amidst the competition between universities, social media provides an opportunity for various private campuses to build an image that makes them stand out. Social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok are widely used to show campus life, learning culture, and the diversity of their students and lecturers. The presence of higher education institutions on social media also influences the decision in choosing higher education. (Hajatina, 2024).

Social media marketing (SMM) strategies have been shown to have a positive and significant influence on the formation of attitudes towards institutions, increasing brand awareness, and strengthening the campus image. The institutional image built through content strategy on TikTok significantly influences the audience's attitude towards the university. In addition, a high level of brand awareness also contributes to forming a strong institutional image in the minds of the public. These results provide important insights for university managers in optimizing platforms such as TikTok as a strategic medium for building a relevant and competitive institutional identity in the digital era (Anjel et al., 2022).

TikTok is no longer a place to express yourself and find entertainment. TikTok has become a stage for campuses to convey their stories. This platform is very effective in reaching thousands or even millions of prospective students. The main interaction on TikTok is not between users and their social networks, but between users and the representation of themselves that has been built by the algorithm. When the application is opened, users are immediately presented with videos that have been personalized based on their preferences (Montag et al., 2021). This makes higher education TikTok accounts able to directly target their target audience.

The following are user accounts from Telkom University, Swiss German University, Bina Nusantara University, Pelita Harapan University, and the Islamic University of Indonesia on the TikTok platform.

Table 1. Table of TikTok accounts of private campuses in Indonesia

University	TikTok Username	Followers & Likes	Description	Top Content
Telkom University (TelU)	@universitastelkom	24.9k followers 725.3k likes	This account actively promotes campus activities, students' daily lives, tips and tutorials, as well as light content typical of GenZ, and content that follows the latest trends on TikTok. The creator consistently uses the term "TelUtizen" as a term for their followers and viewers.	1) Content 'POV Anak Teknik' 113.6k likes 2) Content TelU Choir in Bandung Mall 61k likes 3) Content 'Dormitory Tour' 22.2k likes
Bina Nusantara University (BINUS)	@binusuniversityofficial	21.9k followers 558k likes	This account features a variety of content that reflects campus life, from student activities, available facilities, to marketing materials that introduce the campus and the study programs offered.	1. Content 'Hafalin Yel-Yel Binusian Bersama Blackpink' 143.1k likes 2. Content 'Gombalin Dosen Terganteng' 72.7k likes 3. Content 'Twit Menolak PTN, Memilih Binus' 33.1k likes

Swiss German University (SGU)	@swissgermanuniversity	2,514 followers 14.7k likes	This account actively shares content about campus activities, student life, facilities, and promotions of study programs offered. Alumni testimonials are also displayed to provide a real picture of the learning experience. Some content uses English to showcase images of international campuses.	1. Content 'From Indonesia to Germany' 2,295 likes 2. Content 'SEE Promotion' 1,827 likes 3. Content '#MulaiAja Dulu- Double Degree SGU' 1,388 likes
Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH)	@uphimpactlives	7,056 followers 146.7k likes	This account shows a lot of students' daily lives and creates content that really follows TikTok trends, giving a fun and enjoyable impression.	1. Content 'Koperasi Karyawan' 30.3k likes 2. Content 'Fasilitas UPH' 19.5k likes 3. Content 'Campus Facility Tour' 13.8k likes
Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII)	@uii.yogyakarta	12.4k followers 885.6k likes	This account presents various content about campus facilities, promotions presented in a contemporary style, and occasionally shares religious information and reminders in a light	1. Content 'Drone View UII Campus' 218.3k likes 2. Content 'ACC Skripsi' 62.5k likes

			way. Everything is packaged according to the current trend on TikTok,	3. Content 'Ayo ke UII' 26.3k likes
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B. Multimodal Discourse Analysis on Private Campus TikTok Accounts in Indonesia

Social semiotics can be viewed using a multimodal approach that focuses on identifying modalities. Language, images, music, sound and movement are sources of discourse. The multimodal model is a technique used to understand discourse that uses several modalities to convey information. (Jewitt & Kress, 2003). Multimodality studies on social media are drawing on digitally mediated resources on social media such as text, emoji, gifs and the potential of existing meanings. The features on social media that create and share content are semiotic sources (Sarwo Nugroho & Fa'iqah Salsabil Qadiriyyah, 2021).

The multimodal approach combines the study of language with visual analysis to understand how meaning is formed and communicated through a variety of signs or semiotic elements (Firdausiyah et al., 2024). Each semiotic mode on the TikTok accounts of higher education institutions in Indonesia is explained in more detail as follows.

Language

Language is a social practice that affirms or challenges power, analyzing how texts shape social reality and readers' attitudes (Fairclough, 1995). Language and verbal modes cannot be seen as the sole means of conveying meaning when viewed from a multimodal approach. Language is only one element of semiotics. Furthermore, in the context of digital media, language cannot stand alone. Instead, it collaborates with images, sound, movement, and other visual elements. Language plays a strategic role: helping facilitate direct understanding, shaping readers' perspectives on an issue, and framing social reality according to the speaker's interests.

Table 2. Language style of Private University in TikTok

University	Language style
Telkom University	Casual, Gen Z-friendly, light, trend-following
Bina Nusantara University (BINUS)	Varied, casual Gen Z style, promotional, occasionally informal in promotional content
Swiss German University (SGU)	Informative, formal-bilingual, casual Gen Z style, informal in promotional segments
Universitas Pelita Harapan (UPH)	Narrative, light, Gen Z-casual, TikTok trend-based

Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII)	Contemporary, educational, casual Gen Z style, infused with Islamic values
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In the context of social media platforms, particularly TikTok, language emerges through various forms, including captions, overlay text, voice-overs, and comments. Language in media is not only informative but also expressive, interpersonal, and strategic. Therefore, it's important to understand how language is used to convey a campus's identity, build rapport with its audience, and convey specific values.

These five private universities have adapted to their social media presence. Their language style adapts to the platform's language style. Educational institutions, typically tied to academic and formal language, are absent from almost all of these campus TikTok accounts. They strive to showcase the fun side of their campus or highlight its qualities. Many of the languages used encourage audience interaction, such as "I want to study here too," "Tag your friends who want to enroll." This persuasive element remains present, even in a contemporary context and style, encouraging other TikTok users to leave comments and foster engagement.

Image

Besides language, the element of image is also clearly visible in the five campus accounts. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that each visual element contains meaning that can be analyzed through three dimensions: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. Institutional symbols such as campus logos, iconic buildings, alma maters, and distinctive attributes are often found in various content formats. These symbols can be seen and read as multimodal strategies to strengthen institutional identity. Images or visuals can not only show but also construct the institutional reality that the audience wants to experience.

In this case, each campus shows a distinctive visual consistency: (Tel-U) always embeds a logo on each thumbnail of its posts; BINUS often displays snapshots of campus facilities to strengthen visual appeal; UII and UPH consistently highlight campus attributes such as alma maters and other institutional symbols; SGU often includes internationally themed images, to strengthen their global identity. Image symbols are not only markers of educational institutions, but also serve to strengthen the campus image.

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2002), color is a mode that has its own grammar, which is used to distinguish, highlight, and identify something. So color is not just a choice for decoration but color also gives meaning. Institutional color is also one of the keys to forming the tone and nuance of the content. Each institution consistently shows its own color identity, such as SGU and UII which predominantly use blue according to their logo color, and Telkom University which consistently uses red, while Binus and UPH do not show any specific color character.

Music, Sound

The audio components analyzed in this section are the video sound, background music, and voice over. The background music that these accounts mainly use were categorized into 3 (three) types: (a) Popular Song Frith (2021) defined popular music as "a music that is produced for a mass audience and is typically disseminated through mass media and characterized by its commercial intent, accessibility, and repetitive form." Popular songs are mostly in English, but

in this study, well-known songs in Indonesian language are included as well. (b) Jedug/Viral Remix Songs © The term ‘*jedug*’ song comes from the sound of bass ‘*jedag-jedug*’ which are mainly a remixed and faster version of an original popular song to give energetic, humorous, and dramatic effect. This type of song is popular among Indonesian youths especially TikTokers. (d) Instrumental Music, Instrumental music is a type of music that comes without any vocals or lyrics, therefore the message is represented by musical instruments only (Miller, 2005; van Leeuwen, 1999)

The use of background music in these 5 universities TikTok Content is shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Background Music of 5 Universities TikTok Content

University	Major Type of Background Music			Background Music Example
	Popular Song	<i>Jedug</i> / Viral Remix	Instrumental Music	
TelU	V		V	Western Popular : Heroes-Alesso, Somewhere Only We Know-Keane, Style- Taylor Swift Indonesian Popular: Bila Kau Tak Disampingku - Sheila On 7 Instrumental: Happy , Professional
BINUS		V	V	<i>Jedug</i> : DJ Janji Janji Seribu Janji, Beauty and the Beat Remix, Kasih Slow, Stecu Instrumental: Funny, Professional, Chill
SGU	V	V	V	Western Popular : Supernatural- Ariana Grande, Azul-J Balvin, Crazy Right Now-Beyonce, You’re on Your Own, Kid - Taylor Swift <i>Jedug</i> :DJ Alasannya Seringkali Ku Dengar - DJ NWP Instrumental : Happy, Professional
UPH	V		V	Western Popular: APT- Rose ft Bruno Mars, Counting Stars - One Republic, Baby- Justin Bieber, Classic-MKTO Instrumental : Funny, Professional
UII	V	V	V	Western Popular: You’re On Your Own Kid-Taylor Swift, All Too Well - Taylor

				Swift, Fortnight-Taylor Swift, Chemtrails Over the Country Club - Lana Del Rey <i>Jedug</i> : Uh Sadap Remastered, Mode Pesawat - Dandy Barakati Islamic Songs: Abeer Nehme- Bi Saraha, Eid Mubarak, Salla Alayka Rahman - Maher Zain Instrumental : Happy, Professional
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Every educational institution, such as university, has its own unique identity to distinguish itself from other competitors (Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007). This identity can also be declared through music. All of the universities in this study use instrumental music with professional and positive nuance, which can be a reflection of seriousness, optimism, and future success for their students. Instrumental music was chosen because it is free from distracting lyrics and language barriers, therefore the message can be conveyed more clearly and inclusively (Machin, 2010).

UPH and TelU rarely use *jedug* music. *Jedug* music is highly associated with the youth TikTok culture that represents chaos which is often unaligned with conventional branding values (Abidin, 2021). This might affect the perceived professionalism and credibility of the university (van Leeuwen, 1999; Hemsley-Brown & Goonawardana, 2007; Chapleo, 2011). On the other hand, *jedug* music is attractive to Gen Z and helps enhance the account visibility on TikTok (Abidin, 2021; Zulli & Zulli, 2022).

As an Islamic university, UII uses some Islamic songs for their content. However, the majority of the UII TikTok content uses popular songs without Islamic nuance. While UPH does not show its Christian identity through its music choice. These universities are likely to avoid using mainly religious music in their digital content to maintain inclusivity and professionalism, while still expressing faith-based identity through other semiotic modes (logo, motto, etc.) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Roper & Fill, 2012; Hoover, 2016).

Table 4. Background Music of Top Three Content in 5 Universities TikTok Account

University	Top Content	Likes	Major Type of Background Music		
			Popular Song	<i>Jedug</i> / Viral Remix	Instrumental Music
TelU	POV Anak Teknik	113.6k	V		
	TelU Choir performing "Viva La Vida"	61k	V		

	Dormitory Tour	22.2k			V
BINUS	Hafalin Yel-Yel Binusian Bersama Blackpink	143.1k			V
	Gombalin Dosen Terganteng	72.7k			V
	Twit Menolak PTN, Memilih Binus	33.1k	V		
SGU	From Indonesia to Germany	2,295	V		
	Sustainable Energy & Environment Promotion	1,827			V
	#MulaiAjaDulu - Double Degree	1,388		V	
UPH	Koperasi Karyawan	30.3k			V
	UPH Campus Facilities	19.5k	V		
	UPH Campus Tour	13.8k	V		
UII	UII Campus Drone View	218.3k	V		
	ACC Skripsi	62.5k	V		
	Ayo ke UII	26.3k			V
Total			8	1	6

The most engaging content from all university samples tends to use popular songs in English, for example the songs of Taylor Swift, Coldplay, and NIKI. High engagement was also observed from content with upbeat or comedic instrumental background music. This aligns with Seemiller & Grace, 2019 who mentioned that social media content with fast pace, emotional authenticity, and global culture is embraced by Gen Z. Additionally, it is observed that the high engagement is not caused by a specific type of background music only, but also due to the content type. For example, TelU, UPH, and UII content with highest engagement are displaying campus facilities, but using different music types for each content.

D. Movement

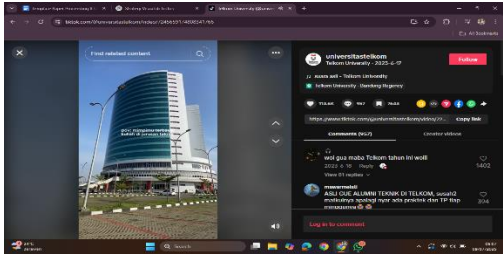
The analysis at this stage is based on the participants' gestures and behaviors in the video content (Wijaya et al., 2024). Generally, the facial expressions of the students in the content include smiling, laughing, and engaging in various informal interactions. The gestures displayed not only reflect the institution but also convey the campus's humanistic side, which is familiar and relatable to students and prospective students, as the account segment. These gestures are not merely a visual style, but part of a visual communication strategy that

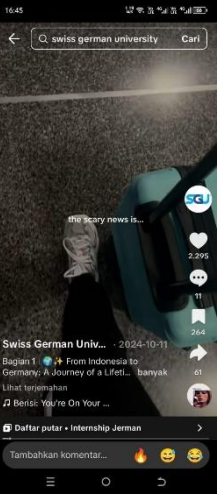
emphasizes the campus as a humanistic, intimate, and close place to the lives of Generation Z, in line with the results of a study on expressive communication among Generation Z on TikTok (Mardianto, 2023). Students are now increasingly following TikTok trends that demonstrate their familiarity with digital culture. The resulting impression and closeness demonstrate a non-hierarchical relationship between you and prospective students. Semiotically, these gestures and expressions play a crucial role in shaping interpersonal meaning, meaning that emerges from symbolic interactions between the institution (through students) and prospective audiences. Gestures of familiarity, direct attention to the camera, and informal interactions create a non-hierarchical and friendly impression, factors that are very important for building closeness with generation Z (Agustina, 2024).

B. Audience Engagement on Private Campus TikTok Accounts

Each campus has its own content creation strategy, which creates distinct identities for each campus on TikTok. Audience engagement is a delivery experience that connects audiences and actively engages with content on social media (Calder et al., 2009). Practically, audience engagement can be seen in the behavior of audiences who like, comment on, and share content they find on social media. Based on a documentary study, audience engagement on private campus social media accounts is relatively high, as can be seen below:

Table 5. Audience Engagement on Private Campus TikTok Accounts

Content	University	Audience Engagement	Audience comment
	Tel U	1,1 M views, 113,6k likes, 1.085 comments, 3.661 shares	“woi gua maba Telkom tahun ini woiii” “tahun ini jd maba telkom 🙌” “Dijamin Senyum Terus pokoknya kuliah di teknik 😊👍”

	BINUS	1,3 views 143,1K likes 1.346 komentar 2.116 share	“gua sering ngayal tiba2 emak gua datang dan bilang ke gua: 'gausa cape2 belajar buat PTN nak, masuk Binus aja” angkatan binusian 2013 hadir. jaman dimana ospek dulu, isinya para komedian semua. kagak ada pelonco2an yg ada cerita ngakak trus 🤡” “emang di binus ada beasiswa" gt yaa? pgn bgt masuk sana”.
	SGU	79,1K views 2.295 likes 264 komentar 61 share	“Allahumma Shalli 'Ala Sayyidina Muhammad masa depanku ya Allah 🙏” “do u have masters degree programs??” “double internship double degree double opportunity 🥰🥰”

		643,3K views 30,3K likes 156 komentar 634 share	“Enak enak semua dari snack sampe makanan beratnya jd kangen jd mahasiswa lg” “uph negeri atau swasta” “Enak enak bangettt.. nasi kuning nasi ayam buah minuman2 nya asli enaaaa trus hemat juga karna murahh drpd FJ dan benton 🥰”
	UII	2JT views, 218,3K likes, 1.649 comment, 3.453 share	“kapan jalur kasian dibuka minn” “di uii ada jurusan farmasi dan dokter gigi gak ?” “OI UII JGN LUPA TRIMA AKU YA DI TAHUN 2027 🥰👊👊👊”

Based on data from the most engaged accounts at the five universities mentioned above, there are differences in engagement patterns based on the type of content displayed. The TikTok accounts belonging to Telkom University, UII, and UPH show high engagement rates for content showcasing campus facilities, such as lecture halls, cafeterias, classrooms, public areas, and the campus environment. This type of content is generally presented in an engaging, cinematic visual style and uses trending audio, reinforcing the impression of a professional, modern, and comfortable place to study. For prospective students, the visualization of facilities is a crucial factor in shaping perceptions of an institution's quality.

Meanwhile, the Binus and SGU TikTok accounts actually received high engagement for content showcasing student experiences, such as organizational activities and experiences during college. This type of content tends to be more casual and humanistic, showcasing the emotional and social aspects of campus life. This strengthens the emotional connection with audiences, especially Generation Z, who tend to seek authentic and relatable content.

This finding aligns with the concepts of representational and interactive meaning in Gunther Kress & Theo van Leeuwen's (2006) multimodal theory, which argues that visuals not only

represent reality but also build relationships between creators and their audiences. In this context, content showcasing campus facilities emphasizes representational meaning, demonstrating how the institution aims to present itself as a modern, high-quality place of learning with its various qualities. Meanwhile, content depicting student experiences emphasizes interactive meaning, fostering an emotional connection between the campus and students or prospective students.

In the context of digital communication strategies, content that touches on the emotional side has proven to be highly appealing among the younger generation. Audience engagement arises when users see reflections of themselves in the stories and experiences shared in the media environment (Jenkins et al. 2013). Thus, the different strategies employed by each campus reflect deliberate choices in representing institutional identity, such as emphasizing physical features and facilities, while others feature real-life student stories as the primary narrative. Both are effective multimodal strategies for building image and engaging audiences on social media platforms like TikTok.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that TikTok has become a strategic platform for private universities in Indonesia to connect with their student and prospective student audiences through tailored content strategies. An analysis of the TikTok accounts of Telkom University, Swiss German University, Bina Nusantara University, Pelita Harapan University, and the Islamic University of Indonesia reveals that these universities have adapted a distinctive social media communication style, including the use of casual language, dynamic visuals, popular music, and institutional symbols.

The use of symbols such as campus logos, iconic buildings, and other distinctive attributes is not merely visual decoration, but rather part of a multimodal strategy deliberately employed to shape and strengthen the institution's identity. The music and gestures displayed by students also contribute to strengthening the campus's image as a friendly, open, and relatable place to students' daily lives.

In terms of audience engagement, the content that garnered the most responses in the form of likes, comments, and shares was content that showcased campus facilities and real-life student experiences. This suggests that audiences connect more with content that is authentic and relevant to their lives. In terms of music, popular music (not *jedug*) and instrumental are both used in highly engaged contents.

Overall, this study provides a picture that social media, especially TikTok, is not only used as an information channel, but has become an important space for building image, strengthening emotional connections, and presenting a more human face of the campus amidst increasingly fierce competition among universities.

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