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MASTER'S THESIS (PROJECT)

« Branding Universities using Social Media: how brand value is created (case of Kazakhstan) »

program <u>7M04127</u>- «Marketing»

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Abstract of « Branding Universities using Social Media: how brand value is created (case of Kazakhstan) » , by Damira Nurman, HSE KAZGUU University, May 2021

In a competitive education market, universities pay special attention to brand image in order to ensure high demand among their target audience. The positive image of each university affects the prestige of an individual educational institution, as well as the formation of an overall positive image and rating of the state education system. In this regard, the relevance of studying the brand image of higher educational institutions arises.

The issues of the need to form and maintain the brand of educational institutions of higher professional education, the functions and elements of the brand structure are considered. The article reflects the specifics of educational services in the context of the formation of the brand of the university. A review of approaches to determining the criteria for evaluating university brands according to various independent ratings is carried out.

The study analyzes the factor variables that affect the reputation and relevance of the university among students. In addition to the theoretical part of the study, the article examines the results of interviews with respondents.

Introduction

Updating the university's development strategies, increasing competition in the labor and educational services market, and the widespread use of modern information technologies and communication methods in the developing intellectual society encourage higher education institutions to look for new ways to increase competitiveness and create competitive advantages. Each university strives to be as attractive as possible to its target audience (applicants, students, employers, government agencies, investors). The solution to this problem depends on creating a memorable image and brand of the university and maintaining it at a high level.

Education is an integral part of the life of a developed society, the development of which stimulates the development of the potential of the state at all levels, especially its cultural and spiritual life. It is known that the main product of higher education institutions is an educational service (higher education, master's degree, postgraduate studies, retraining of specialists, advanced training, preparatory courses, etc.), which is mainly considered by researchers as an economic and social category. This is an action in which one person (the seller of the service) provides another person (the consumer of the service) with a product or service, in this case education.

In recent years, trends in the penetration of market laws have been increasingly traced in the education system, which finds their expression not only in the diversification of educational services for free and paid ones but also in the formation of sound competition between higher educational institutions. Today, the growth of globalization and integration processes, supplemented by the peculiarities of the demographic and urbanization situation, the growing role of marketing and social communications in Kazakh society, have formed the need for the use of PR technologies in the formation of a positive image of universities.

The education sector is undergoing significant transformations due to the development of Internet marketing technologies. Many HEI around the world uses various Internet platforms to promote their educational services. Leading HEI even offer a full-fledged education (obtaining a diploma) online, as part of online education programs. Kazakhstan is trying to keep up with global trends. Therefore, the Kazakhstan HEI is also actively introducing the practice of Internet marketing in their promotion, focusing on the needs and interests of their main target audience - applicants and students. These individuals are the most active users of the Internet and social networks. The positive image of each HEI influences the prestige of an individual educational institution and affects the formation of an overall positive image and rating of Kazakh education as a whole.

In this regard, there is the relevance of the study of existing PR-technologies of modern universities in Kazakhstan and the assessment of their effectiveness.

Brand image of higher education institutions

The attitude of the target audience to the university has shaped its image. All components of the university's image (location, name, Mission, corporate image, logo, history, prominent people, website, and other elements) should be used to make the university attractive, arouse the interest of the target group, and encourage them to make a decision. All universities should put the solution to this problem in a strategic direction and continue to participate in the development of its image. If the university does not solve this problem in time, then the target audience will still form their own views on the university and its services. And it is improbable that it will be positive. The formation of the image of the university is a complex process, that is, the image is a subjective opinion and an invisible process. It is influenced by many external and internal factors (the region, the reputation of the rating position, the demand for university graduates, the qualifications of the teaching staff, the availability of a new material and technical base, a high level of infrastructure, etc.).

Many universities at home and abroad are aware of the need for purposeful and systematic work and use technology and marketing tools to form a positive image.

Brand strategy can inform the target audience about the unique characteristics of the university, its products and services, contribute to the understanding and identification, preservation and improvement of abilities in a competitive environment. In addition, the university brand offers a number of other competitive advantages:

- make consumers, employers and other target groups more attractive to increase loyalty to the university, its products and services ；

- creating barriers for competitors in the labor market and educational activities ；

- more successful introduction of new products and services to the market than competitors ；

- establish close ties with leading universities in the country and abroad ；

- attracting investment.

In this regard, one of the most important tasks is the formation and development of the brand image of universities, which should be professionally dealt with by specialists in marketing and brand management.

The main purpose of branding is to differentiate it from similar products or other educational services on the market. That is to show the consumer as something special and unique. In this respect, how are the services of a university different from those of other universities, and why should consumers give their preference to a particular university? It is also expected that the consumer will not only like the product (service), but also have the opportunity (affordable) to buy it over and over again.

The use of branding complicates the situation in the educational services market with two different forms of conflict. On the one hand, it is a "public good", designed to raise the social status of a citizen, ensure the right to a well-paid job and quickly adapt to changes in the external environment. On the other hand, educational activity is a market category that reflects the commercial interests of the university, which may contradict the socio-cultural needs of the individual, the state and society. In

addition, universities should offer their brand to consumers in a new way, pay attention to solving their problems and the benefits that they receive from this brand.

As a rule, the formation of a brand takes place in two directions: external and internal position.The first direction is related to the market (for universities, this is the market of labor, educational services, intellectual property, scientific products and technologies) and is aimed at ensuring a certain competitive position. The second area reflects the internal localization of the brand through its personality, relationships, internal marketing and organizational support.

In the process of positioning, the university must convey to the consumer its main idea- uniqueness. It is designed to show your values, mission, and vision. Well-known brands in the field of higher education, such as Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, Humboldt, Sorbonne, etc., do the same (Diane et al., 2015)[1].They focus on history, alumni achievements, high quality teachers, freedom and democracy in teaching and research, and decision-making processes. A special role in it is played by marketing communications with the target group (advertising, public relations, the use of mass media, Internet communications, modern means of communication, in which direct marketing plays a special role).

Research aim and objectives

The purpose of the study is to identify the specifics and factors of forming the brand value of Kazakhstan universities in social networks. For that purpose, we consider it rational to identify the main factors of the HEI brand value formation in the Kazakhstan educational services market.

In this study, we consider it rational to focus on analyzing the influence of the HEI brand image on the formation of trust and brand value, as well as its services among the target audience. Therefore, in our study, we set the objectives to reveal:

1. Strategies for building and promoting the brand of Kazakhstan HEI in social networks as part of a marketing strategy.

2. To study the value of brands, mission, and philosophy of Kazakhstan HEI, as key factors of marketing strategy.

Marketing communications in educational institutions

The educational services market is developing rapidly and grows from year to year. All educational institutions are direct participants in market relations. Today in the country there are several hundred universities of various fields. Against this background, competition in the educational services market is intensifying.

An educational service differs from other services, which imposes certain features in the framework of the use of marketing communications. The target audience in this context mainly consists of applicants, students, graduates, which means it is located in the internal environment of the educational institution.

Among the principles that could form the basis for building a marketing model for the education sector, the following can be noted:
- using a systematic approach;
- customer orientation;
- application of synergistic principles.

Starting from three classic marketing actions: market segmentation; product positioning; determination of target segments of influence, the scale of activities of educational institution marketers is obvious. A marketing-oriented educational institution forms a unique selling proposition based on the analysis of competitors and identifies the price of educational services. Then the university forms a

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[1] Diane, A. Market Academy: Marketing. Per. with fr / A. Diane, F. Bookerel, R. Lankar, et al .. - M .: Economics, 2015 .-- 572 p.

complex of marketing communications. The modern marketing strategies of HEI have to orient on a modern student, who is an active user of social media.

Today, social media have become an effective tool for promoting goods, services, and even forming a brand (personal and corporate). Marketing and targeting have transformed into the main methods of communication with target audiences of different ages. Moreover, the toolkit of many social media has become so convenient that it is used not only for commercial purposes but also for social, political, cultural, etc.

The main advantage of social media as a promotion platform is the ability to get feedback from the target audience, as well as the ability to see, in a statistical and empirical context, the effectiveness of using each of the tools through a functional statistics panel.

Like any communication channel, social media can transmit, save, broadcast, distribute information in various formats. This aspect is important for commercial companies and brands looking for new communication channels and ways of contacting the consumer.

Through social media, organizations can indicate their presence, build an additional communication channel, receive feedback from the target audience, form a clear portrait of their consumer, and add another advertising channel.

Thus, unlike traditional communication channels, social media have several features that distinguish them favorably from others and can be used for commercial purposes.

Work in social media related to marketing, promotion, or public relations involves the creation of a community (brand platform) and the organization in it of live communication between representatives of the target audience of the brand. Also, through this brand platform, positioning, promotion, etc. will be carried out. organizations in a particular social network.

As practice shows, HEI in their promotion work mainly uses methods such as creating websites, social media accounts, and placing information in catalogs. The most time-consuming, but at the same time effective, by right, should be considered the creation of sites, and posting on social networks is a supportive method of promotion.

The tendency for HEI to create accounts and groups in social media is increasing, at the same time, there is a problem of insufficient knowledge of the marketing mechanism by moderators of social networks. Because of this, groups and pages on social networks are not often moderated (content is rarely updated, for example, once a week), there is practically no user activity.

Social media is a digital tool that allows users to easily create and share information. Instagram and Facebook are the most popular social networks in Kazakhstan. According to statistics in Kazakhstan there are on Instagram 10 715 000; on Facebook 11 456 000 active users. Mobile internet penetration in Kazakhstan - 84%. The number of users on Instagram at the age of 18-24 years - 2 400 000(*NapoleonCat*, 2021). [2]

Research hypothesis

These assumptions lead to the following hypotheses:
1.   The level of activity in social media significantly affects the effectiveness of student recruitment.
2.   Universities (brands) use Instagram more often than other social networks since according to statistics, the younger generation mainly uses Instagram.
3. Interaction with consumers through social networks increases the value of higher education institutions in Kazakhstan.

Research Questions

1. How does branding in social media influence the choice of University?
2. How HEI can increase brand value using social media?

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[2] *NapoleonCat*. (2021). https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-kazakhstan/2021/02

By exploring these issues, this research will also be useful for University leaders, given the main marketing (and branding) initiatives currently underway in this sector, and the basic need to develop appropriate strategies to better communicate and interact with students and graduates.

Literature Review

The development of technology and ongoing digitalization has increased the requirements for higher education institutions. In this regard, universities began to pay special attention to creating and maintaining their branding. Universities are aware of the branding potential of the Internet, especially social networks. However, research shows that their efforts are often ineffective because universities do not have a robust social media strategy designed with the target audience in mind (Constantinides, E. and Stagno, M.C.Z., 2011).[3]

The target audience of universities is not only school graduates who are going to enter higher education, but also their parents. This list is supplemented by people who want to get different academic degrees and qualifications. Social media use is widespread in these target groups. In this way, social media offers a valuable platform on which universities can interact with their customers.

The websites of universities and colleges have the potential to be the basis for creating attractive user environments, while social networks are ideal extensions for relationship marketing campaigns due to their collaborative and interactive nature (Weiss, 2008).[4]

Casidy (2013) provides empirical evidence showing that a clear brand orientation works for the benefit of the university. In her work, she shows that student perception of a university brand is associated with satisfaction, loyalty, and post-admission communication behavior. [5]

Adding or changing the connection of a traditional brand through social media often brings positive results for brands, especially when customers and brands create content together and allow brands to find new customers. While organizations recognize the benefits of implementing and integrating social media, research shows that brands don't know how to manage their social media strategies and therefore can't achieve positive results (Hanna, et al., 2011).[6]

HEI not so long ago began to use PR. The use of advertising alone no longer gives the desired effect. Today, only a few research in the scientific literature concerns the impact of the HEI brand value on their consumer demand among the target audience (Dholakia&Acciardo, 2014). [7]With high competition, it is not enough just to tell the population about the university, it needs to have an image and a good reputation. Many organizations turn to the services of PR specialists to increase their competitiveness by creating a positive image among the public. When creating an image in the framework of PR activities, the university has the opportunity to indicate its strengths and advantages. In modern market conditions, it is necessary to create authority and reputation and spread them before it develops on its own in society, because the existing image under the influence of the public masses may not correspond to what the leadership wants to achieve.

The university provides services and to attract applicants, it needs to be presented with reliable information about how high the quality of their services and how prestigious they are. Through PR, the university posts information about a favorable internal climate, about highly qualified employees, about the possible personal growth of students, about the opportunities that open up after receiving an education. It is also effective to mention famous personalities who graduated from this educational institution. The main goal of PR-actions is to increase the reputation of an educational institution.

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[3] Constantinides, E.; Stagno, M.C.Z. (2011). *Potential of the social media as instruments of higher education marketing: A segmentation study: Journal of Marketing for Higher Education: Vol 21, No 1.*
[4] Weiss, M. (2008). *Results-Based Interaction Design. 2008*, 8.
[5] Casidy, R. (2013). The role of brand orientation in the higher education sector: A student-perceived paradigm. Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics
[6] Hanna, R., Rohm, A., & Crittenden, V. L. (2011). *We're all connected: The power of the social media ecosystem.* 9.
[7] Dholakia & Acciardo. (2014). *Branding a state university: Doing it right: Journal of Marketing for Higher Education: Vol 24, No 1.*

The result of PR activities is an increase in demand for educational services. The demand will increase both among highly qualified teachers who want to work at a prestigious university and among applicants who want to get a decent higher education.

Strengthening the role of PR is facilitated by the need to expand the educational space of an educational institution, its integration into a single European educational space. If you do not purposefully build your image, it will form spontaneously and not always the way you would like to see it.

For research purposes, it is important to define the key terms that the study will use in the future. The research focuses on the branding of higher education institutions and their behavior in social networks.

American economists and marketers Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong describe «a brand as a combination of a name, a symbol, a design, or individually. They identify the manufacturer as well as the seller» (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010).[8]

An educational service has certain characteristics inherent in both services as a whole (intangibility, inseparability from the source, impossibility of storage and transmission, the inconstancy of quality) (Ksenofontova, 2012)[9], and some specific features inherent only in educational services (the elongation of service consumption over time, the discrepancy between the volumes and quality of the provision and consumption of services, the fundamental possibility of transferring the acquired knowledge, skills and abilities without their loss by the consumer himself, his active role, the asymmetry of the information of the educational institution and the consumer in the formation educational product) (Ababkov, 2009).[10]

Students form their perception of the brand image even before entering the University, and it continues to develop during their studies and even after graduation. Considering that the brand value will move into the consumer's life by its efforts (McCracken, 1989), it can be expected that the different stages in which the student finds himself will lead to the construction of different values. And for this, the corporate identity cannot remain unchanged. To be sustainable in a changing higher education environment, brand identity must be dynamic and flexible and must be improved to meet consumer expectations.

Experts emphasize the need for higher education institutions to use marketing technologies. Marketing is a component of the modern economic system. Marketing in the field of education seems to be a very promising and in its way unique phenomenon. Its subject is a system of measures to increase the competitiveness of HEI by rationalizing actions for analyzing the marketing environment, managing the product range, developing a pricing policy, and sales. In particular, Medvedeva L.O., Gabdulkhakova R.V. et al. (2010) note that educational institutions should pay significant attention to the classic marketing mix, namely:

• product policy (the range of educational services, their quality, learning technologies, that is, methods and forms of education);

• pricing policy (there may be the same tuition fees for students of different specialties, provided that the demand for these specialists in the labor market is different);

• communication policy (methods of promoting educational services, the level of public awareness of the qualification characteristics of various specialties);

• sales policy (infrastructure of educational services, optimization to provide it, material and technical equipment of educational institutions and premises).[11]

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[8] Kotler, P., & Armstrong, G. (2010). *Principles of marketing. Prentice Hall*

[9] Ksenofontova, O.L. (2012) Specificity of educational services: marketing aspect // Marketing in Russia and abroad.

[10] Ababkov, Yu.N. (2009) Modern marketing technologies in the educational services market // Techno-technologist. service issues. No. 9. - P. 77–87.

[11] D. O. Medvedeva, R. V. Gabdulkhakova [et al.] // Higher education in Russia. - 2010. - N 11. - P. 141-144.

The quality of education and the reputation of an educational institution are the main criteria for choosing and entering a University. However, since it is impossible to assess quality before admission, branding can serve as a collective image of the entire range of criteria, such as business reputation, the fame of graduates, availability of an academic degree, innovative technologies, interaction with employers and students, quality of education, opportunities at the University.

The technology of developing a PR-program for an educational institution consists of four stages: R - research - research; A - action - development of an action plan; C - communications - implementation of the plan; E - evaluation - evaluation of results (Azarovet al., 2018).[12]

Caywood and Clarke (2012) considered the University brand as a collection of images, emotions, experiences, and facts that the University created in the public mind. These characteristics of the institution distinguish it from others, reflecting its ability to meet the needs of students and inspire confidence. Therefore, a University with a positive brand image evokes positive associations, emotions, images, and faces, thereby distinguishing it from other universities. Positive emotions make prospective students feel valued and develop a connection with them, which leads to positive outcomes such as emotional attachment and loyalty (Caywood, et al., 2012).[13]

Rutter, Roper, and Lettice (2016) selected 60 higher education institutions in the UK, which included the London School of Economics, Oxford University, and Cambridge University, to monitor and analyze their social media activity. Their research examined the use of social media by UK universities and the impact of social media on specific goals in higher education, i.e. admissions. Research data shows that social media can predict demand because higher education institutions with higher social media recognition have higher demand for student recruitment (Rutter, et al., 2016).[14]

Constantinides and Stagno (2011) suggest that social media is important for achieving University goals and attracting students. «Social media penetration is extremely high among potential students, usually between the ages of 15 and 19; representatives of the millennial generation; extremely tech-savvy and immersed in social media» (B. Liang, M. Commins, N. Duffy, 2010).[15]

Philip Kotler (2010) emphasizes that the word marketing should be understood not only as sales and advertising but also as customer satisfaction. It is important to create a product with high consumer value, effective promotion, it creates a high demand on the market.

With the advent of digitalization, it is necessary to adjust well-established marketing strategies based on traditional views. This provides new opportunities for growth and value creation through social media. Social networks can serve as a place where organizations and customers interact and create value with each other.

Methodology

Since a dissertation is a huge and complex study, we will use qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as primary and secondary data.

As part of our research, we selected 3 respondents - 2 students and 1 opinion of an industry expert. This choice of respondents was dictated by the desire to establish what information resources they used to search for information about the university and its educational programs. We also seek to determine what factors guided the respondents when choosing this university. Namely, we want to

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[12] Azarova, L., Achkasova, V., Ivanova, K., Krivonosov, A., Filatova, O. (2018) Situational analysis in public relations: Textbook for universities. 2nd ed., Add. And corrected. Third generation standard - SPb .: Peter.

[13] Caywood, C., academics, plus, & practitioners. (2012). *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Marketing Communications*.

[14] Rutter, R., Roper, S., & Lettice, F. (2016). Social media interaction, the university brand and recruitment performance. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(8), 3096–3104.

[15] Liang, B., Commins, M., & Duffy, N. (2010). Using Social Media to Engage Youth: Education, Social Justice, & Humanitarianism. *Prevention Researcher*, *17*(5), 13–16.

determine which variables of the university brand values influenced the respondents ' choice of the university.

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with a marketing expert and university students. The interview was conducted with students of the 2nd year of the master's degree and the 1st year of the bachelor's degree. All interviews were conducted online using ZOOM software and lasted on average about 30 minutes. All respondents ' data is hidden to preserve confidentiality.

The results of the survey of 100 people will serve as the main statistical study. These will be students of various universities of Kazakhstan and their parents. The purpose of the survey is to determine which groups of people from the entire target audience of the university use social networks (including Instagram) to search for basic information about the university and its educational services. The survey was conducted among students of higher educational institutions (M. S. Narikbayev KAZGUU University, Al-Farabi KazNU, L. N. Gumilyov ENU, KAZGAS University, G. Daukeev AUPET) and their parents. The questionnaire was filled out using Google Forms (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/14eV3f72AMgwVtD_LeplN_ix60sZ5iyi6qnEHOhvkku4/edit), and it was attended by 100 people.

To achieve the goals of this study, the researchers selected several universities in Kazakhstan. Facebook Instagram and other social networks were reviewed and analyzed data extracted from each university's social networks (blogs, activity, comments, and subscriptions). It also shows what strategy universities follow, what philosophy, and their main message that they want to convey to consumers.

Research methods can be more useful for identifying and characterizing the influence of brand value on the demand for its educational services among the target audience. Since the survey is conducted from the number of students receiving educational services, this will allow us to determine the factors of choosing a particular university for training (university rating, university brand value, etc.) from the point of view of buyers. Moreover, we believe that such an approach will allow us to identify the main factors of brand value formation, dictated by the demand of the target audience. In addition, the interview will allow us to establish how effective the methods of promoting the university in various social networks are. We want to establish which of the social networks is most suitable for promoting the educational services of the university. As well to establish whether promotion on social media is a way to increase HEI brand value in the eyes of the modern target audience.

Initially, we need to establish the main branding factors based on statistical research. The scope of these studies will then be supplemented by the results of our interviews and surveys, which will allow us to supplement or refute some of the factors.

Initially, we need to establish the current level of presence of Kazakhstan HEI in social media.

The analysis of communications in social networks will be carried out according to the following criteria:
- the number of social networks in which the university is represented;
- number of subscribers in the social network;
- content of groups (update frequency);
- social network activity (number of posts), etc.

Qualitative approaches are aimed at finding out the "how" and "why" - these are the aspects we want to identify in our study of marketing strategies for promoting the university in social networks. Moreover, qualitative methods can be used to improve the quality of quantitative assessments (statistics). Also, qualitative methods can be more useful for identifying and characterizing the impact of brand promotion in social networks on the value of the university brand in the eyes of the target audience.

This research intends to answer the research questions mentioned earlier by completing the following steps: to collect research data, a semi-structured interview will be conducted, which will be attended by students from various universities in Kazakhstan. We decided to use interviews as our main research method. An interview is a personal conversation with a respondent. The interviewer can record the statements the interviewee says, as well as observe body language, facial expressions, and other reactions to questions. This allows the interviewer to conclude easily.

In our study, we used non-probability sampling. This method was chosen because it allowed us to select the most suitable respondents for our study. As you know, the non-probability sampling method closely depends on the need of the researcher to obtain certain information, which can only be provided by respondents with certain experience in the field under study. It is also one of the qualitative research methods to ensure the reliability of results.

Findings and results

Analysis of social networks of universities in Kazakhstan

In 2020, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs" Atameken " commissioned by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan conducted a study of the rating of the best universities in the country (kazinform,2021). The list of university rankings is given below:
1. KAZGUU University of M.S. Narikbayev
2. Kazakh-British Technical University
3. KIMEP University
4. International University of Information Technologies
5. Kazakh-German University
6. University named after Suleiman Demirel
7. Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov
8. International Education Corporation
9. Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketova
10. Narxoz University

According to this study, the social networks of the top ten universities in the country were studied. Facebook, Instagram, VK, and more rarely Telegram all these universities are represented in social networks. According to data obtained from social networks, universities are more active on Instagram than on other social networks. Facebook, Instagram posts are most often identical to Instagram posts, but the number of people who are subscribed is much smaller. In the Instagram of universities, after the description of the accounts, there was a link to the main site. The number of subscribers, publications, and the regularity of publications on Instagram is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Social media activity of the best HEI in Kazakhstan

№	HEI	Number of followers	Publications	Activity
1.	KAZGUU University of M.S. Narikbayev	44300	3241	1/day
2.	Kazakh-British Technical University	15000	1640	2-3/week
3.	KIMEP University	13600	1838	2-3/week
4.	International University of Information Technologies	15900	1565	1/day
5.	Kazakh-German University	2981	1566	Few times/day
6.	University named after Suleiman Demirel	49900	2772	2-3/week
7.	Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilyov	20000	829	Few times/day
8.	International Education Corporation	8324	566	Few

				times/week
9.	Karaganda University named after academician E.A. Buketov	4884	384	Few times/day
10.	Narxoz University	16900	1883	1/day

As can be seen from the data in Table 1, all of the top ten universities in Kazakhstan are implementing an active promotion policy in social media.

On average, Kazakh universities add one or two publications per day or week. Therefore, all of the above universities believe that regular publication is the key to success in social networks. These publications most often show the university's news and events. Universities also publish entertainment content, share photos/videos, and student achievements. Thus, universities try to be interesting. Some higher education institutions have developed their own strategy and are trying to find a certain content plan with well-thought-out publications. For example, in the Instagram account of KAZGUU, The Jester brand archetype is observed, which conveys a funny and cheerful mood. The Jester archetype shows confidence, freedom of creativity, and is not afraid to stand out. This is proved by the publications in the social network Instagram: various entertainment videos, categories, colors, and designs that are used in the account.

Nevertheless, many Kazakh universities do not pay enough attention to their pages on social networks. For example, in several universities, the official page contains an incorrect link to their social networks, or perhaps they are blocked. It is also difficult to find a correct and official page on social networks, as there are several of them. In this regard, potential customers of universities do not have access to the social networks of the university. With the help of social networks, they can get unofficial information about the student's vision, about the internal environment of the university itself, which they will not be able to find on the official websites of the institution.

Survey and interview results

The results of our research (interviews and polls) indicate that both students and parents use university social media accounts as a source of relevant information. One of the respondents emphasized that he initially turned to the official website for information, but then she went to the university's page on social media, since "university life was demonstrated better on Instagram." According to the survey, 51.4% of respondents consider social media as a source of up-to-date information about the HEI, while the official website is 49.5%. At the same time, 85.6% of respondents consider social media accounts to be an effective source of information. According to the target audience, the most effective platform for promoting the brand of the university are two social networks - Instagram (73.9%) and Facebook (19.8%).78.4% of respondents are confident that the presence of the HEI in social media stimulates the demand for HEI services among applicants. We admit that this is due precisely to the fact that the university's website contains basic official information, while university accounts in social media contain a lot of additional relevant information about student life. The most relevant topics of HEI's posts in social media: educational programs, student life, and information about the university and dormitory. We find confirmation in the results of interviews with students who confirmed that the university's social media accounts are a relevant source of information and they stimulate demand among applicants.

Thus, in the view of the target audience, the official website of the HEI and its accounts on social media is practically equivalent sources of information. Consequently, HEIs that do not use the full potential of social media should rethink their attitudes, since social media is indeed an effective branding tool.

The main factors influencing the choice of the university among the respondents are: university's status (rating), level of knowledge, teaching staff.73% of respondents stressed that the prestige of the university brand had a key influence on their choice of university in the end. We believe that these aspects can also be paid attention to in posts on social media. A broad information policy

about the main advantages of the university will help maintain a high demand for university services among applicants.

In an interview about building a university brand strategy by the presence in social media, the expert pointed out that different Kazakhstani universities use social media in different ways. Ideally, social media carry out information to the audience. Posts should reflect the values of the university to help the students. Social media of Kazakhstani universities are more focused on the student, to help him/her make a choice, to provide awareness about the university. Classical education is a complex product in comparison with other types of products. Kazakhstani universities have different goals in social media, some have a formed strategy, some lack it, which can be seen on social networks.

The expert stressed that to increase brand value using social networks, it is necessary to understand how the university is going to increase the brand value. If the organization itself does not understand how the brand is built, then social media can't be helpful. Social media only reflect the built strategy, not organizes it. Social media has a huge impact on brand awareness. The university should have an understanding of what image it wants to create, what it wants to broadcast on social networks. For example, what it can talk about-values, key associations, etc. If a higher education institution is perceivedas a university with traditions and heritage, then it should not deviate too much and try to fundamentally change and be something that you are not. Then, based on this, it is already determined for whom this page is provided, who should be the target audience of this page. There may be several interested parties, or the higher education institution is focused only on applicants. it is important to understand that applicants are different, for example, the requests of doctoral students and undergraduates do not coincide with the requests of bachelors. Based on the above, the style should correspond to the corporate style of the university, if there are any messages that will be transmitted on the page, whether there are indicators by which the results are evaluated, this should determine and launch the university's account in social networks.

The expert stressed that if this is the strategy that the organization has, it is necessary to be relevant, follow the existing trends. If this coincides with the general direction, then the university can offer some non-standard formats. Students have different opinions on this matter. Some students like entertaining content because they find it interesting, while other students don't like such content on the page because the university needs to have a certain image. When entering the page of a higher education institution, they would like to find more informative content rather than entertaining information. But the expert suggests that the marketing department has a strategy to attract applicants, namely, attracting students to show them student life. Because the marketing department can confirm that students are attracted not only by academic quality but also by student life. From this point of view, higher education institutions could showcase and attract more applicants by using entertainment content.

Social media is important, as people spend at least 3 hours a day there, and the media plays a big role. Especially if we are talking about students, applicants. "I would like to add that not only the university itself but also the key persons of the university is becoming active on social media. We are talking about the top officials of the university. Their social activity also influences the brand value of the university itself" – the expert said. Of course, in different universities, it is at different levels. Nevertheless, this process reflects in the brand a lot.

Influence Marketing in Higher Education

Influencer marketing is the promotion of products and brands through the use of influencer services. E. Katz and P. Lazarsfeld developed the theory of influence as a marketing tool in 1940 in the study "The People's Choice". Influencer marketing has been active on the internet since 2016. Influencers are becoming an integral part of the marketing industry in 2017. The formation and rapid growth of such indicators are associated with the fact that conventional media and advertising channels lost the influence they had on the target audience. Today, advertising on TV or with the participation of stars is becoming less relevant and effective, as the target audience has lost faith that the stars are really using the product they advertise. At the same time, social media platforms are actively developing,

which are characterized by an active growth of followers, and, accordingly, the formation of new platforms for advertising (banner, video, etc.).

Influencer marketing is the promotion of products and brands through people who have the ability to influence consumer opinion. The promotion covers the aspects of influence and the establishment of relationships with the subjects of influence. K. Freberg said: "Social media influencers are a new type of independent advocate who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media channels" (Freberg , 2010). [16]The essence of influencer marketing is shaped by the human bias for trust. Regular advertising is usually intrusive and interrupts the viewing of content, while influencer marketing is a form of native advertising that is part of the content and does not generate negative attitudes from the target audience.

The algorithm for using influencer marketing is as follows: an influencer creates and distributes promotional content within his account, the purpose of which is to popularize a particular brand. Over the past 2 years, this tool has become so popular and effective that special applications have been developed to study the dynamics of statistics on the influence of an account/post, the number of views of the publication, likes/comments, etc.

Social media influencer marketing has become a new channel for brands to communicate directly with their target audience without restrictions. In fact, the researchers point out that social media has made brands easier for the average consumer to use personally. Influencers, in turn, only act as a link between the brand and the target audience (consumers). As L. Bayer notes: "due to their sincerity and openness towards consumers, influential people have high social authority and trust" (Bayer, 2017). [17]In turn, E. Ledbetter emphasizes the important specifics of influencer marketing - where traditional marketing was oriented towards a mass audience, influencers have a unique ability - to target niche audiences that were previously inaccessible or inactive (Ledbetter, 2017). [18]Based on these facts, we can conclude that a blog (an account on a blogger's social network) is a relevant, effective, and demanding advertising tool for human resources. In our case stuff of the higher education institution and its students could be an influencer.

According to E.S. Starotitorova's position, today there are two formats of influencer marketing: integration with users who have more than a million subscribers (millionaires) and those who have less than a million subscribers (thousand people). Micro-influencers are ordinary people with no more than 30,000 followers who are deeply passionate about a particular topic (like fashion, photography, or travel) – in our case stuff of higher education institution. Macro-influencer – influencers with hundreds of thousands or even millions of followers. [19]According to marketing agency Mediakix research, microstructure marketing is more effective because users with less in quantity more in the quality audience (active users) are usually more effective at promoting brands. So, in case all the staff and students of the higher education institutions promote the HEI's brand (by different ways and means), all of them cover a very huge active audience of their personal followers.

Even though social networks are an excellent channel for communicating with the target audience and promoting the university's brand, they can't be regarded as the main information page of the higher education institution. The expert emphasized that social networks cannot be the only source of information, despite the fact the audience spends a lot of time there, the university should have an official page. There are several reasons for this. First, it is impossible to post all the interesting and necessary information on social media, because, in a different format, it does not imply the placement of any necessary criteria, the student will write or call the admissions office. International partners, universities, scientific communities can focus on social media or use information from an Instagram account as a reliable source of information. Second, a social network is a platform that belongs to a

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[16] Freberg, K. (2010) Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. // Public Relations Review.

[17] Buyer, Lisa. (2017) PR Under the Influence: Why Influencer Marketing is all the Buzz.

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third organization, but as soon as the user breaks some rules, followers can complain about its post(s), so the user loses everything and there should be an alternative. Third, periodically social media are blocked, so the organization needs its own official website, where it can provide the main information.

Therefore, it is rational to pay attention to the informational orientation of the digital website of a higher educational institution.

The goal of any online marketing strategy is to increase sales of goods and services, attract new and retain old customers, and raise the university's awareness of the market, so before the university decides to engage in online marketing, it is necessary to develop a clear strategy for online activities, including its own.：

- Internal and external work on the university's website；

- Work to attract, retain and encourage visitors to purchase educational services；

- Website promotion in search engines and professional ratings；

- Maintaining the integrity of the content on the international market (versions of the website written in English and other languages）；

- Analysis of consumer behavior, as well as the opinions of the audience, measuring the effectiveness of the site.

The main problem of promoting universities on the Internet is the targeted content of educational programs (EP) and convenient navigation (information search). This problem requires constant attention since there is no single correct solution.

In the process of developing an Internet marketing strategy, the university faces some objective problems：

1) Turbulence in the micro-environment of the university. Not only the population problem (the increase in school leavers and the reduction of threats), but also the reduction of the most unpleasant threats), but also the most unpleasant micro-ring, political advertising campaigns require a high degree of"creativity"of marketing, advertising and public relations experts.

2) As we all know, most universities are conservative and rigid organizational structures, not because of backwardness, but because of size. Every spring and summer, students are admitted to the university only once. But the site has been viewed for a whole year. With the expansion of the second higher education (MBA, especially distance education), the focus on the site, and in general, additional professional education (APE) requires constant flexibility and adapts the site to the interests and needs of the target audience.

3) Lack of qualified personnel in the field of marketing, advertising and public relations , their salary is low , and usually do not have the ability to professionally win and freely solve the wide range of reasons.

According to the results of the interview with an expert, we conclude that there is a need to summarize the brand promotion strategy of HEI in social media:

1) study and formation of demand in the market of educational services in a particular region;

2) creating a clear strategy for promoting the higher education institution in a social network based on the main advantages of the brand (higher education institution's rating, its values, mission, historical status, scientific achievements, professional staff, etc.);

3) the formation of a positive image of the higher educational institution in the eyes of the target audience;

4) preparation and publication of information and reference materials on various areas of activity of a higher educational institution to ensure the interests and information needs of the entire target audience (students, applicants, and their parents);

5) advertising and informational support of popular events of student life;

6) preparation and implementation of the content plan of the higher education institution.

Marketing strategy in the example of a university of Kazakhstan

Let's consider the specifics of brand value formation using the example of the best university in Kazakhstan –KAZGUU University of M.S. Narikbayev.

The marketing strategy of the of KAZGUU University of M.S. Narikbayev. is organized as follows. There is a marketing department that is responsible for many things, it is responsible for events, an open day, attracting applicants. It also carries design functions and there are admissions, which work together with marketing. They are sufficiently coordinated and the work results of the marketing department already directly affect the result of the selection committee. Accordingly, how the admissions committee serves the student, how it conducts all the processes, this all affects overall satisfaction, which is also important in the end. KAZGUU has a PR department, which is mainly engaged in media coverage, interactions with the media to form a brand image in the long term. The goal is to form the image of the university. The key role in that brand value strategy takes the mission of the university. The mission of the university is to provide affordable and quality education. Based on this mission, values were laid, one of the values is the academic quality of the programs, academic honesty, which is broadcast and maintained at the university. If we are talking about the brand values that the university is broadcasting and trying to broadcast, these are professionalism, honesty, reliability, modernity, and relevance.

According to the expert, the presence of the university in social networks allows it to be closer to the target audience, create awareness, establish the first contact with the student, give a general idea of the university, its image. However, without additional support, the university's social media account is only at the first level of the decision-making process, then open days and school visits work well to move on to the next stage, this greatly affects when a student comes with their parents, which also affects communication with the admissions committee. Also, the results of the UNT (unified national test), affects the passage to the next stage. That is, social networks, awareness, and so on will not matter if the results do not allow you to enter the university.

Indeed, social media is a good, effective channel, but this channel, to some extent, does not allow the identification of potential customers. For an applicant to choose the higher education institution from all alternatives, other tools are needed. That is if only social media works are being conducted, and other tools are not connected, then this reduces the effectiveness of the brand promotion.

Kazguu University has several schools: Higher School of Law and Higher School of Economics, Higher School of Humanities and Business School of MBA and DBA. In Instagram, the above-mentioned schools have separate accounts, which are also actively maintained. The main reasons for the separate accounts of different schools are, first of all, it is impossible to place all the information that happens in the school on the university page. To do this, you need to post a lot of posts a day. This may be considered spam and lead to the account being blocked. Secondly, the audience of schools has different directions and the published information is more relevant for those who are interested in a particular school.

After analyzing a blog (social media account) as a marketing communication tool, we came to the following conclusions (Table 2)

Table 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Blogging as Main Activity and Marketing Tool

PROS	CONS
Blog is a modern and effective means of promotion in the Internet environment	People who are not internet users are affected, as they can write blogs only through the principle of viral marketing through intermediaries
Compared to other internet marketing tools, blogs are generally more effective than contextual advertising and search engine optimization and promotion.	Blogging requires constant monitoring and content creation, so it requires more creativity and time than all other internet marketing methods
Blogging can enable the person to engage in	Invest a lot of time, energy and money in the

activities, generate high passive income and improve his or her personal brand as a professional	development and promotion of your blog
The blog allows for useful connections and public presentations on almost any topic, including educational and scientific issues	Some users suspect advertising messages that indicate bloggers are interested in finance
Blogs provide an opportunity to share their interests, achievements, responsibilities and plans, and improve users' writing skills	Effective blogs require personality appeal, literary talent, and broad vision to deliver high-quality, engaging content to users

Thus, influencer marketing is a new and rather effective tool for promoting brands. The main advantage of this type of marketing is direct communication with the target audience and informing them about specific benefits and brands. This type of marketing is most effective for new and small brands that do not have the ability to pay huge amounts of money to advertise with celebrities or launch a full-blown ad campaign available in all formats (TV, internet, banners, etc.). In our case, the staff of the higher education institution could be considered as influencers, who additionally promote the higher education institution. Based on the growing popularity of social media and the activity of pedagogical and administrative personal of higher education institutions we can conclude that this type of marketing has great potential in the higher education institution's advertising (promotion) industry in the next 10-15years.

High competition in the market of educational services makes it necessary for higher education institutions to have a presence in social media. Becoming one of the leading higher education institutions requires openness and recognition, having a good reputation and high brand value. This can be achieved by implementing a competent communication policy for positioning and promoting theuniversity in social networks.

Based on the data of the research work carried out and the results of the interviews and surveys, we can conclude that branding of HEI in social media is an important modern direction of their successful promotion strategy. Social media branding has its own specifics, which are systematized below in the SWOT analysis matrix[figure 1]. As an example, the social network Instagram is specified.
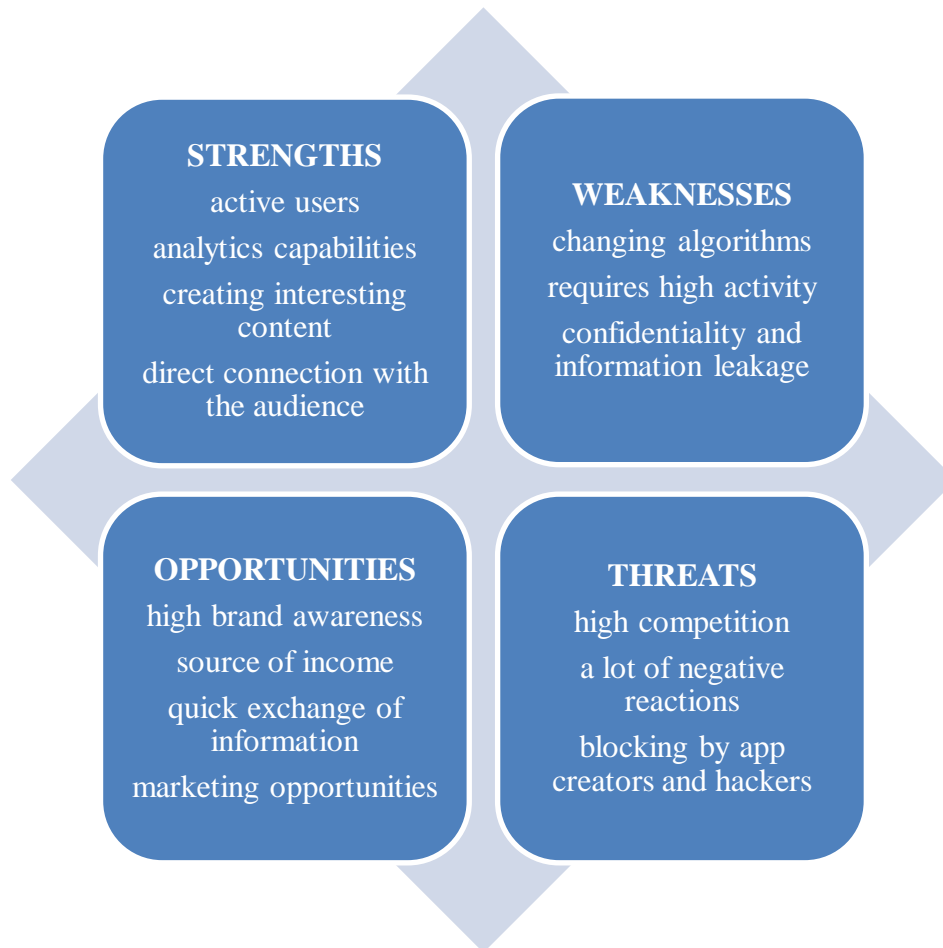
Figure 1. SWOT analysis: social network Instagram

Conclusion

Promotion in social networks is a new direction of university brand marketing. Social media is a new effective tool for promoting higher education institutions' brands. The main advantage of this type of marketing is direct communication with the target audience and informing them about the specific advantages and educational services of the higher education institution. Today, this promotion tool has become more popular than the official websites of higher education institutions. Nevertheless, promotion in the social network is an effective tool, however, social networks still cannot be the only and official source of information about the university.

To implement the brand value of a higher education institution in social networks, it is recommended:

1) study and formation of demand in the market of educational services in a particular region;

2) creating a clear strategy for promoting the higher education institution in a social network based on the main advantages of the brand (higher education institution's rating, its values, mission, historical status, scientific achievements, professional staff, etc.);

3) the formation of a positive image of the higher educational institution in the eyes of the target audience;

4) preparation and publication of information and reference materials on various areas of activity of a higher educational institution to ensure the interests and information needs of the entire target audience (students, applicants, and their parents);

5) advertising and informational support of popular events of student life;

6) preparation and implementation of the content plan of the higher education institution.

As a result of the research we proved that the value of a university brand is determined by the following factors: university rating at the national and international level; affordable training programs and the student mobility programs; teaching staff and their scientific achievements. The main sources of brand value formation are information (promotion) resources. These resources include the university's official website and social media accounts (mainly Instagram and Facebook). As a result of our research, we were able to establish that at the moment the target audience of HEI considers accounts in social media as a reliable source of information. Besides, the expert and respondents confirmed that social media play an important role in the development of brand value by increasing the demand for its educational services.

Thus, based on the results of our research, we can recommend to all Kazakhstani HEI to develop an active strategy of positioning and promotion in social media. Such a strategy will allow to qualitatively increase the value of the university brand in the eyes of the target audience, which, in fact, is the marketing strategy of promotion.

Indeed, the image of the university has a significant impact on the reputation and demand for its educational services among applicants, students, and scientists. Understanding the main factors of the university image many modern universities can transform their own marketing promotion strategy in order to improve it.

As a result, domestic and foreign universities understand the important role of branding in connection with the increased competition in the labor market and educational services. They achieve great success by making specific decisions and solving problems to create a high level of brand potential and give value to consumers and other target groups.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions with an expert

1. What should the branding of a higher education institution be based on?
2. In your opinion, why do universities need social networks?
3. How should marketing be organized at the university? Who should be responsible for marketing decisions?
4. In your opinion, the ranking of the best university depends on the branding in social networks ?
5. What other opportunities do social networks offer in comparison with other channels?
6. Is it possible to increase consumer demand for university services with the help of a social network?
7. How can I use social media to increase the brand value?
8. Social networks can be an alternative to the official page?
9. What situations can universities that are just starting to actively conduct social networks face?
10. What publications are most popular with the audience? What are the students ' reviews of humorous and entertaining content?

Appendix 2

Interview questions with students

1. What are the main resources you used to find information about the university and its educational programs?
2. What factors influenced your choice of university for training?
3. Has the prestige of the university brand in the country-influenced your choice?
4. What do you know about the university's social media accounts?
5. Do you consider university accounts on social networks an informative source of information?
6. In your opinion, does the presence of the university in social networks stimulate an increase in demand for university services among applicants?
7. What posts in the university's social networks do you consider the most informative? Why?
8. University accounts in which social networks in your opinion are the most informative and relevant?

Appendix 3

Questionnaire

1. Mark who you are *
   a) student
   b) parent

2. Specify your gender *
   a) female
   b) male

3. What are the main resources you used to find information about the university and its educational programs? (you can choose several options) *
   a) social networks
   b) official website
   c) Search engine (google; yandex, etc.)
   d) Other:_____

3. What factors influenced your choice of university for training? (you can choose several options)*
   a) educational
   b) programs academic mobility and internship programs
   c) teaching staff university
   d) rating
   e) Other: _____

4. Did the prestige of the university brand in the country influence your choice? *
   a) yes
   b) no

5. Do you consider university social media accounts to be an informative source of information? *
   a) yes
   b) no

6. In your opinion, does the presence of the university in social networks stimulate the growth of demand for university services among applicants? *
   a) yes
   b) no

7. Which university social media posts do you find most informative and useful? (you can choose several options) *
   a) about educational programs
   b) about the life of students
   c) about the university and the hostel
   d) entertainment content
   e) Other: _____

8. In your opinion, which social media accounts of universities are the most informative and relevant? *
   a. Instagram
   b. Facebook
   c. TikTok

d.   Other: _____