

Research Article

Social Media Brand Engagement in The Multi-Stakeholder Environment of Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Foundation Universities in Istanbul

*Yükseköğretim Kurumlarının Çok Paydaşlı Yapısında Sosyal Medya Marka Etkileşimi:
İstanbul'daki Vakıf Üniversiteleri Örneği*

Ahmed Abdulkareem Ahmed AHMED Haliç University, TÖMER ahmedalhayek10@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2728-649X	Şahver OMERAKI ÇEKİRDEKÇİ Dr., Free Researcher sahver.omeraki@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0735-7240
--	---

Makale Geliş Tarihi	Makale Kabul Tarihi
18.04.2025	12.08.2025

Abstract

The marketization and internationalization of Higher Education Institutions necessitate the use of branding strategies in higher education in developed and developing countries. Social media platforms offer various opportunities for Higher Education Institutions by assisting in the development of institutional brands and the formation and cultivation of relationships with students and other stakeholders that will enable engagement. Rather than taking students and potential students as the major unit of analysis, the present study focuses on how Higher Education Institutions create social media content to enable engagement with different stakeholders in an emerging market. Instagram data was collected for four months from the top twenty foundation universities in Istanbul. The findings provide evidence that Higher Education Institutions use different types of Instagram strategies to contribute and foster a multi-stakeholder engagement creating a student, academic, community or hybrid form of social media engagement. The paper offers several contributions to the brand management literature especially with a focus on Higher Education Institutions branding and managerial implications for Higher Education Institutions that aim to stay competitive in the presence of a multi-stakeholder environment.

Keywords: social media brand engagement, higher education institutions, stakeholders, social media strategies, Instagram.

Öz

Yükseköğretim kurumlarının ticarileşmesi ve uluslararasılaşması, gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan ülkelerde yükseköğretimde marka stratejilerinin kullanılmasını gerekli kılmaktadır. Sosyal medya platformları, yükseköğretim kurumlarının kurumsal markaların geliştirilmesine ve öğrenciler ile diğer paydaşlarla ilişki kurup bu ilişkileri sürdürebilecek etkileşim ortamlarının oluşturulmasına yardımcı olarak çeşitli fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Bu çalışma, öğrencileri ve potansiyel öğrencileri temel analiz birimi olarak ele almak yerine, yükseköğretim kurumlarının geliştirmekte olan bir pazarda farklı paydaşlarla etkileşim kurmak amacıyla sosyal medya içeriğini nasıl oluşturduklarına odaklanmaktadır. İstanbul'daki ilk yirmi vakıf üniversitesine ait Instagram verileri dört aylık bir süre boyunca toplanmıştır. Bulgular; yükseköğretim kurumlarının öğrenci, akademik, topluluk temelli ya da hibrit bir sosyal medya etkileşimi yaratarak çoklu paydaş etkileşimini desteklemek ve geliştirmek üzere farklı Instagram stratejileri kullandıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, özellikle yükseköğretim kurumlarının markalaşmasına odaklanarak marka yönetimi literatürüne çeşitli katkılar sunmakta ve çoklu paydaş ortamında rekabetçi kalmayı hedefleyen Yükseköğretim kurumları için yönetsel çıkarımlar sağlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: sosyal medya marka etkileşimi, yükseköğretim kurumları, paydaşlar, sosyal medya stratejileri, Instagram.

Önerilen Atıf /Suggested Citation

Ahmed, A.A.A. & Omeraki Çekirdekçi, Ş., 2025, Social Media Brand Engagement in The Multi-Stakeholder Environment of Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Foundation Universities in Istanbul, *Üçüncü Sektör Sosyal Ekonomi Dergisi*, 60(3), 2639-2669.

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have significantly transformed due to the marketization and internationalization of higher education both in developed and developing countries (Maringe and Mourad, 2012). The liberalization of markets and the move to a knowledge-based economy, competition among institutions to attract local and international students and academic staff, reduction in public funding and the pressure to maintain quality and generate profits are some of the factors that necessitate the use of branding strategies in higher education (HE) (e.g. Civera, Cattaneo, Meoli, Paleari and Seeber, 2021; Gibbs, 2018; Lomer, Papatsiba and Naidoo, 2018).

The market of HEIs has been characterized as complex and diverse due to differences in countries and the respective classification systems (Le, Phan Tan and Hoang, 2023). For example, HEIs can be classified based on degree levels, program types and level of institutional control (state and foundation) (McCormick and Borden, 2020). Despite the differences HEIs have embraced a market orientation with branding being a significant part of their marketing strategy (Le, Fuller, Hoang and Nguyen, 2023). The rising numbers of universities and students worldwide make the adoption of branding strategies indispensable. According to the 2023 “Higher Education Worldwide” Statista report, India has the highest number of universities worldwide counting 5,350, followed by Indonesia and the United States with 3,300 and 3,200 universities respectively (Statista, 2023). In Turkey, state (129) and foundation (75) universities and a few private vocational colleges (4) (two-year non-academic, job-specific training schools) comprise the total number of HEIs as of 2024 (www.yok.gov.tr). Apart from the number of students in HEIs, the number of international students as a share of the total higher education population has also increased over the years. In 2022, Canada had the greatest number of international students with nearly 30% of students being international followed by Australia (25%) and the United Kingdom (23%) (Statista, 2023). Turkey as a developing country has also attracted the attention of international students in the region with a total of 336.291 international students corresponding to nearly 2.37% of the total higher education population in Turkey (14.162.578 total students) (www.yok.gov.tr). This number is expected to grow given the Turkish Council of Higher Education’s strategic internationalization objective.

Social media platforms offer various opportunities for HEIs by assisting in the development of institutional brands and the formation and cultivation of relationships with students and other stakeholders (Le et al., 2023b; Pawar, 2024). Studies discuss the role of social media on assisting potential students’ decision-making process of selecting a HEI and program, and more importantly on facilitating students’ engagement with HEIs (e.g. Bélanger, Bali and Longden, 2014; Pawar, 2024). Nowadays HEIs necessitate the formation and cultivation of relationships and engagement with various stakeholders. Apart from students, academic and administrative staff, alumni, parents, accrediting agencies, institutions that provide funding, governmental institutions, industry professionals and the society in large shape the co-creation of brand meanings and values in HEIs (e.g. Jain, Mogaji, Sharma and Babbili, 2024; Ng and Forbes 2009).

Existing research calls for the examination of the social media strategies used in the multi-stakeholder environment of HEIs (Jain et al., 2024; Le et al., 2023a; Pringle and Fritz, 2019). As multi-stakeholders enable the development of brand value in HEIs, HEIs increasingly create content to enable stakeholder engagement. This paper will answer this call. Studies also focus generally on developed countries and scholars call for more research to understand HEIs social media marketing in emerging markets (Pawar, 2024).

In the Turkish context, the literature on social media branding in HEI concentrates generally on factors such as marketing mix, positioning, corporate brand image, academic performance and student satisfaction (e.g. Çatı and Çömlekçi, 2023; Karadağ et al., 2022; Sezgin et al., 2019). However, these studies focus only on a single stakeholder group mainly students. Consequently, the theoretical gap regarding the social media strategies on multiple stakeholders also hold in the Turkish HEI context. Rather than taking students and potential students as the major unit of analysis, the present study will focus on how HEIs create social media content to enable engagement with different stakeholders.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Consumer Brand Engagement in Digital Contexts

Consumer engagement (CE) defined as consumers' resource investment in brand interactions has become a significant metric for developing and managing consumer relationships in the last 15 years (e.g. Hollebeek, Kumar, and Srivastava, 2022; Hollebeek, Sarstedt, Menidjel, Sprott and Urbonavicius, 2023). While the conceptualization and measurement of the construct is still debated, in their review article Hollebeek et al. (2023) discuss that scholars agree on three CE characteristics: interactivity, consumers' contributions and multidimensionality.

First, CE is an interactive process referring to the “mutual or reciprocal action or influence” (Vargo and Lusch, 2016, p. 9) between consumers and brand stakeholders. Consumers interact directly or indirectly with brands, other consumers, employees, suppliers, distributors and other brand related stakeholders (Merz Merz, He, and Vargo, 2009; von Wallpach, Voyer, Kastanakis and Mühlbacher, 2017). In the digital context these interactions increase with the proliferation of various brand or not brand controlled social media platforms, applications or service robots to name a few (e.g. Chen, Sherren, Smit and Lee, 2023; Mattison Thompson and Brouthers, 2021). Narayanan and Singh (2025) in their review of the consumer activism literature discuss that external stimuli (like violations of human rights and environmental degradation) stimulate internal evaluation of perceptual (perceived misconduct), physical (consumer well-being), emotional (self-esteem) and philosophical (moral foundation) activities. These evaluations trigger consumers to respond through boycotts, anti-brand activism, commodity activism and buycotts. Thus, these responses enable the communication of discontent using digital platforms.

Second, CE is realized through the positive or negative contributions made to the brand. While positive CE contributions can range from the communication of positive word of mouth communication to the passionate expression of love, negative CE contributions can range from the communication of brand hate to the call for a collective brand boycott (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012; Klein, Smith and John, 2004; Kucuk, 2019). For example, in a meta-analysis of brands owned social media, Liadeli, Sotgiu and Verlegh (2023) show that to create an engagement on social media, brands should focus on emotional needs. On the other hand, the authors argue that brands should avoid the promotion of deals as they are the least effective content type for engagement. Consequently, different marketing objectives require the development of different digital content.

Third, despite the initial conceptualization of the construct as unidimensional, several scholars nowadays support the multidimensionality of CE. Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie (2014)'s theorization of the dimensions of social media-based consumer brand engagement (CBE) are highly accepted in the literature. The authors argue that CBE comprises cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions that stem from a particular consumer/brand interaction. The cognitive dimension refers to the processing and elaboration of brand related information, the affective dimension refers to the emotional reactions, and the behavioral dimension refers to the level of energy, effort and time spent on the brand.

In line with the service-dominant (S-D) logic, emerging literature on CE extends the focus on consumers' engagement with brands and acknowledges the value of all brand stakeholders in the process of mutual value creation (Brodie, Fehrer, Jaakkola and Conduit, 2019; Hollebeek, Kumar and Srivastava, 2022; Shawky, Kubacki, Dietrich and Weaven, 2020). Moving beyond the dyadic interactions, engagement occurs due to dynamic and iterative relationships among interdependent and versatile actors (Brodie, et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2022; Vargo and Lusch, 2016). The interdependency and versatility of actors is explained through the actor engagement construct. Actor engagement (AE) is defined as “a dynamic and iterative process, reflecting actors' dispositions to invest resources in their interactions with other connected actors in a service system” (Brodie et al., 2019, p. 174). Particularly social media has changed the nature of CE as it facilitates complex interactions among different groups of actors (Brodie et al., 2019; Lariviere, Bowen, Andreassen, Kunz, Sirianni, Voss, De Keyser and De Keyser, 2017). Given this AE perspective, Shawky et al. (2020) identify four levels of engagement on social media namely, connection (one-way communication), interaction (two-way communication), loyalty (repeat interactions between actors over time) and advocacy (actors willingly advocate brand related information). This research stream calls for an understanding of actors' engagement roles in different contexts to allow the development of a classification of AE types (Shawky

et al., 2020). The research will answer this call by exploring how HEIs create social media content to directly and indirectly engage with different brand stakeholders.

2.2. Higher Education Branding and Engagement with University Social Media Content

HEIs operate in a highly competitive and international marketplace that necessitate the use of branding strategies (Le et al., 2023a, b; Maringe and Mourad, 2012). Branding emerged as an important strategy to attract primarily new students (national and international) and foster loyalty among existing students (Maresova, Hruska and Kuca, 2020) trying to increase engagement and decrease brand switching behaviors.

The marketization and internationalization of HEIs also attracted the attention of scholars leading to an influx of research in HE branding using the established theoretical frameworks and constructs in the brand management literature (such as Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). In a bibliometric analysis of branding in HE, Le et al. (2023a) identify five clusters of research: HE brands and branding frameworks, antecedents and consequences of HE brand components, internationalization in HE branding, HE communication strategies, and HE brand value co-creation. Particularly, brand value co-creation was identified as key research theme from 2016 onwards acknowledging the role of several stakeholders in creating value for HE brands and calling for new research in this venue.

In the HEI context the literature identifies students, academic and administrative staff, alumni and parents as primary key stakeholders (Lowrie and Hemsley-Brown, 2011). The marketization of HE creates accountability to various other stakeholders such as accrediting agencies that ensure the quality of education, and public and private sources of funding to pursue strategic goals and objectives (Ng and Forbes, 2009). Increasingly, scholars explore branding in HEIs by focusing on the interactions of various stakeholders. While some studies focus on the role of a specific stakeholder, others try to offer a more holistic understanding on the stakeholders' interactions on the co-creation of brand meanings and values. For example, Dean, Arroyo-Gamez, Punjaisri and Pich (2016) explore how administrative staff co-create brand meanings through the interactions with management, other employees (academic and administrative staff) and customers. Ng and Forbes (2009) explore how university experience is co-created by internal stakeholders within the university – between students, students and teachers, students and administrators. In a more recent study Jain et al. (2024) propose an integrated higher education marketing framework of stakeholder engagement and relationships in which value is co-created as an outcome of stakeholder engagement by focusing on students, faculty members, administrators and industry professionals.

The transformation of HEIs also necessitates the adoption of digital communication channels. Particularly, social media platforms are powerful spaces that enable interactions among different stakeholders. These interactive channels enable the promotion of the institution, allow collaboration, teaching and learning tools, and offer career opportunities (Benson and Morgan, 2018). When compared to traditional promotional strategies, social media offers several advantages to HEIs. The cost of social networks is generally low since opening an account is free, each platform offers different tools for the creation of content and for the measurement of the executed strategies, and finally the platforms are widely accessible especially by the tech savvy university students (Garza Salgado and Royo Vela, 2019; Bonilla Quijada, Perea Muñoz, Corrons and Olmo-Arriaga, 2022).

Several HEIs nowadays have an active presence on social media platforms as they allow the formation and cultivation of consumer engagement (for a review check Pawar, 2024). Existing research on social media as a consumer engagement channel in HEIs focuses on the factors that enable consumer brand engagement by focusing on different social media platforms (e.g. del Rocío Bonilla, Perea, del Olmo and Corrons, 2020; Palmer, 2014; Wu, Chen, Chen, Dou, and Shao, 2019). For example, del Rocío Bonilla et al. (2020) investigate Instagram as a channel of generating engagement and focus on how format (such as video, photo, series of pictures), content (such as news, advertisement, achievements) and strategy (such as providing information, projecting a favorable organizational image) create differences in behavioral engagement (likes and comments for the selected platform). Other studies investigate the association between social media engagement and HEI attributes (e.g. Capriotti, Oliveira, and Carretón, 2023; Sörensen, Vogler, Fürst and Schäfer, 2023). For example, Capriotti et al. (2023) investigate the effect of universities' Instagram posting strategies on their followers' interactions and

conclude that the interaction rate is lower than expected, and university-created content leads to greater engagement than university shared content. Finally, a group of studies focus on social media accounts created and managed by students. For example, Larson and Salvador (2020) examine students' engagement with user-generated humorous content shared on a student created social media account associated with their university. The findings indicate that even though brand parody as a unique form of online brand engagement is potentially harmful to the image of HEIs, it enables the formation of an online brand community and the cultivation of group identification.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that creating social media content that meets audiences' different needs and keeping up to the latest trends (in terms of the platforms used and the specific strategies that can be executed) is a challenging process. Existing research calls for the examination of the social media strategies used in the multi-stakeholder environment of HEIs (Le et al., 2023a; Pringle and Fritz, 2019). As multi-stakeholders enable the development of brand value in HEIs, HEIs increasingly create content to enable stakeholder engagement. Studies also focus generally on developed countries (namely, USA and UK) and more research is needed to understand the situation of HEIs' social media marketing in emerging markets given the contextual economic, political and socio-cultural particularities (Pawar, 2024). Rather than taking students and potential students as the major unit of analysis, the present study will focus on how HEIs create social media content to enable engagement with different stakeholders.

3. Research Methodology

Instagram data was collected manually from the top 20 foundation (private) universities in Istanbul (URAP, 2023) from May 1, 2023, to August 31, 2023 (table 1). Foundation rather than public universities was selected purposefully given continuous increase in the number of foundation universities and the pressure for attracting more successful students and fill the quotas determined by Turkish Council of Higher Education. This pressure increases consequently the use of several communication channels for the promotion of foundation universities. The selected time of data collection coincides with the promotional activities conducted by the universities, and especially with the registration open days.

Table 1. Top 20 Foundation Universities in Istanbul as of 2023

No.	University	Instagram Official Account	Followers
1.	Koç University	https://www.instagram.com/kocuniversity/	71,200
2.	Sabancı University	https://www.instagram.com/sabanci_university/	53,500
3.	Acibadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	https://www.instagram.com/acibademuniversitesi/	26,300
4.	Bezm-İ Alem Vakıf University	https://www.instagram.com/bezmialemvakifuniv/	16,100
5.	İstanbul Medipol University	https://www.instagram.com/medipoluniv/	100,000
6.	Yeditepe University	https://www.instagram.com/yeditepeuniversitesi/	66,600
7.	İstinye University	https://www.instagram.com/istinyeunivedu/	33,600
8.	Özyeğin University	https://www.instagram.com/ozyeginuni/	35,400
9.	Bahçeşehir University	https://www.instagram.com/bahcesehiruniversity/	88,200
10.	Kadir Has University	https://www.instagram.com/khasedutr/	24,000
11.	Biruni University	https://www.instagram.com/biruniuniversitesi/	39,800
12.	İstanbul Bilgi University	https://www.instagram.com/bilgiofficial/	71,600
13.	Altınbaş University	https://www.instagram.com/altinbasuni/	25,900
14.	İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	https://www.instagram.com/zaimuniv/	20,800

15.	İbn Haldun University	https://www.instagram.com/ibnhalduni/	12,600
16.	İstanbul Ticaret University	https://www.instagram.com/ticaretedutr/	18,100
17.	İstanbul Arel University	https://www.instagram.com/areledu/	30,900
18.	İstanbul Okan University	https://www.instagram.com/okanuniversitesi/	43,100
19.	İstanbul Aydın University	https://www.instagram.com/iaukampus/	68,600
20.	İstanbul Gelişim University	https://www.instagram.com/igugelisim/	59,900

Reference: (URAP, 2023)

During the specified period, the total number of posts was 2,011 for the universities included in the sample. Table 2 shows the total number of posts for each foundation university.

Table 2. Total Number of Posts of Top 20 Foundation Universities in Istanbul as of 2023

No.	University	Number of Posts
1.	Koç University	54
2.	Sabancı University	110
3.	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	35
4.	Bezm-i Alem University	131
5.	Medipol University	218
6.	Yeditepe University	166
7.	İstinye University	38
8.	Özeğin University	38
9.	Bahçeşehir University	43
10.	Kadir Has University	125
11.	Biruni University	157
12.	Bilgi University	54
13.	Altınbaş University	63
14.	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	119
15.	Ibn Haldun University	16
16.	Istanbul Ticaret University	190
17.	Istanbul Areal University	91
18.	Istanbul Okan University	73
19.	Istanbul Aydın University	217
20.	Istanbul Gelişim University	73
Total		2,011

All posts were initially thoroughly reviewed to grasp the diversity and scope of the content to identify recurring themes and patterns within the posts regarding the primary target audience. Based on this initial observation four stakeholder-driven forms of engagement were identified: academic engagement, community engagement, student engagement, and hybrid engagement. Then a content analysis was performed to categorize the posts for each stakeholder form of engagement. A short explanation of each

identified theme is provided in table 3. When the total number of posts for each theme is observed, 568 posts are for student engagement, 609 posts for academic engagement, 35 posts for community engagement, and 799 posts for hybrid engagement.

Table 3. Description of Stakeholder-Driven Forms of Engagement

Theme	Description
Student Engagement	Refers to all the content that is directly related to students and potential students to assist in the creation of interest and eventually an engagement with the HEI such as campus life, academic programs, personal development student clubs and graduation ceremonies.
Academic Engagement	Refers to the content related to the academic purpose of the HEI; that is, interviews on academic matters and programs at the institution, and accomplishments of academic staff that stimulate intellectual activities and knowledge building.
Community Engagement	Refers to the content related to the relationship between HEI and the wider community including social impact programs with an aim of improving community partnerships.
Hybrid Engagement	Blends any or all forms of engagement (academic, community and student) to represent a wide variety of contacts and experiences within the HEI such as campus facilities, and cultural events.

From the 2,011 posts shared during the specified period, a total of 77 codes were extracted: 42 for student engagement, 9 for academic engagement, 3 for community engagement and 23 for hybrid engagement. Table 4 shows the codes that correspond for each stakeholder-driven form of engagement.

Table 4. Codes and Themes

No	Code	Stakeholder-Driven Engagement
1	Advice to students	Student Engagement
2	Appreciation of art on campus	
3	Campus aesthetics and environment	
4	Campus events	
5	Campus life experience	
6	Championships	
7	Club activities	
8	Creativity and innovation	
9	Curiosity and exploration	
10	Digital expression and interaction	
11	Emoji	
12	Encouragement for active living	
13	Encouraging participation	
14	Exam date	
15	Fairs	

16	Friendship	
17	Graduation ceremonies	
18	Health advice	
19	Humorous reflection	
20	Information about registration	
21	Lifestyle advice	
22	Love for reading	
23	Nostalgia for friends	
24	Philosophical reflection	
25	Positive outlook	
26	Positive outlook and motivation	
27	Positive start to the week	
28	Reflection on the year	
29	Seasonal greeting	
30	Seasonal reflection	
31	Self-Reflection and motivation	
32	Special university events	
33	Sports events	
34	Student experience	
35	Students' achievements	
36	Students' reflections	
37	Students' testimonials	
38	Success wishes	
39	Weather commentary	
40	Weekend greeting	
41	Welcome activities	
42	Welcomer summer	
43	Academic interviews	Academic Engagement
44	Academic programs	
45	Academic recognition	
46	Faculty achievements	
47	Faculty spotlights	
48	Organized scientific event	
49	Research	
50	Seminars	

51	Webinars	Community Engagement
52	Condolences	
53	Donations and aid campaigns	
54	Involvement with the community	
55	Campus facilities	Hybrid Engagement
56	Career and alumni engagement	
57	Collaboration between universities	
58	Cultural events	
59	General information	
60	Hybrid content	
61	Important announcements	
62	Institutional information	
63	Institutional promotion	
64	Interactive question	
65	Interviews about the registration	
66	National celebrations	
67	News in the media	
68	Official holidays	
69	Open days	
70	Opening ceremony	
71	Projects abroad	
72	Reflections and insights shared by alumni	
73	Scholarship funds	
74	Technological festival	
75	University slogan	
76	Visits made and visitors accepted	
77	Vlogs and YouTube	

The analysis afterwards was performed as follows. For each theme (stakeholder-driven engagement) the posts were analyzed independently by identifying the content type (image, video and carousel) the numbers of likes and the numbers of comments and calculating percentages and averages for each. Afterwards the general engagement rate was calculated using Excel by adding the number of likes and comments and dividing it into the total number of followers in the respective HEIs' Instagram account – an engagement rate measurement employed in the literature (Putranto, Rizaldi, Riskiawan, Setyohadi, Atmadji and Nuryanto, 2022). Although during data collection Instagram had already developed the sharing activity, at the time of data collection statistics regarding the number of shares was not provided by the platform. For this reason, the analysis focuses only on the number of likes and comments as well as the type of the format used (image, carousel or video).

The findings will be presented by analyzing each theme, the type of content developed for each post and the resulting general engagement rate. Word clouds were also used as an assessment tool for the identified themes.

4. Research Findings

Before moving to the analysis of each form of stakeholder engagement, initially HEIs posts were analyzed by observing all four forms of engagement in terms of likes and comments (figure 1 and figure 2). According to the findings, student engagement is the most observed, while community engagement is the least observed content of engagement. Academic engagement is present across all universities but generally exhibits low counts compared to student and hybrid engagement.

Overall, both for likes and comments student engagement received greater attention from stakeholders when compared to the other forms of stakeholder engagement. However, the findings provide evidence that the target audience is also receptive and attentive to the other forms of engagement. The following sections will analyze thoroughly each of form of stakeholder engagement.

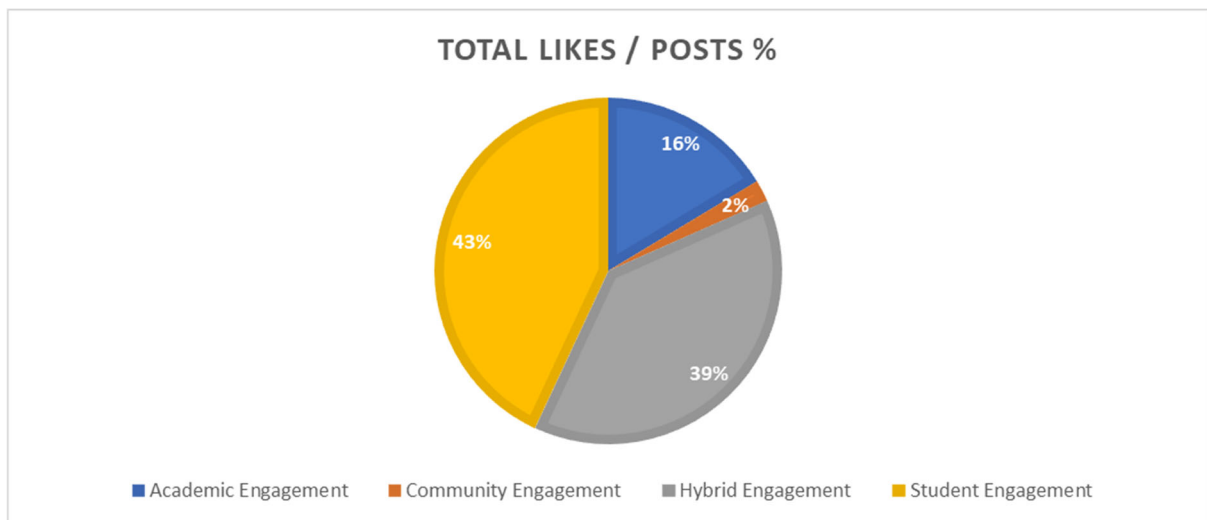


Figure 1. Number of Posts for Each Stakeholder-Driven Engagement

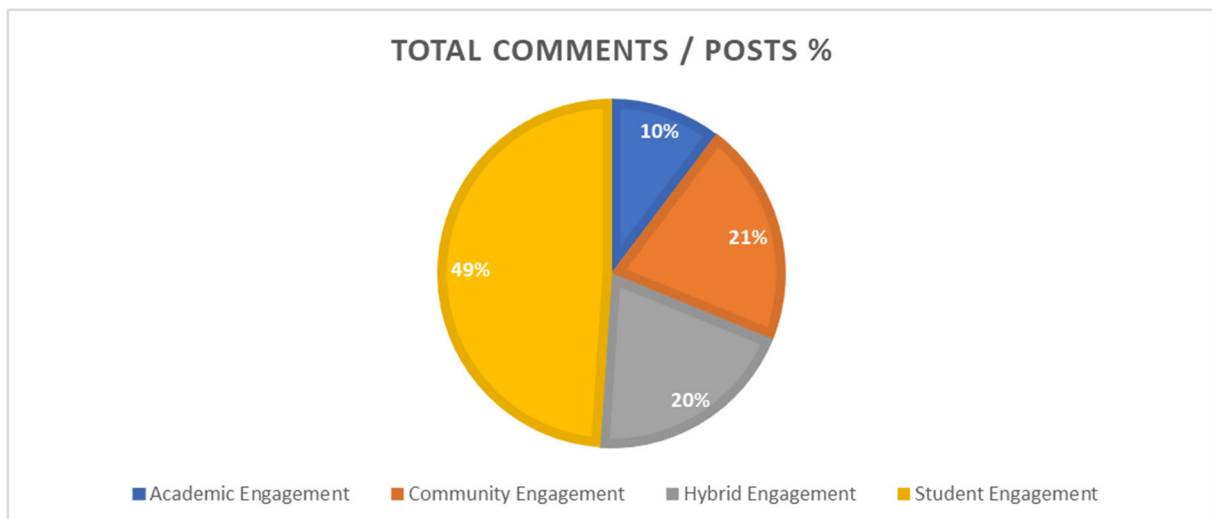


Figure 2. Total comments per post in all themes

Figure 5 shows the content format preferences (image, video and carousel) for student engagement. When the total posts for each format are observed the image format is the most prevalent (38%), followed by video (37%), and carousel (25%) formats. While some universities have not created any posts for for the image and video formats.

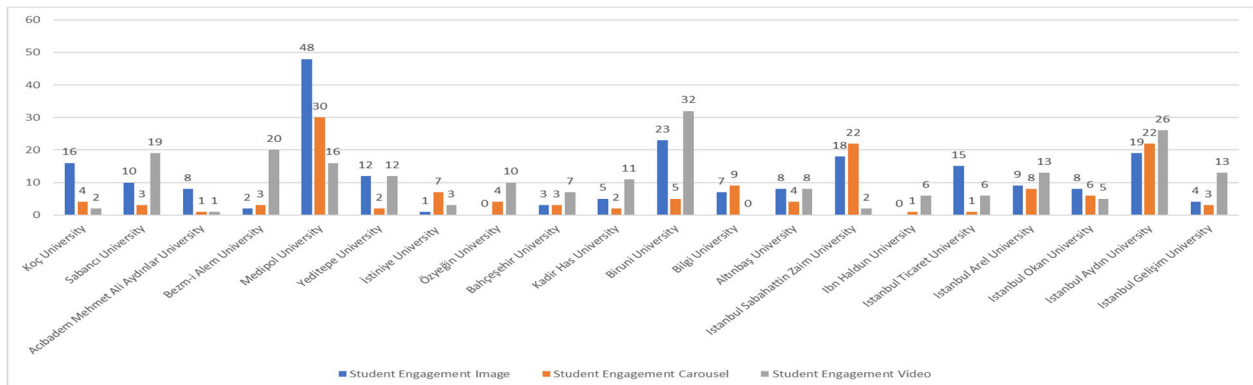


Figure 5. Number of Student Engagement Posts for each University

Figure 6 examines the percentage of average likes per post for each format. The findings show that the carousel format has a greater rate of engagement in 10 universities (38%), followed by the video format in 9 universities (40%) and the image format only in 1 university (22%). Given the earlier findings related to the number of likes, universities use more frequently the image format. However, as observed in figure 6 the image format has a lower level of engagement when compared to other content format preferences.

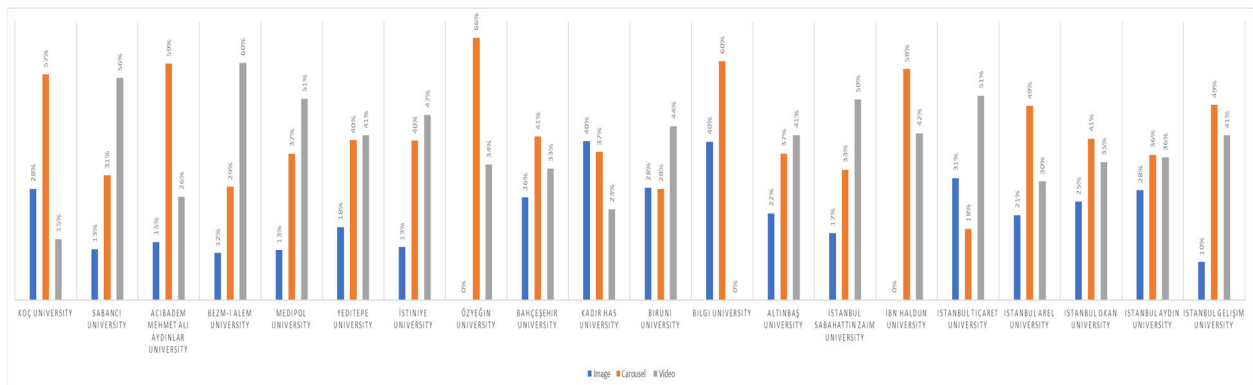


Figure 6. Percentage of Average Likes per Post for Student Engagement

Moving to comments for student engagement posts, figure 7 examines the percentage of average comments per post for each format. The findings show that the video format has a greater rate of engagement in 11 universities (60%), followed by the image format in 7 universities (29%) and the carousel format only in 2 universities (11%). Similar to the response of likes, the highest number of comments were received for the video rather than the image format that was shared more frequently.

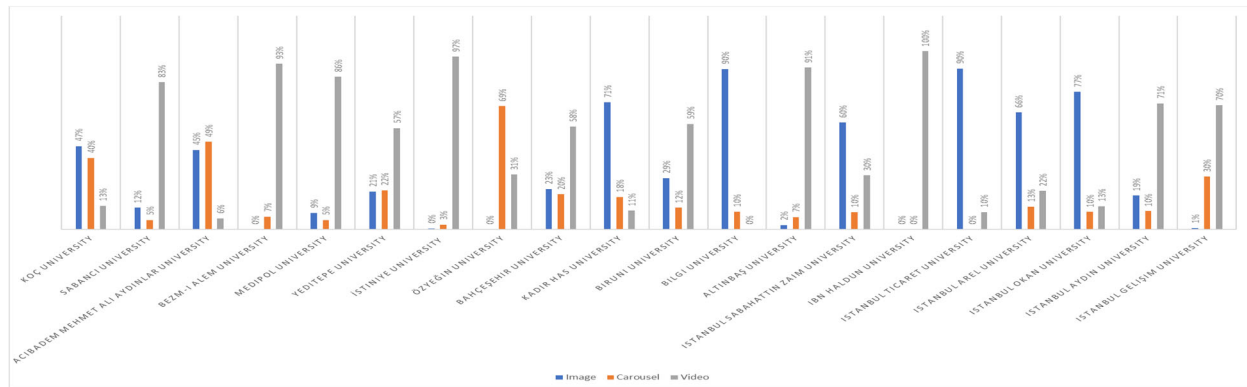


Figure 7. Percentage of Average Comments per Post for Student Engagement

Table 5 provides the results for the measurement of total engagement rate across the different formats for the student engagement theme. The findings show that Biruni University has the highest (206%), and Ibn Haldun University has the lowest (21%) engagement rate. Given the content format, Biruni University has the highest engagement rate in video (132%) and image formats (52%), Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University has the highest engagement rate in the carousel format (63%). When the total student engagement rate is observed, video was the most engaging format (48%), followed by carousel (27%) and image (25%). Video format content tends to capture more the audience's attention and allows for a more in-depth engagement when compared to still images.

Table 5. Total Engagement Rate for Posts in Student Engagement

No.	University	Image	Carousel	Video	Total Engagement
1	Biruni University	61%	13%	132%	206%
2	Sabancı University	14%	10%	114%	137%
3	Medipol University	27%	49%	37%	114%
4	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	28%	63%	9%	101%
5	Koç University	39%	19%	3%	61%
6	Istanbul Aydın University	12%	19%	23%	54%
7	İstanbul Arel University	10%	18%	18%	45%
8	Bezm-i Alem University	1%	3%	41%	45%
9	Yeditepe University	12%	4%	27%	44%
10	Istanbul Gelişim University	2%	8%	32%	43%
11	Özyeğin University	0%	18%	24%	42%
12	Istanbul Okan University	14%	15%	11%	40%
13	Kadir Has University	14%	5%	18%	37%
14	Altınbaş University	9%	7%	18%	33%
15	Bilgi University	12%	21%	0%	33%
16	Bahçeşehir University	6%	9%	17%	32%
17	İstinye University	1%	18%	12%	31%
18	Istanbul Ticaret University	15%	1%	9%	25%
19	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	12%	6%	3%	21%
20	Ibn Haldun University	0%	4%	17%	21%

Figure 8 illustrates that the engagement rate curves reach their peaks between June and July across most universities. This trend reflects the heightened interest in obtaining information about the universities during open days and the graduation ceremonies that occur in June.

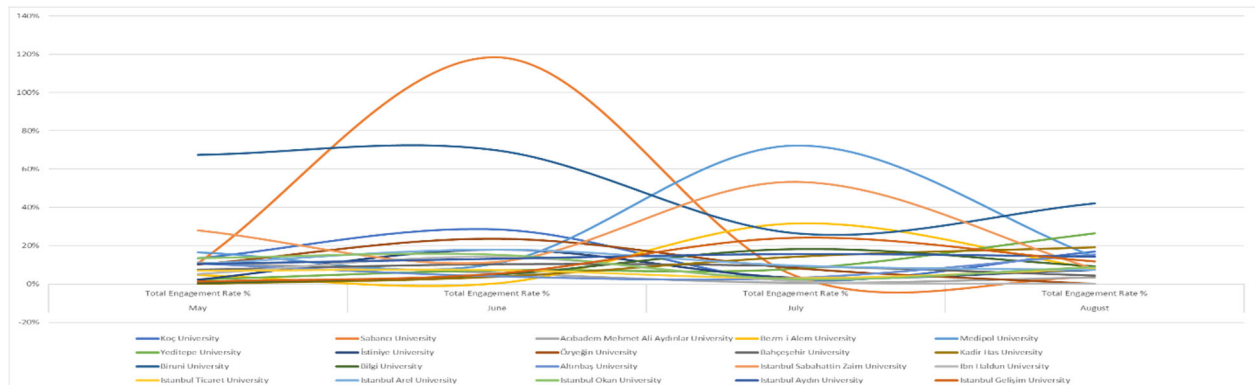


Figure 8. Engagement Rate Between May to August in Student Engagement Theme

4.2. Academic Engagement

Academic engagement refers to posts that aim to create engagement about the academic value of HEIs by focusing on academic programs, research publications and scholarly events. Academic staff are the primary co-creators of this content along with other internal (e.g. other academic and administrative staff) and external (e.g. accreditation agencies, participants in scholarly events) stakeholders. This is also reflected in the word cloud formed for the posts for academic engagement. Figure 9 shows that university, professor, dr., faculty, education, program, research and information were the most frequently encountered words.

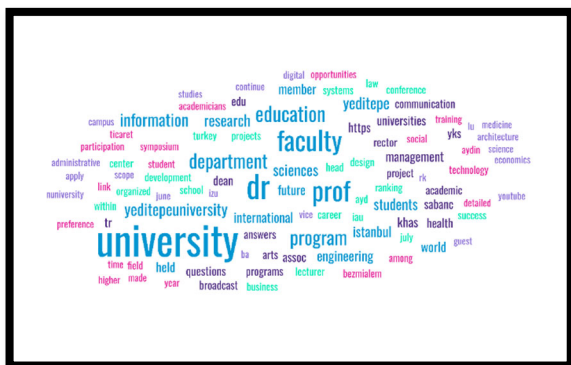


Figure 9. Word Cloud for Posts for Academic Engagement

Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of posts for academic engagement. Yeditepe University leads with the highest number of posts (91), while Ibn Haldun University has zero posts.

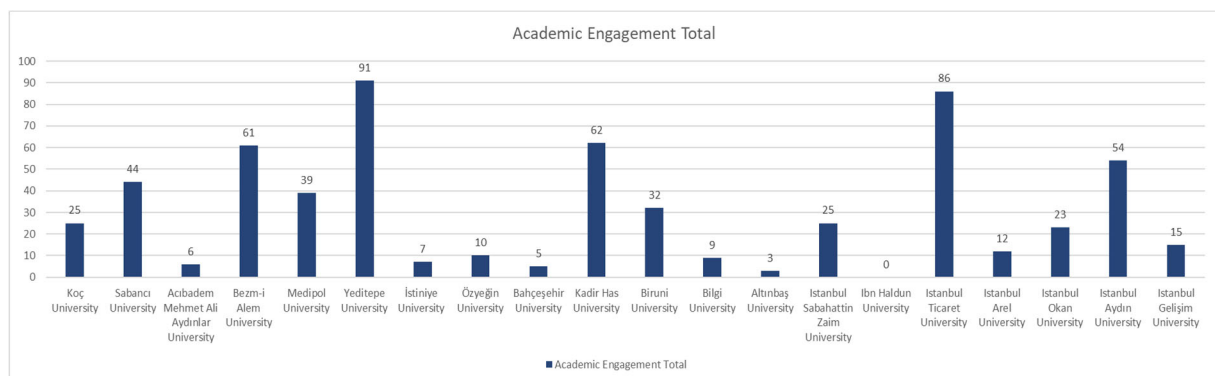


Figure 10. Number of Academic Engagement Posts for each University

An analysis was also performed based on the content format (image, carousel or video) of the post created. When the total posts for each format in academic engagement are observed the video format is the most prevalent (43%), followed by images (37%), and carousel (20%). It should be noted that the reason for this finding could be related to the timing of data collection. A typical content for open days is videos of deans, department and/or program heads to promote the university, faculty, department or program respectively. Figure 11 shows the content format preferences for each university. It should be noted that for some formats HEIs have not created any content.

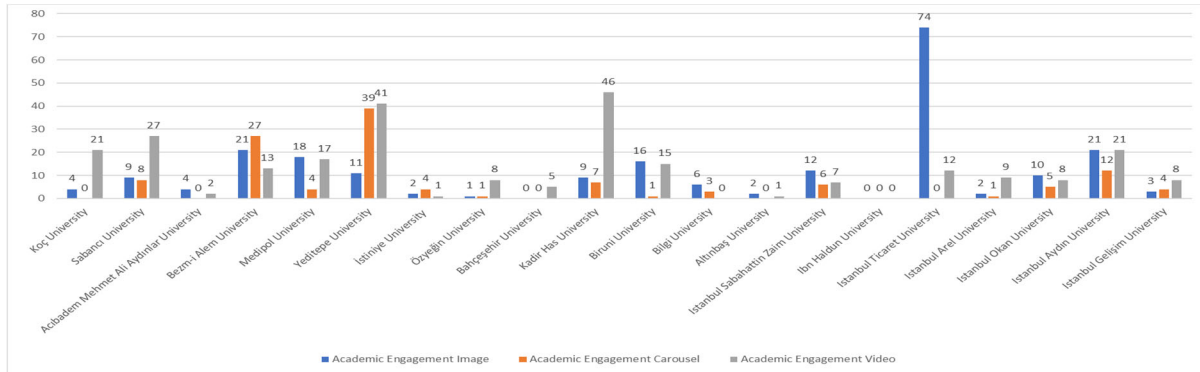


Figure 11. Number of Academic Engagement Posts for each Format

Figure 12 examines the percentage of average likes per post for each content format. The findings shows that the carousel format has a greater rate of engagement in 9 universities (43%), followed by the video format in 8 universities (30%) and the image format in 2 universities (27%). Similar to student engagement, even though the image format is the most preferred format by universities, given the findings in figure 12 the image format has a lower level of engagement when compared to other content format preferences.

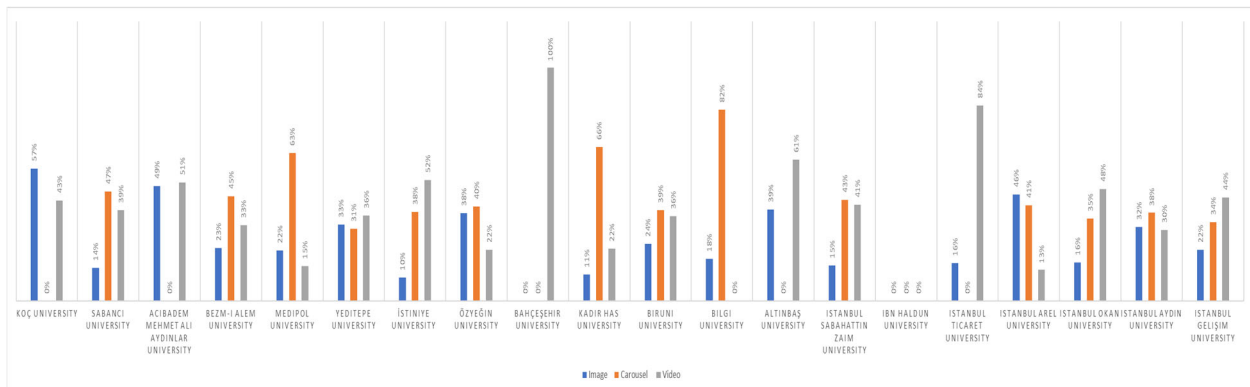


Figure 12. Percentage of Average Likes per Post for Academic Engagement

Moving to comments for academic engagement figure 13 examines the percentage of average comments per post for each format. The findings shows that the image format has a greater rate of engagement in 8 universities (56%), followed by the carousel format in 6 universities (29%) and the video format in 5

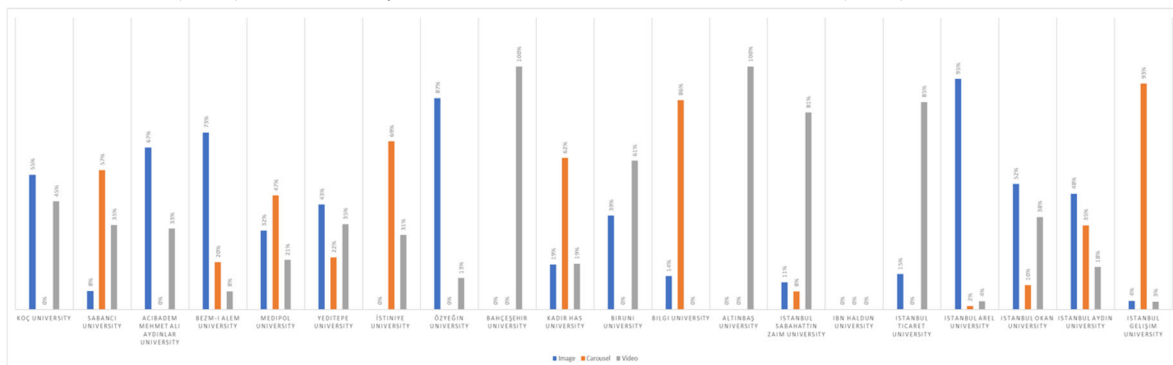


Figure 13. Percentage of Average Comments per Post for Academic Engagement

universities (17%). Consequently, in contrast to likes, for comments the findings are consistent with the most used format. The lower rate for video formats can be explained by the content of the video shared during the open days. As the videos include promotion of the faculties, departments and programs by academic staff the audience may hesitate to share comments due status related concerns.

Table 6 provides the results for the measurement of total engagement rate across the different formats for the academic engagement theme. The findings show that Bezm-i Alem University has the highest engagement rate (62%), while Altınbaş University has the lowest (1%). Given the content type, Medipol University has the highest engagement rate in image (20%), Bezm-i Alem University in carousel (35%), whereas Kadir Has University has the highest engagement rate in video (33%). When the total academic engagement rate is observed, video was the most engaging format (48%), followed by carousel (26%) and image (26%) formats respectively. Like student engagement the video format content tends to capture more the audience's attention.

Table 6. Total Engagement Rate for Posts in Academic Engagement

No.	University	Image	Carousel	Video	Total Engagement
1	Bezm-i Alem University	14%	35%	12%	62%
2	Kadir Has University	3%	15%	33%	51%
3	Biruni University	19%	2%	27%	48%
4	Medipol University	20%	13%	13%	46%
5	Yeditepe University	4%	13%	16%	33%
6	Istanbul Ticaret University	18%	0%	15%	33%
7	Istanbul Aydın University	12%	8%	11%	30%
8	Koç University	6%	0%	22%	28%
9	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	6%	9%	10%	26%
10	Sabancı University	2%	5%	15%	22%
11	Istanbul Okan University	4%	4%	9%	17%
12	Istanbul Gelişim University	1%	4%	8%	13%
13	Bahçeşehir University	0%	0%	13%	13%
14	Özyeğin University	2%	2%	7%	10%
15	İstanbul Arel University	3%	1%	4%	8%
16	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	5%	0%	2%	7%
17	Bilgi University	2%	4%	0%	6%
18	İstinye University	0%	4%	1%	5%
19	Altınbaş University	1%	0%	1%	1%
20	Ibn Haldun University	0%	0%	0%	0%

The engagement rates over the specified time of data collection were observed. Figure 14 illustrates that the engagement rate peaks during July across most universities. This trend reflects the heightened interest in obtaining information about the universities during open days and registration periods.

Figure 17 shows the content format preferences for each university. When the total posts for each format are observed carousel is the most prevalent (47%), followed by images (43%), and video (10%).

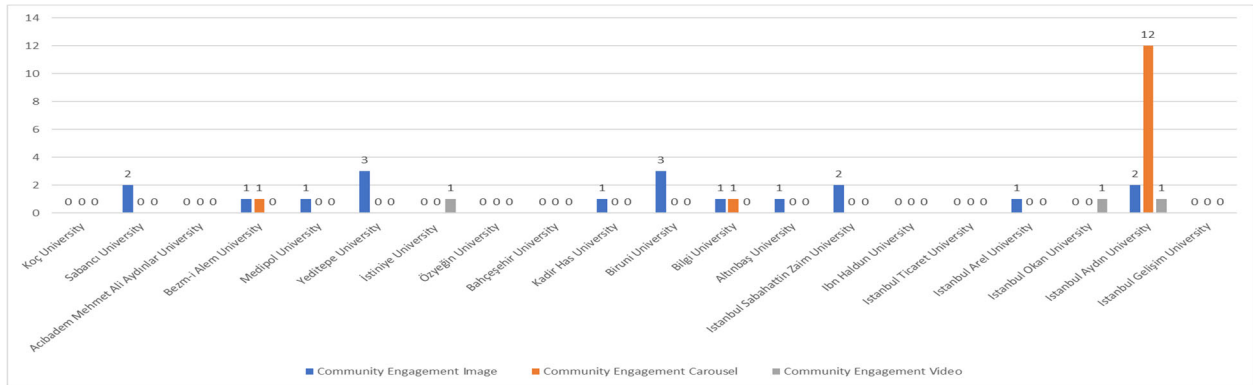


Figure 17. Number of Community Engagement Posts for each Format

Figure 18 examines the percentage of average likes per post for each format. The findings show that the image format has a greater rate of engagement in 9 universities (45%), followed by the carousel (35%) and video (20%) formats.

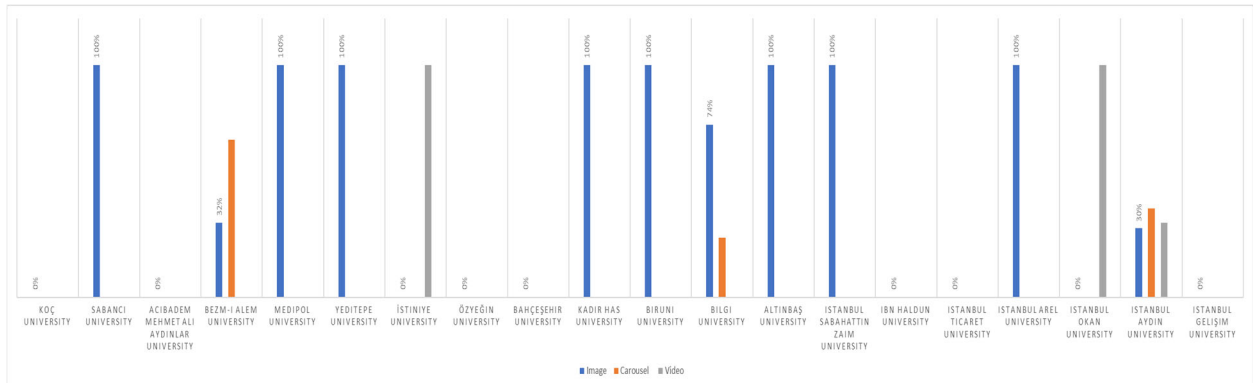


Figure 18. Percentage of Average Likes per Post for Community Engagement

Moving to the comments for community engagement figure 19 shows the percentage of average comments per post for each format. The findings show that the image format has a greater rate of engagement in 8 universities (58%), followed by the video (20%) and carousel (22%) formats in 3 universities. Despite the low frequency of community engagement content, the number of likes and comments is highest for the most preferred format by HEIs. The low level of engagement especially in terms of likes can be attributed to the fact that individuals hesitate to press the like button and write a comment for a content related to sad news. As the timing of data collection coincides with the post-earthquake period, this can be considered a reason for the low observations.

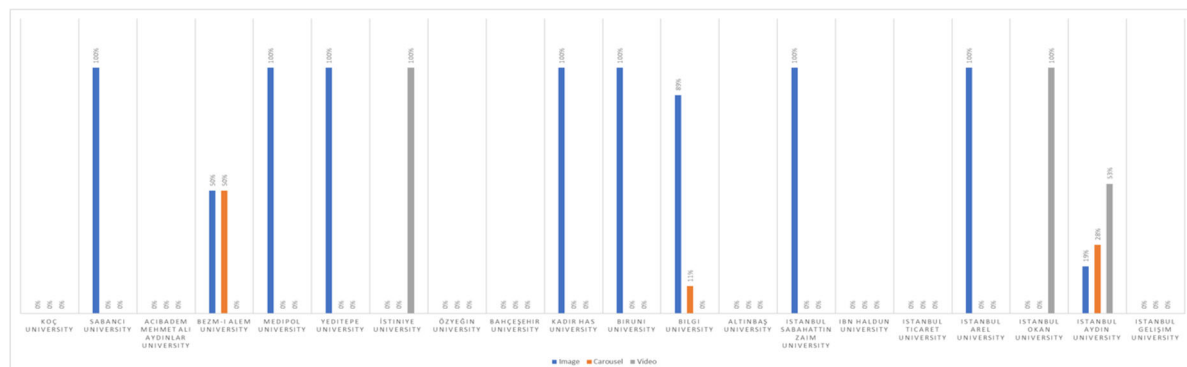


Figure 19. Percentage of Average Comments per Post for Community Engagement

Table 7 provides the results for the measurement of total engagement rate across the different formats for the community engagement theme. The findings show that Istanbul Aydın University has the highest engagement rate (15%) and Istanbul Okan University has the lowest (1%). Regarding the format, Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University has the highest engagement rate in image (9%), Istanbul Aydın University in the carousel format (12%), whereas Istanbul Aydın University and Istanbul Okan University in the video format (1%). When the total academic engagement rate is observed, image was the most engaging format (67%), followed by carousel (29%) and video (4%) formats respectively.

Table 7. Total Engagement Rate for Posts in Community Engagement

No.	University	Image	Carousel	Video	Total Engagement
1	Istanbul Aydın University	2%	12%	1%	15%
2	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	9%	0%	0%	9%
3	Sabancı University	7%	0%	0%	7%
4	Biruni University	5%	0%	0%	5%
5	Bezm-I Alem University	1%	3%	0%	4%
6	Yeditepe University	4%	0%	0%	4%
7	Bilgi University	2%	1%	0%	3%
8	Kadir Has University	2%	0%	0%	2%
9	Medipol University	2%	0%	0%	2%
10	İstanbul Arel University	1%	0%	0%	1%
11	Istanbul Okan University	0%	0%	1%	1%
12	İstinye University	0%	0%	0%	0%
13	Altınbaş University	0%	0%	0%	0%
14	Koç University	0%	0%	0%	0%
15	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	0%	0%	0%	0%
16	Özyeğin University	0%	0%	0%	0%
17	Bahçeşehir University	0%	0%	0%	0%
18	Ibn Haldun University	0%	0%	0%	0%
19	Istanbul Ticaret University	0%	0%	0%	0%
20	Istanbul Gelişim University	0%	0%	0%	0%

When the engagement rates are plotted during the months of data collection (figure 20), the curves peak in May and June across most universities and then start to decrease. Even not high, the community engagement rate on these two months can be attributed to the posts related to the earthquake.

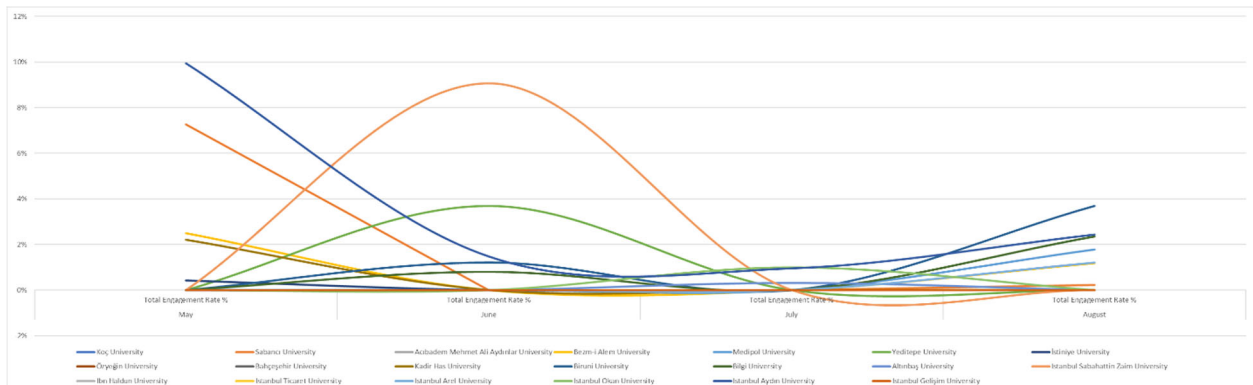


Figure 20. Engagement Rate Between May to August in Community Engagement Theme**4.4. Hybrid Engagement**

Hybrid engagement refers to posts that attempt to increase interaction with several stakeholders: students and parents, potential students and parents, alumni, academic and administrative staff and the community in large. This is also reflected in the word cloud formed. Figure 21 shows that university, Istanbul, scholarship, education, students, faculty, program, YKS, career, and future are the most frequently used words. Even if this can also be reflected as part of student engagement, data in the word cloud provides evidence for the hybrid form of engagement (such as business, cooperations and graduates).

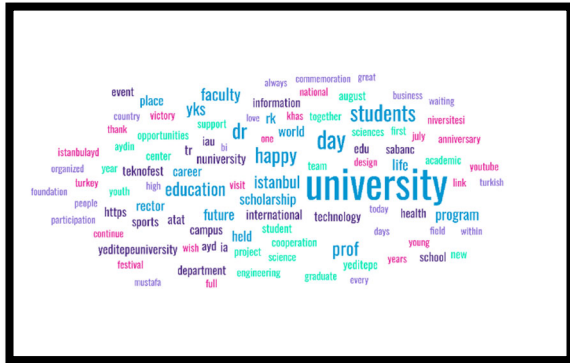
**Figure 21. Word Cloud for Posts for Hybrid Engagement**

Figure 22 illustrates the distribution of posts for hybrid engagement. Medipol University comes first with the highest number of posts (84), while Koç University comes last with 7 posts.

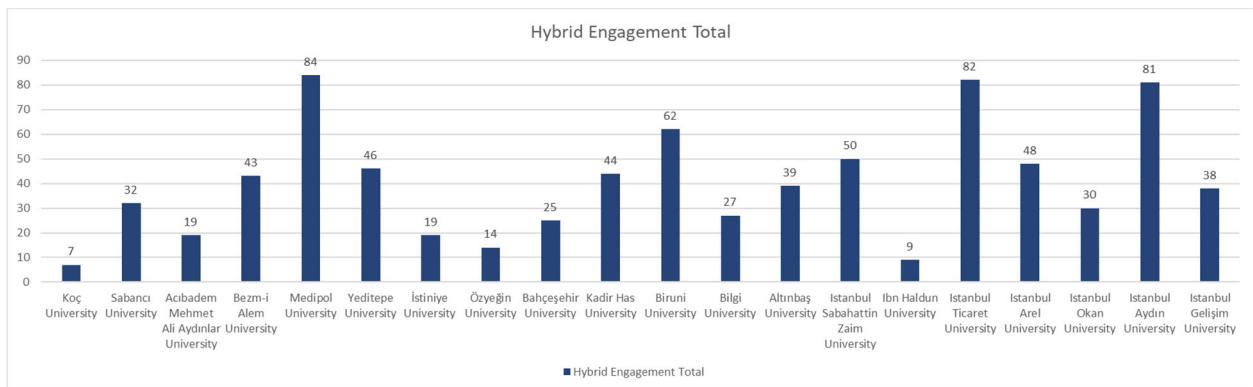
**Figure 22. Number of Hybrid Engagement Posts for each University**

Figure 23 shows the content format preferences. When the total posts for each format in hybrid engagement are observed video is the most prevalent (47%), followed by image (39%), and carousel (14%). Some universities have not created any posts for the image and carousel formats.

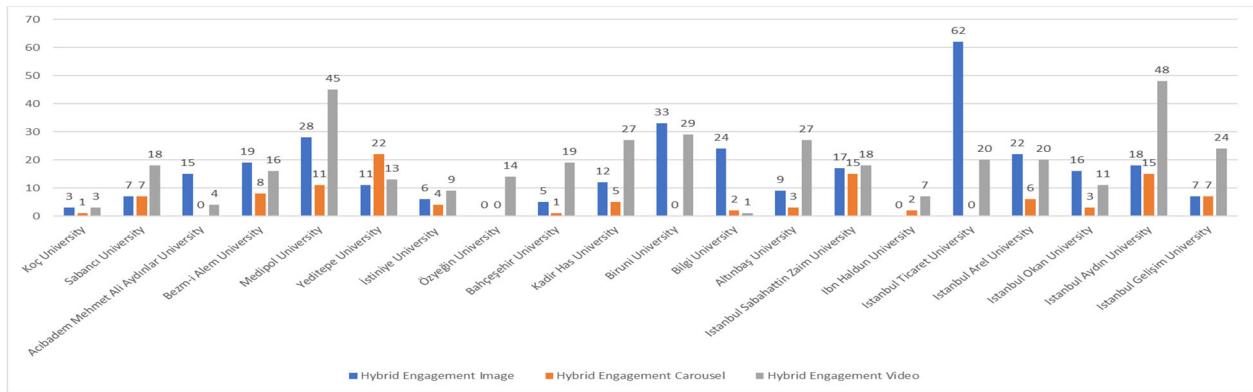


Figure 23. Number of Hybrid Engagement Posts for each Format

Figure 24 examines the percentage of average likes per post for each format. The findings show that the video format holds the top position in ten universities (35%), followed by the carousel format in 7 universities (43%) and the image format that lags behind observed only in three universities (22%).

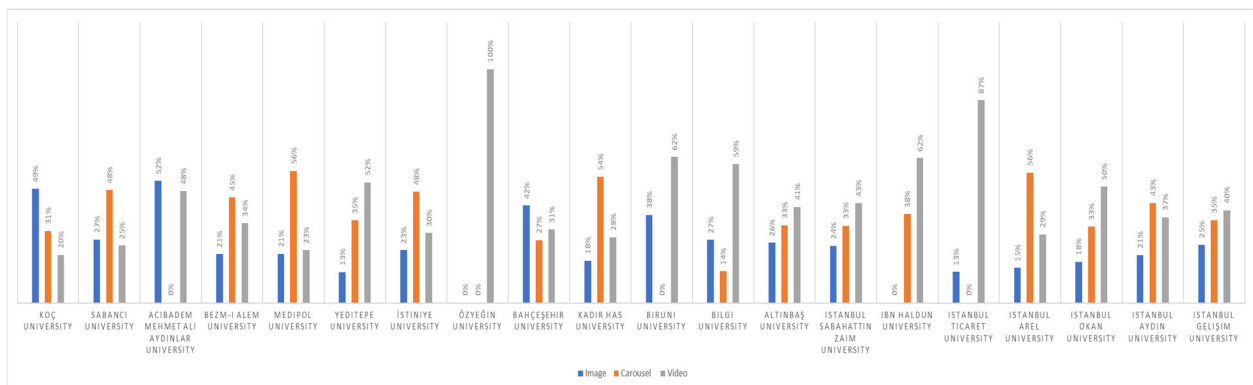


Figure 24. Percentage of Average Likes per Post for Hybrid Engagement

Moving to comments for hybrid engagement, figure 25 examines the percentage of average comments per post for each format. The findings show that the video format holds the top position in 10 universities (46%), followed by the carousel in 7 universities (32%), while the image format was only used by 3 universities (22%). Like student and academic forms of engagement, the video format leads to higher engagement in terms of likes and comments.

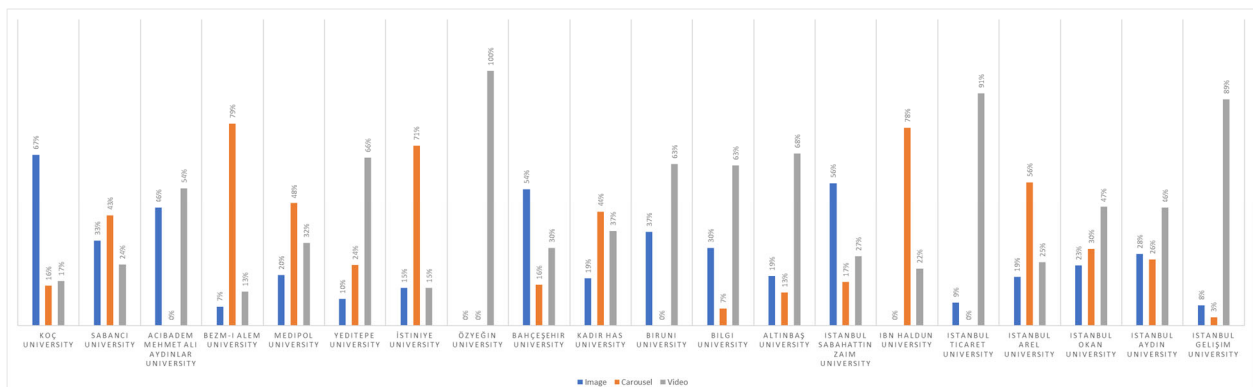


Figure 25. Percentage of Average Comments per Post for Hybrid Engagement

Table 8 provides the results for the measurement of total engagement rate across the different formats for the hybrid engagement theme. The findings show that Biruni University has the highest engagement rate (128%), and Koç University has the lowest (17%). Given the content format, Biruni University has

the highest engagement rate in the image (52%) and video (76%) formats, while Medipol University has the highest engagement rate in the carousel format (32%). When the total academic engagement rate is observed, video is the most engaging format (55%), followed by image (28%) and carousel (18%).

Table 8. Total Engagement Rate for Posts in Hybrid Engagement

No.	University	Image	Carousel	Video	Total Engagement
1	Biruni University	52%	0%	76%	128%
2	Medipol University	30%	32%	53%	115%
3	Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University	25%	30%	46%	100%
4	Istanbul Aydın University	10%	17%	46%	72%
5	Istanbul Ticaret University	21%	0%	45%	66%
6	Kadir Has University	11%	14%	39%	65%
7	Yeditepe University	5%	25%	22%	52%
8	Altınbaş University	8%	4%	40%	52%
9	Bahçeşehir University	12%	2%	35%	49%
10	Istanbul Arel University	12%	12%	20%	43%
11	Bezm-i Alem University	13%	12%	18%	43%
12	Istanbul Okan University	13%	4%	25%	42%
13	Istanbul Gelişim University	5%	7%	29%	41%
14	Istinye University	9%	12%	17%	38%
15	Sabancı University	7%	13%	17%	37%
16	Bilgi University	28%	1%	3%	32%
17	Acıbadem Mehmet Ali Aydınlar University	25%	0%	6%	31%
18	Ibn Haldun University	0%	4%	25%	29%
19	Özyeğin University	0%	0%	26%	26%
20	Koç University	10%	2%	4%	17%

When the overall engagement rates are plotted along the month of data collection, the curves peak in July across most universities (figure 26). Like the other forms of engagement, several stakeholders show greater degree of engagement during open days and registration periods.

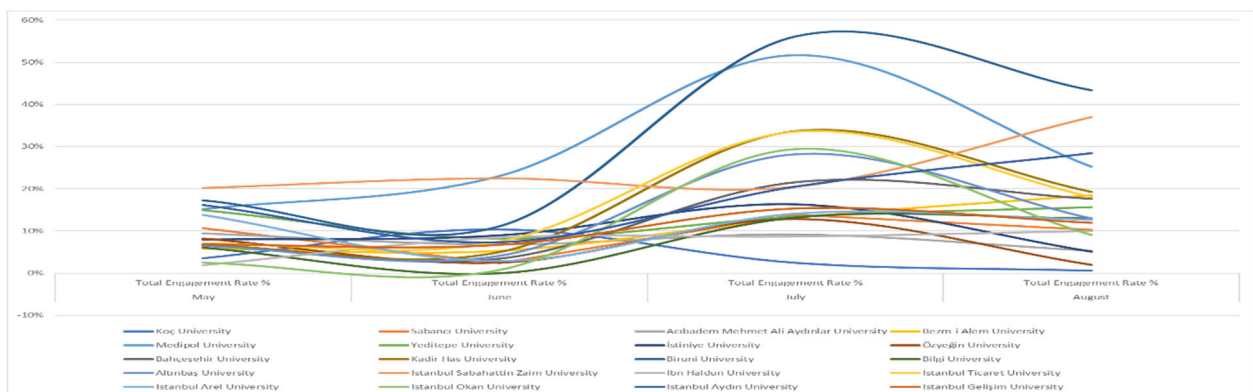


Figure 26. Engagement Rate Between May to August in Hybrid Engagement Theme

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper attempts to answer the academic call for understanding actors' engagement in multi-stakeholder environments (Le et al., 2023a; Pringle and Fritz, 2019) by exploring how HEIs create social media content to directly and indirectly engage with different brand stakeholders. The paper offers several contributions to the brand management literature especially with a focus on HEI branding.

First, several studies on social media engagement in HEIs focus on the measurement of student engagement or institutional branding (for reviews check Le et al, 2023a and Pawar, 2024). However, there is scant theoretical exploration on how HEIs simultaneously engage several stakeholders (Jain et al., 2024). Especially, the present study focuses on how digitalization increases the complexity of interactions that necessitate the creation and share of differentiated or hybrid contents. Shifting the unit of analysis from students and potential students (e.g. Farhat, Mokhtar and Salleh, 2021; Wahid and Gunarto, 2022), the findings provide evidence that HEIs use different types of Instagram strategies to contribute and foster a multi-stakeholder engagement. Student engagement focuses on the overall well-being of students by focusing on different elements of the service experience and by actively using students for the co-creation of brand value. Academic engagement focuses on communicating the academic value of HEIs by sharing information about academic programs, research publications, rankings and scholarly events. In this form of engagement internal and external stakeholders take a direct or indirect role in the co-creation of brand value. For example, by providing information about the accrediting agencies that have accredited the HEI ensures the multidimensional quality of the service received. The self-evaluation report prepared for the accredited agencies includes information about students, academic programs, academic staff, infrastructure, financial situations, organizational structure and decision-making processes, and strategic goals and objectives. Community engagement focuses on forming an engagement with the wider community by developing and communicating projects to increase community involvement. Hybrid engagement on other hand blends student, academic and hybrid engagements to increase interactions among students and parents, potential students and parents, alumni, academic and administrative staff and the community in large. Consequently, by executing student, academic, community and hybrid forms of engagement strategies attempt to reach multiple engagement goals.

Second, the paper also attempts to provide some initial thoughts about the situation of HEIs' social media marketing strategies in emerging markets (Pawar, 2024). In Turkey the maximum number of students for each program are specified by the "Student Selection and Placement Center" yearly before the "Higher Education Institutions Examination". Students make 24 possible placement selections. The selections are identified by comparing the scores received with the minimum score received by the previously enrolled student in the relevant academic program. Potential students and parents visit HEIs during open days to receive information about the overall service experience by getting in contact with academic and administrative staff, and students as they are present on open days to share their own experiences. Consequently, social media platforms assist potential students in their decision-making process by providing information and inviting students and families to open days. It should also be noted that as Turkey is a collectivistic culture parents are active in the decision-making process making them a potential audience also for HEIs social media content. Social media content created during the open days also support this as images and videos show the active presence of parents in the service environment.

Third, social media engagement is generally measured using quantitative interactions (e.g. likes, comments, shares) (e.g. Bartoloni and Ancillai, 2024; Farhat, et al., 2021; Perera, Nayak, and Nguyen, 2022). The paper triangulates qualitative and quantitative measures to understand how social media content attempts to facilitate interactions with different stakeholders. Except the quantitative interactions, the categories identified for each form of engagement and the word clouds assisted in reaching a qualitative understanding on the differentiated strategies employed before the quantitative analysis.

The paper also offers implications for HEIs. The findings provide evidence that the audience is generally responsive to all forms of engagement. Consequently, HEIs need to create content for each form of engagement given the diverse stakeholder ecosystem. The quantitative findings show that the rate of

engagement was higher for student and hybrid engagement. However, this does not mean that academic and community engagement should not be used. For example, community engagement should be strategically used as community work embodies part of the holistic academic ecosystem (Chankseliani and McCowan, 2021). Each form of engagement serves different objectives and for this reason each should incorporate different sources and messages and attempt to reach different target audiences to enable interactions and the formation of engagement within the diverse HEI ecosystem.

The findings also show a variation in terms of the number of likes and comments for each engagement form and across the content type (image, carousel or video) used. Although it is difficult to make any generalizations, it is evident that the timing of the posts and the relevance of the content enable/disable engagement. According to the findings, for all forms of engagement and across the content type the engagement rate was higher during open and registration days. Consequently, HEIs should pay attention on the important dates on the academic calendar as well as the changes in the micro and macro marketing environments that may require the creation and communication of content.

Given the different forms of engagement and the different types of content that can be created, the findings show that HEIs lack a strategic social media plan. Some universities did not create any posts for specific forms of engagement and others used only specific content types. Given the media consumption habits of university students and the different stakeholders with whom the HEI attempt to initiate an interaction, HEIs need to plan strategically their social media platforms (Lund, 2019). With the internationalization and commercialization of HEIs and the presence of a diverse stakeholder ecosystem, HEIs need to include promotional strategies as part of their strategic plans. This necessitates also the formation of a corporate communication department that will work on the management of all forms of communication. The mere fact of having a social media existence will only enable a connection and not enable the development of an interaction that is necessary for the formation of a stronger engagement (Shawky et al. 2020). Creating content related to the identified forms of engagement, selecting the most appropriate content type (image, video, carousel) and source(s) along with visual (image or video) and verbal (including hashtags) messages are significant for creating and nurturing engagement. It should be noted that engagement is not only restricted to students, but it includes all direct or indirect stakeholders that HEIs have an interaction with. HEIs need to acknowledge that the continuous transformations in the higher education ecosystem necessitate new marketing practices and policies (Jain et al., 2024). As it was stated before the whole process should be managed. This means that the corporate communication department should not only focus on the creation of content, but they should also continuously control the metrics for the developed strategies. For example, Instagram and the other social media platforms provide free insights to view metrics for business or creator accounts. This a valuable information that can help to take corrective actions and serve as feedback for the development of new social media engagement strategies.

The study focused only on the top 20 foundation universities in Istanbul, which limits the generalizability of the findings to state universities or to other countries that have a different student selection and placement system. Data collection was performed in a specific period, using a single social media platform. Future studies can expand the understanding of proposed engagement forms by collecting data throughout the academic year and across the different social media platforms. The analysis considers only HEIs permanent posts on Instagram. Future research can perform an analysis that incorporates all shared content and compares engagement forms between permanent (posts, reels and highlights) and not permanent contents (stories). Finally, the paper focuses only on post content quantitative metrics. Performing an analysis on the contents and the hashtags shared might provide several contributions.

6. References

- Bartoloni, S., & Ancillai, C. (2024). Twenty years of social media marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework, and future research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 26(3), 435–457. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijmr.12360>
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.09.0339>

- Bélanger, C. H., Bali, S., & Longden, B. (2014). How Canadian universities use social media to brand themselves. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 20(1), 14–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2013.852237>
- Benson, V., & Morgan, S. (2018). Measuring the social impact: How social media affects higher education institutions. In *Social media marketing: Breakthroughs in research and practice* (pp. 1167–1184). IGI Global.
- Bonilla Quijada, M. D. R., Perea Muñoz, E., Corrons, A., & Olmo-Arriaga, J. L. (2022). Engaging students through social media. Findings for the top five universities in the world. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 32(2), 197–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2020.1841069>
- Brodie, R. J., Fehrer, J. A., Jaakkola, E., & Conduit, J. (2019). Actor engagement in networks: Defining the conceptual domain. *Journal of Service Research*, 22(2), 173–188. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670519827385>
- Capriotti, P., Oliveira, A., & Carretón, C. (2023). A model for assessing the active presence of institutions on social media: application to universities worldwide. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 34(2), 1035–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2023.2166188>
- Çatı, K., & Çakır Çömlekçi, S. (2023). Yükseköğretim kurumlarında konumlandırma, pazarlama karması ve performans etkileşimi. *Elektronik Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 22(85), 64–85. <https://doi.org/10.17755/esosder.1126742>
- Chankseliani, M., & McCowan, T. (2021). Higher education and the sustainable development goals. *Higher Education*, 81(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00652-w>
- Chen, Y., Sherren, K., Smit, M., & Lee, K. Y. (2023). Using social media images as data in social science research. *New Media & Society*, 25(4), 849–871. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211038761>
- Civera, A., Cattaneo, M., Meoli, M., Paleari, S., & Seeber, M. (2021). Universities' responses to crises: The influence of competition and reputation on tuition fees. *Higher Education*, 82, 61–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-020-00622-2>
- Dean, D., Arroyo-Gamez, R. E., Punjaisri, K., & Pich, C. (2016). Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3041–3048. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.019>
- del Rocio Bonilla, M., Perea, E., del Olmo, J. L., & Corrons, A. (2020). Insights into user engagement on social media: Case study of a higher education institution. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 30(1), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1693475>
- Farhat, K., Mokhtar, S. S. M., & Salleh, S. B. M. (2021). Role of brand experience and brand affect in creating brand engagement: A case of higher education institutions (HEIs). *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 31(1), 107–135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2020.1759753>
- Garza Salgado, E., & Royo Vela, M. (2019). Brand Fan Pages experience and strength as antecedents to engagement and intensity of use to achieve HEIS' brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(1), 102–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1605437>
- Gibbs, P. (2018). Higher education marketing—does inducing anxiety facilitate critical thinking or more consumerism? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 28(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2017.1311979>
- Hande Karadağ, Petek Tosun & Büşra Ayan (2022). User-generated and brand-generated content as indicators of university brand personality and business strategy. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 34(2), 646–668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2022.2056281>
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002>

- Hollebeek, L. D., Kumar, V., & Srivastava, R. K. (2022). From customer-, to actor-, to stakeholder engagement: Taking stock, conceptualization, and future directions. *Journal of Service Research*, 25(2), 328–343. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670520977680>
- Hollebeek, L. D., Sarstedt, M., Menidjel, C., Sprott, D. E., & Urbonavicius, S. (2023). Hallmarks and potential pitfalls of customer-and consumer engagement scales: A systematic review. *Psychology & Marketing*, 40(6), 1074–1088. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21797>
- Jain, V., Mogaji, E., Sharma, H., & Babbili, A. S. (2024). A multi-stakeholder perspective of relationship marketing in higher education institutions. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 34(2), 502–520. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2022.2034201>
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299305700101>
- Klein, J. G., Smith, N. C., & John, A. (2004). Why we boycott: Consumer motivations for boycott participation. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(3), 92–109. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.3.92.34770>
- Kucuk, S. U. (2019). Consumer brand hate: Steam rolling whatever I see. *Psychology & Marketing*, 36(5), 431–443. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21175>
- Lariviere, B., Bowen, D., Andreassen, T. W., Kunz, W., Sirianni, N. J., Voss, C., De Keyser, A., & De Keyser, A. (2017). Service encounter 2.0: An investigation into the roles of technology, employees and customers. *Journal of Business Research*, 79, 238–246. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2017.03.008>
- Larson, L. R., & Salvador, J. (2020). Unsanctioned user-generated content: Student perceptions of academic brand parody. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26(2), 365–381. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-11-2019-0140>
- Le, Q. H., Fuller, R., Hoang, T. H., & Nguyen, N. (2023a). Branding in higher education: A bibliometric analysis and research agenda. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2023.2289020>
- Le, Q. H., Phan Tan, L., & Hoang, T. H. (2023b). Brand posts and brand co-creation in higher education communities: A social communication process theory. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2023.2239756>
- Liadeli, G., Sotgiu, F., & Verlegh, P. W. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221123250>
- Lomer, S., Papatsiba, V., & Naidoo, R. (2018). Constructing a national higher education brand for the UK: Positional competition and promised capitals. *Studies in Higher Education*, 43(1), 134–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2016.1157859>
- Lowrie, A., & Hemsley-Brown, J. (2011). This thing called marketisation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(11–12), 1081–1086. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2011.614733>
- Lund, B. (2019). Universities engaging social media users: An investigation of quantitative relationships between universities' Facebook followers/interactions and university attributes. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(2), 251–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1641875>
- Maresova, P., Hruska, J., & Kuca, K. (2020). Social media university branding. *Education Sciences*, 10(3), 74. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10030074>
- Maringe, F., & Mourad, M. (2012). Marketing for higher education in developing countries: Emphases and omissions. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 22(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2012.719297>

- Mattison Thompson, F., & Brouthers, K. D. (2021). Digital consumer engagement: National cultural differences and cultural tightness. *Journal of International Marketing*, 29(4), 22–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1069031X211005729>
- McCormick, A. C., & Borden, V. M. (2020). Higher education institutions, types and classifications of. In *The International Encyclopedia of Higher Education Systems and Institutions* (pp. 697–705). Springer.
- Merz, M. A., He, Y., & Vargo, S. L. (2009). The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 37(3), 328–344. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-009-0143-3>
- Narayanan, S., & Singh, G. A. (2025). From stimulus to response: Understanding the causes and outcomes of consumer activism. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 24(2), 820–845. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cb.2438>
- Ng, I. C. L., & Forbes, J. (2009). Education as service: The understanding of university experience through the service logic. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 19(1), 38–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841240902904703>
- Palmer, S. (2014). Characterizing Twitter communication—A case study of international engineering academic units. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 24(2), 257–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2014.907220>
- Pawar, S. K. (2024). Social media in higher education marketing: A systematic literature review and research agenda. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1), 2423059. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2423059>
- Perera, C. H., Nayak, R., & Nguyen, L. T. V. (2022). Social brand engagement and brand positioning for higher educational institutions: An empirical study in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 32(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2020.1841068>
- Pringle, J., & Fritz, S. (2019). The university brand and social media: Using data analytics to assess brand authenticity. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 29(1), 19–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2018.1486345>
- Putranto, H. A., Rizaldi, T., Riskiawan, H. Y., Setyohadi, D. P. S., Atmadji, E. S. J., & Nuryanto, I. H. (2022, September). Measurement of engagement rate on Instagram for business marketing (Case study: MSME of Dowry in Jember). In *2022 International Conference on Electrical and Information Technology (IEIT)* (pp. 317–321). IEEE.
- Sezgin, A. A., Karabacak, Z. İ., Elmasoğlu, K., Türkoğlu, E. (2019). Üniversitelerin Kurumsal Profillerinin Sosyal Medya Boyutu: Devlet ve Vakıf Üniversitesi Ayrımı. *Yükseköğretim Dergisi*, 9(3), 303-314. <https://doi.org/10.2399/yod.19.005>
- Shawky, S., Kubacki, K., Dietrich, T., & Weaven, S. (2020). A dynamic framework for managing customer engagement on social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 567–577. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.03.030>
- Sörensen, I., Vogler, D., Fürst, S., & Schäfer, M. S. (2023). Platforms matter: Analyzing user engagement with social media content of Swiss higher education institutions. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2023.2289009>
- Statista. (2003). Higher education worldwide. <https://www.statista.com/study/123772/higher-education-worldwide/>
- URAP. (2023). Türkiye özel sıralaması. University Ranking by Academic Performance. <https://newtr.urapcenter.org/Rankings/2023-2024/GENEL-SIRALAMASI-2023>
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2016). Institutions and axioms: An extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(1), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-015-0456-3>

- Von Wallpach, S., Voyer, B., Kastanakis, M., & Mühlbacher, H. (2017). Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: Introduction to the special section. *Journal of Business Research*, 70, 395–398. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.08.028>
- Wahid, R. M., & Gunarto, M. (2022). Factors driving social media engagement on Instagram: Evidence from an emerging market. *Journal of Global Marketing*, 35(2), 169–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08911762.2021.1956665>
- Wu, J., Chen, J., Chen, H., Dou, W., & Shao, D. (2019). What to say on social media and how: Effects of communication style and function on online customer engagement in China. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 29(5/6), 691–707. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-11-2018-0243>
- YÖK (n.d.). Yükseköğretim Bilgi Yönetim Sistemi. <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr>

Araştırma Makalesi

Social Media Brand Engagement in The Multi-Stakeholder Environment of Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Foundation Universities in Istanbul

Yükseköğretim Kurumlarının Çok Paydaşlı Yapısında Sosyal Medya Marka Etkileşimi: İstanbul'daki Vakıf Üniversiteleri Örneği

Ahmed Abdulkareem Ahmed AHMED Haliç University, TÖMER ahmedalhayek10@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2728-649X	Şahver OMERAKI ÇEKİRDEKÇİ Dr., Free Researcher sahver.omeraki@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0735-7240
--	---

Genişletilmiş Özet

Yükseköğretim kurumları hem gelişmiş hem de gelişmekte olan ülkelerde yükseköğretimin ticarileşmesi ve uluslararasılaşması sonucunda önemli bir dönüşüm geçirmiştir (Maringe ve Mourad, 2012). Piyasa ekonomisinin serbestleşmesi, bilgi temelli ekonomiye geçiş, yerli ve uluslararası öğrenci ile akademik personel çekme konusundaki kurumlar arası rekabet, kamu finansmanının azalması ve kaliteyi sürdürme ile kâr elde etme baskısı, yükseköğretimde marka stratejilerinin kullanılmasını zorunlu kılan başlıca faktörler arasındadır (ör. Civera vd., 2021; Gibbs, 2018; Lomer vd., 2018).

Sosyal medya platformları, yükseköğretim kurumlarına marka kimliği oluşturma ve öğrenciler ile diğer paydaşlarla ilişki kurma ve bu ilişkileri sürdürme konusunda çeşitli fırsatlar sunmaktadır (Le vd., 2023b; Pawar, 2024). Yapılan araştırmalar, sosyal medyanın potansiyel öğrencilerin yükseköğretim kurumu ve program seçimindeki karar verme süreçlerine katkısını ve daha da önemlisi, öğrencilerin kurumlarla etkileşim kurmasını kolaylaştırmadaki rolünü vurgulamaktadır (ör. Bélanger vd., 2014; Pawar, 2024). Günümüzde yüksek öğretim kurumlarının yalnızca öğrencilerle değil; akademik ve idari personel, mezunlar, veliler, akreditasyon kurumları, fon sağlayan kuruluşlar, devlet kurumları, sektör profesyonelleri ve genel toplum gibi çeşitli paydaşlarla da etkileşim kurması ve bu ilişkileri geliştirmesi gerekmektedir. Bu paydaşlar, yükseköğretim kurumlarının marka anlamlarının ve değerlerinin ortak yaratım sürecini şekillendirmektedir (ör. Jain vd., 2024; Ng ve Forbes, 2009).

Mevcut literatür, yükseköğretim kurumlarının çok paydaşlı ortamında kullanılan sosyal medya stratejilerinin incelenmesi gerektiğine dikkat çekmektedir (Jain vd., 2024; Le vd., 2023a; Pringle ve Fritz, 2019). Paydaşların marka değerinin oluşumuna katkı sağlamasıyla birlikte YÖK'ler, paydaş katılımını sağlamak amacıyla sosyal medya içerikleri üretmektedir. Bu çalışma, literatürdeki bu çağrıya cevap vermektedir. Ayrıca mevcut çalışmalar çoğunlukla gelişmiş ülkelerde yürütülmekte olup, gelişmekte olan pazarlarda yükseköğretim kurumlarının sosyal medya pazarlama stratejilerinin anlaşılması için daha fazla araştırmaya ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır (Pawar, 2024). Bu çalışma, öğrenciler ve potansiyel öğrenciler yerine, yükseköğretim kurumlarının çeşitli paydaşlarla etkileşim kurmak amacıyla sosyal medya içerikleri üretme biçimlerine odaklanmaktadır.

Veriler, İstanbul'daki ilk 20 vakıf üniversitesinin (URAP, 2023) Instagram hesaplarından 1 Mayıs 2023 - 31 Ağustos 2023 tarihleri arasında manuel olarak toplanmıştır. Vakıf üniversiteleri, sayılarındaki sürekli artış ve Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK) tarafından belirlenen kontenjanları doldurmak amacıyla daha başarılı öğrencileri çekme baskısı nedeniyle kamu üniversiteleri yerine özellikle seçilmiştir. Bu baskı, vakıf üniversitelerinin tanıtım faaliyetlerinde çeşitli iletişim kanallarını daha yoğun kullanmasına neden olmaktadır. Veri toplama süresi, üniversitelerin tanıtım etkinlikleriyle ve özellikle kayıt günleriyle örtüşmektedir.

Tüm paylaşımlar, öncelikle hedef kitleye yönelik tekrar eden tema ve desenleri belirleyebilmek amacıyla kapsamlı biçimde incelenmiştir. Bu ön incelemeler doğrultusunda, dört farklı paydaş temelli etkileşim türü belirlenmiştir: akademik etkileşim, toplumsal etkileşim, öğrenci etkileşimi ve hibrit etkileşim. Ardından, içerik analizi yöntemiyle her etkileşim türü kapsamında yer alan paylaşımlar kategorize edilmiştir.

Analiz süreci şu şekilde ilerlemiştir: Her tema (paydaş temelli etkileşim) için gönderiler bağımsız olarak içerik türüne (görsel, video, veya karusel- birden fazla görsel veya video içeren gönderi), beğeni ve yorum sayılarına göre analiz edilmiş ve her biri için yüzdelikler ile ortalamalar hesaplanmıştır. Sonrasında, genel etkileşim oranı, gönderi başına toplam beğeni ve yorum sayısının, ilgili üniversitenin Instagram hesabındaki takipçi sayısına oranlanmasıyla hesaplanmıştır – bu oran literatürde kullanılan bir yöntemdir (Putranto vd., 2022). Bulgular, her tema, içerik türü ve genel etkileşim oranı üzerinden sunulmuştur. Belirlenen temaları değerlendirme aracı olarak kelime bulutlarından da yararlanılmıştır.

Bulgular, yükseköğretim kurumlarının çok paydaşlı yapısında etkileşim kurmak için paydaş odaklı bir perspektifin önemine işaret etmektedir. Öğrenci etkileşimi, öğrenciler ve potansiyel öğrencilerle etkileşim kurmak amacıyla hizmet deneyimine ait farklı unsurların kullanıldığı gönderileri içermektedir. Bu paylaşımlar genellikle kampüs yaşamına dair öğrenci deneyimlerini aktarmakta, öğrenci başarılarını ve görüşlerini sunmakta, kişisel ve akademik gelişimi teşvik ederek öğrencilerin sunduğu hizmetlere katılmalarını özendirmekte ve pozitif bir zihniyet kazandırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Akademik etkileşim, üniversitelerin akademik değerini vurgulayan içeriklerle ilişki kurmayı hedefleyen gönderileri kapsamaktadır. Bu içeriklerin başlıca yaratıcıları akademik personel olmakla birlikte, diğer iç ve dış paydaşlar da sürece katılmaktadır (ör. diğer akademik/idari personel, akreditasyon kurumları, akademik etkinlik katılımcıları). Toplumsal etkileşim ise, yükseköğretim kurumlarının daha geniş toplumla olumlu bir kurumsal imaj geliştirmek için halkla ilişkiler stratejilerini kullandığı gönderileri kapsamaktadır. Bu tür içerikler, sosyal sorumluluk projeleri gibi toplumu içine alan faaliyetlerin duyurulmasına yöneliktir. Hibrit etkileşim ise öğrenciler ve velileri, potansiyel öğrenciler ve velileri, mezunlar, akademik/idari personel ve genel toplum gibi birden fazla paydaşla etkileşim kurmayı hedefleyen içerikleri kapsamaktadır.

Bu çalışma, çok paydaşlı ortamlarda aktörlerin etkileşimini anlama çağrısına yanıt olarak (Le vd., 2023a; Pringle ve Fritz, 2019), yükseköğretim kurumlarının sosyal medya içerikleri aracılığıyla farklı marka paydaşlarıyla doğrudan ve dolaylı etkileşim kurma biçimlerini incelemektedir. Çalışma, özellikle yükseköğretim kurumlarının markalaşmasına odaklanarak marka yönetimi literatürüne çeşitli katkılar sunmaktadır. Birincisi, sosyal medya etkileşimine ilişkin çalışmalar çoğunlukla öğrenci etkileşimi ya da kurumsal markalaşmanın ölçümüne odaklanmakta olup (bkz. Le vd., 2023a; Pawar, 2024), yükseköğretim kurumlarının aynı anda birden fazla paydaşla nasıl etkileşim kurduğuna dair kuramsal açıklamalar sınırlıdır (Jain vd., 2024). İkincisi, çalışma gelişmekte olan pazarlarda yükseköğretim kurumlarının sosyal medya stratejilerine ilişkin ilk değerlendirmeleri sunmaktadır (Pawar, 2024). Üçüncüsü, sosyal medya etkileşimi genellikle nicel göstergelerle (beğeni, yorum, paylaşım) ölçülmektedir (ör. Bartoloni ve Ancillai, 2024; Farhat vd., 2021; Perera vd., 2022). Bu çalışma, sosyal medya içeriklerinin farklı paydaşlarla etkileşimi kolaylaştırma biçimini anlamak üzere nitel ve nicel ölçümleri birlikte kullanmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, çok paydaşlı ortamlarda rekabet avantajı sağlamak isteyen yükseköğretim kurumları için yönetsel çıkarımlar sunmakta. Yükseköğretim kurumlarının, paydaş ekosisteminin çeşitliliği göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, her bir etkileşim türüne yönelik özel içerikler üretmeleri gerekmektedir. Araştırma bulguları, her bir etkileşim biçimi ve kullanılan içerik türleri (görsel, karusel veya video) bakımından beğeni ve yorum sayılarında farklılıklar olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Genelleme yapmak güç olsa da gönderilerin zamanlaması ile içeriklerin paydaşlara olan ilgisinin etkileşimi artıran ya da azaltan önemli etkenler olduğu açıktır. Etkileşim biçimlerinin çeşitliliği ve oluşturulabilecek içerik türlerinin farklılığı dikkate alındığında, yükseköğretim kurumlarının stratejik bir sosyal medya planlamasından yoksun oldukları görülmektedir. Bazı üniversitelerin belirli etkileşim biçimlerine yönelik hiç paylaşımda bulunmadığı, bazılarının ise yalnızca belirli içerik türlerini tercih ettiği gözlemlenmiştir. Üniversite öğrencilerinin medya tüketim alışkanlıkları ve kurumların etkileşim kurmayı amaçladığı çeşitli paydaş grupları dikkate alındığında, yükseköğretim kurumlarının sosyal medya platformlarını stratejik biçimde planlamaları gerekmektedir (Lund, 2019). Yükseköğretimin

uluslararasılaşması ve ticarileşmesi ile birlikte ve çok paydaşlı yapının varlığı bağlamında, tanıtım stratejilerinin kurumların stratejik planlamalarının bir parçası hâline getirilmesi elzemdir. Bu durum, tüm iletişim biçimlerinin yönetiminden sorumlu olacak kurumsal bir iletişim biriminin oluşturulmasını da zorunlu kılmaktadır.

Bu çalışma yalnızca İstanbul'daki ilk 20 vakıf üniversitesine odaklanmış olup, bulguların devlet üniversiteleri ya da farklı öğrenci seçme ve yerleştirme sistemlerine sahip ülkeler için genellenebilirliğini sınırlandırmaktadır. Veri toplama süreci belirli bir dönemde ve yalnızca tek bir sosyal medya platformu (Instagram) üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Gelecek araştırmalarda, önerilen etkileşim biçimlerinin daha iyi anlaşılabilmesi amacıyla, akademik yıl boyunca farklı sosyal medya platformları üzerinden yürütülen stratejilere ilişkin veri toplanarak kapsam genişletilebilir. Son olarak, bu çalışma yalnızca paylaşım içeriklerine ilişkin nicel verileri (beğeni ve yorum sayıları) temel almıştır. Paylaşımlardaki içeriklerin ve kullanılan etiketlerin (hashtag) analizine dayalı yapılacak çalışmalar, literatüre önemli katkılar sunabilir.