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# Instagram Content Analysis of a Higher Education Institution using Social Media Analytics and Topic Modeling

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## Abstract

Social media is an important communication channel for higher education institutions to share information and build institutional identity. This study analyzes Instagram content from a selected institutional account, including collaborative posts involving other accounts. A descriptive quantitative approach was applied to 100 valid posts collected through web scraping. The analysis combined Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) to describe content formats, posting activity, likes, and comments with Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to identify recurring themes in captions. The results showed that image posts were the most common format, followed by carousel posts and videos. LDA identified three main themes: student achievement and development, religious values and character building, and institutional collaboration and community engagement. Religious values and character building accounted for the largest proportion of posts and had the highest average numbers of likes and comments among the identified topics. Content specifically focused on student admission was less prominent in the identified themes. These findings provide descriptive insights for future content planning; however, they do not establish causal relationships between content characteristics, engagement, or admission outcomes.

**Keywords:** higher education, instagram analytics, latent dirichlet allocation, social media analytics, topic modeling.

## 1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally transformed communication practices across various sectors, including higher education. Universities increasingly utilize digital platforms not only to disseminate academic information but also to strengthen institutional branding, establish relationships with stakeholders, and attract prospective students. Among various digital platforms, Instagram has become one of the most influential social media channels because of its visual-oriented content, interactive features, and high engagement among young users. As a result, Instagram has become an essential component of higher education marketing strategies, particularly in promoting academic programs and supporting new student admission (NSA) campaigns [1].

The competition among higher education institutions has intensified the importance of digital marketing strategies that are capable of reaching prospective students effectively. Modern applicants increasingly rely on digital information and social media interactions before making enrollment decisions. Consequently, higher education institutions are expected not only to maintain active social media accounts but also to understand which types of content generate the highest engagement and positively influence prospective students' perceptions. Recent studies indicate that social media marketing activities significantly influence institutional trust, brand recognition, and students' intention to enroll in higher education institutions [2].

Social Media Analytics (SMA) has emerged as an important analytical approach for extracting meaningful insights from social media data. By analyzing user interactions, posting behavior, textual content, and engagement metrics, SMA enables organizations to evaluate communication effectiveness and formulate evidence-based marketing strategies. In higher education, SMA can support institutional decision-making by identifying audience interests, measuring engagement performance, and understanding communication patterns reflected in published content. Furthermore, integrating text mining techniques such as Topic Modeling allows researchers to discover hidden

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themes within social media content, providing deeper insights than conventional descriptive engagement analysis [3].

Although numerous studies have investigated social media marketing in higher education, existing research primarily emphasizes engagement metrics, promotional strategies, or student perceptions. Comparatively fewer studies have integrated social media analytics with topic modeling to explore dominant communication themes that may contribute to optimizing new student admission strategies. This research gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive analytical framework capable of combining quantitative engagement analysis with textual content analysis to support strategic decision-making in higher education marketing [1].

Therefore, this study proposes a Social Media Analytics framework to analyze Instagram content published by higher education institutions. The research integrates Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)-based Topic Modeling to identify content characteristics, posting patterns, engagement performance, and dominant communication themes. The analysis is conducted using Instagram datasets collected through web scraping, providing empirical evidence regarding how institutional social media content can support new student admission strategies.

The contributions of this study are threefold. First, it demonstrates a reproducible descriptive workflow that combines Social Media Analytics and topic modeling for Instagram content. Second, it identifies recurring themes in posts collected from one higher education institution's primary account, including collaborative posts. Third, it offers data-informed suggestions for future content planning while recognizing that the relationship between topics, engagement, and student admission outcomes requires further testing.

## 2 Literature Review

Social media has become an important communication and marketing channel for higher education institutions, particularly for attracting, informing, and engaging prospective students. A systematic review of social media research in higher education marketing identified student engagement, branding, enrollment decision-making, relationship management, and strategic marketing as major research areas [1]. Previous research has also shown that social media is increasingly incorporated into student recruitment strategies, reflecting a shift from conventional promotional communication toward more interactive and digitally oriented approaches [4]. In Indonesia, digital marketing strategies involving social media have been found to positively influence prospective students' interest in registering, which subsequently affects enrollment decisions [5]. These findings indicate that social media serves not only as a promotional medium but also as an important component of the student recruitment and decision-making process.

Several empirical studies have demonstrated that the characteristics of social media content influence prospective students' engagement and perceptions of higher education institutions. [6] found that social media marketing activities significantly influence prospective students' behavioral engagement, with brand equity playing an important mediating role. In Indonesia, [2] similarly demonstrated that social media marketing can increase students' interest in higher education through trust and brand recognition. These studies emphasize that effective social media communication should not merely focus on posting frequency, but also consider the informational, emotional, and relational value of the content.

Instagram has become particularly relevant for higher education communication because of its visual and interactive characteristics. Studies examining university Instagram accounts have shown that content strategy is closely related to audience engagement[7]. Other research has shown that institutional life, visual storytelling, video, and socially oriented content can generate substantial audience participation [8]. In the Indonesian higher education context, content type, emotional appeal, hashtags, and interactive elements have also been identified as important factors influencing Instagram engagement [9]. Furthermore, quantitative content analysis of a higher education institution's Instagram account found that the implementation of dialogic communication principles remained limited, particularly in facilitating direct interaction between the institution and its public [10], [11]. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of university Instagram communication depends not only on the amount of content published but also on how content facilitates interaction and engagement.

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Beyond measuring engagement, recent research has increasingly applied computational approaches to identify patterns and themes within social media content. Topic modeling enables researchers to move beyond descriptive engagement indicators, such as likes, comments, and posting frequency, by identifying underlying topics within large collections of social media text. A systematic review of topic modeling applications in short-text social media analysis highlighted its potential for discovering thematic structures while also emphasizing challenges related to topic evaluation and meaningful interpretation [12]. This approach is therefore relevant for examining not only how audiences respond to university content but also what themes are predominantly communicated through institutional social media.

Recent studies also indicate that social media analytics can contribute directly to student acquisition and enrollment strategies. Prospective students frequently use social media to obtain information about universities and academic programs, while limited institutional engagement can hinder their access to relevant information [13]. More recent evidence demonstrates that the quality of interaction-oriented content is positively associated with student acquisition, suggesting that universities need to consider not only what information is communicated but also how it is presented and delivered [14]. This strengthens the importance of combining engagement analysis with content-based approaches when evaluating social media strategies.

The importance of engagement becomes even more evident in the context of student recruitment. Research on prospective students has emphasized the importance of engagement, relationship building, creative visual content, and practical application information in social media recruitment strategies [15]. More recent evidence indicates that active digital engagement, including content sharing, peer discussion, and virtual campus experiences, is associated with students' enrollment decisions [16].

These findings suggest that universities should evaluate social media not merely based on the quantity of published content but also on the extent to which the content generates meaningful interaction and provides information relevant to prospective students. Despite these developments, previous studies tend to focus separately on social media marketing effectiveness, engagement metrics, or content characteristics, while relatively fewer studies combine quantitative social media analytics with topic modeling to examine what themes universities actually communicate and whether these themes align with prospective students' recruitment needs. Therefore, this study combines social media analytics, exploratory data analysis, and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to identify engagement patterns and dominant themes in higher education institutions' Instagram content. This approach provides a more comprehensive perspective by connecting content characteristics, audience engagement, and thematic communication, thereby supporting the development of more targeted social media strategies for higher education student recruitment.

## 3 Research Method

This study employed a quantitative descriptive approach to analyze Instagram content as part of social media analytics for optimizing new student admission strategies in higher education. The research framework consisted of five main stages: data collection, data preprocessing, exploratory data analysis, topic modeling, and result interpretation. The overall research methodology is illustrated in Figure 1.

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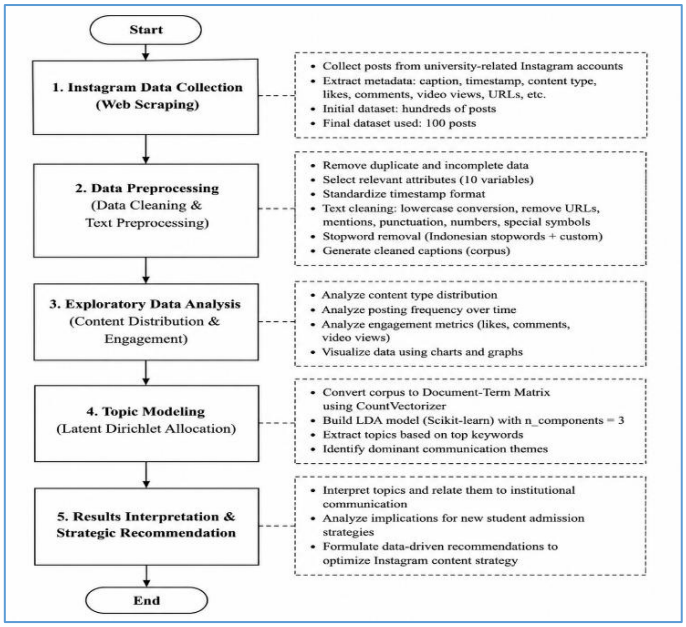



**Figure 1 Research Framework**

### 3.1 Data Collection

The dataset was collected from the official Instagram account of a higher education institution, using a web scraping technique. The collection focused on posts retrieved through this account, including collaborative posts involving other Instagram accounts. Therefore, the ownerUsername metadata may identify a collaborator rather than the primary account. The collected metadata included captions, publication timestamps, content types, likes, comments, video views, account information, and post URLs.

Ten attributes were selected for analysis: post ID, owner username, caption, timestamp, content type, number of likes, number of comments, video views, post URL, and display URL. The raw CSV contained 101 rows. After validation, one row without a valid post ID, caption, or publication timestamp was excluded, leaving 100 valid posts for analysis.

### 3.2 Data Preprocessing

Data preprocessing was conducted to improve data quality and prepare textual information for analysis. The raw dataset contained 101 rows. One incomplete row without a valid post ID, caption, or publication timestamp was excluded. Among the remaining 100 posts, no duplicate post IDs or empty captions were identified. Timestamps were standardized to datetime format for temporal analysis.

Text preprocessing focused on cleaning Instagram captions. The process included converting text into lowercase letters, removing URLs, user mentions, punctuation, numerical characters, special symbols, and excessive whitespace. Indonesian stopwords were removed using the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) library, and additional custom stopwords representing institutional names and frequently occurring non-informative words were incorporated to improve topic extraction quality. The resulting cleaned captions constituted the corpus used for topic modeling.

### 3.3 Exploratory Data Analysis

Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) was performed to describe the dataset before text mining. The analysis covered content-type distribution, monthly posting frequency, and engagement metrics, including likes and comments. These descriptive analyses characterize the observed posts but do not establish causal relationships between posting frequency, content characteristics, and engagement.

### 3.4 Topic Modeling Using Latent Dirichlet Allocation

The primary analytical method employed in this research was Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), an unsupervised machine learning algorithm designed to identify latent semantic topics within textual documents. LDA assumes that each document consists of multiple topics, while each topic is represented by a probability distribution over words.

Before model construction, the cleaned captions were transformed into a Document-Term Matrix (DTM) using the Count Vectorizer technique available in the Scikit-learn library. The LDA

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model was then developed using three predefined topics ($n_components = 3$) with a fixed random state to ensure reproducibility of the analysis.

The implementation was performed using Python and the Scikit-learn library. The three topics were interpreted from the highest-weighted words generated by the final LDA model. Topic labels were assigned by examining the semantic patterns of these keywords and the associated captions

### 3.5 Result Interpretation

The final stage involved interpreting the results of Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) and Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) to outline communication themes and engagement patterns in posts from the primary account, including collaborative posts. The findings from dominant topic analysis and interaction patterns were then formulated into strategic recommendations to optimize social media utilization for supporting new student admissions. These recommendations are presented as practical implications rather than causal claims regarding the effectiveness of specific content and are discussed from the perspective of digital marketing and institutional communication in higher education.

## 4 Results and Analysis

### 4.1 Exploratory Data Analysis

The analyzed dataset consisted of 100 valid Instagram posts collected through the selected institutional Instagram account, including collaborative posts involving other accounts, including collaborative posts involving other accounts. The raw CSV contained 101 rows; one incomplete row without a valid post ID, caption, or publication timestamp was excluded. No duplicate IDs or empty captions were found among the 100 retained posts. The final dataset included captions, publication dates, content types, likes, comments, and other metadata used for EDA and topic modeling.

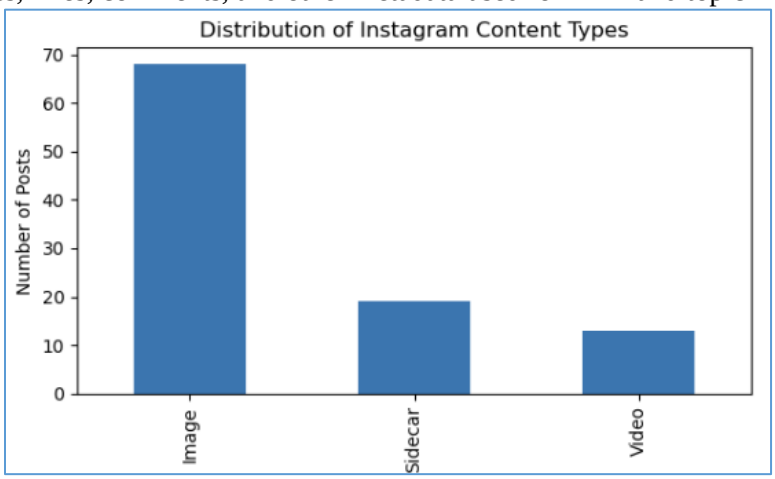



**Figure 2 Distribution of Instagram Content Types**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of content types in the analyzed posts. Image posts accounted for the largest share (68 posts), followed by carousel posts (19) and videos (13). This distribution describes the formats present in the dataset; it does not, by itself, demonstrate that one format is more effective than another.

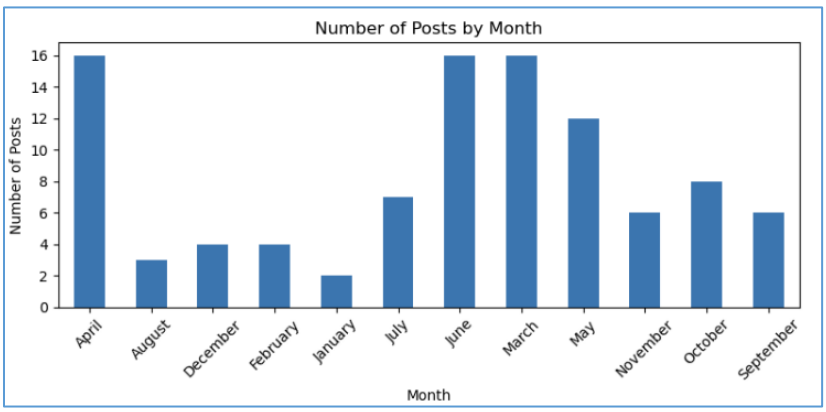



**Figure 3 Monthly Distribution of Instagram Posts**

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Figure 3 presents monthly posting activity during the observation period. The number of posts varied across months. Because this study did not test the statistical relationship between monthly posting frequency and engagement, the observed variation should not be interpreted as evidence that a more consistent posting schedule increases engagement. A regular schedule may be considered as an operational planning option, but its relationship with engagement should be evaluated using additional analysis.

**Table 1 Instagram engagement statistics**

| Metric | Value |
|---|---|
| Total Posts | 100.00 |
| Average Likes | 107.40 |
| Average Comments | 1.11 |
| Maximum Likes | 538.00 |
| Maximum Comments | 9.00 |

Table 1 summarizes engagement in the analyzed dataset. Likes and comments varied between posts. Descriptive differences in engagement may reflect multiple factors, and the current analysis does not establish that content characteristics cause higher audience responses.

The Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) model identified three dominant topics in the Instagram captions. The topics were interpreted based on their representative keywords and the associated captions: (1) Student Achievement and Development, (2) Religious Values and Character Building, and (3) Institutional Collaboration and Community Engagement. To further examine the distribution of these topics and their associated audience responses, each post was assigned to the topic with the highest probability generated by the LDA model. The number and percentage of posts, together with the average numbers of likes and comments for each topic, are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2 Distribution of posts and engagement by topic**

| Topic | Number of Posts | Percentage (%) | Average Likes | Average Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Student Achievement and Development | 29 | 29.0 | 98.00 | 0.79 |
| Religious Values and Character Building | 59 | 59.0 | 115.10 | 1.27 |
| Institutional Collaboration and Community Engagement | 12 | 12.0 | 92.25 | 1.08 |
| Total / Overall Average | 100 | 100.0 | 107.40 | 1.11 |

As shown in Table 2, Topic 2, representing religious values and character building, was the most prevalent theme, accounting for 59 posts (59% of the dataset). This topic also recorded the highest average engagement in terms of likes and comments, with 115.10 likes and 1.27 comments per post. Topic 1, related to student achievement and development, comprised 29 posts (29%), with averages of 98.00 likes and 0.79 comments. Meanwhile, Topic 3, concerning institutional collaboration and community engagement, represented 12 posts (12%) and received an average of 92.25 likes and 1.08 comments per post.

These findings indicate that religious values and character-building content constituted the largest proportion of the analyzed posts and had the highest average numbers of likes and comments among the three topics. However, these differences are descriptive and do not establish that a particular topic causes higher engagement. Other factors, such as posting time, visual presentation, audience characteristics, and the nature of collaborative posts, may also contribute to variations in audience responses.

**Table 3 Average engagement by content type**

| Content type | Number of posts | Average likes | Average comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| Image | 68 | 92.66 | 1.03 |
| Carousel (Sidecar) | 19 | 149.79 | 1.00 |
| Video | 13 | 122.54 | 1.69 |
| Total / overall average | 100 | 107.40 | 1.11 |

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Table 3 compares audience engagement across different content types. Image posts were the most frequently published format, accounting for 68 posts, with averages of 92.66 likes and 1.03 comments per post. Carousel posts (Sidecar) recorded the highest average number of likes, at 149.79 per post, while video posts received the highest average number of comments, at 1.69 per post. These results indicate that engagement patterns varied across content formats. Nevertheless, the findings are descriptive and do not demonstrate that content format alone determines audience engagement.

### 4.2 Topic Modeling Analysis

To identify the dominant communication themes, this study applied Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) using three predefined topics. Prior to model development, Instagram captions were preprocessed through text cleaning, stopword removal, and vectorization using the CountVectorizer technique. The resulting document-term matrix was then analyzed using the LDA algorithm implemented in the Scikit-learn library.

**Table 4 Dominant topics identified by LDA**

| Topic | Representative Keywords | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Topic 1 | semangat, mahasiswa, prestasi, Indonesia, muda, kerja, studi, provinsi, inspirasi, nyata | Student Achievement and Development |
| Topic 2 | ramadhan, penuh, kajian, menjaga, kehidupan, kebaikan, membawa, pengingat, suci, mahasiswa | Religious Values and Character Building |
| Topic 3 | balangan, pendidikan, kabupaten, fakultas, teknik, akademika, masyarakat, generasi, hukum, langkah | Institutional Collaboration and Community Engagement |

The final LDA model identified three dominant themes in the captions. Topic 1 was interpreted as student achievement and development, with representative terms including “mahasiswa,” “prestasi,” “muda,” and “inspirasi.” Topic 2 reflected religious values and character building, represented by terms such as “Ramadhan,” “kajian,” and “kehidupan.” Topic 3 represented institutional collaboration and community engagement, with terms including “Balangan,” “pendidikan,” “fakultas,” “masyarakat,” and “kabupaten.” These labels are interpretive summaries of the topic-word distributions.

The first topic focuses on student achievement and development, reflecting posts about students, achievement, inspiration, and educational or professional growth. This theme suggests that the account uses Instagram to highlight student-related activities and accomplishments. The interpretation is based on caption keywords and should not be taken as a direct measure of the impact of these posts on institutional branding.

The second topic emphasizes religious values and character building, with terms related to Ramadan, religious study, and positive conduct. This indicates that the account also uses Instagram to communicate religious and character-oriented messages. The third topic concerns institutional collaboration and community engagement, reflected in terms associated with education, faculties, the local region, and the community. The topics describe recurring caption themes rather than measured effects on audience behavior.

### 4.3 Discussion

The findings show how Social Media Analytics can combine descriptive analysis and topic modeling to characterize Instagram content from one higher education institution’s primary account, including collaborative posts. EDA describes the distribution of post formats and observed engagement, while LDA identifies three recurring themes in captions. The analysis is descriptive and does not independently establish the causal effectiveness of the content strategy.

The identified topics indicate that the analyzed posts emphasize student achievement and development, religious values and character building, and institutional collaboration and community engagement. Content specifically focused on student admission appears less prominent in the interpreted topics. This observation should be understood within the limits of the 100-post dataset and the selected observation period.

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From a digital communication perspective, the findings suggest that the institution could consider complementing its existing content with practical information for prospective students, such as study programs, scholarships, admission procedures, student testimonials, campus facilities, and graduate career prospects. These are recommendations for future content planning; their effect on engagement or admissions outcomes would need to be evaluated separately.

Overall, combining EDA and LDA provides a descriptive way to summarize content formats, observed engagement, and recurring themes in Instagram captions. The findings can inform content review and planning, but the present study does not validate the causal effectiveness of a particular communication strategy or demonstrate an increase in student recruitment.

## 5 Conclusion

This study applied Social Media Analytics to examine Instagram content collected from one higher education institution primary account, including collaborative posts involving other accounts. EDA was used to describe content formats, posting activity, and engagement metrics, while LDA was used to identify recurring themes in captions. The final analytical dataset contained 100 valid posts. Image posts were the most common format, followed by carousel posts and videos. Likes and comments varied across posts, but the descriptive analysis did not test whether posting frequency or content type statistically predicts engagement. Therefore, the results do not support a causal claim that a consistent posting schedule necessarily increases engagement. Further analysis would be needed to assess such relationships. LDA identified three themes: student achievement and development, religious values and character building, and institutional collaboration and community engagement. These themes suggest that the account uses Instagram to communicate student-related accomplishments, institutional values, and community activities. Content specifically focused on student admission was less prominent in the identified themes, indicating a potential area for future content planning. This study contributes a descriptive workflow for examining institutional Instagram content by integrating EDA and LDA. The analysis demonstrates how public post metadata and captions can be used to summarize content patterns and themes. However, the dataset is limited to 100 posts from one primary account and includes collaborative posts; the findings should not be generalized to all higher education institutions or interpreted as evidence of causal effects on engagement or admissions. Future research could compare multiple higher education institutions, extend the observation period, and apply additional methods such as sentiment analysis, engagement prediction, or recommendation systems. Further studies could also test the association between posting frequency, content type, topic, and engagement using appropriate statistical methods and account-level context.

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