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Social Media Rebranding Strategies for Expanding Audience Reach on Higher Education Institution Promotions and Admissions

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Abstract. This study investigates social media rebranding strategies for expanding audience reach in higher education institution promotions and admissions, focusing on computer-mediated communication (CMC) in private universities. UhamkaTV is a case study to understand CMC's role in adapting to the evolving social media environment. The research delves into rebranding efforts, including alterations in usernames, logos, and content types and their effect on audience engagement and reach. Emphasis is placed on the significance of ongoing analysis and evaluation to identify urgent concerns such as a decline in followers, interactions, and content reach. The results indicate that these efforts led to a more cohesive brand image, increased audience interaction, and improved promotion of academic programs. Furthermore, researchers found that effective internal communication and coordination are crucial for successfully implementing rebranding strategies. This study offers valuable insights for higher education institutions seeking to optimize their social media presence, drive admissions, and adapt to the rapidly changing digital landscape. By rebranding and diversifying content, institutions can enhance their audience reach and engagement, ultimately fostering growth in their admissions numbers.

Keywords. digital marketing, social media marketing, computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology and social media has transformed how higher education institutions communicate and promote themselves to prospective students, parents, and the wider public [1]. Social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have become powerful tools for engaging audiences and providing critical information about academic programs, campus life, and admissions processes [2]. As the competition among higher education institutions intensifies, adopting effective social media strategies has become increasingly important to attract and retain a diverse student body [3]. This study explores the rebranding strategies of social media platforms to expand audience reach in higher education institution promotions and admissions, focusing on computer-mediated communication (CMC)

in private universities [4], using UhamkaTV as a case study. Rebranding on social media often involves changes to usernames, logos, and content types, aiming to enhance the institution's online presence and reach a broader audience [5].

Adapting to the ever-changing social media landscape is crucial for higher education institutions as it allows them to maintain and improve their market position [6]. However, many institutions continue to operate within their comfort zones, overlooking the potential benefits of social media rebranding [7]. The study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the rebranding strategies employed by UhamkaTV, a private higher education institution, and evaluating their impact on audience engagement and reach. In addition to analyzing rebranding efforts, the study emphasizes the importance of ongoing analysis and evaluation to identify pressing concerns, such as a decline in followers, interactions, and content reach. By adopting a case study approach, the research offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities associated with social media rebranding in higher education.

2. Literature Review

Social media platforms have become indispensable tools for promoting higher education institutions and their admission campaigns. Over the years, many institutions have adopted social media to reach a wider audience, enhance their brand image, and effectively communicate with prospective students [8]. In light of these developments, rebranding on social media has emerged as an essential strategy for institutions seeking to expand their audience reach and revitalize their online presence [9]. The literature on social media rebranding in higher education has focused on several key aspects, including the reasons for rebranding, the rebranding process, and the outcomes of rebranding efforts. One of the primary reasons for rebranding is a decline in follower numbers or engagement with published content [10]. A study by Peruta & Shields [11] suggests that institutions may decide to rebrand their social media presence when they experience a significant and continuous decline in their audience reach or interaction with their content. The rebranding process involves various strategic decisions, including changes to the institution's social media usernames, logo redesign, and content diversification [12]. According to Kuoppakangas et al. [13], an effective rebranding strategy should consider the institution's target audience and preferences, ensuring the new branding elements resonate with them.

Diversifying content types is also a crucial aspect of rebranding, as this can result in a more engaging and varied online presence [14]. Additionally, maximizing the use of platform features, such as Instagram's reels and stories, can help enhance the effectiveness of promotional efforts [15]. Various studies have explored the outcomes of social media rebranding efforts, with most emphasizing that executing a well-planned strategy is crucial for achieving success [16]. A successful rebranding campaign can lead to increased audience reach, improved engagement with content, and more consistent and memorable brand identity across multiple platforms [17]. Furthermore, Joseph et al. [18] note that internal coordination and communication play a vital role in the success of rebranding efforts, as they help monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to ensure the strategy's effectiveness. Despite the growing body of literature on social media rebranding in higher education, there remains a need for more empirical research to explore the effectiveness of different rebranding strategies and their impact on audience reach and engagement. Studies should also investigate the role of factors, such as institutional context and target audience characteristics, in shaping the success of rebranding efforts [19].

3. Method

This study aims to investigate the social media rebranding strategies employed by UhamkaTV, a higher education institution, to expand its audience reach and improve its promotions and admissions efforts. A qualitative research design was adopted to achieve this goal, with data collected through multiple sources, including in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation of UhamkaTV's social media platforms. The study's participants were purposively selected, comprising key personnel from UhamkaTV involved in rebranding and responsible for managing the institution's social media presence. In-depth interviews were conducted with these participants to gather their insights and experiences regarding the rebranding efforts and the strategies used to engage with the target audience.

4. Results

The results of this study on the rebranding strategies of UhamkaTV, a higher education institution's social media presence, provide insights into the effectiveness of these strategies in expanding audience reach and engagement. The case study explores the reasons behind the rebranding effort, the implementation process, and the outcomes of the rebranding strategy in terms of audience reach and interaction. Initially, UhamkaTV experienced a continuous decline in follower numbers and engagement with their published content, prompting the institution to seek solutions to these issues. Upon analyzing and evaluating its social media presence, UhamkaTV decided to undertake a rebranding effort to revitalize its online image and expand its audience reach.

Figure 1: PMB Uhamka



Source: @uhamkapmb [20]

The rebranding process from PMB Uhamka (Figure 1) to UhamkaTV (Figure 2) involved several strategic decisions, including changing the institution's social media username and redesigning its logo. The content strategy was also diversified to better cater to the target audience's preferences and create a more engaging online presence. Additionally, UhamkaTV maximized the use of platform-specific features, such as Instagram's reels and stories, to enhance the effectiveness of its promotional efforts. Upon implementing the rebranding strategy, UhamkaTV experienced a significant increase in audience reach and engagement with its content.

Figure 2: UhamkaTV



Source: @uhamkatv [21]

The redesigned logo and diversified content strategy created a more consistent and memorable brand identity across multiple platforms. Moreover, the institution observed improved interaction with its content, including increased likes, comments, and shares, indicating higher audience engagement. Internal coordination and communication played a crucial role in the success of the rebranding effort. UhamkaTV's management team closely monitored the progress of the rebranding process and made necessary adjustments to ensure its effectiveness. This ongoing evaluation allowed the institution to identify areas of improvement and further refine its rebranding strategy to better cater to its audience's needs.

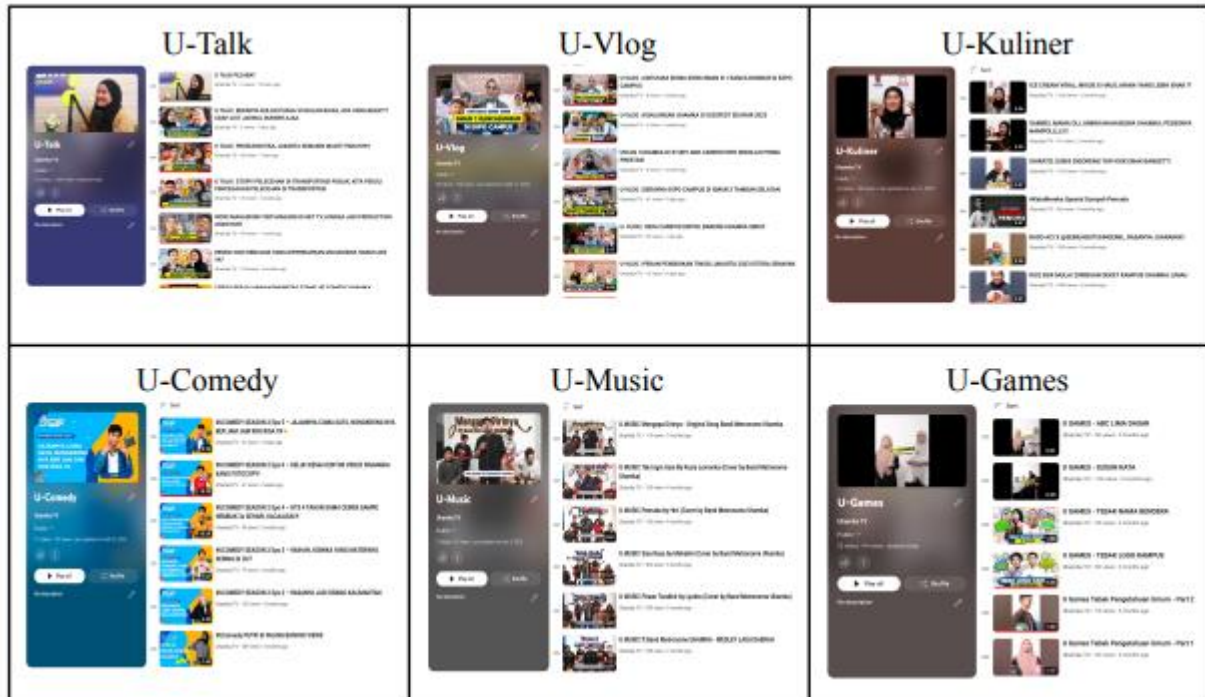
4.1 Positioning social media: As a promotional platform with more diverse content (repositioning)

The development of social media now offers various functions to meet the needs of society. Uhamka Promotion Bureau - BPA UHAMKA (*Biro Promosi Uhamka*) prompted the adaptation and repositioning of its promotional social media channels. BPA Uhamka observes that people use platforms like Instagram and TikTok not only for communication and information sharing but also for entertainment and transactional purposes, as they offer built-in transaction features that facilitate easy transactions between account owners and their audience. Considering these trends, higher education promotional social media must adjust accordingly, positioning itself as an appealing communication channel that provides diverse and relevant information to its target audience, in this case, prospective students. Before the rebranding, UHAMKA's promotional social media was positioned solely as a promotional platform. However, with the rebranding, BPA UHAMKA repositioned its social media to present a new image: a promotional platform that provides diverse, unique, and engaging information without losing its promotional aspect. BPA UHAMKA changed its content based on the needs of the audience.

Before the rebranding, most content published on UHAMKA's promotional social media focused on promotional content and tended to be monotonous. The BPA UHAMKA's rebranding strategy included diversifying the types of content featured on UHAMKA TV's promotional social media. After the rebranding, the content consisted of six program types (Figure 3): 1) U-Talk, featuring discussions on trending topics; 2) U-Vlog or Uhamka Vlog, containing creative vlogs by the BPA UHAMKA team; 3) U-Kuliner, providing food and drink recommendations and reviews; 4) U-Comedy, featuring stand-up comedy for entertainment; and 5) U-Music, showcasing performances by the student organization Metronome, UHAMKA's internal band and 6) U-Games, featuring games by the prospective and existing

student. These six program types serve different purposes, such as education, information, persuasion, and entertainment, in line with challenging and soft-selling promotional activities.

Figure 3: UhamkaTV (U-Talk, U-Vlog, U-Kuliner, U-Comedy, U-Music, U-Games)



Source: @uhamkatv [22]

In the past, PMB UHAMKA's content focused solely on new student admissions. At the same time, UHAMKA TV offers a wider variety of content to prevent monotony and intersperse entertainment elements, such as U-Kuliner, U-Podcast, and others. The aim is to attract a broader audience and offer more varied content to keep prospective students engaged. Another purpose of using social media platforms like Instagram is to disseminate information related to new student admissions, lectures, and other topics, with varied content for hard and soft selling purposes. BPA UHAMKA maximizes content distribution on social media as a primary communication tool and a specific strategy to attract audiences' attention and increase followers on @uhamkatv. To create appealing content, BPA UHAMKA conducts brainstorming sessions to identify current trends and generate content that appeals to a broad audience. If the content is not engaging, it could result in fewer views, boredom, and unfollowing. They also ensure that content is scheduled and posted regularly across various platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

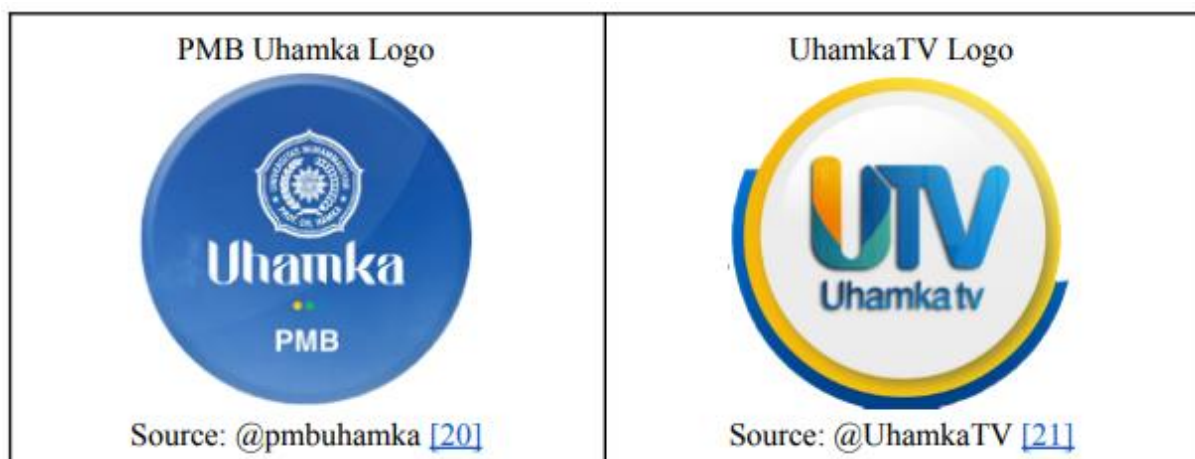
4.2 Changing the Name & Logo of Promotional Social Media: PMB UHAMKA to UHAMKA TV (Renaming & Redesign)

The renaming and redesigning of the logo were carried out across all of UHAMKA's promotional social media platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok. The username change involved modifying other elements on the social media channels, such as altering the logo or symbol displayed on the user's profile picture. In addition to the username, the rebranding strategy for promotional social media involved updating the logo to match the

new username. BPA UHAMKA did not just redesign the logo arbitrarily. Updating a logo should be based on data and concepts. Data is needed as a starting point and for

measurement to justify the redesign of a logo. The concept implemented by BPA UHAMKA was similar to the previous promotional social media logo, @pmbuhamka. The previous logo displayed UHAMKA's emblem, accompanied by the text "PMB" in the institution's signature blue color. In contrast, the logo for the rebranded social media channels, using the username @UhamkaTV, features a more straightforward design expected to be more easily remembered by the public (Figure 4). The new logo consists of the initials of the username, "UTV" or "UHAMKATV," using the institution's corporate colors of blue, orange, and a hint of teal. The new logo also includes an additional description explaining the abbreviation "UTV," placed below the text "Uhamka TV."

Figure 4: UhamkaTV



4.3 Launching the New Identity (Relaunching) & Maximizing Feature Usage

The public launch of the new identity was carried out simultaneously across all of UHAMKA's promotional social media channels, following coordination and communication through monthly meetings. After the rebranding, internal evaluations were conducted weekly by BPA UHAMKA to ensure the effectiveness of promotional activities. During evaluation meetings, participants discussed completed tasks and upcoming work, and individuals presented general reports and suggestions since internal teams within BPA handled detailed reports. Based on the researcher's observations, BPA UHAMKA consistently sought to make its communication messages more effective and far-reaching after rebranding its promotional social media. One strategy was maximizing the features available on each social media platform for promoting and disseminating information about new student admissions. For example, on the promotional Instagram account @uhamkatv, marketing communication activities and main promotions were conducted primarily through photos, videos, and pamphlet designs shared via Instagram feeds, reels, and stories.

Figure 5: UhamkaTV (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, Youtube)



Furthermore, to make it easier for prospective students to access more comprehensive information and optimize Instagram as a promotional medium, the bio of the @uhamkatv account included the usernames of other promotional social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, all under the same name: uhamkatv (Figure 5). The bio also featured a contact person's WhatsApp number, the location of UHAMKA's Promotion and Admissions Office (BPA), Instagram highlights containing information needed by prospective students, and an external link directing Instagram users to other media, such as a registration tutorial video (YouTube), an e-brochure (Google Drive), a registration website, and ten specific information links covering academic services, financial services, e-brochures, potential tests, and social media accounts for each faculty at UHAMKA and the postgraduate program.

4.4 Influencing Factors

Several factors contributed to rebranding UHAMKA's promotional social media. Firstly, the continuous decline in followers and the limited reach and interaction with published posts prompted BPA UHAMKA to seek a solution to these issues. In order to maintain the digital branding of @pmbuhamka, various attempts were undertaken, such as conducting analyses and evaluations and consistently publishing promotional content. However, more efforts were needed to resolve the problem. Consequently, a significant decision like rebranding the promotional social media, as carried out by BPA UHAMKA, was deemed a wise choice to address the challenges and enhance the social media reach. The widespread content reach in the digital world is now known as a viral phenomenon. In Indonesia, marketing strategies leveraging viral phenomena offer considerable advantages. A high number of social media followers indicates substantial brand equity. However, qualitatively, the number of followers does not correlate with the number of buyers. Therefore, many social media users now compete to publish content that reaches a broader audience. As a result, the importance of audience reach in social media usage must be addressed, especially for higher education institutions promoting their services to the public. Coordination and internal communication in the decision to rebrand social media are crucial.

This study shows that in utilizing social media as a promotional platform for private universities, it is necessary to adapt to the ongoing development of social media itself. The flexibility and rapid dissemination of information through online networks like social media demand that business owners continually innovate to produce unique and engaging digital works tailored to the audience's needs. Actions such as rebranding social media, including changing usernames, logos, and the types of content disseminated, are deemed appropriate and necessary to increase the social media audience reach. Rebranding on each promotional social media platform is conducted based on regular analysis and evaluation. Suppose the analysis identifies pressing factors such as decreased followers, interactions, and significant and sustained content reach. In that case, rebranding can be a solution in the field of marketing communication in today's digital era.

5. Discussion

This research provides valuable insights into the strategic use of social media platforms to improve audience engagement and reaches in higher education. The rebranding process, which involved renaming and redesigning the institution's social media accounts and logos, successfully attracted a larger audience and increased interaction with the content posted. The study found that the rebranding led to a more cohesive and consistent brand image across all social media platforms, making it easier for the target audience to recognize and engage with the institution's content. Another crucial finding was diversifying content to maintain audience interest and engagement. The rebranded UhamkaTV social media accounts incorporated a variety of content formats, such as photos, videos, and pamphlets, to cater to the preferences of different audience segments. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the importance of content variety in attracting and retaining users on social media platforms. By offering diverse and appealing content, UhamkaTV expanded its reach and promoted its academic programs more effectively.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of adaptability and innovation in the rapidly changing digital landscape. Higher education institutions must prepare to reevaluate and adjust their social media strategies in response to evolving audience preferences and platform trends. In the case of UhamkaTV, the rebranding efforts not only improved audience reach but also enhanced the institution's image and credibility. In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights for higher education institutions seeking to optimize their social media presence. By rebranding and diversifying content, institutions can attract a larger audience, increase engagement, and drive admissions. Furthermore, effective internal communication and coordination are vital to the success of such rebranding efforts. The findings of this study serve as a useful guide for institutions looking to adapt their social media strategies to the ever-changing digital environment.

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