Analysis of Using Social Networks in Promoting University Educational Services

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to studying the promotion of university educational services in the digital environment and developing recommendations for increasing the effectiveness of this area of their marketing activities. A review of the literature and the use of general and unique methods of scientific cognition made it possible to clarify the role of Internet tools in the communication patterns of a modern university and determine groups of external and internal target audiences. It has been established that the primary means of university digital media communication are the website and social networks. An analysis of the digital profiles of universities on websites made it possible to identify shortcomings related to both the content and the technical side: problems with updating and duplicating information, non-compliance with the sequence of stages of the sales funnel, restrictions on access to information, difficulty in navigation, and lack of mobile versions. Audit and content analysis of university social networks were conducted using quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitative analysis revealed the most significant demand for such platforms as Instagram and Facebook. The quality of using social networks as promotion tools is reduced due to the lack of corporate identity and poor consideration of the interests and needs of the target audience. The authors compiled SWOT-analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Internet resources of Kazakhstan universities and proposed stages, structure and content of the strategy for promoting university educational services in the digital environment.

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Жоғары оқу орнының білм беруқызметтерін ілгерілетуде желілік құралдарды пайдалануды талдау

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ТҮЙІН

Мақала жоғары оқу орындарының білім беру қызметтерін цифрлық ортада ілгерілетуді зерттеуге және олардың маркетингтік қызметінің осы бағытының тиімділігін арттыру бойынша ұсыныстар жасауға арналған. Әдебиеттерге шолу және ғылыми танымның жалпы және арнайы әдістерін қолдану қазіргі университеттің коммуникациясындағы желілік құралдардың рөлін нақтылауға, сыртқы және ішкі мақсатты аудитория топтарын анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Университеттің цифрлық медиакоммуникациясының негізгі құралдары web-сайт және әлеуметтік желілер болып табылатыны анықталды. Веб-сайттардағы жоғары оқу орындарының сандық бейінін талдау мазмұнына да, техникалық жағына да байланысты кемшіліктерді: ақпаратты өзектендіру және қайталау проблемалары, сату шұңқырының кезеңдерінің реттілігін сақтамау, ақпаратқа қол жеткізуді шектеу, навигацияның күрделілігі, мобильді нұсқаның болмауын анықтауға мүмкіндік берді. Жоғары оқу орындарының әлеуметтік желілеріне аудит және контент-талдау сандық және сапалық индикаторлар бойынша жүзеге асырылды. Сандық талдау Instagram және Facebook сияқты платформаларға үлкен сұранысты көрсетті. Әлеуметтік желілерді жылжыту құралы ретінде пайдалану сапасы брендтің болмауымен және мақсатты аудиторияның мүдделері мен қажеттіліктерін ескермеумен төмендейді. Қазақстанның жоғары оқу орындарының интернет-ресурстарының күшті және әлсіз жақтарын, мүмкіндіктері мен қауіптерін SWOT - талдау матрицасы жасалды. Жоғары оқу орнының білім беру қызметтерін цифрлық ортада ілгерілету стратегиясының кезеңдері, құрылымы мен мазмұны ұсынылды.

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Анализ использования сетевых инструментов в продвижении образовательных услуг вуза

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена исследованию продвижения образовательных услуг вузов в цифровой среде и выработке рекомендаций по увеличению эффективности данного направления их маркетинговой деятельности. Обзор литературы и применение общих и специальных методов научного познания позволили уточнить роль сетевых инструментов в коммуникации современного вуза, определить группы внешней и внутренней целевой аудитории. Установлено, что основными средствами цифровой медиакоммуникации вуза являются web-сайт и социальные сети. Анализ цифрового профиля вузов на web-сайтах позволил выявить недостатки, связанные как с контентом, так и технической стороной: проблемы с актуализацией и дублированием информации, несоблюдение последовательности этапов воронки продаж, ограничения доступа к информации, сложность навигации, отсутствие мобильной версии. Аудит и контент-анализ социальных сетей вузов осуществлялся по количественным и качественным индикаторам. Количественный анализ показал наибольшую востребованность таких платформ как Instagram и Facebook. Качество использования социальных сетей как инструментов продвижения снижается отсутствием фирменного стиля и слабым учётом интересов и потребностей целевой аудитории. Составлена матрица SWOT-анализа сильных и слабых сторон, возможностей и угроз интернет - ресурсов вузов Казахстана. Предложены этапы, структура и содержание стратегии продвижения образовательных услуг вуза в цифровой среде.

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Introduction

Digitalization of many spheres of life in modern society has determined the trend for developing the digital architecture of Kazakhstani universities. "The concept of development of higher education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029" defines digital transformation as one of the main conditions for increasing the competitiveness of the university ("The concept of development of higher education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023-2029"). Transformation into a digital university involves creating a flexible learning environment: educational platforms, LMS university management systems, virtual laboratories, the development of massive online courses, and digital libraries. However, using digital technologies in all other university activities, including promoting educational services in the market, is no less critical.

Traditional methods of promoting services by universities are advertising, publications in the media, sales promotion, participation in national and international educational exhibitions, and offline meetings with potential applicants. Discussions with potential applicants are career-oriented in nature and are held in various formats: career guidance visits schools, University Open Days, organization of the work of specialized university classes in schools, "Vacations with benefit" projects based on universities, etc.

Digital marketing is the promotion of goods and services using the Internet as the primary intermediary in communication with the consumer. The increasing use of the Internet in promoting educational services is explained by the fact that the average monthly Internet coverage in Kazakhstan is 98.8%. A sociological study on measuring mobile Internet audiences in Kazakhstan (Web Index 100000+ Mobile) was conducted by TNS Central Asia in 2022. At the same time, in the profile of the Internet audience, users aged 15-34, who make up the potential university target audience, account for 48.6%. Promotion of goods and services by universities is implemented in the following main areas: optimization of websites for search engines (SEO-Search Engine Optimization), promotion in social networks (SMM-Social Media Marketing) and marketing in search engines (SEM-Search Engine Marketing).

The first two directions received the most significant development in Kazakhstani universities due to their advantages such as large coverage, lack of time and territorial restrictions in communication with the consumer (which is important in attracting international students), and low level of funding. The ultimate goal of digital marketing is promoting the university brand, which such indicators can verify as an increase in the number of applicants, an increase in sales of university services, an increase in the level of loyalty, and feedback from educational service consumers.

At the same time, the success of university marketing in the digital environment depends on the correctness of the promotion strategy, which is essential in the highly competitive market of higher education in Kazakhstan. Properly designed university promotion programs using digital communication tools will allow the university to increase the potential pool of applicants and expand all other areas of its activity. In this regard, analysing the marketing promotion of universities in Kazakhstan in the digital environment and the ways of its development is a new research task with a practical focus.

The scientific significance of the study lies in the fact that the proposed new approaches to university marketing in the digital environment will contribute to the development of a positive image and presentation of the competitive advantages of Kazakhstani universities both in the national and international educational markets.

The research aims to develop recommendations regarding the structure and content of the marketing strategy for promoting the university's educational services in the digital environment.

Literature review

The issue of promoting universities in the digital environment is interdisciplinary. This is because the study of this area of university activity lies not only in the marketing plane, but is also associated with information technology. In addition, due to the specifics and social significance of educational services as an object of marketing, the philosophical basis of the issue is also of considerable importance. In this regard, the theoretical basis of the study is quite multidirectional.

The basic concepts, functions and marketing methods are well described in foreign and domestic scientific and educational literature. In recent years, a sufficient number of works devoted directly to Internet marketing have also appeared. They mainly deal with general issues of the features and role of Internet marketing, methodological approaches and promotion tools, and increasing sales efficiency in Internet marketing.

Several Russian authors devote their works directly to media communication in the youth environment and higher education system. Kulikova (2020) carried out a literature review of the concept of "digital marketing", investigated its goals, objectives and ways of their realization. Analysing various approaches to defining the essence of the concept of "digital marketing", the author demonstrates not only a variety of interpretations of this concept but also often a limited approach to it, basically, as to advertising on the Internet. The author emphasizes the importance of a clear definition of the target audience and the professional choice of information and methods of its delivery. Accordingly, Internet marketing is a company's digital strategy to promote a product or a service.

Gureyeva (2021) notes the need for universities to use all available means of media communication in the face of tough competition in the academic environment. At the same time, the emphasis is made on the characteristics of the university's target audiences, which are mainly young people. It is noted that, despite the importance of using social networks in interaction with the target audience due to the synergistic effect, the universities mainly work in this direction haphazardly and intuitively, without having a necessary promotion strategy.

The importance of choosing the leading platform for promoting university educational services in social networks with consideration of the needs and wants of the target audience is also indicated by Korchagova (2019). At the same time, the emphasis is on the need for active interaction with the audience in social networks to determine adequate approaches to developing the university's communication policy. The work of Karpova, Shulga and Rudnikova is devoted to the methodology of calculating university ranking (Karpova et al., 2015). Medvedeva and Vodaturskaya consider approaches to evaluating the effectiveness of promoting university educational services on various platforms in social networks (Medvedeva & Vodaturskaya, 2013).

The active export activity of modern universities in the context of globalization aimed at attracting international students also places unique demands on digital marketing channels and tools. Moskovkin and Yavey point out the need not only for the university to have a website in a foreign language but also the importance of having foreign-language accounts on social networks (Moskovkin & Yavey, 2019). To manage the university's reputation on the Internet, a

strategic program should be developed to ensure the interconnection of sites and social networks and promote the university's online courses. According to the authors, the relationship of sites and social networks can be carried out using the Seolit tool, which, by setting up RSS, provides auto-posting of information from the site to the appropriate social networks.

The problems of promoting services through Internet marketing in Kazakhstan are considered by Nasakayeva (Nassakayeva, 2021). Kazakhstan researchers Zarubina, Zarubin and Vassilchuk explore the issues of promoting university educational services in the context of digitalization, mainly through websites (Zarubina et al., 2022). Thus, there need to be more domestic studies in the field of universities using the entire range of online tools for promoting educational services. Mostly, they focus on general issues of internet marketing and the use of official websites as a means of media communication. The research results presented in this article fill this gap and consider university marketing in the digital space as a whole, including the use of social networks. They also justify the need for and provide recommendations on developing a unified strategy for promoting educational services in the digital environment.

Research Methodology
As the main methodological approaches to the analysis of the state and trends of digital marketing of educational services of Kazakhstani universities in general and their use of SMM in particular, available research methods were used, first of all, analysis and synthesis.

The review of the depth of development of the research topic was carried out using the method of retrospective literary analysis. The analysis of the place and role of digital marketing in the promotion of educational services of modern universities was carried out using the methods of system analysis, statistical analysis and web analytics of the use of the site and social networks in the system of media communications and service promotion.

The empirical foundation of the study was formed based on an audit and content analysis of official university websites in Kazakhstan, as well as available information about social networks the universities use in their activities.

In order to assess the digital image of the university, a comparative analysis of the official websites of Kazakhstani universities was carried out. Social networks were analysed against

quantitative and qualitative indicators: the number of subscribers, engagement, design, relevance and quality of content.

Also, the analysis and evaluation of digital marketing in the higher education system were carried out using the method of non-formalized study of documents from several universities in Kazakhstan. The analysis of the place and role of social networks in the motivation for choosing an educational institution was carried out with the help of a selective survey of the 1st year students of the Kazakh-American Free University.

Results and discussion

The main types of Internet media communication tools of Kazakhstani universities in the digital environment are shown in Figure 1. They are the official website, social networks and platforms that offer their own massive open online courses (MOOCs).

The target audience of digital media communication promotion of university services consists of external and internal information consumers, as shown in Figure 2.
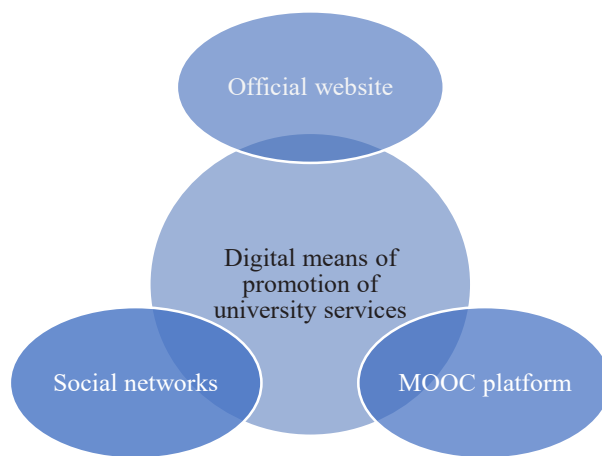

Figure 1 - The main tools of the university media communication
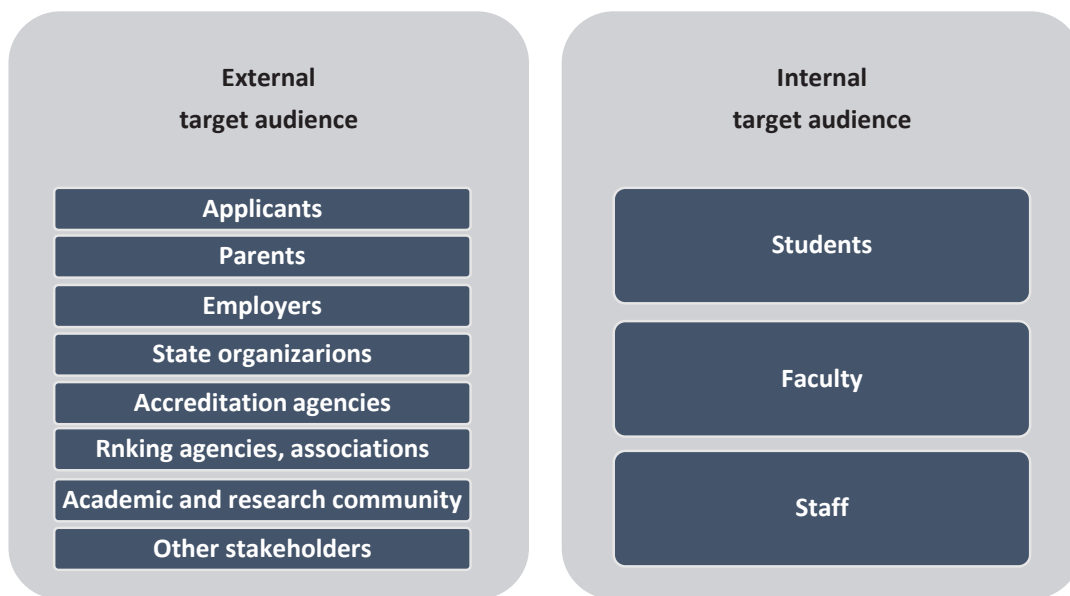
Note: compiled by authors

Figure 2 - Groups of the university's target audience in network communication channels

Note: compiled by authors

As of the beginning of 2023, according to the data of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, there are 120 universities in the country, which train more than 623 thousand students and employ 36,378 faculty members (MSHE RK, 2023). All universities have official websites. Until 2018, the structure and content of the website were regulated by the requirements of the authorized body for university Internet resources. These requirements have become invalid with the provision of academic freedom to universities in Kazakhstan. Universities independently develop the design, structure and content of their official websites. However, some legal documents provide for the mandatory placement of specific information on the official university Internet resource (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Requirements of regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan for information that is mandatory for posting on the official university website

Legal act	Information required to be posted on the official university website
Standard Regulations for the Operation of Organizations of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education No. 595 as of October 30, 2018	Information on the suspension, revocation and deprivation of the university license for educational activities
	List of graduates with the names of educational programs they graduated from and the numbers of their diplomas
	The leading indicators of the university's financial and economic activities for the reporting year
Standard Regulations for admission to study in educational organizations of Higher and (or) Postgraduate Education No. 600 as of October 31, 2018	Essay topics and entry examination questions for PhD program applicants
Rules for the distribution of places in dormitories of educational institutions No. 66 as of January 22, 2016	Information about the availability of vacant places in the university dormitory
Rules for awarding educational grants to pay for higher or postgraduate education with the award of a "bachelor" or "master" degree No. 58 as of January 23, 2008	Call for grant applications indicating the number of vacant educational grants.
	Data of applicants for vacant grants indicating their GPA by program, year of study and groups of educational programs
	List of vacant educational grants released in the process of obtaining higher and postgraduate education
Education Quality Assurance Manual	Information about the university's operation, including details about offered educational programs
	The results of the survey of faculty and staff

Note: compiled by authors

The target website audience is the widest of all digital channels for promoting university services and is represented by all groups of information consumers. Overall, functioning as communication channels, websites provide information about university activities to all interested groups of people. The means of getting feedback mainly include the university rector's blog, direct emails, WhatsApp, Pop-Up windows.

An analysis of the websites of Kazakhstani universities revealed that they have an identical structure in most cases. The information on the sites is mainly structured into the following sections: the main page with a news feed and announcements, information about the university, education programs, admission, research, international cooperation, and student life. The content is also quite similar. The most significant amount of information is devoted to academic issues related to the organization of the educational process and the conditions for university admission. The differences relate to the site's design, navigation, and presentation in foreign languages.

The Kazakh accreditation agency IQAA (Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education) ranks university websites every year. The ranking methodology involves assigning points according to the following criteria: website size (number of web pages); content (number of

documents); website update; design and ease of navigation; presentation of information in Kazakh, Russian, English and other languages, the number of visits, the number of links to the site; site speed. The maximum possible score is 100 (IQAA, 2022).

In 2022, IQAA ranked the websites of 99 universities: 38 multidisciplinary universities; 23 technical universities; 21 humanitarian and economic universities; 8 medical universities; 5 pedagogical universities and four arts universities. Table 2 shows the universities that were placed in the top-three positions in the ranking by groups of universities.

Table 2 - Kazakhstani university's website ranking according to IQAA

Groups of universities	Position 1		Position 2		Position 3	
	University	Score	University	Score	University	Score
Multidisciplinary universities	Nazarbayev University	100	Al-Farabi KazNU	98,78	L. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	89,14
Technical universities	D. Serikbayev EKTU	86,8	Satpayev University	86,78	A. Saginov KarTU	82,99
Arts and Economics universities	KIMEP University	81,42	Almaty Management University	72,34	Turan University	69,05
Medical universities	Asfendiyarov KazNMU	95,81	Semei Medical University	67,21	Kazakh-Russian Medical university	66,52
Teacher-training universities	Abai KazNPU	72,61	KazNPU	68,52	Pavlodar teacher training university	56,59
Arts	Kazakh National University of Arts	70,4	Kazakh National Academy of Choreography	64,96	T. Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts	62,14

Note – Compiled from IQAA (2022)

Among the world rankings, the most authoritative university website ranking is the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. The representation of Kazakh universities in global rankings is not only a trend in universities' international activities, contributing to deeper integration into the global educational space, but also an essential factor in improving the quality and competitiveness of educational services. The motivation to enter the ranking encourages universities to seriously work on improving their performance. It is no coincidence that the number of universities included in QS-WUR ranking is a target indicator for the training of highly qualified personnel for the "knowledge economy" per the "Concept for the Development of Education for 2022-2026".

The Webometrics Ranking of World Universities is held every six months. It is based on a composite indicator of the demand for the university's website and university faculty publications in the international scientometric

systems Scopus and Google Scholar. In 2022, 132 Kazakh universities were included into this ranking (Webometrics, 2022). The TOP-3 of the best, according to Webometrics Ranking of World Universities – 2022, included the websites of Nazarbayev University, al-Farabi KazNU and L. Gumilyov ENU, which coincides with the results of the IQAA ranking of university websites.

At the same time, the analysis of the websites of Kazakhstani universities from the standpoint of their assessment as a tool for promoting educational services showed the following shortcomings that reduce the quality of the digital brand of the university:

1. The information provided on the website is only sometimes updated.

2. There is quite often a duplication of information in the "Programs" and "Admission / Applicants" sections

3. The website section dedicated to applicants often contains information mainly related to the conditions and rules of admission.

It is aimed at those who have already decided to apply. Usually, this section needs more information on educational programs and opportunities associated with training in these programs. Thus, this section serves only to complete the tasks of the first stage of the reverse marketing funnel - the "desire" stage with the immediate transition to the "action" stage. The "awareness" and "interest" steps are skipped.

4. Several universities have parts of the information on their website closed to external users; access to it is possible only with a login and password.

5. Website navigation is only sometimes convenient and intuitive.

6. Not all universities have a mobile version of their websites, which reduces the number of site visits, as the number of gadget (smartphone, tablet) users is constantly growing, especially among young people.

7. There is a noticeable decrease in the number of materials presented on the website in the spring and summer periods. This is due to the cycles of university academic activity with examination sessions and the final assessments in spring and vocations in summer. At the same time, during this period, the number of visits to the website by potential applicants and their parents is growing. Consequently, universities need to look for occasions to post information and forms of communication on issues of interest with this target audience in spring and summer.

Another means of digital promotion of the university, which underlies the marketing strategy of most modern universities, is SMM, promotion in social networks. The concept of SMM is defined differently by scientists and practitioners in the field of marketing. Of all the variety of interpretations, the most complete concerning promoting educational services in social networks is the definition of Kaplan (Kaplan, 2015). The author characterizes social media as an Internet application based on the ideological or technological basis of Web 2.0, which allows participants to create content and share it.

The didactic features of social networks as a tool for the marketing promotion of educational services are quite accurately determined by Buturlin, Ozhegova and Lomovtseva (Buturlin et al., 2018). The main components of social networks are as follows:

1. Information resources;

2. Variety of forms of communication: comments, direct messages, forums, polls, voting, likes;

3. Wide demonstration possibilities;

4. Intuitively clear and familiar communication environment for the target audience.

5. Possibility of joint planning and content posting.

To the above mentioned, you can add a wide coverage of the target audience, efficiency, low cost of promotion and the possibility of using targeted advertising.

A retrospective review shows that the use of social networks as a tool for marketing promotion of services by Kazakhstani universities is relatively recent and coincides with the stages of development of social networks themselves. In 2003-2004, Facebook and Linkedin started growing; in 2006 the Russian social network site VKontakte appeared, in 2010 - Instagram, in 2013 - Telegram. However, in the beginning, universities' use of social networks was limited and unsystematic, and only in the last five years can we talk about SMM as a system direction of marketing activities of Kazakhstani universities.

The analysis of the ways the universities use social networks was carried out on the basis of links provided on university websites. For several universities, access to websites and tracking links to social networks turned out to be impossible, despite the presence of a link to the official website on the eGov.kz portal. As a result, 76 universities were analyzed as of January 10, 2023. The representation of Kazakhstani universities in social networks is shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Representation of Kazakhstan universities in social networks

Social network	Number of Kazakhstani universities that have a link to the social network on their website
Instagram	68
Facebook	70
YouTube	60
Telegram	19
Twitter	21
Tik-Tok	8
LinkedIn	5
VKontakte	42
Odnoklassniki (Classmates)	6
Moi Mir (My World)	1

Note: compiled by the authors

According to the results of the audit, it can

be stated that the web pages of most universities on the social networks VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, and YouTube contain information that has not been updated for a long time and is not actively used. This suggests that the maintenance of these web pages is not a priority in the media communication channels of the university.

At the same time, Telegram channels, Telegram chatbots and Tik-Tok pages, despite their small number, are a new, dynamically growing and promising direction in the structure of the university's social networks.

The most popular in terms of the number of subscribers and update activity are the university pages in Instagram and Facebook. In this regard, we will focus on analysing the promotion of university educational services in these networks.

Due to the novelty of the practice of using social networks by universities as a professional marketing tool, there are practically no proven and reliable methods for analyzing and evaluating the effectiveness of this activity. Nevertheless, as in any kind of activity, certain quantitative and qualitative indicators can be used to evaluate

the university's social networks as tools for market promotion of services.

Quantitative indicators are indicators of statistics and analytics by pages (coverage, number and dynamics of subscribers, geography, demographics, referral sources, etc.), which can be embedded in social networks or generated using special digital services. But often such data is available only to page administrators. Therefore, as a quantitative indicator for analysis, we will take the number of subscribers as this indicator is available in the public domain.

The design of the page, the focus of the content on the target audience, and the relevance and quality of the information provided can be considered qualitative indicators.

The number of university Instagram account subscribers far exceeds the number of Facebook and other social networks subscribers. In addition, many universities, besides having a university account also have accounts of structural units in this social network. Table 4 shows 10 universities with the largest number of followers on Instagram.

Table 4 - Top 10 universities in Kazakhstan by the number of subscribers in Instagram

University	Number of university Instagram subscribers (thous.)
Narikbayev KazGUU University	70,1
Suleyman Dimerel University	56,6
Nazarbayev University	49,6
S.D.Asfendiyarov Kazakh national medical University	32
L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University	29
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	28,9
Satpayev University	28,6
University of International Business	27,2
Daukeyev Almaty University of Power Engineering and Telecommunications	24,8
Narxoz University	21,9

Note: compiled by the authors

An audit of the university's digital brand design revealed a fairly common difference in visual identity on different digital platforms. The university websites and different social network pages use different color schemes and fonts; some of them are lacking a university logo. The reason for this may be that the platforms are maintained by different employees and the university does not have a common promotion strategy in the digital environment, or at least a regulation where the requirements for corporate identity would be defined.

Unlike websites that are aimed at almost all target audience groups, different social networks have different target audiences. This is due to the peculiarities of the content being posted. Thus, Instagram accounts are focused primarily on posting visually attractive photos and video materials; it provides possibilities to create stories, arrange live broadcasts, contests, votes, etc. In this regard, the target audience of Instagram is mainly young people, that is, students and potential applicants.

Facebook hosts mainly text and graphics. Facebook users for business communication are primarily teachers, university partners and other representatives of the academic and scientific environment. Consequently, rules and require-ments for posting content on social networks should differ.

This leads to the following conclusion regarding the content of the university social networks and its quality. Content analysis showed that social networks often contain mainly information on news and achievements. Often there is duplication of this information on the university website and university pages on social networks, as well as auto-posting of content from Instagram to Facebook. This is usually not a concise text written in academic language. This explains low engagement rates as a reaction to the relevance and quality of the content. That is, there needs to be a reference to the target audience of this particular type of social network and an understanding of its needs and preferences. Most likely, this is also a consequence of the univer-sity's lack of a marketing strategy for promotion in the digital space.

The modern university content policy in the digital communication environment should be reoriented from a focus on brand advertising to a focus on the user. Cross-media digital marketing, when identical content is posted on different platforms, can lead to the fact that the user eventually chooses only one channel for obtaining information, reducing the volume of communication and loyalty to its brand. Transmedia content is essential, as social networks allow interaction with the target audience actively. As a result, some target audience groups can transfer into other groups: schoolchildren into potential applicants, potential applicants into students, etc. Universities need to move from undifferentiated marketing to concentrated marketing when a separate digital path is developed for each target audience group.

Nevertheless, there are also examples of such a strategy: more and more universities begin to communicate in the language of youth on their Instagram pages, posting a variety of information related not only to education but also to other spheres of student life in a format that is understandable and attractive to young people. And in this area, TikTok, the most popular social network among young people, has excellent prospects. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakh-stan encourages universities to post educational and expert content on this platform and advises to involve students in this activity.

In order to clarify the role of Internet resources in deciding applicants when choosing a university, within the framework of this study, a survey of 1st-year students of the Kazakh-American Free University was conducted. The number of respondents was 345 people. The survey results showed that 28% of students received information from the university's official website and its Instagram and Facebook pages (see Figure 3).
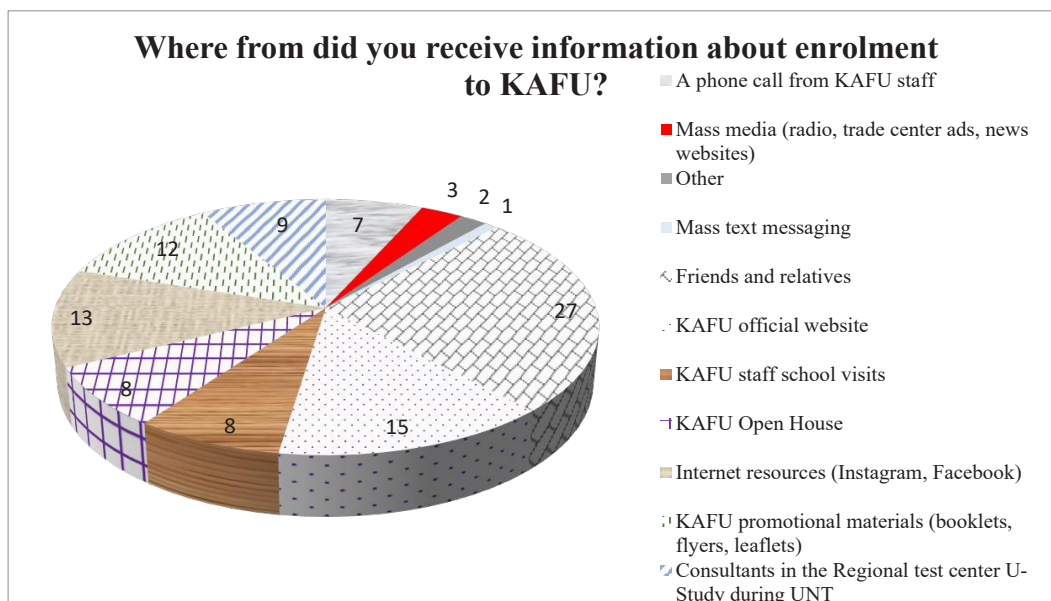

Figure 3 - Results of a survey of 1st-year students of the Kazakh-American Free University

Note: compiled by the authors

SWOT analysis was carried out based on an audit and content analysis of the websites and social networks of universities in Kazakhstan. This analysis matrix was compiled to develop recommendations for using Internet resources in complex marketing actions to promote educational services (see Figure 4).

Strengths:
- Large audience
- Variety of content type: photo, video, likes, comments, forums, live broadcasting, competitions, polls, etc.
- Low cost
- Insignificant competition
- Development prospects

Weaknesses:
- Lack of corporate style
- Monotonous visual content
- Irrelevant content
- Duplication of content on different platforms
- Academic style of content presentation
- Poorly developed analytics

Opportunities:
- Attracting larger amounts of subscribers
- Using new platforms in social networks
- Variety of content

Threats:
- Loss of parts of target audience
- Limitations in Internet access
- Introduction of paid content

Figure 4 - SWOT-analysis of university Internet resources

Note: compiled by the authors

The results of the SWOT analysis allow us to conclude that both the main weaknesses and the existing opportunities for using social network tools in the complex digital marketing of Kazakhstani universities' educational services are associated with the need to develop a promotion strategy in the digital environment. It can be any document in the form of a program or regulation that formalizes the management of the university's marketing activities in digital media. SMM services should ensure the implementation of the promotion strategy, the importance of which should be considered.

The development of a promotion strategy in digital media should be preceded by work on benchmarking Internet resources of domestic and foreign universities, assessment of competitors and study of the target audience.

The structure and content of the strategy for promoting university educational services in the digital environment may include the sections presented in Table 5.

Table 5 - The structure and content of the strategy for promoting university educational services
in the digital environment

Section	Content
Introduction	– the place of the promotion strategy in the digital environment within the university marketing strategy and the overall university development strategy
	– description of the university brand and the stage of its development
	– analysis of the current situation of university promotion in the digital environment
Goals and objectives	– communication goals
	– objectives in communication goal achievement
Target audience	– breakdown of the target audience by groups
	– profile of the target audience (age, geography, occupation, needs, interests, lifestyle of each group of the target audience)
	– preferred presentation of information for each group of the target audience (conciseness, format)
Platforms	– type of Internet resource for a specific group of the target audience
	– tools for presenting information by the capabilities of the chosen platform
Content – list of topics for communication with the audience (posts, stories, reels, videos, live stream, etc.)	
	– format of communication with the audience (contests, games, polls, etc.)
	– ways to activate the audience's interest (feedback, blocking, etc.)
	– ways to deal with negative feedback from the audience
	– content plan for a certain period
Activation schedule	–schedule for using activation methods (targeted advertising, contests, platform updates, etc.) for a certain period
	– activation efficiency measurement tools (reach, likes, comments, shares, etc.)
Project team	–the structure of the SMM service, job responsibilities, advanced training, and forms of interaction with the structural divisions of the university
Funding	– cost estimates

Note: compiled by the authors

Conclusions

The study made it possible to draw the following conclusions:

1. The accelerated process of digitalization of the higher education system has caused a transformation of approaches to the ways of promoting university educational services. In the complex marketing activities of a modern university, an increasing share belongs to digital marketing with the leading media communication channels with the target audience via the Internet. This is due to the fact that 98.8% of the adult population of Kazakhstan uses the Internet, 48.6% of which are young people aged 15 to 34.

2. Digital marketing involves the promotion of educational services in the areas of search engine marketing (SEM), website search engine optimization (SEO) and social media marketing (SMM). The advantages of Internet marketing are extensive coverage of the target audience, the absence of restrictions in time and geography when communicating with it, and low financial costs.

3. The main channels of university media communication with the target audience in Internet marketing are the website, social networks and platforms for providing access to massive open online courses (MOOC). This study analyzes the promotion of educational services through the website and social networks as the main channels of direct marketing impact on the consumer.

4. Internal and external consumers of educational services and stakeholders represent the target audience of the university's digital marketing. The outer target audience includes potential applicants, their parents, government agencies, accreditation and ranking agencies, and academic and scientific community representatives. The internal target audience includes students (undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students, course participants), faculty and university staff. It has been established that a distinctive feature of the target audience for university internet marketing is that external consumer groups can transition to internal groups due to an effective marketing strategy.

5. The analysis of university websites showed their presence in 100% of 120 universities operating in Kazakhstan at the time of the study, according to the link on eGov.kz platform. The official university websites have a similar overall structure with the predominant content of academic information about studying and admission processes. The analysis showed the presence of the following shortcomings in their use as a digital marketing tool: the presence of non-updated and duplicated information both within the site and with university social networks, restriction of access to some data for external users, inconvenient navigation, absence of a mobile version, decreased activity in the spring and summer periods.

6. The review of social networks led to the conclusion that universities predominantly use Instagram and Facebook as platforms for digital media communication. The accounts of Kazakh universities on these platforms were audited in terms of the number of subscribers and such qualitative indicators as page design, content orientation to the target audience, relevance and quality of the information provided. The conducted audit showed the absence in some cases of a corporate identity, poor consideration of the interests and needs of the target audience when using different social networks, duplication of information on the website and social networks, presence of inactive pages on the social networks VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Twitter, and YouTube. The Telegram and TikTok platforms are currently seen as promising for university media communication with the target audience to promote their services. These are technical and organizational deficiencies that universities are recommended to address by revising the content of their websites and social media pages and making certain managerial decisions. Additionally, violations of marketing techniques, such as the "sales funnel" and "content plan," are common. To properly construct a sales funnel model that includes all stages from outreach to transaction, universities need to provide information not only about admission rules but also about the educational program, the field of activity after graduation, additional educational opportunities, and the benefits of studying at their institution in the section of the website devoted to applicants. To avoid a decrease in content activity on the website during the spring and summer periods due to the cyclical nature of the educational process, it is necessary to develop a content plan that includes information about internships, practical experience, and student leisure during this time. This content can also be of an image or presentation nature, designed for the appropriate target audience visiting the site during this period: applicants and their parents.

Consequently, it is recommended that universities first decide on the list of platforms used in social networks and deactivate those that are not used or remove links to them on the website. For each active platform, it is necessary to determine the target audience and develop a promotion plan tailored to the target audience's needs, excluding information duplication. Currently, to enhance media communication between universities and their target audience for promoting their services, it is advisable to develop pages on platforms such as Telegram and TikTok.

7. Based on the findings of the audit and content analysis of Kazakhstan university websites and social networks, an analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Internet resources of Kazakhstan universities was compiled. The SWOT analysis results demonstrated the need for universities to develop a strategy for moving forward in the digital space. The process should be formalized as an internal regulatory document (policy, program, regulations, etc.). The appropriate division should handle the development and implementation of the strategy - the SMM service.

8. The following stages of developing a strategy for promotion in the digital space, using the full range of project management and marketing research tools: benchmarking digital media of Kazakh and foreign universities; competitor evaluation; target audience analysis; strategy development.

9. The recommended structure of the promotion strategy in the digital space may include sections:

- Introduction (analysis and assessment of the current situation in the higher education digital environment; description of the university brand).

- Goals and objectives of the strategy (communication goals and ways to achieve them).

- Target audience (groups, profile, preferred format for presenting information).

- Platforms (type of Internet resource for each target audience group).

- Content (content plan for a certain period, including topics, the format of their presentation, and methods to activate interest).

- Activation schedule (schedule and ways to assess effectiveness).
- Project team (the division, regulations on the division, staffing, job descriptions).
- Funding (cost estimates).

Further research on the use of network tools in the marketing of educational services of domestic universities can be associated with their promotion in a foreign language environment to develop the brand of Kazakhstani higher education, improve its image in the international educational market, and increase the export of educational services from domestic universities.

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