

# “Senggol Bestie” as Media Promotion Among Muhammadiyah Universities

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the emergence of the phenomenon of mutual flexing carried out by Muhammadiyah universities on TikTok social media. So far, every business entity that carries out promotions for its agency tends to avoid offending other agencies and only focuses on discussing the advantages of its products, even if it has to touch other institutions. This has never been done openly. This research was conducted using a qualitative approach with phenomenological analysis. The author collected data with participant observation to find out the participants' essential phenomena in their life experiences. In this case, the author managed the content of official social media creators of Muhammadiyah Universities who created TikTok publication content. Then based on the data obtained from the resource persons, the author draws a research conclusion. The conclusion of this study shows that flexing activities carried out by content creators of Muhammadiyah Universities have the potential to become a new form of publication style that has never existed before among universities.

Keywords: Positive Flexing; TikTok; Promotion; Social Media; Muhammadiyah Universities.

## ABSTRAK

Paper ini bertujuan untuk membahas munculnya fenomena saling flexing yang dilakukan oleh perguruan tinggi Muhammadiyah di media sosial TokTok. Selama ini tiap badan usaha yang melakukan promosi instansinya cenderung menghindari perilaku menyinggung instansi lainnya dan hanya fokus membahas keunggulan produknya sendiri, jika pun sampai harus menyentuh institusi lainnya maka hal itu tidak pernah dilakukan secara terang-terangan. Penelitian ini dilakukan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian fenomenologi, author melakukan pengumpulan data dengan observasi partisipan untuk mengetahui fenomena esensial partisipan dalam pengalaman hidupnya, dalam hal ini author mengumpulkan para konten kreator media sosial official Universitas-Universitas Muhammadiyah yang membuat konten publikasi TikTok, kemudian berdasarkan data yang diperoleh dari para nara sumber tersebut author mengambil sebuah kesimpulan penelitian. Kesimpulan penelitian ini memperlihatkan bahwa aktifitas flexing yang dilakukan oleh para konten kreator Universitas-Universitas Muhammadiyah berpotensi menjadi bentuk publikasi gaya baru yang belum pernah ada sebelumnya di antara perguruan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: Pamer Positif; TikTok; Promosi; Media Sosial; Universitas Muhammadiyah.

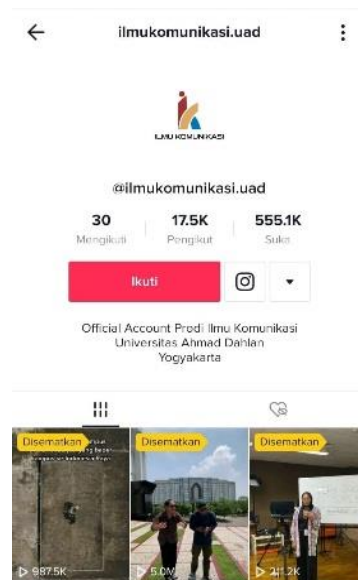
## INTRODUCTION

Generally, in advertising and promotion, a company or specific business unit tries not to mention other companies because various things cause it. It can be due to ethical factors or because they do not want to be subject to legal entanglement. The agency being mentioned could be offended by the promotional materials they provide. So, the average promotional material and publications carried out are always neutral and only focus on the advantages of their products (Xu, 2017). There are times when two companies mention each other when making advertisements. The most memorable example is how Coca-Cola and Pepsi made advertisements that satirized each other, or what we know as the “Cola Wars” (Golan et al., 2000).

However, not many companies dare to advertise with the concept of satire. They clearly state that their products are better than companies that produce similar products or offer similar services, such as Coca-Cola and Pepsi. Even in this era of social media, no one in each institution’s official social media accounts dares to create social media content that offends other institutions. If anyone openly offends, it is done by netizens who are followers and spontaneously mention other institutions when they see social media content on their accounts. Zeng et al. (2022) suggest that if you mention another brand, this is generally done in private through direct messages when there are questions from netizens. In general, this is impossible for official accounts to do openly.

However, entering the middle of 2022, a mutual mention of institutions occurred by official accounts of Muhammadiyah universities on TikTok. They openly do flexing, which confirms that their facilities are better and more attractive than other Muhammadiyah universities. Mentioning the names of other institutions is done clearly and publicly without censoring the institution’s name.

On TikTok social media, of course, this creates a stir in itself. For example, the video produced by the @ilmukomunikasi.uad account as the official TikTok account belonging to the Ahmad Dahlan University Communication Studies Study Program performs flexing against the Muhammadiyah University of Yogyakarta, University of Muhammadiyah Malang, and the University of Muhammadiyah Bandung. In less than a week, the video they made has gone viral and has been viewed more than five million times.



**Figure 1.** The organically viral TikTok account @ilmukomunikasi.uad after flexing another PTMA

The excitement continued because the University of ‘Aisyiyah Yogyakarta and the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra later participated in the flexing activity and other Muhammadiyah universities participated. What these Muhammadiyah universities have done on social media has always been avoided by any agency when they do branding. Apart from ethical issues, there are also concerns that this practice will create unhealthy competition between institutions, especially for institutions with identical products (Grow & Altstiel, 2005).



related to Muhammadiyah institutions. Thus, from this research, a new publication trend will be found that will enrich the study of communication science, especially in terms of institutional communication and marketing for educational institutions, especially for private educational institutions. Unlike state-owned higher education institutions, which have always been the main choice of students, private universities have to fight more to get students because if they fail to get students, the institution's sustainability will be in question. Private universities need unique and interesting promotional techniques to attract new students yearly. That is why this research and publication were carried out.

This paper will examine the phenomena discussed using the cybernetic tradition approach. Cybernetics is a tradition of complex systems in which many people interact and influence each other. This theory explains how physical, biological, social, and behavioral processes work (August, 2022). Communication, in this case, is understood as a system of parts or variables that influence each other, shape and control the character of the whole system, and like organisms, accept balance and change.

The main idea in this theory is the idea of a system or a set of interacting components, which together form something more than just some parts. For example, a family's members are not separated from one another, and their relationship must be considered so that the family can be understood properly as a system (Paidipaty, 2020). Families have characteristics that can form a relationship.

Any part of a system is always interdependent with other parts, and this form of interdependence governs the system itself. However, the system will not survive without bringing in new inputs the form of inputs. Therefore, a system gets input from the environment, processes it, and creates feedback in the form of results for the environment. Inputs and outputs are sometimes in the form of tangible materials or the form of energy and information. Because of this dependence, the system then has the characteristics of regulation, self, and control. In other words, monitor systems, regulate and control their output to be stable and achieve the goal (Espejo & Lepskiy, 2021).

In the discussion of cybernetics, we will talk about communication theory, which emphasizes managing information. Thus, as an interrelated system, the communication mechanism in this tradition will be complex and unpredictable (Espejo & Lepskiy, 2021). The problem contained in the cybernetics tradition, like any system, is noise, either overloading the information to be transmitted or underloading the capacity to be conveyed. There are possible bugs - errors that may occur in encoding and decoding messages, which can cause misinformation to misunderstand (Kline, 2015). Like the cybernetic tradition, the communication system views the process as interrelated and coherent. Elements of the system in the cybernetic tradition experience conditions of interdependence (Westermann, 2020). This interdependent system causes the system to be able to regulate and control itself (self-regulation and control).

One of the exciting things in the cybernetics tradition is the meaning of the human communication process, as the system presupposes the existence of humans and machines. In human living entities, there are emotions that are not logical, as well as connectedness in causality that is not mechanistic because humans are not machines.

## **METHODS**

The research in this paper was conducted with a qualitative approach to explain and analyze phenomena, events, social dynamics, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of a person or group toward something. Thus, the qualitative research process begins by developing basic assumptions and rules of thought that will be used in the research (Fadli, 2021). The data collected in the research are then interpreted. Qualitative study and research in the social sciences will reveal the social meaning of phenomena obtained through research subjects. This subject is usually obtained from the participants or respondents. That way, later, researchers will try to answer how the socio-cultural experience of humans is formed and then gives it meaning. The social phenomenon referred to in this study is the phenomenon of social interaction in TikTok social media, namely institutional flexing activities involving official Muhammadiyah college accounts.

The object of qualitative research covers all aspects or fields of human life, namely humans and everything that they influence. Qualitative research is not as fast as quantitative analysis in analyzing data. In quantitative research, the raw data is immediately ready to be processed. However, data in qualitative research requires a more in-depth systematic process. Data analysis in qualitative research is interpreted as an effort to systematically search and organize notes from observations, interviews, and others to increase the researcher's understanding of the case under study and present it as

findings. To get that understanding, the analysis needs to be continued by trying to find meaning (Creswell, 2014). The data in this study were obtained by reviewing flexing content uploaded to TikTok social media, conducting interviews with admins, and listening to explanations from the head of the communication science study programs of the Muhammadiyah Universities involved in the flexing activity. In qualitative research, four stages are interconnected with one another. Sequentially, data analysis in qualitative research starts from the stages of data collection, data reduction and categorization, data display, and concluding. Qualitative data analysis is integrated into data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and determination of research results. (Williamson et al., 2018).

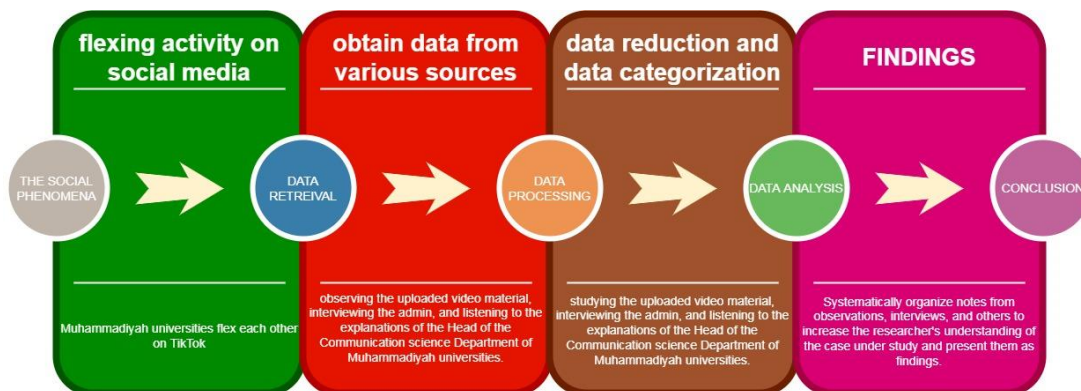


Figure 3. Four stages of qualitative research

The four stages of qualitative research are as follows (Lester et al., 2020): (1) Data collection: the collecting data in qualitative research can be done in various ways, obtained by going directly to the field. This can be done through observations or observations, questionnaires, in-depth interviews with research objects, document studies, and focus group discussions. (2) Data reduction and categorization: in this stage, the raw data will be filtered. The researchers choose which data is most relevant to be used to support research. Qualitative data can be obtained from interviews and observations. So, sorting is needed to facilitate data categorization. So, the filtered data will be categorized as required. For example, in research, data is divided by categories of informants or research locations. (3) Data display: after the information is reduced and categorized, the researcher designs the rows and columns of a qualitative data metric and determines the type and form of data to be entered in the metric boxes. For example, data is presented with narratives, charts, flow charts, diagrams, etc. Information is organized to make it easier to read. (4) Concluding: after three processes have been passed, the last step is to conclude. The content of the conclusion should include all the essential information found in the study. The language used to describe conclusions must also be easy to understand without being complicated.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In a discussion forum facilitated by the Association of Higher Education Communication Sciences of Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah Colleges (APIK PTM), social media activists responsible for creating content are bumping into each other within the Muhammadiyah and Aisyiyah Colleges (PTMA) environment. The discussion highlights the reasons and objectives of why they created content, nudged each other, and showed off with other PTMA. They also explained why they are currently focusing on making TikTok their communication medium.

As Vice-Chancellor of the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, Rudianto explained why PTMA accounts are slowly starting to actively use TikTok as a promotional medium. This is because TikTok is unique. TikTok can interestingly provide serious information. TikTok is considered the ideal medium to be a promotional tool to find students.

*TikTok social media is a suitable communication medium because Generation Z and the Next-generation are all active on TikTok. No one else uses Facebook or Twitter.* (Rudianto, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, 28 April 2022).

Meanwhile, Himawan Sutanto, the head of APIK PTMA, said that PTMA specifically supports this ongoing phenomenon. This is because, for prospective students, State Universities are still the primary choice compared to Private Higher Education. Therefore PTMA must be able to issue new and unique promotional ideas to attract prospective students. It does not just stop at attracting prospective students; these ideas must be developed so that in the future, all Muhammadiyah charities can feel the benefits of this promotion using TikTok.

*Muhammadiyah activists on TikTok help other Muhammadiyah business charities to promote because not all Muhammadiyah charities have good public communication policies.* Himawan Sutanto (Chairman APIK PTMA), 28 April 2022.

TikTok is the leading choice to attract the interest of prospective PTMA new students because this social media application does have unique characteristics. Muhammad Najih Farihanto, the Head of the Communication Studies Study Program at Ahmad Dahlan University, also conveyed how special TikTok is and how other mainstream social media are trying to imitate TikTok.

Then if someone asks where the phenomenon of touching each other and showing off between PTMAs started, it comes from the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY). Erwan Sudiwijaya, as the Secretary of the Communication Studies Study Program at the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, initially only did the usual “senggol bestie” flexing activity related to UMY activities during the month of Ramadan 2022. Then the flexing video performed by UMY received a response from other PTMAs. Interestingly, the answers that emerged from each PTMA did not contain negative feedback on UMY but contained information about the advantages of each campus, of course, by showing off sides that UMY and other PTMAs did not have.

This is, of course, a phenomenon of healthy social media among PTMAs because they have succeeded in taking advantage of bumps from other PTMAs to think about the positive potential of their campus that can be promoted and then promoted published, no matter how small the potential. The PTMA PR team sometimes neglects to think about this as they are usually too busy thinking about big objects to sell to prospective students but forget about simple things that have significant implications for the institution’s promotion process.

*Each Muhammadiyah campus has positioned and made each Muhammadiyah campus think about its potential.* Erwan Sudiwijaya (Secretary of Communication Studies Study Program), 28 April 2022

In addition, the phenomenon of mutual flexing and best friend nudges between PTMAs does not only occur between official accounts of each institution. PTMA students and alumni also feel interested in participating in this mutual flexing phenomenon. Students, as users, can create content about their campus from the student’s point of view, and the militancy of students and alumni grows. In business logic, this raises brand awareness, and students and alumni have become brand defenders. The brand parenting phenomenon emerged because campus students are parents who must be defended. This is where the phenomenon of shifting flexing battles between students and alumni begins.

Nurudin, as the head of the New Student Admissions team at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, conveyed his idea about the flexing battle between students and alumni in the PTMA environment. For him, in marketing logic, it was something delicious. This means that the love of students and alumni on campus has been crushed in the theory of the state of communication. It focuses on the situation where all institution members fall in love with the institution, so the mutual flexing of PTMA in TikTok media can be interpreted as the extent to which all PTMA campus residents are proud of attributes of all things related to the campus.

*Let Muhammadiyah campus residents use their social media to show the advantages of their respective campuses.* Nurudin (Head of UMM New Student Admission Team) 28 April 2022

Although promotional activities on TikTok are fun and exciting to attract prospective students, other social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, cannot be left alone. We must not think that since only elders dominate Facebook, it must be abandoned. PTMA social media managers must remember that prospective students are active on TikTok and do not use old-fashioned social media. Still, their parents and guardians are the final decision-makers when they go to college and are active social media users, which is considered outdated.

Tirta Wibawa Agung, the head of the University of Muhammadiyah Bandung’s promotion section, said that each social media segment still exists. Facebook is for promotion to parents of prospective students, so it cannot be left alone. At UM Bandung, TikTok content attracts prospective students by showing how exciting it is to study on this campus. Then the admins of each social media should not be combined because the characteristics of each social media are different.



If the Facebook admin is made a TikTok admin, it does not connect because the communication technique is different every day, especially if the age is inappropriate. Tirta Wibawa Agung (Head of promotion section of the University of Muhammadiyah Bandung), 28 April 2022.

Based on discussions with digital promotion and communication experts within the Muhammadiyah communication science higher education association, it can be concluded that Muhammadiyah universities in Indonesia play a collective-impact scheme in using TikTok to promote their respective campuses. The collective-impact plan they apply automatically stimulates other Muhammadiyah campuses to find new benefits in their different environments when each institution shows off its respective advantages.

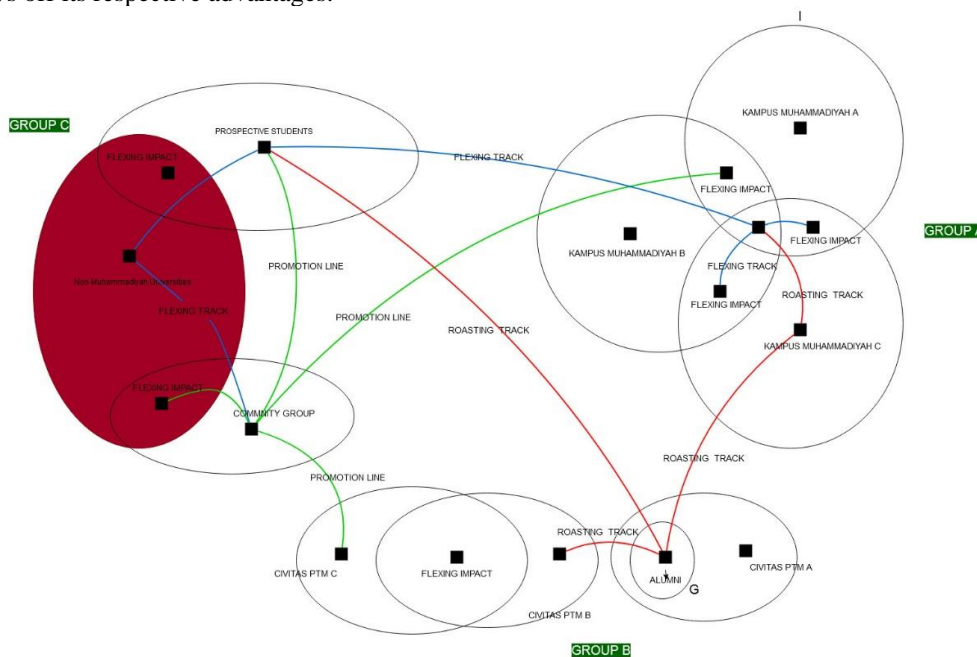


Figure 4. Information distribution patterns due to flexing between PTMAs on TikTok

As shown in Figure 1 above, it is clear how the collective impact roadmap between Muhammadiyah universities is developed in a very structured manner. Three groups were created and accepted the implications of the “Senggol Bestie” war carried out by Muhammadiyah universities, including the following: Group A, consisting of Muhammadiyah universities that officially launched flexing attacks on TikTok social media; Group B, the active academic community in which there are also alumni of Muhammadiyah campuses who then participate in responding and disseminating; Finally, there is Group C which is prospective students, community groups, and non-Muhammadiyah universities who also receive flexing messages from Muhammadiyah universities.

The concept in the communication pattern above is very closely related to the cybernetics tradition in the study of the communication science tradition. The cybernetic tradition is a tradition of complex systems in which many people interact and influence each other. Theories in the cybernetic tradition explain how physical, biological, social, and behavioral processes work. In cybernetics, communication is understood as a system of parts or variables that influence each other, shape and control the character of the whole system as an organism, and accept balance and change.

The main idea of this tradition is that the system idea forms the core of cybernetic thinking. A system is a set of interacting components that form something more than just a number of parts together. Like families, all systems are unique, all characterized by a form of relationship. The dependence of the other parts always forces any part of a system, and this form of interdependence governs the system itself. However, the system will not survive without bringing in new inputs in the form of input. Therefore, a system gets input from the environment, processes, and creates feedback in the form of results to the environment. Input and output are sometimes in the form of real materials or can also be in the form of energy and information. Because of this interdependence, the system is also characterized by self-regulation and control. In other words, the system monitors, regulates, and controls its output to be stable and reach its goal.

The main ideas of systems theory are closely related and consistent, all of which have a major influence on many things, including communication—the extent of system development in the real, physical and social environment. So the cybernetic tradition is not monolithic. This is where we will distinguish between systems theory variations, namely basic systems, cybernetics, general systems theory, and second-level cybernetics.

The ideas in the previous discussion can be assumed as basic systems theory. From its most basic form, this approach describes the system as tangible forms that can be analyzed and observed from the outside. In other words, we can see the parts of the system and how they all interact. We can observe and objectively measure the forces among all system parts and detect a system's outputs and inputs. Furthermore, we can arbitrarily manipulate the system's input with its processing mechanism.

The term cybernetics can be confusing because it can be applied both to the general tradition and to the study of cybernetics, specifically one of its variations. Norbert Wiener popularized Cybernetics in a narrow sense in the 1950s. As an area of study, cybernetics is a branch of systems theory that focuses on reciprocal cycles and control processes. By emphasizing unlimited forces, cybernetics challenges the linear approach that states that one thing can cause another. Instead, this concept leads us to statements about how things affect each other in endless ways, how systems maintain control, how systems find balance, and how reciprocal cycles can maintain balance and create change (Schmidgen, 2020).

The third branch is general theory, General System Theory (GTS), originally formulated by the biologist Ludwing Von Bertalanffy. It uses GTS as a broad and multidisciplinary knowledge approach. This tradition uses systems principles that show how objects in many different studies are similar, forming a shared vocabulary for communication in many studies. Moreover, GTS recognizes that systems are universal in all forms and are concerned with the multiplicity among seemingly diverse systems, such as economic growth, biological development, and social movements (Hofkirchner & Schafranek, 2011).

Some theorists have rejected the idea that systems can be observed objectively. The second level of cybernetics was developed as an alternative perspective and is the last variation in cybernetics. The second level of cybernetics believes that researchers can never see how the system works outside of the system itself because researchers are always cybernetically tied to the observed system. Based on this perspective, whenever we observe a system, we influence and are influenced by the system.

The cybernetic tradition has become a famous and influential part of communication, so it is useful for understanding communication in general and communication that occurs in our daily lives. Due to system influences, the general vocabulary makes the theory appropriate and valuable as a group. Although the cybernetic theory is great for understanding relationships, it is less effective in helping us understand individual differences between system parts.

### **Sub Discussion**

In addition to promoting social media using various types of social media, the TikTok application, which is currently trending, can also be a choice for users to carry out good marketing. Here are some reasons why TikTok can be a great marketing medium (Rimadiaz et al., 2021). (1) Active Users Reach 500 Million. TikTok's active users reach 500 million, which is the most significant achievement of this app. This number may continue to increase. Most of its users use TikTok to create content in the form of movement because TikTok provides an exciting selection of music. Moreover, the current use of TikTok is also considered adequate for conducting online shop promotions; (2) Easy Operation Features. Users do not need to make pretty complicated edits to create exciting content. With TikTok, the content users can grab people's attention; (3) Frequently Shared Content. Content from TikTok is shared more often. Of course, this becomes very profitable for business users who disseminate your products. This can be the right way to promote food online. So, ensure users continue to innovate and create content as creatively as possible; (3) Influencers widely use them. Many influencers use TikTok. Especially now that influencers are very supportive of business activities, when an influencer already uses a platform, many fans will automatically follow in the influencer's footsteps to use it. Users can take this opportunity to spread your product.

Many people from various circles have run sales tricks on Facebook. This has proven to be able to increase sales and reach many consumers. Not inferior to Facebook. Currently, there is the TikTok application which also steals the attention of many people. Over time, the popularity of TikTok has



been used by business people to carry out marketing activities. There are various strategies that users can run to increase sales using TikTok. Including the following (Ponomarenko, 2019).

Online marketing is a series of marketing activities, from planning, action, and service to product delivery. Most of their activities use the internet. Online marketing can be done through social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. Internet Media Promotion, namely the promotion of progress through electronic media. Promotion through internet media is usually through website banner media, and other paid advertising programs such as Google AdSense and Facebook ads. Promotion is essential for the development and success of a business. This cannot be separated from using the right promotional media so that it has a good impact and is right on target. The presence of various social media supported by the power of the internet can make it easier to do promotions (Wursan et al., 2021). Promotion through online media can be done using Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, etc.

Using the internet as a promotional medium has various advantages compared to other media. Namely, it can be done anywhere and anytime, at a lower cost, and has a more extensive and unlimited reach. Online businesses have various buying and selling media and promotions, from websites and social media to business networks. So far, people are still hesitant to do business online for fear of not having a secure sales medium. Even though online media is straightforward to use and has a broad reach (Luo et al., 2021), online media can allow us to do anything easily and quickly, including online business activities.

The promotion of the use of internet media is motivated by the increasing number of internet users today. Technological developments can change everything, including in the business sector. However, this makes it easy to expedite the buying and selling process. Promoting through social media has proven effective, with income increasing and growing from time to time. Everyone has social media, which makes the product easily recognizable, at least in the existing circle of friends. For larger companies and businesses, the power of social media can also be used to promote products and services so that many audiences who recognize them are also interested in buying these products and services. All of this is thanks to the existence of social media in various forms and ways that can be used to carry out promotion (Breckova & Karas, 2020).

- Post videos often. The more videos you post on TikTok, the wider the content spread. Therefore, to boost sales, users must post videos frequently. Schedule in a day, users will post about one to two videos.
- Use of appropriate hashtags. The content will be sorted according to the trending hashtag in the Discover menu. Therefore, ensure the hashtags are relevant to help users spread the content. It would be better if users use specific hashtags so that the content can get the spotlight. Moreover, do not forget to provide a hashtag in the form of #fyp so that it can appear on the user's front page.
- Collaboration With Influencers. There are many TikTok influencers with a large audience and target market. Users can plan to collaborate with them to boost sales.
- They are placing Ads. TikTok allows users to place advertisements easily due to a formal advertising system. Various advertising features can be utilized, where users can be creative in producing content that makes viewers want to try using the user's product.
- Create a Clear Description. In addition to posting videos, users must also create clear descriptions that interest the user's target market—for example, information about the benefits obtained after using the products that users offer. Do not forget to adjust it with SEO so that users' products can be found by consumers easily.

So, TikTok can be the choice of social media as a promotional medium that users can use as well as possible. Use the right strategy so that many consumers are curious about your institutions or product. What must be remembered is that the bribed content should not become a blunder for the institution. Social media is like a double-edged sword; it can build the institution's image but can also damage the image of the institution (Damayanti, 2020).

PTMA has a good communication network, and the relationship between universities is harmonious. It will not be very nice if a PTMA does not welcome the trend that has begun to be echoed by PTMA campuses such as UMY, UAD, UMM, and UNISA Yogyakarta. All universities with PTMA status have all the requirements to master trending on social media, especially TikTok, so the popularity of each PTMA can increase, and of course, it will affect the number of prospective students.

## CONCLUSION

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Every private campus must be able and willing to abandon the classic promotion method deemed unable to provide maximum results even though it spends a small budget. Utilizing the latest social media platforms can be the primary promotional method, but a mature strategy must accompany the weaving. Campuses under the PTMA environment have shown examples of marketing strategies that mutually reinforce one another, enabling each PTMA campus to unleash all its potential to attract prospective students.

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