

The Meaning of Postgraduate Admission Content: A Semiotic Analysis of Instagram @Smbtelkom

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at how pictures and words in postgraduate admission posts on the official Instagram account @smbtelkom share information and shape how the institution is seen. The research uses a qualitative descriptive method and applies Roland Barthes' idea of semiotics, which breaks down meaning into three parts: denotation, connotation, and myth. Four posts were carefully picked: the Direct Track Master's Program, Open Selection Pathways, Master's Program Batch 1, and the LPDP 2025 Scholarship Program. Each post was checked for its visual parts like layout, colors, and symbols, as well as the text parts like headlines, fonts, and captions. The results show that @smbtelkom posts do more than just share info they also help build the university's brand, showing it as modern, welcoming, and competitive. The study found that having a consistent look, matching fonts, and using symbols that relate to the culture help make the content more engaging and improve how the institution is viewed. This research gives useful ideas on how semiotic analysis can be used in higher education marketing, especially in Indonesia, where there is growing competition for postgraduate students. It also adds to conversations about digital communication in academic branding and suggests more research into how audiences receive these messages and how different platforms compare to find better ways to promote academic programs online.

Keywords: *institutional image, Instagram, visual communication, postgraduate admissions, semiotics.*

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital era, social media has become an essential medium for universities to communicate with prospective students. These platforms facilitate institutional efforts to establish connections, disseminate information, and engage in interactive exchanges with audiences considering enrollment. Globally, higher education institutions have adopted platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, LinkedIn, and Instagram to enhance promotional activities, manage institutional image, and foster a sense of community. Among these, Instagram has emerged as a

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particularly influential channel due to its visual-centric nature, ease of content sharing, and interactive features that encourage audience engagement. The platform's integration of high-quality images, short-form videos, and ephemeral "Stories" provides universities with a dynamic space to convey both factual information and emotionally resonant narratives (Leaver et al., 2020) (Sriyanto et al., 2024) .

The prominence of visual communication in the digital sphere has significantly transformed how audiences particularly younger demographics process and evaluate information and brands. Within higher education marketing, the use of visual storytelling not only humanizes the institutional image but also communicates academic strengths and aspirational values. Instagram's multimedia capabilities, including static imagery, short videos, and interactive tools such as polls and quizzes, allow universities to combine informative content with persuasive narratives. When strategically integrated, these elements can strengthen brand identity, foster trust, and influence audience perceptions in ways that text-based communication alone cannot achieve.

In Indonesia, the strategic importance of Instagram is underscored by its extensive user base, which surpassed 130 million active users as of August 2023, positioning the country among the largest global markets for the platform DataIndonesia.id, (2023). This broad reach provides universities with a substantial opportunity to connect with diverse audience segments. For postgraduate programs, the potential is particularly significant, as prospective students often include working professionals and recent graduates seeking to enhance their qualifications. This demographic tends to be highly selective, requiring clear evidence of program quality, institutional reputation, and alignment with personal or professional goals before committing to enrollment.

Competition in Indonesia's postgraduate education market has become increasingly intense with the growth of both domestic and international program offerings. Universities, whether public or private, now provide more specialized master's programs, flexible study options, and competitive scholarship schemes to capture student interest. In this context, simply delivering information is no longer sufficient; communication must be persuasive, culturally relevant, and able to foster emotional connections. Institutions are expected not only to showcase academic advantages but also to construct a strong identity, values, and image that resonate with the aspirations of prospective students. Decisions to pursue postgraduate studies are influenced not only by rational factors such as tuition, accreditation, and career opportunities but also by symbolic considerations such as prestige, belonging, and personal development. As a result, social media narratives that combine informative content with aspirational visuals are particularly effective. With digital-native audiences increasingly drawn to

interactive, personalized, and visually appealing content, Instagram has emerged as a strategic platform for cultivating engagement and sustaining visibility. Therefore, postgraduate marketing strategies cannot rely solely on program offerings but must be conveyed through compelling digital storytelling that builds trust and emotional resonance, ultimately shaping enrollment decisions.

Empirical studies affirm the effectiveness of such strategies. Research indicates that the combination of compelling visual content with clear, targeted messaging can significantly influence perceptions of an institution's credibility, appeal, and trustworthiness Azim & Mustaqeem, (2024); (Ramadanty & Syafganti, 2021). Furthermore, emphasize that successful Instagram campaigns extend beyond aesthetic appeal, incorporating culturally relevant symbols, maintaining consistent visual identity, and including explicit calls to action. These elements not only reinforce institutional branding but also facilitate deeper emotional engagement with prospective students (Bregman & Karimov, 2021).

Despite the value of these insights, most existing studies have concentrated on undergraduate recruitment, leaving postgraduate marketing comparatively underexplored. This is a critical gap, as postgraduate students differ from undergraduates in motivations, expectations, and decision-making processes. Undergraduate applicants may prioritize campus facilities, extracurricular activities, and location, while postgraduate candidates tend to focus on program specialization, academic quality, career advancement opportunities, and institutional prestige. Their selection process is typically more deliberate and research oriented, with heightened emphasis on credibility and the perceived return on investment. The scarcity of targeted research in this domain represents a notable limitation in higher education marketing scholarship, particularly in the Indonesian context where cultural dynamics and market conditions diverge from Western settings.

Semiotics offers a robust theoretical framework for addressing this gap, enabling a systematic analysis of how meaning is constructed and communicated through visual and textual signs. model identifies three levels of meaning: denotation, the literal and explicit meaning of a sign; connotation, the culturally and emotionally associated meaning; and myth, the ideological dimension that reflects broader societal beliefs. This layered approach allows researchers to move beyond surface-level interpretations to uncover deeper cultural codes and value systems embedded in communication (Barthes, 1977).

In the context of postgraduate marketing through social media, a deeper level of analysis is crucial. A single promotional post is capable of conveying multiple layers of meaning at once: it may present straightforward information about available programs

(denotation), evoke motivational or aspirational associations through its visual tone and style (connotation), and simultaneously reinforce wider ideological narratives that connect higher education with success, prestige, and social mobility (myth). Recognizing these layered dimensions enables institutions to better understand how audiences interpret messages and how such interpretations influence their perceptions and engagement with the university's brand.

Recent developments in communication scholarship suggest that integrating semiotic analysis with visual literacy theory enhances analytical depth. Insights from recent studies highlight the role of visual storytelling, symbolic cues, and strategic framing in shaping audience engagement and interpretation in digital environments, aligning closely with Barthes' semiotic principles (Gougou et al., 2023)

Complementing this, advancements in visualization literacy research offer methodological tools for evaluating how audiences process visual information. The Mini-VLAT instrument, for example, provides a validated and efficient method for assessing visualization literacy competence (Arslan & others, 2023), while the latest systematic review on Data Visualization Literacy synthesizes conceptual models and assessment methods that explain the interpretive impact of design elements such as composition, color, and spatial arrangement. These studies collectively affirm that visual design choices are not merely aesthetic decisions but strategic determinants of message comprehension and audience engagement (Börner & others, 2025).

By integrating semiotics with visual literacy, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how visual and textual elements work together to generate meaning in postgraduate marketing campaigns. This approach emphasizes that institutional communication is not merely about transmitting factual information but also about how messages are framed, styled, and contextualized. The effectiveness of such communication depends on the interplay between message content and its visual-textual presentation, as well as the cultural frameworks that guide audience perception. Through this lens, the study highlights how meaning is negotiated, interpreted, and internalized by prospective students.

This research centers on Telkom University's official postgraduate Instagram account, @smbtelkom, which functions as a primary channel for promoting graduate programs, sharing admissions-related information, and engaging with potential students through interactive and visually appealing content. As one of Indonesia's leading private universities with a strong reputation for technology, innovation, and industry-oriented education, Telkom University positions itself as a competitive player in the national and global higher education landscape. Examining its communication strategies on Instagram therefore provides valuable insights into how digital platforms

are utilized not only to inform but also to persuade, inspire, and shape institutional image.

The objectives of this study are threefold and collectively aim to provide a deeper understanding of how social media functions as a tool for postgraduate recruitment. First, it seeks to examine the visual and textual strategies employed in @smbtelkom's Instagram content to attract prospective students. Second, it aims to analyze how these strategies generate layered meanings denotative, connotative, and mythic by applying Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Third, the study evaluates how the integration of design choices and narrative techniques contributes to shaping the university's institutional image while simultaneously influencing audience perceptions, engagement, and decision-making processes.

The contributions of this research are twofold, encompassing both theoretical and practical dimensions. From a theoretical perspective, it advances scholarship on visual communication within higher education marketing by focusing on the relatively underexplored postgraduate segment and extending the application of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to the dynamic and evolving context of social media platforms. From a practical standpoint, the study offers actionable insights for university communication strategists, marketers, and social media managers in designing campaigns that go beyond surface-level promotion. Such campaigns should be visually engaging, culturally resonant, aligned with institutional branding, and capable of fostering meaningful audience interaction and long-term engagement.

By positioning this study at the intersection of semiotics, visual literacy, and higher education marketing, the research underscores the critical role of communication strategies that are simultaneously culturally grounded and analytically robust. It highlights that the effectiveness of postgraduate recruitment campaigns on Instagram cannot be attributed merely to the use of attractive visuals or aesthetic appeal. Rather, success depends on crafting integrated messages in which textual and visual elements work together to convey layered meanings that resonate with the values, aspirations, and decision-making considerations of prospective students. In doing so, the study emphasizes the strategic importance of meaning-making in digital academic promotion.

LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

a. Semiotics and Roland Barthes' Framework

Semiotics is the discipline that examines how signs and symbols generate meaning within communication processes. Barthes (1977) introduced a three-tier framework consisting of denotation, which refers to the literal or surface-level

description of a sign; connotation, which encompasses meanings shaped by cultural and emotional associations; and myth, which conveys broader ideological narratives embedded within the sign. This theoretical model allows researchers to move beyond surface interpretations and explore how visual and textual elements reinforce values, norms, and institutional identity. Semiotic analysis has been applied in various fields, including advertising, media studies, and institutional branding, to reveal the underlying mechanisms through which communication strategies influence audience perceptions. By employing this approach, scholars can uncover the deeper layers of meaning that shape public understanding, construct brand narratives, and strengthen the intended messages conveyed by organizations, as highlighted by (Azim & Mustaqeem, 2024).

b. Visual Literacy in Digital Communication

Visual literacy refers to the capacity to decode, interpret, and create meaning from visual content (Dondis, 1973). Within the realm of digital communication particularly on social media, it entails understanding how design elements such as layout, typography, and color schemes affect audience attention, comprehension, and perception. Research in higher education marketing demonstrates that visually attractive yet culturally resonant materials significantly enhance audience engagement (Sriyanto et al., 2024); Quijada et al., 2022). Complementing this, Adriani, Chrisdina, and Irwandy (2024) in the *Journal of Communication and Public Relations* observed that digital platforms can foster interpersonal interaction and cultivate a sense of community belonging. In the context of postgraduate recruitment, these insights suggest that integrating clear, well-structured informational content with a consistent visual identity not only reinforces institutional credibility but also aligns with the emotional motivations of prospective students, thereby increasing their interest and trust in the institution.

c. The Grammar of Visual Design

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), introduced the notion of the *grammar of visual design*, which argues that images, much like written language, operate according to specific structural conventions that shape the process of meaning-making. Within this framework, elements such as *salience* (the degree to which certain components stand out), *framing* (the way visual elements are bounded or separated), and *spatial arrangement* (the placement and organization of elements in space) play a central role in directing the viewer's attention and influencing their interpretation. In today's digital media landscape, the application of this theory has become increasingly evident, particularly on visually driven platforms such as Instagram. Here, the deliberate organization of visual components ranging from carefully positioned text overlays,

impactful focal imagery, and consistent branding elements, is strategically employed to enhance the clarity of messages. As demonstrated such visual structuring not only improves the precision of communication but also strengthens brand recall, ultimately serving as an effective strategy for fostering long-term engagement and loyalty among social media audiences (Ramadanty & Syafganti, 2021).

d. Corporate and Institutional Communication

Institutional communication can be understood as the purposeful and strategic crafting of messages aimed at shaping, sustaining, and reinforcing an organization's identity Cornelissen (2014). Within the context of higher education, effective brand positioning is frequently anchored in the consistent deployment of recognizable institutional symbols such as logos, official color schemes, and standardized typographic styles across a wide range of promotional channels Brengman & Karimov, (2021). The advent of social media has broadened the scope of these practices, transforming them into interactive, participatory spaces where audiences are not merely passive recipients but can actively engage with, circulate, and even co-create the institution's brand narratives. Emerging research suggests that campaigns which integrate culturally localized symbols alongside student-centered storytelling approaches tend to elicit higher levels of audience interaction and cultivate more enduring brand associations. Such strategies not only enhance visibility but also strengthen emotional connections, fostering a sense of belonging among both current and prospective members of the academic community (Dinya & Azzam, 2023).

However, in the context of postgraduate student admissions, studies that specifically examine how institutional communication is realized through visual content on social media are still limited.

e. Social Media Marketing in Higher Education

Social media marketing within the higher education sector has progressed beyond its early function of delivering straightforward informational updates, evolving into a more sophisticated practice that integrates cohesive visual and textual elements to reinforce institutional branding. Among available platforms, Instagram has been particularly noted for its ability to combine striking visual content with succinct, persuasive copy that resonates with younger, digitally fluent audiences Leaver et al. (2020). Although scholarly attention to undergraduate recruitment strategies is well established, research focusing on the postgraduate market remains comparatively limited. Recent studies by Sriyanto et al., (2024) and Quijada et al., (2022). emphasize the untapped potential of postgraduate marketing campaigns to employ trust-driven storytelling, emphasize professional advancement opportunities, and leverage a sense

of exclusivity as key persuasive mechanisms to attract high-caliber applicants. The application of semiotic analysis to such campaigns provides a nuanced understanding of how these narratives are intentionally constructed, strategically communicated, and ultimately interpreted by prospective students within increasingly competitive academic environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the implicit and explicit meanings embedded in Instagram content related to postgraduate admissions. The analysis was guided by Roland Barthes' (1977) semiotic theory, which comprises three interrelated levels of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the study examined literal and directly observable elements such as imagery, typography, captions, and compositional arrangement. The connotative level extended the analysis to cultural, emotional, and symbolic associations that shape audience perception. The mythic level revealed the ideological narratives and socially constructed values subtly reinforced through the posts, demonstrating how visual and textual choices contribute to institutional branding and positioning. This multi-layered framework enabled a holistic understanding of how design elements and discourse interact to construct meaning, enhance audience engagement, and communicate institutional identity. The methodology was chosen for its capacity to bridge textual interpretation and visual analysis, thereby providing nuanced insights into strategic communication practices within digital media contexts.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the selection of Instagram posts that were thematically relevant and diverse in promotional style. Four posts were obtained from the official @smbtelkom account, each addressing postgraduate recruitment through distinct thematic angles, including direct entry pathways, open selection processes, program batch promotions, and scholarship announcements. Data collection was conducted from January to April 2025, during which screenshots of each post were captured in their original format to preserve both visual and textual integrity. Analytical procedures followed systematic coding, linking observed patterns to broader communicative strategies. This process incorporated detailed field notes and triangulation with existing literature in visual communication, digital marketing, and higher education branding to enhance validity. Ultimately, the methodology not only examined Instagram as a promotional platform but also as a medium for building relational engagement, fostering aspirational connections, and strengthening institutional credibility in a competitive academic environment.

Table 1. Selected Instagram Posts for Semiotic Analysis

No	Title of Post	Date Posted	Theme/Focus
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1	Direct Track Master's Program	15 Jan 2025	Fast-track postgraduate admissions
2	Open Selection Pathways	28 Jan 2025	General admissions announcement
3	Master's Program Batch 1	12 Feb 2025	Academic program promotion
4	LPDP 2025 Scholarship Program	25 Mar 2025	Scholarship and funding opportunities

Data analysis followed Barthes' semiotic framework. Both visual and textual components were examined to identify how design choices, symbolic meanings, and ideological messages interact. To ensure analytical rigor, systematic coding was applied, field notes were maintained, and findings were cross-referenced with existing scholarship in visual communication, digital marketing, and higher education branding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of promotional content uploaded by the @smbtelkom account was conducted using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. This approach examines visual and textual elements across three layers of meaning: denotation, connotation, and myth. To present the findings systematically, each piece of content is described and analyzed in a table mapping the sign, signifier, and signified, followed by interpretation. The results are organized into four sections: Direct Track Master Program, Selection Path Program, Master Program, and LPDP Scholarship Program 2025.

a. Direct Track Master Program

Visual: Young woman sitting with a laptop, looking upward. Blue-to-purple gradient background. Telkom University logo and @smbtelkom account are featured.

Text on image: "No Test!" Deadline for Registration: January 10, 2024" "Lecture Period: February 2024" "Get a 50% Alumni Scholarship"

Caption: "Hey Telutizen! For Telkom University alumni who want to continue their master's studies, join now through the Direct Track program for February 2024. Don't miss this opportunity to get a 50% alumni scholarship."



Picture 1: Direct Track Master Program
(Source: Instagram @smbtelkom Accessed on June 3, 2025)

At the denotative level, the image shows a young woman with an open laptop, sitting cross-legged in a private room with soft lighting. This directly represents individual study activity in a personal setting. At the connotative level, the visual suggests independence, flexibility, and enthusiasm for academic achievement, while also reflecting the lifestyle of a younger generation accustomed to digital technology. At the mythic level, the content reinforces the idea that Telkom University offers accelerated and prestigious study opportunities for independent and high-achieving students.

Table 1. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis:

Visual elements/Text	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Myth
A young woman with an open laptop, sitting cross-legged in a private room with soft lighting.	Independent learning activities in private space	Independence, flexibility, academic enthusiasm, young generation accustomed to using technology	Telkom University provides accelerated study opportunities for outstanding and independent students.

(Source: Author's processing 2025)

The underlying ideology of this promotional content positions the Direct Track Master's Program as a swift, accessible, and prestigious pathway to a promising future. The young woman working on her laptop serves as a visual metaphor for autonomy and competence in the digital era. Meanwhile, textual cues such as *"No Test"* and *"50% Alumni Scholarship"* reinforce the university's image as modern, efficient, and inclusive.

Collectively, these elements frame Telkom University as a forward-looking institution that values both academic excellence and accessibility.

b. Selection Path Program Currently Open

Visual: Blue-to-purple gradient design with the Telkom University logo

Text on the image: "Current Selection Path" + "Deadline July 31, 2024"

Caption: "Time to Level Up!" + Tel-U postgraduate application call. "Time to Level Up!" + CTA "Register Now"



Picture 2: Selection Path Program Currently Open
(Source: Instagram @smbtelkom Accessed on June 3, 2025)

At the denotative level, the post shows a young man in a maroon alma mater jacket, confidently standing in front of campus buildings. The textual element emphasizes the announcement of the admissions deadline. At the connotative level, this depiction symbolizes optimism, professionalism, and institutional pride, while the call to action highlights accessibility and inclusiveness for diverse applicants.

At the mythic level, the program is framed as an equitable gateway to higher education, positioning Telkom University as a prestigious and forward-looking institution that offers opportunities for all qualified candidates.

Table 2. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis:

Visual elements/Text	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Myth
A young man wearing a maroon alma mater jacket, standing confidently against the	Students are ready to register for the selection pathway	Optimism, professionalism, pride in being part of a renowned institution	Telkom University is a prestigious choice for pursuing postgraduate studies.

backdrop of campus buildings.			
"Registration for the Regular and RPL Pathways is Now Open!"	Information on the opening of the entrance selection	Accessibility of higher education for various backgrounds	Telkom University provides broad opportunities for prospective students from various paths

(Source: Author's processing 2025)

The content portrays Telkom University as a forward-looking and sophisticated institution that remains attuned to evolving societal trends and workforce demands. Through the integration of visual and textual elements, the message conveys that pursuing postgraduate studies at Telkom University extends beyond purely academic advancement; it is positioned as a strategic means for enhancing social standing, fostering personal growth, and attaining professional success. Expressions such as "Improve Your Career" encapsulate the meritocratic ideal, framing education as a purposeful investment in upward social mobility and long-term economic prosperity.

c. Master Program

Visual: Three students wearing red alma mater jackets (male and female), modern campus setting, bright color elements (blue, purple, green).

Image Text: "Master's Program" "Registration Deadline: April 16, 2025" "Intake: September 2025" "Batch 1 (Odd Number)" Tagline: #LevelUpYourCareer

Caption: "Telkom University [Master's Batch 1 – Intake September 2025]" (full text in the full text section)



Picture 3: Master Program

(Source: Instagram @smbtelkom Accessed on June 3, 2025)

To interpret the content presenting information about Telkom University's Master's Program, this study applied Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. Each visual component was examined across three levels of meaning: denotative, connotative, and mythological, in order to reveal how layers of meaning are intentionally constructed. This method offers insight into the ways promotional messages are conveyed and how the institution's image is shaped through the strategic use of visual symbols. The table below outlines a detailed mapping of these elements along with their corresponding interpretations.

Table 3. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis:

Visual elements/Text	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Myth
Slideshow containing photos of students in their alma mater jackets and lecture activities, accompanied by professional graphic design.	Illustration of academic activities of the master's program	Academic enthusiasm, seriousness of study, active and professional student representation	Telkom University's Masters Program is attended by qualified students who are ready to compete in the academic and industrial world.
"Batch 1 Registration is Now Open – Register Now!"	Information regarding the initial registration wave	Participatory invitation, urgency to register immediately, exclusive impression	Batch 1 is a golden opportunity to be an early part of a leading academic community.

(Source: Author's processing 2025)

The content projects Telkom University as a prestigious and forward-thinking postgraduate institution dedicated to cultivating the next generation of leaders. Through visuals featuring confident students, contemporary campus architecture, and digital iconography, the university conveys its alignment with modern advancements and societal progress. The slogan *"Be a Future Leader"* alongside motivational statements reinforces the notion that studying at Telkom University represents not merely an academic pursuit but a strategic pathway toward a promising future and visionary leadership within the digital era.

d. LPDP Scholarship Program 2025

Visual: Students in alma mater jackets, campus buildings, LPDP icon, futuristic illustration.

Image text: "LPDP Scholarship 2025," "Registration Deadline: July 3, 2025," "Announcement: July 10, 2025," and list of study programs.

Caption: "The LPDP Telkom University Scholarship (Batch 2) is Now Open! Come and seize the opportunity to study postgraduate studies with full funding from LPDP! Register before July 3, 2025."



Picture 4: LPDP Scholarship Program 2025

(Source: Instagram @smbtelkom Accessed on June 3, 2025)

To interpret the content presenting information on the 2025 LPDP Scholarship at Telkom University, this study utilized Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Each visual element was examined at three analytical levels denotative, connotative, and mythological, to uncover the layered construction of meaning. This approach highlights how visual symbols are strategically employed to communicate promotional messages while reinforcing the institution's image and values. The table below provides a detailed mapping of these elements along with their corresponding interpretations.

Table 4. Roland Barthes' Semiotic Analysis:

Visual elements/Text	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Myth
Illustrative image of a student with the Indonesian flag as a background and educational symbols such as a toga, books, and the LPDP icon.	Representation of scholarship recipient students	Hope, achievement, nationalism, and access to quality higher education	LPDP is a symbol of meritocracy and a golden opportunity for the nation's best sons and daughters to study at leading campuses such as Telkom University.
"Tel-U x LPDP 2025 – Get Your Scholarship Now!"	Information on scholarship collaboration between Telkom University and LPDP	Affirmation of campus quality, optimistic invitation to register, full funding opportunities	Telkom University is a strategic partner campus of LPDP to produce future leaders of Indonesia.

(Source: Author's processing 2025)

The content conveys the perspective that higher education particularly when made accessible through scholarship programs constitutes a valid and esteemed

pathway to upward social mobility. By featuring the collaboration between Telkom University and LPDP, it reinforces the message that prompt and uncomplicated access to high-quality education is a deserved privilege for individuals who demonstrate exceptional achievement. This framing reflects the ethos of digital meritocracy, wherein academic excellence combined with technological proficiency is presented as a critical foundation for securing a brighter and more competitive future.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the postgraduate student admissions content on Telkom University's Instagram account @smbtelkom is not merely designed as informational announcements, but as carefully constructed communication artifacts that combine visual identity and persuasive textual elements. Across the four analyzed contents Program Direct Track Magister, Jalur Seleksi yang Sedang Dibuka, Program Magister Batch 1, and Beasiswa LPDP 2025 there is evidence of consistency in brand representation, manifested in the repetitive use of the Telkom University logo, standardized color palettes, and modern typography. These visual markers are systematically combined with textual strategies such as motivational taglines, directive captions, and hashtag clusters to reinforce institutional identity and increase message discoverability (Hanif, 2025).

From the perspective of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework Barthes (1977) the findings illustrate the layered nature of meaning-making in digital communication. At the denotative level, the analyzed posts convey factual admission-related information such as deadlines, program details, and scholarship opportunities. At the connotative level, the imagery of students in alma mater jackets, the usage of gradient color schemes, and the incorporation of nationalistic symbols highlight cultural associations of modernity, credibility, and inclusivity Smith & Liu (2024). At the mythic level, the contents construct broader ideological narratives that equate postgraduate education with leadership, professional advancement, and nation-building aspirations Gupta et al., (2025). This layered analysis demonstrates that @smbtelkom's Instagram content is a hybrid communication practice, simultaneously serving practical informational needs while projecting aspirational institutional myths.

Moreover, the findings indicate that the analyzed posts are designed as multimodal storytelling devices, not isolated pieces of information. The integration of directive and motivational language with strategic visual cues fosters stronger audience identification and engagement Han et al., (2025) For example, the Direct Track Program post communicates efficiency and exclusivity through the "No Test" tagline paired with futuristic gradients, while the LPDP Scholarship post constructs a nationalistic narrative through the imagery of the Indonesian flag and LPDP icon. These strategies align with

studies showing that visual storytelling and symbolic framing significantly enhance audience trust and engagement in digital environments (Dhanesh et al., 2022) (Börner & others, 2025)

Overall, the analysis concludes that @smbtelkom's Instagram content functions dually: as a source of concrete information about admissions and as a mechanism of institutional branding through semiotic storytelling. This dual role positions Telkom University not only as a credible higher education provider but also as an active participant in the digital storytelling landscape of Indonesian academia.

a. Theoretical Contributions

Theoretically, this research enriches the discourse on semiotics and multimodal communication by demonstrating how Barthes' three levels of meaning can be applied in the context of higher education social media. It provides evidence of the interplay between denotation, connotation, and myth in shaping institutional branding narratives on Instagram Azim & Mustaqeem, (2024). Furthermore, it contributes to the understanding of how visual consistency through color schemes, typography, and logo placement operates as a semiotic code that reinforces trust and recognition across audiences. This confirms that higher education branding in the digital era requires the integration of semiotic depth and narrative strategy rather than reliance on surface-level promotional content.

b. Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, this study offers recommendations for university communication managers. First, consistency in visual identity (logos, typography, color palettes) should be maintained to strengthen brand recall and recognition Gupta et al., (2025). Second, captions should integrate motivational and directive language, while also embedding localized cultural references such as Bandung's cultural identity to foster deeper audience connection Hanif, (2025) Third, adopting interactive content formats such as carousel posts, testimonial videos, or short-form reels can enhance message clarity and boost engagement Arslan & others, (2023). This aligns with digital marketing research that emphasizes interactivity and personalization as key drivers of user trust and loyalty.

c. Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focused exclusively on semiotic sign analysis, without incorporating audience reception or interpretive feedback, which could have added valuable insights. The sample was limited to only four Instagram posts, which constrains the generalizability of findings to the broader content strategy of @smbtelkom. Moreover, semiotic interpretation is inherently subjective,

relying on the researcher's analytical lens, which introduces potential bias in meaning construction (Barthes, 1977).

d. Suggestions for Telkom University (@smbtelkom)

Based on the findings, three key recommendations are proposed: (1) maintain design consistency in typography, logos, and color usage to reinforce institutional identity Smith & Liu, (2024) ; (2) integrate localized cultural and national symbols more explicitly to enhance emotional resonance with audiences; and (3) expand into interactive and narrative-rich formats such as student testimonials, behind-the-scenes reels, or scholarship journey stories, which humanize the institutional brand (Han et al., 2025).

e. Suggestions for Future Research

For future studies, incorporating audience-centered methods such as surveys, interviews, or comment analysis can provide deeper insights into how prospective students interpret visual-textual strategies Börner & others, (2025). Employing digital ethnography would allow exploration of the broader social context of higher education communication on platforms like Instagram Dhanesh et al., (2022) Expanding the sample across multiple universities could also enable comparative analysis, revealing diverse branding strategies and their effectiveness in different cultural or institutional contexts.

BIODATA

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