



Leveraging Alumni Networks: An Examination of Communication Strategies in Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is an investigation of communication strategies employed by higher education institutions (HEIs) in leveraging their alumni networks. Such communication strategies are fundamental in fostering alumni networks whose developments not only instil a sense of belonging but are also strategic in improving institutional reputation, fundraising efforts, as well as student mentorship opportunities. The methodological approach focused on a document analysis, through an examination of relevant secondary sources of information, in order to determine communication strategies for improved alumni involvement. The findings are documented around four emergent themes: (i) the importance of strategic communication in HEIs, (ii) improving alumni engagement with modern communication, (iii) barriers to communication in HEIs and (iv) the benefits of an engaged alumni network. Recommendations for HEIs include the development and implementation of communication strategies that meet the unique requirements of their alumni, the usage of data analytics to manage alumni information, the dissemination of clear and consistent messages across all communication platforms and the encouragement of alumni participation in areas such as academic advisory boards and university volunteer programmes. Additional recommendations include the feature of alumni success stories in HEI communication channels, use of the surveys to gather alumni feedback and the investment in digital technologies to reach and communicate with alumni (such as virtual events, alumni portals and mobile applications). This paper contributes to the scholarship of research on fostering alumni relations through an exploration of communication strategies that encourage increased alumni involvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the association with alumni and their ongoing engagement with their respective alma mater is of vital importance. HEIs depend on the support of their alumni for their continued operational sustainability.¹ Pedro, Mendes, and Pereira highlight that the two most important constituents of a higher

¹ Daniel Diaz Vidal and Thomas G Pittz, “Educating beyond the Classroom: Alumni Giving and the Value of Campus Culture,” *Studies in Higher Education* 44, no. 12 (2019): 2208–22.

education institute (HEI) are the students and the alumni.² Gallo defines alumni as graduates of HEIs who have an intricate relationship with their alma mater.³ Straujuma and Gaile-Sarkane emphasise the importance of active alumni involvement in HEIs for the enhancement of alumni relations.⁴ This can be reached with the support of an efficient strategic communication system that produces an active alumni network. Natalea and Lubniewski affirm that communication is the process through which messages are delivered to the intended audiences via various channels.⁵ Hajid defines strategic communication as a focused and deliberate two-way exchange of information between internal and external stakeholders, which is derived from the organisation's strategic plan.⁶ The purpose of these communication strategies is to inform all stakeholders about the actions the organisation has implemented. Hajid claims that there is limited evidence available on strategic communication in HEIs, which contributes to the lack of communication systems at HEIs for stakeholder interaction.⁷ Furthermore, Mangundu adds that the shift in communication in HEIs post-COVID-19, from face-to-face to online lecturing methods, exhibits HEIs' adaptability to communicate with their stakeholders.⁸

The aim of this research was to investigate strategic communication within the HEI sector with a particular focus on how different communication strategies can leverage alumni networks. Communication strategies were explored in terms of traditional and digital methods. This paper also aimed to investigate how different communication strategies were used in HEIs to influence alumni to remain connected with their alma mater in leveraging alumni networks for a mutually beneficial relationship between the alumnus and alma mater. By assessing different communication strategies, both modern and traditional, this study offers insights that can enhance HEI engagement activities and possibly strengthen their alumni relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As outlined by Gujarathi, alumni remain an important stakeholder of HEIs and actively assist in the representation of their alma mater following graduation.⁹ HEIs need to cultivate the relationship with their alumni to harness this valuable source of talent, skills or funding. The need to employ diverse communications tools to bridge the gap and foster connections between alumni and their institution is necessary to build a cohesive alumni network. As cited by Dillon, the perception of 'alumni role identity' refers to a psychometric measurement assessing how far an individual self-identifies as an alumnus.¹⁰ Dillon further affirms that there is a link between alumni's contribution and their sense of belonging to their alma mater.¹¹

Strategic Communication with Stakeholders at HEIs

Tulankar and Grampurohit highlighted that alumni networks embody a fundamental resource, not only for fostering institutional loyalty but also for generating financial support and enhancing the HEI's reputation.¹² Effective communication strategies are important in terms of connecting these networks, as

² Ilda Maria Pedro, Júlio da Costa Mendes, and Luís Nobre Pereira, "Understanding Alumni-Alma Mater Commitment Relationships Upstream and Downstream," *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education* 31, no. 2 (2021): 175–96.

³ Maria L Gallo, "How Are Graduates and Alumni Featured in University Strategic Plans? Lessons from Ireland," *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education* 22, no. 3 (2018): 92–97.

⁴ Anita Straujuma and Elina Gaile-Sarkane, "An Alumni Knowledge Management Model for Sustainable Higher Education and Research Institution Management.," *Journal of Business Management*, no. 15 (2018).

⁵ Kirstin Natale and Kathryn Lubniewski, "Use of Communication and Technology among Educational Professionals and Families.," *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 10, no. 3 (2018): 377–84.

⁶ Mutambuli James Hadji, "Analysing the Strategic Role of Communication Practitioners in South African Universities," *Communicatio* 48, no. 2 (2022): 110–35.

⁷ Hadji, "Analysing the Strategic Role of Communication Practitioners in South African Universities."

⁸ John Mangundu, "The Effects of Technostress on Academic Commitment among First-Year Undergraduate Students at an Institution of Higher Education in South Africa," In Proceedings of the 4th African Human Computer Interaction Conference, 2023, 106–17.

⁹ Mangundu, "The Effects of Technostress on Academic Commitment among First-Year Undergraduate Students at an Institution of Higher Education in South Africa."

¹⁰ Jay Le Roux Dillon, *Factors and Characteristics of Alumni Role Identity: Implications for Practice in Higher Education Fundraising and Alumni Relations* (University of San Francisco, 2017).

¹¹ Dillon, *Factors and Characteristics of Alumni Role Identity: Implications for Practice in Higher Education Fundraising and Alumni Relations*.

¹² Saroj Tulankar and Bhagyashree Grampurohit, "Role of Alumni as Stakeholders in Enhancing Quality Education," in Sustaining Quality: NAAC New Guidelines 2017 Conference, Bhandup, Mumbai, 2020.

they can potentially foster alumni participation and investment into their respective alma maters. As HEIs work in increasingly complex environments that are characterised by changes in technologies, stakeholder expectations and shifting demographics, strategic communication within this sector has a critical function to play. Effective communication tactics help not only to improve institutional reputation but also to establish relationships with different stakeholders, from students, academics, staff, and alumni. This literature review analyses core issues in strategic communication in HEIs, particularly the leveraging of alumni networks as a key component of such strategies.

Strategic communication is viewed as the strict application of communication by an organisation to pursue its mission and attain its objectives. The administrative and academic nature of HEIs, along with their intricate organisational arrangements and substantial staffing levels to be communicated, are thought to frequently obstruct their communication processes. The two-way symmetrical model of Grunig and Hunt emphasises dialogue between HEIs and their stakeholders that will foster a mutual relationship and understanding.¹³

Stakeholder theory maintains that organisations need to take into account the interests of all the stakeholders to achieve long-term success.¹⁴ In HEIs, these stakeholders comprise a wide variety of groups, including existing students, professors, prospective students, parents, business partners, and alumni. Identification of these stakeholder expectations and needs is instrumental to effective strategic communication. Literature indicates that HEIs that embrace proactive connection of their stakeholders by means of open and participative communication are better placed to create trust and loyalty.

Literature also identifies several communication strategies which HEIs can use to effectively engage with alumni. These strategies encompass customised contact, targeted messages and the use of internet platforms to build connections. Alumni networks serve a fundamental role in this engagement, providing opportunities for networking, mentorship, and career development. HEIs that utilise data analytics to section their alumni database and adapt communications accordingly have reported higher engagement rates and additional engagements.

In examining the connection between strategic communication and alumni engagement, it becomes evident that effective communication strategies are essential for leveraging alumni networks. By adopting a strategic approach to stakeholder communication, HEIs can enhance their relationships with alumni, resulting in a strong network that supports the HEIs' goals.

Traditional Communication and Modern Communication

Poku claims that proper channels of communication serve a significant role in HEIs as all operations are based on some type of direct or indirect communication.¹⁵ Traditional means of communication in HEIs have historically relied on official channels like newsletters, printed reports, alumni publications, and face-to-face conferences. These methods are typically characterised by their one-way system of communication, where HEIs transmit information to alumni with minimal opportunity for feedback or interaction. On the other hand, contemporary or modern communication channels and methods use digital platforms and associated technologies to develop improved connections and involvement of alumni.

Johnson offers important insight in suggesting that email communications, online networks and social media have now become essential tools of and for alumni relations based on their ability to encourage and foster two-way communication and increased active engagement.¹⁶ Studies suggest that modern communication can help grow the spirit of community and belonging among alumni, leading them to engage more intensely with their alma mater. Also, the use of data analytics in modern communication allows institutions to transform message content and participation to connect with alumni interests and tastes, to more effective engagement strategies.

Thus, traditional channels like communication have been core in alumni engagements, but adapting to more modern communication approaches is crucial in leveraging deeper bonds and enhancing overall

¹³ Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism* (Lafayette: Huntington House, 1983).

¹⁴ C. Freeman, *Technology Policy and Economic Performance: Lessons from Japan* (Pinter Publishers, 1987).

¹⁵ Michael B Adusei Poku, "Administration of Universities and Channels of Communication In Ghana," *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* 13, no. 5 (2022): 196–207.

¹⁶ Jacquelyn T Johnson, "A Study of Higher Education Alumni Perceptions of In-Person or Online Engagement," 2023.

alumni engagement within HEIs. This literature emphasises the need for HEIs to find a balance between traditional and modern approaches in their quest to boost their alumni networks effectively.

Alumni Loyalty at HEI's

Alumni networks are an important stakeholder group for HEIs, acting as a resource and means of HEIs engagement. Literature suggests that alumni involvement is associated with institutional performance, such as increased fundraising, improved reputation, and better student recruitment. Alumni tend to be brand ambassadors, and their stories can reinforce the institution's values and mission. In addition, harnessing alumni networks can provide useful partnerships with industry, opening doors for existing students and improving the institution's relevance to the labour market.

Snijders, Wijnia, Rikers and Loyens accept that alumni loyalty can be defined as the allegiance and affective commitment that former students have for their alma mater.¹⁷ The study cites that such loyalty is guided by numerous factors, including the quality of learning experience, the reputation of the institution, and ongoing engagement opportunities. The Commitment-Trust Theory, among others, emphasises the saliency of trust and satisfaction in fostering loyalty, which in alumni loyalty can be highly relevant. Snijders et al. confirm that the HEI formative period exerts a strong impact on alumni loyalty.¹⁸ The study discovers that alumni with favourable academic and social experiences tend to engage with their HEI after graduation. As illustrated in research by Pedro et.al., continued engagement through events, newsletters, and networking opportunities enhances alumni loyalty.¹⁹ The study emphasises that the role of alumni associations in facilitating these connections is critical, as they provide platforms for interaction and relationship building. As stated by Bwemelo and Magasi, the recognised reputation of a HEI plays a vital role in determining alumni loyalty.²⁰ HEIs that maintain and build strong reputations through accomplishments and community impact are inclined to foster more loyal alumni.

Communication Barriers

Effective communication is vital for engaging alumni networks in HEIs. However, Malhotra, Massoud, and Jindal state that various barriers hinder this process, affecting alumni loyalty and the success of HEIs.²¹ This literature review examines the key communication barriers faced by HEIs in leveraging alumni networks, focusing on both technological and interpersonal aspects. According to Jelani and Nordin, communication barriers refer to obstacles that prevent the effective exchange of information and understanding between parties. In the context of HEIs and alumni relations, these barriers can lead to disengagement, miscommunication, and ultimately, a weakening of alumni loyalty.

This section has outlined the literature review for the study and illustrates an examination of strategic communication in HEIs. The literature review highlights the significance of operative stakeholder engagement via both traditional and modern communication methods. The literature review also points out the role of communication strategies in fostering alumni loyalty and identifies communication barriers that can hinder engagement. Overall, it joins existing knowledge and indicates areas for further research, setting a foundation for enhancing communication methods within HEIs to upgrade stakeholder relationships. The next section outlines the methodological approach for this study.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative methodological approach based on document analysis, using secondary data sources to investigate how communication strategies can foster the connection between alumni and their alma mater over time, developing engagement and participation in the HEI's activities and goals. Document analysis concerns the assessment of various documents, including books, newspaper articles,

¹⁷ Ingrid Snijders et al., "Alumni Loyalty Drivers in Higher Education," *Social Psychology of Education* 22, no. 3(2019): 607–27.

¹⁸ Snijders et al., "Alumni Loyalty Drivers in Higher Education."

¹⁹ Ilda Maria Pedro et al., "Alumni's Perceptions about Commitment towards Their University: Drivers and Consequences," *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing* 17, no. 4 (2020): 469–91.

²⁰ Gordian Stanslaus Bwemelo and Chacha Magasi, "Influence of Undergraduate Experience on Alumni Loyalty to Their Alma Mater in the Tanzania's Higher Education Context," *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science* 11, no. 4 (2022): 333–41.

²¹ Ruchika Malhotra, Massoud Massoudi, and Rajni Jindal, "An Alumni-Based Collaborative Model to Strengthen Academia and Industry Partnership: The Current Challenges and Strengths," *Education and Information Technologies* 28, no. 2 (2023): 2263–89.

academic journal articles, and institutional reports. Any text-containing document serves as a prospective resource for qualitative analysis. Desktop research is a time-effective and cost-efficient method that relies on existing documents without fieldwork. Purposive sampling allowed for the deliberate selection of articles related to communication strategies, higher education and alumni relations. Data (journal articles written in English) were collected from academic databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCO, ProQuest Education Journals, Sage Journals Online, Taylor and Francis Online Journals and Emerald during the period 2019 to 2024, using key terms in the search such as “higher education communication”, “alumni networks” and “higher education communication barriers”. The timeframe for the data collection was selected as documents under analysis during this period would typically reflect both traditional and communication strategies.

Braun and Clarke’s six-phase model of reflexive thematic analysis was used, which involved a familiarisation of the documents, coding of documents, initial themes generation, review of themes, finalisation of the themes and findings write-up.²² To ensure the validity of the research, trustworthy and credible secondary data sources were used (such as academic journal articles through reputable databases). Reliability was ensured through the triangulation of findings across journal articles; a clear methodology for the selection, coding and analysis of the data and an evaluation of the methodology used in the original data collection of the secondary source for identification of any possible biases or limitations.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Following a thematic analysis of the published works, key themes were identified in relation to the research questions.

Table 1: Themes aligned to Study Objectives

Research Questions	Theme
What communication strategies are currently used by HEIs to connect with their alumni networks?	Importance of Strategic Communication in HEIs
	Improving Alumni Engagement with Modern Communication
What barriers do HEIs encounter in executing effective communication strategies with their alumni?	Barriers to Communication in HEIs
How can HEIs successfully employ new technologies and digital tools to augment alumni communication and engagement?	Benefits of an Engaged Alumni Network

DISCUSSION

Theme One: Importance of Strategic Communication in HEIs

Theme one, which was sourced from studies by Schwetje, Hauser, Bösch and Leßmöllmann, Letlatsa, Capriotti, Carretón and Zeler and Fürst, Volk, Schäfer, Vogler and Sörensen underlines the significant role strategic communication plays in developing a HEI's reputation, stakeholder engagement, and brand awareness.²³ Letlatsa states that for HEIs, productive communication strategies are vital for fostering relationships with students, faculty, alumni, and external stakeholders.²⁴ In the context of the research topic, *Leveraging Alumni Networks: An Examination of Communication Strategies in Higher Education Institutions*, strategic communication becomes even more critical. Through applying tailored communication methods, HEIs can strengthen alumni relations, engage alumni in their alma mater growth,

²² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Reflecting on Reflexive Thematic Analysis,” *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* 11, no. 4 (2019): 589–97.

²³ Thorsten Schwetje et al., “Communicating Science in Higher Education and Research Institutions: An Organization Communication Perspective on Science Communication,” *Journal of Communication Management* 24, no. 3 (2020): 189–205; Relebohile Letlatsa, “Towards a Communication Strategy Implementation Framework for Higher Education Institutions in Lesotho,” *Communitas* 27 (2022): 169–84; Paul Capriotti, Carmen Carretón, and Ileana Zeler, “Exploring Interactivity Strategies in Social Media Communications of Leading Universities: A Cross-Continental Study,” *Sage Open* 14, no. 2 (2024): 21582440241259400; Silke Fürst et al., “Assessing Changes in the Public Communication of Higher Education Institutions: A Survey of Leaders of Swiss Universities and Colleges,” *Studies in Communication Sciences* 22, no. 3 (2022): 515–34.

²⁴ Letlatsa, “Towards a Communication Strategy Implementation Framework for Higher Education Institutions in Lesotho,” 170

and tap into their expert networks for fundraising, mentorship, and career development prospects.²⁵ Eventually, strategic communication not only improves a HEIs missions and goals but also enables impactful connections with alumni, making them a prized resource for HEIs long-term success. Regardless of the potential benefits, HEIs face challenges in efficiently communicating with alumni. One significant hurdle is the diversity of the alumni pool, which may possess varying interests, levels of engagement, and expectations.²⁶ Additionally, as cited by Shen and Sha, sustaining consistent and meaningful communication can be resource-intensive.²⁷ HEIs must develop strategies that balance engagement efforts with available resources while ensuring that communication is applicable and valuable to alumni.

Theme Two: Improving Alumni Engagement with Modern Communication

According to Capriotti, Carretón and Zeler, modern communication has developed into a vital tool for HEIs to implement strategies intended to encourage establishing and fostering communicative relationships with their alumni.²⁸ Research indicates that while traditional communication methods can successfully transmit HEIs messages and updates, they often lack the immediacy and engagement that modern communication tools provide.²⁹ The reliance on traditional methods can lead to decreased alumni involvement, as many alumni may find these approaches less appealing compared to interactive platforms. Camilleri states that by leveraging modern communications channels, HEIs can augment engagement and build a stronger sense of community amongst alumni.³⁰ Camilleri's study further illustrates that the adoption of modern communication channels can lead to substantial cost savings for the HEI as the change from traditional to modern technology enhances both efficiency and value.³¹ Additionally, the present HEI stakeholders' prevalent use of technology suggests that it is in the best interest of HEIs to stay relevant by the usage of modern communication channels.

Several studies probe the deployment of modern technology platforms in handling alumni relations. Notably, research by Rubejes-Silva investigates the development and execution of alumni portals and tracking systems, as these systems commonly support features for data management, communication tools, and online directories.³² Although the study highlights the growing adoption of these modern systems, there remains a gap in comprehending how these platforms can be constructed to successfully balance widespread functionality with a user-centered model to advance optimal alumni engagement.

Through integrating innovative modern communication such as virtual events, online forums and interactive content, HEIs can not only engage alumni more effectually but also inspire more participation in HEI activities, fundraising initiatives, and mentoring programmes.³³ Creating an Alumni Portal or Mobile Application which will design a central digital hub where alumni can retrieve news, events, networking opportunities, and resources would increase participation from alumni networks. As a result, HEIs can foster a more dynamic, engaged, and loyal alumni network, advancing both the HEI and their alumni.

²⁵ Capriotti, Carretón, and Zeler, "Exploring Interactivity Strategies in Social Media Communications of Leading Universities: A Cross-Continental Study," 2.

²⁶ Jason Paul Guilbeau, "Student Diversity in Higher Education: Are Alumni Part of the Equation?," 2018, 26-27.

²⁷ Hongmei Shen and Bey-Ling Sha, "Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Alumni Engagement: When Conversational Voice Matters More than Openness and Assurances of Legitimacy," *Public Relations Review* 46, no. 5 (2020): 101974, 7

²⁸ Capriotti, Carretón, and Zeler, "Exploring Interactivity Strategies in Social Media Communications of Leading Universities: A Cross-Continental Study," 1.

²⁹ Xuewen Luo, Hsiao-Hwa Chen, and Qing Guo, "Semantic Communications: Overview, Open Issues, and Future Research Directions," *IEEE Wireless Communications* 29, no. 1 (2022): 210–19, 211.

³⁰ Mark Camilleri, "Higher Education Marketing Communications in the Digital Era," in *Strategic Marketing of Higher Education in Africa* (Routledge, 2020), 77–95, 5-6

³¹ Camilleri, "Higher Education Marketing Communications in the Digital Era," 6.

³² Sarah Mae Rubejes-Silva, "Bridging the Gap Between Universities and Alumni: A User-Centered Evaluation of a Digital Alumni Engagement Platform," *Journal of Innovative Technology Convergence* 6, no. 2 (2024), 52.

³³ Janet G Hamilton, Raymond N Johnson, and John L Eckroth, "Critical Thinking Skills In The Accounting Curriculum.," *Journal of Theoretical Accounting Research* 18, no. 3 (2023), 29.

Theme Three: Barriers to Communication in HEIs

Modifications in alumni access to technology create significant barriers. As stated by Oetjen, Oetjen, Richardson, Calkins and Gordon, alumni from diverse backgrounds may have unequal access to digital platforms, which limits their engagement opportunities.³⁴ For instance, older alumni might be less familiar with social media or mobile applications that HEIs use to communicate. The study further illustrates that the multitude of communication channels can overwhelm alumni. HEIs often use multiple platforms, e.g., email, social media and newsletters, which may lead to uncertainty or disengagement if alumni do not know where to focus their attention.

Generic communication strategies can alienate alumni. Research by Malhotra *et al.* indicates that personalised communication fosters stronger connections, while impersonal communication may lead to disengagement. Thus, alumni are more likely to respond to tailored messages that resonate with their individual experiences.³⁵ Communication barriers significantly impact the ability of HEIs to leverage alumni networks effectively. By recognising and addressing these barriers, HEIs can enhance alumni engagement and foster stronger relationships. Future research should focus on the development and assessment of innovative communication strategies that specifically address these challenges, ensuring that alumni networks remain energetic and connected.

Theme Four: Benefits of An Engaged Alumni Network

Theme four underscores the versatile value that a strong, active alumni community brings to HEIs. In a study conducted by Malhotra *et al.*, it is stated that alumni can be prominent mentors for students, contributing guidance based on shared experiences and challenges encountered at HEIs.³⁶ The study elaborates that alumni who are subject matter experts in time management, financial planning, leadership and trending topics can be an asset to their alma mater as well as become brand ambassadors for the HEI. By giving back to the HEIs, alumni assist in increasing the HEI's credibility, enhance student confidence, and foster a campus culture that exhibits the HEI's missions, goals and values.³⁷

Smith highlights that alumni engagement is crucial for HEIs, not just for fundraising but also for developing the HEI's brand.³⁸ Alumni assist in attracting and retaining prospective students by showcasing famous individuals, marketing the HEI within their networks, and impact through participation in events and volunteerism.³⁹ Hence, an engaged alumni network not only heightens the reputation, financial sustainability, and opportunities to a HEI but also impacts the holistic growth of its students and the HEI's societal impact.

Research reiterates the importance and benefit of an engaged alumni network to their alma mater. Joshi expands on this philosophy and rationalises that alumni engagement can be categorised into two primary functions, which are financial and non-financial.⁴⁰ The financial function usually involves monetary contributions, whilst the non-financial functions can include activities such as mentoring, internships, career guidance and job opportunities. Joshi illustrates that alumni can furthermore influence policymaking and identify areas of improvement in their respective alma maters through continuous surveys conducted.⁴¹

³⁴ Reid M Oetjen et al., "Creating a culture of connectedness to foster alumni engagement," *Journal of Health Administration Education* 40, no. 1 (2023).

³⁵ Malhotra, Massoudi, and Jindal, "An Alumni-Based Collaborative Model to Strengthen Academia and Industry Partnership: The Current Challenges and Strengths."

³⁶ Malhotra, Massoudi, and Jindal, "An Alumni-Based Collaborative Model to Strengthen Academia and Industry Partnership: The Current Challenges and Strengths"; Joana Heil and Dirk Ifenthaler, "Online Assessment in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Online Learning* 27, no. 1 (March 1, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v27i1.3398>, 2264.

³⁷ Malhotra, Massoudi, and Jindal, "An Alumni-Based Collaborative Model to Strengthen Academia and Industry Partnership: The Current Challenges and Strengths," 2264.

³⁸ K. Dunkle et al., "The Influence of Organizational Culture on Employee Engagement.," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 14, no. 2 (2020): 60-75, 14.

³⁹ Brigitte Smit, "Atlas. Ti for Qualitative Data Analysis," *Perspectives in Education* 20, no. 3 (2002): 65–75, 14, 18.

⁴⁰ Seema Joshi, "Alumni Engagement in Higher Education Sector: What Does the Literature Tell Us," Department of Economics (UGC CAS Phase II) Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar 17 (2022): 55–64, 18.

⁴¹ D.B. Shah, Y.V. Joshi, and S.V. Patel, "A Better Understanding of Components Impacting Consumer Purchase Behaviour from Literature," *Indian Journal of Marketing* 43, no. 6 (2013): 4–14.

The theme assigns emphasis on the substantial value a solid and active alumni network brings to HEIs. An engaged alumni network is crucial for the long-term success and advancement of HEIs as it not only reinforces their reputation, financial sustainability, and student development but also fortifies their societal impact and vision and mission. This section has shown that valuable alumni engagement is essentially tied to strategic communication and the implementation of modern communication tools. The significance of constructing good, consistent, and targeted communication strategies cannot be overstated, since it has a direct effect on the impact of alumni relations with their alma mater. Furthermore, the positives associated with an active and involved alumni network, mentorship and professional collaborations reinforce the value of these relations to HEIs and alumni themselves. Additionally, the research has found that there are substantial barriers to strategic and effective communication, such as a lack of individualisation, age and technological limitations that need to be addressed in order to increase alumni contribution and participation. Lastly, current methods of communication, such as e-mail marketing and social media, are crucial in terms of addressing some of these gaps and working towards ensuring more meaningful and active engagement. When adopting such communication methods coupled with a strategic approach, HEIs can develop a more effective and lasting partnership with their alumni that is symbiotic in nature; mutually beneficial for both HEIs and alumni.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered in terms of how HEIs can develop their alumni communication strategies to optimise alumni relations:

- The development and implementation of communication strategies that meet the unique requirements of their alumni
- Usage of data analytics to categorise alumni according to, for example, age, year of graduation, current location, and employment.
- Development of clear and consistent messages across all communication platforms that obviate miscommunication and misunderstandings.
- Encouragement of alumni participation in areas such as academic advisory boards, university volunteer programmes and sharing of knowledge and expertise through guest lectures.
- Feature alumni success stories and achievements in HEIs' communication channels to foster alumni relations.
- The use of surveys and other feedback mechanisms to gain insight from alumni on the communication strategies.
- Investment and growth in the use of digital technologies to reach and communicate with alumni (such as virtual events, alumni portal and a mobile application).

CONCLUSION

The goal of the study was to identify how higher education institutions (HEIs) can leverage communication strategies to strengthen alumni networks. The study findings highlighted that intentional and effective communication plays a critical role in creating alumni loyalty, enhancing institutional status and creating mutually beneficial relationships, which could include mentorship, work-readiness development and increasing the HEIs third stream income. The study thus advocates for the development and use of strategic communication that is not only valid and relevant but also flexible, to meet the needs of diverse alumni communities. The findings of the study also pointed out that communication barriers like irregular and impersonalised messaging, as well as limited or no access to technology, could have a negative impact on alumni engagement if not addressed. This paper proposes that meaningful and impactful relations with alumni contribute to the sustainability of HEIs. Based on this study, it is evident that the future of alumni relations is linked to strategic, custom-made and technology-driven communication tactics that will ensure active and lucrative alumni engagement with their alma mater.

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