

# Sustainable Business School Alumni Engagement in the Age of AI



## MOTIVATION

Business school alumni are strategically important stakeholders who contribute to institutional reputation and legitimacy, support student mentoring and employability, strengthen connections with employers and industry, facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation, provide fundraising and broader institutional support, and foster lifelong learning communities. Universities, business schools produce a significant number of graduates each year, forming an increasingly valuable segment of their external stakeholder environment. According to Statistics Poland (GUS, 2023), 292,605 students graduated from higher education institutions (HEIs) in the 2022/2023 academic year, and similar upward trends are observed across the European Union (Eurostat, 2023). This expanding alumni population represents a strategic asset for HEIs, not only in terms of institutional reputation and development but also as a foundation for long-term engagement, collaboration, and impact. Literature highlights the mutual value of fostering strong alumni and alma mater relationships. For institutions, alumni contribute to reputation building, fundraising, and knowledge exchange (Gallo, 2012; Pedro et al., 2018), while for alumni and society, engagement with universities can enhance employability, foster a sense of identity, and support societal advancement (Cownie et al., 2020). Studies have also shown that strong HEI and alumni relationships can improve students' satisfaction with their studies (Alves et al., 2007), promote lifelong learning and skills development (Fleischman et.al., 2019), and create opportunities for professional networking and collaboration. Despite this potential, HEIs face significant challenges in building and sustaining alumni relationships, particularly in the European context, where alumni engagement culture remains relatively underdeveloped (Pedro et al., 2020; Snijders et al., 2019). While many universities have begun to recognize the strategic importance of alumni relations, implementation often remains fragmented, lacking integrated systems and longterm planning. This gap is even more apparent within business schools and management programs, where alumni are both potential collaborators and brand ambassadors, yet often remain not exploited enough in institutional development strategies. Furthermore, alumni engagement is gaining growing importance in accreditation standards and international rankings, influencing the assessment of educational programs and institutional quality. Strategic alumni relationship management is no longer a peripheral activity it is becoming a core component of value creation and institutional sustainability in higher education.

AI enabled alumni engagement as a mechanism supporting both institutional sustainability and long-term stakeholder value creation.

At the same time, alumni networks can strengthen the sustainability impact of business schools by connecting education with responsible business practice, social impact, knowledge transfer, and long-term value creation across organizations and communities. The rapid development of AI creates an additional dimension of alumni engagement, as AI-enabled personalization, data analytics, and digital platforms can support more tailored communication, lifelong learning, professional networking, and collaboration between business schools and their graduates

## GENERAL IDEAS OF RESEARCH GAP

Despite growing interest in the role of alumni in the development of higher education institutions (HEIs), existing research in this field remains limited, fragmented, and largely exploratory. A clear gap persists in the availability of comparative and longitudinal studies that would enable a deeper understanding of alumni engagement dynamics over time and across institutional contexts. Current literature is predominantly based on single institution case studies (e.g., Pedro et al., 2020; Robinson et al., 2016; Helgesen & Nettet, 2007; Maric et al., 2010; Bingham et al., 2003), which limit the generalizability of findings and hinder the development of evidence-based, scalable engagement models. Additionally, there is a notable absence of comparative analyses between institutions of varying profiles, particularly between top-ranked and lower-ranked universities, where alumni strategies, resources, and institutional priorities may differ significantly. Another underexplored dimension is the alumni relationship management practices within Business and Management (B&M) programs and institutions, which often operate under different organizational structures, market logics, and stakeholder expectations compared to multi departmental universities. The distinct positioning of business schools at the intersection of academia, industry, and global networks suggests the need for dedicated research into how these institutions cultivate, manage, and strategically benefit from relationships with alumni. This constellation of limitations highlights a substantial research gap. There is a need for cross institutional, longitudinal, and context sensitive studies that examine how alumni relationships are initiated, sustained, and leveraged. Particularly within the B&M field. Addressing this gap is critical for developing effective, evidence informed strategies that support institutional development, community building, and long-term sustainable impact in higher education.

## METHODS

The research seeks to explore the relationship between institutional ranking and the digital communication practices of higher education institutions (HEIs) in the field of Business and Management (B&M), with a specific focus on alumni engagement and possibly the use of AI. The guiding research questions are as follows:  
**RQ1:** Are top ranked higher education institutions in the field of Business and Management more active in digital communication with and about alumni compared to middle- and lower ranked institutions?  
**RQ2:** What digital communication channels are used by HEIs in Business and Management across the three ranking-based cohorts analyzed (top, middle, and bottom)?  
**Research Thesis**  
The central thesis of the study is that there is a positive correlation between institutional ranking and the intensity of digital communication activities aimed at alumni. Specifically, higher-ranked HEIs in Business and Management, as classified by the QS Top Universities ranking, exhibit greater activity and diversity in alumni focused digital communication compared to their lower-ranked counterparts.

## EMERGING RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Business schools can manage alumni relationships through integrated CRM platforms, professional social networks, virtual communities, digital events and lifelong learning services. AI can support audience segmentation, personalized communication, mentoring matching, conversational assistance and the prediction of engagement needs. Sustainability should be embedded through digital-first communication, support for ESG initiatives, inclusive access and alumni participation in social and environmental projects. These methods require transparent data governance, informed consent, algorithmic fairness and human oversight.

## TO BE SOLVED

- Consistent rules for identifying alumni related content, measuring communication activity and diversity.
- Distinguishing genuine AI supported engagement from the simple presence of a chatbot or automated too.
- Comparability of institutions across ranking tiers, the English language limitation, differences in resources and international orientation,

## DISCUSSION

- Is institutional ranking genuinely influences alumni communication or merely reflects differences in resources, international orientation and digital maturity?
- How digital activity should be measured, how alumni-related content should be classified, and how observational data can be complemented by surveys, interviews and longitudinal analysis?
- How comparative findings can be translated into responsible and transferable practices involving AI supported personalization, transparent data use, inclusive communication, sustainability and measures of engagement extending beyond posts, followers and donations.

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