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## **Social media presence and organisational attractiveness of ship owner and management companies**

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## Social media presence and organisational attractiveness of ship owner and management companies

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**Abstract:** Social media platforms are the most effective tools used to transfer information. Companies can actively promote organisational attractiveness and recruitment efforts by using these platforms. In this context, this study analyses the familiarity and attractiveness of shipping companies from the perspective of maritime students. The social media pages of 27 shipping companies across all platforms were examined and 578 maritime students were surveyed. Social media usage habits of maritime students and shipping companies were discussed. Findings showed that larger fleets correlated with a greater presence on social media. Companies mostly utilised Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram to promote different activities. Students were able to gain familiarity with shipping companies through these platforms but findings on increasing organisational attractiveness were limited. The use of social media in the maritime industry is still very limited. The most significant factors for high social media presence were found to be follower size and frequent posting. Other key points to increase social media activities to promote recruitment in the maritime industry are discussed.

**Keywords:** social media; organisational attractiveness; shipping companies; online recruitment.

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**Biographical notes:** Taha Talip Türkistanlı is a researcher at Mersin University Maritime Faculty. He has received his Bachelor's in Maritime Transportation Engineering from Dokuz Eylül University. He holds a Master's and PhD in Safety, Security and Environmental Protection in Maritime. He has several publications in maritime transportation and maritime education and training. He gives lectures in various maritime operation related subjects.

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## **1 Introduction**

The contributions to improving society are becoming an important subject for an increasing number of organisations. Adopting environmentally responsible and sustainable practices as well as promoting a socially responsible employer image is now one of the strategies that organisations adopt. Prominent organisations go beyond these efforts and aim for improving life skills, sense of worth, social relationships, satisfaction, well-being, and overall quality of life of their employees (Boreham et al., 2016; Thompson and Bruk-Lee, 2021). Achieving this contemporary employer attitude that embraces and cares for their employees and environment is a difficult challenge. Still, many organisations pursue that image since potential employees are also starting to place greater emphasis on these efforts made by potential employers. Most job seekers favour organisations that share similar concepts to their own traits and prefer to work for socially responsible, and caring organisations (Belinda et al., 2018; Kissel and Buttgen, 2015). Since attractive organisations attract a larger applicant pool, they obtain greater utility and competitive advantage in their recruitment efforts (Srivastava and Bhatnagar, 2010). On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly difficult for various organisations to recruit the human capital they need with specific skills. This is especially true for the shipping sector, where we see a trend of declining interest in maritime-related jobs (Jensen et al., 2016).

The shipping industry has been growing dramatically and contributes significantly to the world economy. The expansion of this industry has also provided various employment opportunities for individuals willing to work in ships, ports, and related agencies. However, high turnover rates, the shortage of qualified seafarers, and a negative image have plagued shipping for a long time. This situation has become a global issue and the career choices of the skilled human capital in maritime jobs have become significantly more important. In return, the competition to recruit competent employees has increased intensely. Human capital was always an important factor for many organisations and shipping companies, but with the higher attrition rates, this competition is only getting fiercer for the maritime industry (Chen et al., 2022). Considering the potential applicants' initial impressions of organisations are strong predictors of attraction, presenting an attractive image and a good impression of the organisation should provide a considerable advantage in this recruitment competition (Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Thus, projecting an attractive employer image is now slowly becoming a necessity instead of a strategy for shipping companies to attract the competent human force (Carpentier et al., 2019; Lievens and Slaughter, 2016; Ployhart et al., 2017).

None of these discussions are new to the maritime industry. Adopting a strategy for image improvement to achieve competitiveness in recruitment has been a long and ongoing discussion for maritime organisations (Barnett et al., 2006; Jensen et al., 2016; Thai et al., 2013). The use of social media seems to be a low-cost low effort strategy for

this objective. In addition, the spread of social media with the development of technology has led to it becoming an area of interest for almost all businesses (Boediman et al., 2021). Social media platforms present a great opportunity for companies to utilise word of mouth and communicate with their stakeholders and develop their attractiveness. Moreover, various social media platforms are used by businesses to publish marketing news and communicate with customers (Lin et al., 2022). Yet, in spite of these, many shipping companies still suffer from low public profiles and fail to maintain or build any kind of organisational attractiveness strategy. Most ship owners/management companies do not develop proper marketing strategies to attract potential employers and neglect communication (Chen et al., 2022). Failing to develop or adopt proper means of communication with the stakeholders, especially in the age of social media where communication is easier for all parties involved seems unacceptable from the eyes of the employees. We have now come to the point that the image and attractiveness of companies are also shaped by their online presence, the content of their social media pages, and the perceptions of the individuals connected through social media to that company (Muntinga et al., 2011). Evidently, the overall online presence of organisations is increasing significantly. These online ‘displays’ are becoming a more popular and easy way for job seekers to evaluate potential employers (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Soulez and Guillot-Soulez, 2011).

With these in mind, we examine the social media presence of ship-owner companies and measure the organisational attractiveness and familiarity with these companies from the perspective of maritime students. We also explore the relationships between attractiveness, fleet size, familiarity, willingness to work, follower size, and activity on social media. In this direction; we establish the framework with definitions and literature related to recruitment, organisational awareness, and social media in the second section. Then we give detailed information about the methodology used in the study and data collection. The findings obtained as a result of the analyses are given in the fourth section. The study is concluded with discussions on social media marketing for attracting potential employees, and the limitations of the study.

## **2 Recruitment, organisational awareness, and social media**

Organisational attractiveness conveys the benefits that a potential employee sees in working for a specific organisation. This concept is closely related to employer branding seen as an antecedent of employer brand equity (Berthon et al., 2005). As the perceived attractiveness of an employer increases, that organisation’s employer brand equity gets stronger and it attracts more applicants, therefore it achieves a greater pool of human capital (Berthon et al., 2005; Eger et al., 2018). The first step in the recruitment process is to identify and attract the potential workforce to apply for positions in an organisation (Barber, 1998), having the image of an attractive employer allows organisations to hire competent employees (Cable and Turban, 2003). The successful attraction of competent human capital has positive implications for the organisation’s human source functions (Carlson et al., 2002). Recruitment efforts affect the quality of an organisation’s workforce by creating an initial pool of high-quality applicants (Carlson et al., 2002).

This attraction results in a two-way decision that both the individual and the organisation are making about one another (Lievens et al., 2001).

An organisation's attractiveness is revealed when potential employers start to seek to participate in the selection process at a specific organisation. At its first stage, organisational attractiveness is dependent on materials issued by the organisations such as advertisements and recruitment materials (Barber, 1998). Recruiting materials enhance organisational attractiveness by signalling to job seekers that the organisation cares about its employees (Casper and Buffardi, 2004). The internet, however, has revolutionised the way individuals learn about organisations. With the amount of information available online, job seekers have multiple options for information sources whether organisation-dependent or independent (Van Hove and Lievens, 2007). Recruitment pages and an organisation's own web page are one of the key choices of information sources. These web pages often serve as the primary tool for job seekers to gather information about the organisations (Cappelli, 2001; Williamson et al., 2003). In this regard, organisation websites have gained popularity and become essential for employers in terms of reaching potential candidates and attracting them to apply for jobs (Walker et al., 2011; Pfielmann et al., 2010). However, there has been a decrease in the use of corporate websites by employers due to the paradigm shift towards social media sites. Individuals' preferences are shifting to social media use for searching for information about a company, brand, or product rather than a company's official website (Bradwell and Reeves, 2008; Priyadarshini et al., 2017).

The Internet and social media are now facilitating communication between job seekers and organisations by making it more accessible and more frequent. Meanwhile, social networking sites are providing reviews, advice, and opinions of peers regarding an organisation's potential as an employer (Van Hove and Lievens, 2007). Social media platforms differ from conventional communication due to their features and could be used for various goals. It can act as a tool in different subjects such as communication, recruitment, job seeking, product information, and brand awareness (Andersson and Wikström, 2017). Therefore, the strategies adopted by organisations regarding the use of social media differ considerably. Different messages aimed for different purposes convey different communications with different parties (Sasser et al., 2014). While some organisations prefer and prioritise their own web pages for product or company information, they often utilise social media pages for other purposes like communication. Many organisations include their social media links to their own web pages and their company information on social media pages. In a sense, social media pages are now no longer restricted to recreation purposes and are becoming extensions of the organisations' own web pages (Doherty, 2010; Wilson et al., 2012). From this perspective, social media pages have become major platforms for organisational activities to the extent that they are also starting to replace existing platforms, e.g., organisations now post job openings on social media sites in addition to recruitment pages. However, the main differences in the organisational form of social media use start with the organisations' preferred social media platform.

There are various social media platforms aimed at different user demographic or different use purposes. The most well-known and used social media platforms are generally listed as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Twitter posts

are limited in characters and might include links/photos. Twitter posts are mostly news regarding the organisation and might include retweets (shares) from employees or other organisations. Instagram is associated with photos and short video shares accompanied by occasional short text and hashtags. Instagram's 'story' function also allows easy-to-see limited-time posts. Organisations generally prefer the use of the story function of Instagram for limited-time offers or announcements. Sharing or republishing options of a post can be considered more limited on Instagram when compared to other platforms. However, Instagram incites content discovery through the discover option making it easier to see the trend. Both Instagram and Twitter also incite the use of hashtags to create trends and promote content. LinkedIn is seen as the corporate-dominated platform of social media. LinkedIn pages mostly focus on education, work experience, and recent achievements while encouraging networking between users. It also promotes HR activities and provides a specialised section for job listings or willing-to-work options. YouTube on the other hand focuses on lengthier videos and generally does not include any text or still images. Facebook allows the use of mixed content in various forms like text, photos, and videos while also enabling the sharing process in a convenient manner. Various other platforms also exist with more specific user bases, purposes or region focuses. These platforms serve different purposes like social networking, business networking, or video/photo sharing but the main idea is to create and/or share content through a network. For corporate use, these platforms often serve as tools of brand awareness for providing visibility. Usage patterns of different social media platforms are a wide and different subject. Regarding the organisational use of these, however, it is seen that organisations often have to choose from utilising no-social media at all to focusing on one platform or trying to be active on all platforms as they can possibly manage. Depending on this choice; the content, audience, and therefore communication differ significantly.

### **3 Methodology**

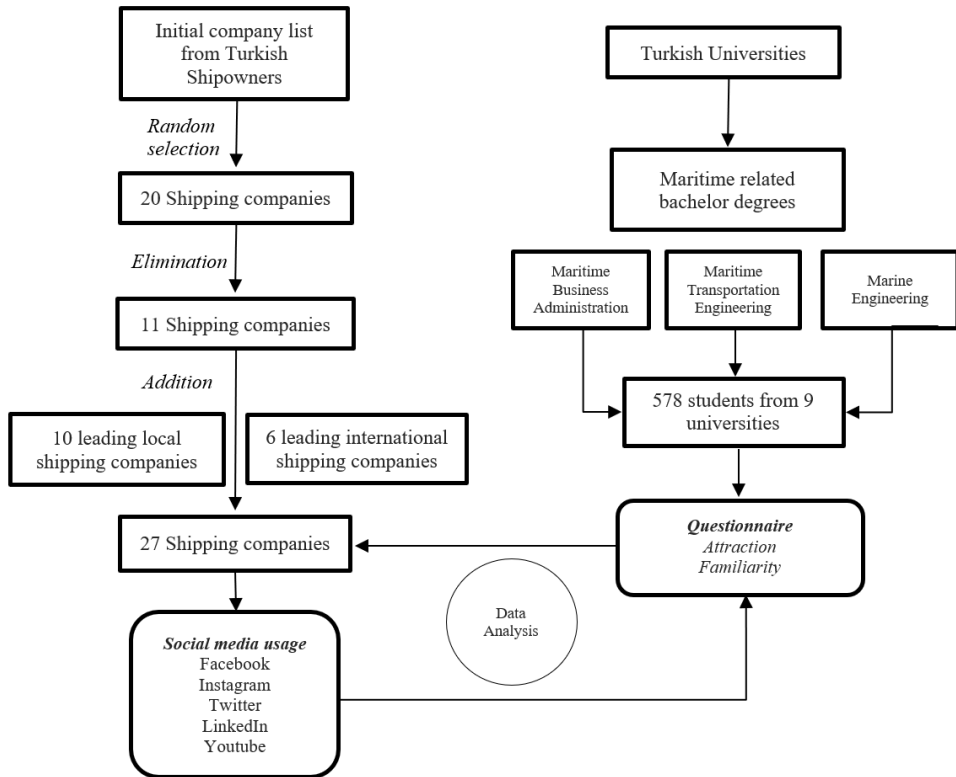
The purpose of this study is to examine how maritime students' exposure to a shipping company's social media page relates to their subsequent organisational attractiveness perceptions. We explore students' familiarity with shipping companies and explore relations between those and fleet size, social media activity, and estimated job opportunities. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and cluster analysis were used to explore these. All analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 29 software.

#### *3.1 Participants*

Participants of the study were 578 maritime students recruited from 9 different Turkish universities. Participants were reached through their enrolled institution and recruited on a voluntary basis with the permission of these institutions. The participants were studying various maritime-related programs at the time of data collection. 317 participants were studying in the Maritime Transportation Engineering program which was 9.4% of the total population enrolled in that department in all Turkish universities in 2021 (total

population of 3,343). 218 participants were enrolled in Maritime Business Administration representing 9.9% of the students in that program in Turkish universities as of 2021 (total population of 2,198). 48 participants were enrolled in the Marine Engineering program representing 3% of the students in that program in Turkish universities as of 2021 (total population of 1,707). In total, we have reached 8% of the students enrolled in these three maritime programs. Our sample size, therefore, represents the population with a 3.9% margin error at 95% confidence level. Most of these participants are future job seekers and new talent pools for shipping companies as possible employees.

**Figure 1** Flowchart of the study



### 3.2 Sampled companies

Through the study, we have included and investigated 35 shipping companies with the majority of them being Turkish-origin firms. The following step has been taken to identify the companies; a full list of maritime transportation and/or shipping companies was obtained from the Turkish Shipowners Association. Then we randomly selected 20 companies registered in this association. To acquire related and essential data required by the study we carried out an elimination process through that list. Only the companies which own at least two vessels, both greater than 500 gt. and, has a working company

webpage has been included. Nine companies not matching these criteria were excluded from the list. We have also selected to include 10 well-known Turkish shipping companies. In order to evaluate and compare the use of social media and the organisational attractiveness perceptions of these companies by the students, 6 of the world's leading shipping companies were included in the analysis. Therefore, our sample consists of 27 companies presented in Table 3.

### 3.3 *Data collection*

Data collection in the study was done in two different stages. In the first stage, we collected the data through the social media pages of the companies. Data regarding the online social media presence of the shipping companies were gathered in late August 2022. This was done through a review of the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube pages of the companies. We searched directly for the companies' names using the search engines with the keywords 'company name + social media platform'. We also utilised the search function of social media platforms by directly putting the company name in the search bar. In addition to this, we have also reviewed the company web pages for additional material. At this stage, we determined that several companies have multiple social media pages with different corporate brands, sub-brand, or holding company names. For this reason, we determined a few ground rules to ensure uniform data collection throughout. We prioritised direct links from the company web page to social media pages if there were any. If the company is attached to another brand or is one of the group companies and there are several social media pages for these, the least different registered name from the Turkish Ship-owner Association is prioritised. If there are several accounts with similar names, priority was given to companies' social media accounts with the name including, and promoting shipping or liner services. If the company has several accounts with minimal differences in name or under the same name, priority was given to the account that had more followers. Still, for some companies, we had to use social media accounts registered under the holding company name.

Platform depending on data gathered in this study is shown in Table 1. These categories generally signified as engagement statistics might be reported differently depending on the platform. For example; YouTube uses subscribers instead of followers and Twitter uses retweets and favourites instead of shares and likes. For ease of reporting, these are combined under the same category in the study. For the social media usage (SMU) score, we utilised the metrics developed by Aichner and Jacob (2015) to further review the social media pages of the companies [formula (1)]. We also adapted this index for LinkedIn and Instagram to better reflect the engagement of these platforms. Since our data only included four months of activity; we adapted the index to utilise total metrics instead of averages as proposed by the authors. We limited our data gathering to the last four months of activity on these pages (May 2022–August 2022). Still, the data we gathered (likes, comments, and shares) are subject to change since users can still interact with already published posts on social media. We utilised platform application programming interface (API) for various data where available. However, most of the data collection was done manually.



$$\begin{aligned}
 SMU(\text{facebook}) &= \text{posts} * \frac{\text{total}(\text{likes} + \text{comments} * 5 + \text{shares} * 10)}{\text{followers}} \\
 SMU(\text{twitter}) &= \text{posts} * \frac{\text{total}(\text{favourites} + \text{retweets} * 10)}{\text{followers}} \\
 SMU(\text{instagram}) &= \text{posts} * \frac{\text{total}(\text{likes} + \text{comments} * 5)}{\text{followers}} \\
 SMU(\text{linkedin}) &= \text{posts} * \frac{\text{likes} + \text{comments} * 5 + \text{shares} * 10 + \text{jobposting} * 5}{\text{followers} - \text{employees}} \\
 SMU(\text{youtube}) &= \text{videos} * \frac{\text{views} + \text{likes} * 100 + \text{commentes} * 500}{\text{subscribers} * 0.025}
 \end{aligned}
 \tag{1}$$

Source: Adapted from Aichner and Jacob (2015)

The second stage of data collection was conducted with the utilisation of online survey services. An online questionnaire was sent to maritime-related departments of nine universities located in Turkey. Students under these departments were asked to participate in the study, and the questionnaire was distributed through an Internet link. A total of 578 students voluntarily participated in the study.

**Table 1** Collected data

Platform	Followers	Post count	Total likes	Total comments	Total shares	Employees	SMU score (4 months)
Facebook	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Instagram	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Twitter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
LinkedIn	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□	✓
YouTube	✓	✓	✓	✓	Views		✓ (no time limit)

*Additional data*

- Fleet size
- Links to social media platforms from company web page
- Links to company page from social media platforms

The questionnaire consisted of two basic measures and was rated on a Likert five-point scale. The questionnaire included profile queries regarding the university, program, class, or degree of students. We also surveyed daily and weekly social media use, used social media platforms, and most frequently used social media platforms. The main measures within the questionnaire were; overall familiarity with the firm and attraction to the firm adapted from the previous study by Turban (2001). Each item is presented for each of the companies in the sample list. All measures and items were presented in Turkish to participants. Questionnaire items are listed in Table 2.

**Table 2** Questionnaire items in the study

<i>Measure</i>	<i>Items</i>	<i>Scale</i>	<i>Source</i>
Profile	University, department, class	<i>Multiple choice</i>	
Social media Use	Daily social media usage	<i>5-point Likert</i>	
	Weekly average social media usage	1 = Never 5 = Very frequently	
	Social media platforms used	<i>Checkbox/multiple choice</i>	
	Most frequently used social media platform	Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube	
Employment Opportunities	Best estimate of your employment opportunities in your job market after graduation	<i>5-point Likert</i> 1 = No alternatives 5 = Many alternatives	Cable (1995)
Attraction	I would exert a great deal of effort to work for 'company', 'company' would be one of my first choices as an employer, I would definitely accept a job offer from 'company'	<i>5-point Likert</i> 1 = completely disagree, 5 = completely agree	Turban (2001)
Familiarity	In general, how familiar are you with 'company'	<i>5-point Likert</i> 1 = Not at all 5 = Very familiar	Turban (2001)
Familiarity influence(s)	From which channels you heard about the 'company' Which channel has the single most effect on your familiarity of the 'company'	<i>Checkbox/multiple choice</i> Never heard of it; social media; recruitment websites; family; friends/peers; career days/events; educators/advisors; company employees; advertisements	Lee et al. (2019)
Social media followers	Company list	<i>Checkbox</i>	

#### 4 Findings

Our initial findings provide a basis for shipping companies preferred social media platforms. From 21 sampled Turkish corporations, 16 of them have registered a Facebook account for the company. While 11 companies have an Instagram account, six have a Twitter account, six have a YouTube account, and 15 have a LinkedIn account registered. Even though this finding only shows the registered accounts of the companies and does not take into consideration the activity of the account; we still can argue that the most used platform by the shipping companies is Facebook, closely followed by LinkedIn. We also see that YouTube and Twitter are the least favoured platforms by corporations. In return, five of the well-known international companies that we use as a benchmark in the study had accounts on all social media platforms that we reviewed. Only one benchmark company had an account on a single social media (LinkedIn). Another significant finding is that most well-established shipping companies use widgets on their company web page to further direct/link users to their social media pages. However, out of the 21 Turkish companies, only three had fully working widget links to their social media. While seven

of them had widgets or links on their company page, they were either completely broken (directing back to the main site/to broken pages or not directing) or have been directing to older or even abandoned social media pages. A few of them has widget or link for only one social media account that the company has while not providing links to other platforms even if the company also has an account there. The current state of the selected shipping companies on social media platforms is presented in Table 3.

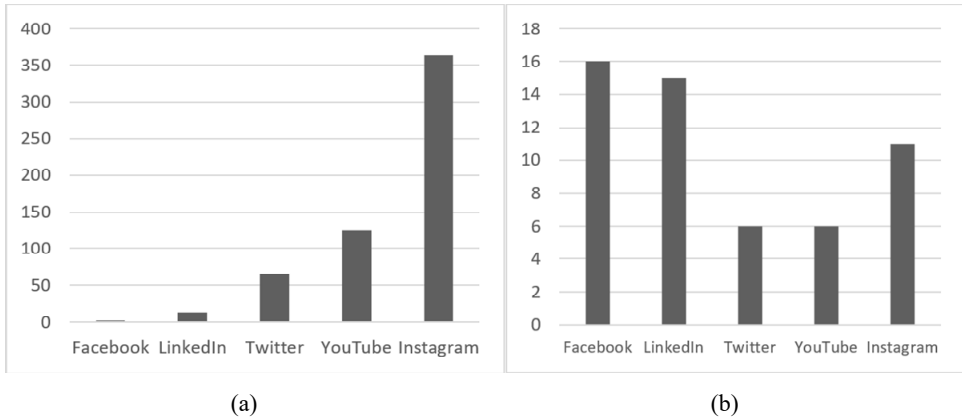
**Table 3** Sampled shipping companies and their social media availability

<i>Company</i>	<i>Facebook</i>	<i>Instagram</i>	<i>Twitter</i>	<i>LinkedIn</i>	<i>YouTube</i>	<i>Social media widgets</i>
<i>Sample</i>						
Akaylar Shipping	✓	✓		✓		Limited/broken
Arkas Line (Shipping and Transport)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A
Batınak Shipping (Holding)						N/A
Beks Shipping	✓			✓	✓	N/A
Besiktas Shipping Group	✓	✓		✓		N/A
Beykim (Petroleum and Ship Management Company)	✓			✓		□
Canbaz (Shipping Group)	✓	✓	✓	✓		Limited/broken
Ciner (Maritime) Group						N/A
Cunda Shipping	✓	✓				N/A
CVS Ship		✓		✓		N/A
DFDS Med Shipping and Transportation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	□
Ditaş (Marine Operations and Tanker Management)	✓	✓	✓	✓		□
ER Group (Shipping)				✓		Limited/broken
GSD Marin (Shipping)						N/A
Gunes Shipping	✓					Limited/broken
Ince Shipping Group	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	N/A
Pacific Shipping Group of Companies	✓	✓		✓	✓	N/A
Safir (Ship Transportation)	✓	✓				Limited/broken
Transal Shipping	✓		✓	✓		Limited/broken
YA-SA Shipping (Holding)	✓			✓	✓	Limited/broken
YMN Tankers (Tanker Marine Management)	✓			✓		N/A
<i>Sample total</i>	16	11	6	15	6	3

**Table 3** Sampled shipping companies and their social media availability (continued)

Company	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	LinkedIn	YouTube	Social media widgets
<i>Benchmark</i>						
Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement (BSM)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Harren & Partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
MSC Mediterranean Shipping Company	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oldendorff Carriers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thome Ship Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
TORM				<input type="checkbox"/>		
<i>Total</i>	21	16	11	21	11	8

**Figure 2** Social media preferences of shipping companies and maritime students, (a) participants preferred social media vs. (b) companies preferred social media

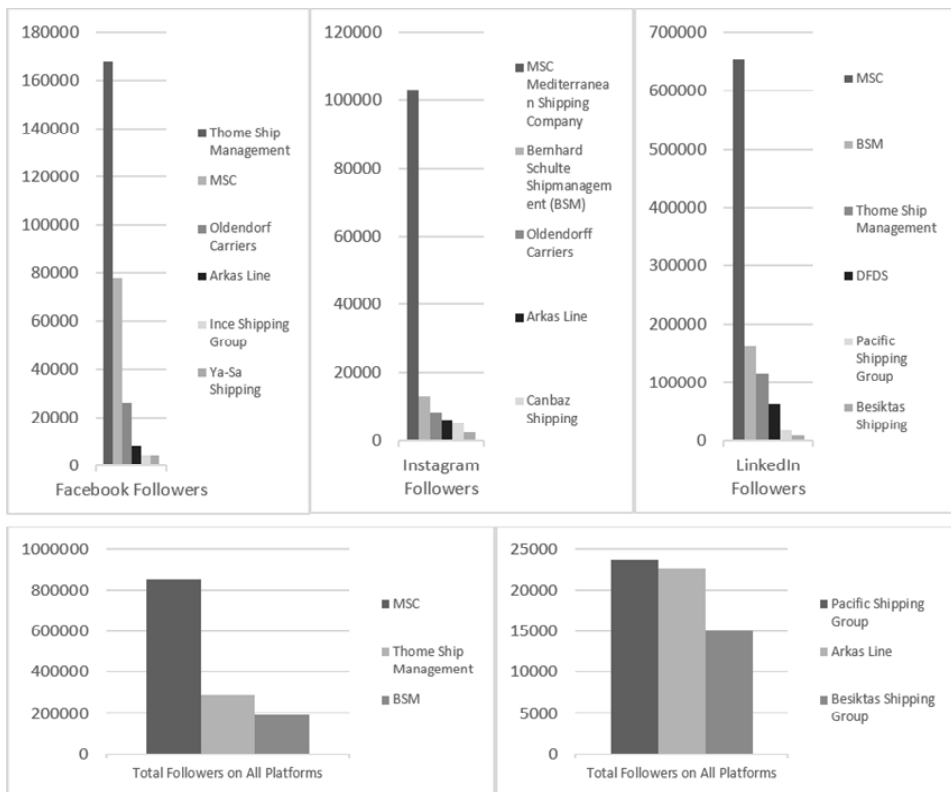


Findings on the social media usage habits of maritime students show that 92.7% of the participants were frequently using Instagram on a weekly basis. While only 20% of the same participants reported that they use Facebook regularly. The most used platforms by the participants were Instagram, followed by YouTube (84.5%), Twitter (55.4%), and LinkedIn (36.7%). As can be seen from the ratios, the least used platform for the participants was Facebook. On the contrary, we see that most of the shipping companies' priority was setting up a Facebook account. This trend also applies to other social media platforms. YouTube and Twitter have the second and third highest reported usage frequency in our sample; however, these are also the least favoured platforms by shipping companies. This situation becomes more worrisome when participants were asked to select only one social media platform they use most frequently. Less than 1% selected Facebook as their frequently used platform. Instagram was at the top spot with 62.8% only followed by YouTube with 21.8% of the participants. These findings clearly call for a more in-depth review of social media platforms' overall users, their demographic, and usage patterns. But also, these are clear indicators that some platforms are 'out of date' for the current generations' internet habits. Shipping companies and future job seekers

seem to be on the opposite end of the preferred platforms. The findings obtained as a result of the analysis are shown in Figure 2.

Findings on the followers are provided regardless of activity or engagement of said accounts. We see that follower counts differ greatly for each platform. Findings show that MSC has the highest follower count on LinkedIn, followed by Thome Ship Management on Facebook and Bernhard Schulte Ship Management (BSM) on LinkedIn. On platform basis, we see that for Facebook; Thome Ship Management has the highest follower count by a huge margin. MSC also has the highest follower count on Instagram nearly tenfold in numbers to second place. Figure 3 shows the follower counts and the highest-ranked companies by the follower count on each social media platform, and also provides the total follower number on all platforms for both international and Turkish-origin companies.

**Figure 3** Most followed shipping companies per social media platform



LinkedIn is clearly the winner in terms of follower count by a huge margin for several companies. In addition to that, we see that some companies have significantly high follower numbers on Facebook than they do on other platforms.

To explore the relations between follower count, familiarity, and attraction we use the survey results from our participants. We asked our participants to evaluate their level of familiarity with each shipping company. Indications of familiarity were exemplified as familiarity with the logo, previous WOM, experiences, social media visits, previous

knowledge about the company working domain/area and/or mission, and vision. Our survey results revealed that participants have high levels of familiarity limited to a number of companies. These findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4** Familiarity and Attraction levels of maritime students towards shipping companies

<i>Company</i>	<i>Familiarity</i>		<i>Attraction</i>		<i>Total followers on social media</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Arkas Line (Shipping and Transport)	4.3	1.03	4.0	1.2	22,761
MSC (Mediterranean Shipping Company)	3.9	1.32	4.0	1.3	858,544
Besiktas Shipping Group	3.8	1.38	4.0	1.2	14,981
Ince Shipping Group	3.7	1.50	3.7	1.3	7,928
YA-SA Shipping (Holding)	3.7	1.46	3.8	1.3	8,227
DFDS Med (former U.N Ro-Ro)	3.4	1.51	3.4	1.3	69,315
YMN Tankers (Tanker Marine Management)	3.1	1.52	3.5	1.3	9,474
Ditaş (Marine Operations and Tanker Management)	3.0	1.50	3.3	1.4	9,177
Oldendorff Carriers	2.8	1.60	3.5	1.4	129,861
Pacific Shipping Group of Companies (TR)	2.8	1.44	3.2	1.4	23,775
Ciner (Maritime) Group	2.4	1.38	2.9	1.4	-
Beykim (Petroleum and Ship Management Company)	2.3	1.41	3.1	1.4	3,386
Harren & Partner	2.2	1.40	3.2	1.4	21,347
Safir (Gemi Taşımacılık – Ship Transportation)	2.2	1.25	2.8	1.3	3,600
Batınak Shipping (Holding)	2.2	1.25	2.7	1.3	-
Transal Shipping	2.1	1.28	2.8	1.3	8,803
Thome Ship Management (Thome Group)	2.0	1.30	3.1	1.4	290,225
BSM (Bernhard Schulte Shipmanagement)	2.0	1.30	3.1	1.4	192,160
Beks Shipping	2.0	1.28	2.8	1.3	1,597
Akaylar Shipping	2.0	1.17	2.7	1.3	7,759
Canbaz (Shipping Group)	1.9	1.19	2.7	1.3	6,004
TORM	1.9	1.27	3.0	1.4	86,110
GSD Marin (Shipping)	1.9	1.20	2.8	1.3	-
CVS Ship	1.8	1.16	2.7	1.3	2,858
ER Group (Shipping)	1.8	1.17	2.7	1.3	2,327
Gunes Shipping	1.8	1.07	2.7	1.3	-
Cunda Shipping	1.8	1.12	2.7	1.3	3,998
Familiarity on 5-point Likert			Attraction on 5-point Likert.		
1 = Not at all – 5 = Very familiar			1 = Not at all – 5 = High		

The highest level of familiarity was recorded for the company Arkas Line with a mean score of 4.36. MSC, which has the most followers on social media, ranked second place

in familiarity with a mean score of 3.95. Other international shipping companies that we used for comparison had even lower levels of familiarity among our participants. The lowest levels of familiarity averaged around the score of 1.8 on a five-point Likert scale. The highest levels of attraction towards the company were recorded for MSC and Besiktas Shipping Group with a 4.05 mean score. The lowest levels of attraction score for shipping companies were around 2.7. These findings suggest that Turkish students' perceptions regarding shipping companies are greatly in favour of Turkish companies. Influences of familiarity regarding these companies provide additional insight into the subject. Table 5 shows the means of familiarity of the participants regarding the shipping companies.

**Table 5** Main influences of familiarity with a shipping company

<i>Influence</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Career events (days/fairs)	186	32.2
Peers/friends	105	18.2
Social media	88	15.2
Faculty members/advisors	55	9.5
Career web pages	52	9.0
Sector employees	52	9.0
Family	23	4.0
None/I'm not familiar with any company	13	2.2
Adverts	4	.7
Total	578	100.0

The highest influence for gaining familiarity with a shipping company was reported as career events (fairs or days). The impact of social media on familiarity was reported at around 15% nearly the same as the influence of peers and friends (18%). The effect of employees, job/career pages, and faculty members was reported to have a similar impact on overall familiarity. Advertisements had no valuable impact according to participants. We also investigate the correlations between follower counts and other variables. These findings are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6** Spearman's rank correlations between follower count, familiarity, and attraction

<i>No.</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>
1	Facebook followers	-							
2	Instagram followers	0.6**	-						
3	Twitter followers	0.55**	0.78**	-					
4	LinkedIn followers	0.7**	0.57**	0.72**	-				
5	YouTube followers	0.61**	0.64**	0.8**	0.68**	-			
6	Familiarity	0.45*	0.4*	0.39*	0.41*	0.45*	-		
7	Fleet size	0.76**	0.5**	0.51**	0.6**	0.67**	0.4*	-	
8	Attraction	0.4*	0.45*	0.34	0.52**	0.46*	0.28	0.43*	-

Note: \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

**Table 7** Social media presence of shipping companies

<i>Company</i>	<i>Total SMU</i>	<i>SMU Facebook</i>	<i>SMU Instagram</i>	<i>SMU Twitter</i>	<i>SMU LinkedIn</i>	<i>Total followers</i>	<i>Total engagement</i>	<i>Engagement ratio</i>	<i>Total post</i>
DFDS Med	519.1	124.45	384.98	0.10	9.60	69,315	29,128	0.4	172
Besiktas Shipping Group	33.3	4.02	27.05	-	2.20	14,981	10,774	0.7	26
BSM	32.9	22.21	7.69	1.78	1.18	192,160	22,367	0.1	66
Oldendorff Carriers	23.8	9.05	9.77	3.42	1.60	129,861	18,601	0.1	70
MSC	19.9	10.14	4.62	2.30	2.83	858,544	105,478	0.1	105
Thome Ship Management	17.5	7.88	2.77	0.36	6.52	290,225	21,000	0.1	140
Harren & Partner	16.6	2.61	8.69	1.87	3.45	21,347	3,348	0.2	55
Pacific Shipping	12.7	0.67	11.18	-	0.83	23,775	1,734	0.1	53
Ince Shipping Group	8.9	0.00	5.12	3.81	-	7,928	976	0.1	14
Arkas Line	8.9	0.72	4.91	2.80	0.4	22,761	1,829	0.1	39
TORM	4.2	-	-	-	4.16	86,110	11,709	0.1	26
Ditaş	3.9	-	0.98	2.51	0.38	9,177	997	0.1	8
YMN Tankers	2.6	-	-	-	2.57	9,474	1,307	0.1	11
Beykim	2.6	2.46	-	-	0.10	3,386	252	0.1	14
Canbaz	1.9	0.05	1.14	0.71	-	6,004	801	0.1	12
CVS Ship	0.5	-	0.45	-	-	2,858	170	0.1	2
Safir	0.2	0.18	-	-	-	3,600	180	0.1	2
Akaylar Shipping									
ER Group (Shipping)									
Beks Shipping									
YA-SA Shipping (Holding)									
Batnak Shipping									
Ciner Group									
Cunda Shipping									
GSD Marin (Shipping)									
Gunes Shipping									
Transal Shipping									

Note: Statistics from YouTube accounts are not included.



**Table 8** Spearman’s rank correlations between social media presence, attraction, and familiarity

No.	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Attraction	-										
2	Familiarity	0.284	-									
3	Fleet size	0.431*	0.398*	-								
4	Total followers	0.503**	0.473*	0.670**	-							
5	Total Posts	0.312	0.428*	0.548**	0.878**	-						
6	SMU Facebook	0.177	0.403*	0.460*	0.687**	0.837**	-					
7	SMU Instagram	0.330	0.515**	0.490**	0.676**	0.796**	0.730**	-				
8	SMU Twitter	0.384*	0.466*	0.543**	0.575**	0.640**	0.496**	0.679**	-			
9	SMU LinkedIn	0.255	0.352	0.570**	0.786**	0.800**	0.629**	0.561**	0.333	-		
10	SMU YouTube	0.352	0.437*	0.581**	0.609**	0.604**	0.606**	0.671**	0.546**	0.430*	-	
11	Total SMU	0.375	0.523**	0.566**	0.834**	0.950**	0.809**	0.874**	0.635**	0.800**	0.574**	-

Note: \*\*p < 0.01; \*p < 0.05.

Company social media follower count and student familiarity also have a positive and moderate correlation. This correlation was visible for all platforms in the complete analysis, while for Turkish companies it was only available on Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube. Another correlation was found out was between familiarity and fleet size. Fleet size; used as an indicator of company size in the study, had a positive and moderate correlation with the familiarity of a company. A similar finding was also visible between fleet size and social media follower counts. There was not any statistically significant correlation between the attraction and familiarity of the company. To further investigate the issue, we analysed the usage score for each social media and analysed familiarity and attraction related to social media use.

Total SMU scores are presented in Table 7. Among the reviewed 27 shipping companies, 17 of them are actively using social media platforms to promote and communicate. The other 10 companies either do not have social media accounts on various platforms or abandoned the ones they created some time ago. We also see that several companies are always more active on one platform while only a few are active on every social media we have reviewed. Overall engagement (like, share, comments) to follower ratios are generally very low. Only a few posts gain traction and go viral while other posts just obtain a few likes and are not provoking enough to create reactions from the users. Total post counts also fluctuate between companies. Still, there is a clear indication that frequent posters gain more interaction and usage scores even when the posts do not gather high engagement. Posts on matters which directly affect seafarers, generate enough engagement to go viral and reach an audience beyond a page's followers.

The total SMU scores show that DFDS Med has great social media usage and has the highest posting frequency despite its follower count. DFDS Med also has a high engagement ratio compared to other shipping companies. Besiktas Shipping Group has the highest engagement ratio when all platforms are included. Still, their low follower and post count limited their audience and reach. When we compare the total engagements, it is clear that MSC has achieved a communication that cannot be compared to other companies sampled in the study. Even though the company's engagement ratio is low, the sheer number of followers enables the company to reach a great audience.

Results regarding social media presence and usage are shown in Table 8. Findings show that the number of total users following a company account through all social media platforms is significantly related to familiarity and attraction to a company. Follower count is also significantly related to social media activity or usage of a company. We also see a significantly high correlation between social media usage and the posting frequency of an account. This posting frequency also affects the engagement a company account generates. The highest rate of correlation other than the posting frequency was between the overall social media usage of a company and its total follower count. The size of a company in terms of owned or managed ships also has a significant relationship with a company's online social media presence. It is also positively linked to familiarity and attraction to a company. Familiarity was significantly correlated with all aspects of social media except for the company presence on LinkedIn. Attraction on the other hand only had significant correlations with total followers and fleet size of a company. Social media usage between platforms was significantly related to nearly all platforms. Posting frequency on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn had the highest relation with social media usage.

**Table 9** Clustering analysis of companies based on SMU, familiarity, and attraction

Cluster 1 (n:4) High SMU medium to high attraction and familiarity	Cluster 2 (n:3) Medium SMU medium to high attraction and familiarity	Cluster 3 (n:2) Medium SMU high attraction and familiarity	Cluster 4 (n:3) Low SMU medium to high attraction and familiarity	Cluster 5 (n:14) Low SMU low attraction and familiarity	Outlier Very high SMU
MSC BSM Oldendorff Carriers Besiktas Shipping	Harren & Partner Thome Ship Pacific Shipping	Ince Shipping Group Arkas Line	YMN Tankers YA-SA Shipping Ditas	CVS Ship Safrir Akaylar Shipping ER Group (Shipping) Beks Shipping Batnak Shipping Ciner Group Cunda Shipping GSD Marin (Shipping) Gunes Shipping Transal Shipping Torn Beykim Canbaz	DFDS Med

To further draw upon these findings, we conducted a hierarchical clustering analysis which aims to classify similar objects in the same clusters and create a hierarchy of clusters in a tree structure, based on social media usage score, familiarity, and attraction. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 9. We see five main clusters each containing several shipping companies. There is one outlier DFDS Med which has a very high SMU score when compared to other companies. Cluster 1 consists of four shipping companies. These all have high social media presence and scored high to medium on attraction and familiarity. Most of these companies also have a considerable fleet size and social media, followers. Companies in cluster 2 also have medium to high attraction and familiarity scores but they had relatively lower social media activity than those companies in cluster 1. Companies in cluster 3 had similar social media presence but had higher attraction and familiarity scores. Companies in cluster 4 have lower social media presences but they still had medium to high attraction and familiarity rates. Companies in cluster 5 on the other hand, have low social media activity and low attraction and familiarity. These findings show that companies in clusters 3 and 4 can benefit significantly from a higher social media activity. It is also clear that companies are cluster 5 have to take drastic measures to achieve notable differences.

## **5 Discussion and conclusions**

This research further develops the social media use of shipping companies while also discovering the implications for local shipping companies. Findings are expected to provide additional insight into shipping companies and motivate effective communication via social media platforms.

Results from our research validate the findings of Bitiktas and Tuna (2020) that social media use in the shipping market is limited and narrow. It is obvious that many shipping companies still do not have a clear strategy in terms of social media usage. Most of the companies in this research were not active or did not have social media accounts on various platforms. Even then, many did not have any references, links, or widgets for their social media on their web page. In cases where companies had social media widgets on their web pages most of them were not properly working. With the rise of social media, company web pages have also become a hub directing users to specific information on other platforms. This is pointed out by several studies where it is claimed that social media pages are now extensions of company web pages (Doherty, 2010; Wilson et al., 2012). Thus, certain information such as product information is more suitable for web pages whereas day-to-day activity, collaboration announcements, or educational videos are more suitable for social media. Carpentier et al. (2019) also build on this notion and argues that job seekers will prefer an organisation's social media page to derive organisational characteristics. Organisations would benefit greatly by involving social media in their web page to distribute their content. Such as videos about organisations could find more places on YouTube whereas job listings or collaboration announcements could generate more attraction on LinkedIn. An intriguing photo would be more suitable on Instagram than it would be a company web page for gaining attraction. Integrating multiple social media platforms and providing links to those on every platform is an important implication for shipping companies.

Our findings suggest that Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are the most used social media by shipping companies. The least used ones are found to be Twitter and YouTube

by a huge margin. Many other studies support this finding by reporting Facebook as the most used platform in the maritime industry and focusing their analysis solely on this platform (Baruonu Latif and Sanrı, 2019; Bitiktas and Tuna, 2020; Çalışkan and Esmer, 2017; D'agostini, 2022; Vitellaro et al., 2022). However, many users, in this case, our participants were more active on Instagram and YouTube. Facebook was the least-used platform by our demographic. Still finding is in line with the findings of Mansur et al. (2020) claiming YouTube and Instagram as the most preferred platforms. Most shipping companies put their focus on Facebook and several do not even have an Instagram account. Even the most prominent ones still use Instagram less frequently than Facebook. It is thought that the reasons why companies prefer these platforms are that Facebook is one of the oldest and most well-known social media platforms and that LinkedIn is predominantly a business-oriented platform.

It is not entirely possible to claim that one platform is better than the other for specialised communication or attraction. Yet, there is a clear contradiction between the participants' preferred platforms and the companies' use of these platforms. This raises the thought that maritime students might have yet reached a point where their social media usage shifts to other platforms for job seeking or networking. For example, we know that LinkedIn is a professional networking platform that focuses on employment options. It also enables stakeholder communication probably better than the other platforms. It might be possible that most of the maritime students are not interested in job seeking yet and in fact, might be using social media only for social and recreational purposes without any further motivation. Thus, they just visit the social media platforms that facilitate that intent. Still, there seems to be a clear contradiction between the preference and activities of shipping companies' social media platforms and the preference of the current generation of individuals.

A significant finding in our research suggests that the sheer number of followers a company has is one of the biggest advantages they can achieve in social media use. The reach and engagement of a platform are also closely related to the number of followers. The reach of a platform can be way greater than the others based solely on the number of followers. But also, the follower number does not reflect engagement, virality, or commitments of fans but is merely one indicator of the popularity of the account. In addition, the same individuals might also be following the company on several different platforms. User demographics, habits, and purposes differ for each platform. Still, one implication this calls for is putting efforts to increase social media followers. Even with low rates of engagement companies can still reach a much greater audience than the companies with low follower numbers but great engagements. Company social media accounts with low follower numbers can achieve great engagement 'on the paper' through viral content. For example, Bitiktas and Tuna (2000) reported that some companies had generated 48 times higher engagement than their competitors. Similarly, D'agostini (2022) found that there was no relationship between the number of followers and engagement activity among the companies examined. A similar case is also available in our research where some companies achieved much higher engagement and ranked above others. Still, the number of 'engaged individuals' were lower than the companies that had high follower numbers.

Generating actual engagement on social media could not be always possible. Wishing and happy holiday through a company account would not instantly result in happy holiday responses or shares. But, not acknowledging an important holiday might also create a dilemma or illusion of not being active on social media. On top of that, when we

consider the findings on the effects of posting frequency; shipping companies can definitely benefit from using social media more actively and posting more regularly without considering the engagement they are getting on their pages. Another factor on this matter that we have to disregard is user activity. Users on a platform could no longer be active or regularly using the platform. But they might be still 'marked' as followers of a company. On top of that, there is no way to properly estimate the 'lurkers' on a company page. Lurkers are users who observe social media but do not participate in any way and make up a large proportion of online communities (Nielsen, 2006). So instead of focusing on generating engagement, one consideration to be made should be the contents of the posts.

Our main results suggest that familiarity can be gained through social media. Many factors of social media use had relations with the familiarity maritime students had with a company. However, familiarity did not necessarily mean attraction or interest in a company. On the contrary, attraction generally included familiarity. This means that attraction towards a company might encourage an individual to follow a company on social media and therefore laying the foundations for familiarity. However, no direct relationship was not found between social media and attraction in this study. There is no certainty that an individual will be attracted to a company just because they are familiar with its way of work. Instead, familiarity might even cause a loss of attraction. Individuals can become to the realisation that a company would not be ideal for them through familiarity. This is also supported by the work of Banks et al. (2016) where they claim potential applicants' repulsion from an organisation when it is perceived as incompetent and/or cold because they fear it could negatively reflect on their self-concepts. For this reason, it is crucial for shipping companies to establish or provide familiarity with potential employees to find suitable candidates.

One surprising finding was how the fleet size of a company affected its use of social media. The fleet size of a company correlated with its online social media presence. Companies with greater fleets were more active on social media. In addition to that on several occasions, they had more followers on social media. This finding is also similar to the findings of Bitiktas and Tuna (2020) and Vitellaro et al. (2022). This shows us that company size or the size of their fleet is an important factor regarding social media use.

Results showed that many Turkish shipping companies are not active on social media or are not effectively using these platforms. Many relationships regarding social media use were missing in the isolated analysis. This case was rather severe for several shipping companies where they did not put any effort into social media. Therefore, the first implication for many Turkish shipping companies would mean getting those accounts active. Other than that, to summarise the most basic practical implications for shipping companies would be; to utilise all social media platforms, link and redirect users to different social media platforms for appropriate content, post regularly and frequently, and attract more followers regardless of the engagement, post emotional contents for follower attraction, and provide information for job seekers to increase familiarity.

The use of social media for recruitment purposes is still unknown to many companies. This study also made an effort to reveal the importance of online brand image and attractiveness by analysing the social media presence of shipping companies. We included five major social media platforms and reviewed each company on all platforms. In this way, this presents a unique approach. In addition, examining the social media platform usage approaches of young students, who are the most intense social media users, is another important aspect of this study, enabling maritime companies to develop

policies in line with these approaches. However, several limitations also prevent researchers from conducting more in-depth analyses. Since both social media platforms and shipping companies are private enterprises; the social media utilisation statistics, traffic data, demographic data, and real engagement ratios are hard to attain and usually kept as secrets. Additional limitations on the use of API and discouragement to web scrapping further prevent access to this knowledge.

Another limitation was the perception of students between the distinction between local and international shipping companies. Also, sampling students from one nation only reinforced this limitation. The perception of many students was also influenced by other factors which were revealed in our study but not further inspected. We also adopted a randomisation process to select companies to prevent selection bias without making a distinction between two types of operations of the company (e.g., liner or tanker manager).

There are several ways to estimate the online presence of a company whether through follower numbers, engagement ratios, or usage scores, and determine a proper social media strategy. Yet, the only way to reach a proper understanding of this matter is through the companies themselves. Using platform-provided specific dashboards or user panels allows companies to make detailed analyses of their usage and the attraction they create through social media.

For future studies, to observe the social media orientation, it is recommended that the study be done again with higher participation in the future. It is also recommended to analyse the posted content by the companies and the attractiveness and recognition perceived by the stakeholders and customers. In addition, future studies with the participation of students from different countries will provide a broader perspective on the subject.

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