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Social Media as a Model of Communication Between Students and the University: The Example of El Oued University

Abstract

This study examines the extent to which university students consider social media an effective communication tool between them and their academic institutions. With the growing influence of digital platforms, social media has become a crucial medium for students to interact with their universities, access information, and engage in academic and administrative discussions. Using a descriptive analytical approach, the research explores how students perceive and utilize social media for communication within the university environment. The findings reveal that 100% of the surveyed students believe that universities should establish official social media pages to facilitate direct and formal communication. Social media is seen as essential for staying informed about university announcements, academic schedules, administrative procedures, and extracurricular activities. This overwhelming consensus highlights the increasing demand for universities to integrate social media into their official communication strategies, improving accessibility, efficiency, and transparency. The study underscores the importance of digital engagement in modern academic institutions and calls for universities to adopt structured policies for social media communication. Future research can further explore the effectiveness of various platforms, their impact on student satisfaction, and best practices for universities to maximize engagement.

Keywords: Social media, university, student, communication, digital engagement, higher education

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Sosial media tələbələrlə universitet arasında ünsiyyət modeli kimi: El Oued Universitetinin nümunəsi

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Xülasə

Bu araşdırma universitet tələbələrinin sosial medianı öz akademik qurumları ilə nə dərəcədə effektiv ünsiyyət vasitəsi hesab etdiklərini araşdırır. Rəqəmsal platformaların artan təsiri ilə sosial media tələbələrin universitetləri ilə qarşılıqlı əlaqədə olması, məlumat əldə etmələri, akademik və inzibati müzakirələrdə iştirak etmək üçün mühüm vasitəyə çevrilib. Təsviri-analitik yanaşmadan istifadə edərək, tədqiqat tələbələrin universitet mühitində ünsiyyət üçün sosial medianı necə qavradığını və istifadə etdiyini araşdırır. Nəticələr göstərir ki, sorğuda iştirak edən tələbələrin 100%-i hesab edir ki, universitetlər birbaşa və rəsmi ünsiyyəti asanlaşdırmaq üçün sosial mediada rəsmi səhifələr yaratmalıdırlar. Sosial media universitet elanları, akademik cədvəllər, inzibati prosedurlar və dərsdənkənar fəaliyyətlər haqqında məlumatlı olmaq üçün vacib hesab olunur. Bu böyük konsensus universitetlərə sosial medianı rəsmi kommunikasiya strategiyalarına inteqrasiya etmək, əlçatanlığı, səmərəliliyi və şəffaflığı artırmaq üçün artan tələbi vurğulayır. Tədqiqat müasir akademik institutlarda rəqəmsal cəlbediciliyin vacibliyini vurğulayır və universitetləri sosial media kommunikasiyası üçün strukturlaşdırılmış siyasətlər qəbul etməyə çağırır. Gələcək tədqiqatlar müxtəlif platformaların effektivliyini, onların tələbə məmnunluğuna təsirini və universitetlər üçün ən yaxşı təcrübələri tədqiq edə bilər.

Açar sözlər: Sosial media, universitet, tələbə, ünsiyyət, rəqəmsal cəlbedicilik, ali təhsil

Introduction

With the technological boom of our time, entrepreneurs and businesses have increasingly sought ways to leverage these advancements for economic purposes—whether in production, marketing, promotion, or even global market expansion with just a single click. As new ideas emerged, technology-based enterprises flourished, with many operating solely in the digital sphere without physical locations. Among these are companies specializing in social networking and global connectivity, such as Facebook and Twitter.

In recent years, technological advancements have profoundly impacted individuals and nations alike, necessitating adaptation across various fields, including economics, politics, society, and education. Concepts such as distance learning, virtual academic interactions, and social media platforms have reshaped global communication. Social media, in particular, has become a dominant force worldwide, boasting billions of users due to its accessibility, cost-free nature, and ability to facilitate unrestricted communication, news dissemination, and freedom of expression.

The widespread use of social media has marked a fundamental shift in the global system, compelling societies to engage with both its advantages and drawbacks. Universities, as key societal institutions responsible for producing scientific and intellectual elites, must acknowledge the significance of these platforms. Given that students represent a major segment of social media users, universities should actively utilize these platforms to enhance communication. This can be achieved through official university pages or informal channels, such as professors' and students' personal accounts, which indirectly serve as university-affiliated communication networks.

Research

As social media platforms have become an undeniable reality, this study seeks to investigate whether students perceive them as effective communication tools between themselves and their universities. Specifically, the study explores the role of these platforms in disseminating academic news, facilitating scientific exchanges, sharing lectures, and enabling communication between students and faculty members. The central research question is as follows:

To what extent do university students consider social media an effective communication tool with their university?

From this main question, the study poses several sub-questions:

- What are social media platforms, and which are the most widely used?
- What are the global statistics regarding the most popular social media platforms?
- What is the concept of a university, and how does it function as an academic institution?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study lies in the increasing role of technology in individuals' daily lives. The research aims to determine whether university students engage with their institutions through social media platforms. Given the rapid expansion and influence of social media, understanding its role in academic communication is crucial. Social media networks have become integral to both individual and national activities, making their study essential in assessing their impact on modern higher education.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to:

- 1. Assess whether students perceive social media platforms as a model for leading technology-based institutions and as a reliable means of obtaining university-related information.
- 2. Identify the most commonly used social media platforms among students for academic and administrative communication.
- 3. Highlight the role social media plays in students' daily lives, particularly in their interactions with universities.
- 4. Provide insights into global statistics on social media usage and its impact on academic institutions.

By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on digital transformation in higher education and the role of social media in fostering student-university engagement.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

- 1.2 Definition of Social Media
- Social media is defined as a system of electronic networks on the internet that allows users to create their own personal profiles and connect through a digital social system with other members who share similar interests and hobbies, or with friends from university, high school, or other affiliations. (Mujahidi, & Bouabaia, 2019, p. 60).
- It is also described as virtual communities on internet networks that bring together individuals with shared interests, enabling them to exchange experiences and information through a specific platform or application they all use. (Yahyaoui, & Four, 2019, p. 108).

2.2 Major Social Media Platforms

In recent years, social media platforms have expanded and diversified in terms of purpose, functionality, and user engagement. The following are some of the most prominent and widely used platforms:

2.2.1 Facebook

Facebook is an online platform designed primarily for social interaction, enabling individuals to connect with others through a network of virtual friends. Each member of this network presents themselves digitally by creating a personal profile, which includes a brief description of their identity, interests, and professional background. Users can also post, share, and exchange content with their friends. (Saidi, & Sayed Maouch, 2018, p. 68).

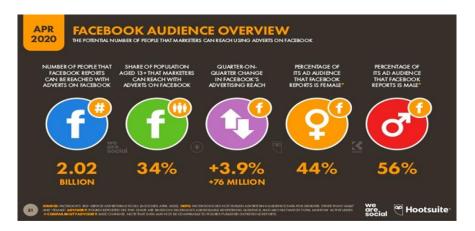
Facebook has emerged as one of the most influential and widely used social media platforms in recent years. The following figure illustrates its global reach and usage trends:

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Figure 1: Facebook Audience for April 2020

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Source: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot consulted on 13/09/2020 at 21:49.

It is observed from the figure that Facebook has an exceptionally large user base worldwide, with a total of approximately 2.02 billion users, a significant number of active participants. The figure also indicates that the potential reach of posts from individuals aged 13 and above is 34%, while the percentage of searches for advertisements over a three-month period stands at 3.9%. Additionally, the Facebook advertising audience is distributed by gender as 44% female and 56% male. This data highlights Facebook's strong appeal and its ability to attract a vast and diverse audience globally.

2.2.2 Instagram

Instagram is a free photo-sharing application that also functions as a social networking platform. Launched in October 2010, it allows users to capture images, apply various filters and edits, and share them across multiple social media services. It also enables users to comment on and interact with shared posts. (Zaboun, 2019).

Recently, the increasing popularity of Instagram has become evident among technology users. The following figure presents key statistics related to Instagram usage:

INSTAGRAM AUDIENCE OVERVIEW
THE POTENTIAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT MARKETERS CAN REACHUSING ADVERTS ON INSTAGRAM

NUMBER OF PEOPLE THAT INSTAGRAM REPORTS
CAN BEACH WITH ADVERTS ON INSTAGRAM CONTROL INSTAGRAM

SUPERTS ON INSTAGRAM AUDIENCE
CAN REACH WITH ADVERTS ON INSTAGRAM ADVERTS ON INSTAGRAM

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Figure 2: Instagram Audience for April 2020

Source: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot, conculted on 13/09/2020 at 21:49.

The figure indicates that in April 2020, the number of Instagram users reached approximately 970 million, a remarkably high figure. The potential reach of posts from individuals aged 13 and above was around 16%, while the percentage of advertisement searches on the platform exceeded 4.5% over a three-month period. In terms of gender distribution, 51% of Instagram users were female, while 49% were male, demonstrating a relatively balanced user base (Hmeidane, 2020).

2.2.3 Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging platform that allows users to post short updates, known as tweets, with a maximum length of 140 characters per message. Users can post tweets directly through Twitter's website or mobile application. The platform was initially developed as a research project by the American company ODEO in San Francisco in early 2006. Twitter was officially launched for public use in October 2006, and in April 2007, it became an independent company under the name Twitter Inc. (Al-Muhtasib, 2017, pp. 41-42).

The following figure presents key statistics regarding Twitter's global audience for the year 2019:

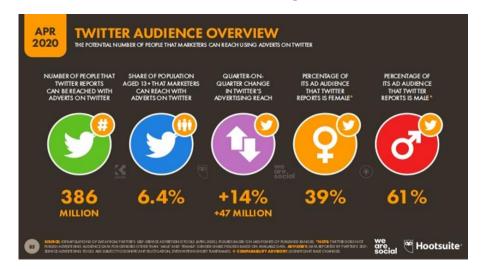


Figure 3: Twitter Audience for April 2020

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Source: https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-april-global-statshot Accessed on: September 13, 2020, at 21:49.

The figure shows that in April 2020, the number of Twitter users worldwide reached approximately 386 million. The percentage of advertisements and searches for ads on the platform was 6.4%, while the overall search for advertisements on Twitter exceeded 14%. In terms of gender distribution, 39% of users were female, while 61% were male, indicating that Twitter has a significant user base, particularly among men.

2.2.4 WhatsApp

WhatsApp is an application that uses the internet to send text messages, images, voice messages, and videos. It was created in 2009 by two former Yahoo employees and is available as a free messaging app. (Al-Oqla Ihsan, 2018).

Notably, Facebook acquired WhatsApp in 2014 in a deal valued at \$19 billion, making it the largest acquisition by the social media giant to date. (Iqbal Mansour, 2020). According to the latest statistics, WhatsApp had approximately 1.5 billion users as of 2019. (Iqbal, 2020).

Overall, there are numerous other social media platforms. The following figure illustrates the top 20 social media sites globally:

Figure 4: The Top 20 Social Media Platforms.

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Source: https://www.businessofapps.com/data/whatsapp-statistics/#1 accessed on September 16, 2020, at 01:37.

Tencent Weibo

2.2.5 The University

A university is a space where open and free discussions take place between educators and students, with the aim of evaluating various ideas and concepts. It is also an environment where faculty members interact across different disciplines, as well as where students from various fields of study engage in academic exchange. (Saqr, 2005, p. 50).

2.2.6 University Student

A university student is the recipient of knowledge—the individual whom both professors and curriculum designers seek to engage and influence within a structured educational framework. The learning process is carried out with specific objectives, over a defined period, and through planned methodologies (Fellouh, 2018, p. 82).

3. Field Study

3.1 Study Population and Sample

The study population consists of students from the University of El Oued who use social media platforms. The platforms chosen for this study include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp, as they are the most widely used among students.

Due to the large number of students and the difficulty of conducting a complete census, a sample was selected. An electronic questionnaire was distributed through various university-related groups and pages, as well as through direct communication with some students. A total of 105 responses were collected; however, three responses were excluded as they fell outside the geographical scope of the study. Thus, the final study sample consists of 102 participants, which is considered a reasonable sample size for analysis (Boualchaour, 2018).

3.2 Statistical Processing

For data analysis, the study employed frequency distribution and percentage calculations to interpret the collected data.

3.3 Study Limitations

The study is limited to the following parameters:

- The sample consists of students from the University of El Oued who actively use social media.
 - The data collection period was March 2019.

• The research instrument used was an electronic questionnaire.

4.3 Previous Studies

- **4.3.1 First Study:** The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Supporting Innovation in Startups, with Reference to the Algerian Experience by Ala Eddine Boudiaf and Zoubir Mohamed (Boudiaf, 2020). This study aimed to explore the key role played by innovative startups in modern economies, particularly in relation to technological infrastructure in communication and information systems. It found that education significantly influences youth awareness and their readiness to engage in entrepreneurial and creative activities. The study also highlighted the mismatch between university graduates and labor market needs in Algeria. Additionally, it emphasized the importance of business incubators in enhancing the national economy by facilitating communication between startups and technological hubs both locally and internationally.
- **4.3.2 Second Study:** The Impact of Social Media on the Cultural Identity of Algerian Youth A Field Study by Salma Hamidan (2020). This study investigated the most commonly used social media platforms among Algerian youth and examined their influence on cultural identity. It found that social media has both positive and negative effects on religious identity. Additionally, 42% of participants reported using a mix of Arabic and foreign languages in communication, while 62% affirmed their commitment to Islamic culture and their efforts to preserve it against foreign cultural influences.
- **4.3.3 Third Study:** Facebook Use in Algeria: Testing the Relationship Between Addiction and Depression Among Users by Tarek Said Saidi and Abdelhafid Maouch (2018). This study explored the correlation between Facebook addiction and depression symptoms among Algerian users. The findings indicated a positive relationship between excessive Facebook use and depression, with higher daily usage linked to increased symptoms of depression. Conversely, the study found a negative correlation between the number of Facebook friends and depression levels, suggesting that a broader online social network may mitigate feelings of isolation.
- **4.3.4 Fourth Study:** The Impact of Social Media Use on the Moral Value System of University Students by Hanane Fenich (2016). This study examined how social media, particularly Facebook, influences the ethical value system of university students from their own perspectives. The results highlighted both negative and positive effects. The negative impacts included an increased likelihood of illicit relationships, neglect of religious practices, and moral deterioration. On the other hand, positive effects were observed in terms of improved access to national news, enhanced learning opportunities, and greater freedom of expression. The study also noted that social media has encouraged students to communicate more openly with the opposite gender.

5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Study Data

5.3.1 First Section: Basic Information

Table 1: Institutional Affiliation of Respondents

Institutional Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Chahid Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued	102	97.1%
Other Universities	3	2.9%
Total	105	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on questionnaire results.

The table shows that the majority of respondents belong to the target sample, with 97.1% (102 individuals) affiliated with Echahid Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued. This represents a highly acceptable response rate. The remaining 2.9% (3 individuals) will be excluded from the analysis as they fall outside the geographical scope of the study (Fneish, 2016).

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Table 2: Sample Distribution by Gender

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Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	62	60.8%
Male	40	39.2%
Total	102	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on questionnaire results.

The data indicates that female respondents constitute the majority of the sample, representing 60.8%, while male respondents account for 39.2%. This distribution reflects the demographic characteristics of the study population, suggesting a higher engagement of female students in the survey.

5.3 Presentation and Analysis of Study Data

5.3.1 First Section: Basic Information

Table 1: Institution of Affiliation of the Sample Members

Institution of Affiliation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Chahid Hamma Lakhdar University of El Oued	102	97.1
Another University	3	2.9
Total	105	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on questionnaire results.

From the table, it is observed that most of the respondents belong to the target sample, with 97.1% (102 individuals) affiliated with El Oued University. This is a highly acceptable response rate, while the remaining 2.9% (3 individuals) are excluded as they fall outside the geographical scope of the study.

Table 2: Distribution of the Sample by Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	62	60.80
Male	40	39.20
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The table illustrates that the sample consists of 102 respondents from both genders, with 40 males and 62 females. The higher number of females compared to males can be attributed to the fact that university student populations tend to have a higher percentage of females than males. Thus, these proportions are considered representative of the study sample.

Table 3: Educational Level of the Sample

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's	53	52
Master's	31	30.40
PhD	18	17.60
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The table above shows the educational levels of the sample. The majority of students are in the Bachelor's program (52%), followed by Master's students (30.4%), and finally, PhD students (17.6%). This reflects a diverse sample across the three academic levels within the university under study.

5.3.2 Second Section: Social Media Usage

Table 4: Types of Social Media Platforms Used by the Sample

Social Media Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	98	59.76
Instagram	34	20.73
WhatsApp	22	13.41
Twitter	10	6.10
Total	164	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

(Note: 164 represents the total number of responses, not the number of individuals, as respondents could select multiple platforms.)

The table shows that most respondents use Facebook (59.76%), indicating that it is the most widely used platform. Instagram follows with 20.73%, WhatsApp with 13.41%, and Twitter with 6.10%. These percentages reflect the degree of usage of these platforms, confirming that the respondents are familiar with them, although their usage levels vary.

Table 5: Time Spent on Social Media

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Time Spent on Social Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 3 hours	42	41.20
3 to 5 hours	27	26.50
More than 5 hours	33	32.30
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

Analyzing the responses, most respondents (41.20%) report using social media for less than three hours per day. Meanwhile, 32.30% spend more than five hours daily, and 26.50% use it between three to five hours per day. These findings suggest that a significant portion of the sample engages in social media use in a balanced manner. However, the data also indicates a high level of interest in these platforms among the respondents.

5.3.3 Third Section: The Relationship Between Students and the University on Social Media

Table 6: Presence of University-Related Pages on Social Media

Are there pages dedicated to university news?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	92	90.20
No	3	2.90
I don't know	7	6.90
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The majority (90.20%) of respondents confirm the presence of social media pages dedicated to university news and activities. Meanwhile, 6.90% are unaware of such pages, and 2.90% believe no such pages exist. This indicates a strong interest in university updates via social media. Those unaware of or denying the existence of such pages may simply not be interested in this type of content.

Table 7: Frequency of Accessing University-Related Pages

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Do you visit these pages?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	59	57.84
No	13	12.74
Sometimes	30	29.42
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The table reveals that 57.84% of respondents frequently visit social media pages that share university news, while 29.42% visit them occasionally. A smaller percentage (12.74%) do not visit these pages at all. Overall, 87.26% of the sample engages with university-related content on social media, underscoring the role of these platforms in keeping students informed.

5.3.4 Fourth Section: Elements of University-Related Content That Interest Students on Social Media

Table 8: Types of University-Related Content That Attract Respondents

University News Posted	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Announcements and activities	68	47.55
Grades and exam results	18	12.59
Cultural activities	8	5.60
Research and communication with students and professors	49	34.26
Total	143	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

(Note: 143 represents the total number of responses, not the number of individuals, as respondents could select multiple options.)

The table indicates that 47.55% of respondents are most interested in university announcements and activities (e.g., re-registration, thesis defenses, scheduling, and exams). Another 34.26% use these pages to communicate with fellow students and professors. Meanwhile, 12.59% seek information about grades and exam results, and 5.60% follow cultural activities (Khellout, Brouwail, 2017).

Table 9: Importance of Social Media Pages Connecting Students to the University

Do you consider university social media pages important?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	65	63.70
Agree	34	33.30
Disagree	2	2.00
Strongly disagree	1	1.00
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The majority of respondents (97%) believe that social media pages connecting students to the university are essential for keeping them informed, especially during holidays or weekends. This highlights the role of social media as a communication tool between students and the university.

Table 10: Necessity of Universities Having Official Social Media Pages

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Should universities have official social media pages?	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	79	77.50
Agree	23	22.50
Disagree	0	0.00
Strongly disagree	0	0.00
Total	102	100

Source: Prepared by the researchers using Excel.

The table shows that 100% of respondents support the idea that universities should have official social media pages, confirming the importance of these platforms as an official and reliable source of information for students.

Conclusion

By highlighting the importance of social media for university students and the extent to which these platforms serve as a crucial means of communication between students and their universities, it becomes evident that social media occupies a significant space in students' lives. Since they spend considerable time browsing and engaging with these platforms, universities must adapt to this reality and leverage social media for effective communication with students.

The study found that social media platforms are technology-driven institutions focused on facilitating communication and information exchange among individuals. It provided an overview of global social media statistics, revealing that Facebook is the most widely used platform worldwide, with approximately 2.02 billion users, followed by WhatsApp (acquired by Facebook in 2014) with 1.5 billion users, Instagram with 970 million users, and Twitter with 386 million users. The study showed that the surveyed sample consisted of 60.80% female respondents and 39.20% male respondents. The educational level distribution of the sample was as follows: 52% were undergraduate (Bachelor's) students, 30.40% were Master's students, and 17.60% were PhD students, reflecting a diverse and well-balanced sample. The study revealed that 59.76% of the respondents use Facebook, 20.73% use Instagram, 13.41% use WhatsApp, and 6.10% use Twitter. The findings indicated that 41.20% of the respondents spend less than three hours daily on social media, while 32.30% spend more than five hours, and 26.50% spend between three to five hours per day. The study found that 90.20% of respondents follow university-related news on social media, while 6.90% are unaware of such pages, and 2.90% believe these pages do not exist. A total of 87.26% of respondents stated that they visit university-related social media pages either regularly or occasionally, while 12.74% do not visit these pages at all. The study highlighted that the most engaging type of university-related content for respondents is announcements and events (47.55%). Other significant interests include communication with students and professors (34.26%), academic results and grades (12.59%), and cultural activities (5.60%). A significant 97% of the sample affirmed that university-related social media pages play a crucial role in keeping them informed, while 3% disagreed. The study revealed that 100% of respondents support the need for universities to establish official social media pages for direct communication and access to official updates. Given their widespread global reach, social media platforms have become one of the primary sources of information exchange. They now serve as an essential bridge between students and universities due to their continuous influence on individuals' daily lives, particularly students.

So, as some recommendations, universities should actively integrate social media platforms into their communication strategies with students. A dedicated unit should be established to develop and maintain the university's online presence, linking it with social media platforms. Universities should embrace various social media platforms to align with student preferences and expectations. Social media usage should be optimized for disseminating announcements, academic campaigns, and cultural and scientific activities. A diverse approach should be adopted by utilizing platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to maximize student engagement.

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