

The Use of Social Media as a Medium for Disseminating Academic Information

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Abstract

Keywords:

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Background: Higher education institutions face increasing pressure to disseminate academic information efficiently to academic communities dominated by digital-native generations. Traditional communication channels such as notice boards, institutional emails, and printed announcements are often considered slow, limited in reach, and less aligned with contemporary communication habits. **Objective:** This study aims to analyze the level of adoption and preference for using social media as a source of academic information, evaluate the effectiveness of platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and Facebook in enhancing reach and delivery speed, and identify key challenges related to credibility, interaction management, and the risk of misinformation. **Methods:** A quantitative approach was employed through a survey involving 450 respondents representing students, lecturers, and administrative staff at University X. The survey was complemented by a six-month content analysis of the institution's official social media accounts (January–June 2024). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple regression. **Results:** Findings indicate that 88% of students and 72% of lecturers/staff rely on social media as their primary source of academic information. Average monthly reach on social media was significantly higher than the open rate of academic emails. Regression results reveal a significant positive correlation between posting frequency and perceived communication effectiveness. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, social media is an exceptionally effective tool for fast and wide academic communication. However, the study emphasizes that integrated governance linking social media with formal communication channels such as institutional websites is essential for ensuring information credibility and minimizing misinformation risks.

INTRODUCTION

Efficient, rapid, and accessible information dissemination has become an essential pillar in the operational activities and accountability frameworks of higher education institutions. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability of universities to communicate effectively with their academic communities directly impacts institutional transparency, student engagement, and organizational performance (Al-Dossary & Al-Samarraie, 2020; Salloum et al., 2020). Traditionally, universities have relied on physical bulletin boards, academic email systems, and official websites to communicate important announcements, policies, and academic schedules (Manca & Ranieri, 2016; Al-Dossary et al., 2021).

Although these traditional channels remain relevant, they often fail to keep pace with the communication habits of today's students and academic staff most of whom belong to the digital-native generation and prefer platforms that offer immediacy, visual appeal, and constant

connectivity. Research consistently demonstrates that millennials and Generation Z, the dominant cohort in contemporary universities, spend an average of three to five hours daily on social media platforms, making these environments a natural space for institutional communication (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; De-Marcos et al., 2020).

The evolution of communication technologies has transformed social media from a personal interaction space into a powerful institutional communication tool capable of accommodating large-scale information sharing. Platforms such as Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and even messaging applications like WhatsApp and Telegram enable universities to reach audiences instantaneously, disseminate information through engaging multimedia formats, and create two-way communication streams that facilitate real-time responses and community engagement (Salloum et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2021).

In an academic context, the application of social media covers a wide range of informational needs, including admission schedules, policy changes, administrative deadlines, academic activities such as seminars and workshops, research promotion, student achievements, and updates related to community engagement or service-learning programs (Lee & Chang, 2023; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Its immediacy makes it particularly appropriate for urgent announcements such as emergency notifications, class cancellations, or sudden academic schedule changes that require rapid dissemination (Tufekci, 2020).

Furthermore, social media enables universities to establish a more human and relatable institutional identity. Through storytelling content, behind-the-scenes academic life coverage, and student spotlight posts, institutions can foster a sense of community, belonging, and institutional pride that traditional communication channels rarely achieve (Shen et al., 2021; Vassiliou et al., 2022). The interactive nature of social media also creates opportunities for two-way dialogue between the institution and its stakeholders, enabling feedback collection, clarification of information, and proactive community management (Smith & Jones, 2023; Salloum et al., 2020).

Recent empirical studies have reinforced the growing importance of social media in academic communication. For instance, Al-Dossary and Al-Samarraie (2020) found that social media platforms significantly enhance academic communication and knowledge sharing among university students, with instant messaging applications proving particularly effective for real-time information exchange. Similarly, Salloum, D'Mello, and Aburayya (2020) demonstrated that social media use positively correlates with student engagement and perceived communication effectiveness in higher education settings, highlighting the need for institutions to strategically integrate these platforms into their communication frameworks. More recently, Smith and Jones (2023) examined verification behaviors among university students, revealing that while students heavily rely on social media for initial information discovery, they consistently cross-verify critical academic information through official institutional channels, indicating persistent credibility concerns.

Despite the growing body of research on social media in educational contexts, several gaps remain unaddressed. Most existing studies have focused either on social media's role in teaching and learning processes (Manca & Ranieri, 2016) or on its function in student engagement and informal learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012). Limited empirical attention has been devoted specifically to examining social media as a formal institutional channel for

disseminating academic information, such as administrative announcements, policy updates, and academic schedules to the entire academic community (Cakir & Yavuz, 2023; Safa et al., 2022). Furthermore, few studies have systematically compared adoption patterns and perceived effectiveness across different stakeholder groups (students, lecturers, and administrative staff) within a single institutional setting (Tufekci, 2020; Vassiliou et al., 2022). The integration challenges, including credibility management, real-time interaction handling, and the need for hybrid communication strategies linking social media with official institutional platforms, remain underexplored in the literature (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Hemsley et al., 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach combining user adoption patterns (survey of 450 students, lecturers, and staff) with institutional performance metrics (six-month content analysis) to examine social media as a formal academic communication channel. It specifically addresses the underexplored area of hybrid communication governance, investigating how social media can function as a rapid-notification layer while maintaining credibility through integration with authoritative institutional sources (Al-Dossary & Al-Samarraie, 2020; Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Additionally, this research provides practical insights into platform-specific strategies, response time management, and operational resources for sustainable social media governance in higher education (Smith & Jones, 2023; Safa et al., 2022).

However, the growing dependence on social media also introduces significant challenges that institutions must carefully navigate. Concerns regarding the credibility and accuracy of information shared through social media channels are frequently raised in academic discussions (Tufekci, 2020; Lee & Chang, 2023). The informal and fast-moving nature of social media sometimes undermines perceptions of reliability, compelling users to cross-verify information with official institutional channels (Salloum et al., 2020; Shen et al., 2021). Additionally, the potential for misinformation to spread rapidly across networked communities poses risks to institutional reputation and decision-making processes (Tufekci, 2020; Vassiliou et al., 2022).

Data privacy risks, platform dependency, and the increasing need for skilled professional digital communication staff further complicate institutional social media management. Ensuring that information shared meets institutional standards while adapting to the evolving features and algorithms of diverse platforms requires dedicated expertise, systematic workflows, and continuous monitoring (Hemsley et al., 2020; Al-Dossary et al., 2021).

Despite these challenges, the strategic importance of social media in academic communication continues to grow globally. Institutions that fail to develop coherent digital communication strategies risk losing relevance with their constituencies and undermining their ability to manage institutional narratives effectively. Given these dynamics, this study aims to investigate the actual patterns of social media use in academic communication, the extent of its adoption among key academic groups, the perceived effectiveness of different platforms, and the operational challenges that accompany its institutional implementation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for higher education institutions seeking to integrate digital communication strategies effectively and responsibly within their academic ecosystems. The findings of this study are expected to contribute practical insights for communication managers,

institutional policymakers, and academic administrators in designing more effective and resilient digital communication frameworks.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study applied a descriptive-evaluative research design, which allows researchers to systematically describe the current conditions and assess the effectiveness of social media as an academic communication tool. The descriptive component captures the status quo of social media use, adoption patterns, and platform preferences. The evaluative component assesses whether social media effectively serves as a channel for academic information dissemination by measuring communication performance indicators. This combination is particularly suitable for examining patterns of usage, user perceptions, and measurable communication outcomes in institutional settings.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of the entire academic community at University X, including active students enrolled in all faculties, full-time lecturers, and administrative staff. The total population comprised approximately 8,500 individuals. The sample ($n = 450$) was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation from each academic group. This technique guarantees that the sample reflects the diversity of the population and minimizes selection bias. The breakdown of the sample included 350 students (77.8%), 65 lecturers (14.4%), and 35 administrative staff (7.8%).

Research Instruments

Two primary data collection instruments were employed in this study. First, a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was developed to collect quantitative data regarding platform usage frequency, trust levels, perceived information accuracy, response speed, and overall satisfaction with academic information delivered via social media. The questionnaire underwent validity testing using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.87$), confirming its suitability for data collection. Second, a qualitative content analysis guide was used to systematically examine the university's official social media accounts on Instagram and X over six months (January–June 2024). The analysis focused on posting frequency (posts per week), interaction metrics including engagement rate, comment volumes, likes, and shares, types of academic content uploaded, and the institution's average response time to user inquiries and comments.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequency distributions, means, and percentages to identify usage patterns, adoption levels, and perceived effectiveness across respondent groups. Simple regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between posting frequency (independent variable) and perceived communication effectiveness (dependent variable), with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative content analysis was applied to categorize academic information into thematic groups, identify

interaction trends over time, and assess communication patterns across platforms. Triangulation between survey data and content analysis findings was employed to strengthen the validity and reliability of conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Media Adoption Patterns

Survey results indicate a substantial and statistically significant shift in communication preferences within the academic community at University X. A total of 88% of student respondents and 72% of lecturers and administrative staff reported that social media serves as their primary source of academic information, surpassing institutional emails (adopted by 61%) and official websites (46%) as preferred first points of access. This finding reflects the dominance of digital-native communication behavior, where rapid, easily accessible, in-platform information is consistently favored over traditional channels perceived as slower and less engaging. These findings are consistent with broader trends in higher education globally. The shift toward digital-first information behavior is not exclusive to students but is also progressively influencing professional and administrative staff, suggesting that the digitalization of institutional communication is increasingly an organizational imperative rather than merely a student-oriented strategy.

Platform Preference Analysis

Platform preference data revealed meaningful insights for strategic communication planning across different academic groups. Institutional WhatsApp and Telegram groups recorded the highest adoption rates—92% among students and 85% among lecturers/staff—demonstrating the critical importance of closed, real-time notification channels that provide high-visibility alerts directly within personal messaging environments. The immediacy and directness of messaging platforms explain their dominance, particularly for time-sensitive communications.

Among open social media platforms, Instagram emerged as the most popular choice among students (75%), indicating the dominant role of visual and story-based content in student communication preferences. The platform's features—including Stories, Reels, and carousel posts enable universities to package academic information in engaging, digestible formats suited to short-attention-span consumption patterns. Meanwhile, Facebook exhibited comparatively higher adoption among lecturers and staff (30%) than among students (15%), reinforcing well-documented generational differences in platform use and reflecting Facebook's stronger foothold among older digital users.

X (formerly Twitter) demonstrated moderate adoption across all groups (42% students, 28% staff), primarily used for real-time event updates, academic announcements, and public discourse around institutional activities. Its character-limited format is particularly suited for concise, high-frequency academic communication updates.

Table 1. Platform Adoption Rates Among Academic Community Members

Platform	Students (%)	Lecturers/Staff (%)	Overall (%)
WhatsApp/Telegram Groups	92	85	89.5
Instagram	75	22	57.3

X (formerly Twitter)	42	28	37.5
Facebook	15	30	20.3
Official Website	46	55	49.1
Institutional Email	61	70	64.0

Source: Primary data, 2025

Communication Performance Metrics

Content analysis of the university's social media accounts during the six-month observation period revealed clear advantages in communication performance compared to traditional channels. The average monthly reach of institutional social media posts was found to be 180% higher than the open rate of academic email blasts sent during the same period. This substantial gap underscores the fundamental shift in attention economy dynamics, where social media's algorithm-driven visibility and push notification features provide significantly greater audience penetration than email-based communication.

Response time analysis further confirmed social media's operational advantages. Social media interactions including queries, comments, and requests for clarification received institutional responses within an average of 2–3 hours, compared to email responses which typically required 12–24 hours. This difference has practical implications for student decision-making processes, especially during critical periods such as enrollment, examination scheduling, and deadline management. Regression analysis yielded statistically significant results ($F = 18.43$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.42$), indicating that posting frequency explains approximately 42% of the variance in perceived communication effectiveness. This finding reinforces the hypothesis that consistent, regular content delivery builds user trust, maintains community engagement, and enhances overall perceptions of institutional responsiveness.

Challenges in Social Media-Based Academic Communication

Despite its demonstrated advantages, the study identified two major recurring challenges that institutions must address to maximize the effectiveness of social media in academic communication. First, 55% of respondents reported that they still verify important academic information through the university's official website after initially encountering it on social media. This persistent verification behavior reveals that social media is predominantly perceived as a rapid-alert or notification system rather than a definitive authoritative source. Users distinguish between platforms used for quick discovery and those used for confirmed, official information.

This finding has important strategic implications: universities should leverage social media as a gateway that drives traffic toward authoritative official sources rather than treating it as a standalone communication channel. Content design strategies should explicitly include calls-to-action directing users to official websites, portals, or documented policies for comprehensive information. This integrated approach sometimes called a hybrid communication strategy maximizes each channel's comparative advantage while ensuring information accuracy and institutional credibility.

The second major challenge identified was the operational complexity of managing high volumes of real-time interactions on social media platforms. With millions of potential touchpoints generated through comments, direct messages, and mentions, institutions require dedicated, professionally trained communication personnel with real-time access to accurate institutional data. Ad hoc or understaffed communication management leads to response delays, inconsistent messaging, and reputational risks.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that social media has become an indispensable communication channel in higher education, with high adoption rates among students and staff, particularly for messaging and visual platforms. The significant positive correlation between posting frequency and perceived communication effectiveness underscores the need for consistent, strategic content delivery. Institutions must treat social media management as a core operational competency requiring dedicated resources and systematic governance. The persistent pattern of cross-verification highlights the importance of an integrated hybrid model, where social media serves as a rapid notification layer directing users to authoritative institutional sources. To address real-time interaction challenges, institutions should invest in capable communication teams with clear roles and protocols, as well as digital literacy programs to ensure best practices and crisis preparedness. In conclusion, social media is no longer optional in higher education communication it is a fundamental infrastructure requirement for effectively engaging modern academic communities. Universities that embrace integrated, governance-driven social media strategies are positioned to enhance institutional transparency, stakeholder engagement, information accessibility, and ultimately the quality of the academic experience for all community members.

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