



Perceptions of International Students toward Social Media of Universitas Sebelas Maret

Marieti Debyora Gardiana^{1,*}, Andre Noevi Rahmanto², Ign. Agung Satyawan³

¹ International Office, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

^{1,2,3} Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia

* Corresponding author. Email: md.gardiana@staff.uns.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The results of the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings 2023, released in June 2022, placed the Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS) in 1201-1400 worldwide. UNS cannot join the ranks of the 500 most prominent universities in the world due to the low proportion of international students, below 1%. In order to recruit more international students, it is vital to continuously enhance reputation and image, including optimizing social media functionality. This study employed the relationship management theory to determine international students' perceptions of UNS social media. The research was conducted through a survey with 20 international students, who were then interviewed to triangulate the findings. In general, international students positively perceived UNS social media, although they had not utilized it as their primary source of information when selecting a university. In addition, international students believed that information regarding faculty and department activities had not been disseminated appropriately through university social media.

Keywords: World University Rankings, international students, social media

1. INTRODUCTION

In June 2022, Quacquarelli Symonds released the QS World University Rankings 2023 [1]. The ranking is based on eight key assessment indicators: academic reputation, employer reputation, citations per faculty, student ratio, international student ratio, international faculty ratio, international research networks, and employment outcomes. As one of the ranking indicators outlined by Quacquarelli Symonds and Times Higher Education, universities must continually strive to grow their international student population.

Social media is the most accessible online service today. It facilitates the creation, access, response, and dissemination of information. Therefore, colleges must be able to serve as a vehicle for establishing a positive reputation and image among all stakeholders. According to Sulthan and Bekti [2], the daily lives of millennial students are inseparable from social media. Students select social media sites that meet their informational, communication, amusement, and self-actualization. It demands paying close attention to the platform's attributes. Users' impressions of social media will be favorable if they are participatory and provide a forum for conversation.

More precisely, the positive perception of international students toward higher education services,

including the fulfillment of information demands through social media, will be a means of promotion to attract prospective international students from their countries. Based on data from smartin.uns.ac.id as of March 2022, there were 152 international students at Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS), only about 0.46% of the total 32,793 UNS students. To expand the number of international students, UNS needs to continue strengthening its offerings, notably in terms of satisfying information demands through social media. This study intends to determine international students' perceptions of UNS social media to fulfill their need for information.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Three strategic models can be implemented to increase the number of students [3]: increasing student services, promoting the programs offered, and stressing partnership with the media. The first strategy is based on recognizing that university students exist as customers and marketers. Students will communicate the quality of services provided by universities through word-of-mouth. Hence, students' positive perception benefits the universities' reputation and marketing, and vice versa. Most prospective students utilize social media information when selecting a college as a consideration and deciding factor [4].

Following the relationship management theory proposed by John Ledingham and Steven Bruning [5], quality organizational services will favor its image and reputation. Good service from a company in addressing the needs of all stakeholders will promote a good perception of stakeholders to establish a positive reputation for the organization. Within higher education, student satisfaction with the services provided will increase the quality of the relationship between universities and students [6], further impacting a positive perception and loyalty.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was undertaken by distributing a questionnaire to determine international students' perceptions of various dimensions of social media effectiveness. There was no examination of an independent variable's effect on certain dependent variables. Using the dimensions of measurement and evaluation of public relations [7] employed in the study of [8], the questionnaire was developed to assess the efficiency of higher education websites as information providers based on the following factors.

1. Transparency: Easy access to all forms of information needed openly
2. Interactivity: Providing a space for dialogue between users, as well as between users and managers, and has a link feature with other college social media platforms
3. Usability: Easy to learn and can be used smoothly, has multilingual facilities, sitemap, FAQ, and a search engine
4. Maturity: Sophisticated and modern, features audio and video files
5. Positivity: Effective communication, pleasant interactions, and appreciation for public involvement
6. Openness: Content is regularly and quickly updated by following the latest events.
7. Access: The presence of an email address and contact information from the creator or manager that users can easily contact
8. Useful information: Conveying detailed and complete information for users about applicable regulations or procedures

The assessment comprises five answer categories, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) with a score of 5 to Strongly Disagree (SD) with a score of 1. Twenty respondents provided the following survey responses and

questionnaire assessments, the primary data source for analysis.

Table 1. Research respondents

Code	Name	Country of Origin	Faculty/ Department
P1	Ahmet Tasliyev	Turkmenistan	Master Program of Management
P2	Myrat Kovusov	Turkmenistan	Bachelor Program of Pharmacy
P3	Zoarinala Faratiana Irene Arson	Madagascar	Master Program of Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers
P4	Rakotoarisoa Maminiaina	Madagascar	Master Program of Management
P5	Eric Ngezahayo	Rwanda	Master Program of Environmental Science
P6	Fidele Iraguha	Rwanda	Master Program of Chemical
P7	Osman Sankoh	Sierra Leone	Master Program of Management
P8	Daniel Mao Mansaray	Sierra Leone	Master Program of Industrial Engineering
P9	Husen Wae Doloh	Thailand	Master Program of History Education
P10	Suhailee Sohnui	Thailand	Doctoral Program of Indonesian Language Education
P11	Eugenio Lay	Timor Leste	Bachelor Program of Communication Science
P12	Suzi Maria Peregrina Lim	Timor Leste	Bachelor Program of Interior Design

P13	Muhamma d Danish	Malaysia	Bachelor Program of Electrical Engineering
P14	Noor Shazreen Bt Mortadza	Malaysia	Doctoral Program of Economics
P15	Aguri Hara	Japan	Bachelor Program of Accountancy
P16	Margarita Olegovna	Russian Federation	Master Program of Cultural Studies
P17	Nouraldee n Ameen Abaker	Sudan	Master Program of Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers
P18	Kho Chah	Vietnames e	Bachelor Program of Medicine
P19	Ma Ry	Vietnames e	Bachelor Program of Medicine
P20	Lovelina Cecilia Dos	Timor Leste	Bachelor Program of English Literature

A literature review of books, scientific journals, and the internet yielded secondary data [9]. The assessment comprises five answer categories, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) with a score of 5 to Strongly Disagree (SD) with a score of 1. Twenty respondents provided the following survey responses and questionnaire assessments, the primary data source for analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Many 15 respondents stated that the quality of education at UNS was why they decided to study there, and 14 learned about UNS from their parents, friends, and teachers. These results demonstrate that word-of-mouth marketing remains an effective strategy for attracting international students. Therefore, the long-term increase in the number of international students will be contingent on the quality of the interaction between UNS and international students. When international students

are satisfied with the service they receive at UNS, they will promote the university to prospective students from their home countries. The limited access to information about UNS through social media by international students was caused by the lack of multilingual facilities on social media.

2. All international students followed the official Instagram account of UNS (@unsofficial) and utilized it as a source of information about academic activities (UNS agenda and accomplishments, seminar or competition information) and non-academic information (vaccination programs, events, and information about Solo).

Instagram provides advantages over other social media platforms because it is visually appealing and expressive with audio and visual formats, is participatory, allows for interaction between users as well as between users and management, and is reasonably simple to use. Instagram also offers multiple types of digital involvement, such as followers, views, likes, reposts, tagging, mentions, direct messages, and hashtags, making millennials and generation Z more comfortable with the platform.

On June 7, 2022, a post about student achievement received one like on the website, 23 likes, and one retweet on Twitter, 67 likes, three comments, and one share on Facebook, but 5,243 likes and 59 comments on Instagram.



Figure 1. Instagram post at @unsofficial on June 7, 2022

(Source: [Universitas Sebelas Maret \(@unsofficial\)](https://www.instagram.com/unsofficial) • Instagram photos and videos)

Unfortunately, international students believed faculty activity schedules had not been adequately published on UNS's social media platforms.

3. As foreign nationals, international students aspired to receive a larger proportion of news coverage of their everyday activities to help attract potential students

from their home nations. It is in line with [10], in which prospective students utilize social media not only to seek information on the academic sector but also about the lifestyle and culture of the institution they wish to attend. It also agrees with the proximity concept from a communication standpoint, stating that the public will be interested in gaining access to the media if their self-portrait or things relating to their interests are recorded or represented.

Although nothing has been accomplished, on November 11, 2021, UNS social media uploaded profiles of various international students, which received 8,727 likes and 54 comments on Instagram but only 102 likes, two comments, and six shares on Facebook.



Figure 2. Instagram post at @unsofficial on November 11, 2021

[Universitas Sebelas Maret \(@uns.official\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

In addition, international students hoped that UNS social media would provide specific information regarding their self-actualization as international students. Such as information on further study scholarships, career opportunities for foreigners, and opportunities wereto establish relationships with international students from other universities.

- All respondents believed that UNS social media was a practical and up-to-date source of information; consequently, thirteen of them utilized it as a two-way communication channel by actively commenting and asking questions through the direct message feature. This level of efficacy is also evident from the dimensions of measurement and evaluation of public relations assessment outcomes [7]. None of the eight analyzed dimensions received ratings of "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" from respondents.

Table 2. The results of the eight-dimensional social media effectiveness questionnaire

Factor	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	Total Score (SSx5) + (Sx4) + (Bx3)	Percentage (Score: 500) x 100%
Transparancy	11	8	1	450	90%
Interactivity	7	11	2	425	85%
Usability	6	12	2	420	84%
Maturity	9	9	2	435	87%
Positivity	15	5		475	95%
Openness	11	8	1	450	90%
Access	10	10		450	90%
Useful information	12	8		460	92%
Average				445.625	89.125 %

Ideal criteria calculations under the theory of [11] were carried out in several steps.

- Calculating the maximum total score per dimension

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \text{number of respondents} \times \text{number of statements} \\
 &\quad \text{per dimension} \times \text{maximum score} \\
 &= 20 \times 5 \times 5 \\
 &= 500
 \end{aligned}$$

- Calculating the total score obtained per dimension

$$= (SAx5) + (Ax4) + (Nx3) + (Dx2) + (SDx1)$$

It obtained an average total score of 445.625. In other words, the effectiveness of UNS social media, according to international students, acquired 89.125%. Thus, overall international students possessed a positive perception of UNS social media.

The positive perception international students possessed of UNS social media has also been reflected in the statements of 15 respondents. They willingly reposted content they found helpful on UNS social media and posted about their activities at UNS on their social media accounts. P1 and P4 disseminated information on UNS's activities to promote the organization as one of the university's suggestions. In the meantime, P16 uploaded her activities at UNS using the hashtag #UNS. The act of

social tagging or commenting on social media platforms is an example of an individual's participation in the process of a brand's reputation formation. The building of a reputation by users is frequently viewed as more reliable and influences public perception.



Figure 3. Instagram post of respondent P16 at @margaritanaini



Figure 4. Instagram post of respondent P1



Figure 5. Instagram post of respondent P11

With hashtags such as #UNSBisa, #UNSJuaara, and #UNSBerprestasi on international students' personal social media accounts, UNS has benefited from their role as micro-influencers who engage in digital storytelling and promote engagement [12]. UNS stakeholders comprised primarily of millennials, including prospective students, active students, and graduates, have presented an excellent opportunity to develop electronic word of mouth. Stakeholders with a positive perception and engagement will increase brand resonance, enhancing the reputation of UNS and vice versa.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, international students positively perceived UNS social media, even though most of them did not use it as a source of reference when selecting a destination college for study, nor did they use it as a medium for two-way communication. In addition, they believed that university-level social media had not provided sufficient information about faculty or department activities. To further enhance the positive perception of international students, it is required to develop further measures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank the informants in this study, the Institute for Research and Community Service, the Technical Implementation Unit for International Cooperation and Services, and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Universitas Sebelas Maret for their assistance in the completion of this study.

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