

TASMANIAN

UNIVERSITY

STUDENT

ASSOCIATION

**Enhancing Clubs and Societies Exposure to Students at
the University of Tasmania:**

Implementation of Updating Clubs & Societies Information
on The Tasmanian University Student Association Website

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

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Executive summary

One extensive longitudinal study reported that participating in extra- and co-curricular activities is one of the most significant factors for student success, both in university and professional life (King et al., 2020). In addition, co-curricular opportunities encouraging diverse student interaction are found to achieve higher student satisfaction (Rusu, 2019). For the University of Tasmania, student support was deemed improved, with 75.5 percent rating positive in 2020, a 2.2 percent up from 2019.

This project details the implementation, findings, and recommendations arising from updating the information of each club and society on the TUSA website in the section 'Find a Club or Society'. The change in method from sending information request emails to searching for information on the respective Facebook page was explored. The relative activeness of most clubs and societies on social media (mainly Facebook, then Wechat, and Instagram) was pointed out. In addition, the awareness of COVID-19 impact on clubs and societies was raised.

From the findings, three recommendations were made, with the aim of improving students' experience with the clubs and societies. The first recommendation is an increased engagement of TUSA with Clubs and Societies on social media. The other two recommendations include further research into the impact of COVID-19 on clubs and societies, and encouraging online events.

Introduction

Clubs and societies play a crucial role in the university lifestyle, offering social connection, peers' collaboration, and career support, which greatly help build the network essential for the later professional life of a student (Fenech, 2012). Cultural societies bring a sense of belonging to students, especially international students (Glass, 2018). Support societies provide empowerment and networking while clubs of similar interests or faculty-based societies provide workshops and events that enhance one's skills (University of Sydney, 2020). Henceforth, clubs and societies are essential in university life (Fenech, 2012). Henceforth, supporting students in joining the clubs and societies conveniently is a major concern that should be ticked at every single chance.

Background

TUSA, as the student association of UTAS, is dedicated to supporting students in study and wellbeing. One of the ways of doing this is building a diverse supportive community through clubs and societies (TUSA, 2021a). As of 2021, there were over 120 clubs and societies mainly categorized into course-related, political, sports, social, special interests, spiritual, and cultural (TUSA, 2021a). With the changing of committee members, the operation of the clubs and societies, and the events organized were updated yearly. On the TUSA website, a section is dedicated to 'Find Clubs and Societies' encourages students to search for a club/society that may suit them (TUSA (b), 2021). Convenient access to detailed information becomes very important in

decision making. Proper presentation of information in a clear, concise, and descriptive way is essential in the decision-making process of the audience (Khandare et al., 2018). In addition, visualisation of photos develops decision accuracy and cognitive processing (Eberhard, 2021). Henceforth, it is very essential that the information and photos of previous events is up-to-date on the website.

Method

The project is a modified implementation research of the findings from an earlier report (Zuo, 2021) which suggested an update on the information about clubs and societies on the TUSA website. The main aspect of the research was conducted digitally through the Facebook pages of the clubs and societies. This is because most TUSA clubs and societies have a website and their own social media platforms; Facebook, WeChat, etc. Facebook was the social media that the majority of clubs and societies used (TUSA (b), 2021). The TUSA website provided a direct link to the Facebook pages of the clubs and societies albeit some of the links were not up-to-date. The Microsoft OneNote was used to list the clubs and societies, and record the description, email address, main social media link, and photos uploaded. However, data gathering from some clubs and societies was done through separate emails from TUSA. The reasons for this are the private Facebook pages and/or insufficient information on Facebook.

Another interesting point to note is that the main method to gather the data had to change drastically in the early weeks of the project. The original plan was to send the detailed request email to the clubs and societies and expect a response within the following three weeks. The risk that clubs and societies would not send the details was identified as a very high risk, and it ultimately was right with only two clubs and societies sending back their details. This might be partly due to the fact that the requested email sounded demanding and put pressure on the receiver (clubs and societies) (Derks & Bakker, 2010). Another point to consider is that the clubs and societies had already had the main social media to get in contact with the students and did not need the TUSA website to get the exposure. After 2 weeks of no reply from most clubs and societies, the project was modified to collect the information and photos from their main social media, which, according to the records on the TUSA website (TUSA, 2021b), was Facebook. Henceforth, respective Facebook pages of each club or society were visited to collect the required information.

The use of emails to communicate with the clubs and societies in getting mass updated information

should be reconsidered for the coming years. Instead, gathering data from the main social media of the clubs and societies should be considered.

Findings

There are two main findings that TUSA might already be aware of but would be beneficial to reinstate.

The first finding is the engagement of clubs and societies on social media. The main engagement form of the majority of UTAS clubs and societies is Facebook. According to their Facebook pages, at least over 60 clubs and societies were active on Facebook in various forms; private/public groups, and pages. Announcements, sponsorships, photos of the events are uploaded on Facebook. Facebook provides massive exposure to the student population in UTAS. And also, since a large number of connections were provided, it was easier for clubs and societies to connect, and collaborate on events and increase social awareness. It is also noteworthy that some other forms of social media, WeChat, Instagram, is also used as the main communication method by some clubs and societies.

The second finding is that the number of events run by clubs and societies was greatly reduced in 2020. Most photos of the past events found on Facebook were from 2018 and 2019. While it is possible that clubs and societies decided against uploading photos of the events of 2020, another plausible reason that should be considered is that the number of events was impacted by the COVID-19. While the COVID-19 situation in Tasmania is relatively low risk as of November 2021 (Tasmanian Government, 2021), the UTAS clubs and societies seem not as active as they were before the lockdown.

Discussion and recommendations

Based on the findings, three recommendations could be considered.

Recommendation 1: Further Engagement with Clubs and Societies on Social Media

As stated above, most clubs and societies seem to be more active on social media rather than on the TUSA website. Engagement with the stakeholders on social media enhances the work harmony within an organization, eases the organisational flow of communication (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). TUSA has a main official Facebook page 'Tasmanian University Student Association-TUSA' that represents all UTAS campuses. Engaging with clubs and societies on social media via the aforementioned official page is therefore recommended. Social media is an effective tool for promoting events and pages (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012), henceforth, would be an effective way to promote TUSA's official Facebook page and clubs and societies' pages. Some ways to increase engagement are shoutouts, mentions, and tagging from TUSA to clubs and societies and vice versa.

Recommendation 2: Further Research into the Impact of COVID-19 on the Clubs and Societies

As the operation of clubs and societies seems less active than it had been in the pre-COVID-19 situation, it would be worth researching how clubs and societies were affected by the COVID-19 situation so that they can be better supported. Clubs and societies, as well as their events and workshops, are a great way for students to make new friends and enhance a sense of belonging (University of Sydney, 2020).

This is especially important since the impact of COVID-19 leaves the students with isolation, stress, and less social connectedness (Lyons et al., 2020). Henceforth, further research into COVID-19 impact on clubs and societies and the ways to support them, hence supporting the students in turn should be highly considered.

Recommendation 3: Encouraging Clubs and Societies to Organize more Online Events

Online learning is expected to be the majority of learning for UTAS students in 2022 and many students worry about the isolation they will continue to feel (Gwynn, 2021). This worry is supported by TUU Vent Tent-COVID-19 Edition, where many students report loneliness and isolation from the campus lifestyle (Lippis & Crothers, 2020). With that in mind, it might be worth looking into the potential benefits and disadvantages of encouraging clubs and societies to organise online events and workshops where students can participate from home. While online learning is considered by many students less effective in enhancing social and practical skills, the majority agreed that it's better than having no interaction at all (Baczek et al., 2021). From this framework, it can be deduced that while online events won't have the same great effect on students as face-to-face events and workshops, they might let students experience the extra-curriculum activities to a certain extent.

Conclusion

As a crucial part of university life, clubs and societies are effective channels for university student associations, such as TUSA, to deliver diverse and respected communities and offer a safe space

to enjoy. The improvement in the connectedness of the clubs and societies to the students is a focusing area student associations are always trying to achieve. Presenting the information on the clubs and societies' information on the TUSA website helps students be aware of the communities they might like to be a part of, henceforth encouraging peer support, and training to enhance their own's skills.

With the highly likely potential that online learning will continue in the University of Tasmania in 2022, paying more attention to helping engage the students digitally in the clubs and societies should be one of the TUSA's focused areas.

Limitations

The implementation of the project was conducted from August 2021 to November 2021, which was during the time when most clubs and societies conduct Annual Meetings for the following year's club development. Henceforth, there was a chance that the data gathered would not be up-to-date in the first semester of the following year. In addition, the majority of the research was conducted through the Facebook page of clubs and societies. Hence, the data was limited to what was mentioned on the respective Facebook page of the clubs and societies.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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