

TASMANIAN

UNIVERSITY

STUDENT

ASSOCIATION

TUSA student engagement online

Recommendations for the Tasmanian University Student
Association

TUSAxUC Student Lead Research Project

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Executive summary

The Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) was established in 1899 (then called TUU) to represent the University of Tasmania (UTAS) students (TUSA webpage, 2021). TUSA has grown substantially since its inception with the many clubs and societies, adventure clubs, assistance for students, use of equipment and facilities. TUSA is student-led and wants to enable more on-campus and online student engagement online.

TUSA would like to increase online engagement on multiple platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, despite the growth of its online following. They anticipate doing this by involving current students to provide answers as a means of increasing engagement.

This report looks at how students now engage and utilise online platforms and how TUSA can incorporate students to use them to connect and engage.

TUSA wishes to support students and their basic needs, campus needs, social needs, and connections, and this starts with them engaging to see the availability of what TUSA offers.

Data was collected from current University of Tasmania students during the "Donut Fear TUSA is Here" day, along with various literature reviews to support recommendations for TUSA's proactive outcomes. The following recommendations are given: Use paid Facebook advertising; Utilise Facebook live features and interact with students through interactive polls; Provide incentives to students; Communicate with other student associations.

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Introduction

The purpose of this project is to develop ways to bring the Tasmanian University Student Association (TUSA) to the forefront, primarily for new students to engage in what is available to make their time at the University of Tasmania (UTAS) a positive experience. To make TUSA a place that students want to come for assistance in multiple ways. TUSA is for all students not only for study but also for community events, support for housing, food, wellbeing, financial guidance.

It's important to TUSA that this research is narrow enough to produce actionable recommendations in the online engagement space. While online engagement does have clear links to on-campus engagement – I do want to clarify that we are looking specifically at how on-campus students engage with us online and how we can improve the quality and reach of that engagement (B Broad 2021, personal communication, 1 September).

Currently, TUSA is providing engagement opportunities via Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and email. This project aims to increase the number of students of all educational modes to engage with TUSA online.

TUSA provided an event called “Donut Fear TUSA is Here” for students to promote what TUSA has to offer and have a presence for TUSA to engage with students and assist in many ways. The enticer for the students to complete questionnaires and learn about TUSA was they received a free donut voucher. Students completed the questionnaire to gain a perspective of knowledge and view of TUSA (Appendix A). The outcome of the data collection is to determine a result for the best way to engage with all students both online and on-campus.

The current challenge for TUSA is predominately to continue and increase student engagement throughout COVID-19 restrictions. During 2020 all students studied online during COVID-19

restrictions, therefore it is more challenging to liaise directly with on-campus students.

In consultation with TUSA they responded with the below as to what they want to achieve:

- If students engage without social channels, we can update them more readily on our events, support services, clubs and societies activations
- If they engage and ask questions, we can respond in real-time
- Utilising our online channels helps us reach more students in an efficient way
- To offer live streaming or pre-recorded events and activities to those who are interested and have access
- To feel better knowing we are reaching as many UTAS students as possible, especially since we have several campuses, including satellite campuses (*Sweetman, A – 26 October 2021*).

TUSA aims to increase students' awareness and engagement with what TUSA offers, especially during a pandemic. This project will explore the possibilities to provide an understanding of the services that TUSA provide. This project aims to create a positive link between UTAS students and TUSA to give information on the current student services.

There are challenges in obtaining information and data from other Student Associations as it is reliant upon them returning correspondence. However, as a researcher, the tools required to provide relevant resources to gain information are sometimes limited to responses from third parties. Obtaining data pertinent to the project's objective and coordinating with tutors to collect such data within a given timeframe is not always feasible. The timeliness of data collection and the awareness not to impede student studies e.g., exams, semester breaks, are essential considerations.

Table 1. TUSA offers the following services

<p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Advocacy •Financial Support •Academic Support •Basic needs
<p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Events •Calendar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Unique Tassie Experiences •Add your event to the calendar •Clubs and Societies •TUSA spaces <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Venues, Rooms and Amenities •Student Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Togatus •Partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Community Partnerships •Campus Music Competition •Campus Photo and Video Competition •Campus Writing Competition •Resources •Resources and Info Library
<p>Representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Key Focus Areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sustainability and Climate Action •Student Housing and Accommodation •Mental Health and Wellbeing •What have we delivered •Student representation
<p>Student Growth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Join the team •Training and Workshops •Student Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Student-Led Projects, Insight and Reports •Research Project Expression of interest •Resources

Background

Many online communication platforms are available today: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube, and Blogger. They enable people to communicate, share and collaborate, globally. Social media is convenient and low-cost while being widely available. It can generate increased engagement and empowerment of individuals. Through social networks, there is provision for users to learn about opinions, skills, and lives of others and be more active in marketing content with companies and their brands. (Silva, et al., 2019)

TUSA offers online engagement, including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and email. TUSA's primary connection with students is via Facebook and Instagram. TUSA provided the following stats on 15 October 2021 for the month of September 2021. These figures illustrate the steep increase in the use of online social media platforms.

Table 2. Reach to students as at September 2021

	Facebook	Instagram
Post average reach		
August 2021	9,983	1,073
September 2021	36,454	12,480
	265.2% increase from August	1063.09% increase
Page like/followers	7,849	1,967

Although the number of connections to Facebook and Instagram has risen dramatically, TUSA's objective is to increase student online engagement. The research aims to find out how students want to find more information and know of TUSA's dedication to all students. The rebranding of TUSA from TUU shows that TUSA is a student-focused organisation. To provide outcomes of students' perspective of TUSA's aims and goals, awareness, and initial thoughts.

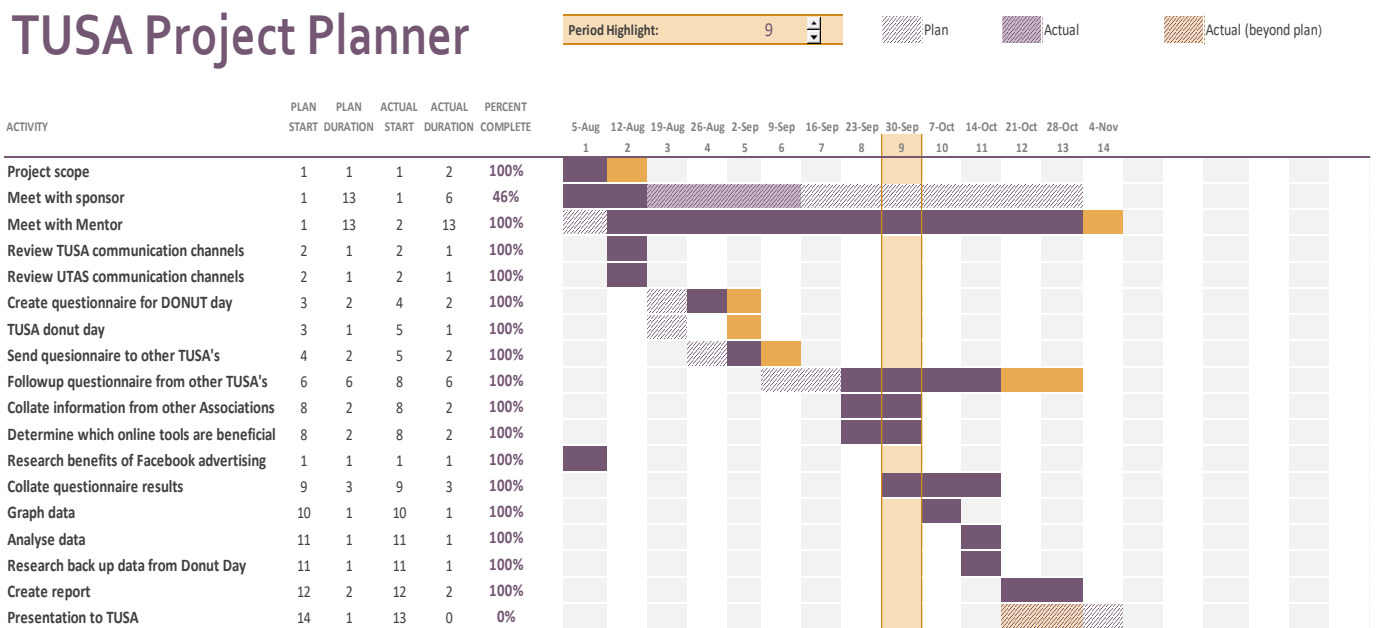
In 2020 UTAS students were primarily Millennials and Generation Z (UTAS, 2020, Image 1). Millennials have grown up with product reviews and social tools to share opinions before committing. Social media is a way for the student to engage in brand loyalty and provide an unofficial endorsement by utilising likes, reposting and shares. This direct engagement invites the millennial audience into a conversation while strengthening the relationship between the student and TUSA. Researchers have found that students, especially millennials, are more likely to watch user-generated content on social media, which is supposed to be more realistic, increasing their engagement with the medium (Munsch, A, et al. 2021).

Method

Research design

The GANTT chart provides guidelines for the accurate completion of the project progress. The Chart was updated together with new strategies developed to complete tasks within designated timeframes. Corresponding with the Mentor and Sponsor was of imperative importance for the project to be on target to TUSA's expected outcomes.

Figure 1. Gantt Chart



Data collection

The method for data collection was qualitative research techniques. During the TUSA “Donut Fear TUSA is here” event on UTAS grounds. The data of students’ knowledge of TUSA, their utilisation of on-line engagement when conducting business, communicating with peers and students within their subject was obtained from 21 students completing a questionnaire. Each student signed a consent form for data used for the research of this project. The student provided information from tick boxes then elaborated on three questions to provide their experience, knowledge, and desired outcomes from TUSA.

Donut fear TUSA is Here!

TUSA Student-Led Research and Project Program

Age: 17-21 22-27 28-32 33 – 37 38-45 45-55 55-65 over 66

Gender:

Post – Grad Online:

Under – Grad On-Campus

Research online/on-campus

Are you aware of TUSA online? Yes No

Where have you seen them: _____

What has your experience been like: _____

What is your preferred social media format

Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn

YouTube Snapchat TikTok Whats App Other: _____

How do you usually liaise with your fellow classmates:

Discussion groups Facebook Groups Online Chat Zoom

Face-to-face Other: _____

Do you engage with businesses online through any of these social media platforms?

Facebook Twitter Instagram LinkedIn

YouTube Snapchat TikTok Whats App Other: _____

If you could suggest something to TUSA to improve how they engage with students online, what would you recommend?

Figure 2. Questionnaire

Questions addressed to Deakin University Student Association (DUSA), Charles Darwin University Student Association (CDUSA) and Australian National University Student Associations (ANUSA) to get clarity and to form investigations of their engagement with students on-campus and on-line. These emails were sent on 3 September 2021 and then a follow up on 18 October 2021. To date, there has only been one response from CDUSA.

The following table (dese.gov.au, accessed October 2021) illustrates the diversity of each university as measured by their student numbers, mode of educational attendance, and gender.

Table 3. Mode of study, attendance and gender for students in 2019

Table 2.7: All Students, Higher Education Institution, Mode of Attendance, Type of Attendance and Gender 2019

State/Institution	Mode of attendance			TOTAL	Type of attendance		TOTAL	Gender	
	Internal	External	Multi-modal		Full-time	Part-time		Males	Females
Deakin University	28,177	17,755	16,281	62,213	42,353	19,860	62,213	26,880	35,333
University of Tasmania	13,898	17,004	5,582	36,484	18,990	17,494	36,484	12,842	23,642
Charles Darwin University	2,650	6,737	2,623	12,010	6,099	5,911	12,010	3,630	8,380
The Australian National University	25,982	215	120	26,317	20,262	6,055	26,317	12,508	13,809

Shown below are the variations between the Universities of education delivery in 2019 by percentage.

Table 4. The percentage for educational mode

2019	Internal	External	Multi-Modal
DEAKIN	45%	29%	26%
UTAS	38%	47%	15%
CDU	22%	56%	22%
ANU	99%	0%	0%

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are applied to connect with people, the sharing information, and enhance marketing strategies (Burrus, 2010). Social media monitoring has become a core focus within professional work (Dyer, 2013). By effectively implementing social media platforms and Web 2.0, businesses can unlock innovation, increase productivity, and improve student's engagement (Cilliers et al., 2015).

There are numerous marketing opportunities on social media. For example, social media advertising is becoming an increasingly attractive way of enhancing advertising effectiveness (Lee & Hong, 2016). Social network sites (SNS) provide opportunities to advertise in a targeted and personalised manner. (Wiese et al., 2019)

TUSA would benefit from engaging and communicating with Facebook users via paid advertising or organic (free) advertising such as posting content on their brand pages that can be liked, commented on, or shared (Curran et al., 2011; Logan, 2014).

The value of Facebook SNS advertising may be a combination of the perception that the message is informative, entertaining, or enhances social value, the value of on-line personalisation, and the credibility of the advertiser (Wiese et al., 2019).

Facebook advertising is affordable and controllable to a selective and specific audience. (www.facebook.com/business/ads/pricing, viewed 24 October 2021). By limiting the amount of money spent each month, you are able to stay within budget but continue to reach out to new students to encourage engagement.

Findings

Twenty-one participants provided data at the TUSA “Donut Fear TUSA is here” day. The data set is inconclusive as it does not represent a sufficient student cohort to determine accurate outcomes. However, there were clear findings with the data obtained. The below data graphs detail the platforms utilised for multiple communication categories, student age and type of study mode.

Figure 1. Social media platforms used by participants

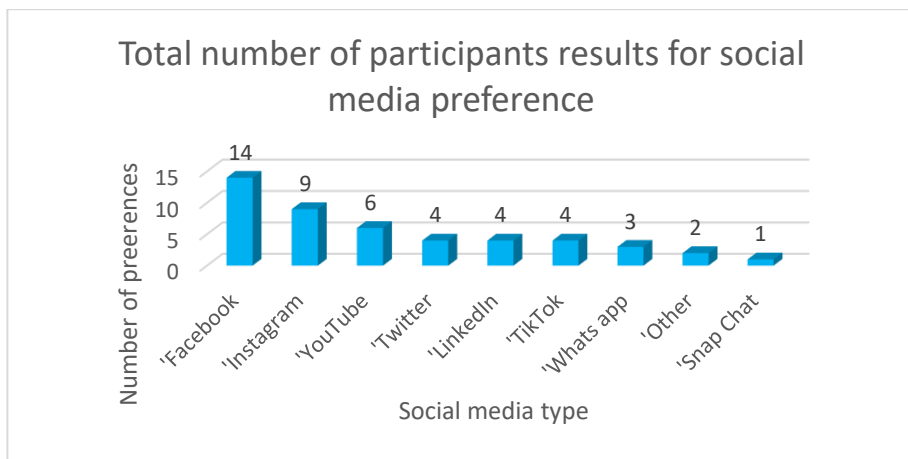


Figure 2: Age ranges of participants was diverse

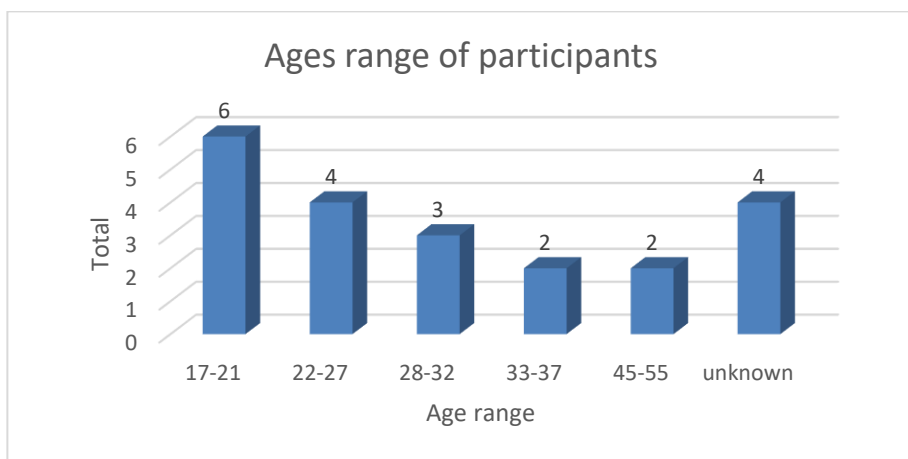


Figure 3: Study mode of students was primarily on campus and multimodal.

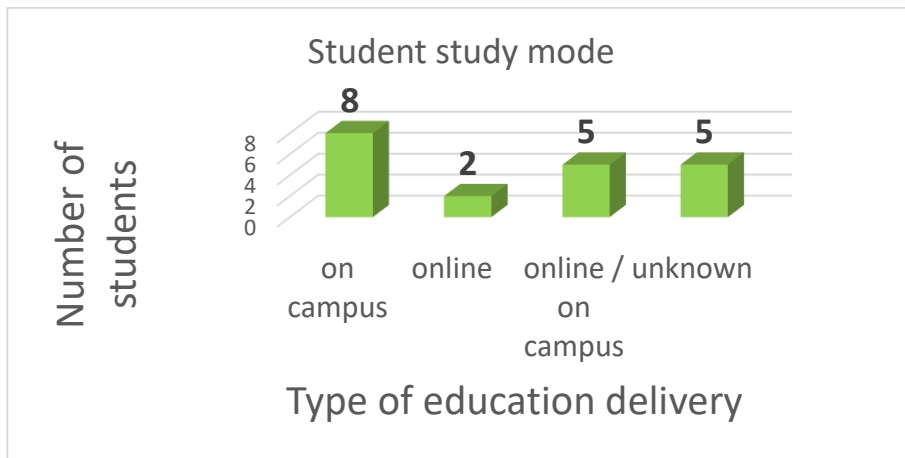
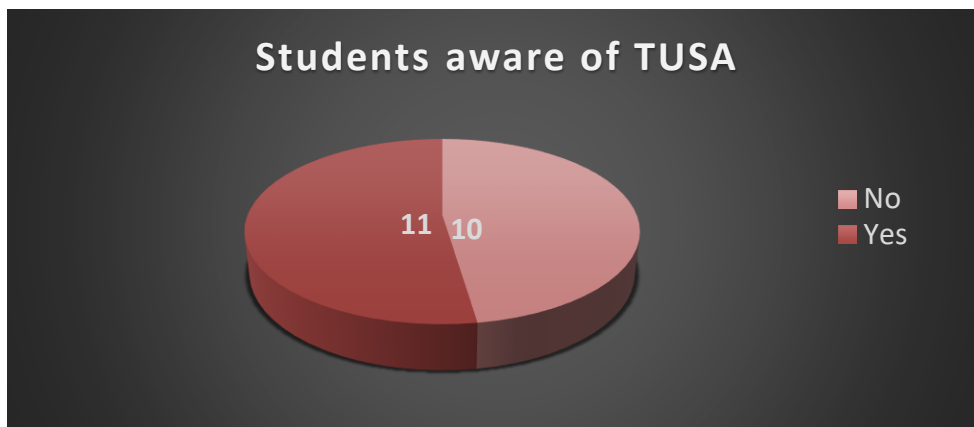


Figure 4: Awareness of TUSA



Those aged 17 - 21 made up the majority of active participants. With six surveys completed, however, there was minimal feedback to elaborate on the questions asked. All participants aged 22-27 provided feedback on questions with relevant suggestions.

From research on other University Associations: ANUSA, DUSA and CDSUA, the number of students on the social media platforms varied, and data provides the number of followers, not the number of current students. For example, the number of students studying at UTAS in 2019 was

36,484, but they have 426,787 Facebook followers.

Comparison of data:

Table 5. Followers for each University's student online Platform

Online options for student contact										
	Facebook followers	Twitter followers	Phone	email	web	Instagram	Instagram Followers	chat	LinkedIn followers	Youtube
Australian National University	273,000	19,400	✓	✓	✓			✓	119,246	✓
Deakin	597,633	56,200	✓	✓	✓	✓	62,900	✓	234,337	✓
Charles Darwin	61,107	10,100	✓	✓	✓	✓			26,233	✓
University of Tasmania	426,787	15,200	✓	✓	✓	✓			80,098	✓
Data sought online - 22 August 2021										

Table 6. Followers for each University Student Association's online Platform

	FB Followers	Instagram	Phone	email	web
Australian National University Student Association	18,000	1,950	✓	✓	✓
Deakin University Student Association	41,388	11,600	✓	✓	✓
Charles Darwin University Student Association	0	0	✓	✓	✓
Tasmanian University Student Association	8,360	1,965	✓	✓	✓
Data sought online 23 October 2021					

Discussion and recommendations

This report has brought to the forefront of ways for TUSA to engage online with students studying online and on-campus. With the research conducted, 66 percent indicated they were on Facebook. However, the quantitative numbers are not enough to represent the student population. Please find below suggested recommendations to move forward and increase student engagement.

Facebook is an engaging way to educate students on TUSA and what it offers academically and socially. Therefore, the use of paid Facebook to raise awareness to benefit students would be advantageous. The reasoning behind this recommendation is that the questionnaires completed by students, there were only half that know of TUSA online, however, all student utilised Facebook. Therefore, Facebook advertising to raise awareness of TUSA's services can increase actual engagement from students, not just the click on "likes". The cost of Facebook advertising is comparatively affordable compared to other types of advertising as you can limit the amount of spend each month and target your audience. To investigate further Facebook advertising and target students within specific areas to engage and look at the viability of advertising costing instead of other advertising methods. (Curran et al., 2011; Logan, 2014).

Recommendation 1. Use paid Facebook advertising.

From the "Donut fear TUSA is here" day questionnaire a student suggested to utilise Facebook live features and student polls to connect with students on Facebook and capture student engagement data in real-time. Use connections to answer questions or to arrange events for online students to have a positive experience. Opinion polls are a way of estimating public opinion on a certain matter. (www.netigate.net, Nov 2021) This statement will require further investigation and research in future studies.

Recommendation 2. Utilise Facebook live features and interact with students through interactive polls

Incentivise students to connect with the implementation of an online competition to capture students' stories about TUSA. In return for student time, TUSA provide vouchers in multiple denominations for entertainment, food or subscriptions. According the Survey Monkey (Survey Monkey, Nov 2021) 34% of people will complete surveys to get a prize, gift or discount.

Recommendation 3. Provide incentives to students

Collaborate with other University associations to create a community of practice to gain insight into what has worked for them and what has not. We forwarded correspondence to ANUSA, DUSA and CDUSA with only feedback from CDUSA. Sharing of knowledge can grow across organisational boundaries and has the capacity to encompass multiple groups, including student associations (Burk, M., 1999). Further research from other students or TUSA may yield more information.

Recommendation 4. Actively communicate with other Student Associations.

Conclusion

Through TUSA actively engaging students of all educational modalities, they are aware of areas of improvement and have reached out to students to improve student engagement with TUSA online. There are many aspects for TUSA to explore and follow up on with recommendations made. TUSA can also benefit from extending the stated recommendations to achieve specific outcomes. This project gives some thought to marketing and research into generational engagement and the best ways to collaborate with and engage students with TUSA, and it opens doors to future research opportunities.

Limitations

Access to required information was not always available. Responses from other University Associations was limited to acquire data. The time frame was limited to be able to obtain adequate data to form more accurate recommendations for TUSA.

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Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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