SOCIAL MANAGEMENT AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AS IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF MODERN HIGHER EDUCATION

GESTÃO SOCIAL E COMUNICAÇÕES DIGITAIS COMO COMPONENTES IMPORTANTES DO ENSINO SUPERIOR MODERNO

Liudmyla Mialkovska (ID)
Lutsk National Technical University
Lutsk, Ukraine
l.myalkovska@lutsk-ntu.com.ua

Rymma Redchuk (ID)
Private Higher Educational Institution Academy of
Recreational Technologies and Law
Lutsk, Ukraine
redchuk.rimma@gmail.com

Iryna Sushyk (ID)
Lutsk National Technical University
Lutsk, Ukraine
sushykiryna@lutsk-ntu.com.ua

Yaroslava Martyniuk (ID)
Lutsk National Technical University
Lutsk, Ukraine
mart.sn@ukr.net

Oksana Maiboroda (ID)
Lutsk National Technical University
Lutsk, Ukraine
mayboroda_ksy@ukr.net

Nadiia Savchuk (ID)
Lutsk National Technical University
Lutsk, Ukraine
n.savchuk@lutsk-ntu.com.ua

Resumo. A gestão social e as comunicações digitais são altamente atuais e amplamente reconhecidas como um componente importante do ensino superior moderno. Eles fornecem um grande número de benefícios que contribuem para o desenvolvimento do ensino superior. As principais razões pelas quais eles são considerados meios poderosos são: comunicação eficaz e serviços de suporte, engajamento e interação, aprendizado acessível e flexível, networking e desenvolvimento profissional, análise de dados e insights, colaboração e trabalho em equipe, alcance global e intercâmbio cultural, divulgação e recrutamento. Assim, o objetivo do artigo é estudar as peculiaridades do uso de comunicações digitais para gestão social em instituições de ensino superior na Ucrânia. Os instrumentos de coleta de dados utilizados foram análise de fontes científicas, questionários, entrevistas e discussão em grupo. No artigo foram identificadas as principais direções da gestão social e estudados os principais aspectos do uso das comunicações digitais. Os resultados dos questionários e das entrevistas permitiram avaliar as principais razões da gestão social e do uso de comunicações digitais no ensino superior na Ucrânia. A pesquisa do problema oferece oportunidades para determinar as principais barreiras da gestão social e do uso de comunicações digitais no ensino superior.

Palavras-chave: Gestão social, comunicação digital, meios digitais, ensino superior, aprendizagem, inovação.

Abstract. Social management and digital communications are highly topical and widely recognized as an important component of modern higher education. They provide a great number of benefits that contribute to higher education development. The key reasons why they are considered powerful means are: effective communication and support services, engagement and interaction, accessible and flexible learning, networking and professional development, data analytics and insights, collaboration and teamwork, global reach and cultural exchange, outreach and recruitment. Thus, the aim of the paper is to study the peculiarities of using digital communications for social management at higher education institutions in Ukraine. Instruments of data collection used were analysis of scientific sources, questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussion. In the paper the main directions of social management were identified and the main aspects of digital communications usage studied. The results of questionnaires and interviews made it possible to rate key reasons of social management and digital communications usage in higher education in Ukraine. Searching the problem provide the opportunities to determine the main barriers of social management and digital communications usage in higher education.

Keywords: Social management, digital communications, digital means, higher education, learning, innovation

INTRODUCTION

Recent circumstances in higher education have led to various changes that affected building the strategies of social management. The events of last years surpassed consumer behavior 10 years ahead in Ukraine. Most of the citizens had to learn using digital communication. They quickly learned to implement computer technologies not only in the work, but also to conduct business, shop, donate to the army, use digital services, etc. (переписаний)

Nowadays social management and digital communications usage has increased drastically among the educational process participants of higher educational institutions in Ukraine. In this context of change,

using the digital means aimed at socialization generates new challenges and opportunities that influence different areas of the university's organization. They promote engagement, accessibility, collaboration, and global connectivity while providing a range of benefits for students, faculty, and institutions. Leveraging these tools effectively allows higher education institutions to adapt to the evolving needs of learners and establish a strong online presence, fostering a vibrant and connected educational community.

Now it's time for universities to leap ahead into digital-first practices. Institutional leaders and communicators should redefine the value proposition for the universities because there are a lot of risks: adaptation to distance learning, differentiation from other establishments and how they will sustain quality education in agile, hybrid and even virtual environments. While different departments have been accelerating digital communications usage for last two years, there is no turning back for higher education institutions. The behavior of educational process participants has changed (Johnson & Walker, 2021).

A lot of scientists from different countries touch on this issue, in particular – economic changes, changes in the regulation of the education system, or the internationalization of education (Uslu, 2018). However, today's educational need is universities are also expected to respond to societal changes, shouldering relatively new responsibilities such as skills training among older workers, improving education attainment levels among disadvantaged populations, and spurring economic development and innovation (Lumina Foundation, 2015).

Modern higher education institutions have become increasingly entrepreneurial, often pursuing income-generating opportunities while eschewing activities that may produce social benefits. Some researches touch the problem of trending toward "privatization and accountability" (Hearn et al., 2016) and prove that there is declining public funding, university entrepreneurial behavior, and increasing regulation.

The debate on the purpose of higher education is placed under the context of the most recent developments of increasing social inequalities in higher education and some scientists suggest that the current policy focus on labor market have led to an ever-growing competition transforming this social institution to an ordinary market (Kromydas, 2017). In order to attract and maintain a higher number of students higher education establishments adapt marketing strategies to foster their education offer and differentiation factors. For that purpose, various tools of research are conceptualized and implemented. So, the rapid proliferation of communication technologies affects the recruitment of new students and the communication strategies of universities. (Arlindo).

Social management and digital communications play a crucial role in higher education in today's interconnected world. These aspects have gained immense importance due to the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of digital platforms.

Social management refers to the processes, strategies, and techniques used to guide, influence, and control university social systems and groups. It involves the application of principles and practices to address various social issues, promote social well-being, and achieve desired outcomes within an institution. (перенесла з результатів)

Nowadays digital means have become essential tools for modern higher education institutions. By embracing these components, institutions can enhance undergraduates' engagement, streamline communication, strengthen their brand, and create a dynamic and inclusive learning environment.

A subsequent review of scientific literature provided in the next section also justified the need to resolve the research gaps and extracted problems by attaining the formulated objectives in this research study. Therefore, it has been observed that there is a need to understand digital communications usage for social management in higher education.

Despite the attention of scientists to the problem of social management and digital communications in higher education both Ukrainian and foreign researches still do not exhaust all aspects of social management and digital communications usage among the educational process participants of higher educational institutions in Ukraine.

Therefore, the aim of the article is to study and substantiate the phenomena of social management and digital communications as important components of modern higher education in Ukraine. To achieve the aim we should implement some tasks, the solution of which will ensure the step-by-step realization of the result. The tasks are: 1) to identify the main directions of social management; 2) to study main aspects and trends of digital communications; 3) to rate key reasons and barriers of social management and digital communications usage in higher education in Ukraine.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The past decade has seen a renewed importance in the issue of digital communications usage with the purpose of social managing in higher education. A lot of foreign scientists studied the issue of social management in higher education.

American scientist emphasizes that colleges and universities receive many valuable privileges from local and national governments in support of the social responsibilities. Most higher education institutions are designated as non-profit organizations and enjoy exemptions from income, property, and sales taxes; preferred eligibility for federal grants and contracts; favorable treatment of charitable giving; and – in the case of public universities – regular (albeit declining) state subsidies (Cahoy, 2015). Specific social responsibilities such as providing educational opportunities to recently disenfranchised populations (O'Malley, 2016) may emerge and evolve more rapidly.

H. Donelan (2016) pays attention to social media for professional development and networking opportunities in academia. The group of other American researches describes the process of privatization, accountability trends, and policies in the public higher education (Hearn et al., 2016). In the overview, D. Lambić (2016) investigates the need of correlation between Facebook use for educational purposes and academic performance of students. N. Patel (2016) calls into question some aspects about social media management. Q. Zhang et al. (2016) highlight exploring the communication preferences of MOOC learners and the value of preference-based groups. In contrast to this, S. Sharma et al. (2016) mention a multi-analytical approach as a means of predicting the Facebook usage in higher education. A. Sobaih et al. (2016) discuss about importance of using social media in higher education in developing countries.

Australian authors C. Sadowski et al. (2017) affirm university students' perceptions of social networking sites in their educational experiences at a regional university. Other scientists drew our attention to analysis of social media usage in higher education institutions implementing the technology acceptance model (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). F. Moreira and co-workers (2017) study social networks and knowledge-sharing as a means of customized X-learning environment. N. Muscanell and S. Utz (2017) make the analysis on the reasons academics use different social networking, in particular ResearchGate. The purpose of higher education and its institutional characteristics, various pedagogical traditions are critically reviewed and used as examples, which can potentially inform today's university policy making (Kromydas, 2017). Next study examined the digital and social media communication practices of urban universities and compared those to known corporate best practices. (Drake, 2017). C. Assimakopoulos and others (2017) suggest effective social media marketing strategy and describe the importance of Facebook for universities. V. Balakrishnan (2017) has shown key determinants for intention to use social media for learning in higher education institutions. H. Meishar-Tal and et al. (2017) discuss about the reasons of using academic social networking sites by scientists.

A number of studies have found the impact of social media on international student recruitment on the example of Lebanon (Vrontis et al., 2018); the usage of social media by social scientists for scholarly communication (Al-Daihani et al., 2018); a content analysis of university marketing on social media, in particular Facebook post types and formats (Peruta & Shields, 2018); the peculiarities of modelling an interplay of adoption determinants with respect to social Web applications used in massive online open courses (Orehovački et al., 2019); the impact of social media on learning behavior for sustainable education in Pakistan (Abbas, et al., 2019); the information from social media electronic that are searched by intending students during the university choice process (Le et al., 2019).

Since 2020, much more information on the topic has become available: the influence of individual innovativeness on technology and social media usage in higher education (Aldahdouh et al., 2020); the empirical study on electronic word of mouth engagement in social commerce platforms (Ali et al., 2020); researching the alternative approaches of online learning during COVID-19 pandemic crisis and impact of digital social media on Indian higher education (Dutta, 2020); a systematic review on professional development through social media in higher education (Luo et al., 2020); the importance of social networks in higher education management (Melián-Alzola, 2020).

Many attempts have been made in order to investigate challenges of implementing digital communication in higher education institutions (Santos et al., 2021); describe the process of integration of social media for smart pedagogy in high school students in Ghana (Barfi et al., 2021); point out the pedagogical instruments of social media adoption framework in higher education classrooms (Hamadi et al., 2021); study managing digital accessibility at universities during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lazar, 2021); argue the global perspective of higher education for sustainability (Žalėnienė & Pereira, (2021); outline the

determinants of social media based learning in higher education (Rahman et al., 2021); make a scoping review on social media usage by higher education academics (Chugh et al., 2021).

Changes in the Higher Education paradigm in Portugal, have made the sector competitive where different higher education institutions adapt marketing strategies to foster their education offer and differentiation factors in order to attract and maintain a higher number of students. The rapid proliferation of communication technologies affected the recruitment of new students and the communication strategies in higer education. For that purpose, various tools of research were implemented in the reserch (Santos et al., 2021).

A recent review of the literature on the topic found the checklist of sustainable digital communication in higher education (Sumedrea et al., 2022); the study on social networking platforms and social media in higher education institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Sengupta et al., 2022, 2023).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To achieve the aim of the research, a set of instruments of data collection were used: theoretical: analysis of scientific sources; empirical: observation of the management process in higher education establishments, questionnaires, interviews, and conversation; statistical; graphic.

This study analyzed the prior literature within quality scientific journals and books to explore the constructive and negative factors and the elements of digital communications that typically impact social management to develop a comprehensive understanding of this topic. Our research resulted in the defining the main directions of social management and the modern trends of digital communications. Then we developed a survey to understand the view of the leading university community regarding digital tools in order to improve managerial process in higher educational establishment. Before administering the survey, we consulted specialists to ensure that the survey is adequate and suitable. We took into account the expert opinions including proper variables in the study.

In order to check the effectiveness of digital means of university management process, an anonymous survey of 86 higher education managers of different levels of Lutsk National Technical University and Private Higher Educational Institution Academy of Recreational Technologies and Law was conducted using the service Google Form.

After that in the research process, the methodology of expert evaluation was implemented with the determination of weighted coefficients of key reasons of social management and digital communications usage in higher education, the provision of which will contribute to the management process in Ukrainian universities. For this purpose, there was a need for an expert group, which included managers of various levels of the named higher education institutions. The methodology of expert assessment was implemented in order to find out key reasons and barriers of social management and digital communications usage in higher education as the main means of improving the process of higher education management. The carried out ranking of the expert assessment made it possible to identify eight main reasons for improving the social management at the university through digital communications. (перероблений повністю)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of social management encompasses a wide range of areas. The managers of higher education establishments should take into account such directions of social management: social policy (developing and implementing policies that aim to improve social conditions, such as healthcare, education, welfare, and employment); social services and development (facilitating the growth and empowerment of an institution by promoting social cohesion, participation, and sustainable development. Planning and delivering social programs and services that meet the needs of individuals, and vulnerable populations); social justice (advocating for fairness, equality, and human rights, addressing issues related to discrimination, inequality, and marginalization); conflict resolution (managing and resolving social conflicts within groups or between different societal entities in the university, promoting dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation). However, it is worth noting that social management is not limited to the above-mentioned directions. Moreover, its understanding and application may vary across different academic contexts and establishments.

One of the most powerful means of social management is digital communications. They have become increasingly important in the modern era, transforming the way information is shared, disseminated, and accessed. Digital communications refer to the transmission, exchange, and storage of information using electronic devices and technologies. This encompasses a wide range of platforms and channels, including

the internet, email, social media, instant messaging, video conferencing, and various other digital tools and applications.

Based on the research we can define some key aspects and trends related to digital communications.

1. Digital communications connectivity gives the opportunity individuals, organizations, and communities to connect and interact across geographical distances, facilitating global collaboration and knowledge sharing.
2. Digital platforms provide efficient and widespread information dissemination of scientific research, scholarly articles, and other forms of academic information. Online databases, digital libraries, and open-access journals have made scientific knowledge more accessible to a broader audience.
3. Digital communication means foster collaboration and networking among researchers, enabling them to connect, share ideas, and collaborate on projects regardless of their physical location. Online platforms and social networks have become popular spaces for scientific communities to interact and engage in discussions.
4. Digital communications facilitate the sharing and analysis of large datasets, supporting scientific research in various fields. Researchers can exchange data, collaborate on data analysis, and utilize advanced computational techniques for complex research inquiries.
5. Digital platforms play a crucial role in science communication, allowing scientists to engage with the public, share research findings, and promote scientific literacy. Science blogs, podcasts, videos, and social media platforms have become channels for scientists to communicate their work and interact with a broader audience.

The survey of participants in the educational process made it possible to determine the main reasons for improving the social management at the university through digital communications (figure 1). Higher education establishment managers and administrators (92 respondents) of various levels took part in the survey.
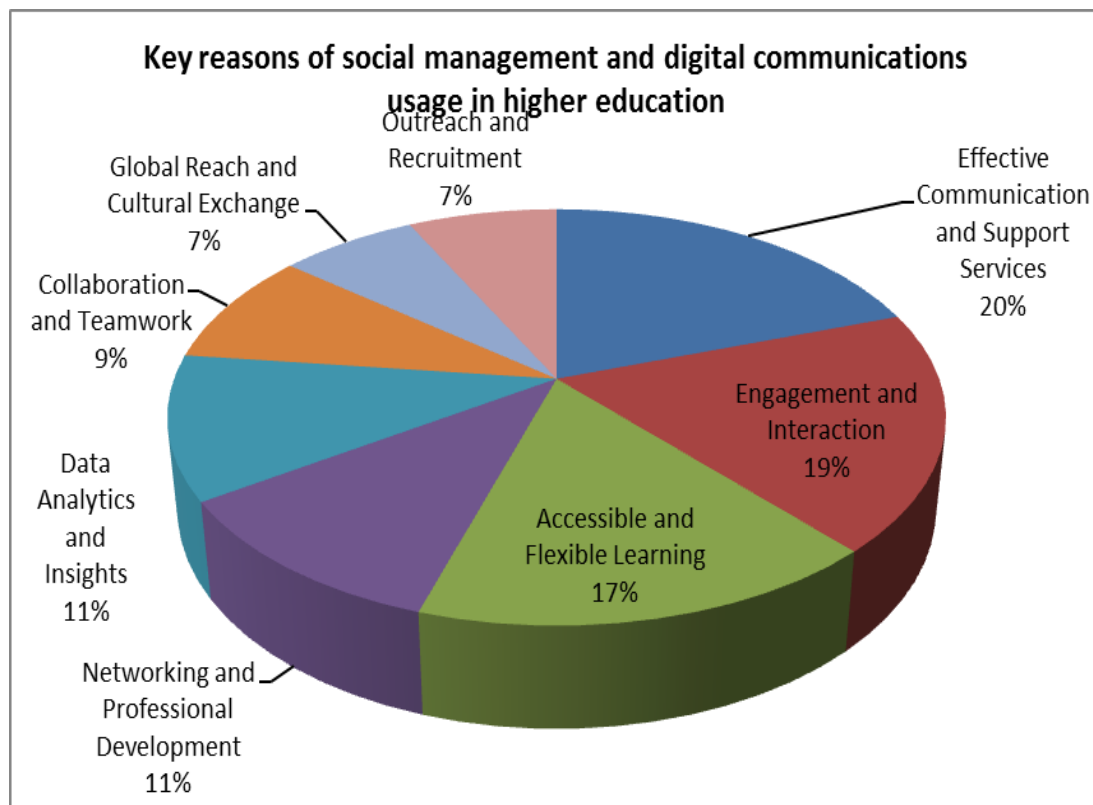

Figure 1. Key reasons of social management and digital communications usage in higher education

Let' s dwell in more detail on the analysis of the key reasons of social management and digital communications usage in higher education.

Effective Communication and Support Services. Social management and digital communications enhance communication channels between students, faculty, and administrative staff. Instant messaging,

email, and online portals allow for efficient and timely communication of important information, such as course updates, deadlines, and administrative procedures. Additionally, digital platforms can provide access to support services like academic advising, counseling, and career guidance, ensuring students receive the assistance they need to succeed academically and personally. Educational institutions can create dedicated groups or networks where current students, alumni, and faculty can connect, share resources, and exchange professional opportunities. This fosters a sense of community, facilitates mentorship, and opens doors for future collaborations and career advancement.

Engagement and Interaction. Social media platforms, online forums, and collaborative tools allow for seamless communication and foster a sense of community within the higher education environment. This engagement enhances student learning experiences, encourages active participation, and facilitates networking opportunities. They provide an effective way to engage with students outside the traditional classroom setting. Educational institutions can use social media channels to share important updates, news, and events, fostering a sense of community among students. These platforms also allow for two-way communication, enabling students to ask questions, provide feedback, and collaborate with their peers.

Data Analytics and Insights. Digital communications allow institutions to collect valuable data and insights. By analyzing engagement metrics, social media reach, and website analytics, institutions can assess the effectiveness of their communication strategies and make data-driven decisions for improvement. This data can also help identify trends, preferences, and areas where additional support may be required.

Accessible and Flexible Learning. Digital communications enable the delivery of educational content and resources in a variety of formats, making education more accessible and flexible. Online learning platforms, virtual classrooms, and video conferencing means provide undergraduates' to access lectures, course materials, and discussions at their own pace and from any location. This flexibility accommodates diverse learning styles and helps overcome geographical barriers, enabling individuals to pursue higher education regardless of their location or personal circumstances.

Global Reach and Cultural Exchange. Social management and digital communications have expanded the reach of higher education institutions beyond traditional boundaries. Through online platforms, universities can attract international students, offer remote learning programs, and foster cross-cultural collaborations. This global reach promotes cultural exchange, diversity, and a broader understanding of different perspectives, enriching the educational experience for all participants.

Collaboration and Teamwork. Digital communications tools facilitate collaboration and teamwork among students, faculty, and researchers. Through virtual project management platforms, shared documents, and communication apps, students can work together on group assignments, share ideas, and exchange feedback. This collaborative approach mirrors real-world professional environments and prepares students for future careers that often involve remote collaboration. Digital tools facilitate seamless communication and collaboration between students, faculty, and staff members. Online platforms, such as learning management systems, enable the delivery of course materials, assignment submissions, and discussions. Collaborative tools and video conferencing platforms promote teamwork and enable virtual meetings, facilitating effective communication regardless of physical location.

Networking and Professional Development. Social management and digital communications facilitate networking and professional development opportunities within the higher education community. Platforms like LinkedIn and online professional forums allow students to connect with graduates, industry professionals, and potential employers. These interactions can lead to mentorship opportunities, internships, and job placements, enhancing students' career prospects.

Marketing, Branding and Reputation. Higher education institutions rely on social management and digital communications to market their programs, attract prospective students, and enhance their brand image. Social media platforms, websites, and online advertising campaigns are effective channels for promoting the institution's unique offerings, showcasing faculty expertise, and highlighting student achievements. This visibility is crucial in a competitive higher education landscape. Social media platforms offer opportunities for institutions to build and manage their brand reputation. By sharing success stories, achievements, and unique aspects of their programs, colleges and universities can create a positive image and differentiate themselves from competitors. Additionally, they can promptly address any concerns or negative feedback through social media channels, showcasing their commitment to student satisfaction.

Outreach and Recruitment: Digital communications play a vital role in the recruitment process for higher education institutions. Many students now turn to online resources, such as university websites and social media profiles, to gather information about potential colleges and universities. Institutions that effectively utilize digital platforms can show case their programs, campus culture, and student achievements,

thereby attracting and reaching a wider pool of prospective students.

The most commonly used digital communication tools in higher education institutions in Ukraine include learning management systems (LMS), email, online collaboration tools, instant messaging, and chat applications, social media platforms, online discussion forums. Reporting results from questionnaires and interviews make it possible to rate the main digital communications used in higher education in Ukraine nowadays (Table 1).

The most commonly used social and digital communication tools in higher education institutions in Ukraine include Moodle, Microsoft Teams, Google Workspace, Zoom Google+, Telegram, WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube showed the highest ranks. Most students have contacted a friend or a university staff for university course information by using social media sites.

It's important to note that the specific usage of digital communication means may vary among institutions, faculties, and individual professors. Furthermore, the adoption of digital communications can evolve over time, and new platforms may emerge as technology advances.

Table 1. Key digital communication means used in higher education in Ukraine.

Digital communication means	Advantages
Learning Management Systems (LMS)	LMS platforms, such as Moodle, Blackboard, or Canvas, are commonly utilized by higher education institutions in Ukraine. LMS platforms provide a central hub for online course materials, assignments, discussions, and communication between faculty and students.
Email	Email remains a widely used digital communication tool in higher education institutions worldwide, including Ukraine. It is used for official communication between faculty members, administration, and students.
Online collaboration tools	Tools like Microsoft Teams, Google Workspace (formerly G Suite), and Zoom are frequently used for online meetings, video conferencing, and collaboration among faculty, staff, and students. These tools facilitate synchronous and asynchronous communication and enable virtual classrooms, group work, and academic discussions.
Instant messaging and chat applications	Applications like Telegram, WhatsApp, and Viber are popular for quick and informal communication among students, faculty, and staff. They are often used for group discussions, sharing information, and coordinating activities.
Social media platforms	Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are widely used by higher education institutions in Ukraine. They are used for various purposes, including disseminating information, promoting events, engaging with students, and building online communities.
Online discussion forums	Higher education institutions may have their own online discussion forums or platforms where students and faculty can engage in academic discussions, ask questions, and share resources.

Social management and digital communications have indeed become important components of modern higher education. With the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of social media and digital platforms, educational institutions are recognizing the need to adapt and incorporate these tools into their strategies.

Nevertheless, there are several barriers that may prevent university lectures from using social media as a means of scholarly communication. These barriers can vary depending on individual preferences, institutional policies, and disciplinary norms (table 2).

Table 2. Key barriers of social management and digital communications usage in higher education.

Perception of credibility	Some academics may view social media platforms as less credible or less academically rigorous compared to traditional scholarly communication channels. There can be concerns about the accuracy, quality, and peer review process of information shared on social media.
Time constraints	Engaging with social media requires time and effort, which can be a challenge for busy academics who already have numerous responsibilities such as teaching, research, and administrative tasks. Many academics may feel that they cannot allocate sufficient time to maintain an active and meaningful presence on social media.

Privacy and data security concerns	Social media platforms often collect and utilize personal data, which can raise privacy concerns for academics. Sharing research findings or engaging in discussions on social media may require disclosing information that some academics prefer to keep private.
Institutional policies and guidelines	Some universities may have policies and guidelines that restrict or discourage the use of social media for scholarly communication. These policies may be based on concerns about reputation management, data security, or conflicting interests.
Lack of incentives and recognition	In many academic institutions, traditional forms of scholarly communication, such as peer-reviewed journals and conference presentations, are highly valued for career progression and recognition. Engaging with social media platforms for scholarly communication may not be incentivized or recognized in the same way, leading to a lack of motivation for academics to use these channels.
Technical barriers and digital literacy	Some academics may face technical barriers and feel less comfortable with using social media platforms. Lack of digital literacy or limited knowledge of how to effectively navigate and leverage social media for scholarly purposes can be a significant obstacle.
Disciplinary norms and traditions	Different academic disciplines have distinct communication practices and norms. Some disciplines may have a more conservative approach to scholarly communication and may not consider social media as a suitable platform for academic discourse.

It's important to note that while these barriers exist, many academics are embracing digital communications as a valuable means for social management and scholarly communication. Over time, as the benefits of digital communications become more apparent and institutional attitudes evolve, these barriers may be overcome or mitigated.

Therefore, our research deals with new findings regarding digital communications usage, and it aimed to examine the effects of digital communications on university managing process. The issue of using remote digital technologies became especially important after the start of the 2019 coronavirus pandemic (Dutta, 2020; Lazar, 2021; Sengupta & Vaish, 2022, 2023). The work of J. Johnson and B. Walker (2021) revealed that incorporating digital communications in higher education has a positive impact on managing experience of higher education institutes. Our research confirms with the previous results (Santos et al., 2021; Sumedrea, 2022) and proves that digital communications implementing has both positive and negative impacts on university management processes, and a balanced approach is recommended for productive process of managing the university. Moreover, the study is in good agreement with L. Melián-Alzola (2020), the evidence we found points to the main directions of higher education management in Ukraine. (додала. Те, що потенційно може бути – дискусія)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in the paper we have presented the study of social management and digital communications as important components of modern higher education in Ukraine. According to the purpose of the study, we implemented some tasks:

1) we have outlined the main directions of social management in Ukrainian higher education institutions;
2) main aspects and trends of digital communications were identified according to the social management usage in universities in Ukraine;
3) key reasons and barriers of social management and digital communications usage in higher education in Ukraine were to rated.

The findings reveal that digital communications acceptance and usage benefits play a decisive role in university managing during distant educational process. These findings confirm that taking a balanced approach to implementing computer technologies for productive managing can help maintain communication between all departments of a higher education institution, especially in difficult times (pandemic, war). School heads can also benefit from the search. Future investigations should investigate another digital communications as a means of management process to expand on the ones already used in this study. Further research should also explore the effects of another specific digital tools that will be invented in future. Moreover, similar studies can be conducted by including other type of establishments. (додала)

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