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Editors:

Dr. Seema Jha

Dr. Manjusha Kulkarni

Dr. Usha Bhandare

Dr. Vinayak Raje

Dr. Darshana Kadwadkar

Ms. Zeenat Shaikh



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IGNOU, THE LARGEST OPEN UNIVERSITY IN THE WORLD USED SOCIAL MEDIA: FACEBOOK AND TWITTER EXTENSIVELY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC TIMES (2020-2021) AS AN OUTREACH TO ITS 3 MILLION PLUS LEARNERS ACROSS INDIA

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Incharge Public Information Unit (PIU) & Social Media Champion IGNOU

Abstract:

Social media in the present times has become a powerful tool for communication. This paper discusses the use of social media by IGNOU, the largest Open University in the World. The paper focuses on the use of Facebook and Twitter extensively during the COVID-19 pandemic times (2020-2021) as an outreach to its 3 million plus learners across India by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India. The paper highlights the utility of social media to reach unreached learners during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. The paper highlights the use of different media by IGNOU. The paper ends with suggestions on how to use social media for the benefit of the university.

Key Words: *Social Media, IGNOU, Facebook, Twitter, COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown*

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Introduction:

Social media marketing is the use of social media platforms and websites to promote a product or service. Social networking websites allow individuals, businesses, and other organizations to interact with one another and build relationships and communities online. Marketing through social media becomes effective through its ease of access, use of viral marketing techniques, and the ability for sharing information.

In today's connected and hyper-information world, it is imperative for an educational institution to have social media presence and harness the power of the same. Blogs, digital media, and social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Pinterest, offer new and exciting opportunities for university faculty, staff, students, and alumni to share knowledge, express creativity, and connect with people who have common interests. Social media is a communication channel that allows users to create and share information in virtual communities. Social media channels include blogs and online communities such as Facebook and Twitter. These channels allow University faculty, staff, students, and alumni to interact with each other in a variety of ways – sharing information related to university policies and events.

**Use of social media by IGNOU:**

It is imperative for an educational institution to have a social media presence

University to students (General instructions)

: Department to students (Specific to the department)

: Intra-university communication for Faculty

: University/Department to Alumni (Alumni social media presence)

: Student to student (sharing of information)

: University/Departments to students (Videos, educational capsules)

Takeaway: Social media networks are a powerful platform for content dissemination.

The use of Social Media has helped IGNOU to reach out to its learners which is otherwise difficult. The use of technology also ensures that there is no extra cost involved to organize these sessions on Social Media platforms than physically conducting them in a classroom setup, which otherwise requires renting auditoriums etc.. There are not many open universities that use digital tools like IGNOU and this is one area where we can learn from them and adopt their techniques or even improve upon them.

The University has been active on social media platforms, especially Facebook and Twitter, to engage and interact with its learners. The use of Social Media has helped IGNOU to reach out to its learners which is otherwise difficult. The use of technology also ensures that there is no extra cost involved to organize these sessions on Social Media platforms than physically conducting them in a classroom setup, which otherwise requires renting auditoriums etc.. There are not many open universities that use digital tools like IGNOU and this is one area where we can learn from them and adopt their techniques or even improve upon them.

The launch of the 'IGNOU Social Media Lecture Series' in March 2020 received overwhelming response from the learners and more than 330 sessions have been conducted so far on various topics related to various programmes. We saw cumulative reach of 3,686,292 (36 Lakh plus) with views of 7,12,334. The sessions have generated 29,854 likes (Facebook Reactions) till 10th July 2020.

- 330 plus sessions have been done till today.
- Cumulative Reach of the sessions till 9th July, 2020 was 3686290 (36 Lakh plus) with cumulative views around 712334 (around 7 Lakh).
- The sessions have generated 29854 Likes (Facebook Reactions).
- The "shares" have been 7366 (i.e., the no. of users who shared the sessions).

The University used purely organic reach to create awareness about the sessions. The reach was achieved using the following strategies:

- University website
- WhatsApp Groups of Regional Centres
- Facebook and Twitter pages of IGNOU
- Other Social Media Platforms of IGNOU - Instagram and YouTube
- E-Mailers sent by the university to students and stakeholders



While creating a Post on the social media platforms, these were some considerations that were kept in mind at every stage. Designing a post with a custom graphic/image which should be visually appealing and should have a message which clearly states the purpose of the post. If there is an announcement for a particular lecture, then it should also highlight the topic and time. In case of a general informative message, then it should have a clear statement as to why is this important for our learners to know.

The response to the lecture sessions by IGNOU faculty has been very encouraging and has immensely benefited the learners during the lock-down period due to the pandemic COVID-19.

Takeaway: University should continue to use social media for distributing information about some activities that are important for students. All the programmes of the University have pages on Facebook where live sessions and lectures are conducted for the benefit of its learners.

IGNOU SOCIAL MEDIA

S.No.	Name of Media	Followers	Page likes		
1	FACEBOOK	61615	50000	4000 approx.Post	FB Live sessions shared on e-Gyankosh also
2	TWEETER	40.5K	-	3335 Tweets	
3	INSTAGRAM	14.2 K	-	192 Post	

Live session by Vice Chancellor during the lockdown 2020-2021

Address to the Students by the Vice Chancellor

S.No.	Date	Reached	Like	Share	Comments
1	5 th May 2020	125.5 K	2700	342	2600
2	20 th May 2021	66,011	743	107	1200

Hello IGNOU

The special “**Hello IGNOU**” sessions conducted to take the queries of the learners and clear their doubts and worries by the university have received tremendous feedback. So far 4 sessions have been held by PIU with the help of Regional Services Division (RSD) IGNOU. The response has been overwhelming in terms of Facebook Reactions, Comments from the learners of each of these sessions. The queries were responded to in real-time by the experts

In the second wave of Pandemic, two “**Hello IGNOU**” sessions have been held on 23rd May, 2021 and 26th May, 2021 and have received tremendous response. Apart from these, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Nageshwar Rao also did an online session to address the students’ concerns during COVID-19 pandemic lockdown.

S.No.	Date	Reached	Like	Share	Comments
1.	30 th May 2021	11566	257	41	2000
2.	26 th May 2021	30212	240	84	1200
3.	23 rd May 2021	56,184	351	47	1000



4.	1 st April 2021	12600	246	32	302
5.	4 th August 2020	60700	236	43	299
6.	29 th July 2020	42100	263	70	309
7.	23 rd June 2020	76800	352	66	327
8.	17 th June 2020	53100	540	80	334

Facebook Live Sessions by IGNOU Faculty provided Academic Support to Students during PANDEMIC TIMES 2020.

Overall the Facebook sessions have been very successful in connecting with the learners and providing them with counseling and guidance in these trying times

Best Practices to Engage Your Audiences via Social Media:

The University expects that all employees utilizing social media covered by this policy will utilize the following best practices:

1. Overall, be selective and thoughtful about where you post and how you reply or choose not to reply. It is perfectly acceptable to invite a phone call to discuss something or refer someone to the appropriate office. When in doubt, don't say it.
2. A common practice among individuals who write about the industry in which they work is to include a disclaimer on your site, usually on the "About Me" page. If you discuss higher education issues or matters within your field of expertise on your own social media site in a manner that could reasonably lead readers to believe that you are speaking on behalf of University, you should include a sentence similar to this:
"The views expressed on this [blog, website] are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University."
3. When posting to a blog, keep the tone of your comments respectful and informative. Avoid personal attacks, online fights, and hostile communications. If a blogger or any other online influencer posts a statement with which you disagree, voice your opinion, but do not escalate the conversation to a heated argument.
4. Write reasonably, factually, and with good humor. Understand and credit the other person's point of view and avoid any communications that could result in personal, professional, or credibility attacks.
5. When lawful, appropriate and possible, provide a link to your supporting documents or your own profile on campus. This will help raise your online ranking results, too.
6. Solicit help from the Marketing & External Relations office to respond to someone who questions or impugns the credibility of the University.
7. Post frequently. A small amount of action on a social media page is almost as bad as having no page at all. In order to keep the audience engaged, try to comment or provide an update at least once a week. Leave yourself an "appointment to post" on your calendar to remind you to update the social media site.
8. Keep your audience in mind. Remember that many different kinds of people have access to view the social media account when posting. While writing in a style appropriate to the medium, be sure to consider this when



displaying information so as to not alienate any of the potential students, alumni, prospective students, parents, etc.

9. Post accurate information. Many people will have access to information posted on social media sites. Ensure that the information is correct before it is posted and consistent with other published materials on the same topic.
10. Spelling and grammar check. We're in the education business and with that comes a set of expectations. Double check all spelling and grammar before posting.
11. Fix errors quickly. When mistakes occur, fix them as soon as possible. Do not wait, or simply leave the error up.
12. Live the IGNOU Values.
 - a. Integrity: Honesty and accountability in our actions and words form the foundation of our relationship with others. Be truthful in all matters, including without limitation your credentials (such as degrees earned, titles held, research published) and facts about the institution, department, program or unit itself.
 - b. Teamwork: Credit appropriately just as you would in scholarly work or team-based projects: do not violate copyrights or other intellectual property rights and cite/link the materials borrowed from others.
 - c. Diligence: Fact check your posts. Spell and grammar check everything. Remember: Content never disappears entirely. Mistakes still happen – correct errors promptly.

Further questions regarding the Social Media Policy can be directed to the Director of News & Digital Content Services (Public Information Unit) in the Marketing & External Relations office.

Takeaway: By combining the list of benefits outlined here with the statistics you have read above, you may be able to take a clearer decision about whether or not to have your University on social media.

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