

Universities' Social Media Usages for Sustainable Corporate Communication: A Research on Students' Views in Online Learning Processes During Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

Covid-19 was appeared in 2019 and rapidly spread worldwide. In Turkey, the universities had to execute online learning as a precaution. The courses and sustainable corporate communication activities had to move to an online environment by the universities during the pandemic. During this period, the universities strived to convey both information and sustainability messages via their social media (SM) accounts. In this context, this study aims to identify students' views on their university's SM usage for its sustainable corporate communication during the Covid-19 process. A structured questionnaire was carried out with 272 students at Sakarya University of Applied Sciences. The research results revealed that many students followed their university's SM accounts, and most of their families and friends encouraged them to follow them. In addition, the study showed that most of the students found their university uses SM accounts for sustainable corporate communication useful and enjoyable. However, it was found that the student's preferences in adopting the sustainability messages would be affected if the messages were complicated. The data also indicated that most of the students were aware of the sustainability messages of the university through SM accounts.

Keywords: sustainability messages, university, online learning, UTAUT, sustainable corporate communication

INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus disease (Covid-2019), which first appeared in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, spread rapidly worldwide and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March (WHO, 2020). According to the T.C. Ministry of Health (MH) (2020), the first case of Covid-19 in Turkey was observed in April 2020, and the disease spread throughout the country. To prevent the further spread of the disease in Turkey, many measures have been taken which affected all segments and structures of society. One of the structures affected by Covid-19 has been the education sector. The Turkish Council of Higher Education has decided that all universities should switch from face-to-face education to online education until the threat of the virus subsides. Thus, all universities conducted an online education period from the spring semester of 2020 to the fall semester of 2021. During this online education period, universities carried out educational activities, and corporate communication activities had to be moved to the online environment.

Many countries had managed the pandemic process with 'physical distancing' strategies, which mostly involved restricting physical contact to the bare minimum required for daily living. This has increased the use of and dependence upon social media (SM) to stay connected for work and education (Wong et al., 2021: 255). As today's one of the most important communication channels, SM "employ mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify usergenerated content"(Kietzmann, 2011: 241) also helps individuals during the pandemic. It became a helpful tool for individuals to communicate with friends and family during quarantine periods. It helped spread necessary information about identifying symptoms, sharing treatment, employing control measures from other countries, and adapting them with available resources (Radwan et al. 2020: 1-2). Universities also use SM to communicate with students and staff in a frequent, open, and targeted manner (Quiroz Flores et al., 2021: 2) and obtain real-time feedback on universities' communications (Bellucci and Manetti, 2017: 898) like other organizations have embraced SM for enabling fast interactions with their stakeholders (Quiroz Flores et al., 2021: 2). Universities had to communicate with students and potential students through their official online platforms, such as their websites and social network pages, during the Covid-19 pandemic's online education process. Since the online environment was the main communication channel used by universities, the way the universities sent messages during the pandemic became essential to maintain favorable relationships with their students (Bularca et al. 2022:2).

As revealed before, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people are sourcing their news and updates from SM, and this is particularly true for young people (Calonge et al., 2021: 7). In particular, with COVID-19, SM usage



has increased significantly in the groups of 16-24 years old (58%), 25-34 years old (50%), 35-44 years old (42%), 45-54 years old (34%) and 55-64 years old (32%) (We are Social, 2020). Many students use SM as a primary source of information and connection to the campus community. With students turning to SM for health information, universities must use the SM platforms effectively, regularly, and candidly to communicate time-critical and correct messaging and overcome the potential for communicates complex information to their varied constituencies quickly their SM strategy will likely fail due to negative posts by students, parents, and staff (Calonge et al., 2021: 8).

In this process, universities also used SM for their sustainable corporate communication messages. Like all institutions, universities strive to improve their performance and make it sustainable with the corporate communication applications they perform. In this process, the universities aim to demonstrate their corporate identity and adopt values for all stakeholders and the public, especially their students and employees (Kadıbesegil, 2009). Nowadays, many institutions prefer SM as a sustainable corporate communication tool. As the result of research, which examined the SM used by 10 official public institutions with SM accounts as a means of corporate communication, it was indicated that institutions use SM mostly to promote their services. In addition, it was observed that SM is more effective in directing the preferences of the target audience compared to the traditional media (Ilgin et al., 2019). According to Özpınar's (2021) study, the institutions should feel open to technological development and obliged to use this technology to communicate with all stakeholders efficiently and innovatively. According to a study (Gökler and Onay, 2020) that examined SM usages of universities for corporate communication purposes, universities regularly share information about orientation, remembrance, workspace, and employee-related issues via their official Instagram accounts. A study (Ün and Türkal, 2018) that aimed to determine how universities use YouTube as a means of corporate communication tool showed that; universities use their YouTube channels as an economic promotion tool, and they include their scientific, educational, social, and cultural activities in their YouTube pages.

Adding sustainability messages to universities' corporate communication activities is highly emphasized nowadays. According to Cortese (2003:17), universities bear a moral and profound responsibility to increase the awareness, knowledge, skills, and values needed to create a sustainable future. Also, Lozano et al. (2013: 18) stress the importance of leaders of the universities that they must ensure the needs of present and future generations be better understood and addressed; thus, the professionals who are well versed in sustainable development can effectively educate students of 'all ages' to help make the transition to 'sustainable societal patterns.' To do this, university leaders and staff must be empowered to catalyze and implement new paradigms, introducing sustainability into all courses and curricula and other university activities elements.

A prerequisite for a university to commit to sustainability is communication. It can be spontaneous communication impulses and initiatives for the professional management of long-term consultation processes and other participatory interactions (Franz-Balsen and Heinrichs, 2007: 431). Sustainability communication is a process of mutual understanding, dealing with the future development of society at the core of a vision of sustainability. It is both about values and norms such as inter-and intragenerational justice and research into the causes of problems and the individual/societal possibilities to take action and influence development. This process of mutual understanding takes place on many different levels and in other contexts such as; between individuals, between individuals and institutions, between institutions and within institutions, in schools and universities, in the media, in politics, in business, in communities and at regional, national and international levels (Godemann and Michelsen, 2011: 6). Lertpratchya et al. (2017: 1064) point out the role of sustainability communication messages toward students. According to the study, the universities with sustainability initiatives use various communication strategies for reaching their significant stakeholders. The majority indicated that students are one of their primary target groups. These universities directly communicate sustainability to students through traditional and SM channels. As a result, the students of these universities are often exposed to sustainability communication, leading to cumulative effects as they progress in their studies.

It is expected that universities will lead sustainability practices that are carried out to positively affect people, the planet, and societies. Since universities contribute to society through education by institutionalizing their values, missions, and practices, and serve as a driving force for sustainable change. However, as mentioned earlier, during Covid-19 mandatory changes were made in the functioning of universities, as well as in all structures of society. During the pandemic, universities have moved their educational systems and corporate communication efforts, including sustainable communication activities, to the online environment. They tried to convey corporate communication and information messages to their students, one of the most critical stakeholders, through their websites and official SM accounts throughout the pandemic. In this regard, the primary purpose of the research



was to reveal the views of students on their university's SM usage for sustainable corporate communication during the online teaching period in the Covid-19 process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research method

The quantitative method in which the statistical analysis of the data was proposed within the framework of deduction was used. Quantitative research tests, measures, and statistically analyzes the identified problem. It also examines the situation from a holistic perspective.

The primary purpose of the research was to reveal the views of students on their university's SM usage for sustainable corporate communication during the online teaching period in the Covid-19 process. The secondary aim of the study was to reveal whether students' views differ according to age and gender. In addition, the sub-aim was determined to identify the levels of students' follow and subscribe statuses of the university's corporate SM accounts during the Covid-19 period.

The sub-question related to the research question is below.

RQ1: What are the students' levels of following and subscription statuses of the university's corporate SM accounts during the Covid-19 period?

The research questions related to the primary aim are below.

RQ2: How much does the performance that students expect from the university's official SM accounts for sustainable communication contribute to them following these accounts?

RQ3: Do the students believe that the universities' official SM accounts are useful?

RQ4: To what extent do students believe that the people close to encourage them to follow the university's SM accounts?

RQ5: What is the degree to which students believe universities' SM usage as a sustainable corporate communication medium facilitates their understanding and knowledge of environmental issues?

The hypothesis related to the secondary aim of the study is below.

H1₁: There is a significant difference between age and performance expectancy.

H2_{1:} There is a significant difference between age and effort expectancy.

H31. There is a significant difference between age and social influence.

H4₁: There is a significant difference between gender and performance expectancy.

H5₁: There is a significant difference between gender and effort expectancy.

H61: There is a significant difference between gender and social influence.

However, facilitating conditions are not included in the hypothesis because many researchers claim that facilitating conditions are not a significant driver as the other factors (Chua et al., 2018:121).

Sample and Sampling Technique

Sakarya University of Applied Sciences was chosen as a sample by purposive sampling method cause sustainability is at the heart of the university's strategic plan. The state in detail in this plan that they adopt sustainable corporate communication (Sakarya University of Applied Sciences Strategical Plan of 2020-2024).

The universe of this research consists of 26.815 students of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences. The probability-based random sampling method was used to select the students. The research sample consists of 272 students studying at Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, Turkey.

	Demographic Variables	N	(%)	
	Female	141	51,8	
Gender	Male	131	48,2	
	Total	272	100,0	
	<18	4	1,5	
	18-21	207	76,1	
Age	21-25	42	15,4	
	26-29	19	7,0	
	Total	272	100,0	
Education	Undergraduate / Associate Degree	166	61,0	
Euucation	Undergraduate / Bachelor Degree	96	35,3	

Table 1: Basic Descriptive Statistics of the Study Participants



Postgraduate / Master and Ph.D. Degree	10	3,7
Total	272	100,0

As shown in Table 1, 51.8% of Sakarya University of Applied Sciences students participating in the research are female, and 48.2% are male. The gender distribution of the students participating in the research is almost equal. The age-ratio distribution of 272 students; 1.5% are under 18, 76.1% are between 18-21, 15.4% are between 22-25, 7% are between 26-30. The majority of the students participating in the survey are between 18-21, with 76.1%. This age range is important in making sense of the relationship between the university's corporate communication studies and new media channels. 61% of the participants are associate degree students, 35.3% are bachelor's degree students, and 3.7% postgraduate students. Most of the students participating in the survey are associate degree students, with a rate of 61%.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the study, the Unified Technology of Acceptance and Use Technology Model (UTAUT) scale was used, developed by Venkatesh et al. (2003). The reliability value was calculated by Cronbach's alpha method of 0. 821. The questionnaire consists of three parts. In the first group, participants were asked about their demographic characteristics. In the second part of the questionnaire, 5 questions were conveyed to the participants to identify the levels of students' follow and subscribe statuses of the university's corporate SM accounts during the Covid-19 period. The data obtained from the questions about the use of SM are in the findings. The last part of the research includes 20 questions that aim to reveal students' points of view on using SM to ensure sustainable corporate communication of the university during the online education period. Statements in the questionnaire were prepared with a Likert rating of 5 (5-Strongly agree, 4-Agree, 3-Undecided, 2-Disagree, 1-Strongly disagree).

Offering a conceptual framework, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003) provides an opportunity to evaluate the compatibility of new communication technologies with institutions. It offers this with four main determining factors. These are performance expectancy, effort expectancy, facilitating conditions, and social influence. Performance expectancy is defined as "the degree to which an individual believes that using the system will help him or she attain gains in job performance." Statements about performance expectations were evaluated with four questions in the research. Effort expectancy is defined as "the degree of ease associated with the use of the system." Statements about effort expectation were evaluated with four questions in the research. Social Influence is defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives that important others believe he or she should use the new system". Statements about social influence were evaluated with three questions in the research. Facilitating conditions are defined as "the degree to which an individual believes that an organization's and technical infrastructure exists to support the use of the system." Statements on facilitating conditions, including technical infrastructure and institutional support, were evaluated with nine questions in the research.

The questionnaire was distributed on social networking sites between April 10, 2021, and May 14, 2021. Participation was voluntary, and the survey completion process took approximately 10 minutes.

Descriptive analysis was used in the study. The data obtained in the descriptive analysis are summarized and interpreted according to predetermined themes. The aim is to present the findings to the reader in an organized and interpreted form. The descriptive analysis consists of four stages. The first is to draw a framework of the data that make up the research content. The second stage is the processing of data within the specified framework. The third stage is the definition of the findings, and the last stage is the explanation, correlation, and interpretation of the findings.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 26 was used to aid the researchers in evaluating data derived from the copies of the questionnaires that the respondents filled. The findings used frequency-percentage distributions, Independent Groups t-test, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The study had several limitations. Choosing Sakarya University of Applied Sciences avoids the possibility of representing other universities in Turkey and the world. Additionally, the narrowness of the demographic qualities of the students and that the students were chosen from Turkey is another limitation.

FINDINGS

RQ1: What are the students' levels of following and subscription statuses of the university's corporate SM accounts during the Covid–19 period?

It is determined that 95.6% of the students follow the university's SM accounts, and 4.4% do not follow the university's SM accounts. In the ranking of the university SM platforms most frequently used by students, it is seen that the university's Instagram is followed by 70.6%. The second by YouTube by 36%, and Twitter by 27.9%. It was determined that the students who participated in the research preferred mobile devices by 87.5%, computers



by 63.2%, computers, tablets, and other devices other than mobile by 41.9%, in order of the tools they used most frequently.

The findings of the questions created to reveal the students' perspectives on the use of SM within the scope of sustainable corporate communication at a university during the online education period during the Covid-19 pandemic are given below.

RQ2: How much does the performance that students expect from the university's official SM accounts for sustainable communication contribute to them following these accounts?

The study revealed that 77.2% of the students found useful of the university's usage of SM for sustainable corporate communication. It is shown that the students' SM usage contributes to the fact that they are quickly informed about the university's public relations and sustainable corporate communication activities at a rate of 66.2%. According to the results, it has been revealed that the university's SM usage as a sustainable corporate communication channel encourages students (71.7%) to follow this medium. 43% of the students find SM understandable and easy to use, reflecting a low rate compared to the total. Therefore, it shows that there may be messages that students do not understand on SM and that they find difficulties understanding while receiving the messages via SM accounts.

RQ3: Do students believe universities' official SM accounts are useful?

With a high rate of 83.4%, it is seen that students have enough sources to use SM, such as mobile phones, computers, and internet connections and 66.6% of them have enough knowledge of using SM. 90% of university students stated that they have uncomplicated access to information through the university's SM accounts. According to this result, it can be deduced that uncomplicated access to information is an essential factor that encourages students to use universities' official SM accounts. According to the research data, 74.7% of the students stated that the university's usage of SM as a sustainable corporate communication medium did not affect their preferences of the university. Also, 79.2% of the students stated that if the university's sustainable corporate communication messages via SM were complicated, it would affect their preferences in adopting them. With a high rate of 85.3%, students find it beneficial that the university's corporate communication department uses SM for sustainable corporate communication. It revealed that 79.8% of the students have more information about the communication activities of the institution thanks to the SM posts of the university.

RQ4: To what extent do students believe that the people close to encourage them to follow the university's SM accounts?

According to the data obtained, it was seen that 92.3% of the students were encouraged to follow the SM accounts of the university by their family and friends. In other words, it is determined that the people close to students are influential in making them follow the university's SM accounts. However, it is determined that 7.3% of the student's friends and family do not have any influence in making them follow the SM accounts of the university. It is also reflected that the students do not need any assistance while using SM, with an average rate of 50.3%.

RQ5: What is the degree to which students believe that universities' SM usage as a sustainable corporate communication medium facilitates their understanding and knowledge of the environmental issues?

A high percentage of the students (74.6%) stated that it is not a good idea to maintain the university's sustainable corporate communication through SM accounts after the pandemic ends. In addition, it has been revealed that 71.3% of the students find it enjoyable that the university uses SM accounts in their sustainable corporate communication. It is shown that with a high rate of 85.3%, students are aware of the sustainability messages existence of the university through SM, and 77.8% of the students think that the university's corporate communication department uses SM acts as a sustainability communication medium.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Performance	Between Groups	1,035	3	,345	,945	,419
Expectancy	Within Groups	97,834	268	,365		
	Total	98,869	271			
Effort Expectancy	Between Groups	,626	3	,209	,576	,631
	Within Groups	97,132	268	,362		
	Total	97,758	271			
Social Influence	Between Groups	3,657	3	1,219	3,594	,014
	Within Groups	90,892	268	,339		
	Total	94,549	271			

TABLE 2: Difference between age and performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence



H1: There is a significant difference between age and performance expectancy.

H2: There is a significant difference between age and effort expectancy.

H3: There is a significant difference between age and social influence.

One Way Anova test was used. As a result of the test performed at 95% confidence level, the significance value between age and performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence were tested. There is a no significant difference between age and performance expectancy (p=0.419>0.05 (f=0, .945). H1 was rejected.

There is a no significant difference in age and effort expectancy (p=0,613>0.05 (f=0,576). **H2 was rejected.** The data also show a significant difference between age and social influence (p=0,014<0.05 (f=3,594). **H3 was supported.** Age was determined as a variable affecting the social influence dimension.

TABLE 3: Difference between gender and performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social impact

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		uality of	t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Differenc e	Std. Error Differ ence	95% Confid	lence Interval Difference Upper
Performance Expectancy	Equal variances assumed	,703	,403	,252	270	,801	,01853	,07342	-,12603	,16308
	Equal variances not assumed			,252	266,153	,801	,01853	,07355	-,12628	,16334
Effort Expectancy	Equal variances assumed	3,083	,080	-1,468	270	,143	-,10678	,07273	-,24997	,03641
	Equal variances not assumed			-1,461	259,206	,145	-,10678	,07308	-,25069	,03713
Social Influence	Equal variances assumed	1,700	,193	-2,725	270	,007	-,19302	,07084	-,33250	-,05355
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,711	258,462	,007	-,19302	,07121	-,33324	-,05281

dimensions Independent Samples Test

H4: There is a significant difference between gender and performance expectancy.

H5: There is a significant difference between gender and effort expectancy.

H6: There is a significant difference between gender and social influence.

Independent samples t-test was conducted to reveal differences between male and female participants regarding performance expectancy, effort expectancy, and social influence dimensions.

There is statistically no significant difference between the female (3.73, SD=.59) and male (3.71, SD=.61) in the performance expectancy dimension according to the t-test (t=.252Sig (2-tailed) >0.05). **H4 was rejected.** As a result of the t-test, there is no statistically significant difference between the female (3.83, SD=.56) and male (3.93, SD=.63) in the dimension of effort expectancy (t=-1.468 Sig (2-tailed) >0.05). **H5 was rejected.** According to t-test, there is also no significant difference between the female (3.32, SD=.54) and male (3.52, SD=.62) in the social influence dimension (t=-2.75 Sig (2- tailed) >0.05). **H6 was rejected.**

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In the pandemic period, many university students used SM as a primary source of information and connection to the campus community. In addition, universities use SM to communicate with their students and staff and obtain feedback on universities' communications. During the online education process, universities had to share with



students and potential students through their SM accounts, websites, etc., for their sustainable corporate communication messages. The pandemic made the universities aim to demonstrate their corporate identity and adopt values for their students and employees via SM. In today's environment, universities have a moral and profound responsibility to increase the values, awareness, knowledge, and skills needed to create a sustainable future. The managers of the universities and the staff should implement sustainability into all courses and all other elements of university activities. A university's sustainability communication is consciously and effectively integrating sustainability in its communication strategy by telling the students and staff about its sustainability goals and efforts. The universities mostly communicate sustainability to students through SM and traditional ones. By using various communication channels, the students of these universities are often exposed to sustainability communication. Universities contribute to society through education by institutionalizing their missions, values, and activities on sustainability, and they convey these via SM.

In this context, mainly this research aimed to reveal students' views on their university's SM usage for sustainable corporate communication during the online teaching period in the Covid-19 process. 272 students studying at Sakarya University of Applied Sciences, Turkey, were chosen as a sample with a probability-based random sampling method to achieve the aim of the study. Sakarya University of Applied Sciences was selected as a sample by purposive sampling method. Since sustainability is at the heart of this university's strategic plan and the state in detail, they adopt sustainable corporate communication. UTAUT scale was used, and the research questionnaire consisted of three parts.

During the pandemic, students increased their SM usage to receive information. It was questioned in the study whether these students, whose educational lives were continuing during a pandemic, followed their university's official SM accounts to maintain the connection with them. The study results indicated that 95.6% of the students followed their university's official SM accounts; Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter, respectively.

The results of research questions related to the primary aim are given here. The data of research question 2 coincide with the literature data. Referring to the performance expectancy, the study revealed that most of the students found the university's SM usage for sustainable corporate communication useful. In addition, the results indicated seeing the university's SM usage as a sustainable corporate communication channel useful encouraged most of the students to use the medium. Previous studies support these data. According to Toh's (2013) research data, performance expectancy has positively affected the students to follow SM. Also, Chang (2013) found that performance expectancy positively affects students' intention to use library apps in university libraries in his research.

The results of research question 3 coincide with the literature data also. Referring to the effort expectancy, the study revealed that most university students stated that they have uncomplicated access to information through the university's SM accounts. In addition, most students find it beneficial that the university's corporate communication department uses SM within the framework of sustainable corporate communication with uncomplicated access to information. In contrast, most of the students stated that if the university's sustainable corporate communication messages via SM were complicated, it would affect their preferences in adopting them. These findings are supported by previous studies. According to Chua et al. (2018)'s study on effort expectancy on SM, the complicated online system would discourage individuals from adopting it.

The results of research question 4, similar to the literature data, are given here. Referring to the social influence, the study indicated that most of the students' families and friends encourage them to follow the university's SM accounts. These results are supported by previous studies. According to Lian (2015)'s study on factors on cloud-based e-invoice service adoption, social influence affects individuals' intentions.

The results of the final research question coincide with the literature data also. Referring to the facilitating conditions, the study revealed that most students found it enjoyable that the university uses SM accounts for sustainable messages. A high rate of students is aware of the sustainability messages existing of the university through SM. Previous studies support these data. According to Šumak et al. (2010), facilitating conditions affect the usage of Moodle, which is an open distance education system.

The secondary aim of the study was to reveal whether students' views differ according to their age and gender, and the hypotheses results created for this aim are given here. There was no significant difference between age and performance, and effort expectancy. However, there was a significant difference between age and social influence. Also, the research data showed that there wasn't a significant difference between gender and performance, effort expectancy, and social influence.



The expectation of effort should be increased to encourage increasing the levels of following and subscription statuses of universities' SM accounts. The managers of the universities must continue the sustainable corporate communication messages by taking into account that students are essential stakeholders of the universities. Social influence is a critical factor for SM behavior, so SM managers should always consider the element of social needs of students and allocate resources to improve the social influence of social networking apps. Also, the more the social environment is aware of the sustainable messages of a university, the more confidence it will have in the university. This situation can indicate that the university has an essential role in constructing a sustainable future.

The impact of mandatory changes in the educational system during the Covid-19 period was reflected in both students and institutions. In particular, students have an essential stakeholder role in universities' sustainable corporate communication process. Especially in an environment such as the pandemic, where there is no face-to-face communication, sustainable messages have been conveyed online to all stakeholders, including students. In this context, SM has served as the primary tool for universities. Proceeding from this point, the measurement and evaluation of all these processes from the students' dimensions and the introduction of the results into the literature reveal the central importance of the study. In addition, the feedback received from the students will contribute to the processes of updating the sustainable corporate communication messages of universities. On the other hand, it is essential that universities that do not have a strategic plan within the scope of sustainable corporate communication can be encouraged to structure in this regard.

The further researches could be conducted on a larger sample in this area based on the importance of sustainable corporate communication messages for universities. It is also essential to conduct studies on universities' other stakeholders' opinions on this issue. Finally, the new studies would compare the results of this research covering the online education process when corporate communication activities were not only carried out online.

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