

Engagement Report

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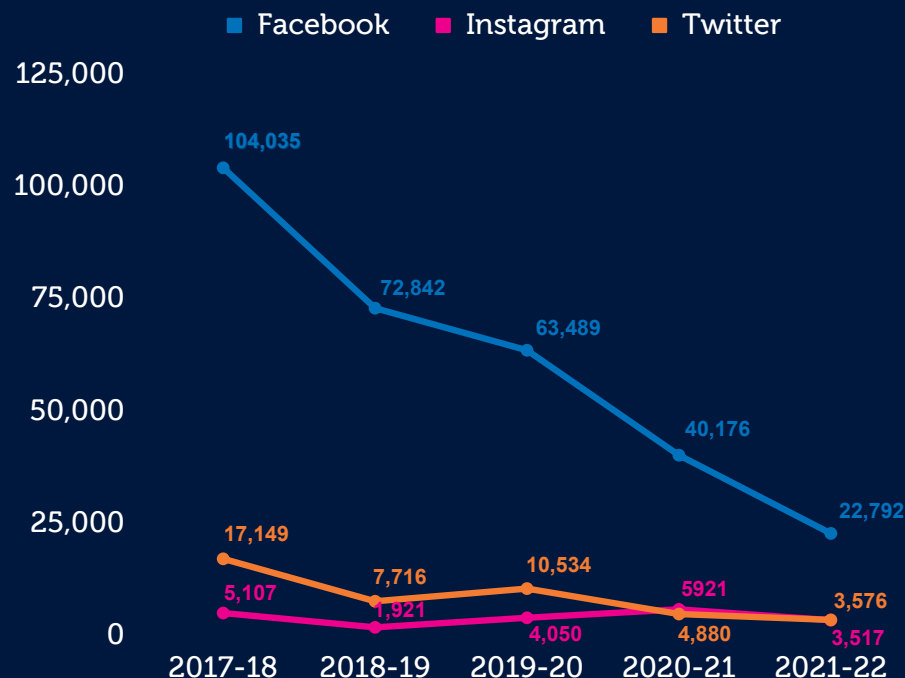
17/10/2022

5 Year Engagement Social Media

During the last five years, we have seen a significant decline in user engagement via Facebook. Factors in this decline are changes in Facebook's algorithm to focus more on user content rather than commercial, the increased age of the platform's user base (25-34 - 31%, 18-24 - 22.6%, 13-17 - 5.6%) and Covid-19. It is possible that Covid-19 exasperated the decline in Facebook engagement; so while a further decline is expected this year, it should not be as pronounced as in previous years, resulting in a slight boost to our yearly engagement figures.

Instagram is the platform in which we are seeing the most significant growth. While the information presented in the graph shows a decline in Instagram engagement, this is not an accurate indication of overall performance as we are missing reporting data for a 3-month period this year (March-May). We would have seen a significant uptake in engagement during the period due to cornerstone events such as Elections and the Star Awards. I would predict that with this missing data incorporated we would have seen an overall increase in engagement.

As set out in the Strategic Plan communications via Twitter will be targeted toward Academics and the academic interests of students as opposed to other communications which encompass the full scope of our work.



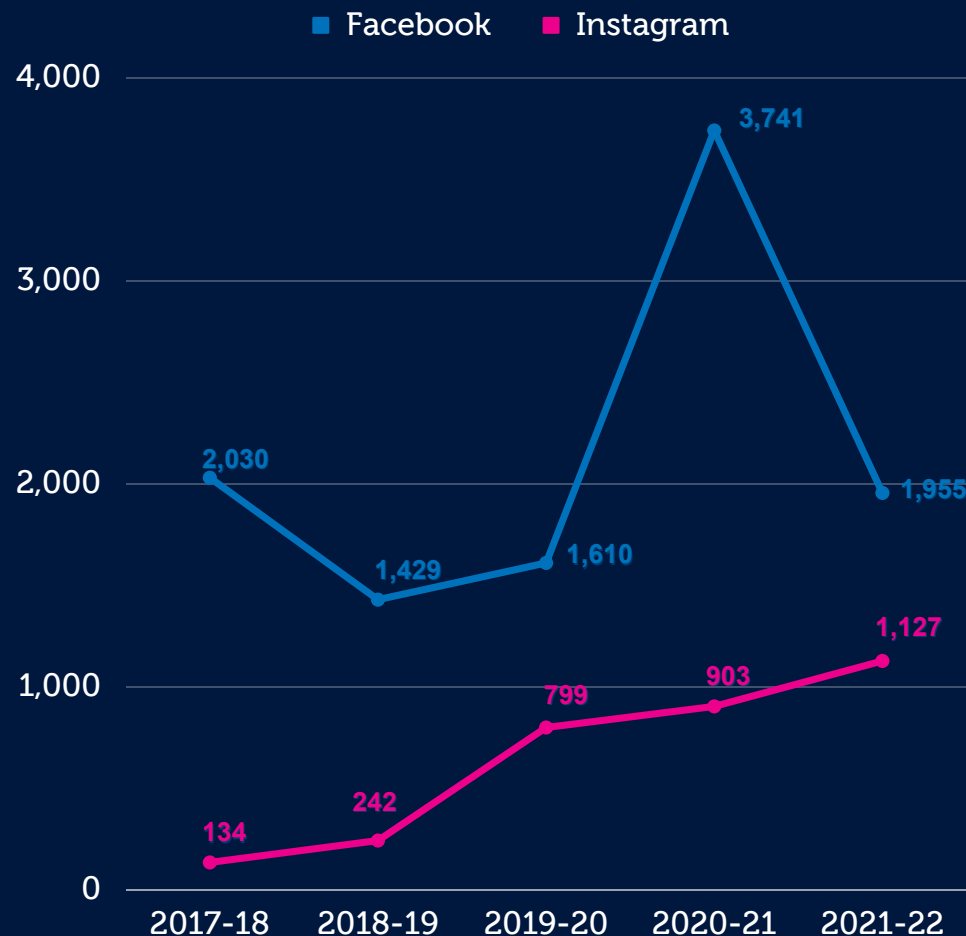
We have a new and emerging presence on TikTok and work is ongoing to increase our followers on the platform. Statistics from the platform have not been included in this report as they would not add anything meaningful. However, TikTok is a platform with growing popularity among Gen Z, (10-25 year-olds) an upcoming core demographic. We will continue to monitor TikTok's growth with this demographic as it may become Gen Z's preferred social media platform. It is however too early to say this with confidence as social media trends can be fickle. For instance, Snapchat was once in the same position as TikTok until Instagram introduced Stories - a feature similar to Snapchat's USP, something that drastically curtailed its growth.

5 Year Engagement Direct Messages

Online trends show that how users are choosing to interact with organisations is changing. Engagement via traditional social media means (posting an image or video to your feed) is varying depending on the platform. The area where we are seeing consistent growth is Direct Messaging.

"[Direct messaging] will continue to grow as the number one way for brands to communicate to customers. I truly believe it will surpass email, and physical mail. People are much more likely to reach out through social media for customer service help than five years ago." - Sprout Social

2020-21 saw a significant increase in the number of students engaging with us via Facebook Messenger; this is likely to be a result of being in lockdown. While there has been a decrease in the number of messages this year, it should not be seen as a negative, but rather a correction, with this year's figure being more indicative of the volume of messages we would expect to see in an average year. It is expected that we will see a steady increase in users opting to engage with us via Facebook Messenger.

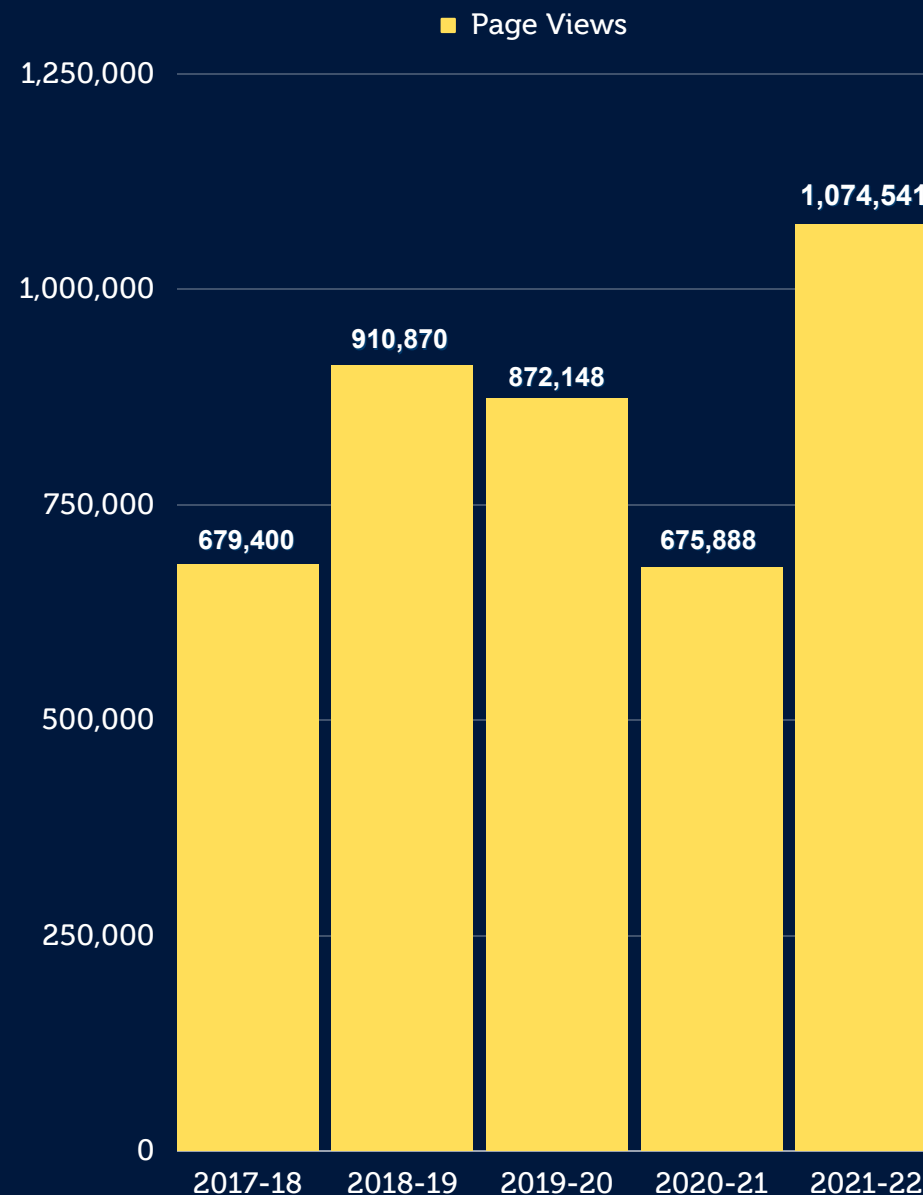


Direct Messages via Instagram is the only metric which we have measured for this report that has seen consistent yearly growth. This growth is expected to continue.

5 Year Engagement Website

The decline in website views in 2020-21 and the increase in 2021-22 can both be attributed to Covid-19 and the effect of the Lockdown. The drop we see in 2020-21 correlates with when we entered a lockdown, the closure of campus and being unable to hold events (GCUstudents.co.uk is the main location where students can find information and signup for these events). Alternatively, as we entered a hybrid learning approach in 2021-22 with a mixture of online and in-person events taking place we required greater use of our website to monitor students' attendance to ensure that we were operating in a Covid-safe manner which accounts for the increase in page views.

It is expected that as we appear to be largely past the effects of the Lockdown website views will return to pre-Covid levels, with views predicted to be around the 900k - 1,000k range going forward.

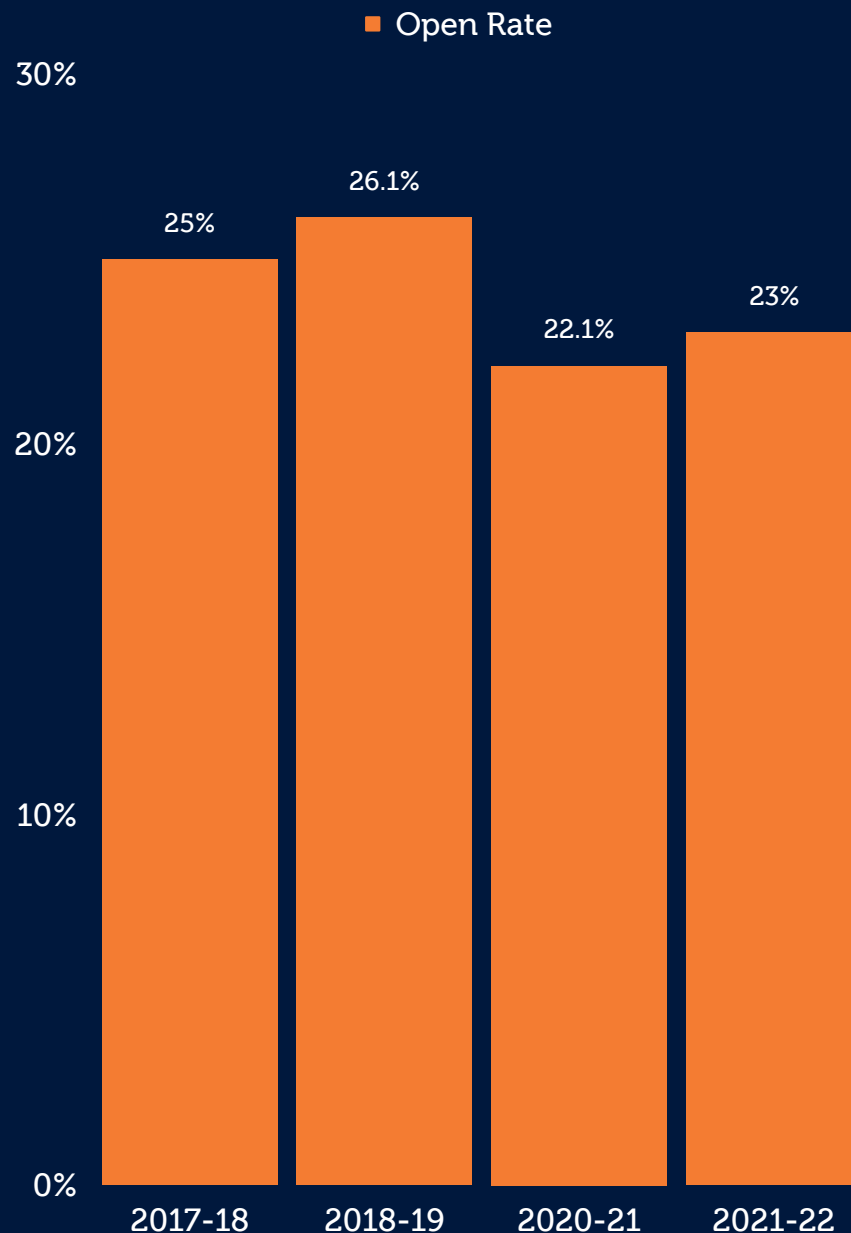


5 Year Engagement All Student Email

Our email open rate is consistently in line with industry averages (Sprout Social - 21.3%, Education - 23.4%, Not for Profit - 25.2%) and was largely unaffected by Covid-19.

It should be noted that we are missing statistics from Trimester 2 2017-18 and for the year 2019-20. However, based on the statistics we do have there is no reason to believe there would have been a significant variation in the open rate.

Contributing factors to the strength of the open rate are, consistent by-weekly sending of the All Student Email (e.g. not spamming students with emails) and relevance of the content.



Recommendations Social Media

Facebook

There is very little we can do to stop the decline in engagement via Facebook. However, if we adjust what as an organisation we want to achieve from our presence on the platform it does still have strategic value. We should now consider Facebook not primarily as a way to generate engagement with students by rather as a method of raising awareness of the services we provide.

If we anecdotally think of how we use Facebook in our everyday lives it is likely that we browse the platform daily, seeing posts and watching videos, but not necessarily engaging with the content by way of Reactions, Comments or Shares. That is not to say that we are not absorbing or aware of the content on the platform.

Instagram

For a long time, Facebook was the dominant social media channel, this however is no longer true regarding the demographics we wish to engage. Currently, this position is being filled by Instagram; for this reason, it is recommended we adopt an "Instagram first" approach to our social media communications. Going forward we should focus on delivering our social media communications utilising the

Stories and Reels feature of the platform; as this is where we are seeing the greatest level of engagement; while still posting to Facebook.

The benefits of this approach are that we should see a greater increase of engagement via Instagram and as Instagram uses the same dimensions for content as TikTok we will be able to utilise the same content on that platform with little to no adjustment required. This should allow us to grow on both platforms with relative ease.

Twitter

Using Twitter as a communications tool to engage with Academics and to communicate the academic interests of students remains the correct course of action.

However, this has the potential to change in the coming years. This is not something that needs immediate action as it is currently conjecture, but is useful to be aware of. Elon Musk may purchase Twitter, and if early indications are correct the changes he proposes to implement will fundamentally alter how the platform is used. Reports suggest that Elon Musk, will attempt to replicate the success of the Chinese app WeChat - a service which provides text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging, video conferencing, video games, sharing of photographs and videos, person-to-person bank transfers and location sharing.

Recommendations Direct Messages

Currently, we are reactive to direct messages (a student sends us a message and we respond), we need to become proactive during key moments in our communications calendar and send students messages.

If internal resources allow (staff time, cost, etc.) this functionality can be implemented by integrating a ChatBot with our primary direct message provider Facebook Messenger and will have numerous benefits. These benefits include providing out-of-hours support to students. By and large, we typically receive the same sort of enquiry time and time again. For example, "how do I join a Society?" or "I need help with Mitigating Circumstances", etc. In these instances, a polite response is given directing students to where the information can be found on our website. Currently, this is achieved by a staff member responding to each of these enquiries. With the implementation of a chatbot, students will receive an automated and instant response regardless of if the office is open or not improving the student experience while freeing staff time to work on other tasks.

The chatbot will also allow us to monitor emerging messaging trends and inform campaigns we may wish to run. Take for example if we were to see an influx of students asking "how do I join a society" we may want to consider running a campaign explaining how to do this.

Aside from the benefits, a chatbot will provide students it also has the potential to vastly increase our levels of engagement with them. At key moments in the academic year (Freshers, elections, recruitment for SLP, unexpected campus closure, etc) we could send students a personalised message. "Hi Jeff, today is the last day of voting in the elections. Make sure your voice is heard by voting at GCUstudents.co.uk/vote" is one example. After sending such a message one would expect to see a high percentage of read receipts on the message, direct responses to the message and a proportional increase in students voting (which we could track via Bitly).

Recommendations Website

Our website is full of valuable information, regularly updated with the work we are doing and visited by students. Its one downfall is that it is not particularly mobile-friendly. Between August 1st 2021 and July 31st 2022 66.2% of the people who viewed our website did so on a mobile device. By having a mobile-friendly website we should see an overall increase in page views as users spend more time on the site and navigate to different pages. We are limited in adding this functionality as it requires substantial changes to be made by UnionCloud our Contents Management System provider.

Recommendations Email

As already covered in this report the open rate of our emails is in line with industry standards. There is however a way in which we can increase this and it is by using what is referred to in our system (UnionCloud) as Liquid Variables. A liquid variable is a small piece of code that we can include in the body of our email that personalises the content to the recipient.

Currently, these liquid variables are limited to the recipient's first name and last name and do not work in the subject line of the email. If we can get UnionCloud to expand the range of liquid variables to include information such as year of study, course, society membership, etc. we will be able to provide a much more personalised and tailored experience for our students. However, the most important element of this is having the liquid variables work in the subject line.

This is important because research which included Stanford University has shown that:

"When they added the name of the receiver to the subject line of the emails open rates increased by 23% and clickthrough rates (CTRs) increased by 32%."

A large part of what makes this effective is that when we see our name in the subject line or body of the email we pay more attention to the content; and when we pay more attention we're more likely to act on the message, especially if it's a compelling argument.

This unfortunately may not be easy to achieve as UnionCloud is not currently working on this. As an organisation, we could proactively and regularly highlight the importance this feature would have to our communications.