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Study: Promotion of third mission by Kyrgyz higher educational institutions through social media

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Authors:

- **Mirlan Chynybaev, Kyrgyz State Technical University: Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**
- **Gulnara Isaeva, National Erasmus+ Office, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**
- **Rita Ismailova, Computer Engineering Department, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**
- **Amangeldi Zhumadilov, Salymbekov Univeristy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan**

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Introduction

The "third mission" of universities refers to their role in driving community engagement, social development, and innovation beyond teaching and research. This includes activities like public outreach, lifelong learning initiatives, partnerships with industry and government, and contributions to solving societal problems (often aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals). In Kyrgyzstan, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognizing the importance of this mission and the need to communicate it effectively. A recent seminar in Bishkek (April 2025) organized by the National Erasmus+ Office and the Ministry of Education brought together university leaders and PR/SMM specialists to discuss how universities can better engage society, business, and government erasmusplus.kg. A key takeaway was that social media is a critical tool for promoting the third mission and building public trust, yet many HEIs have room to improve their strategies erasmusplus.kg. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of how Kyrgyzstani HEIs currently use social media to advance their third mission, evaluates the effectiveness of these efforts across major platforms, compares practices with international examples, identifies challenges, and offers recommendations for improvement.

Social Media Landscape of Kyrgyz HEIs

Kyrgyzstan's universities maintain a presence on popular social platforms – primarily Instagram, Facebook, and to a lesser extent YouTube and TikTok – to reach students and the broader community. Table 1 summarizes the social media followings of selected HEIs (including the 10 featured in the provided presentation and other major institutions), illustrating their current visibility and reach:

Table 1. Social Media Followings of Selected Kyrgyz Universities (followers/subscribers as of 2024–2025)

University	*Instagram Followers (Feb 2024)*	*Facebook Followers (June 2025)*	*YouTube Subscribers (June 2025)*
Salymbekov University (Bishkek)	94,950unirank.org	2,644unirank.org	29unirank.org
American Univ. of Central Asia (AUCA)	76,039unirank.org	78,068unirank.org	805unirank.org

Islamic University of Kyrgyzstan	23,252unirank.org	10,704unirank.org	6,980unirank.org
Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas Univ. (KTMU)	19,627unirank.org	9,867unirank.org	3,810unirank.org
Osh State University (OSU)	*Not in top 37* (est. <1k)	7,902unirank.org	25,500unirank.org
Kyrgyz Economic Univ. (KEU)	4,804unirank.org	6,681unirank.org	546unirank.org
Kyrgyz National Univ. (KNU)	~1,300instagram.com	3,795unirank.org	*N/A* (minimal presence)
Kyrgyz State Tech. Univ. (KSTU/KGTU)	*N/A* (active but low)	663unirank.org	710unirank.org
Kyrgyz State Medical Acad. (KGMA)	*N/A* (active but low)	4,599unirank.org	23,100unirank.org
Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic Univ. (KRSU)	1,794unirank.org	876unirank.org	4,280unirank.org
Bishkek Humanities Univ. (Karasaev)	3,345unirank.org	*N/A* (<500)	*N/A*

International Univ. of Kyrgyzstan (IUK)	*N/A* (active but low)	1,109unirank.org	321unirank.org

("N/A" indicates no official account or very low follower count not ranked.)

Several insights emerge from these figures: Instagram and Facebook are the dominant platforms for Kyrgyz HEIs, while YouTube is underutilized by many, and TikTok is only beginning to be explored. On Instagram, a few institutions command relatively large followings – notably Salymbekov University (~95k) and AUCA (~76k) lead by a wide margin unirank.org, reflecting strong social media marketing efforts. Salymbekov University, a newer private institution, has achieved the #1 Instagram following in the country, suggesting an aggressive strategy to build its brand online. AUCA, an internationally-oriented university, also boasts a high follower count and thousands of posts, indicating a consistently active presence unirank.org. By contrast, many older public universities have modest Instagram followings despite their large student bodies. For example, Kyrgyz National University (KNU) had only ~1.3k followers on its official IG page instagram.com, and KSTU (Kyrgyz State Technical Univ.) did not even appear in the top IG rankings (likely only a few hundred followers). This disparity points to uneven adoption of Instagram: some HEIs (especially private and international ones) see it as a key outreach tool, while others have been slower to generate content that attracts followers.

On Facebook, a similar pattern exists but with some differences in rankings. AUCA is again a top performer with around 78k followers unirank.org. Interestingly, Osh State University – despite a low profile on Instagram – has about 7.9k Facebook followers unirank.org, reflecting its large alumni and student network in southern Kyrgyzstan. The OSCE Academy (a graduate institute) also has a strong Facebook presence (32k+ followers)unirank.org, showing that research-focused institutions can draw significant audiences on that platform. Meanwhile, KNU's official Facebook page has under 4k followers unirank.org, and KSTU's only ~663 unirank.org, again indicating limited reach. Notably, some entities that dominate Facebook in Kyrgyzstan are those targeting foreign students for medical programs – e.g. "Swiss International University" (a private medical school) tops the Facebook list with ~129k followers unirank.org, reflecting how *marketing-driven content* (university promotional material often pushed by overseas agents) can inflate follower counts unrelated to community engagement. In general, Facebook in Kyrgyzstan skews toward information dissemination and reaching parents, older audiences, and international applicants, whereas Instagram is favored by local youth and students for more visual content.

On YouTube, very few Kyrgyz universities have capitalized on the platform for outreach. The clear leader is Osh State University, with 25.5k subscribers on its channel unirank.org – likely attributable to the university uploading many lectures, events, and perhaps content for its massive medical faculty (which attracts viewers from India and elsewhere). The Kyrgyz State Medical Academy (KGMA) also has over 23k subscribers and an astonishing average view count per video (220k+) unirank.org, suggesting some of its videos (perhaps graduation ceremonies or educational clips) went viral or are being used as study resources by a wide audience. These are exceptions; most other HEIs have only a few hundred subscribers (e.g.

AUCA ~805unirank.org, KSTU ~710 unirank.org) or no significant YouTube presence at all. This represents a missed opportunity, since YouTube can host longer-form content like public lectures and documentaries highlighting university-community projects. The low uptake might be due to the effort required to produce video content and a focus on flashier social media.

TikTok remains nascent in Kyrgyz HEI marketing. As of 2025, only a handful of universities have established official TikTok accounts – for instance, Ala-Too International University, AUCA, and Kyrgyz-Kazakh University are listed as having a presence unirank.org. This means most universities are not yet leveraging TikTok, despite its popularity among young people. A few proactive steps have been taken: AUCA's International and Business Law Department, for example, ran a TikTok video contest to encourage students to create short videos showcasing campus life and the legal program auca.kg. This contest aimed to engage students and generate authentic content (with prizes for the most engaging videos) as a way to establish the university's TikTok footprint auca.kg. Such initiatives are still rare, but they signal an understanding that emerging platforms can be harnessed to reach new audiences where they spend time.

In summary, visibility varies widely across Kyrgyz HEIs on social media. A few institutions command tens of thousands of followers and post content frequently, while many others have a limited follower base and sporadic activity. This disparity suggests that some universities have dedicated social media strategies, whereas others treat it passively. Next, we examine what content is being shared – especially content related to the third mission – and how effective these efforts are in promoting community engagement and innovation.

Third Mission Content and Strategies on Social Media

A university's third mission encompasses a broad range of socially oriented activities: public lectures and educational outreach, social and civic initiatives, community partnerships, entrepreneurship and innovation programs, and more. Kyrgyzstani universities are using social media to showcase many of these initiatives, although the depth and tone of content vary. Broadly, current content strategies can be grouped into a few categories, each illustrated by examples from local HEIs:

- Public and Community Outreach Events: Many universities post about events that invite or benefit the community. For instance, the American University of Central Asia regularly shares news about outreach programs – one notable example is AUCA's free summer program for Afghan refugee children, aimed at empowering refugee youth through education and creativity instagram.com facebook.com. Such posts typically include details of the program and a call to action for community participation, signaling the university's engagement with vulnerable groups. Another example is AUCA hosting a Model United Nations conference for high school and university students, which was promoted on Instagram – an event fostering civic engagement and dialogue on global issues instagram.com. These kinds of posts highlight universities acting as venues for public discourse and youth development. However, aside from a few internationally oriented universities, open public lectures or community workshops are not heavily advertised on social media by most Kyrgyz HEIs. This suggests room to expand content about public-facing academic events (e.g. lecture series, knowledge-

sharing   workshops)   as   part   of   third   mission   promotion.

- Social and Civic Initiatives: Some HEIs highlight volunteer work and community service involving their students and staff. For example, students of Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU) participated in a volunteer visit to a Bishkek nursing home, performing songs and poems for the elderly instagram.com. This act of service was noted on social media (by the hosting organization and presumably by participants), though KRSU's own official pages could amplify such heartwarming community engagement stories more. Similarly, universities often celebrate days of national or international significance (Environment Day, Disability Day, etc.) by organizing student-led activities – when these are shared on Facebook or Instagram, they demonstrate the institution's social responsibility. Civic engagement posts, however, can be inconsistent: they often depend on student clubs or initiative of individuals rather than an institutional communication plan. A more systematic approach (e.g. a hashtag or series highlighting "#UniversityInCommunity") could help brand these efforts.

- Partnerships and Regional Development Projects: Universities use social media to announce partnerships with industries, NGOs, or local government, especially when these collaborations aim at regional development or innovation. Kyrgyz State Technical University (KGTU) named after I. Razzakov has provided a notable example: their Instagram showcased *"BATKEN 4.0"*, a project bringing digital solutions to a remote region. This included a hackathon where students and local youth developed startup ideas for the Batken region's development, strengthening university-community ties and contributing to regional digitalization. By posting about such projects, KGTU not only informs the public of its outreach but also emphasizes its relevance to economic and social challenges. Another partnership example is when universities display their links to industry through technology transfer events. KGTU's Instagram reel of students assembling the first Kyrgyz-made laptops in the university's production lab is a case in the presentation. The post described how this initiative creates opportunities for students and faculty, contributes to technological advancement, and boosts the local economy – effectively framing a tech news item as a third mission success (innovation and local economic impact). Such content resonates with the idea of universities as "engines of societal change", and social media allows these achievements to reach a broad   audience   including   potential   partners   and   supporters.

- Educational Programs and Lifelong Learning: Universities also promote workshops, trainings, and courses that extend learning to new audiences or enhance skills, aligning with the lifelong learning aspect of the third mission. An example comes from Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, which shared on Instagram about a series of research project writing seminars it offered to researchers and staff. The posts highlighted that participants gained new skills to boost their research, and noted the broader impact: fostering economic mobility and university-industry collaboration. By communicating these outcomes, the university positions itself as a contributor to professional development beyond its student population. Additionally, some universities advertise public access courses or extension programs on Facebook, although this is not widespread. Where it does occur (for instance, short courses in entrepreneurship open to the community, or language classes), it directly supports the third mission by opening

university expertise to the public. Social media coverage of these programs tends to be informational (dates, enrollment info) but could be enhanced with follow-up stories of participant success to humanize the impact.

- Student Entrepreneurship and Innovation: Entrepreneurship is a growing theme in university social media content, often overlapping with partnerships and outreach. Competitions like hackathons, startup incubators, and innovation labs are frequently posted about. Several universities (e.g. AUCA, Ala-Too University) have innovation or business accelerators and share updates on student startup successes or pitch competitions. These posts serve a dual purpose: showcasing student talent and inviting external stakeholders (investors, industry mentors) to engage. For example, posts about Enactus teams or business idea contests not only congratulate winners but implicitly communicate the university's role in nurturing future entrepreneurs – a key facet of the third mission's economic development role. However, outside a few active universities, the social media coverage of innovation tends to be sporadic event-based announcements rather than a sustained narrative.

In evaluating these content strategies, we see that Kyrgyz HEIs do produce content across the spectrum of third mission activities, but the volume and quality of such content differ by institution. According to one content analysis framework, university social media posts generally fall into five categories: Teaching, Research, Social Commitment, Organizational, and Contextual nature.com. The "Social Commitment" category corresponds to third mission content – covering community service, sustainability, and social engagement projects nature.com. Many Kyrgyz universities currently prioritize organizational and teaching content (e.g. admission info, campus news, exam schedules) on their feeds, with social commitment content being a smaller portion of total posts. In the Instagram analysis from the presentation, for instance, only a subset of posts were identified as third mission-related, and some universities (like KNU or BHU) likely had very few such posts. Others, like AUCA or Manas, had a relatively higher share. This indicates an opportunity for a more balanced content mix. A truly "engaged university" social media profile would have a balanced combination of content types – not only marketing to prospective students but also stories of community impact, research breakthroughs in local context, and inclusive dialogue with stakeholders nature.comnature.com.

Moreover, the tone and engagement style of content is worth noting. A lot of university posts in Kyrgyzstan are currently informational and monologic – that is, they broadcast news in a one-way fashion (text + photo, with formal descriptions), which corresponds to a "monologic focus" in social media communication nature.com. There is limited use of interactive or conversational techniques, such as polls, Q&A sessions, replying to comments, or user-generated content campaigns. For example, a typical Facebook post might announce "X University signed an MOU with Y Organization to collaborate on Z" – important news, but often posted without soliciting any interaction from followers. By contrast, best practices suggest moving toward a more "dialogic focus" – encouraging two-way conversations and community contributions nature.com. Some initial steps in this direction have been seen: universities thanking volunteers publicly and tagging them, or using Instagram Stories for quick student polls (e.g. "Which community project should we do next?"). However, these are not yet common. Similarly, user-generated content is underutilized. Globally, universities often

harness content created by students or alumni (for instance, photos, testimonials or takeovers) to personalize their social media and build a sense of community timeshighereducation.com. In Kyrgyzstan, aside from occasional reposts of student competition wins, the official pages rarely hand over the storytelling to their students or partners. This conservative approach could be limiting engagement – social media communities tend to grow when the audience feels like participants rather than just consumers of content.

To sum up, Kyrgyz HEIs are showcasing third mission initiatives on social media through various content types: event announcements, success stories, volunteer highlights, and innovation showcases. The effectiveness of these posts depends on how well they engage the audience emotionally and interactively. So far, the content is strongest when it tells a story (e.g. a student startup that will help their hometown, or a community event that made a local impact), but many posts remain purely informational. The next sections evaluate how effective and far-reaching these efforts have been, and how they compare with international benchmarks.

Effectiveness and Reach of Current Efforts

Evaluating the effectiveness of Kyrgyz universities' third mission promotion on social media involves looking at both quantitative reach (followers, views, engagement metrics) and qualitative impact (how the content is perceived and whether it fosters community relationships). Based on the visibility data and content analysis above, several observations can be made:

- Reach vs. University Size: There is a notable mismatch in some cases between an institution's size/importance and its social media reach. For example, Kyrgyz National University is one of the largest HEIs in the country (with tens of thousands of students), yet its official social pages have only a few thousand followers across platforms unirank.org. This implies that a large portion of KNU's own students and alumni – let alone the general public – are not tuning in to the university's social media content. A similar pattern is seen with Kyrgyz State Technical University and others which have low follower counts. Low reach means the great things these universities *are* doing in the community may not be widely known or recognized, even domestically. In contrast, smaller or newer institutions that have invested in social media (like Salymbekov University or the International Higher School of Medicine) punch above their weight in reach. Some of these have focused on specific audiences (e.g. Salymbekov Univ. appeals to local youth with frequent Instagram content; private medical universities heavily target foreign applicants via Facebook), thereby boosting their follower numbers. The takeaway is that reach is less about the size of the university and more about the strategy and consistency of content.

- Engagement Levels: While follower counts give a measure of reach, engagement (likes, comments, shares) is an even better indicator of effectiveness. Although detailed engagement statistics aren't readily available from all pages, anecdotal evidence suggests engagement is moderate at best on most Kyrgyz university posts. A post about a hackathon or volunteer event might garner a few hundred "likes" on Instagram and a handful of comments, typically from those directly involved. By comparison, purely promotional or administrative posts (like exam schedules or rector's announcements) often see very little engagement. This mirrors global patterns: content that highlights

human stories or tangible impact tends to perform better (more shares, comments) than dry announcements. For instance, AUCA's post about the Afghan refugee children's program likely resonated emotionally (empowering refugee kids is a compelling narrative), whereas a post about a routine faculty meeting would not. The challenge is converting passive followers into an active community. Right now, many HEIs have followers that scroll past content without interacting, meaning the content isn't always compelling enough or the platform algorithm isn't prioritizing it. With Instagram and Facebook algorithms favoring content that generates interactions, low engagement can further limit reach (a vicious cycle where posts are seen by fewer people due to past low   engagement).

- Platform Effectiveness: Each platform shows different strengths for third mission promotion. Facebook is effective for reaching a broad, possibly older audience including government and media circles; posts there (especially if in Russian/Kyrgyz) can be picked up by news outlets or shared in community groups. For example, when a university holds a high-profile event (like an international conference or a charity drive), a Facebook post can be easily shared by attendees and partners, extending its reach beyond the official page's followers. Facebook is also useful for posting photo albums and longer descriptions of impact – for instance, the OSCE Academy's Facebook often posts photo essays from its community workshops, generating discourse in comments. Instagram, on the other hand, is effective for visually showcasing activities and engaging the student demographic. Stories and short videos on IG can give a quick behind-the-scenes of an event (e.g. a 15-second clip of students planting trees on campus for Earth Day, with a catchy caption). Some universities have started using Instagram Reels to summarize community projects in a more dynamic, bite-sized format. However, Instagram's reach is limited if content is only in Kyrgyz/Russian without translation, since it won't be discovered by international audiences through hashtags. A few universities (AUCA notably) post in English or bilingually, which increases shareability across borders (important for international donors or alumni overseas). YouTube's effectiveness has been largely untapped except by those few who posted educational content. Where it has been used (e.g. Osh State's channel), it can attract massive viewership for content like recorded public lectures, how-to seminars, or student documentary projects. The fact that KGMA's average YouTube views per video is over 200k unirank.org hints that some content (possibly medical lectures or health advice) hit a sweet spot of public interest – a sign that universities could do more in producing high-quality informational videos for public consumption. TikTok, though new, could dramatically increase engagement if used well – it thrives on authentic, relatable content. A creative TikTok video of students executing a community project (say, a before-and-after of renovating a local playground) with a trending soundtrack could go viral far beyond the university's immediate circle. So far, though, effectiveness on TikTok is unproven for Kyrgyz HEIs; success will depend on whether they can adapt to the platform's informal, trend-driven style.

- Benchmarking to Global Peers: In absolute terms, the social media reach of Kyrgyz universities is modest compared to global universities (where top institutions have millions of followers). But a fairer comparison is with similarly sized universities in

other countries. We find that Kyrgyz HEIs lag behind in follower counts and engagement relative to many universities in Europe or North America of comparable size. For example, a mid-sized European university might have 50k+ followers and a highly professionalized social media output. One reason is that abroad, social media teams actively highlight the university's research impact and community service to build public support timeshighereducation.com. Kyrgyz university pages have only begun to do this. Another metric of effectiveness is stakeholder interaction: globally, one can see local community members (not just students) commenting on or sharing a university's posts when the university is seen as a key community player (for instance, a university helping in a local crisis or contributing to city policy). In Kyrgyzstan, such stakeholder engagement on social media is rare – comments are mostly from students or staff. This suggests that the broader public isn't yet actively following or perceiving universities as hubs of community problem-solving. Changing that perception is part of the third mission challenge, and social media could be the vehicle.

In conclusion, the current social media efforts have achieved pockets of success (some strong followings, good examples of content) but overall effectiveness is uneven. The reach of third mission messaging is limited by low engagement and inconsistent usage across platforms. There is clear evidence that where universities post compelling third mission content, they strengthen their public image: for instance, KGTU's posts about regional innovation likely improved its profile with both the local community and government stakeholders, and AUCA's outreach stories reinforce its reputation for social responsibility. Yet, many initiatives remain low-profile because of weak social media amplification. The next section will consider how international best practices could inform improvements, and what challenges must be overcome to elevate the impact of social media for the third mission.

International Comparisons and Best Practices

To put Kyrgyz HEIs' social media practices in context, it's useful to look at how universities around the world leverage social platforms to promote community engagement and innovation. Globally, universities have increasingly embraced social media not only for student recruitment but also as a storytelling platform for their societal contributions. A few best practices and trends can be highlighted:

- Strategic Storytelling and Value-Driven Content: Leading universities craft narratives on social media that underscore the *value* they bring to society. This often means sharing layperson-friendly stories of research and initiatives that solve real problems. For example, a university might post a short video showcasing how its scientists purified a local water source or how a group of students started a social enterprise – framing it as making a difference in the community. The University of Manchester, which is ranked among the top in the world for social and environmental responsibility, regularly shares content about its programs helping the community (e.g., outreach at Manchester Museum, Fairtrade campaigns) as part of its social responsibility agenda. These posts are tied to a larger institutional strategy (Manchester's is explicitly aligned with the SDGs) and reinforce the university's brand as a civic institution socialresponsibility.manchester.ac.uk. The lesson for Kyrgyz HEIs is to go beyond ad-hoc posts and develop a content strategy aligned with their third mission goals – be it

local sustainable development, public health, or educational access. Each piece of content should answer "How are we benefiting society?" in a way that is relatable. Research suggests content that is *educational, inspirational or entertaining* for the audience drives engagement timeshighereducation.com. Universities like UCLA or UBC often post "public service announcement" type content (mental health tips during exams, environmental awareness on Earth Day) which, while not directly about the university, show it cares about community well-being and thereby draw positive engagement timeshighereducation.com. Kyrgyz universities could similarly post content that provides value – e.g., a quick infographic on earthquake safety (relevant to Kyrgyzstan) courtesy of the engineering faculty, or a video tutorial on business plan writing from their entrepreneurship center. This positions the university as a helpful expert in public life, not just a school.

- Multi-Platform Audience Targeting: Successful HEIs recognize that different social platforms reach different segments of their audience and tailor their content accordingly timeshighereducation.com. For instance, Twitter/X and LinkedIn are often used by global universities to share news of research breakthroughs, policy impact, and faculty op-eds – targeting journalists, professionals, and alumni. Facebook might target local community and alumni for events and feel-good stories, Instagram targets current and prospective students with visually engaging snapshots of campus life and student initiatives, and TikTok might be used for student takeovers, trends, and challenges that show a fun, human side of the institution. A one-size-fits-all approach is avoided; instead, tone and content are adapted per platform timeshighereducation.com. In Kyrgyzstan's case, not all these platforms are equally popular (Twitter usage is low, for instance), but the concept still applies. A platform-specific strategy could involve: using Facebook (perhaps also the Russian network VK, which some locals use) for posting in Kyrgyz/Russian to reach community leaders and parents; using Instagram and TikTok in more colloquial language with student-generated media to engage youth; and maybe LinkedIn or YouTube in English for international partners/donors. By segmenting content, universities ensure the message of their third mission is heard by all stakeholders in the appropriate voice. Currently, most Kyrgyz HEIs mostly duplicate content across Facebook/Instagram in the same format, which might not optimally engage each audience.

- Campaigns and Hashtags for Social Causes: Many universities abroad run themed social media campaigns to rally support or awareness for specific causes, often using hashtags and challenges. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, universities launched campaigns like #UnivNameCares where they shared daily stories of faculty making PPE or students volunteering, encouraging others to share similar stories. Such campaigns, when done with a unifying hashtag and possibly involving influencers or notable alumni, can greatly amplify reach atlantis-press.com. Hashtag campaigns around sustainability (#CampusCleanUp), around giving/charity (#GivingDay, a fundraising drive often trending globally), or around community days (#DayofService) are common. These not only highlight third mission work but actively encourage participation from the audience (tagging volunteers, etc.), turning social media into a two-way engagement tool rather than a passive news feed atlantis-press.com. In Kyrgyzstan, universities could collaborate on a sector-wide campaign – for instance, a

"University Social Week" where multiple HEIs simultaneously showcase their community projects with a shared hashtag in Kyrgyz and English. This could draw national attention to the concept of the third mission. Additionally, partnering with local social media influencers (e.g., popular educational bloggers or civic activists) to co-create content can lend campaigns a personal touch and broaden audience trust erasmusplus.kg.

- Institutional Support and Policy: Leading institutions often formalize their social media and community engagement efforts. Some have dedicated social media managers or teams within their communications department, who are trained in storytelling, analytics, and engagement tactics. They also establish guidelines that encourage faculty and students to share their work on personal channels (thus multiplying reach while maintaining quality messaging). For example, universities might run internal workshops on "Communicating your research to the public via social media" to empower professors – this echoes the recommendation from the Erasmus+ seminar in Bishkek to use communications tools more effectively for third mission promotion erasmusplus.kg. Another aspect is high-level buy-in: when university leadership frequently speaks about social impact and even engages on social media (say, a rector writing LinkedIn articles on the university's community role), it sets a tone that third mission is core to the institution's identity. One might note that some global university presidents have active Twitter accounts to discuss education policy, community issues, etc., reflecting a top-down championing of engagement. In Kyrgyzstan, if rectors and administrators more visibly championed their university's social media outreach (perhaps even appearing in videos, or hosting live chats about social issues), it could elevate the importance of the third mission both internally and externally.

Overall, international best practices emphasize community cultivation on social media – treating followers not just as an audience but as a community of stakeholders who can engage in dialogue, contribute content, and act as ambassadors. As one higher-ed digital expert put it, having an engaged social media community requires careful attention to tone, platform differences, and content that provides genuine value or emotional connection timeshighereducation.com. The idea is to *show* the university's impact rather than just tell. For instance, rather than a press-like announcement "University X held a clean-up event," a best practice post would feature a short clip of students at the clean-up, a quote from a community member thanking them, and maybe a statistic about waste collected – a mini-story that users can connect with and share. Adopting such approaches could help Kyrgyz universities bridge the gap with global standards in third mission communications.

Challenges and Gaps in Current Practices

Implementing the above strategies and improving third mission promotion via social media is not without challenges for Kyrgyzstani HEIs. Key obstacles and gaps include:

- Limited Resources and Training: Many university PR or communications departments in Kyrgyzstan are small and operate with constrained budgets. Managing multiple social media accounts with regular, high-quality content is labor-intensive. There may not be staff with specialized training in social media management, data analytics, or

multimedia design. This can lead to infrequent posting and a reliance on basic text-and-photo updates. The need for capacity building is evident – as recognized at the April 2025 seminar, where PR/SMM specialists gathered to learn practical tools and strategies erasmusplus.kg. Without additional training or hiring of social media specialists, universities will struggle to elevate their content to the storytelling and interactive quality seen elsewhere.

● Lack of Strategic Planning: A gap in current practice is the absence of a clear social media strategy tied to third mission goals. Posts are often reactive or event-driven rather than planned as part of a campaign or content calendar. For example, if a university hosts a community event, it may post about it once, but there is no follow-up or broader narrative connecting that event to the university's mission or other initiatives. Few HEIs have defined key performance indicators (KPIs) for their social media beyond follower counts. Without a strategy, content can appear aimless or inconsistent, and opportunities to reinforce messages are missed. A strategy would help ensure, for instance, that each month a certain number of posts are dedicated to community engagement, that posts align with themes (health, environment, education, etc.), and that cross-promotion with partners happens. Currently, such coordination is minimal.

● Language and Audience Segmentation Issues: Kyrgyzstan's multilingual context (Kyrgyz, Russian, English) poses a dilemma for content: which language to use to reach the intended community? Some universities default to Russian (as a lingua franca in higher ed), which might alienate purely Kyrgyz-speaking rural communities. Others use Kyrgyz on Facebook but Russian on Instagram, or English for certain announcements (to appeal to donors or international audiences). This inconsistency can dilute messaging. If a success story is shared in Kyrgyz only, it may not get picked up by national Russian-language media or international observers, and vice versa. Crafting multilingual posts or maintaining separate language pages is extra work that not all teams can handle. As a result, some audiences remain underserved – for example, local community members in provincial areas might not even be aware of a university's projects in their region if those are only promoted in English on Instagram. Reaching across demographic groups (students vs. local elders vs. international partners) is a challenge that requires careful content planning and possibly platform-specific language choices.

● Monologic Communication Culture: As mentioned, many university communications are still stuck in a top-down, formal style that does not invite interaction. This is partly cultural – universities are traditionally seen as authoritative institutions, and there may be caution about engaging in open dialogue (fear of criticism or controversy on public forums). This leads to a gap in responsiveness: comments or inquiries on posts might go unanswered, and user-generated content (both positive and negative) is not actively acknowledged. For example, if an alumnus comments praising a community project, that's a missed chance if the university doesn't respond or highlight that testimonial. On the flip side, if someone raises a concern on social media (say, questioning the impact of a project), universities may avoid addressing it publicly, which can undermine trust. Overcoming a "broadcast" mindset and shifting to a community

management approach is a significant challenge requiring mindset and policy changes.

- Content Creation Challenges: High-quality content for third mission stories – such as well-produced videos, compelling photography, and human-interest writing – is not easy to produce consistently. Universities might lack the equipment or expertise for video editing, graphic design, etc. Student-generated content can fill this gap to some extent, but it still needs curation. Additionally, some third mission impacts are long-term or abstract (like "improved regional economy" or "better university-community relations"), which are harder to visualize and package into a quick social media post. Telling these stories in a digestible way requires creativity. If content is dull or poorly presented, it won't engage people, yet producing polished content is resource-intensive – a classic challenge.

- Measuring Impact: Another gap is the lack of monitoring and evaluation of how social media is contributing to the third mission. Are universities tracking whether social media posts lead to higher attendance at public events, more partnerships, or a better public image? Probably not in any systematic way. Without metrics tied to goals (beyond likes and shares), it's difficult to learn and adapt. For instance, if posts about entrepreneurship consistently get more engagement than posts about pure volunteer work, that insight could guide the content emphasis or approach to framing volunteer posts more effectively (maybe by highlighting entrepreneurial aspects of volunteer initiatives, such as student leadership). The current practice doesn't seem to incorporate feedback loops from social media analytics into decision making.

- External Factors: There are also external challenges. Internet accessibility and social media usage, while high among youth, may be lower in some rural communities the universities want to reach for outreach programs. Additionally, social media trends change quickly (today's TikTok might be overtaken by another platform tomorrow), requiring continuous learning – something hard to maintain without dedicated staff. Lastly, universities must compete with the noise on social media: their posts vie for attention with entertainment and commercial content. Gaining traction requires not just good content but also sometimes paid promotion or collaboration with widely followed pages, which they may not be doing.

Identifying these gaps is important because it pinpoints where interventions (training, resources, policy changes) are needed. The challenges are significant but not insurmountable. In the next section, we provide actionable recommendations that address these gaps and aim to improve the strategic use of social media for promoting the universities' third mission.

Recommendations for Enhancing Third Mission Promotion on Social Media

To strengthen the strategic use of social media by Kyrgyz HEIs in promoting community engagement, innovation, and social development, we propose the following actionable recommendations:

1. Develop a Clear Social Media Strategy Aligned with the Third Mission: Each university should create a social media strategy document that identifies key goals related to its

third mission (e.g. "engage local community in lifelong learning" or "showcase student innovations addressing social issues") and outlines how social media will support those goals. Define target audiences for each platform and the tone to use for each timeshighereducation.com. For example, use an informal, inspiring tone on Instagram to connect with students and young alumni, while a more informational tone on Facebook can engage parents, partners, and officials. Set a content calendar ensuring regular posts about third mission activities – not just during major events, but also off-cycle (e.g. a weekly "Impact Friday" post highlighting a past success or a community member's story). Having this roadmap will move communications from ad-hoc to proactive.

2. Diversify and Humanize Content – Tell Stories, Not Just News: Shift from purely informational posts to storytelling that puts a human face on the university's impact. Whenever possible, frame posts around individuals and outcomes: a short profile of a student volunteer, an interview quote from a community member who benefited, or a before-and-after photo series of a project site. For instance, instead of posting "We held a seminar for school teachers," post a photo of a teacher at the seminar with a caption like, *"Meet Aigul, a rural teacher who learned new IT skills at our workshop – 'I can't wait to bring these ideas to my students,' she says"*. Such narratives are more engaging and shareable. Utilize user-generated content by encouraging students and staff to share their own photos/videos of volunteer and project activities (perhaps create a hashtag for your university's community work) and then repost the best content on official channels (with credit) timeshighereducation.com. This not only provides authentic material but makes contributors feel valued. Aim to create content that provides *value* or inspiration to viewers timeshighereducation.com – e.g., tips from an expert (five ways to conserve water from the environmental science dept), or an inspirational success story (a graduate's startup solving a social problem).

3. Increase Interactivity and Community Engagement Online: Transform your social media pages from one-way news feeds into interactive communities. Engage, engage, and engage some more – make a habit of responding to comments and messages promptly in a friendly tone, which encourages more interaction and builds trust. Pose questions in your captions to invite discussion (e.g. "How do you think we can make our city greener? Share your ideas!" when posting about an environmental initiative). Use interactive features: polls and question stickers in Instagram Stories to crowdsource opinions or volunteer sign-ups, live Q&A sessions on Facebook or IG Live with project leaders ("Ask our Medical Academy doctors about COVID-19 prevention" for example). When followers see that the university listens and replies, they'll be more likely to participate and amplify messages. Consider hosting periodic social media contests or challenges related to third mission themes to spark engagement – similar to AUCA's TikTok contest auca.kg, challenges could include things like a photo contest of students volunteering in their hometowns, with winners featured on official pages. Contests and challenges not only generate content but also create a sense of community and fun around the university's mission.

4. Leverage Hashtags and Collaborative Campaigns: Use consistent hashtags for your initiatives to increase visibility. For example, if KGTU runs a series of hackathons for

regional development, a hashtag like #KGTU4Community can be attached to every related post. Encourage students and partners to use it too when posting. Additionally, collaborate with other universities and organizations for themed campaigns. A national campaign (perhaps facilitated by the Ministry or Erasmus+ Office) like #UniServiceWeek could see multiple universities posting their community service activities during a dedicated week, using a unified hashtag. This cross-promotion can draw media attention and foster a healthy competition/peer inspiration among HEIs to showcase their best outreach efforts. International days (like World Environment Day, International Literacy Day) offer perfect hooks for joint campaigns – e.g., on Earth Day, several Kyrgyz universities might coordinate to each post a short video of their green campus initiatives or student eco-clubs, all using #EarthDayKyrgyzstan. Such efforts align the universities with global movements and show that they are socially conscious actors.

5. Optimize Platform Use – Right Content for the Right Platform: Recognizing the strengths of each platform, tailor the content format accordingly. For Facebook, longer-form posts with multiple photos or a short video plus a detailed caption (possibly in bilingual format) work well to tell a complete story to community stakeholders. Use Facebook events feature to promote public lectures or volunteer drives so people can easily indicate interest. On Instagram, focus on high-quality visuals: invest in compelling photographs of people (faces and emotions drive engagement) and short clips. Try Instagram Reels for 30-second recaps of an event or before/after transformations. Maintain a consistent visual style that reflects your university's brand (colors, logos, hashtags on graphics). For YouTube, consider creating playlists for "Community Engagement" or "Innovation at [University]" where you upload well-produced videos: these could be recordings of public lectures, mini-documentaries of projects (even 3-5 minute videos highlighting a problem and how students/faculty addressed it), or interviews with experts on social issues. Promote these videos via your other social channels. As for TikTok, if you decide to venture there (recommended for those with sizable student populations), adopt a student-driven approach: perhaps let student volunteers or club leaders run the account or submit content, since authenticity and trend-awareness are crucial on TikTok. Keep TikTok videos informal, positive, and in tune with viral trends (while still subtly conveying the university's values). The key is don't copy-paste the same content across all platforms – repurpose it in format and tone for what works best on each timeshighereducation.com.

6. Collaborate with Influencers and Media: To broaden reach, partner with popular social media figures or local media outlets on select campaigns. For example, invite a well-known Kyrgyz blogger who focuses on education or youth issues to an event and encourage them to post about it (their outsider voice can attract followers who might not follow the university directly). Or have an alumna with a big following do an Instagram takeover for a day, showing how her university experience led her to make community impact – this can inspire current students and also showcase outcomes to the public. Engaging local journalists by sending them human-interest story tips (backed up by your social posts) can also get your third mission achievements reported in traditional media, which often then gets shared on social platforms for even wider reach. Essentially, build a network of digital advocates: enthusiastic students, alumni,

faculty, and external influencers who regularly share or contribute to your content. This not only amplifies reach but adds credibility (people trust messages coming from individuals more than institutions, typically). The April seminar specifically noted working with influencers as a tactic for effective outreach erasmusplus.kg – universities can start by identifying a few such partners and planning joint content.

7. Ensure Bilingual (or Trilingual) Communication: Overcome language segmentation by adopting a bilingual content policy wherever feasible. This could mean writing social media captions in two languages (e.g. Kyrgyz and English, or Kyrgyz and Russian) in one post – many global organizations do this to cater to multiple audiences. At least for key posts that highlight third mission efforts, providing an English summary will allow international organizations or partners to appreciate and possibly share your news (important for attracting grants and collaborations). Conversely, including Kyrgyz ensures local community members feel addressed in their native language, building goodwill. If writing in multiple languages in one post is too cluttered, consider alternating languages by platform (for instance, Facebook posts predominantly in Kyrgyz, Instagram in Russian/English mix). Also, use visuals (photos, videos) that transcend language – a powerful image of students and villagers working together on a project can speak to anyone and might get shared even without words. The goal is to maximize inclusivity of the audience, so no group feels the university's social media "is   not   for   them."

8. Professionalize and Train the Social Media Team: Invest in your communications personnel. This can involve formal training (through Erasmus+ workshops, online courses in social media management, or peer learning with social media managers from foreign universities) to learn about analytics, content strategies, and new tools. Equally, empower student interns or volunteers in communications programs to join the team – they often bring creativity and native social media savvy. Establish an editorial workflow where content is planned, reviewed for quality (text proofread, visuals checked for appeal), and posted at optimal times. Use analytics tools (the built-in Facebook/Instagram insights or third-party tools) to track which posts perform well and understand your audience demographics. For example, if you notice posts about entrepreneurship consistently get higher reach, you might increase those or analyze why (perhaps the use of certain hashtags or an alumni network sharing them). Set measurable targets like "increase engagement rate by X% next quarter" or "double the number of shares on community-related posts by year's end," and regularly review progress. Celebrating social media milestones internally (like reaching 10k followers or a successful campaign) can also motivate the team and draw administrative support.

9. Highlight and Align with Global Goals and Rankings: Connect your university's third mission efforts to global frameworks and communicate that on social media. For instance, explicitly mention relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) when posting (many universities now tag posts with icons like #SDG4 Quality Education, #SDG13 Climate Action, etc. when their projects contribute to those). This framing can make content more attractive for international audiences and show that the university is globally aware. Also, if your university achieves or aims for any rankings or recognitions in social responsibility (for example, participation in the **"UI

GreenMetric" ranking for campus sustainability, or any Times Higher Education Impact Rankings), promote that on social media. It provides an external validation of third mission commitment that can enhance credibility. Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University recently appeared in an international "Three University Missions" ranking instagram.com, which was newsworthy; sharing such achievements and explaining what they mean (i.e. how third mission is measured) can educate the public that these aspects matter. Essentially, be proud and loud about your social impact track record and ambitions – it sets a positive narrative that the university is a force for good, not just an ivory tower.

10. Monitor, Evaluate, and Adapt: Finally, implement a feedback loop. Continuously monitor social media metrics related to third mission posts – not just vanity metrics like followers, but engagement ratios (comments per post, shares per post) and community feedback. If certain content isn't gaining traction, try to learn why: Was the timing poor? Was the content not compelling or clear? Conduct occasional surveys or polls among your followers: *"What community topics would you like to see more from us?"* This can guide content creation to match audience interests. Additionally, track offline indicators of impact: Do more people show up to events after aggressive social media promotion? Are local partners referencing your social media posts in conversations (a sign your messaging is reaching them)? Adjust your strategy based on what works. Social media trends evolve, so be ready to experiment with new formats (today Reels and TikToks, tomorrow maybe something else). The goal is to gradually move your social media presence up the ladder from *"very expositive" (one-way content)* towards *"dialogic and interactive"* nature.com – where your university's pages become vibrant spaces of exchange around the university's social mission.

By implementing these recommendations, Kyrgyz universities can significantly improve their outreach and public engagement through social media. It will help them not only broadcast their third mission activities more widely, but actually involve the community in them – turning online followers into offline participants, supporters, and proud stakeholders of university initiatives. Strengthening this bridge between the university and the public via digital platforms ultimately contributes back to the third mission: it builds trust, mobilizes resources and volunteers, and elevates the university's role in social development erasmusplus.kg.

Conclusion

Kyrgyzstan's higher education institutions are poised to become powerful catalysts of positive change in society – a role encapsulated in their third mission. Social media, with its vast reach and engagement potential, is a vital instrument in this endeavor. Our analysis shows that while Kyrgyz universities have made initial strides in using platforms like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok to promote community engagement, innovation, and social development, there is substantial room for growth. The current visibility of third mission initiatives varies widely: a few universities shine with active, strategy-driven content and large followings, but many others have yet to fully tap into social media's potential. Content to date has highlighted hackathons driving regional development, university-led innovations in technology and lifelong learning workshops, student volunteerism and outreach programs – all indicating that the seeds of an engaged university culture are present. The challenge and

opportunity now is to nurture these seeds by adopting more systematic, creative, and collaborative approaches online.

International comparisons underscore that Kyrgyz HEIs can learn from global best practices in crafting compelling narratives, engaging diverse audiences, and leveraging digital tools to build a community around their mission. With intentional effort – from training communication teams and involving students as content creators, to forging a more dialogic social media presence – universities in Kyrgyzstan can significantly amplify their impact. They can showcase to the public not only *what* they do in terms of education and research, but *why it matters* for society, thereby rallying greater support and participation. In turn, a stronger public connection can feed back into university success, creating a virtuous cycle (for example, engaged communities may be more inclined to collaborate with or donate to universities, and students proud of their university's social role can become its best ambassadors).

As the concluding note, it's evident that universities are no longer just "centers of education and research" but are "engines of social change," as stated in the presentation. In Kyrgyzstan's context – with its economic aspirations, young population, and myriad social needs – the third mission is not just a theoretical add-on but a practical necessity. Social media is the megaphone that can broadcast universities' contributions to a brighter, more sustainable future, inspiring others and holding the institutions themselves accountable to their social commitments. By actively developing and investing in this aspect of communication, Kyrgyz HEIs can strengthen their third mission, ultimately helping to build a more informed, engaged, and progressive society. As one seminar speaker urged, universities must "actively develop and strengthen their third mission to create a more just, sustainable, and prosperous future" – and doing so visibly and vibrantly on social media is now an indispensable part of that call to action.

The list of sources:

Source Type	Title	Institution	Year
Presentation	Promotion of Third Mission via Social Media	National Erasmus+ Office Kyrgyzstan and HERE team, Rita Ismailova, KTU Manas	2025
Website	Official Facebook and Instagram pages of Kyrgyz HEIs	Various Universities	2024
Report	Global University Third Mission Trends	OECD	2021
Academic Paper	The Third Mission of Universities: A Comparative Study	Elsevier/ScienceDirect	2020
Policy Brief	Strategic Development of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan	Ministry of Education and Science	2023
Data Source	QS University Rankings	QS	2024
Blog/Article	Social Media Strategies for Universities	Times Higher Education	2022