Student Entrepreneurial Societies - Catalysts of Entrepreneurial Culture in Romania. Case Study: The Communication of the Universities of Timișoara SESs

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Abstract: *Student Entrepreneurial Societies (SES) were created six years ago, however there is little research done on them. The objective of this study is to find whether the websites of the SESs belonging to the main universities in Timișoara communicate effectively with the target audience, students and graduates in the first three years after*

graduation. A short introduction about the SESs, the factors that led to their emergence, will be presented, followed by the factors which determine an effective communication of a website, the premise being that for the communication process between SES and students through the website to take place, it must exist, be visible and be qualitative. The research method involves a qualitative analysis of the online communication of the SES of Timișoara universities, specifically through their online presence and the quality of their websites. To complement this analysis, the criteria of online visibility and a model for analysing academic websites will be used to measure their quality. The findings of the study show that not all universities in Timișoara have a website dedicated to SESs and their activities, nor a presence on social media. The next thing revealed is that SES activities are not routinely updated on their websites. Updating information is important on the website, but also on the social media pages, as they work in tandem to ensure an unobstructed flow of communication. The last issues found are that not all SES websites offer resources about entrepreneurship, and that some changes in the website design would positively influence the quality of the website and the communication.

Keywords: *student entrepreneurial society, online communication, website quality, visibility*

1.Introduction

Student Entrepreneurial Societies (SES) are designed to promote entrepreneurial education among students by giving them the opportunity to acquire a new set of skills, secondary to those acquired in the university courses in which they are enrolled. This study aims to uncover some of the ways in which SESs of Timișoara universities communicate their presence and activities with the external environment, consisting of students and other stakeholders, by analysing their online presence through their websites. However, before addressing this issue, it is necessary to introduce SESs and how they came into being.

1.1 The genesis of SESs

The European Union (EU) foresaw a paradigm shift in the labour market as early as 2000, when the effects of globalisation and technological development on European society were discussed at the Lisbon European Council. One of the ideas put forward to cope successfully with the coming change was the development of 'a true entrepreneurial spirit' in Europe (Eur-Lex, 2005).

However, the idea of creating SESs crystallised following Communication C17/02 of 2015, published in the Official Journal of the European Union. One of the key points of this communication is the EU Council's call to Member States to introduce entrepreneurship education at all levels of education. Furthermore, at university level, the EU Council specifies the following ideas for Member States: to support and promote "student entrepreneurship initiatives" (p. 3, 2015) by providing conducive learning environments; to provide professional advice and find entrepreneur-mentors to share their experiences and know-how in the field and, furthermore, to offer "on-the-job learning opportunities, internships and apprenticeships" (p. 3, 2015); and, last but not least, to facilitate access to business incubators for students with entrepreneurial aspirations.

These ideas were introduced in the text of the Ministry of Education (MoE) order no. 3262/2017 published in the Official Gazette in 2017, which defines the concept of a student entrepreneurial society, how it should be organised and its operating parameters (lege5.ro, n.d.). Thus, every higher education institution, accredited on the Romanian territory, has the legal obligation to create a student entrepreneurial society, whose purpose is to educate and support students and graduates in their first three years after graduation, regarding entrepreneurial education.

The duties of SESs, according to Article 3 of the order, are to create teaching materials to help students design business plans and financing projects, mentor students who want to start their own businesses, especially so that they can acquire entrepreneurial skills,

providing feedback on business ideas and start-up projects, facilitating the obtaining of funding and acting as a coordinator for other entrepreneurial activities within the university, such as stimulating enterprises.

SESs are coordinated by an executive board, made up of university teaching staff and tutors, as well as students and local business people. Members of the executive board are approved by the senate of the university to which the SES belongs.

1.2 Online communication

Universities are actively investing in online forms of communication in order to be visible to young people, to facilitate their access to information and to create a positive image of themselves (Tănase and Ciacu, 2013).

According to a survey conducted by Tănase and Ciacu (2013, p. 49), this effort on the part of universities is appreciated by students, who actively use the following means to inform themselves about university activities: website (37% of respondents); information directly from the professor or secretariat (23%); Facebook page (20%); notice board (12%) and other methods of information - email, phone or from other colleagues (2-3%). It is obvious from the above figures that the university website is the most frequently used source of information and should, therefore, be one of the main methods of communication of the university with students, but also with the external environment.

The same study highlights the fact that the most searched information by students on the university website are: timetable (73%), exams scheduling (67%) and events organised by the university (40%) (Tănase and Ciacu, 2013, p. 51). In light of these results, it is relevant to mention that SESs and the events organised by them should be visible and accessible to students visiting the university website. Another relevant information of Tănase and Ciacu's (2013, p. 52) study is that 80% of the respondents believe that the university Facebook page is a good source of communication on university activities, having a dual

role of socialisation and information. This perspective should also be taken intoaccount by SESs to promote their existence and activities.

2. Research method

The premise of this study is that in order to have an effective communication with students, the website of the SESs of Timişoara universities must meet two conditions, namely, to be visible online and to be qualitative. To see if these conditions are met, a qualitative research method was chosen, analysing the websites against the criteria of online visibility and Devi & Sharma's (2016) model factors for a quality website. In this regard, to satisfy the visibility criterion, SESs' websites must meet three conditions:

- the existence of a dedicated section for SES on the universities' main website, with a link to the SES's own website;
- the existence of an obvious promotion of SES actions on the website launch page;
- the existence of SES's own website, visible and easily accessible either from the main university website or from a popular online search engine such as Google.

The model proposed by Devi & Sharma is used to analyse the quality of academic websites. It is based on five quality factors: usability, reliability, functionality, content and presentation; where the first three factors are part of the ISO 9126-1 quality model (Devi & Sharma 2016, p. 236). As it can be seen in Figure 1 below, each of the five quality factors have a number of sub-factors that allow for a more detailed analysis of the quality of academic websites.
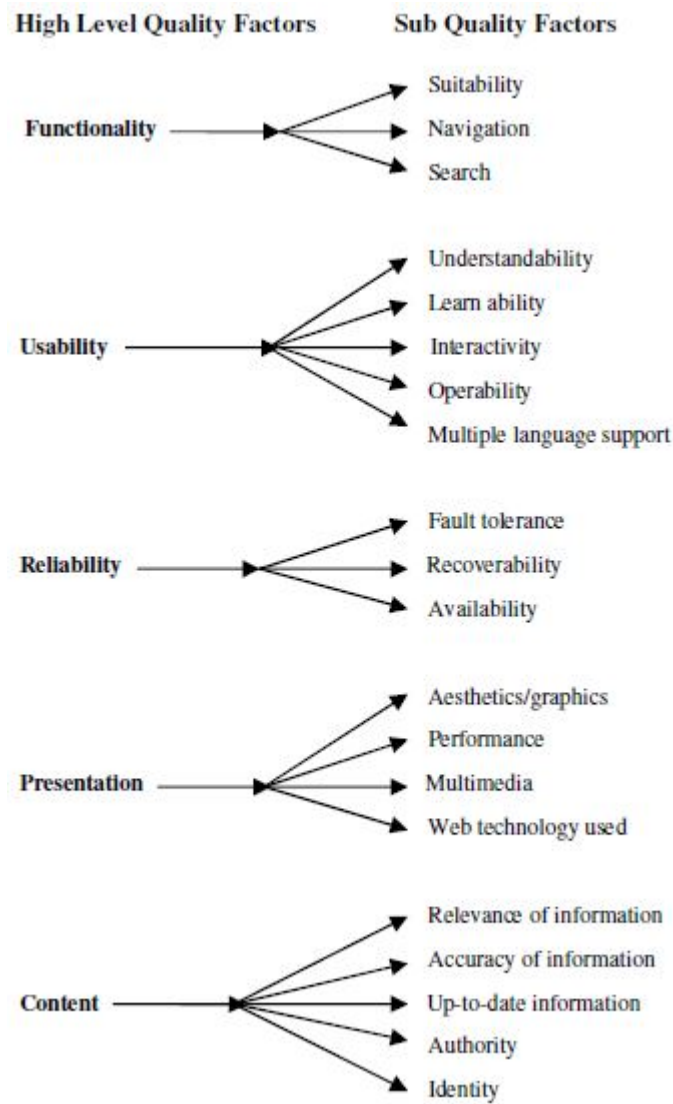
High Level Quality Factors   **Sub Quality Factors**

Functionality
- Suitability
- Navigation
- Search

Usability
- Understandability
- Learn ability
- Interactivity
- Operability
- Multiple language support

Reliability
- Fault tolerance
- Recoverability
- Availability

Presentation
- Aesthetics/graphics
- Performance
- Multimedia
- Web technology used

Content
- Relevance of information
- Accuracy of information
- Up-to-date information
- Authority
- Identity

Figure 1. Framework for assessing the quality of an academic website (Devi & Sharma, 2016, p. 236).

3. Results

3.1 Student Entrepreneurial Society of Politehnica University Timișoara

The first criterion that the SES must meet to ensure communication with students and alumni online is a visible presence on the websites of the university to which it belongs and the existence of its own webpage.
Accessing the website of Politehnica University of Timișoara (UPT) and searching among its pages, we do not find any reference to the SES of the university. In the section "Students", subsection "Student organisations", there is no reference to the existence of a SES within UPT. However, in the website menu there is a special section called "Entrepreneurship", from which we can infer that there is a specialised department dealing with the development of students' entrepreneurial skills, but there is no mention of the university's SES here, either.

The next step in validating visibility was a search for the keyword "student entrepreneurial society" using the search option on the main UPT webpage. This search returned no results.

SESs need to have their own websites to be visible online. A search for the keywords "UPT student entrepreneurial society" on the Google search engine produces a number of results, along these lines. The first result is the InoHub UPT website, but only the 4th result mentions that InoHub UPT is related to SES UPT. Accessing the InoHub UPT webpage, this is still not clear, finding the first reference to InoHub UPT actually being the SES of UPT, if we scroll down the initial page to the "News" section and the Facebook widget. Also, InoHub UPT is clearly defined as SES of UPT, if one clicks on the "+" button at the top right of the screen, unfolding a pop-up with this information. With its own website, the UPT SES partly meets the visibility criterion.

Although online visibility is a decisive factor for initiating communication, the communication itself, using a website, is dependent on its quality. Using Devi & Sharma's (2016) model, we can see that the

InoHub UPT website partially fulfils two of the sub-factors of functionality, and completely fulfils the third one. Thus, the InoHub website has a good navigational structure, which is evident by the logical and clear way in which the website menu has been created. The sub-sections of the "Students", "Alumni" and "About" pages are also well defined, and the nature of the information that students and alumni can find if they access these pages is obvious. As for the other two sub-factors of functionality, the InoHub UPT website has only one method of searching for information, individually accessing each page of the website, and the Alumni section is not complete and the information on the website is not updated with SES activities.

The usability factor of the InoHub UPT website is almost fully satisfied, except for the sub-factor of translation into several languages, this website does not have this option. However, this is an easy fact to remedy. Otherwise, the information on the website is easy to understand, using familiar language, respecting the comprehensibility sub-factor. The design of the website is classic, easy to grasp and operate, with hidden sections having written prompts such as "Click here!", the website meets the sub-factors of learnability of a website and operability. As for the interactivity sub-factor, the InoHub UPT website has a sub-section dedicated to SES contact details in the "About" section of the menu, but it also offers students the possibility to contact SES members via a Facebook Messenger web chat, which can be found at the bottom right-hand side of each website page.

We will consider that the InoHub UPT website meets the reliability factor, as we have not encountered any technical difficulties in any of its multiple accesses and navigations.

The presentation factor of Devi & Sharma's (2016) model is fully satisfied, with each of the four sub-factor criteria being met. Aesthetically, the InoHub website has a simple and pleasing design, using shades of blue and grey on a white background, mirroring the design of the main UPT website. The performance of the website is fast, a fact that is constant during several navigations of the website, and the

sub-factor type of web technology is fulfilled by the fact that this website can be accessed correctly using the Google search engine. In terms of the multimedia sub-factor, the InoHub UPT website is littered with multiple such media: images from conferences, interactive content present via the Facebook Messenger web chat, a Facebook widget on the website launch page, and user-generated content through student and alumni testimonials present on various pages of the website.

At the bottom of the InoHub UPT website, social media buttons to Instagram and Twitter can be found, in addition to the Facebook one, as well as access to a dedicated SES app. It is important to note that InoHub UPT has an active presence on Facebook, which is relevant due to the popularity of this social media channel among students as a source of information on SES activities. The society's Twitter page is active but not updated, and the Instagram page no longer exists, although its corresponding button still exists on the SES website.

The last factor that will be used to analyse the quality of the InoHub UPT website is the content, which is particularly important in the context of communication. The SES website fulfils almost all the criteria of the content sub-factors. Starting with the sub-factor relevance of information, all the information provided by the InoHub UPT website is relevant to the topic of entrepreneurship education. In particular, the sub-sections "Useful Resources" and "Guide" in the "Students" section contain abundant and well-structured resources for students interested in starting their own business. The information on the website is grammatically and spelling correct, thus meeting the accuracy of information sub-factor, but the information is not up-to-date and complete as required by the up-to-date information sub-factor. The copyright and identity sub-factors are met. The InoHub UPT website has a dedicated contact page, which gives students multiple possibilities to contact SES members: contact form, exact address, phone number and email address. The InoHub UPT logo is present at the top left of each page of the website, linking the SES to the university to which it belongs, not only by adding the UPT acronym in

its name, but also by integrating the university logo into the SES logo. Although I have tried to treat each factor and sub-factor individually and separately, they actually work together, each influencing the outcome of the others. Thus, in order to enhance the effectiveness of thecommunication of the InoHub UPT website, it is necessary that all the factors and sub-factors of Devi & Sharma's (2016) model are fulfilled. Inthe case of the UPT SES, this objective is relatively easy to meet: the SESmust be presented on the university's website, and this must be linked to the SES website; the InoHub UPT page must be constantlysupplemented and updated, including social media buttons, and search and translation options in other languages of circulation must be addedto the website.

3.2 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the West University of Timișoara

The SES of West University of Timișoara (UVT) is mentioned on the university's main webpage in the "Education" section, sub-section "Facilities for Students". Accessing this link automatically opens a new page, the SES UVT webpage. A search for the keywords "student entrepreneurial society", using the search option on the main UVT website, leads to a series of articles about SES UVT activities. SES's activity is promoted on the university's main webpage. The first result when searching the terms "UVT student entrepreneurial society" on the Google search engine takes us directly to the SES page, which is described as such in the presentation displayed by Google. Thus, in terms of visibility, the SES website is well represented.

Analysing the SES UVT website through the functionality factor, it can be seen that the website has a good navigation structure, the menu is well defined and clear, and the pages are linked by a series of buttons that take the user directly to the desired web page section, thus fulfilling the requirements of the navigation sub-factor. On the other hand, the searchand suitability sub-factors are not met, as the website has only one option for finding information, page-by-page navigation,

and the information on the website is not up-to-date and accessible to all users.

In the case of the usability factor, the SES UVT website complies with all factors except for the multilingual translation factor, as this option is not present on the website. The terms and links use familiar language, and the website design is easy to understand and operate, thus meeting the requirements of the sub-factors comprehensibility, learnability of a website and operability. In terms of the interactivity sub-factor, there is a Contact section in the website menu, which contains a contact form through which students can initiate a conversation with SES members.

The SES UVT webpage functioned perfectly during each access and navigation of the webpage, thus meeting the requirements of the reliability factor.

The second to last factor of the SES UVT website analysis is the presentation. In terms of aesthetics, the website is attractive, mirroring the website of the university it belongs to by using similar colours, shades of blue, grey and black on a white background. Browsing the website, there is no noticeable delay in its response to user requirements and the SES UVT website opens correctly when accessed using the Google search engine, respecting the sub-criteria of performance and web technology type. In terms of the multimedia sub-factor, there is an interactive animation on the launch page, a promotional video of an event on the website in their dedicated section, various images are on all pages of the website, and the social media buttons are present at the bottom of the website launch page. In terms of social media channels, SES UVT uses three: Instagram, Facebook and YouTube, all of which have corresponding buttons on the SES website. Both the Instagram and Facebook pages are more up-to-date than the YouTube channel, although posts are made sporadically, they are done consistently. SES UVT's YouTube channel is the least used, with only three videos added two years ago, one interview and two promotional videos.

The content factor of the model used in the analysis is not fully

met, which influences the effectiveness of SES UVT's communication with its target audience, students and alumni. The information found on the website is only a series of articles, in the form of a blog, about the field of entrepreneurship, the last one having been added three years ago, satisfying the requirements of the information relevance sub-factor, but not those of the up-to-date information sub-factor. However, in order to access more information about the field, users have to become members of SES UVT, which might discourage students who do not have a clear interest in entrepreneurship. The other three sub- factors of content, accuracy of information, copyright and identity, are met. The information on the SES UVT website is grammatically and spelling correct, there is a dedicated contact section with a form created for this purpose, and the SES UVT logo is present on every page. The logo communicates the SES membership of the university by integrating the UVT logo into it.

3.3 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Life Sciences"King Michael I" of Timișoara

The SES of the University of Life Sciences "King Michael I", called SES-USA-TM, is visible on the main page of the university, being placed in the "Departments" section of the page, through an image with the logo of the society. The logo image is actually a link to the SES website. SES-USA-TM does not have a separate website, it is integrated into the university webpage. A search for the term "student entrepreneurial society" on the university's webpage yields two results: a link to the SES-USA-TM launch page and a link to the "About Us" section of the society's webpage. Using the Google search engine to search for SES-USA-TM, we are directed to the "About Us" section page of the SES website. It is important to note that the Google page description clearly and specifically defines what SES does and why it is of interest to students. Taking these results into account, it can be argued that SES-USA-TM complies significantly with the criterion of online visibility, as defined in this study, even though there is no information about SES

activity promoted on the main university web page.

Of the three sub-factors of functionality, only the navigability sub-factor is partially met, as the SES-USA-TM webpage has a simple menu that is easy to understand. The reason why the navigation sub-factor is not fully met is due to the fact that under the menu is a banner about this year's university admissions, the same one that exists on the main university webpage. The presence of the banner is not relevant to SES activity and may confuse the user. In terms of the suitability of the website, the information on the website has not been updated for four years, and the search sub-factor is not met either, as the SES website is actually a sub-section of the university's website, and an attempt to search for information about SES does not produce specific results, but some general ones about the university itself.

As for the usability factor, the website uses easy-to-understand language, has a classic structure, is not difficult to navigate, and provides students with a contact email address of SES-USA-TM members. Thus, the SES-USA-TM website meets the requirements of the sub-factors of comprehensibility and learnability of a website, interactivity and operability. The only sub-factor that is not satisfied is the multi-language translation sub-factor. Although the button for this option exists, probably due to the fact that the SES website is linked to the university website, once accessed, the user receives an error message saying that the page searched for is not available.

With the exception of the error mentioned above, the SES-USA-TM website did not offer any other technical difficulties during several accesses and navigations of the website, thus partially meeting the reliability factor.

Being part of its university's website, the SES-USA-TM website is built in the same image as the university's website, thus meeting the criterion of the aesthetics sub-factor of presentation. From the perspective of performance and type of web technology, the SES-USA-TM website did not show any delays in meeting the required requirements and could be accessed using the Google search engine. As

for the multimedia sub- factor, there is only one image of the university used on the launch page, and otherwise no other multimedia appears on the website. Searching for SES-USA-TM's presence on the most popular social media channels, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, no results were found.

The requirements of the content factor were partially met, with the information provided on the website being grammatically and spelling correct. There are also two sub-sections, "Careers" and "Contact", which provide the possibility for students to initiate a discussion with SES members, and the SES-USA-TM logo can be found on all pages of the website, satisfying the sub-factors of accuracy of information, copyright and identity. In contrast, the sub-factors of relevance and timeliness of information are not met. Although there is information describing the SES mission, events and some projects, it is described very briefly and it has not been updated for over four years.

3.4 Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Medicine andPharmacy "Victor Babes" in Timişoara

The Student Entrepreneurial Society of the University of Medicine and Pharmacy "Victor Babes" (UMFT) does not have a visible online presence. Only one activity of the SES is presented on the main webpage of the university. On the same page, there is also a presentation of the results of this project. To find this information, students should search for the acronym "SES" on the university website. Otherwise, no other clear information about the university's SES can befound on the UMFT website, as it does not have a special section on the website. The UMFT website has been re-created, recently, and is still under construction, so some sections still have no information. There is such a sub-section, called "Entrepreneurial University", where information about SES and its work could be added in the future. SES UMFT does not have its own webpage resulting from a Google search, nor does it have a social media presence. Instead, on Facebook, a form of organisation within the university, that is involved in entrepreneurial education activities,

called the UMFT Entrepreneurial Advisory Board can be found. However, there is no mention of whether this council has a link to the university's SES.

4. Conclusions

The present study may be the first in the country to investigate communication within SES, specifically communication via websites. In order to ensure effective online communication, SESs need to have a quality website that is visible. Thus, we discovered that not all universities in Timișoara have a website dedicated to SESs and their activities. In terms of online visibility, this is the first thing that needs to be achieved. Also, social media presence increases the online visibility of SES and their websites, so SESs need to build a presence in this direction as well, if they don't already exist. The next thing revealed by the study is that SES activities are not routinely updated on their own websites, which can work to the disadvantage of SES as it ignores a popular communication channel among students. Updating information is also important for social media pages, with these and the website working in tandem to ensure an unobstructed flow of communication. Another aspect, found in this study, is that not all SES websites offer resources on entrepreneurship, which could spark student interest if they had access to them. Also, some changes in the website design, as modelled by Devi & Sharma (2016), such as introducing the search function or offering users the possibility to view the page in multiple languages, would positively influence the quality of the website, and at the same time communication.

Concretely, to ensure effective communication, InoHub UPT needs to be defined as SES of UPT in a clear way on its webpage. It also needs to create a presence on the university's webpage, update information about its activities, as it does on Facebook, and on its own website, but also on other social media channels, and last but not least, work a bit on the webpage design, adding search and translation options in several languages. In the case of the website, InoHub UPT

needs to make sure that the Alumni section is completed, being the only one of the SESs studied to have a dedicated alumni section on the website, which is an advantage as the SESs are also targeting them, not only as beneficiaries of their activities in the first three years after graduation, but also as possible mentors for the next generations. Another example of good practice in InoHub UPT communication, which is not shared by the other SESs studied and which it is recommended that they adopt, is that they have a "library" of resources on their website about the field of entrepreneurship in general and, specifically, about how to open and run a business.

Although SES UVT is visible online, its website is linked to the university's website and easy to find, it needs to be updated with information about its activities, as do the society's Facebook and Instagram pages. Like the InoHub UPT webpage, the SES UVT website would benefit from adding search and translation options in multiple languages. Websites are sources of information for users, accessing the information they are looking for in an easy and structured way ensures their interest and future use of the website. From this point of view, I believe that restricting access to information about entrepreneurship to SES members only is a disadvantage for SES UVT, which may cause disinterest among students who access the page. The strengths of the SES UVT website are its aesthetics and ease of navigation, with pages linked to each other by buttons that ensure a fast browsing experience.

SES-USA-TM does not have an individual website, their webpage is linked to the university website. From this point of view, SES-USA-TM is easy for students to find, but the downside of this arrangement is that the settings of the university's main page interfere with those of the society page, which can cause confusion and affect the communication process. Of all the SESs studied, SES-USA-TM is the most visible online when the society is searched on the Google search engine. Thus, I recommend that SES-USA-TM build its own website, taking into account the criteria of a quality website. SES-USA-TM should also create social media pages dedicated to the

company, which should not be ignored when it comes to online communication. SES-USA-TM needs to work on the content of its website, as the information on the website isvague and the information about activities is not up-to-date. In light of these observations, students who turn to the website for informationabout SES-USA-TM may be discouraged into thinking that the society is not active. To avoid this and to ensure effective communication, Irecommend that SES-USA-TM add information about its current activities and resources about the field of entrepreneurship.

Of all the SESs studied, SES UMFT is the only one without visible online communication. An advanced search on the UMFT website reveals that the society exists and is active, but the information is scattered and difficult to find; the website does not have a section dedicated to the society. SES UMFT does not have its own website or presence on socialmedia channels. From this perspective, students who are interested in SES UMFT activities and want to search for information online will not find any mention of it. In order to communicate effectively online, I recommend SES UMFT to create an online presence through its own website, which is also visible on the university website and through thesocial media channels.

In conclusion, in order to ensure effective communication, it is recommended that SESs have their own websites, but their presence should also be promoted on the websites of their universities. Social media presence should not be ignored, as it and the websites work together in the communication process. The information on the SES website should be up-to-date, relevant, interesting and complex enough to support their mission of educating students and graduates in entrepreneurship. Some care should be taken in the way websites are designed, small aspects that facilitate the communication process.

The communication of universities' SESs with the external environment is not an extensively researched topic, so there is the possibility of creating many other studies in this direction. The following examples are just a few possibilities for study: social media

presence and communication of SESs; the impact of online communication on students, but also on alumni; but also effective methods of communication of SESs with alumni.

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