

Exploring the Impact of Digital Communication Platforms on Student Engagement: Evidence from Youth League Activities at Jiangyang City Construction College

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were (1) to explore students' experiences using digital communication platforms in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College, (2) to identify the benefits and challenges of digital communication platforms in fostering student engagement, and (3) to understand how digital communication platforms influence collaboration, motivation, and participation in youth league activities. This study employed a qualitative research design to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions and lived experiences. The population of the study consisted of students at Jiangyang City Construction College who actively participated in youth league activities, and purposive sampling was used to select 12 respondents with direct experience using digital communication platforms in this context. The primary research tool was semi-structured, in-depth interviews, which allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and viewpoints. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis, involving systematic coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to student engagement. The results of this study found that digital communication platforms play a central and indispensable role in organizing, coordinating, and sustaining youth league activities. The findings indicate that these platforms enhance student engagement by improving communication efficiency, increasing accessibility to information, and supporting collaboration, motivation, and participation among students. At the same time, the study identified challenges such as information overload, unequal levels of participation, and concerns regarding reduced face-to-face interaction. Overall, the study concludes that digital communication platforms are powerful tools for enhancing student engagement in youth league activities when they are strategically managed and thoughtfully integrated with in-person interaction to support inclusive, balanced, and meaningful engagement.

Keywords: Digital Communication Platforms, Student Engagement, Youth League Activities, Higher Education, Qualitative Content Analysis

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has transformed communication practices within higher education institutions, reshaping how students interact, collaborate, and participate in academic and extracurricular activities. Digital communication platforms, such as WeChat, and other social and institutional applications have become integral tools for disseminating information, coordinating activities, and maintaining continuous interaction among students and educators. These platforms offer flexible, real-time communication channels that extend engagement beyond traditional face-to-face settings, thereby influencing students' participation and sense of involvement in institutional programs (Gopinathan et al., 2022; Pasi & Dhamak, 2025; Uzorka & Odebiyi, 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Student engagement is widely recognized as a critical factor in students' personal development, learning outcomes, and overall educational experience. Engagement extends beyond academic classrooms to include extracurricular and co-curricular activities, which play

an essential role in fostering leadership, teamwork, social responsibility, and civic awareness (Kahu, 2013; Papavasileiou et al., 2025). Among these, youth league activities in Chinese higher education institutions serve as an important platform for cultivating students' ideological development, organizational skills, and community participation. As such activities increasingly rely on digital communication platforms for organization and interaction, understanding how these tools influence student engagement has become an important area of inquiry (Buzinde et al., 2019; Hou, 2024).

Existing studies on digital communication platforms in education have largely focused on academic learning environments, online instruction, and classroom interactions, emphasizing outcomes such as learning performance, communication efficiency, and technology acceptance. In contrast, limited attention has been given to extracurricular contexts, particularly youth league activities that rely on voluntary participation, peer interaction, and collective identity. In addition, much of the existing research employs quantitative methods, which often overlook students' lived experiences and perceptions. There is also a lack of context-specific qualitative studies that examine how digital communication platforms influence student engagement in institutional settings, especially in vocational and construction-focused colleges such as Jiangyang City Construction College.

This gap highlights the need for in-depth qualitative research to understand how digital communication platforms shape interaction, collaboration, and motivation in youth league activities. Therefore, this qualitative study explores students' experiences and perceptions through semi-structured interviews at Jiangyang City Construction College. It aims to understand how digital communication platforms facilitate or hinder interaction, collaboration, and motivation in youth league activities, while offering insights for both academic research and practical strategies to enhance student engagement.

Research Methodology

Qualitative research seeks to explain how and why a specific social phenomenon or program functions within a given context, providing insights into the social world and the factors that influence its current state (Limna & Shaengchart, 2025). In this study, a qualitative methodology was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of how digital communication platforms influence student engagement in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enables the exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions, which are essential for understanding complex engagement processes related to digital communication, peer collaboration, and organizational practices within youth league programs. The population of the study comprised students at Jiangyang City Construction College who actively participated in youth league activities and regularly used digital communication platforms for coordination and interaction. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had direct and relevant experience with these platforms in the context of youth league involvement. A total of 12 participants were recruited, including youth league members and student organizers who were actively engaged in planning, communicating, and participating in youth league activities. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This involved a systematic and iterative process of data familiarization, coding meaningful segments of text, organizing codes into categories, and identifying overarching themes related to student engagement and digital communication. This analytical approach allowed for the identification of patterns and relationships across participants' accounts while preserving the contextual richness of their experiences. Through this rigorous methodological process, the study generated credible and context-specific insights into how digital communication platforms facilitate or hinder student engagement in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College.

Result

This study involved twelve students actively engaged in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College, all of whom had sustained experience using digital communication platforms. The respondents represented diverse academic disciplines and levels of responsibility, including both general members and student leaders, enabling the study to capture a range of perspectives on digital platform use in youth league contexts.

The study's findings indicate that digital communication platforms are central to the organization and daily operation of youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College. Students primarily used instant messaging applications and social media groups for announcements, scheduling, coordination, and information sharing, making them the dominant channels for day-to-day communication. These platforms were widely perceived as convenient and flexible, allowing students to remain consistently informed and actively involved while balancing academic demands with extracurricular responsibilities. Furthermore, participants identified several benefits of digital communication platforms, including increased accessibility to information, improved communication efficiency, greater clarity and transparency of messages, and a stronger sense of inclusion and organizational connectedness among members. At the same time, challenges were also evident, particularly information overload, unequal levels of online participation, and concerns about reduced face-to-face interaction, which some students felt could weaken interpersonal relationships and the depth of social bonds. Overall, the findings demonstrate that digital communication platforms positively influence collaboration, motivation, and participation in youth league activities by facilitating teamwork, enabling timely feedback and recognition, and supporting continuous engagement beyond physical meetings. However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends on careful and strategic management to ensure that online communication complements rather than replaces in-person interaction, thereby supporting inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable student engagement.



Figure 1 Word Cloud

The word cloud presented in Figure 1 visually synthesizes the dominant themes identified in the analysis, including engagement, communication, collaboration, motivation, participation, inclusion, and efficiency. The prominence of these terms reflects their central role in shaping students' experiences and underscores the interconnected nature of digital communication and student engagement in youth league activities. In summary, this synthesis confirms that digital communication platforms exert a significant and multifaceted influence on student engagement at Jiangyang City Construction College in China. When strategically

and thoughtfully implemented, these platforms enhance communication efficiency, foster collaboration, and strengthen student motivation and participation, thereby contributing to more dynamic and inclusive youth league activities.

Discussion and conclusions

This study explored the impact of digital communication platforms on student engagement in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College. The findings reveal that digital communication platforms play a central role in facilitating communication, coordination, and participation among youth league members. Students widely used these platforms to access information, organize activities, and maintain continuous interaction with peers and leaders. The results further indicate that digital communication platforms enhance student engagement by improving accessibility, fostering collaboration, and increasing motivation. Students reported that timely updates, online discussions, and recognition of contributions encouraged active involvement and sustained participation. At the same time, the findings highlight several challenges, including information overload, unequal levels of participation, and the potential reduction of face-to-face interaction. Overall, the results demonstrate that while digital communication platforms significantly support youth league engagement, their effectiveness depends on thoughtful and balanced implementation.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital communication platforms shape student engagement in extracurricular contexts. Consistent with existing literature on digital communication and student engagement, the results suggest that digital platforms serve as effective tools for enhancing behavioral, emotional, and collaborative engagement. The ease of communication and flexibility afforded by digital platforms align with contemporary students' communication preferences, thereby increasing their willingness to participate in youth league activities (Bajaj, 2020; Han et al., 2024).

The positive influence of digital communication platforms on collaboration reflects their capacity to support group-based interaction, task coordination, and shared decision-making. These findings support engagement theories that emphasize interaction and social connection as key drivers of sustained participation. Furthermore, the motivational effects observed in this study highlight the importance of timely feedback, visibility of peer contributions, and inclusive communication practices in fostering a sense of belonging and commitment among students (Noe et al., 2010; Tadjibaeva, 2025; Xue et al., 2025).

However, the challenges identified underscore the need for careful management of digital communication. Information overload and passive participation may undermine engagement if not addressed through clear communication guidelines and active facilitation. In addition, the potential weakening of face-to-face interaction suggests that digital platforms should complement, rather than replace, in-person activities (Chu, 2025; Bondanini et al., 2025; Simon et al., 2025; Umoren & Ukpe, 2025). This balance is essential for maintaining strong interpersonal relationships and a cohesive youth league community.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that digital communication platforms have a significant and multifaceted impact on student engagement in youth league activities at Jiangyang City Construction College. These platforms enhance communication efficiency, support collaboration, and increase student motivation and participation. By enabling continuous interaction and multiple forms of engagement, digital communication platforms contribute to more inclusive and dynamic youth league activities. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that digital communication platforms present inherent challenges that must be managed strategically. Without intentional moderation and integration with offline activities, the benefits of digital engagement may be diminished. Overall, the study concludes that digital communication platforms are valuable tools for youth league engagement when used in a balanced, purposeful, and student-centered manner.

Suggestion

The findings of this study have several important implications and recommendations. For youth league organizers and student leaders, the results highlight the need to develop clear communication strategies that minimize information overload and encourage active participation. Establishing guidelines for message frequency, content clarity, and inclusive interaction can enhance the effectiveness of digital platforms. At the institutional level, Jiangyang City Construction College may consider providing training or workshops to improve students' and leaders' digital communication skills. Such initiatives could promote equitable participation and ensure that digital platforms are used in ways that support collaboration and motivation. Additionally, integrating digital communication platforms with face-to-face activities can help maintain strong interpersonal connections while maximizing the benefits of online engagement. Future studies could examine the long-term effects of digital communication platform use on leadership development, social relationships, and sustained participation in youth league activities.

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