

# Analysis of Communication of Croatian Faculties through Facebook - Part I

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**Abstract.** *In the 21st century, if a faculty wants to have an effective communication with their fans (for example former, potential or existing students) it must include social networking sites and see them as very important way of communication. With the number of internet, as well as social networking users constantly increasing, it is important and sometimes even vital for faculties to be present on and, consequently, to be proactive. Today social networks facilitate relationship-building since they have become a very powerful communication tool between users, as well as between faculties and their fans. The aim of this paper was to analyse the way Croatian faculties communicate with their fans via Facebook. The paper also shows differences between private and public institutions and their way of communicating with their fans.*

**Keywords.** communication, Croatian faculties, internet, social networking, Facebook.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays if company wants to survive, it needs appropriate marketing and communication strategies so they need to improve effectiveness of both online marketing and communication strategies. New internet marketing strategies include new ways of targeting, focusing on benefits; product strategy emphasising authenticity and promotion based on well-managed websites. By using such marketing strategies, companies can go beyond “one-to-one” and develop “many-to-many” communications [14, 64]. Electronic communication channels are used by companies to cope in the current dynamic environment because they make it possible to meet across geographic and cultural boundaries [18, 191] and potentially reach international audience. With the advent of the internet, many marketing communication researchers realised that this new

medium would bring new opportunities for the marketing communication process.

A few years ago internet communication appeared, and today it is affected by a tremendous speed of development and it is not enough „just to be there“, companies need to define its objectives and strategies not to develop their web site, or pages on social networks in a standard or in a „me too“ format. Companies need to be present and interactive. Therefore the situation should change from active consumer-passive company to active consumer-active company in which both sides are looking for long-term relationships [23, 109].

There are different ways of communicating with different groups/segments of consumers and it is important to know the communications media to which each group responds. Communication is defined as a two-way process: it involves receiving information (and acting on it) as well as sending it [1, 69].

This paper will try to analyse the way Croatian faculties communicate with their consumers (fans) via Facebook.

## 2. Internet communication

Digital technology, especially the internet is the key to major technological changes in the media image of the 21st century. At the beginning, the internet was seen as an opportunity for marketers to contact their customers and to interact with them. Today, it became clear that consumers are using the internet to interact with each other and it dramatically facilitates consumer interconnections [12, 82]. Also that internet makes it easier for consumers to spread their words, and facilitates access to such opinions in the same way as they do offline and their opinions can reach far beyond the local community, because consumers all over the world can access them via the internet [5, 479].

The development of the internet has brought dramatic changes not only in how individuals communicate every day, but also in how organizations conduct their businesses. Technology development makes creation of content incredibly easy and virtually free, both for consumers and the media [17, 2]. The World Wide Web has revolutionized relations between organizations and their public [2, 381] and it is considered to be the first mass medium allowing direct communications between organizations and their public. Through the web marketers can communicate directly with their public with transparency, frankness and democracy [13, 167]. “The internet has broken the barriers of classical communication models as each recipient is a sender too [20, 35-36].”

Company has to communicate with their audiences or their public (consumers, investors, employees) in order to survive and develop as entities. The modern communication techniques permit reaching more and more public faster than before and allow increasing the freedom of action for the public. They offer new ways of transmitting the message, more efficient way to reach the public and more sophisticated ways to convince it but they also bring unexpected challenges [20, 33].

Interactive media, particularly the internet, allow an easy flow of information, because of which users can participate in, and modify the form and content of the information they receive in real time. Traditional media are a one-way medium, as companies are not aware of the response to it. On the other hand, the new media allow users to perform a variety of functions (receive information, make inquiries, respond to questions and make purchases) [3]. And what is very important, traditional media need to adapt to demands of new audiences. Instead of passive consumers, new types of users appear, active creators of forms and content of new media [16, 51].

Today, marketers are seeking for much more than just a one-time exchange or transaction with customers. Similar to marketers, companies have started to pay more attention to understanding customers and their behaviour and also to develop and sustain long-term relationships with their customers. They have realized that by using the right information about their customers, they can gain a competitive advantage in their business surroundings. Companies can use the Internet to structure their information to respond instantly to expanding

issues and market developments and changes [13, 167]. It is all about creativity, imagination and ability of sender of messages to offer people a good reason to change beliefs about the company, product or service.

### **3. Communication through social networking sites**

Social networks are considered to be one of the largest internet developments, or rather, phenomenon in the 21 century and today it takes a considerable part of internet activities that enables users to be part of a large, international community and to share information, opinion and content with other members of the network and they “allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others” [7]. The goal of a social network, as the word itself implies, is networking of users so that they can exchange information, pictures, music, experiences and everything that interests them as individuals. Also social networking sites are instruments for building social networks, for individuals with similar education, lifestyles, interests, or activities [4, 1].

Social networks represent relationships between individuals and groups of people within a community. In practice, a social network creates family, friendly, professional and organizational relationships. The theory of social networking has developed successful techniques in many fields, including sociology, anthropology, psychology and organization. Analysis of social networks are used as analysis of the organizational structure of staff, identification of individuals or as a proposal of structural changes to improve efficiency [22]. “One of the main advantages of online social networking is the ability to create and manage a diffuse network of weak ties”. [15, 385]

First it came into existence as a communication and sharing tool and today it become much more. Nyland and Near (2007) performed an exploratory factor analysis and found five uses of social networking sites: (1) Meeting new people, (2) Entertainment, (3) Maintaining relationships, (4) Learning about social events and (5) Sharing media [15, 382]. By participating in social networking sites, users share a piece of themselves with others. They disclose information such as their name, e-mail address, gender, date of birth, location, political

and religious affiliation, relationship status, and sexual preference. But also they self-disclose, give additional information about themselves, such as general interests (e.g. hobbies), entertainment interests (e.g. favourite books, movies, music, or TV shows), photographs, videos and so on.

In literature are mentioned four different approaches to understand social networks, or better said the four fundamental features of social networks, and they are [21, 28]:

1. interaction approach (based on the contacts individuals have with others over a period of time)
2. role relation approach (it focuses on the types of roles which impact on individuals, such as family members or intimate friends)
3. affection approach (individuals' subjective criteria to determine who is the most important for him/her)
4. and, exchange approach (individual behaviour based on specific rewarding systems to determine the scope and composition of one's social network).

According to research conducted in 2011 internet users use different platforms to share online content with different groups of people, and social networks are the top method for sharing content with friends (92% of users do so), while email is the most popular way to share with family (86% of examinees says so). In sharing online content with the general public, consumers prefer to use message boards (in 51%) or blogs (41%) [8]. From this research we can see that social networking sites have an important role in sharing content, opinions and so on.

#### **4. Communication through Facebook**

In order to reach the goals of the research that is to be shown in this paper, it is important to explain the Facebook network, one of the most popular online social networks. According to Facebook website it is "a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. The company develops technologies that facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world social connections" [9].

When Facebook was launched in February 2004 as an on-line database of Harvard students and web site intended as a

communications forum; later the site was expanded to other universities. Later high school students were invited to join, and the posting of photographs and videos was promoted. A "live chat" capability was added to the site. Eventually, corporations and other businesses were accommodated within the Facebook community [6, 290]. Although the initial popularity of Facebook was related to younger groups of internet users, with the growth the demographic picture has changed significantly and it increasingly attracts more mature population. For example, until August 2006 more than two thirds of users were above 25, with more than 40% of them being in the age group 35-40 [19]. Today Facebook has more than billion monthly active users and more than 618 million daily active users on average in December 2012 [10]. The growth of Facebook has been truly astonishing since from its establishment only 9 years has past.

According to research conducted by Hew in 2011, following motives for Facebook usage were identified [11, 668]:

- Maintaining of existing relationships;
- Meeting new people;
- Using Facebook is cool;
- To make oneself more popular;
- To pass time;
- To express or present oneself;
- For learning purposes;
- Task management tool;
- Student activism.

It is obvious how people use Facebook for different reasons, as well as how Facebook plays a big role in everyday lives of many individuals.

The growth of Facebook since its beginning was extraordinary. Today, the network provides many ways of communicating among users in form of:

- Wall posts – users can share information on their own profile or on profile of another user;
- Status updates – users can share information with everyone who is connected with them;
- Photo uploading – users can upload photos and share them with other users;
- Video uploads – as with photos, users can upload videos too;
- Sharing content from other sources – users can pick any URL address on the Internet and share it with other users;

- Messaging – users can communicate with other users through messages either individually or in groups;
- Chat – users can communicate in real time with other users much like with IM services;
- Groups – users can join in groups based on interest or any other specific topic;
- Comments – users are able to comment other's activities;
- Liking – users can express their approval of the content that others share;
- Apps – Facebook's functionalities are greatly expanded with apps which can be published by developers all over the world. If we would consider apps as expansion of Facebook's functionalities we could say that its functionalities are almost endless.

## 5. Research

In order to research the communication of different parts of universities through Facebook, 113 institutions were taken into consideration, with the goal to examine their presence on Facebook. Out of those 113, 71 have the official Facebook page (N=71) which gives a rate of 62,83%. There were 30 variables examined, such as period of the existence of the official page on Facebook, number of people participating in the communication, variables connected to posts, etc. Some of the results are shown in this paper.

Important limitation has to be accentuated, which is, that the data was taken in a single day, giving the results being accurate between the faculties, however, due to the fast changes in communication and technologies, it is possible that differences between faculties can be different at any other point in the future. The data was taken on January 20<sup>th</sup> 2013. Nevertheless, during the development of this paper, changes in data have occasionally been monitored and it was concluded by the authors how trends in numbers were such that the taken data was qualitative enough to be used for the research.

Both private and public institutions were examined, which was important from the view of financial capabilities, where it can generally be perceived how private institutions can make more expenses on Facebook promotion. However, knowledge of human resources can as well have the affection on communication over

the Facebook. Out of 71 institutions that were examined, 45 were public (63,38%), whereas 26 were private (36,62). 17 institutions were faculties from the University of Zagreb.

Most of the results that can implicate conclusions represented in this research were reproduced by the descriptive statistic methods.

Only 14 institutions joined Facebook over the official Facebook page in the past one year, where the average duration of the existence is approximately 22 months, which means, almost 2 years. The average number of people liking the page (also known as "fans") is 1762,34 (max=14641; min=6). Out of the first ten institutions with the highest number of people liking their page, only one is the public faculty (Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb), while the others are private. This is represented in Figure 1 with number of posts by faculties shown next to number of fans. Statistically significant correlation exists between the duration of existence on Facebook and number of "fans", for which Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used ( $r=0,434$ ;  $p<0,01$ ).

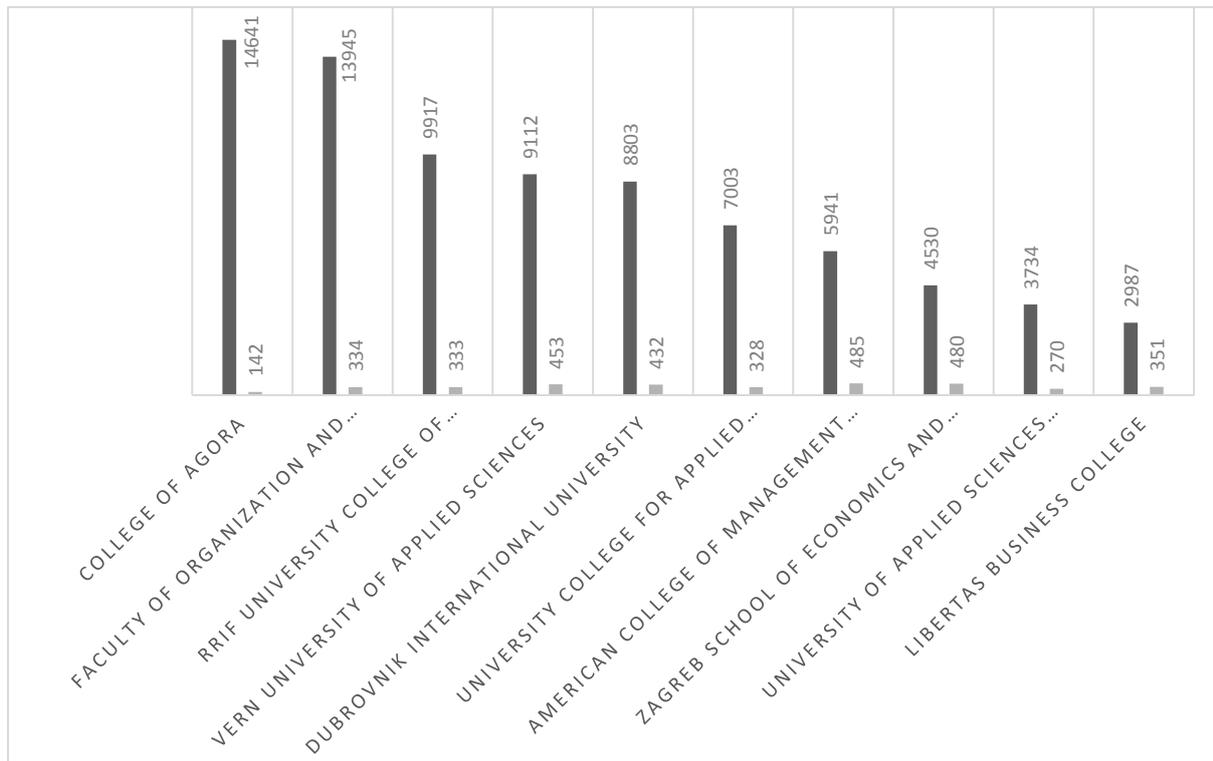
In order to examine if institutions have interest in connecting their Facebook page with others mean of communication, the number of those who have their page linked to their official web pages was observed. 51,11% (N=37) do not have it linked, while 47,89% (N=34) do have links that lead to their Facebook pages published on their official web pages.

It can be concluded how most of the examined institutions can be considered to be active with publishing information. Average number of posts per month published by faculties is 8,03 (max=41,33) and average number of posts altogether published on one page by faculties is 161,13 (max=500).

As it is generally important for the communication on Facebook for the education institutions to have actions from visitors (such as students), data was as well analysed. The average number of posts by visitors is 22,48 (max=145; min=0). The reason for having 0 posts by visitors can be due to the option which does not allow posts being made by visitors which can be decided by administrators.

It can be also seen from the result that 59% represents the number of sum of fans for private institutions compared to 41% which represents those liking pages of public institutions. This information is important

knowing the fact that more than 92% of students in Croatia study on public institutions. [24]



**Figure 1. Top 10 institutions based on number of fans and numbers of posts made by administrators of pages**

## 6. Conclusion

The paper shown represents the theoretical basis, as well as part of the research connected to communication of Croatian higher level education institution through their official Facebook pages. The need for such research was found in facts that today's communication is partially moving to web spaces, such as social networks. Social networking sites have become a new focus for many faculties owing to the awareness that such sites build up customer satisfaction and loyalty by means of two-way communication. Students can respond to the faculties' announcements and participate in communication process. It is very important for faculties to share information via social networks regularly, sometimes several times a day, in order to keep fans engaged and interested. Finally, if social networking sites are used effectively they can produce a positive image for the faculty which can be a competitive advantage among others. Results shown in this paper represent just the first step in the analyses, where

mostly the descriptive statistics methods were used. It will be used for further research in order to examine the ways of communications of educational institutions, as well as their development and connections to other mediums of communication.

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