

Anna Scheibe

Social media as a promotion tool of polish universities

Problemy Zarządzania, Finansów i Marketingu 30, 393-403

2013

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

ANNA SCHEIBE¹

Uniwersytet im A. Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PROMOTION TOOL OF POLISH UNIVERSITIES

Summary

In the contemporary world the use of social networks for business purposes become a common way of proceeding. Company's fanpage, if properly managed, can be a good way for creating closer relations with the brand community, source of innovation and a way of creating positive buzz around the organization. Furthermore, it becomes relatively cheap promotion tool with the raising efficiency. Those advantages make the social networking the promotion tools suitable also for the universities. The paper analyses involvement of Polish universities in social network promotion by Facebook fanpage activity observation. Not only the number of supporters but other measures of fanpage popularity were measured, as number of comments, post sharing, responsiveness and nature of comments were the subject of the research.

Keywords: social networks, Facebook, universities, fanpage

Introduction

In the Web 2.0 era, social media catches the attention of researchers and practitioners. In the time of multilevel communication, one-way interaction is not enough to catch attentions of stakeholders. In their internet communication organizations are forced to use more than only webpages. Blogs, forums, sites of customer created content, video-sharing pages or Twitter enjoy the rising popularity in the Web 2.0.

One of the most popular social network is Facebook. With the number of one billion active members it is at the moment one of the most powerful network on the world. The popularity of the service was also used by companies

¹ scheibe@amu.edu.pl.

who started to create their own fanpages on the service, hoping for closer relation with customers and creating positive word-of-mouth. Presence in such social media give companies several possibilities for presenting their offer and creates a brand images. In those networks companies try to create their own community around the brand or use the existing community to promote their offer. The goal of those activities is to encourage customers to active behavior towards the brand creation, to present opinions or to create a strong feeling of community and engagement. As former research shows, Web 2.0 solutions are used by organizations mainly to viral promotion, as platform for building innovative and customer friendly brand, as channel of relationship and for marketing research.² In general, one can say that such media are the tools of decreasing the gap between the organization and its' audience.

The aim of the article is to show how social media tools are used by top Polish universities for relations building and knowledge sharing. The analysis of popularity of social media usage will be conducted. Not only the quantitative research (based on the number of supporters and "likes") will be conducted but also some the quality of fanpages will be evaluated on the basis of active behavior of community members, the character of communication and the fanpage page owner reactivity be the subject of analysis.

Literature review

The increasing role of social media in relations creation and information search is highlighted in many research. Network media are defined as configuration of people connected to one another through interpersonal means, such as friendship, common interest or ideas.³ Social network is a site designed to allow users to meet, communicate, share content, and built communities.⁴ Recently the word-of-mouth marketing using, among others, such tools as internet communities, forums and social networks became the next promotion mix element, standing together with such traditions tool as direct marketing, advertising or public relations,⁵ which highlights their role in the brand creation process.

² G. Mazurek, *Web 2.0 Implications on marketing*, "Organizaciju Vadyba, Sisteminiai Tyrimai" 2009, No. 51, p. 69–82.

³ C. Coyle, H. Vaughn, *Social networking: communication revolution or evolution*, "Bell Labs Technical Journal" 2008, No. 13/2, p. 13–17.

⁴ *Report: The Wave 5, Socialization of brands*, Social Media Tracker, 2010, <http://pl.scribd.com/doc/39391023/Social-Media-Wave-5-OCT2010-Universal-McCann>.

⁵ Ph. Kotler, K.L. Keller, *Marketing*, Wyd. Rebis, Poznań 2012, s. 512.

Nowadays, in the time of globalization, virtualization and communication revolution, it is necessary for the brand to build the unique connection with users and to enhance the sense of belonging through their engagement. Furthermore the possibility to belong to the community is strongly desirable by the customers. People who admire brand or organization, desire to engage with others, and with the organization as well, into the communities supporting the brand.⁶ Social media are indispensable in revealing, that there are some people behind the brand – people the customer can communicate with. Social media help to eliminate internal and external dissonance in access to information, which creates saving in communication. Using the information from social media helps the organization to be more responsive to the audience demand, save the communication costs and create the image of a modern organization. The dialogue on Facebook also can help to create brand awareness among non-brand users⁷ and this way to find new supporters.

All those features seem to be appropriate also for such organizations as universities. Set on interactions, knowledge sharing, innovations and promoting academic achievements universities should also use the new technology achievement, follow the changes in people life and be open to the interaction with stakeholders. University student are in majority young people – representatives of the Y generation, set on the internet use in everyday life. The fact should be a factor for finding alternative ways of communicating. Furthermore, current demographic trends suggests that there will be fewer students in the future, which makes universities to induce young people to choose their school. Universities, as a public organization must also face some financial restrictions forcing them to cost reductions. In this situation managing fanpage could help in achieving the goal of image creations together with the cost saving. The ten top world universities (Harvard University, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Michigan, University of Pennsylvania, University of California Los Angeles UCLA, University of California Berkeley, Columbia University New York, University of Minnesota, Cornell University⁸) run their own fanpages or channel on at least three social networks, namely: Facebook, YouTube and Tweeter.⁹

⁶ J.H. McAlexander, J.W. Schouten, H.F. Koenig, *Building brand community*, "Journal of Marketing" 2002, No. 66/1, p.38–54.

⁷ J. Yan, *Social media in branding: fulfilling a need*, "Journal of Brand Management" 2011, Vol. 18, No. 9, p. 668–696.

⁸ *Ranking Web of the Universities*, <http://www.webometrics.info/en/world>.

⁹ On the basis of links placed on the official web pages of those universities.

The main obstacle here can be the perception of the university as a place with strong reputation that maybe should not involve in such new solutions and remain more traditional. Another way of thinking, discouraging from social media involvement, might be related with the dignity of such institutions and the rank of their achievements that might seem to be not suitable for social networks. The problem that can discourage university authorities from getting involved into social networking is also the threat of destroying the brand image¹⁰ if too many negative reviews appear on the fanpage. The thing that has to be accepted is the lack of total control over what was written by community member in public.

According to J. Yan to overcome these barriers the organization has to answer several questions before taking the decision of social network use. They are related with the accepted level of transparency in branding strategy, level of accepted interactions, problems of extending roles in creating the brand image and the way of measuring the success in social networks.¹¹ The aim of the paper is to answer the question how many of top rated Polish universities took a risk of interact within the community on social network and what is the character of these interactions. The paper is to verify not only such measures as number of supporters but also number of comments, willingness of post sharing, nature of comments and the organization responsiveness to the problem presented on the web.

A lot was said on the tools and techniques of managing a social network by the company. The majority of scientists and practitioners agreed that effectiveness of such efforts cannot be evaluated on the basis of number of supporters because there are a lot of ways to multiply number of visits on the fanpage as well as number of its supporters. A good example can be lotteries and contests organized to motivate people to like the page. Another way is to give the access to some funny applications or special offers only to people liking the page. The extreme situation is to simply buy fans, choosing from one of the offers presented on Allegro. The way of acting can increase visibility of the official fanpage within the community but cannot tighten the relations between supporter and the company.

For this reason other ways to check the real popularity of the fanpage were created. Some promotion agencies propose the traditional approach to the prob-

¹⁰ C. Manara, C. Roquilly, *The risk of brand erosion in the social media: the efficacy and limitations of legal instruments*, "Recherche et Applications on Marketing" 2011, No. 26, p. 93–114.

¹¹ J. Yan, *Social media...*

lem, taking under consideration reach measures (for example the campaign research, numbers of visitors, numbers of clicks, or number of unique users) and engagement measures (for example number of comments on the webpage, number of clicks, number of posts, numbers of votes in the contests could be mentioned¹²). Other authors propose quite a similar set of metrics, relating them with the main goals of social networking which are to deepen relation with customers (number of advocates, comments, advocates influencing profile, etc), learn from the community (rank the topics, positive vs negative opinions) and drive purchase intent (product brochure download, leads to commerce pattern and retail locator).¹³ Some propositions concentrate on the three stages of virtual community creation process: understand customer needs and motivations, promote participation and motivate cooperation.¹⁴ Understanding customers influences the character of posts presented on the fanpage by organization. Promoting the participation is based on encouraging people to creating high-quality content, problems solving and interactive learning, and creation of positive, unique experiences related with the community. Motivating cooperation is related with mobilizing the community leaders, inspiring ideas and polling a panel of members. Taken under consideration the above mentioned elements, indexes such as, shares, "likes" and number of comments of the single posts as well as its character (positive or negative) can here be a measure of quality of fanpage, as it is a results of the actions taken in each of the stages. As presented above, not only the number of supporters is perceived to be a measure for the network popularity, but rather elements related with the character of activity of community on the profile.

Methodology

The research was conducted on the group of Polish universities placed in the "Webometrics Ranking of World Universities" in January 2013. The rating is prepared every 6 months by a research group belonging to the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), the largest public research body in Spain counting the web presence of all the universities on the World.¹⁵ The rank

¹² Grupa robocza social media i WOOM AIB Polska, *Wskaźniki efektywnościowe w social media*, s. 7, <http://www.iabpolska.pl/index.php?app=docs&action=get&iid=699>.

¹³ Ch. Murdough, *Social media measurement: it's not impossible*, "Journal of Interactive Advertising" 2009, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 94–99.

¹⁴ C. Porter, N. Donthu, W. McElroy, D. Wydra, *How to foster and sustain engagement in virtual communities*, "California Management Review" 2011, Vol. 53, No. 4, p. 80–107.

¹⁵ *Ranking: Web of Universities*, <http://www.webometrics.info/en/world>

is based on four features: impact (number of links leading to the organization webpage), presence (the total number of hosted web pages), openness (number of files published on the web), excellence (academic papers published in international high ranked journals).¹⁶ Based on the assumption that internet presence openness, defined by these four characteristics, motivates also to create and successfully run one's own social network on the web the rank was considered to be a good university choice criterion. High position can be an evidence of a high level of universities' set on innovation, openness and friendliness towards the stakeholders as well as the willingness to share knowledge and highlight scientific achievements. From the rank the group of 20 best Polish universities was chosen for further research. From the rank of world best universities, the group of best 20 Polish universities was chosen. Analyzed universities ranked from 234 (Warsaw University) to 960 (Technical University of Lodz together with Rzeszów University of Technology).

In the next step of the studies only the universities having the official Facebook fanpage were chosen for further research. The fact of choosing the only social network was caused by the fact that this is the most popular social channel in Poland. Report Interaktywni.com present Facebook as the biggest internet community in Poland, counting over 13.5 million people, placed just before NK.com, and Onet.pl.¹⁷ In February 2013 over 53% of the Polish surfers were Facebook members, which consists 26.93% of all Poles. Polish Facebook members are mainly people in the age from 18–33 years old (summing up for 52% of Facebook users).¹⁸ Facebook is also the main place of interest for companies (86% of companies run a fanpage on the social network), placed before YouTube and LinkedIn.¹⁹ Although Nasza Klasa is ranked just after Facebook (taking under consideration the number of users), it is not of interests of entrepreneurs.²⁰

¹⁶ <http://www.webometrics.info/en/Methodology>.

¹⁷ *Report Media społecznościowe*, July 2012, <http://interaktywnie.com/download/53>.

¹⁸ *Report: Fanpage trends*, <http://www.sotrender.com/uploads/pdf/trends/a5d8cb0a74124927c9bac242059e457d6326c9e.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Biznes społecznościowy – nowa era w komunikacji biznesowej. Raport na podstawie badania „Polskie firmy na Facebooku – portale społecznościowe w komunikacji marketingowej polskich przedsiębiorstw”*, 2012, s. 11, http://www.deloitte.com/assets/Dcom-Poland/Local%20Assets/Documents/Raporty,%20badania,%20rankingi/pl_Facebook_2012_PL.pdf.

²⁰ K. Samura, M. Krzycki, S. Prokurat, P. Kubisiak, *Polskie firmy w mediach społecznościowych*, Report prepared by Capgemini and Harvard Business Review, <http://www.pl.capgemini.com/insights-and-resources/publications/raport-polskie-firmy-w-mediach-spoecznościowych/>.

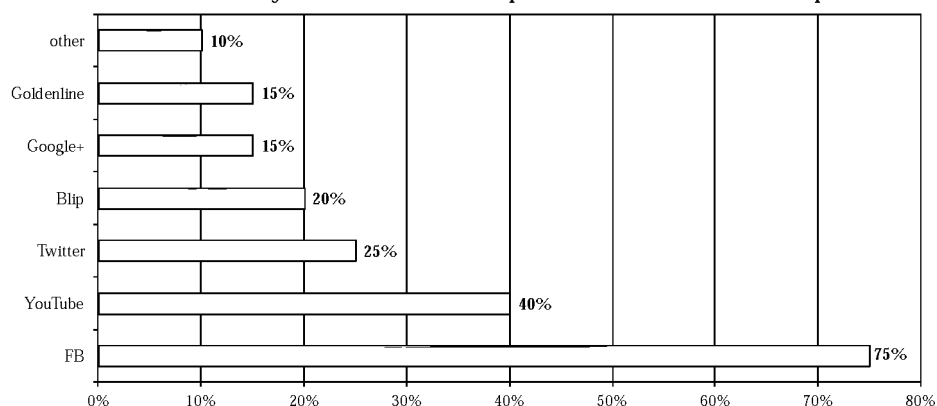
The real problem in the Facebook pages analysis is to recognize which of the pages were official university sites, and which were created by organization supporters. To solve the problem only fanpages related with the official university webpage were taken under consideration. The way of thinking was also used by other researchers analyzing Polish universities presence in the social media.²¹

The research was conducted in February 2013. Its aim was to analyze not only the number of supporter of the organization profile, but also evaluate the character of interaction and its quality on the basis of above mentioned measures, use for social networking.

Findings

Having analyzed the official webpages of top Polish universities high level of social media consciousness could be noticed. Fifteen out of twenty universities manage at least one fanpage or channel. Five universities have no links to social media profile on their official webpages, and the search for their official profile on Facebook gave no results. Due to this fact, the 5 organizations were not a subject for further research. What is interesting, within the top 15 only one organization didn't have a fanpage, but it is planned to run the Facebook fanpage one this year. The rest four were ranked lower in the report.

The most popular social network used by the universities was Facebook (see graph 1). These results are similar to the rank of popularity of social networks within the society and the to rank of preferences of Polish companies.



Graph 1. Percentage of universities having social media fanpage or channel

Source: own elaboration by author on the basis of official webpages analysis.

²¹ E. Kulczycki, *Uczelnie wyższe w mediach społecznościowych*, http://ekulczycki.pl/teoria_komunikacji/social_media/.

The number of people liking the fanpages ranked from 2804 to 19 575, while the number of people talking about the page was at the level from 84 to 996, giving the average of 3.4% of people talking in comparison to the number of supporters. Those numbers show relatively high level of interest related with such fanpages.

In general the analysis of total number of posts placed by the organization on the fanpage as well as the activity of community in commenting, sharing and liking them presented a great discrepancies among the universities. The average number of post in analyzed period accounted to 47.2 per month, but significant difference between universities could be noticed (with the lowest rate of 14 and the highest of 236 – standard variation 17.92). At the average each post was commented 3.67 times, shared 1.67 times, and liked by over 15 people. The average appears to be quite satisfying but huge difference in the indexes for individual Universities can be noticed. There were fanpages that seemed to be forgotten by supports, with high level of official post but very low of comments (the average of comments per post 0.06 only, with the most positive result 16.54). The results can be a sign of not understanding customer expectations towards the profile. In case of only four universities the number of comments per post was lower than one. The rest of universities managed to attract the attention of customers and create a discussion around proposed topics. What was significant to the fanpages was a huge dispersion between number of comments to the individual post. The most popular one were those related mainly with entertainment (contests) or opinion request (eg. evaluation of a new initiatives and buildings). Lower interest was set to the information related with everyday activities on the university.

The vast majority of comments were of a positive nature. In all the research only few negative comments in all the universities posts were noticed. The fact can be caused either by so positive relations with the community members, or the fact that a real name of a person commenting is presented on public. It is actually a good factor for the university, as according to some authors, presenting the real name is indispensable condition for effective brand community creation as the anonymous media can prompt unearned criticism.²² Another explanation for such a small number of negative opinions can be the fact of deleting them by fanpage managers. Although such practices were not noticed in the research, there is a possibility of taken such actions.

²² J. Yan, *Social media...*, p. 694.

The next positive element in universities fanpage management was participation of the fanpage managers in the discussion on the web and answering their questions. In all the cases the reaction from the part of page administrators could be notice. The fact confirming a good understanding of social media nature can also be the language of interaction that was far from the official forms of communication. It helps to communicate in a less formal way, which also favors the community creation. There was only one exception to rule noticed on the pages of universities. This was a situation where post as well as comments were placed almost only by the fanpage managers, without a strong community involvement. This created the impression of a diary rather than an interaction with community members.

The research seems to confirm observation coming from companies, related with the small number of enthusiasts in comparison to total number of community members. In three the most popular fanpages in Poland: Serce i rozum, Play, Allegro²³ the relation of number of supporter to active members was accordingly: 0.07; 0.05; and 0.04. Although in the research the number of active members was not measured, a similar conclusion can be drawn from the analysis of the number of posts compared to the number of posts. The average relation of comments to the number of supporters was 0.023, which indeed consists really small part of all community members (the highest rate accounted for 0.197). The fact shows significant difference in the abilities to motive community to engage in organization life. The limitation of such measure is unfortunately the fact that one supporter can place more than one comment on the fanpage, which doesn't reflect the real number of participants. To give the example in case one of the universities, one supporter liked all the posts presented on the fanpage, independently of the topic, and very often was the only person, who presented his opinion.

A significant difference was also noticed in the number of supporters liking the post and commenting it. In all cases (with only one exception) the number of comments was much lower than number of likes. In average comments consisted $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total number of likes on page. Each post was like by 21 people in average, but again, the huge dispersion in number of likes could be noticed not only between the universities but also in number of 'like per post'. The most 'liked' by community members were pictures of the university buildings, in-

²³ *Aktywność branż na Facebooku*, March 2012, <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artukul/markina-facebooku-play-i-reserved-w-gore-raport>.

formation on organization achievements and companies' best wishes of different occasions.

Last measure used in the research was the number of shares. Each post was shared at average 2.36 times giving quite satisfying result if it comes to sharing the content with friends – especially taking under consideration the average number of Facebook users' friends which accounts for 130 people.

Conclusions and research limitations

The research concentrated on only one, the most famous social network – Facebook, can be considered as a weak point of the research. Social networks can take a variety of forms, and to fully evaluate the organization competencies in the field all the channels should be taken under consideration. Many Universities use e-learning platforms or internal systems to communicate with students and to create intra-university relations. The fact can distract the attention from public channels like for example Facebook. Nevertheless it is worth noticing that despite from having the internal communication system, universities did not neglected the rank of social networking and decided to be present in at least one social network.

Further research limitations were also the lack of access to the official universities data related with the number of people seeing the post or fanpage and people liking it. For the outside viewer it is impossible to verify the number of entrance to the official profile.

Summing up, the research results show high level of awareness of the universities if it comes to the social media presence. Within the Facebook profiles of the universities there was no "dead profiles" that means fanpages with no activity from the part of creator. A positive sign is also the interaction with the community if it comes to the participation the community discussions which confirms the understanding of a nature of social media and responsibility for the fanpage. The research shows that different ways of creating relations were used by analyzed organizations. There were universities with very high rate of posts (namely 137), not realizing maybe that such actions may cause a feeling of information glut, which may lead to withdrawal from the fanpage membership. The rest of the universities tried to follow the rule of one to one and a half post a day (8 out of 15 universities) trying to concentrate rather on the news important for students and crating the buzz.

The indication for further research is to analyze all the universities in Poland – not only those with the highest positions in ranks of web presence. It

might be interesting to get known the reasoning from not seeing the need of being present in social networks, but also to analyze how those organization deal with the challenges related with the social media development.

SOCIAL MEDIA JAKO NARZĘDZIE PROMOCJI POLSKICH UNIWERSYTETÓW

Streszczenie

We współczesnym świecie wykorzystywanie sieci społecznościowych do celów biznesowych stało się powszechną praktyką. Fanpage, jeśli tylko zarządza się nimi we właściwy sposób, są skutecznym sposobem kreowania bliskich relacji ze społecznością marki, źródłem pomysłów dotyczących innowacji, a także sposobem wytworzenie pozytywnego „szumu” wokół organizacji. Jest to także relatywnie tanie narzędzie komunikacji cechujące się rosnącą skutecznością. Te zalety sieci społecznościowych powodują, że mogą one także stać się narzędziem promocji uniwersytetów. W artykule przeanalizowano zaangażowanie polskich uniwersytetów w działania związane z promocją z wykorzystaniem fanpage’u na Facebooku. Analizie poddano nie tylko wskaźniki, takie jak liczba kliknięć „lubię to”, lecz również liczba komentarzy do postów, udostępnienia, stopień interakcji między organizacją a fanami i charakter wypowiedzi.

Słowa kluczowe: sieci społecznościowe, Facebook, uniwersytety, fanpage

Tłumaczenie: Anna Scheibe