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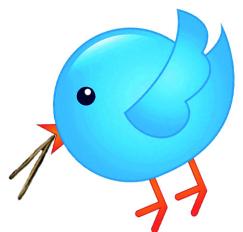
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**ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS
IN SOCIAL MEDIA**

ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Social media are nowadays commonly used by universities to communicate, collaborate, share knowledge and build relationships with candidates, currently enrolled students, alumnus and other stakeholders. However, previous researches focus mainly on the use of social media for marketing purposes of companies. Very little attention is paid to a specific group of organizations i. e. universities. The objective of the research presented in the article is the identification of the existing trends of using social media as a communication tool between the university and its main stakeholders — the students. The research covered the activity of public universities (in Poland) on Facebook — the most popular social media platform among polish Internet users (and students).

Keywords: social media, academic institutions, marketing communication, Facebook

Social media are contributing more and more to the way universities communicate, cooperate, share or manage knowledge and build relations with candidates, current students or graduates.

It is necessary to point out here that despite growing popularity of social media platforms, research carried out up till now is focused on using social media in companies' marketing communication. At the same time little attention is paid to such a characteristic group of organizations as universities.

The subject of this research is the utilization of social media as a tool for communication with main stakeholders of a university. It is exploratory in character and its main goal is to identify trends in the area of utilization of social media as a channel of communication with students by academic institutions in Poland. The following particular targets have been defined: investigating the popularity of social media as a tool for communication among academic units, assessment of the intensity of involvement of universities in social media, as well as the identification of factors behind the success of universities in social media.

The scope of the research covers the activity of universities in the most popular social media network, that is, Facebook.

The research was carried out based on the method of participant observation, which made it possible for the author to understand the characteristics of activity and rules in particular Internet communities by observing them from the inside. In order to guarantee reliability and comparability of the results of research on particular enterprises, observation was organized and structured and the results were encrypted. Standardization made it possible to gain greater control over the research, which was carried out in stages defined in advance. The observation was also hidden in character — the entities subject to observation were not aware they were being observed. This means that their actions were not modified by the observation and thanks to this the objective value of the research is higher.

The research covered all 59 public universities that can be found on the list of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The research covered the whole target population, which made it possible to avoid the mistake of estimation.

Introduction

Social media, in many forms, to an ever greater extent are becoming a key component of the way universities communicate, cooperate, share or manage knowledge and build relations with candidates, current students or graduates.

Here it is necessary to provide a brief definition of the term of social media. The definition proposed by A. Mac describes social media as: "services and applications based on access to Internet network and mobile telephony used for participation, sharing, creating, combining and recording information for the purpose of using it later"¹.

Social media enable transforming communication patterns through intensification of online communication, which is associated with smaller barriers than in case of face to face communication, which boosts the feeling of proximity between candidates and students and a university. This in turn intensifies the feeling of affinity with the academic environment, the conviction that it is possible to achieve success. Social media also constitute a forum for the exchange of ideas with other students. This is where everybody can find answers to the most pressing questions, as well as provide answers and advice. Moreover, participation in social media facilitates the change such as starting studies. Social media portals also support student-student, student-lecturer² relations.

What shows that the utilization of social media in communication of institutions is not just a temporary fashion, but a comparably lasting phenomenon, is that the data from social media concerning the number of views of YouTube, the number of followers on Twitter and the so-called "likes" on Facebook profiles of universities are supposed to be taken into consideration in the new index of reputation of universities for *Times Higher Education World University Ranking*³. This move is supposed to reflect the growing influence of the Internet on the reputation of universities and identify the key role that social media play in forming the opinions of students and their choices with

¹ A. Mac, *E-przyjaciele. Zobacz co media społecznościowe mogą zrobić dla Twojej Firmy*, One Press, Gliwice 2011. You can read more about the main characteristics of social media in A. Chwiałkowska, *Growing importance of social media as the opportunity for brands to win customer attention*, [in:] A. Antonowicz (ed.), "Zarządzanie i Finanse. Journal of Management and Finance", Faculty of Management of Gdańsk University , Vol 10, nr 1 part. 2, March 2012, pp. 471–482.

² D.C. DeAndrea, N.B. Ellison R. LaRose, C. Steinfield, A. Fiore, *Serious social media: On the use of social media for improving students' adjustment to college*, „Internet and Higher Education”, Volume 15, Issue 1, pp. 15,16.

³ Information about the ranking and the applied methodology can be found under the following address: Times Higher Education Rankings, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/> (11.07.2013).

regard to the place where they want to study. As the editor of *Times Higher Education Rankings* says, "social media are one of the most effective ways of monitoring the opinions of students concerning institutions and measuring the popularity of institutions. "Popular social media reflect the general popularity of institutions — high number of visits to YouTube is often a reflection of high creativity of students of a particular university and its employees. Universities which are popular on Twitter are also popular among young people in reality. Social media are a useful indicator of broader social impact of institutions. This phenomenon should be recognized and universities should treat it seriously"⁴.

At the same time it is necessary to point out that research carried out up till now focus on using social media for companies' marketing communication. Little attention is paid to such a characteristic group of organizations as universities.

Research methods

The subject of the research was the utilization of social media as a channel for communication with main stakeholders of a university. The research was carried out based on the method of participant observation in the period from May 5 to May 10, 2013.

The research is exploratory in character and its main goal is identifying trends in the area of utilization of social media as the channel for communication with students by public universities in Poland.

The following particular goals have been defined.

1. Investigating the popularity of social media as a tool for communication among academic units.
2. Assessment of the intensity of involvement of universities in social media.
3. Assessment of practices of Polish universities in social media.
4. Identification of factors behind the success of universities in social media.

The following research theses have been verified.

1. High frequency of publication of contents on official university profiles on Facebook has a positive impact on the rate of involvement of users.
2. High frequency of publication of contents on university's official Facebook profile has an impact on the number of 'likes' for the page.

⁴ P. Baty, *Social media data to be included in new World University Rankings Indicator*, 1 April 2013, „The World University Rankings”, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/news/avril-fule> (11.07.2013).

3. The location of the link to university's profile on Facebook in a visible place has a positive impact on the number of the university's fans.
4. Universities occupying higher positions in the "Ranking of Universities" have greater number of fans of their Facebook pages.
5. The average indicator of involvement of the fans of a university on its official Facebook profile is higher than in case of business entities.

The survey was carried out on the basis of participant observation method that made it possible for the author to understand the characteristics of activities and rules governing particular Internet communities by observing them from the inside. In order to guarantee the reliability and comparability of the results of research on particular enterprises, observation has been organized and structured and the results of research have been encrypted. Standardization raised control over the research that was carried out according to phases defined in advance. Observation is also disguised in character — the investigated entities were not aware that they were being observed. Thanks to this the process of observation doesn't modify their actions and the research can be more objective.

The research covered all universities from the list of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education as shown on the ministry's Internet website on May 5, 2013⁵. At that time the list included 59 universities. The list can be found in attachment number 1.

The research covered the whole investigated population, that is, 59 universities, which made it possible to avoid the error of estimation.

Subject to observations was the activity of universities in the most popular social network among Polish Internet users, that is, Facebook.

Such a limitation of the scope of observed presence of universities in social media is justified with the fact that 71% of Polish Internet users use Facebook (in January 2013 the portal was visited by over 13 million Polish Internet users), the second most popular portal — NK.pl was visited by 40% of users⁶, thus, the gap between the most popular and the second most popular portal is huge. Due to the fact that a university present on less popular social media platforms can certainly be regarded as leading or innovative in this respect (as long as its activity isn't limited to just opening an account, if it is really involved in the community of a particular portal), it would be necessary to answer the

⁵ Ministry of Science and Higher Education, *Wykaz uczelni publicznych nadzorowanych przez ministra właściwego do spraw szkolnictwa wyższego — Publiczne uczelnie akademickie*, <http://www.nauka.gov.pl/szkolnictwo-wyszszego/system-szkolnictwa-wyszszego/uczelnie/uczelnie-publiczne/wykaz-uczelni-publicznych-nadzorowanych-przez-ministra-wlasciwego-ds-szkolnictwa-wyszszego/publiczne-uczelnie-akademickie/> (01.05.2013).

⁶ Money.pl, *90 procent internautów korzysta z Facebooka i podobnych*, <http://manager.money.pl/news/artykul/90;percent;internautow;korzysta;z;facebooka;i;podobnych,25,0,1282073.html> (01.05.2013).

question whether costs associated with this activity (including the time devoted to maintaining presence) don't exceed the achieved effects in form of, for example, small coverage associated with the absence of eg. students on the platform.

It is necessary to remark here that only after a certain critical mass in form of sufficient number of likes for a particular profile on a social media portal is reached, the users of a particular network derive adequate benefits from their presence in the network. This is called the network effect — "the value of an Internet network goes up with every additional user⁷. Network effect is also called the Metcalfe rule saying that 'the usefulness of a network is equal to the square of the number of users"⁸.

Obviously, it doesn't mean that new social media portals rapidly attracting more and more users, such as Pinterest should be disregarded. They certainly shouldn't be disregarded as they have a huge potential and one of them could become "the second Facebook". Thus, they should be watched carefully.

Data concerning the presence of each university subject to research were collected by visiting its official Internet website in search of links to the monitored social network — Facebook in this case. In case of absence of such a link, search for university's official profile was carried out on Facebook. In case of inability to confirm (relevant information in the section "Basic information about webpage) that a particular fanpage is official, the university is marked as one which doesn't have a fanpage on Facebook.

Moreover, it is necessary to emphasize that in the research only main profiles of investigated universities are taken into consideration. This means that for example pages for fans of particular faculties, libraries, student organizations etc. were not taken into consideration.

In course of the research:

1. The popularity of social media among academic units was investigated — the measure was the presence of a particular university on Facebook;
2. The intensity of involvement of a university in social media was analyzed. It was measured with the frequency of posts calculated on the basis of last 6 month, which made it possible to eliminate the subjectivism caused by eg. increased number of status updates due to events like academic festivals and other special events in academic life, the period of recruitment, as well as temporarily lower activity caused by holidays and summer break;

⁷ A. McAfee, *Firma 2.0, Sukces dzięki nowym narzędziom internetowym*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer Business, Warszawa 2011, p. 60.

⁸ J. Van Dijk, *Społeczne aspekty nowych mediów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 89.

3. The universities subject to research have also been distinguished according to the number of fans (people who liked their page on Facebook). It is necessary to point out here that the nominal number of fans may be misleading as it depends to a large extent on the number of students at a particular university who are the main group of users giving "likes" to the university's Facebook profile. For this reason the author calculated also the real level of popularity of each university among users of the Internet media sphere, which constitutes the proportion of the number of fans of a particular page to the number of students of a particular university (information concerning the number of people studying at a particular university was obtained based on data found on official Internet websites of particular universities and their Public Information Bulletins).

Obviously, even the real number of fans reflecting the percentage of total number of students who "like" the profile of a particular university, is not a flawless indicator. Graduating from a university doesn't necessarily mean marking "not like" on the university's profile. Universities can also have their "fans" among candidates and other stakeholders. Thus, at least in theory the percentage could exceed 100%. Despite the fact that the measure is not perfect, it is still, according to the author, more valuable and informative than popularity of a profile expressed in the number of people who "liked" the profile.

4. Involvement indicators have been calculated for each university fanpage. The indicators are calculated based on the basis of ratio of the indicator published by Facebook showing the "number of people talking about it" (which is the sum of: number of posts users on a particular fanpage, number of "likes" of posts published by the page administrator, number of shares of contents published on the page or the number of user comments under contents, number of "I was here" marks, number of tags, number of mentions about a page in users' posts) and the number of people who like a particular page.

The awareness of the indicator of involvement is important, because often in social media platforms it is possible to find fanpages with many millions of "likes" which have a very low indicator of involvement. This suggests that "fans" have no real interest in actual contents posted on a particular fanpage. This doesn't prove that the fanpage is successful, but that the administrator has to revise the company strategy for communication by means of social media.

Obviously, the indicator of involvement is not a perfect measure, as it includes also negative comments and posts. Thus, it is possible to find a situation in which a brand with a huge number of "likes" and above-average level of involvement is

actually hated by its clients and its fanpage gets flooded with an exceptionally high number of customer complaints. However, it is necessary to point out here that such a situation is rather rare (or doesn't happen at all) on official university profiles in social media — due to the fact that here the students are not anonymous, at least on Facebook where according to the regulations they usually post under their own name and surname. On the other hand, there are unofficial hate-pages of universities, where frustrated students display their discontent. However, these pages are not subject to this research.

In order to understand the results presented below, it is necessary to understand what high indicator of user involvement means and what can be regarded as low indicator.

According to the research and analyses carried out up till now, the average indicator of user involvement on a corporate Facebook page ranges from 0.5% to 0.99% and depends on the number of fans of a particular page. Along with growth in the number of fans, the average rate of involvement drops (companies that have 1 million fans find it harder to get their fans involved, than companies that have eg. 1,000 fans). A rate of involvement exceeding 1% is regarded as very high⁹.

Taking into consideration the fact that there has been no research in this area, the average involvement rates for academic institutions are not known. For this reason, for the purpose of this research the author uses for comparison data gathered in the area of commercial activity and assumes involvement rate at the level of 0.50%–0.75% as the average level.

5. The ratios of correlation between the intensity of involvement of universities in social media (by measuring the frequency of posts) and the nominal number of page 'likes' have been worked out.
6. The ratios of correlation between the intensity of involvement of universities in social media (frequency of posts) and the involvement of people who like a particular page (rate of involvement) have also been calculated.
7. Another issue that has been analyzed is the location of the link to the official page on social media portal. The existence of a correlation between its location and the nominal number of fans of a university's profile has been verified.
8. The correlation between the position of a university in "Ranking Uczelni Akademickich 2012 Rzeczpospolita-Perspektywy" (Perspektywy Ranking of

⁹ Zob. M. Leander, *Facebook Engagement Rate Benchmark*, <http://www.michaelleander.me/blog/facebook-engagement-rate-benchmark/> (10.05.2013).

Universities 2012) and the number of fans of a university's profile has also been investigated.

The following sub-chapter presents the results of research.

Research results

According to the author's observation, 48 out of 59 universities have an official profile on Facebook. This means that 81% of public academic units are active in social media and are present on at least one social media platform. Compared to a research carried out by Emanuel Kulczycki, which showed that 68% of universities had a Facebook profile in February 2012¹⁰, 6 more universities now have a Facebook profile. This is strong evidence of an upward trend and growing awareness of universities of the benefits of their presence in the Internet media sphere.

Table number 1 shows universities which have Facebook profiles.

Jagiellonian University in Kraków has the biggest number of fans of its Facebook page. On the day when research was carried out, the profile had 20,615 fans. AGH University of Technology placed second with 19,230 fans. University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn placed third with 13,121 fans.

However, taking into consideration comparative values in form of ratio of the number of fans and current students the ranking already looks differently. According to this measure, University School of Physical Education in Poznań placed first. What's interesting is that in this case the number of fans of Facebook page of the university exceeds the number of current students (101% of current students and just 4,443 fans on the day of observation), which may constitute evidence of involvement of academic staff or graduates. Poznań University of Economics placed second, as 70% of students are fans of a university's profile on Facebook (where the number of fans is 9 204) further positions are occupied by Warsaw School of Economics with student involvement rate of 69% (where the number of fans is 11,167) and Wrocław University of Economics with a 58% rate (9,606 fans on the day of observation).

The number of universities in relation to the percentage of students who are fans of university profile is shown on the chart number 1.

¹⁰ E. Kulczycki, *Wykorzystanie mediów społecznościowych przez akademickie uczelnie wyższe w Polsce. Badania w formule otwartego notatnika*, http://ekulczycki.pl/teoria_komunikacji/social_media/ (12.07.2013).

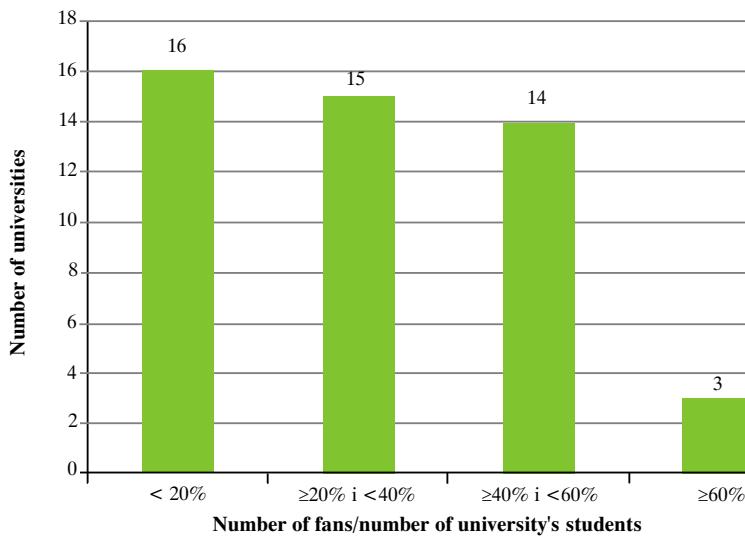
Table 1. Public universities present on Facebook

Lp.	Public Universities	Number of fans	Number of fans/number of university students
1	2	3	4
1	University of Warsaw	9 595	18,5%
2	Białystok University	3 809	22,4%
3	Gdańsk University	3 880	11,8%
4	Jagiellonian University in Krakow	20 615	40,2%
5	Łódź University	7 920	18,4%
6	Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń	8 500	28,3%
7	University of Opole	4 304	29,7%
8	University of Szczecin	6 225	31,1%
9	University of Silesia in Katowice	8 289	20,7%
10	Rzeszów University	2 977	15,2%
11	University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn	13 121	41,6%
12	Wrocław University	5 248	13,1%
13	Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw	8 363	52,3%
14	Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz	5 010	33,4%
15	West Pomeranian University of Technology	2 807	18,2%
16	Warsaw University of Technology	10 532	28,6%
17	Białystok Technical University	3 398	24,7%
18	University of Bielsko-Biala	2 358	31,9%
19	Częstochowa University of Technology	1 775	15,0%
20	Gdańsk University of Technology	3 475	13,3%
21	Silesian University of Technology (Gliwice)	7 141	24,9%
22	Technical University in Koszalin	1 810	16,5%
23	Cracow University of Technology	9 042	50,9%
24	AGH University of Science and Technology	19 230	49,1%
25	Lublin University of Technology	4 425	43,8%
26	Technical University of Łódź	3 535	17,6%
27	Opole University of Technology	2 977	27,9%
28	Poznań University of Technology	5 288	26,2%
29	Kazimierz Pułaski Technical University of Radom	3 747	46,1%
30	Rzeszów University of Technology	1 836	10,5%
31	Wrocław University of Technology	6 940	19,7%
32	University of Economics in Katowice	7 331	48,9%
33	Cracow University of Economics	12 355	58,9%
34	Poznań University of Economics	9 204	70,8%
35	Warsaw School of Economics	11 167	69,8%
36	Wrocław University of Economics	9 606	59,5%
37	Jan Dlugosz University	2 924	14,5%

1	2	3	4
38	Pedagogical University of Cracow	5 001	29,6%
39	University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce	2 329	17,7%
40	Warsaw Agricultural University	12 510	46,3%
41	University of Technology and Life Sciences in Bydgoszcz	4 315	43,2%
42	Agricultural University of Kraków	3 332	25,6%
43	University of Life Sciences in Lublin	4 533	45,8%
44	Agricultural University of Wrocław	5 920	54,8%
45	The Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice	994	19,6%
46	University School of Physical Education in Kraków	459	10,1%
47	University School of Physical Education in Poznań	4 489	101,0%
48	Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw	1 685	27,5%

Source: Own materials.

**Chart 1. The number of universities in relation to the percentage of students
who are fans of a university profile**



Source: Own materials.

The lowest observed involvement of students is 10% and in the 10–20% range there are 16 out of 48 universities that have a Facebook profile (33%). In the range between 20 and 30% there are 12 universities (25%), in 30 to 40% range — 3 universities (6%),

between 40 and 50% — 9 universities (19%), between 50 and 60% — 5 universities (10%) and only 3 universities achieved percentage higher than 60%. This means that in case of majority, that is 60%, of universities less than 40% of students 'like' university's Facebook profile.

It is necessary to remark here that none of the universities with highest nominal number of fans made it to the top. The number of fans is not always the best indicator of success, as naturally universities with higher annual number of students have a chance to obtain a greater number of "ikes". Jagiellonian University in Kraków encouraged only 40% of its students to like its page, AGH University of Technology in Kraków encouraged 49% of its students to give likes and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn managed to encourage 41% of students to give "likes". In this respect universities with the highest total number of fans achieved above-average results. On average, universities manage to encourage about 33% (median is at the level of 28%) of their students to like their fanpage. The third quartile on the level of 45% suggests that only 25% of universities encouraged more than 45% of their students to like their profile.

Another interesting thing is the comparison of rates of involvement of fans on pages of particular universities. In the period of observation Nicolaus Copernicus University had the highest rate of involvement at the level of 0.16. University School of Physical Education in Kraków, Jagiellonian University in Kraków and Białystok Technical University placed second with an involvement rate at the level of 0.12.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that the level of involvement is measured on a weekly basis and is a value subject to substantial fluctuations, which depend on such events as university festival, recruitment period and other university events. For example, the rate of involvement for the best university reached 0.04 on July 11, 2013.

At the average of around 0.0459, median is comparably lower and amounts to 0.03284, which shows very well the influence of extreme values. The lowest observed rate of involvement amounted to 0.006. The values of the first and third quadrilles are 0.0199 and 0.0551, respectively. This means that 75% of universities running Facebook profiles have an involvement rate of 0.0551 or lower. This also suggests that the values of the rate exceeding 0.08 observed in case of 9 out of 49 universities were temporary in character and were the result of important university events. This data can be compared to the average rates of involvement for corporate websites on Facebook, which usually fit in the 0.005–0.0099 range. The values of these indicators suggest that universities are doing better than profiles of product brands. However, it is possible that this phenomenon is associated with the feeling of affiliation to one's alma mater.

Despite big differences in university profiles in terms of the number of fans and rates of user involvement, vast majority, namely, 65% of universities post status updates a few times a day, 16% do this everyday (once a day), 4% — a few times a week. The remaining 12% do it a few times a month or even less often. These figures show that the intensity of actions taken by universities in social media is high.

In order to verify the influence of the intensity of university's activities, that is, the frequency of posts on the university Facebook profile on the rate of users' involvement, which depends on the number of "likes", comments, shares and other above-mentioned factors the correlation of two variables has been worked out. For this purpose data concerning the rate of involvement were recoded. Universities with an involvement rate equal to or below 0.01 were give number 1, universities from $0.01 > x \leq 0.02$ were given 2, $0.02 > x \leq 0.03$ range was given 3 etc. up to number 10 for universities with involvement rate above 0.09. Pearson's correlation ratio calculated for these pairs of variables amounted to 0.367 (it is statistically important on the 0.05 importance level), which shows there is weak positive relation between the frequency of publishing new posts and the involvement of users in interaction with the university. This means that the intensity of actions taken in social media distinguishes, in a statistically relevant way, universities according to involvement of students. However, this relation is lower than is generally thought. This constitutes an interesting issue, which could become the subject of further research associated with this subject scope. However, there is no statistically significant positive correlation between the intensity of activities and the number of fans, which proves that the frequency of publishing posts doesn't influence the number of "likes".

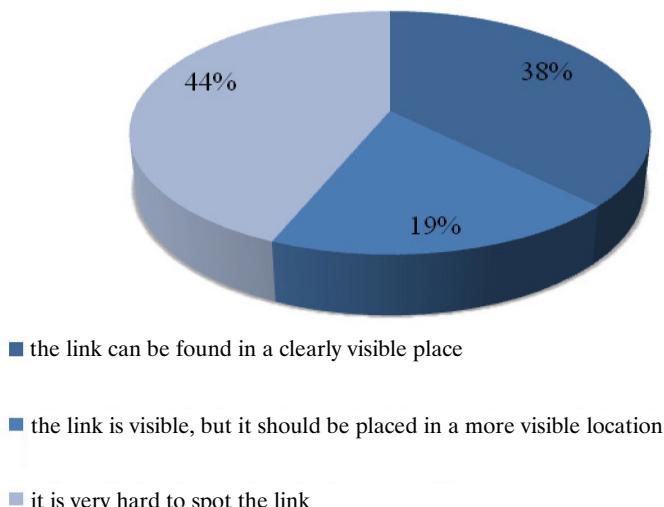
The author was also interested, whether the number of fans of a university page depends to some extent on the position of the university in the Ranking. A kind of pride in affiliation with academic community of a university placed on the top of the ranking was supposed to evoke the need to manifest the fact you are a part of a leading alma mater by "announcing" it on Facebook. There is a strong positive correlation between the position in the ranking and the number of fans of a university expressed in relative values (Pearson's correlation ratio at the level of 0.533 statistically important on the level of significance 0.01).

Particular websites have been distinguished also according to the visibility of links to fanpages. For the purpose of analysis they were divided into three categories. The first category are universities, which on their official website have a link to Facebook profile in a visible place (without the need to scroll the page). In this case universities most often choose upper left/rich corner, or a place on the side of the page. To qualify for

this category, a university's link has to be clearly visible, stand out from the background and be sufficiently big. In case of universities from the second category, it is necessary to scroll down the page slightly down (but not to the bottom). Also in this category links are located at the bottom of the screen (without scrolling) or for other reasons are not well visible. In case of the third it is necessary to scroll the university's website to the bottom to find a link to its Facebook fanpage, which makes the link invisible for the majority of users.

The number of universities allocated to particular categories is shown on the following chart number 2.

Chart 2. Promoting the link to university's profile in social media



Source: Own materials.

As the chart shows, most universities don't promote the link in a proper way and in case of 44% of universities the information that a particular university has an official Facebook profile is located in a place invisible for vast majority of people visiting the university's website. Changing the location of the link could contribute to growth of the number of profile fans.

It is also necessary to draw attention to the fact that there aren't any (generally available) guidelines concerning the utilization of social media by the employees of particular universities. There are no guidelines concerning setting up official profiles of

faculties, departments and other units, as well as student organizations. On the one hand this may constitute an obstacle for the presence of universities in social media, on the other hand it may pose a threat associated with the need to solve emergency situations, such as scandals in social media or abuse of social media by employees/students.

Conclusions

As has already been mentioned briefly, the multitude and diversity of social media platforms don't mean that a particular university should be present on all of them and "having an official Facebook profile and regularly posting contents on it is insufficient to build a community around a brand and encourage its members to interact with the brand, to recommend the website or the brand to friends or encourage other people to visit the site again"¹¹.

First of all, it is necessary to define the goals that the university wants to achieve by means of social media. Here it is necessary to answer the question: What is the target group of messages published in these media? — in case of Polish universities these are mainly students. However, it is necessary to remember the possibility of attracting other groups of stakeholders, for example, sponsors, graduates, academic staff, employees, researchers from other universities and other people, perhaps even people from companies organizing apprenticeship for students or people handling other initiatives associated with academic life.

Only as soon as you know the target group of the strategy implemented in social media, you are able to find out what social media platforms members of the group are using. Here a university has to decide whether it wants to build its presence only on the most popular platforms or expand its presence to platforms which are only now gaining popularity. It is impossible to clearly conclude which solution is better in this case. Limiting activity to one-three most popular networks it is possible to devote most effort and time to the most important platforms reaching the greatest group of recipients. Thanks to concentrating efforts it may be easier to attract a greater number of fans and to build up users' involvement in interaction on the profile. However, excessive focus on social networks which are popular right now may lead to a situation in which a university fails to notice the moment of emergence of another platform, which could gain

¹¹ A. Chwiałkowska, *Monitorowanie mediów społecznościowych jako kluczowy czynnik sukcesu przedsiębiorstwa*, „Zarządzanie i Finanse — Journal of Management and Finance”, kwiecień 2013, Vol. 11, nr 1, p. 51–62.

popularity and draw some users away from the most popular one (social media are a very dynamic phenomenon and for this reason implementing the strategy of presence of a university in the Internet media sphere requires continuous monitoring of constantly changing trends)¹². On the other hand, patience in this respect makes it possible to learn from the experiences and mistakes of other universities which decided to enter new platforms earlier. At the same time it is necessary to remember that not every newly emerging social network can gain as much popularity as, for example, Facebook. In fact, many of them fail to achieve a critical number of fans, sufficient to guarantee the "network effect".

At the same time universities which decide early to adopt new social media platforms, can count on being recognized as innovative institutions open to new trends in the area of communication and make the impression of being friendly to the student environment. On the other hand they expose themselves the risk of failure and lack of tested patterns of dealing with a particular platform. At the same time this gives them a chance to become pioneers shaping new trends and models which will be followed by others. Thanks to entering a particular platform early a particular university will already have a lot of fans by the time other universities join the platform.

Undoubtedly, compared to other entities, universities have the advantage in form of community they want to attract — the community of students who are the most active group in social media. On the other hand this is also a challenge for universities, as they have to satisfy big expectations of a group which is well acquainted with modern technologies and at the same time has different expectations from communication, than has been the norm up till now.

Social media are characterized by the fact that exchange of information takes place immediately, Moreover, social media are interactive in character. All of this means that users used to modern forms of communication expect companies, employees, universities to share information in real time. Communication with the Generation Y should thus imitate compete with the ways modern users and in this case students, receive and exchange information on a daily basis: on time, on demand, by means of various channels of communication¹³. Thus, it can be said that Facebook has changed

¹² Zob. A. Chwialkowska, *Monitorowanie mediów społecznościowych jako kluczowy czynnik sukcesu przedsiębiorstwa*, „Zarządzanie i Finanse — Journal of Management and Finance”, kwiecień 2013, Vol. 11, nr 1, p. 51–62.

¹³ A. Chwialkowska, *Social HRM — Media społecznościowe jako narzędzie wspierające zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w organizacji [w:] Systemy Wspomagania Organizacji SWO 2013*, pod red. T. Porębska-Miąć i H. Sroka, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach, Katowice 2013.

the way students, lecturers and employees of a university communicate outside the lecturing room¹⁴.

Only 40% of universities admit that the growth of importance of social media has to a large extent changed the way they handle student recruitment., 60% planned to raise spending on them next year. All universities planned to use both traditional media and social media. A half planned to reduce spending on traditional media and the so-called paid media. Many universities feel that candidates still feel face-to-face contacts and printed brochures or online brochures. Presence in social media is expected and gives an opportunity to strengthen the message, solve problems and respond to questions faster. On the other hand, despite the popularity of social media among students, the most influential communication channels in the process of choosing a university are traditional media: 90% students pointed to the university's website, 76% mentioned open days and 72% named traditional brochures as the main sources of information that influenced their decision making process concerning the choice of university. Mainstream social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, even though they are visited by two thirds of respondents many times a day, don't have a big impact on people's decision concerning the choice of university. One fifth of candidates and current students felt that universities don't use social media for recruitment in a sufficient way and for this reason they didn't look for information in this channel of communication. 27% of respondents were affected by information published in social media by other students, 25% were influenced by pages at university's Facebook profile, 25% were affected by information posted on blogs, 18% were influenced by information from university account on Twitter.¹⁵

Further directions of research

According to the author, in the future it will be interesting to continue the research in two directions — expanding both the subject of research — to non-public universities, in order to identify potential differences in utilization of social media as a tool for communication with students, as well as their potential for attracting new students, raising the awareness of a university, or as a tool for promotion. The subject of research

¹⁴ T. Kaya, *British Business School Offers M.B.A. Courses on Facebook*, 10 listopada 2010, <http://chronicle.com/blogs/wiredcampus/british-university-offers-m-b-a-courses-on-facebook/28463> (13.07.2013).

¹⁵ The research was carried out on a group of 305 student candidates and current students in Great Britain. They were asked about the role that social media played in their decision to choose a university. See: *Communications Management, Traditional Communications appear most trusted and influential when choosing a university*, 25 marca 2013, <http://www.communicationsmanagement.co.uk/blog/higher-education/traditional-communications-appear-most-trusted-and-influential-when-choosing-a-university/#.Ud-3UW1TvdQ> (02.05.2013).

can also be expanded to other social media platforms popular in Poland, such as: YouTube, Google+, Twitter, Blip, Pinterest, GoldenLine, LinkedIn, universities' official blogs, Flickr, NK.pl, Instagram and others. Moreover, it would be necessary to investigate the utilization of social media in contacts with other stakeholders and as a tool for communication supporting the teaching process.

Moreover, students themselves should be subject to research, so that their expectations with regard to the presence of universities in social media and preferred methods of communication with university could be recognized.

Another step should be building appropriate metrics that could make the assessment of universities' activities in social media more objective.

It is also necessary to remember that social media and changes taking place in them are a very dynamic phenomenon, which means that the data gathered in course of the research will quickly become outdated.

Summary

Polish universities are more and more eager to take advantage of social media as a channel for communication with students. Having own profile on Facebook is already more of a standard, than a novelty among Polish universities. At the same time the presence of universities in social media is not limited to having a profile and most universities use their profiles for intensive communication with their students. Polish universities have managed to get many "likes" for their pages. What shows that the results of Polish universities are good is the fact that their average user involvement rate ("number of people talking about it") is many times higher than the same indicator for corporate profiles. Thus, in this respect Polish universities have managed to overtake the world of business. Further steps that universities should take is preparing the strategy of presence in social media and conscious exploration of opportunities provided by other, less popular platforms, as well as creating various profiles for various purposes, aimed at various target groups. Universities should also in a more conscious way promote their presence in social media by, for example, placing links to their social media profiles in visible locations on their official Internet website.

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Attachment 1

List of public universities subject to the research¹⁶

Universities:

- University of Warsaw
- Białystok University
- Gdańsk University
- Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań
- Jagiellonian University in Kraków
- University of Łódź
- Maria Curie-Skłodowska University
- Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
- University of Opole
- University of Szczecin
- University of Silesia in Katowice
- University of Rzeszów
- University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
- Wrocław University
- Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw
- University of Zielona Góra
- Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz
- Jan Kochanowski University

Technical universities:

- West Pomeranian University of Technology
- Warsaw University of Technology
- Białystok Technical University
- University of Bielsko-Biała
- Częstochowa University of Technology
- Gdańsk University of Technology
- Silesian University of Technology (Gliwice)
- Kielce University of Technology
- Technical University in Koszalin
- Cracow University of Technology
- AGH University of Science and Technology
- Lublin University of Technology
- Technical University of Łódź
- Opole University of Technology
- Poznań University of Technology
- Kazimierz Pułaski Technical University of Radom
- Rzeszów University of Technology
- Wrocław University of Technology

¹⁶ Ministry of Science and Higher Education, [http://www.nauka.gov.pl/szkolnictwo-wyzsze/system-szkolnictwa-wyzszeego/uczelnie/uczelnie-publiczne/wykaz-uczelnii-publicznych-nadzorowanych-przez-ministra-wlasciwego-ds-szkolnictwa-wyzszeego/publiczne-uczelnie-akademickie/](http://www.nauka.gov.pl/szkolnictwo-wyzsze/system-szkolnictwa-wyzszego/uczelnie/uczelnie-publiczne/wykaz-uczelnii-publicznych-nadzorowanych-przez-ministra-wlasciwego-ds-szkolnictwa-wyzszeego/publiczne-uczelnie-akademickie/) (1.05.2013).

Economic universities:

- University of Economics in Katowice
- Cracow University of Economics
- Poznań University of Economics
- Warsaw School of Economics
- Wrocław University of Economics

Pedagogical universities:

- The Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education (Warsaw)
- Jan Dlugosz University
- Pedagogical University of Cracow
- Pomeranian University in Słupsk
- University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce

Universities of agriculture, natural sciences

- Warsaw Agricultural University
- University of Technology and Life Sciences in Bydgoszcz
- Agricultural University of Kraków
- University of Life Sciences in Lublin
- Agricultural University of Poznań
- Agricultural University of Wrocław

Physical education universities

- Gdańsk University of Physical Education and Sport
- The Jerzy Kukuczka Academy of Physical Education in Katowice
- University School of Physical Education in Kraków
- University School of Physical Education in Poznań
- Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw
- University of Physical Education in Wrocław

Theological universities:

- Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna w Warszawie



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