

The Role of Social Media in Management of Relational Capital in Universities

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Abstract

Operation of modern organizations is increasingly affected by various solutions in the field of ICT. Mobile technologies, e-learning platforms, or social media stimulate the development of social and economic life. Furthermore, the growing number of Internet users and social media users contribute to the use of potential of these phenomena in the economic activity. Similar tendencies are observed in education. The wide use of ICT tools affects substantial transformations in operation of schools and universities. Particular importance has been attached to cooperation with stakeholders, which, with ICT development, might be extended to a substantially greater scale. The potential of cooperation with stakeholders is termed as relational capital. Nowadays, this capital represents a valuable resource of each organization, since it affects their operation and development. This paper presented the idea of formation of relational capital in universities using social media. Statistical data concerning the use of social media in Poland were presented. Furthermore, key activities connected with the utilization of social media in university operations were indicated. The paper also emphasized the benefits of the use of social media in universities.

Keywords : relational capital, ICT, social media, university

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The last two decades revealed the need for cooperation and development of relations based on the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT technologies have determined operation of many entities and have stimulated development of new principles of operation in the knowledge-based economy, which also concerns the operation of universities. One of the important ICT solutions is social media. They allow for building strategies in an organization and its positive image, thus ensuring quality of education and knowledge transfer (Dima, Grabara, & Vladutescu, 2014). Such activities are conducive to the development of scientific staff and improvement in the quality of education.

The use of the potential of social media has an important effect on cooperation between the university and stakeholders. Furthermore, social media facilitates such activities as e.g. campaigns, achievement of image-related, didactic and scientific goals, effective communication and reaching a wide group of recipients. The key

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reason for the use of social media in operation of universities is its growing population, with particular focus on the group of young people who are improving their qualifications (Meesala, Vani, & Diana, 2015; Štefko, Bačík, & Fedorko, 2014).

Cooperation based on the potential of social media is essential for development of the resources of relational capital and matches the paradigm of knowledge-based economy. The need for building the relations between key stakeholders, such as university students, employees, and graduates is of great importance for achievement of the university goals which take into consideration the needs and expectations of the entities involved in cooperation. Under contemporary conditions, cooperation of universities with stakeholders is viewed as a prerequisite for its optimum operation.

This paper presents the idea of formation of relational capital in universities using social media. Statistical data concerning the use of social media in Poland is presented, and key activities connected with the use of this instrument in operation of universities has been indicated.

The Importance of Relational Capital from the Standpoint of University Operations

Universities are institutions which have very old and rich heritage. Universities represent a varied group in terms of models of operation, which are determined by the solutions adopted in individual countries. The forms and scope of activity of universities are substantially transformed with the changes in the social and economic contexts. Leading universities in the world differ from each other with their organization and structure, but all of them substantially contribute to civilization advances through breakthrough research and teaching innovative contents. Furthermore, leading universities all over the world have a different degree of staff internationalization, students, research, and different level of involvement of students in research activity at the early stage of education. Another source of high position of these universities is the specialization in key areas of science (Olechnicka, Płoszaj, & Wojnar, 2011). Scientific and research development, staff internationalization, and continuous process of improvement of the quality of education services requires cooperation of universities with their stakeholders. This cooperation is essential for development of relational capital. Development of relational capital concerns the activities aimed at, for example, exchange of information, physical exchange and energy exchange, building permanent relationships based on trust while maintaining the awareness of formation of relations of "who, where, when". Key characteristics of relations include exchangeability, reciprocity, and engagement.

Building relations requires trust, efficient process of communication, ability to cooperate, and proper culture in the organization or society (Ferencová, Misencíková, & Kot, 2014). Trust is stimulated based on a variety of factors, which include credibility, consistency in activities, and the communication process. In this domain, which is often virtual, communication is more and more frequently dependent upon the use of ICT tools. ICT technologies have substantially affected the communication process, opportunities, functions, and tasks of recipients and suppliers and made the course of this process dependent upon the place and time. In the case of the university, another important factor is rankings and image-related development of the university. The image-related development of the university can be interpreted in a double manner. Firstly, as physical facilities, that is, buildings, environment, equipment etc. and, secondly, as an image created in the virtual world through the website of the university and its profile in the social media. The willingness to cooperate is an important factor in the process of building relations. In universities, this cooperation depends upon factors as: opportunities and willingness to carry out joint research, development of joint projects, publications, taking various initiatives, for example conferences, seminars, etc., exchange of students, sharing experience in terms of didactic classes, preparation and development of e-learning materials, and so forth. Furthermore, the organizational culture

determines the way the people affect each other, work, and assign roles. Furthermore, organizational culture regulates what is accepted in a particular organization (Nogalski & Kowalczyk, 2007). The culture has an essential effect on creation of cooperation, engagement, building the relations. It concerns, in particular, the intraorganizational relations, but it also affects those which are interorganizational.

Relational capital is based on relational resources. The components of these resources include (Krupski, Niemczyk, & Stańczyk-Hugiet, 2009):

↪ **Characteristics:** exchange, engagement, reciprocity ;

↪ **Method of Resource Transfer:** formal or informal ;

↪ **Effects Expected:** increased interest in university among potential candidates, reduction in the costs of operation, elimination of danger, increased quality of education;

↪ **Skills:** in terms of the use of resources during organization operation (including using the opportunities) and for generation of specific profits.

With development of ICT, contemporary organizations have more and more opportunities and resources to communicate and build relations. One of them are social media, which allow users to develop personal and social relations and stimulate their loyalty with respect to a specific brand (Ruleman, 2012). Social media also represents the environment in universities, supporting them in development of relations with stakeholders and creation of positive image among future and present students.

Social Media Implications in University Management

Universities have to manage the process of attracting and maintaining the students, offering modern curricula that responds to the labour market demands and the tools that support management of universities (Czmiel-Grzybowska & Brzeziński, 2015). Dynamic changes in the expectations and preferences of students' community are being observed. These changes have been affected by the development of ICT technologies. Students look for information about the university courses and universities on the Internet based on opinions and comments presented by other users. Such opinions are viewed as more credible since they are often generated by the people the users know. Over the education period, students are willing to use various ICT solutions (virtual dean's offices, university websites, e-learning platforms, etc.). The people who graduate from universities should remain in contact with universities through Internet tools of communication. Building and maintaining relations with key group of stakeholders (students' community) might be achieved through social media.

This term relates to the media which is based on easily available information technologies (Krok, 2011). Key social networking websites include: Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, and GoldenLine. Most of the people using the social media associate social media mainly with social networking websites (Bright, Kleiser, & Grau, 2015). Social media has become an important factor of development in the contemporary world. This concerns social and economic growth and development of all educational institutions (Vollum, 2014).

Social media provides innovative tools for faster, effective, and cheap communication with wide opportunities for presentation of the contents and their reception. The contents are distributed using the social interaction. Easy access and easiness of the use causes that creation and reception of the contents are virtually unlimited. In a specific target group, social media allows for achievement of a higher degree of engagement of the recipients while using the traditional media at lower costs of these activities (Proszowska, 2013).

Information in social media is converted and aggregated. Social media removes the barriers between the recipients and senders because the information flows in two directions. Time between formulation of the content and its publication is limited to the minimum, occurring typically without delay. An important characteristic of

social media is free, unlimited method of creation of contents and no control over their content. It is users who determine what will be published or what will be read and modified (Krok, 2011).

Intensification of activities taken within social networking websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, or LinkedIn is typical of the knowledge-based economy. Easy access to modern Internet technologies allows for organization of social campaigns, promotion of projects, support for scientific exchange, support for the didactic process, transfer of knowledge, or strengthening the relationships between the university and its key stakeholders (students). Operation in the area of social media reflects the natural tendency of people for association, expressing their own opinions and sharing emotions, which is obviously conducive to sharing information and knowledge.

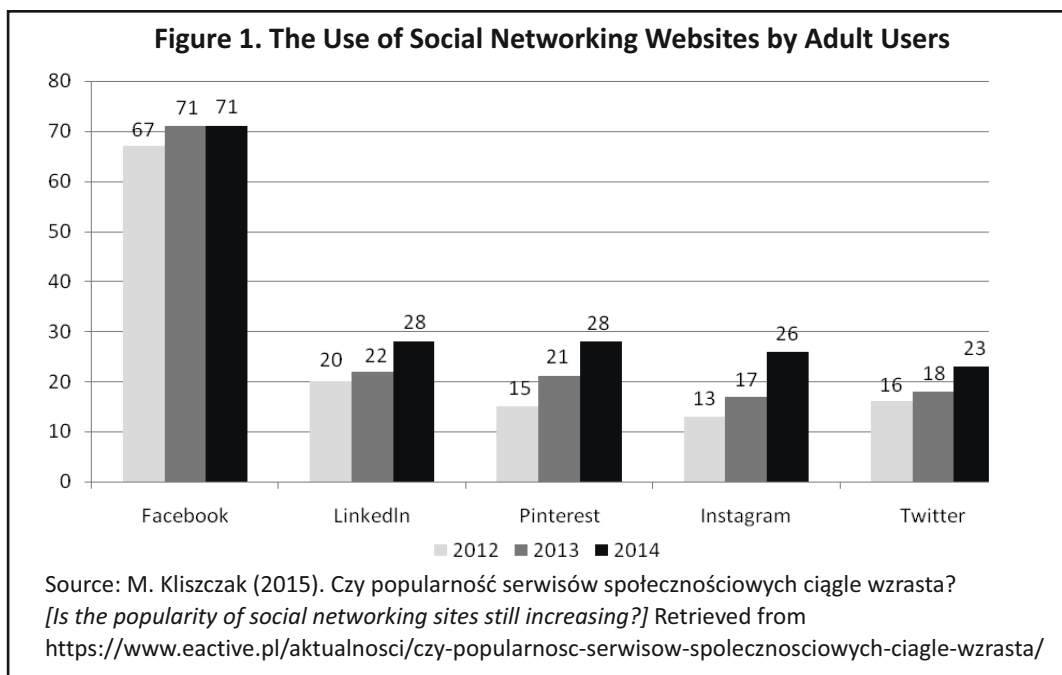
From the standpoint of social media, cooperation of universities with key stakeholders might yield a number of benefits. Firstly, social media represents an important component of effective promotion of educational, scientific, and research activities. Secondly, they ensure easy access to information resources and might represent the valuable source of supplementation of theoretical knowledge. Thirdly, the scientific staff might be encouraged to start cooperation between other scientific centres. Additionally, cooperation between the universities and enterprise, which also utilizes the potential of social media, might have an important effect on absorption of the solutions proposed by the scientific environment for the problems of contemporary organizations. Another important factor in using social media is creation of the value between the involved parties. Access to other users, activation of students, connecting information through hyperlinks for the contents between individual social media websites, the use of synergy during performance of common activities, recommendations of graduates, collecting the opinions and distribution of information are only selected substantial benefits for both universities and their stakeholders. The initiatives started within social media to ensure particular benefits for students and employees also represent an important reason for their use. An important advantage of social media is opportunity for monitoring information generated by stakeholders, especially students and graduates.

The Use of Social Media Among Polish Internet Users

The main benefit of social media is their popularity. In recent years, some growth of the popularity of the social network can be seen, which results from the growing number of Internet users in Poland. During the research, 287 people were contacted between April 3 - 9, 2014, as a representative part of a random sample consisting of 1028 adult Poland citizens. The study was based on the direct interviews method (face-to-face) as well as computer-aided (CAPI). According to the study, most of the Internet users in Poland represented the group of people aged between 18 to 24 years (96%). The number of people in Poland with an account in one of the social networking websites in 2008 was 21% and in 2014, this figure was almost two fifth (39%). The people who use social networking websites indicated that their main functions are (Internauci 2014, 2014):

- ↪ Keeping in touch with friends (54%);
- ↪ Rekindling of old friendships (40%);
- ↪ Starting new contracts (20%);
- ↪ Streaming of various contents (music, videos, photos, reading contents) (38%);
- ↪ Presentation of user's own contents, for example, photos, music, films (26%);
- ↪ Discussions, conversations, and presentation of comments (25%);
- ↪ Looking for a job and presentation for the potential employers (16%); almost the same percentage (15%) of people declared entering into professional relationships.

According to the research concerning the use of websites carried out at the end of 2014 by Pew Research



Center, the most popular social portal is Facebook, with a relatively great advantage (Figure 1). Although its growth has slowed down a little, the degree of engagement and activity of the users has increased. Although the interest in Instagram is also not dynamic, its users are more and more active on the network. They are also of key importance to distribution of information between the social media. Results were interpreted based on data gained through phone interviews made by Princeton Survey Research Associates International in September 2014. On the basis of the results of the whole sample, it can be inferred with 95 % certainty that the mistakes resulting from sampling was a give or take 2.5% points. On the base of results of Internet users ($n = 1,597$), margin of error of sampling results [give or take] was 2.9 % points (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015).

Furthermore, the survey carried out by IRCenter concerning Polish social media showed that despite high popularity of YouTube and Facebook, Internet users are more and more inclined to abandon the active use of many social networking websites. Conventional social channels, such as blogs and microblogs, ceased to be prestigious and popular among the Internet users (Krzosek, n.d.). Analysis of the distribution of the results obtained concerning the statements published in social media in 2014 revealed that the dominant website was Facebook (44.1%) and Twitter (29.1%). The third place was taken by the Internet discussion boards (11.4%) (“What will be the 2015 in social media?” 2015).

Implications

The results presented show that with social media, great opportunities open up for the universities to reach the potential students. Furthermore, the universities can develop valuable relationships with present students. An important factor in operation of universities within social media is not only finding new users, but also stimulation of engagement of students, graduates, employees, and the constructive dialogue with these people. Achievement of these goals requires development of suitable strategies of operation of the university within social media. This strategy should include definition of the following activities (Młynarczyk, 2013):

- ↳ Determination of the target group;
- ↳ Setting the goals, expectations and opportunities, and definition of the ideas;

- ↪ Determination of the channels for communication which are adequate for the target group;
- ↪ Information about initiatives taken by the university;
- ↪ Monitoring of the initiatives and observation of the recipients;
- ↪ Involvement of graduates in promotion of universities.

The functioning of the university in social media can be strengthened by establishment of the unit in the university which is responsible for cooperation within specific social networking websites. Such an entity should be equipped in a specific set of competencies and opportunities for making decisions about the scope of cooperation and it should represent both the interests of the university, its students, employers, and graduates. This approach might raise some concerns about the costs of maintaining the additional staff. However, with a longer time perspective, the benefits of effective cooperation in social media might substantially affect not only the optimal operation of the university, but also its development and dynamics of innovative activities.

Conclusion

Creating relational capital of higher education institutions is an appropriate way to reach the efficiency rise of the college and for the stimulation of the economic development of the region and the country. Building of relations between the college and its stakeholders certainly simplifies using chances appearing on the market but also requires the application of new, and at the same time, quickly becoming widespread forms of communications.

Analysis of the potential and the range of possibilities offered by the social media constitutes a significant feature in drawing the strategy of the functioning of every college within these new forms of communication and cooperation. Aware and oriented activities that approach social media as a method of using the contents with educational, scientific, research, and promotional character allow for supporting the communication with key stakeholders. Such activities translate into the development of relational capital. This capital allows for achievement of a competitive advantage.

The active and involved students who use modern Internet tools of communication represent important links in the process of management of relations between universities and their stakeholders. Development of the Internet, followed by the change in the model of communication from passive (one-directional) towards active (two-directional) equips students and the whole academic society with great opportunities for development (Uroda, 2014).

It should be emphasized that today's cooperation of colleges with their stakeholders and creating sources of relational capital requires using new communication channels that are significant for their stakeholders, that is, among others, social media. It is worthwhile to emphasize that colleges, as places of the development of knowledge, functioning in dynamically changing surroundings, should not that much follow the latest trends of the development of society, but should overtake them.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

Social media has become a significant and gigantic communication channel, in which the possibility of reaching the right persons is great. The presented findings concerning the application of social media both amongst Polish, as well as American Internet users points towards the changes happening in directions of exploiting individual kinds of social media and the dynamics of the activity of their users. Analysis of these examinations is the first and meaning stage in choice of individual kinds of social media for action taken by colleges. Application of a given kind of social media in the next stage is tied up with exploiting their functionality, its potential, and its affects, creating appropriate relations of the college with its stakeholders. The next stage of research should be based upon

the evaluation of functioning profiles and their moderating, way of communicating contents, campaigns directed at its stakeholders, which significantly regards students or college workers.

Described examinations were conducted on a group of people, which did not constitute only stakeholders of the college, and this may constitute a restriction on the construction of a correct strategy of universities in social media. Despite this, the analysis of these studies is important because it enables the identification of phenomena associated with the use of social media (defines directions of development, defining the areas of use of social media, functionality, user expectations, accepted culture of communication, etc.). Social media as a new channel of communication must be monitored and clearly identified as the basis for creating strategies in their structures. In addition, the individual channels of social media content are presented in proportion to their form. This requires organizations to develop content information in a form adapted to the individual channels of social media like presentation of the results, opinions and ideas (blogs), sharing (YouTube), co-creation, cooperation (Google), building and maintaining relationships (Facebook), or communication and discussion (forums). It should be remembered that these contents should be consistent, up to date, and clearly presented despite the presentation of the different channels.

Future research studies should be conducted amongst the selected group of people being stakeholders of the college. Examining the preferences, expectations of individual groups of stakeholders correlated with the level of their digital competences, which determines effective use of the potential of the functionality of social media in university management, is an important component of proposed examinations.

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