UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE COURSE OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES WITH REGARD TO THE EXPLOITATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA POTENTIAL

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Abstract
The steady increase of the Internet’s significance in almost every person’s life has recently become one of the vital trends. The Internet is encroaching upon almost all spheres of human activities. It is becoming a place where interpersonal relationships are established. In particular, social media are undergoing a dynamic change. Their users do not limit their activity exclusively to entertainment but use the media to establish business relations as well. Enterprises exploit the potential of social media to a greater or lesser extent. However, social media online activity requires adequate management.

The subject matter of the present paper pertains to the development of knowledge in terms of skills useful in handling social media from an entrepreneur’s point of view. The objective of the study was to identify and assess the curriculum of management studies in relation to these skills. The curricula of management studies at both state and private universities in Lublin were examined. The analysis of the research results indicates that the curricula include classes connected with Internet skills. However, they tend to lack courses strictly linked with a modern mode of communication with clients offered by social media.

Keywords: social media, university curriculum, management course, universities.

1 INTRODUCTION
At present, the Internet is one of the fastest growing areas of human activity. It has encroached upon almost every individual’s life since its invention 50 years ago. Currently, it seems to be virtually impossible to find an individual who never uses the Internet when e.g. shopping, searching for information or as a form of entertainment. The Internet is becoming a place where people establish interpersonal contacts, frequently resigning from face to face relations. The use of social media, which enable the user to enter into diverse contacts, including business ones, is experiencing a significant growth. It is due to the fact that Internet users seek information related to products, services or companies. In addition, the fact that user recommendation has become one of the most effective forms of advertising is noteworthy. Therefore, businesses have begun to devote attention to the considerable potential of social media. Moreover, the appropriate management of activities in social media may be beneficial with regard to corporate image, sales and finances as well.

In view of the foregoing, there is a need for competences connected with the ability to create corporate image in social media. Such skills seem to be essential not only for online marketing managers but also ought to be highly valued by managers of both micro and small businesses. Furthermore, a manager should be knowledgeable enough to be able to coordinate and control an organization in every field of its activity, including the Internet. The subject matter of the study pertains to the development of knowledge regarding skills useful in handling social media from an entrepreneur’s point of view. The aim of the study was to identify and assess the curricula of university management studies with regard to these skills.

Nowadays the influence of the Internet is accelerating at an incredible speed. The significance of the Internet’s impact can be recognized by the number of its users. For example, in December 1995, the number of Internet users amounted to 16 million (0.4% of the global population). In March 2019, the number was estimated at 4346 million (51.6% of the global population) [1]. The percentage of people using the Internet is especially large in well-developed countries. For example, in 2019, 82.9% of EU citizens used the Internet [1]. In North America exclusively, market penetration index is higher and equals 89.1%. In other parts of the world the index is the following: Australia and Oceania 68%, Latin America 66.6%, Middle East 65.8%, Asia 51.7%, Africa 35.9% [2]. The rapid Internet boom is determined by two factors: development of social networks and mobile technologies [3]. Owing to the social networks, users found a new way of communication. Mobile technologies enabled easier Internet
access. This in turn, resulted in a higher number of users globally. In view of the foregoing, it may be argued that social media currently constitute the principal motive for people’s online activity. It is due to the fact that social media are based on a dynamic structure, i.e. one which enables its users to become active, exchange information in real time and share a strong sense of identity with other Internet users [4]. The most important features characterizing social media include [4]:

- free online information flow. This means that information resources are not developed solely by the author. Content can also be subsequently added by individual users who may supplement it or comment on it.
- the possibility to become organized and exert impact—social media enable their users to form groups which may function independently from businesses;
- co-participation and cooperation, which entails bilateral communication – a company makes use of external sources of knowledge and competences, whereas customers actively participate in creating an offer;
- new sources of knowledge and new role models—opinions expressed by online community members have a considerable impact on buying decisions of other Internet users (even 50% of buying decisions are determined by online opinions).

Currently, there are several types of social media. The most notable ones include [4]:

- services where users create profiles, such as: Facebook, Nasza Klasa, Instagram,
- microblogs, which serve to exchange information through posting short messages and links, e.g. Twitter, Messenger, Blip,
- blogs- mini-bulletins which initially served as online diaries. Their character is widely varied at present,
- professional communities, e.g. LinkedIn, Goldenline, and sector-specific communities,
- portals including thematic social networks, whose content is created by users uploading videos, photos and other materials, e.g. YouTube, Pinterest, Wikipedia,
- citizen journalism services where articles are not published by editors but by users themselves, e.g. Wiadomości24.pl,
- discussion forums. All Internet portals have them. They can also function independently and center around one subject area,
- opinion and recommendation services e.g. Opineo.pl,
- e-commerce services, where social mechanisms are used e.g. to auction, borrow or convert money.

A wide range of various forms of social media means every Internet user is able to find something suitable and compelling. On the other hand, Internet and social media addictions tend to increasingly appear. With regard to America, where the market penetration index is the highest, as many as 22% of Americans use online social networks several times a day [5]. Consequently, the impact of social media on users’ lives tends to be very high. It is worth mentioning that the young generation are the most frequent users. Currently in the USA, as many as 90% of young people (aged 18-29) use social media. This, in comparison with 12% in 2005, indicates a sharp increase by 78%. Other age groups are also highly active in social media. In 2015, the distribution was the following: 77% of Americans aged between 30-49, 51% aged between 50-64, and 35% at the age of 65 and above [6].

Taking the variety of social media and their popularity among Internet users into consideration, it seems vital to mention the leaders in the field. In 2016, the highest number of visitors in the world among all social media sites belonged to: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google Plus+, Tumblr, Instagram, VK and Flickr [1]. On the other hand, in Poland, the most popular social networks include: Facebook, blog platform Blogspot, Onet communities, Twitter, Gazeta.pl (data for 2016) [7].

2 METHODOLOGY

The subject matter of the paper pertains to the development of knowledge concerning skills for handling social media from an entrepreneur’s point of view. The aim of the study was to identify and assess the
curricula of university management studies with regard to these skills. The curricula at both state and private universities were analyzed.

The sample was selected on the basis of age and the profile of the course. Due to a strong correlation between age and social media, and enormous opportunities to exploit the media in business, management studies became the focus of the paper. This results from the fact that management graduates, unlike the graduates of other courses, are more likely to manage organizations in the course of their careers. This means they are likely to make decisions regarding the online presence and operations of organizations.

In view of the foregoing, the curricula of management studies at four state universities were analyzed: Maria Curie-Sklodowska University (MCSU), Lublin University of Technology (LUT), Catholic University in Lublin (CUL), University of Life Sciences in Lublin (ULS). In addition, the following private universities were surveyed: University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin (WSEiI), University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin (WSPA).

The study was conducted in February 2019 by means of the organizations’ document analysis. The curricula and syllabuses of management studies and/or detailed course descriptions which are a part of the curriculum relevant to the issue were analyzed.

3 RESULTS

The growth of importance of the Internet in almost every person’s life influences the way social media are used as well. Currently, apart from serving entertainment and social purposes, social media are also used in business. In view of the foregoing, it seems to be absolutely essential to train prospective entrepreneurs to be able to take advantage of this tool. Therefore, proper education is of utmost importance, especially with regard to management studies.

The first analyzed university offering a management course was Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin. Currently, it is the largest university in the city with 23,796 students (academic year 2016/2017). In addition, it ought to be noted that it is the most international university in Poland [8]. The Faculty of Economics functions in the structure of the university. It offers business-related courses such as Management and Management. Within these courses, there are various specializations selected by students on an individual basis [9]:

- specializations at the Management course in the framework of the first-cycle studies: Advertising and modern forms of marketing communication, Business Management and Human Resources Management;
- specializations at the Management course in the framework of the second-cycle studies: Information systems in administration and business, Brand and corporate image management, Social capital management, Business and social organizations management;
- specializations at the Business Management course: E-business, Human Resources Management.

When conducting the analysis of the curriculum and the syllabuses of the aforementioned specializations, it was observed that there appear classes connected with the subject of social media (Table 1). Nonetheless, such classes are offered only in specializations such as Information systems in administration and business and Advertising and modern forms of marketing communication. However, it seems noteworthy that the ‘Marketing in social media’ class is only one out of 15 given to students in the framework of E-business and social media.

Another university offering a management course is Lublin University of Technology. In academic year 2017/2018, there were 8756 students at the university [10]. The structure of the university features the Faculty of Management, which offers 5 fields of studies, 3 of which are business-oriented: Management, Management and Production Engineering, Marketing and market communication [11]. At the Management field of studies, there is merely a single course pertaining to the subject matter—‘New media in marketing communication’ (Table 1). However, it is an elective course. This means it is not mandatory for every student. On the other hand, with regard to Marketing and social communication field, there are two courses where the issue of social media is discussed to some extent: ‘E-marketing’ and ‘Techniques and tools of social marketing.’ The former is a compulsory course discussing subjects such as online video and audio-vloggers, YouTube campaigns, podcasts. The latter is strictly connected with social media and involves such issues as e.g. channels of communication in social media, branding,
webwriting, blogs, cooperation with influencers, Facebook, self-publishing, and crowdsourcing. Moreover, as part of the course, practical classes are offered. The classes involve a hands-on approach enabling students to create a strategy and subsequently employ it in social media. Nonetheless, it is an elective course. Therefore, not all graduates of this particular field of studies are able to benefit from it.

Other public universities in Lublin which offer business-related fields of studies are the Catholic University of Lublin (CUL)- one of the most distinguishable universities in the city, and the University of Life Sciences in Lublin (LSU). CUL offers Management and LSU offers Management and Production Engineering studies. Neither the former nor the latter has courses connected with social media on offer (Table 1). Obviously, the curricula feature a mandatory course labeled ‘Marketing’ where the issue of social media is mentioned but only in vestigial form, which does not seem to be sufficient.

The situation tends to be similar at private universities- WSPA and WSEiI. They offer ‘Marketing’ in the framework of their Management program. It is a course which covers only fundamental issues related to marketing. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of courses strictly connected with social media. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that WSEiI offers a master’s program in E-business and business management which, in theory, ought to cover the subject matter discussed in the paper. However, information about the course and its content is not specific enough on the website.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Specialization</th>
<th>Courses related to social media</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MCSU Management</td>
<td>Advertising and modern forms of marketing communication</td>
<td>E-marketing and social media</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Human resources management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information systems in administration and business</td>
<td>E-marketing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Brand and corporate image management</td>
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<td>Social capital management</td>
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<td>Business and social organizations management</td>
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<td>Business Management</td>
<td>E-business</td>
<td>WWW Management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>none</td>
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<td>LUT Management</td>
<td>New media in marketing communication (an elective course)</td>
<td>E-marketing Techniques and tools of social marketing (an elective course)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing and market communication</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Management and production engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUL Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSU Management</td>
<td>Management and production engineering</td>
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<td>WSEiI Management</td>
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Source: own study on the basis of: [9], [11],[12], [13], [14], [15].

4 CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays, the ability to operate in social media is one of the fundamental marketing activities a company undertakes. Clearly, not all organizations have been able to appear online. However, a lasting upward trend concerning the significance of the Internet and social media in people’s lives will soon
generate a necessity for all organizations to explore this venue. The situation is motivated by the Generation Z entering adulthood and labor market. The generation is comprised of people who are heavily dependent on technologies and highly active in social media. Apart from that, a tendency towards a stronger interest in social media can be also observed in other age groups. Currently, as many as 90% of Internet users in Poland exploit social media to some extent. In addition, the number of active users, i.e. authors and people who comment online, is on the rise as well [16]. In view of the foregoing, organizations should not only appear in social media but also exploit their full potential. In order to achieve this objective, a proper education of management personnel is essential. Adequate business courses aligned with contemporary trends ought to be offered. Obviously, especially in large organizations, managers benefit from the services of online marketing specialists. Therefore, some argue that managers do not need a more in-depth knowledge of the field. Nevertheless, a manager should be knowledgeable enough to be able to coordinate and control an organization in every field it is active in, including the Internet. Such competences seem to be of crucial importance especially for those running small and micro businesses. This is due to the fact that managers of such organizations are often responsible for undertaking actions concerning all fields of the company’s operations, including creating corporate image in social media.

The subject matter of the paper pertains to the development of knowledge concerning skills useful for managers in handling social media. The review of curricula of studies available at universities in Lublin revealed that the development of social media skills is insufficient. Classes strictly connected with the subject matter of the present paper are available for majors linked with marketing i.e. Advertising and modern forms of marketing communication (MCSU) and Marketing and market communication (LUT). The curricula and majors of the remaining universities do not offer such courses at all. Management at LUT is an exception. It offers a course connected with social media. However, it is an elective course, thus not all graduates of this particular field of studies will pursue it. Obviously, business-related courses feature classes in Marketing at all the surveyed universities. Nonetheless, the analysis of curricula suggests that these courses pertain to fundamental issues concerning management, whereas the subject of social media is either marginalized or downright ignored. Therefore, taking the current trend into consideration, one can observe a gap between market demand and educational offer.

In view of the foregoing, the adjustment of curricula at marketing-related fields of studies seems valid. The adjustment ought to include the content associated with social media skills. The skills will not only help managers to manage online operations of their organizations effectively, but will allow them to monitor and coordinate actions undertaken by specialists in this field. Practical classes seem to be a compelling concept. They enable students to become familiar with the subject matter and confront theory with practice by actually applying social media in the context of business operations. Practical classes offered by LUT titled ‘Techniques and tools of social marketing’ (an elective course) can be considered as a good practice. The content of the practical classes mentioned above discusses issues which may be prospectively of interest with regard to online operations, e.g. strategies for building online presence, development of posting schedules, creation of infographics, compilation and editing of blog content, development of principles for cooperation with celebrities, customer service via social media, triggering and stopping a crisis etc. [17]. Moreover, such classes offer added value. Apart from managers, individuals may also benefit from social media skills in their professional and private lives.

REFERENCES


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