

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR THE REALIZATION OF MARKETING OBJECTIVES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Abstract

Social media have been intensively used as a tool for the realization of marketing objectives of higher education institutions. Higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following the regional trends, started to apply social media as a part of their marketing activities. This paper examines the role and importance of social media in the marketing of higher education institutions, and analyzes the results of research in the application of social media in the marketing of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Secondary data collected between May and July 2014 from web sites and social pages of 9 state and 23 private institutions of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina were used as the sources of information required for this study. Particular emphasis is placed on comparative analysis of the ways in which public and private higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina apply social media to realize their marketing goals. It was established that social media are primarily used as a tool to recruit new students, and that there is a difference between the manner in which state and private institutions of higher education use social media.

Keywords: social media, marketing, marketing objectives, higher education institutions,

INTRODUCTION

Marketing in higher education institutions based on integrated marketing principles of business sector helps them to face the challenges of the changes in the environment by creating so called "learning environment" which is customized to satisfy the recognized needs of the customers. In the context of marketing orientation, the process of higher education is seen as an exchange process where institutions offer various knowledge, skills and competencies, preparation for career, satisfaction and other benefits to their customers by using various resources, and in return, they receive tuition fees, donations, time and energy from their stakeholders (students, funders and labor market). Due to the better choice possibilities of higher education service providers, students today look for value added: better service, program quality and value for money (Štimac, Leko Šimić, 2012).

Although higher education institutions belong to the service sector, their activities is not to be viewed only from the economic aspect, since the purpose of their existence is education. Therefore, the marketing strategies of higher education institutions differ from other service organizations. Marketing here primarily serves as a vital component of communication with target groups: prospective students, alumni and multipliers such as parents, businesses etc (Loevonich, 2009, in Kohn, Griesbaum, Mandl, 2012).

Higher education institutions have at their disposal a number of tools which they need in order to enable the realization of marketing objectives. So far the most used are "leaflets and brochures", "websites" and "university directories". Internet forums and direct marketing are referred to as an additional marketing tool (Jansen, Brenn-White, 2011). However, one of the primary challenges for academic marketers, and one that also exists for many corporate marketers is the lack of adequate resources - human and financial - available for marketing activities (Hawkins, Frohoff, 2011).

This is certainly another reason why higher education institutions are increasingly applying social media that enable them to, at low cost, directly communicate with the target segments. The rapid development of social media and their increasingly intensive use of significantly influenced the change in the mode of communication for students with higher education institutions. Therefore, universities and colleges, in addition to mass communication, pay more attention to the development of instruments of direct communication with target segments, and, in doing so, they are increasingly turning to social media. It is necessary to harmonize them with the instruments of mass communication, and the establishment of integrated marketing communications to enable the realization of the marketing goals.

Therefore, this paper starts from the following research questions:

1. Are higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina applying social media to communicate with their target segments?
2. What marketing objectives are the higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina trying to implement by using social media?
3. Is there a difference in the manner and the intensity of the application of social media between public and private institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of past analysis of the use of social media in higher education

Higher education institutions are increasingly applying social media to achieve direct communication with their target segments, primarily with existing and potential students. In addition, social media enable global connectivity of a certain group and transparent communication. The impact of social media on business higher education institutions is becoming stronger. Choudaha (2013) points out that social media in recent years represent one of the major influences on the future of international higher education; adapting to this change will be critical in realizing internationalization goals in general and recruitment goals in particular for many institutions.

The benefits of using social media in the educational process (adapted from Tiryakioglu, Erzurum, 2011):

- the ability to use regardless of place and time,
- they have an impact on quality improvement and lead to success and efficiency in education,
- the progress of technology offers the possibility of systematic acquisition of knowledge for quite a short period of time,
- the possibility of obtaining rapid feedback,
- to provide opportunities for two-way communication and evaluate the performance of students etc.

Barnes and Mattson conducted a study on a sample of US universities and colleges in 2011. The results of the study showed that officials are increasingly using social media to gather information about potential students. They found that the most used social medium for marketing communication with prospective students was Facebook (98%). Other social media included were YouTube (86%), Twitter (84%) and blogs (66%) (Nyangau, Bado, 2012).

A study conducted in Turkey included 1,818 undergraduate and postgraduate students. The study was an effort to determine whether the educational profile of students affects the intensity

and how to use Facebook. The research results showed that undergraduate students use Facebook for communication and as a source of current information, while graduate students increasingly used for research for homework and projects, sharing teaching materials and the like. These results indicate that the higher education institutions should specify their activities on Facebook following the level of education of their students (Karal, Kokoc, 2013).

The results of the research that included 304 students of the Polytechnic of Sibenik in March 2012 showed that 44.88% of the surveyed students used online media for information purposes, while 8.25% of them still use standard forms of gathering necessary information (message boards, phone calls, etc.). The remaining 46.86% of students said that they used all forms of media. One third of the surveyed students used social networks for discussing current college-related issues, and it is evident that the majority of students find social networks helpful in having information about the studies and examinations. Only 19.3% of the surveyed students reported social networks as not useful in keeping themselves informed of the classes (Goles, Milkovic, Perisic, Skrabo, 2012).

Researching the significance of the presence of higher education institutions in social media was conducted in two institutions in Zagreb in May 2011. The research included the students and employees, and showed that the respondents were aware of the benefits of social media, but they did not have a shared opinion on whether higher education institutions should officially be present in social media (Golubic, Lasic-Lazic 2012).

In Lithuania, an empirical research was conducted applying social media to promote studies in higher education institutions. The results showed that the universities following communication from one another in social media as well as to use the same channels Facebook and YouTube to communicate with schoolchildren and prospective students. As the research showed, Lithuanian universities still do not fully involve their internal audiences and departments into the process of communication in social media (Zailskaite Jakste, Kuvykaite 2012).

Stang's study was conducted including 403 prospective students in the Netherlands where the main objective was to assess the influence of social media on the selection of the university. The results of the study showed that 95% of the respondents had at least one profile on one of the social media. However, studies have shown that social networks were the last on the list of sources of information on institutions and higher education, on which prospective students relied. Instead, students are still using traditional methods including visits to colleges, university websites and brochures as a primary source of information. Therefore, Stagn believes that higher education institutions should develop a clear marketing strategy for social media to define clear objectives and control their implementation if their aim is to establish a more efficient communication with prospective students (Nyangau, Bado 2012).

METHODOLOGY

As sources of information necessary for this research, secondary data were used, ie Web pages and social institutions of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The homepage of the Agency for Development of Higher Education and Quality Assurance of Bosnia and Herzegovina (<http://www.heg.gov.ba>) shows all of the universities in BiH. Bosnia and Herzegovina is territorially divided into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Srpska and Brcko District. While browsing through the homepage, we came to the data that the area of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) currently has 6 state and 10 private universities, while in the Republic of Srpska (RS) there are 3 state and 12 private universities, colleges and high schools. In the Brcko District students may enroll in a private university, and one higher school. After that we analyzed the presence of universities (state and private) on social media in the database of the Agency. Secondary data were collected from May to July 2014, including data from social media (Facebook, Twitter and YouTube) of the listed universities. For the analysis of data collected in the survey, the following statistical scientific methods were used:

- descriptive statistical analysis of the data collected and
- descriptive analysis of mutual relations among the selected data.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study further presents and provides an analysis of the results of the impact of the development of social media to communication activities of the BiH universities. Communicating with the university environment through social media was unknown to many universities until early 2008, when they started to use increasingly social networks like Facebook. Until then, the websites of universities were mainly used for advertising, and in one part for keeping the visitors informed of the latest and upcoming college-related events, and not at all used for interactive communication.

Having realized that through social media universities in a very short time at a very low cost can communicate with their target audience, most universities today use the power of the media to adequately promote their activities to the target audience. Bearing in mind that the most users of social media are persons aged 17-25 years, the promotion of universities, colleges and their activities through these types of media offers these institutions the opportunity to further motivate the prospective students and place more focus on their interests in studying at the given institution.

Figure 1. The presence of the BiH faculties on social networks

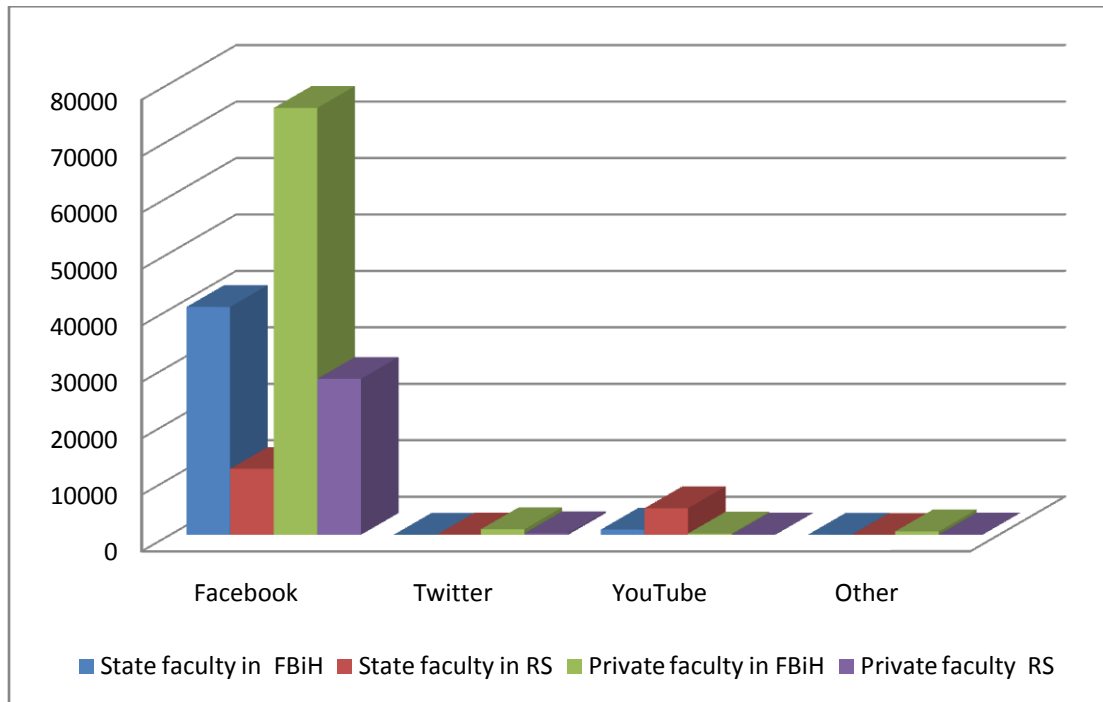
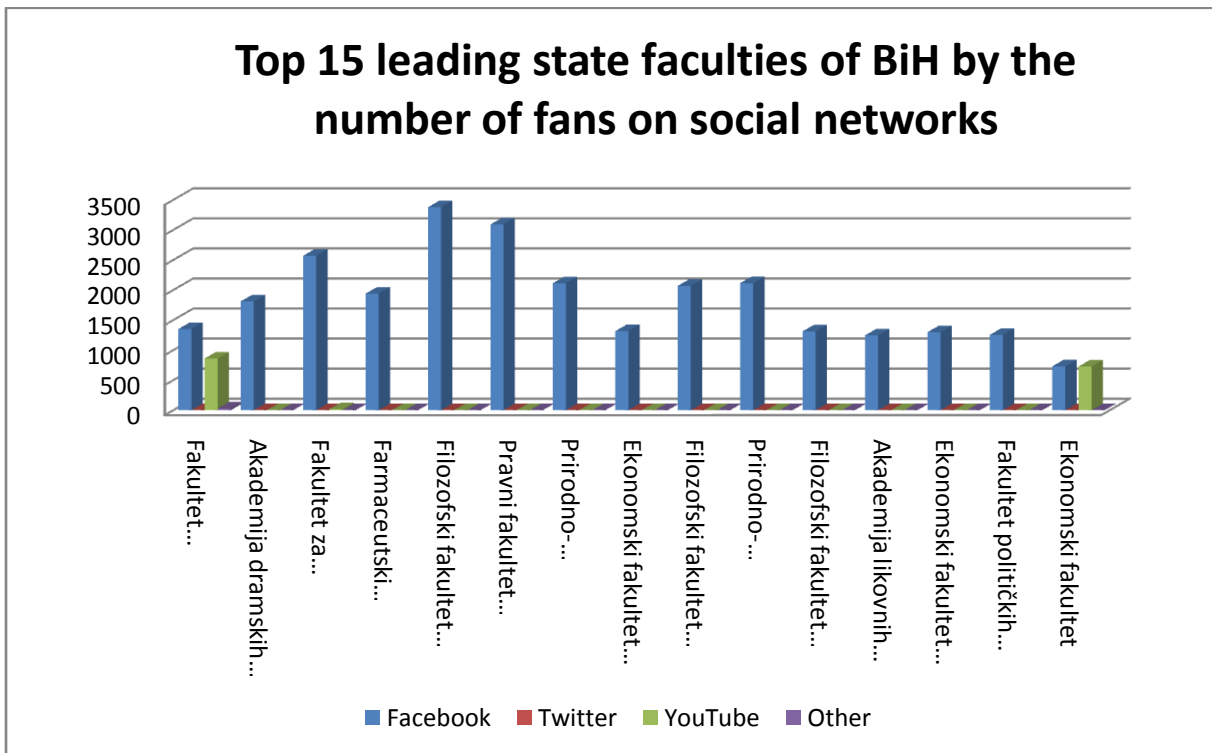


Figure 1 shows the presence of BiH faculties on social networks. What we can see from this chart is that of the total number of *likes* on Facebook profiles of BiH faculties (155,346) almost 49% are related to private colleges of faculties in the FBiH, almost 26% to the state faculties in the FBiH, only 7.5% to the state colleges in the RS, and the remaining 17.5% to private colleges in the RS. It is also interesting to point out that the private colleges or faculties in both the FBiH and the RS have an integrated approach to communicating with the target market. This is supported by the fact that most private colleges do not have their own official page on Facebook as a major social network, but it exists at the university level. What are the leading state colleges as per the number of fans in particular social networks, what content is published on them, and how often are information updated, will be presented in the following paragraphs.

Of a total of nine state universities comprising a total of 72 faculties, 14 faculties have more than 1,000 fans on the most visited social networking site Facebook (Figure 2). However, it is interesting to point out of the top 15 faculties, looking at the number of fans, 10 come from the FBiH and the rest from the RS. Ranked No.1 is the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, with 3,377 fans. On the Facebook group of this faculty, visitors can find plenty of interesting information. There are information available on various festivals, camps, projects, book promotions, scholarships, competitions etc. What is important to emphasize is that the published content on Facebook is not only based on the notifications from the website of the

faculty. However, what we observed in the study is that most of the faculties, including the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo, do not take into account regular updating of information and notices which can result in the so-called "noise" in communication with the target segments. Since the goal of the particular faculty is to establish an interactive relationship with the target group and from them get the necessary information that will later be used for an effective and efficient development of service packages, timely information is of utmost importance.

Figure 2. The presence of the state universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina on social networks



Given the relatively small number of fans on Facebook profiles that state universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have, as well as the fact that they almost never apply other available social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, etc.), we can conclude that the use of social networks for the purpose of higher education institutions interactive communication with their target segment is still underdeveloped. Placed second by the number of Facebook fans in the Top 15 list is the Faculty of Law in Sarajevo, with 3,090 fans. The information published by this faculty through social media is no different from that of the Faculty of Philosophy. However, the fact that this faculty last updated their Facebook page on 1 February 2014 indicates the extent to which this faculty finds the information gathering and establishing communication with potential and existing students useful.

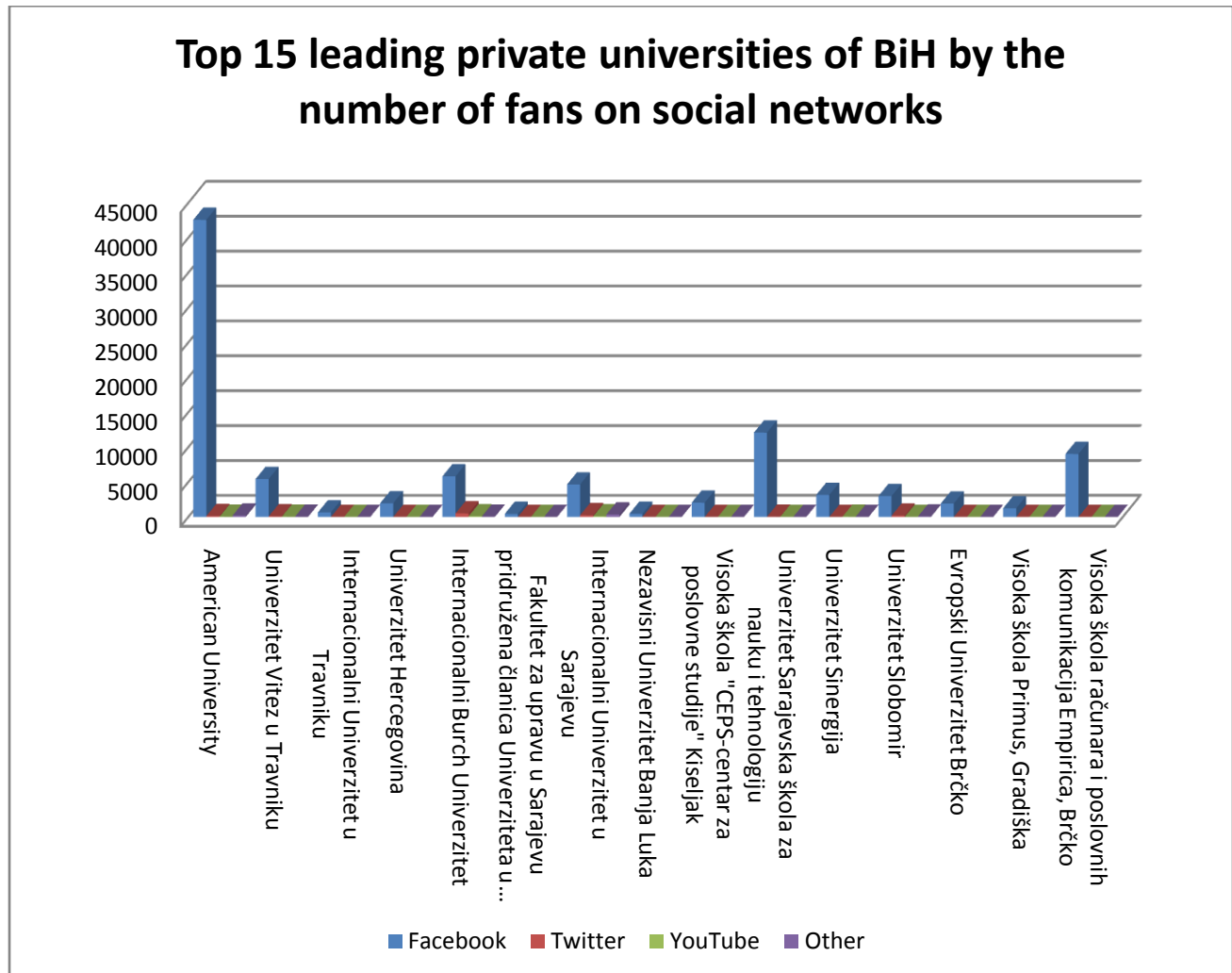
Table 1: The frequency of content updates on social media state universities
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Higher education institutions	The content published on social media	The update frequency of data
Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo	Information on various festivals, camps, projects, book promotions, scholarships, competitions and other current events that may be useful to students.	Web-sites are not updated regularly. The Facebook page last updated 14/05/2014.
Faculty of Law, Sarajevo	Results of the exams, and other information for students.	The web-site is not regularly updated. The Facebook page last updated 02/01/2014.
Faculty of Criminal Justice, Criminology and Security Studies in Sarajevo	Keeps students informed about current events in BiH and the events world-wide in the field of criminology, various projects, conferences and meetings organized by the Faculty. In addition, students are kept informed about ways to enroll in college and timely informed of the results of the examinations.	The Facebook page of this faculty was last updated 07/10/2014.

Placed third with a total of 2,569 fans is the Faculty for Criminal Justice, Criminology and Security Studies also from Sarajevo. This faculty makes use of Facebook to inform students about current events in BiH and the events world-wide when it comes to the field of criminal justice and criminology. Also, through these social networks, students have the opportunity to be informed about various activities organized by the Faculty. In addition to the Facebook group, this faculty has a direct link to the YouTube channel on its website, to which 17 people are subscribed, with no videos uploaded.

Of all the state universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following faculties apply YouTube or another type of social media, apart from Facebook, for making contact with the target segment. In addition to its registered Google+ profile with 27 visitors, the Faculty of Information Technology, the University of Džemal Bijedić, Mostar, has an open YouTube channel with some 860 followers, where they upload video clips and contents related to the activities of the Faculty. Other higher education institutions that recognized the significance of the establishment of interactive communication using various social media are: the Academy of Performing Arts, the Faculty of Criminal Justice, Criminology and Security Studies in Sarajevo, the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in Banja Luka, the Faculty of Law in Banja Luka, and Traffic Engineering of East Sarajevo.

Figure 3. Presence of private BiH colleges on social networks



Analyzing the presence of private colleges or faculties on social networks we get a different situation (Fig. 3). As it happens, most private colleges have their own profile on the famous social networks, already have one profile at the university level, making it difficult to analyze the presence of each of them on different social networks.

However, on the other hand the integrated approach to communication at the university level shows that the management of private universities became aware of the importance and influence of direct communication with current and prospective students via social media before the management of state universities.

Table 2: The frequency of content updates on social media private universities
in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Higher education institutions	The content published on social media	The update frequency of data
American University	Keeping the potential students informed of the type of study, the benefits of study, tuition fees, enrollment deadlines, etc. Also, information to visitors about various events organized and attended by the University, and places and many other information that may be of benefit to their students.	The Facebook page is updated every few days. The Page last updated on 07/13/2014.
International Burch University.	Latest information related to the registration of new students, the events that University organizes, as well as scientific seminars and symposia attended. In addition, dealing with the promotion of current and former successful students of this University	Their Facebook page updated by daily notifications in English and Bosnian.
University of Vitez Travnik	Latest information related to the registration of new students, tuition fees and the ways of studying at the University. Also, information shared about events, scientific seminars and symposia attended by the University. In addition, dealing with the promotion of current and former successful students of this University	University of Vitez regularly updates their Facebook page. Page last updated on 07/28/2014.

The leading private university in the number of fans on the most popular social network in BiH (Facebook) is the American University of Bosnia and Herzegovina with more than 42,000 fans, which makes up over 42% of the total number of fans of the social network when it comes to private universities. In addition to the websites to which it regularly posts notices and new information related to the activities of the University, most of these can be found on Facebook, too. The contents published on this social network mainly pertain to the advantages of studying at the University, the amount of tuition, exam periods, scholarship opportunities and the like. In addition, the administrators of this site publish other information such as: organizing humanitarian aid to assist the vulnerable in the recent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

organizing various tournaments, competitions etc. The fact that over 730 people make reference to the American University in their posts indicates the interest in this University. Regular updates of the Facebook page by the administrator largely contributes to the expression of the interest of the University management for adequate consideration, needs analysis and of the desires of the target group.

The following social media on which the American University is present is Twitter. On this social media, this University has 126 followers, 72 of them active. They only have 33 tweets or posts and two videos. What is important to emphasize is that the last message dates back to 2011, suggesting that this page is not updated as often, and that people wishing to find information about the university should resort to Facebook first. In addition to Twitter, this University has a profile on YouTube, where it has 18 subscribers. As for the posts, they are a lot less frequent than on Facebook. There have been some 20 videos posted in the past six years since they joined YouTube. They have a profile on LinkedIn, where they have 199 followers. On this profile, only basic information about the university are shared, with no announcements.

Placed second looking at the number of Facebook fans with over 12,000 fans is Sarajevo School of Science and Technology, which was opened in October 2004 as the first private university in BiH. Their Facebook page is regularly updated with content related to the registration and administration of exams at this university, calls for scholarships for students, workshops and extracurricular activities involving the University, as well as research and articles or papers that may be of interest to their visitors. In addition to Facebook, this University has a profile on Twitter where there are only 3 tweets and 24 followers. On the official website on YouTube this University has no followers. Sitting in the third place when it comes to private universities and their presence on the social networks is the International Burch University in Sarajevo with over 5,800 fans, 370 posts, notices and announcements, and 9,579 marked Facebook users that have visited this University.

CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions in the region apply social media to get the information about prospective and current students, to promote their institutions, but also for improving the quality of the teaching process. Given the relatively small number of fans on Facebook profiles of state universities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and that same almost never apply other available social media, we can conclude that they almost make no use of other social media available, it can be concluded that the application of social media within the marketing communication of higher education institutions with the target segment is still at an early stage. On the other hand, an integrated approach to communication at the level of private universities indicates that their

management became aware of the importance and influence of an integrated approach to communication to achieve synergy and build long-term relationships with students before the management of state universities did. Private institutions have diverse contents on social media, and regularly update their statuses. However, analyzing the published content it can be concluded that social media are used primarily as a means of attracting new students. Only a few higher education institutions in BiH use social media to build a strong image by promoting successful students.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research should be focused on:

- Research on the attitudes of management, teachers and associates about the possibilities of social media in the marketing of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (for improving the quality of the teaching process, the promotion of study programs, building a strong image etc).
- Primary research of students in BiH on the possibilities of improving communication with faculty staff members and administration with the use of social media.
- Determining the impact of marketing communication through social media on the attitudes and preferences of target groups with respect to BiH higher education institutions.

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