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Source / Izvornik: **Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in Libraries, 2012, 3, 267 - 275**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

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Croatian and Irish public libraries on Facebook

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Abstract: Since its launch in 2004, Facebook has become one of the world's most popular social networking sites. Its usage has increased significantly – that is the reason why libraries often use the network in promoting their activities. In the paper a short literature review is given (e. g. articles written by Jacobson (2011); Bencec (2011) and some others). After the review, results of a study of Croatian and Irish public libraries on Facebook are presented and conclusions are made. Facebook pages of all Croatian and Irish libraries are analyzed showing the main trends in using Facebook as well as libraries' interaction with their users (fans). The results will show libraries' and fans' activities and will indicate what public libraries in both countries could do to enhance library promotion on Facebook.

Keywords: Croatia, Facebook, Ireland, public libraries, social networking

1. Introduction

Facebook, as the most popular social networking site in the world with more than 800 million of users (Facebook statistics, 2012), has made the tremendous influence on communication. Except individual Facebook users, many institutions and firms have recognized its value in promoting their activities or products. Since 2007, many libraries have decided to use Facebook to improve communication with their patrons.

Certain number of surveys has been done to find out about the habits of libraries and their patrons on Facebook. The aim and purpose of our study is to compare Facebook presence of public libraries in Croatia and Ireland, and to see whether there is a difference in the way those libraries use Facebook to communicate and collaborate with their patrons.

2. Literature Review

Facebook was primarily intended for student use; subsequently many libraries have recognized the value of Facebook in communicating with students. There are numerous articles that discuss and analyse use of Facebook in academic libraries (see Connel, 2009; Chu et al., 2008; Calvi et al., 2010; Hendrix et al.,

2009...). But, library literature relating to Facebook use in public libraries has a limited range. Jacobson (2011) lists five categories that all articles fit in. The first and the most popular type of literature are “how-to” based articles. The category does not only include descriptions of the best practices, but also ideas for the use of Facebook in libraries. The second type of library literature is discussions about individual library experiences using Facebook in a variety of outreach and marketing levels. Jacobson concludes that none of the surveys of this category can actually evaluate its effectiveness. Jacobson continues with the third category of Facebook literature, i.e. student-based research. Those articles examine the effectiveness of Facebook as an outreach tool through student perspective. Another type of literature is the analysis of a particular Facebook-based service that a library is attempting to provide. Finally, the last subset of literature is the perceived-use studies that ask librarians about their libraries use of Facebook. Oppose to those five categories, Bencec (2011) lists three categories of literature on libraries’ Facebook usage. In her unpublished study on Croatian libraries on Facebook, she explicitly talks about the following categories: library perspective on Facebook use in libraries, user perspective on Facebook use in libraries and Facebook content analysis. Comparing these two category-sets, we can implement Jacobson’s five categories into Bencec’s set of three categories. Three of Jacobson’s categories (“how-to” based literature, outreach and marketing levels of Facebook use in libraries and service-provided analysis) can be seen as Bencec’s category of articles on library perspective. Jacobson’s category of student-based researches evidently corresponds to Bencec’s category of user-perspective analysis. Finally, Jacobson’s perceived-use study and Bencec’s content analysis can be put as the same category of Facebook literature.

As said before, the most popular type of public library literature on Facebook is the “how-to” based type of literature. There are numerous articles suggesting and explaining the ways to implement Facebook in libraries’ communication patterns with their patrons (King, 2011; Rethlefsen, 2010; Cahil, 2009, 2011...). Special subset of “how-to” literature are articles on “how-to” use Facebook in relation to teen users (Howard et al., 2008; Jennings et al., 2008; Peowski Horn, 2011), as a very delicate group of users because children and teens use Facebook most frequently but their privacy and rights are to be guarded the most.

Three articles are important for our survey. All three can be put into the third category of Facebook literature, i.e. content analysis. In her article about Facebook use in Pennsylvania public libraries, Burgdorfer (2011) concludes that status updates is the most used manner of communicating with the patrons, but low number of users comments indicates that communication on Facebook is mainly one way street. Calvi (2010) conducted a content analysis of 12 university libraries’ Facebook profiles, and despite the fact that this article is about academic libraries; it is a indicator that libraries users are not very keen to interact. As Calvi says, very few are the posting by fans. Bencec’s (2011) survey on Croatian libraries on Facebook gives general idea of how Croatian libraries use Facebook for interacting with their patrons, since this survey

included all types of libraries. According to the survey, in June 2011, 93 Croatian libraries had 99 presences on Facebook (51 Facebook profiles, 36 Facebook pages and 12 Facebook groups). Public libraries were the most common library type on Facebook (54.8% of all Croatian libraries on Facebook).

3. Methodology and Sample

In the changing times social networking takes an important place in both our private and professional lives. Libraries, as social, cultural and educational institutions, have to meet their users wherever they are. And Facebook is definitely a very important place where library users (and potential users) “live“.

In the centre of our interest are Croatian and Irish public libraries and their presence on one of the world's most popular social networks. The two European countries are of a similar size (population of Croatia is 4.3 million according to the 2011 census and population of Ireland in the same year is 4.6 million). If we analyse Facebook statistics for both countries, we can see that there are about 1.5 million Facebook users in Croatia (32.4% of population) comparing to about 2 million Facebook users in Ireland (45.3% of population). 64.8% of Croatian internet users use Facebook (Croatia Facebook statistics, 2012) and 68.8% of Irish internet users use Facebook (Ireland Facebook statistics, 2012). Our intention in the survey was to compare public libraries' usage of Facebook in communicating with their users.

The first step in our survey was making lists of all Croatian and Irish public libraries that have any activity on Facebook. According to the Croatia Bureau of Statistics, there are 257 public libraries in Croatia (Croatia in Figures, 2011). Some of the libraries have branches (e. g. Zagreb Public Libraries have 27 branches) so the total number of libraries with branches is near 300. Facebook page *Croatian libraries on Facebook* helped us in detecting libraries' presence on the network. We found out that 64 of Croatian public libraries are on the Facebook. Libraries, as public institutions, should use Facebook pages to present their activities and to communicate with their users. Not all of Croatian libraries are aware of it – 29 Croatian public libraries use Facebook pages, but 30 libraries use Facebook profiles and 5 libraries present their activities through Facebook groups. As Facebook profiles are personal, intended to be used only by individuals, we excluded the 30 libraries with profiles from our survey. We also excluded Facebook groups as they are also not an appropriate way for libraries to present themselves (although they are maybe appropriate for presenting specific library activities that are interesting to a smaller number of users). At the end of Facebook presence analysis, our Croatian sample consisted of 29 libraries.

The basis for Irish sample was the list of Irish public libraries available on the web portal Libraries. ie. After analysing web sites of all Irish public libraries, we found out that there are 32 central public libraries (library services) in Ireland with the total of 321 branches. Searching the Facebook resulted in finding out that 21 out of 32 central public libraries in Ireland have Facebook

pages. There are no Irish libraries presented on Facebook through profiles or groups. The Irish sample for our survey consisted of 21 libraries.

The 29 Croatian and 21 Irish public libraries with Facebook pages on the 1st of December 2011 is the absolute sample.

Facebook pages of all the 50 libraries were analyzed, and three categories of data were gathered:

1. metrics (number of *Likes*, *Talking about this* and *Were there*)
2. users' activities - what libraries allow their users to do on Facebook pages and which of the opportunities users really use (accessing the pages, posting on the *Wall*, adding photos, tagging photos, adding links, adding videos)
3. libraries' activities - which possibilities libraries use (how many tabs, how many photos, notes, events, posts, which tab is default landing tab, are fans' posts shown)

Our analysis was made on the 1st of December 2011. We analysed all the content for all the categories except wall posts – number of wall posts was counted for the last two months, October and November 2011 because in some cases it would be impossible to count all the wall posts.

4. Survey Results

Metrics

Total number of *Likes* to all the 50 libraries is 13634. Croatian libraries have 8361 *Likes* and Irish libraries have 5273 *Likes*.

Talking about this number, firstly introduced in October 2011, is pulled from interactions that occur on Facebook over the past seven days. The number is updated daily. The situation on the 1st of December 2011 shows that there were 556 Facebook users “talking about” Croatian and Irish libraries – 326 about Croatian and 230 about Irish libraries. As number of *Likes* to Croatian libraries is higher, it was expected that the *Talking about this* metrics would be higher. *Were here* feature on Facebook pages represents how many check-ins and mobile device location shares a library has accrued ever. As the possibility of location shares is rather new, the *Were here* number was not expected to be high. Total number of location shares is 172 – 170 for Croatian and 2 for Irish public libraries.

Table 1. Metrics

	Like		Talking about this		Were here	
	total no.	average	total no.	average	total no.	average
Croatia	8361	288.3	326	11.6	170	5.9
Ireland	5273	251.1	230	11	2	0.1
Total	13634	272.7	556	11.3	172	3.4

Users' activities provided by libraries

Libraries on their Facebook pages may offer some features that can facilitate fans' communication with the library – posting on the library's *Wall*, adding links, photos, videos, tagging photos. Libraries could also have access

restrictions - pages could be opened to anyone or only to Facebook users, i. e. persons older than thirteen years of age (Table 2). We wanted to find out which of the features Croatian and Irish libraries offer to their fans. We also counted the number of posts to each feature in the last two months (October and November 2011). The results show that library fans do not use very often features provided by libraries. Total number of all the posts posted by fans during the two-month period is 84 – 18 from Croatian libraries’ fans and 66 from Irish libraries’ fans. If we analyse posts to each feature, we can see that the most commonly offered feature is posting to the *Wall* – 43 libraries offer that possibility to their Facebook fans (26 Croatian and 17 Irish libraries). Nevertheless, fans of only 9 Croatian and of 14 Irish libraries had used the possibility during the two months and the total number of wall posts is 41 (28 Irish and 13 Croatian).

Table 2. Number of libraries that allow their fans to post on the *Wall*, to add photos, links and videos

	Croatia	Ireland	Total
Wall posts	26	17	43
Photos	21	11	32
Links	23	2	25
Videos	21	2	23

The possibility for fans to add photos on library’s Facebook page is offered by 32 libraries (21 Croatian and 11 Irish) but only fans of 5 libraries (4 Irish and one Croatian) had used the possibility during the two months period. Total number of photos added by fans in the period is 11 – one for Croatian libraries, 10 for Irish libraries. Possibility of tagging photos (either those added by libraries or those added by fans) is offered by 7 Croatian libraries and none of the Irish libraries.

Adding links is offered by 23 Croatian and 2 Irish libraries. We have to notice that some fans post links through their wall posts, so the total number of posted links (either through “add link” feature or on the walls) is 32 – 28 posted by Irish libraries’ fans and four posted by Croatian libraries’ fans. It is interesting that more Croatian libraries offer the link feature but more Irish fans actually add or post links to the library pages.

Fans of 21 Croatian and 2 Irish libraries can add videos to their libraries’ Facebook pages but no one had done so during the two months period. Table 3 shows the number of posts by fans to the *Wall*, number of added photos, links and videos by libraries’ fans in October and November 2011.

Table 3. Number of posts by fans to each tab in October and November 2011

	Croatia	Ireland	Total
Wall posts	13	28	41
Photos	1	10	11
Links	4	28	32

Videos	0	0	0
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Croatian libraries offer more features to their fans than Irish libraries do, but Irish fans use posting possibilities more often. Wall posts are the most interesting feature for library fans and the least popular are videos - fans do not post videos on libraries Facebook pages at all.

Libraries' activities

By analyzing libraries' activities, we wanted to find out which tabs and how many tabs libraries offer (*Wall, Info, Photos, Notes, Events, Questions* and other, added, tabs); which tab is default lending tab and whether fans' posts are shown immediately after opening library's *Wall*. We also counted the number of posts in each tab (number of wall posts were counted for the last two months, and for other tabs the total number was counted).

All the libraries have *Walls*, although 8 Croatian and 2 Irish libraries had not posted any posts in the two month period. Total number of posts on the libraries' *Walls* is 1632 (652 on Croatian libraries' pages, 980 on Irish libraries' pages).

All the libraries also have *Photo* tabs and all the libraries had published at least one photo. Total number of published photos is 5197 (3121 on Croatian libraries' pages, 2076 on Irish libraries' pages). The highest number of published photos is by an Irish library – 606 photos.

Info tabs are offered by 45 libraries (2 Irish and 3 Croatian libraries do not publish basic information - address, contacts and opening hours).

Fourteen Croatian and 7 Irish libraries offer *Event* tabs. Total number of announced events is 855 (668 by Croatian and 187 by Irish libraries). *Link* tabs are offered by 7 Croatian and 6 Irish libraries but the number of links can not be counted because only the last ten links are shown. *Notes* tabs are offered by 9 libraries, 7 Croatian and two Irish libraries. Total number of published notes is 468 – 232 by Croatian libraries, 236 by Irish libraries. One Irish and 5 Croatian libraries offer *Video* tabs. Total number of published videos is 11 – ten by Croatian libraries and one by an Irish library.

Question tabs are offered by one Croatian and 2 Irish libraries but only two questions are published (one by Croatian and one by Irish library). Eleven libraries (4 Croatian and 7 Irish) added other tabs to their Facebook pages. Table 4 shows number of tabs on Facebook pages of Croatian and Irish public libraries.

Default lending tab for 46 libraries is *Wall* (28 Croatian and 18 Irish), for 3 libraries *Info* (1 Croatian and 2 Irish), and one Irish library has an added application as default lending tab (*Wellcome*).

Table 4. Number of Croatian and Irish public libraries' Facebook pages offering each tab

	Croatia	Ireland	Total
Wall	29	21	50
Photos	29	21	50

Info	26	19	45
Events	14	7	21
Links	7	6	13
Videos	10	1	11
Notes	7	2	9
Questions	1	2	3
Added tabs	4	7	11
Total	127	86	213

As the above results show, *Wall* is the most commonly used tab. Small number of libraries do not allow their fans to post to their *Walls* (7 libraries). Those who do not allow posting on the *Wall* do not allow adding photos, links or videos either. However, 27 libraries (16 Croatian and 11 Irish) had decided to show only library posts when the *Wall* tab is opened. Fan posts to those libraries' *Walls* can be seen by choosing *Everyone (most recent)* or *Everyone (top posts)* options.

Table 5 shows the number of published items per tab on Croatian and Irish libraries' Facebook pages. Number of wall posts refers to October and November 2011, other numbers are total.

Table 5. Number of published items per each tab on Croatian and Irish libraries' Facebook pages

	Croatia	Ireland	Total
Photos	3121	2076	5197
Wall	652	980	1632
Events	668	187	855
Notes	232	236	468
Videos	5	1	6
Questions	1	1	2
Total	4679	3481	8160

5. Conclusions

Croatia and Ireland are countries with similar number of inhabitants and with similar number of public libraries. Public library services are organized differently, so the number of Irish central libraries is much lower but the number of branch libraries is higher. Good policy of all the analyzed libraries is that they make Facebook pages only for central libraries, not for the branches. Those are the reasons why the highest possible number of Irish libraries' Facebook pages is much lower (32) than Croatian (257). However, at the moment, the number of public libraries that have Facebook pages is similar (21 Irish and 29 Croatian). One problem of some Croatian public libraries is that they use Facebook profiles or groups. Those libraries were excluded from our survey and our recommendation for them is to start using Facebook pages.

Croatian libraries on Facebook have higher number of fans; they also have more fans who are *talking about this*, and more fans that *were here*. Croatian libraries

most commonly allow their fans to post on the *Wall*, to add photos, links and videos. Number of wall posts by fans, number of added photos, links and videos are higher for Irish libraries. So, we can see that fans of Croatian libraries on Facebook have more possibilities, but take advantage of less. That means that more possibilities offered by libraries to their Facebook fans does not necessarily mean better fans' interaction.

All the Croatian and all the Irish libraries use Wall and Photo tabs. There are more photos added by Croatian than by Irish libraries, but there are more wall posts added by Irish than by Croatian libraries. Info tab is also commonly used. More Croatian libraries use Events tab to announce upcoming events. The number of notes in Notes tab is almost the same for Croatian and Irish libraries. The other tabs (Videos, Questions and added tabs) are not very popular either in Croatian or in Irish libraries on Facebook.

We can conclude that quantity of activities of Croatian and Irish libraries on Facebook is similar. The libraries choose different ways of communication, and that is one of the advantages of Facebook – it offers numerous possibilities and page administrators' can choose and use whichever they think are the most appropriate for reaching their library users (or potential users).

Libraries with better Facebook activity will have higher number of fans and that generates a higher return in terms of fans' involvement. So, the only way for a library to profit from Facebook is to be active by posting interesting links, stories, photos, videos and by using numerous applications, encouraging their fans to interact.

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