Croatian school libraries on Facebook: meeting the needs of young library users

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the presence of Croatian school libraries on Facebook by analysing quality and quantity of interactions.

Design/methodology/approach – In the paper, literature about libraries on Facebook is reviewed and the need for new research on the topic is explained. Quantitative and content analysis of all Croatian school libraries on Facebook is presented. Quantitative analysis includes: metrics, features, number of items in features, number of libraries' and users' activities (posts, likes, comments and shares). Content analysis includes analysis of information section and posts published in two-month period.

Findings – Croatian school librarians know how to use Facebook on a basic level, but some are not educated sufficiently to administer Facebook presences – they use the wrong kind of presence, administer it without planning and sometimes publish inappropriate content. Users of Croatian school libraries rarely interact, mostly by liking library's status and they wait for their libraries to encourage the interaction.

Practical implications – This research can help school librarians to see what they have to do to improve or to implement their Facebook activities. The improvement should advance library service, both on Facebook and in real life.

Originality/value – The paper confirms that Croatian school librarians are aware of the importance of social networking sites for communication with patrons. This is the first complete study of Croatian school libraries on Facebook and intends to be a basis for a longitudinal study of school libraries' presence on social networking sites. The study could also be a starting point for similar analysis worldwide.

Keywords Facebook, Croatia, School librarian, School library, Social networking sites

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Facebook was launched in 2004 as a means of communication for Harvard students (Montefusco, 2010). In September 2006, the site was opened to public, i.e. to everyone who is older than 13 years of age. In October 2012, after 102 months of existence, Facebook has reached the number of 1,000,000 monthly active users (Parr, 2012). Undoubtedly, Facebook has become an important medium for many aspects of social life, and libraries are surely part of it.

Libraries, traditionally trying to be where their users are, know that their actual and potential users are on Facebook. As the first Facebook users were students, academic libraries were the first libraries to realise the importance of communication via Facebook. It was not easy at the beginning because Facebook did not have Facebook

pages, only profiles. According to Facebook terms, profiles can be used by individuals, not by institutions; everyone can have only one personal profile and has to use his/her real name (Facebook, 2012). Pages were launched in 2007 to allow institutions, organisations, etc. to present their activities, programs or products. In the first years of Facebook, some users and even some information specialists were not sure about its future, believing that Facebook lies outside the bounds of librarianship (Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis, 2007). With the growth of Facebook, more and more libraries have recognised the great influence that the new network could have on libraries and their services. Today numerous libraries have official Facebook pages.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the presence of Croatian school libraries on Facebook by analysing the quality and quantity of the content they publish. By January 2013 several studies on Croatian libraries on Facebook had been published, but none were about school libraries.

Literature review

The first articles discussing libraries on Facebook were published in 2007. At the time many libraries used Facebook profiles and some librarians thought that the best way for libraries to communicate with their patrons was to try to friend as many of them as possible (Miller and Jensen, 2007). Some users also thought it was acceptable for a library to try to reach them via Facebook (Connell, 2009). Other authors thought that it was not realistic to think students would like considering librarians as their "friends" (Breeding, 2007). It is better for a library to promote a library's Facebook page than let users find it themselves (Powers *et al.*, 2008). The option of letting users find and choose libraries on Facebook conforms to the Facebook terms – libraries should not have profiles and, when using pages, libraries cannot choose their fans, fans have to find libraries and decide if they want to like them.

By using social networking sites, libraries could be more visible and more convenient to access. By linking to the library's web site, a Facebook page can act as a portal to the library (Farkas, 2007a). Facebook applications can allow users to access some online services without visiting the library's web site;, e.g. libraries can embed the library catalogue using a Facebook application (Farkas, 2007b). Knowing who their users are, libraries can easily decide on whether and how to use various Facebook applications in communication and in promotion of their services and activities.

Another interesting question is – is it enough to "be there"? Of course not, libraries and librarians should know how to "be there". Roncaglia (2009) writes about numerous school libraries with Facebook pages that have only one purpose – to show that they are on Facebook by "collecting" as many fans as possible. That is not the purpose of Facebook. The Facebook page of a library should aggregate and embed information, allowing its reuse – and it should help users in doing the same.

According to Dickson and Holley (2010), Facebook pages provide a marketing tool for the services available to students at their library. However, that should not be their only goal. Services can easily be presented at the libraries' web sites as well. Social networking sites should go one step further; they provide communication tools for user-centred interaction.

Sometimes educators or even librarians might be afraid of new technologies. Whelan (2009) writes about a survey of educators on social networking. Results

showed that school librarians were more positive about the value of social networking in education than other educators. They were, in some cases, frustrated with their schools blocking access to Facebook and similar sites. Based on the results, it can be concluded that school librarians should educate not only users, but also other educators, about the possibilities and positive implications of social networking.

Facebook elevates many ethical concerns about privacy. Fernandez (2009) says if librarians use Facebook, they should be aware that some features can affect the privacy of their patrons as well as that of themselves. Indeed, librarians who administrate Facebook presence of their libraries have to be familiar with all the Facebook terms and rules, but also with all the legal acts, international conventions, codes of ethics and so called netiquette. They have to be very careful, aware of all the threats and traps of virtual world. Only then they would be able to avoid them, to use all the advantages of the new media and to prosper.

When a Facebook page of a library is created, many new questions arise – what to publish, how often, how to communicate, which features to use, how to make users interact . . .? Results of a content analysis of university libraries' Facebook activities in 2010 show that library users are not very keen to interact – the majority of posts are posted by libraries. That means that, although status updates is the most popular manner of communicating with patrons, communication on Facebook is mainly a one way street (Burgdorfer, 2011). That is not a good option because, as stated previously, social networks are user-centred and interactive. Libraries should know how to use all of those possibilities.

Why is it important to analyse libraries' Facebook activities? The findings could enable librarians to understand the Facebook phenomenon; they could enhance and promote, based on better communication with their patrons, library activities and services.

There are only few studies of practicing Facebook usage in libraries and they usually consider academic and public libraries (Aharony, 2012). Although school librarians and their users are very active in using social networks, qualitative or quantitative analysis of school libraries on Facebook was not found in literature.
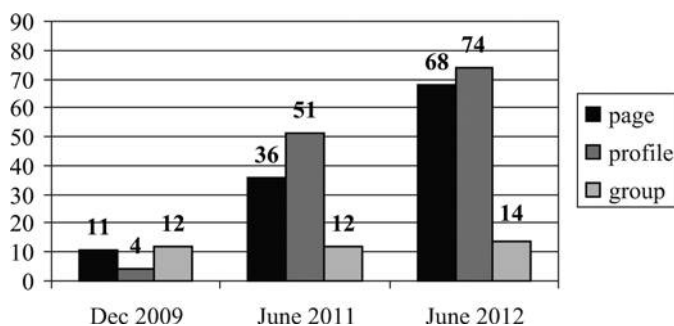
Facebook and Croatian libraries

In January 2013 Croatia had a population of about 4,400,000 people; about 2,700,000 internet users and about 1,600,000 Facebook users (Croatia Facebook Statistics, 2013).

According to the first published research of Croatian libraries on Facebook, there were 27 Croatian libraries on Facebook in December 2009 and five were school libraries (Pazur, 2009). One and a half year later (July 2011), there were 94 Croatian libraries on Facebook, and 27 were school libraries (Banek Zorica *et al.*, 2012a). In the study, all the libraries were analysed by library type, Facebook presence and by number of friends, members or fans. Figure 1 shows the number of all Croatian libraries on Facebook during the three-year period (2009-2012). Figure 2 shows types of Facebook presence (page, profile or group) of Croatian libraries in the same period.

A comparative analysis of Croatian and Irish public libraries on Facebook in 2012 showed that Croatian libraries had more fans, but the average number of *Talking about this* (number of interactions within the last week) was similar. Croatian libraries
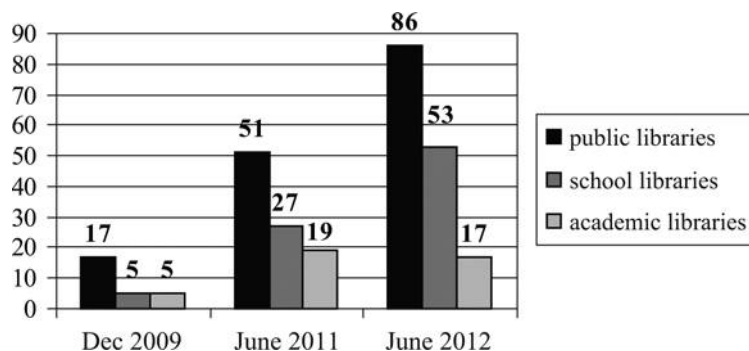
Figure 1.
Croatian public, school
and academic libraries on
Facebook (2009-2012)

Figure 2.
Types of Facebook
presence of Croatian
libraries on Facebook
(2009-2012)

publish more photos and announce more events but Irish libraries publish more wall posts (Hebrang Grgic and Mucnjak, 2012).

In May and June 2011 the wall activity of 91 Croatian libraries was analysed. In a 14-day period 402 posts were published, 468 photos, 157 comments to posts and 1,368 likes to posts (Banek Zorica *et al.*, 2012b).

Ethical questions were discussed in an analysis of Facebook pages that are recommended by Croatian libraries on Facebook (Mucnjak and Hebrang Grgic, 2012). The pages were categorised in 8 categories and results showed that the most important category was *Libraries*. Category *Entertainment* was in second place and *Book promotion* in third place. The study showed that Croatian librarians who administrated Facebook pages rarely expressed their private interests and points-of-views. On the contrary, library administrators of Facebook profiles usually do not understand that they have to separate their personal views from their profession and that all the ethical guidelines that count in real world also count in the virtual world. The study points out that Facebook profiles are not appropriate Facebook presence for libraries, as it is clearly stated in Facebook's *Statement of Rights and Responsibilities* ("... you will not create an account for anyone other than yourself ... you will not create more than one personal account ..."). When using Facebook, libraries have to follow all the Facebook terms that are openly available online (Facebook, 2013).

Methodology and sample

The first step in the study was compiling the list of all Croatian school libraries on Facebook. They were found searching Facebook and through the Facebook page *Croatian libraries on Facebook*. The list was based on a search carried out in September 2012. During the months of October and November 2012 quantitative and content analysis of all the libraries' Facebook presence was made. Quantitative analysis included: metrics, number of features (i.e. applications, such as Events, Notes, Photos . . .), number of items in features, number of libraries' and users' activities (their posts, likes, shares and comments). All the numbers refer to total numbers except for number of activities – it refers to activities during the two-month period (October and November 2012). Content analysis focuses on libraries' information sections (About) as well as on the content of libraries' and users' posts in the two-month period. The information section was analysed to find out if there is some inappropriate information (e.g. information that refers to librarians as persons, not to libraries). Libraries' and users' posts were categorised in six categories: libraries, reading promotion, activities in library, school activities, non-school activities and entertainment. Posts in the first group refer to all the content connected with technical information about the library (such as opening time), information about other libraries (regardless of library type) and library associations. In the second group are all the posts that promote reading (e. g. lists of books, lists of authors, announcements of meetings with authors . . .). School libraries often announce library, school or non-school activities that could be interesting to their users (e.g. workshops, exhibitions . . .). Those posts are in the third (library activities), the fourth (school activities) and the fifth (non-school activities) group. In the sixth group are all the posts that have aim to entertain users (e. g. posts about TV shows, music, theatre, cinema . . .).

Results and discussion

Some correlations are shown – results will be grouped by school type (elementary or secondary) and by Facebook presence (profile, page or group).

Quantitative analysis

There are 53 Croatian school libraries on Facebook – 15 use Facebook pages, 34 use Facebook profiles and four libraries use groups. One library is presented by a group and a page.

The intention of Facebook groups is to bring together smaller groups of users (e.g. classmates, library users interested in a specific library program, etc.). Out of four Croatian school libraries that use Facebook groups, two are closed groups. For this reason the analysis focuses on profiles and pages – results for groups will only be shown in tables.

Table I shows the total number of libraries with each Facebook presence (page, profile or group), as well as total number of users (fans, friends or members), photos, events, notes and posts. Here the first problem of visibility of libraries that do not use pages can be seen. For profiles, users have to send requests, as well as for closed groups. That is the reason why the author does not have the data for eight libraries with profiles (they have not accepted a friend request) as well as for the two libraries whose groups are closed. Pages are more appropriate for libraries because users do not

have to send requests if they want to see their library's Facebook activities – they simply like the page (or, in some cases, content is available even to those who do not like the page or maybe even do not have Facebook accounts). On profiles and closed groups it depends on someone else's (librarian's) decision whether the users will be able to see the content (i.e. whether the requests will be accepted).

If comparing libraries that use pages to those that use profiles, it can be seen that average number of users on pages is 124, and average number of users on profiles is twice as high. Libraries with profiles rarely upload photos (only 18 photos per library). On the contrary, libraries with pages upload photos frequently (97 photos per library). If looking at the statistics, it seems that announcing events is more popular among libraries with Facebook profiles. However, a great majority of the events is announced by only two libraries with profiles. The two libraries announce all kinds of events that usually have nothing to do with libraries – and some are not appropriate to be announced by a school library. A good example is the announcement of event that promotes breast feeding (that is announced by two elementary school libraries). Breast feeding is not interesting to elementary school students and it is obvious that the two librarians express their own private interests using library's Facebook profile. Of course, they could do that even using Facebook Pages – it is not enough to choose correct Facebook presence, it is also important to understand that on Facebook, librarians represent their libraries, not themselves.

The average numbers of posts in the two-month period show that interaction is better on Facebook pages (12 posts per library). It is again one good reason why libraries should use pages if they want to interact. Interaction is the most important goal of social networking sites.

How do Croatian school libraries interact on Facebook? What do they post and what do their users post? Table II provides answers showing the quantity of posts.

The total number of libraries whose posts were available is 32 – 15 profiles, 15 pages and two groups (19 libraries never accepted the friend request, as well as two libraries with closed groups – their posts are not available). Table II shows that number of posts by users in the two-month period is very low (25 in total). That means that libraries, with the total of 313 posts, initiate communication. Expectedly, numbers of likes, comments and shares to libraries' posts are higher than for users' posts. Users are more likely to like (928 likes to the posts) than to comment (233 comments). They rarely share libraries' posts (ten shares), and almost never users' posts (one share).

Table III shows the same categories correlated with school types. Nine libraries are secondary school libraries and 23 are elementary school libraries. Elementary school libraries and users are more active when posting (12.8 posts per library) and

FB presence	No of libraries	No of users	No of published photos	No of announced events	No of published notes	No of posts in two months
Page	15	1862	1449	38	70	178
Profile	34	6802	476	922	6	71
Group	4	436	196	53	7	89
Total	53	8987	2005	989	83	338

Table I.
Quantity of interactions for Croatian school libraries on Facebook

FB presence	No. of posts		No. of likes to posts		No. of comments on posts		No. of shares of posts	
	By library	By users	By library	By users	By library	By users	By library	By users
Page	167	11	219	7	91	5	8	0
Profile	67	4	488	95	70	9	2	1
Group	79	10	102	17	55	3	0	0
Total	313	25	809	119	216	17	10	1

Table II.
Number of libraries' and users' posts, likes, comments and shares in October and November 2013

School type	Posts		Likes to posts		Common posts		Shares of posts	
	By library	By users	By library	By users	By library	By users	By library	By users
Elementary (n = 23)	271	23	500	108	166	16	9	1
Secondary (n = 9)	41	1	311	11	51	2	1	0
Total (n = 32)	312	24	811	119	217	18	10	1

Table III.
Number of libraries' and
users' posts, likes to
posts, comments on posts
and shares of posts (by
school type)

commenting (7.9 comments per library) but secondary school libraries' users are more active when liking posts (35.8 likes per library). The most common action is liking – the action is not very engaging, users just have to click on the icon to express their opinion. Users do not like to share posts (only 0.33 shares per library in the two-month period).

When discussing elementary and secondary school libraries, a new question arises – who are the fans (or friends, or members) of elementary school libraries on Facebook? As stated in Facebook Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, no one younger than 13 can have a Facebook account. Children in Croatian elementary schools are seven to 15 years old. Although it is well known that children younger than 13 years are a large group of Facebook users, the question is – should elementary school libraries encourage those children to join Facebook by promoting a library Facebook page? The study is not focused on the age of users; it is possible, although not probable, that all of them are in the 7th and 8th grade (i.e. older than 13 years of age).

Content analysis
Content analysis had two parts. In the first part content of posts in the two-month period was analysed. In the second part, content of information section (About) was analysed.

In the first part, posts were categorised in six categories. Table IV shows the categories beginning with the one with the highest number of posts. Croatian school libraries and their users on Facebook often publish posts about other libraries, library associations and their activities (131 posts, or 38.7 per cent of all posts). Reading promotion is in second place – 108 posts or 32 per cent of all posts. For groups, reading promotion is more important than promotion of libraries and library associations. School activities are promoted in 42 posts (12.4 per cent). Library activities are announced in 29 posts (8.6 per cent), entertainment in 23 posts (6.8 per cent) and non-school activities in 5 posts (1.5 per cent of all posts).

The information section is part of a Facebook profile or page where basic information about the library is supposed to be announced. Results are different for pages and for profiles. Libraries with Facebook pages publish information about the library, such as opening hours, location, e-mail etc. Libraries on profiles often publish inappropriate information, such as date of birth, names of siblings, hometown, relationship status etc. It is obvious that, in those cases, the information is about

Category	Page	Profile	Group	Total
Libraries	68	33	30	131
Reading promotion	47	14	47	108
School activities	25	17	0	42
Library activities	15	3	11	29
Entertainment 20	3	0	23	
Non-school activities	3	1	1	5
Total	178	71	89	338

Table IV.
List of categories with number of posts on Facebook pages, profiles and groups in October and November 2013

librarians, not about libraries. Out of 18 libraries with profiles 12 publish private information in information section.

Conclusion

The literature review shows that numerous authors have studied the influence of social networking sites on libraries and their users. Different types of libraries are discussed. Some articles have school libraries in the centre of their interest, but there are no articles that analyse the Facebook activities of school libraries using quantitative and content analysis. According to the literature, Facebook enables libraries to market their activities, to interact with patrons and to enhance their services.

In the literature about Croatian libraries on Facebook, data about all library types can be found, but until now, the accent was not on school libraries.

Research results show that some Croatian school librarians think Facebook is an important tool in communication with their users. They encourage interaction by posting statuses and photos, by announcing events or writing notes. Users are not so active in posting and commenting, but the number of fans (or friends), as well as numbers of likes to posts, show that users follow their libraries' activities on Facebook. School librarians should consider using various Facebook applications to attract more patrons. They should also be active in educating users and other educators about the advantages of social networking.

Some librarians on library profiles do not post in the name of their libraries but in the name of themselves as individuals, expressing their personal interests. That is not a good option. The very important thing school librarians have to do is to read all the Facebook terms in order to avoid misuse and to adjust their activities on the network. Those who use profiles should start using pages. That would solve the problem of expressing private interests in information sections. Librarians should be aware that they represent their library, not themselves.

Content analysis of libraries' posts shows that Croatian school librarians do not post inappropriate content on the walls or timelines. All the posts in two-month period can be categorised in six categories, all in some way connected with libraries; education and spending free time (entertainment).

By the end of March 2013, eight more Croatian school libraries have joined Facebook (six via Facebook pages, two via profiles). That makes the total of 61 libraries, opening possibilities of new future research. Further studies on the use of Facebook in school libraries (and in other library types) in different countries would be valuable for understanding Facebook as a medium for exchanging library related information. It should also be interesting to conduct new research on other social networking sites in libraries worldwide.

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