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**FACEBOOK AS A MEDIUM FOR EXCHANGING INFORMATION
AMONG STUDENTS**

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to analyze the way of communication among students of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad. It is the intention of the authors to investigate whether students rather choose Facebook instead of official forum of the faculty as a medium for exchanging information. Having all that in mind, the main topics on these social network sites – issues related to exams, lists of books and bibliographic units available to purchase, problems that students are faced with in educational process and studying, job advertisements, grants and scholarships and other important events in a students` life (parties, promotions etc.), will be discussed. Based on research results, it could be said that Facebook is much more used among student population as a medium of communication than forum on the official site of the faculty. Also, it is believed that students of the Faculty of Philosophy are encouraged to involved themselves in leaving comments, discussion, voting, giving feedback and sharing information with their peers on Facebook. Furthermore, the daily number of users and the topics discussed is increasing.*

Keywords: *Students, Facebook, Forum, Faculty of Philosophy, Information Exchange*

I. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Since their introduction, social network sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Cyworld and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices [1]. Over the past few years, online social networking has exploded in popularity as a means for people to share information and build connections with others [2].

Social network sites could be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site [3].

Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video-sharing [4].

Social network sites such as such as Friendster, CyWorld, and MySpace allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others. Participants may use the sites to interact with people they already know offline or to meet new people [5].

Created in 2004, according to Needham, & Company [6] by 2007 Facebook was reported to have more than 21 million registered members generating 1.6 billion page views each day . According to Eldon [7] Facebook is claimed to be the most popular social network with 123.8 million visitors worldwide while MySpace had 114.5 million.

Facebook is a website with a combination of many useful tools that we need on the Internet. It allows us to do the things we normally do on different, separate websites and software all at one place [8]. When compared to other social networking tools, Facebook's primary distinction is that participation is structured by offline social networks, initially membership in a university community, although now other types of communities, including high schools, towns and regions, and companies are the basis of Facebook "networks" [9].

When people talk about Facebook, they usually categorize it as a social networking site and they sometimes have the impression that these social networking sites are for dating or making new friends [10]. Facebook enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate "friends" who can post comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles [11]. Even though social networks are no longer a new phenomenon, Facebook has created innovations to keep its user interested. Facebook is a unique social network that views itself as a social platform [12].

Despite their limited social presence, computer-supported social networks successfully are especially suited to maintaining intermediate strength ties between people who cannot see each other frequently. On-line relationships are based more on shared interests and less on shared social characteristics [13]. Peers who have some sort of offline connection – either by virtue of prior friendship, common classes, or having met at a social event – constitute the audience for one's profile. They also primarily use Facebook to find information about those with whom they have an offline connection more than they "browse" for complete strangers to meet [14]. Furthermore, the most impressive Facebook function to the informants is the ease to find long lost friends. Through joining school networks or student groups, people can browse through the member lists to see if there is anyone they know, and add them as friends [15].

When logged into Facebook, the first page users can see is called the "homepage". It contains all the "news feed" of friends on their friend list, status update, "friend requests" and all kinds of application invitations. Then the "profile" page is the page which can be seen by friends or other people as well depending on personal privacy settings [16].

The most used features on Facebook, are *the wall* and *message system*. The informants write on their friends' walls when they want to leave them messages. Also, there is a function called "events" on Facebook, which can be used for organizing social events. The organizer can easily fill in the information of a gathering and invite all or some of the friends on his/her friend list to the event by a few easy clicks. No wonder that Facebook is always believed to be a way to communicate with friends rather than merely a dating site [17].

Although motivations behind Facebook use may vary, Facebook could not have achieved the popularity it currently enjoys had it not been able to provide users with some pleasure or psychological benefits. However, it is unclear whether increases in the number of Facebook friends will lead to increases in Facebook-based social support [18]. Still, despite the enormous popularity of online social networking site, little research in psychology has been done on them [19]. Therefore, how Facebook use contributes to psychological well-being has yet to be understood [20].

II. RESEARCH RESULTS

2.1. Introduction

Many studies - Baran [21], Greenhow, & Robelia [22], Selwyn [23], Selwyn, & Grant [24], suggest that students generally accept Facebook as a social technology rather than a formal teaching tool. Facebook was certainly an important part of the 'social glue' that helped students settle into university life, created a sense of community and aided communication (especially about social events) [25]. Having all that in mind, it is the intention of the authors to investigate whether students of the Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, rather choose Facebook instead of official forum of the faculty as a medium for exchanging information and which are the main topics discussed on these social network sites.

2.2. Data collection

Data for the study has been collected from Facebook and official forum on the Faculty of Philosophy, Novi Sad, site. The data collection process took place between 18th October 2011 and January 31st 2012.

2.3. Analysis of empirical material

Inter/multidisciplinarity is one of the basic characteristics of modernization paradigm in humanities and social sciences, since the interest in subject matter and the methods of research of different theoretical movements often converge and intertwine in a vast field of objective reality, which is explained under one broad term of modernity or modernism [26]. Modernisation, a category that encompasses all segments of social, historical and cultural realities, and the very phenomenon of modernity that has inspired extensive and complex scientific and philosophical theories and popular opinions have had many repercussions on *students' discourse*, too.

2.4. Corpus

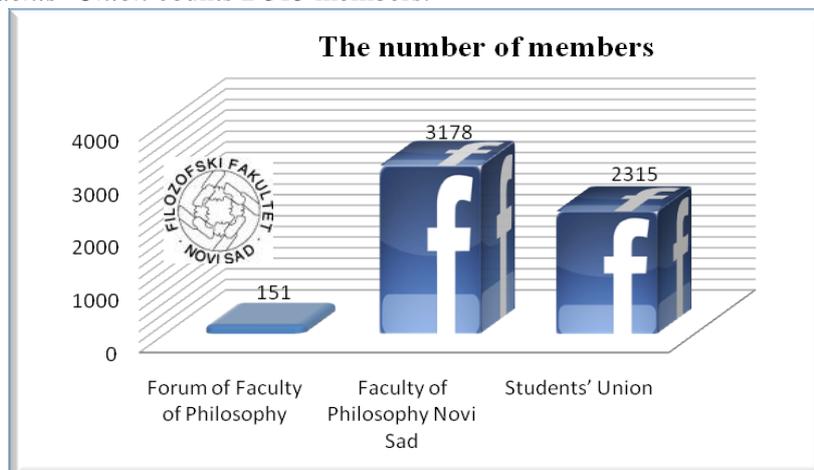
The corpus for research consists of current issues in students' groups *Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad* and *Students' Union of the Faculty of Philosophy* on social network Facebook, or on official forum of the Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad. Posts were published between 18th October 2011 and 31st January 2012, which is the duration of one semester on the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad. 629 posts were analyzed, out of which 457 was on Facebook groups and 172 on Forum of the Faculty of Philosophy. The analysis was conducted according to the beforehand determined topics:

1. The number of members
2. Entrance exam
3. Notices
4. Exam periods
5. Student life and discussions
6. International cooperation, scholarships and travel
7. Parties, gatherings and excursions
8. Exchange of books and material
9. Comments and likes

2.5. Research results

2.5.1. The number of members

When we compared data available on Forum of Faculty of Philosophy and on Facebook groups the conclusion was that the number of students is incomparably larger on Facebook than on the *Forum*. The number of members on *Forum* is 151, on Facebook group *Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad* is 3178 and *Students' Union* counts 2 315 members.



2.5.2. Entrance exams

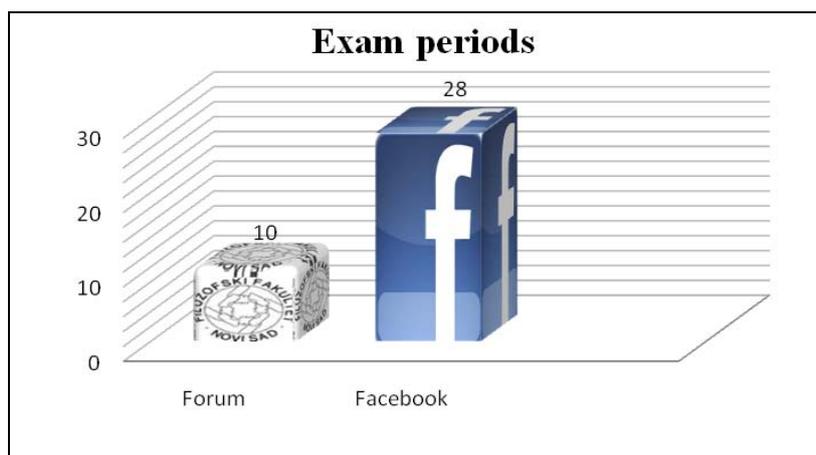
Information about entrance exams is not present at large extent on Facebook pages. The number of posts with questions about entrance exams is 12. In this case *Forum of the Faculty of Philosophy* is more visited, with 7 topics And 45 posts.

2.5.3. Notices

The number of students who use groups on Facebook to inform their colleagues about different activities, educational seminars, volunteering, projects, protests, lessons, humanitarian projects, magazines etc. increases every day. 123 posts on the subject Notices in students' groups on Facebook was registered. Forum of Faculty of Philosophy had only 18 posts/messages on 10 topics.

2.5.4. Exam periods

The number of posts about Exam periods is 28 on Facebook, while on *Forum* the number of these posts is 6.



2.5.5. Student life and discussions

The number of posts on the topic Student life is 123 on aforementioned Facebook groups, and 13 on Forum, which shows that Facebook has become one of the main means of communication among students.

2.5.6. International cooperation, scholarships and travel

The number of posts about this topic is not large: Facebook 22 posts and *Forum* 3 comments. The web site *Infostud* is a main source of information on this topic in Serbia and is very popular among students. Information about new possibilities concerning scholarships, student exchanges, work etc. is updated daily on this site.

2.5.7. Parties and gatherings

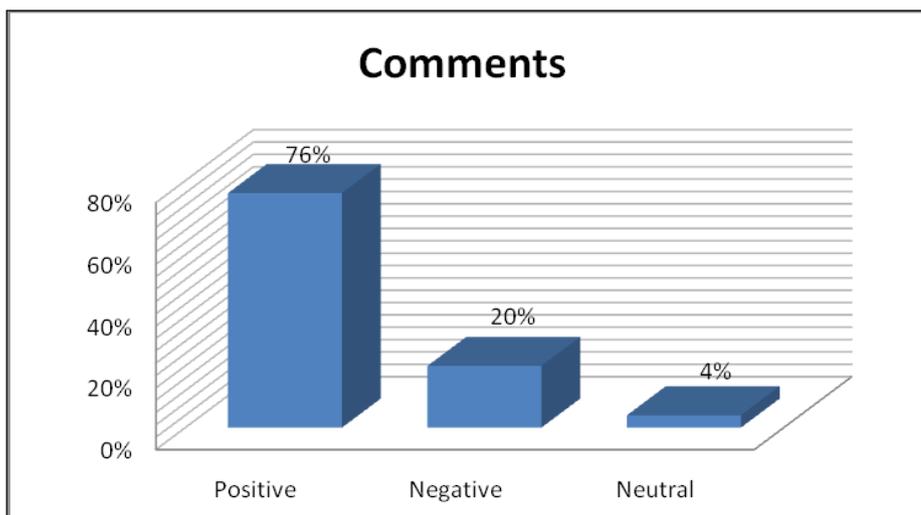
Notifications about this topic are frequent on Facebook groups of students of the Faculty of Philosophy and the registered number of posts is 124. Forum of Faculty of Philosophy had 5 posts on this topic.

2.5.8. Exchange of book and material

The results show that the number of posts on Facebook groups is 33, while Forum of Faculty of Philosophy had 2 posts on 6 topics.

2.5.9. Facebook comments and likes

The number of students' comments on posts by their colleagues is 1056, while the number of likes is 1816. These comments and likes can be interpreted as positive in 76% cases, 20% of them is negative, and only 4% neutral.



III. CONCLUSIONS

According to the analysis of the corpus for research, we can conclude that groups which students of the Faculty of Philosophy created on social network Facebook are more visited than the official *Forum of the Faculty of Philosophy*. Facebook has become some kind of an ID, a reminder and a source of information for all students. On the other hand, although the number of posts and comments on *Forum* is smaller, we have to take into account that information on *Forum* is official and thus more reliable. We can notice that, according to the research and the results, information, posts and comments on Facebook groups are being changed or deleted every day, which is one of the indicators of students' increased activity when it comes to updating their posts. Due to this, the data in this research is prone to change. It is important to mention that Facebook has specific "closed" groups that students create every day and these are available only to certain members. Thus, almost every department and every generation of students has its own closed group on Facebook, e.g. "Faculty of Philosophy, History", "Faculty of Philosophy Novi Sad / Sociology 08", "English Language and Literature Department (Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad)", and so on. These groups are of closed type and the permission of administrator, i.e. one of the members or founders of the group (in this case – students), is needed in order to join such a group. The number of groups, profiles and pages that students of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad have created and which are related to their studies, is impossible to count since this number is in increase. It is recorded that students were most active during the evening hours and that the majority of posts and comments were written in this period. More and more professors open profiles on Facebook to inform students about the lesson schedule, exams, consultations and results of exams. Younger professors most often hold their consultations online during the evening hours. Taking into account all aforementioned, we can conclude that Facebook is an important means of communication among students, that it is often visited (more than official Forum of Faculty of Philosophy) and that all advantages of easier communication among students and easier access to information need to be used. It can be said that students use Facebook in educational purposes, too. We feel that Facebook could be used as an effective means of communication between professors and students and that professors could use this social network to help their students in their learning. Professors can encourage professor-student and student-professor communication by creating groups on Facebook, which could also influence students' motivation for learning.

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