

## SOCIAL MEDIA: A TOOL FOR UNIVERSITIES TO SHARE THEIR EMOTIONS

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**Abstract.** *The research concentrates on describing how emotions are shared on the public online social network of a business faculty. Since the focus is on answering to “how” questions, a case study strategy is employed; this is the most appropriate research strategy for analyzing a real phenomenon within its natural framework. So, the current article aims to analyze the type of emotions and the emotional flows that cross the Facebook page of the Faculty of Management (FM) from the National University of Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest, Romania. The posts and comments posted on faculty’s Facebook page, during the academic year 2016/2017, are extracted; thus, 456 posts and 118 comments are analyzed. These are processed using both social network analysis and sentiment analysis; the former concentrates on the relationship established between FM and the members of its online community while the latter brings forward the type of emotions that are disseminated within FM online community. The main results show that FM’s Facebook page acts more like a communication tool than as a social network that supports knowledge sharing among community’s members. Therefore, it can be argued that FM’s Facebook page serves as a tool for the faculty to share its achievement and events, and although it supports members’ interactions these do not occur very often. Besides, the emotional content of FM’s posts and comments range from negative to positive while FM’s members distribute mainly neutral emotions; still, FM remains the main generator while its members act as receivers. These findings have both theoretical and practical implication. On the one hand, it links the social network theories with the ones from the educational area and knowledge management field. On the other hand, it offers a tool for the educational institution management and it sheds light on the emotional content of posts and comments.*

**Keywords:** *social network analysis; sentiment analysis; emotions; emotional flows; Facebook; business faculty; Romania.*

### Introduction

The post-industrial economy switches rapidly into an Internet driven economy where millions of people join one or more online communities in order to satisfy their need for communication, information, and entertainment (Wang, Yu & Fesennaier, 2002). Within the continuing development of Internet and Web 2.0, social networking gains popularity and sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter represent more than a quarter of all Internet traffic (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Nel & Halaszovich, 2015). They manage to attract more than 90 per cent of young adults and teens (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012) due to the fact that they overcome all the physical boundaries, foster intercultural communication, and transcend age, race, culture, and geographical differences (Graham, Faix & Hartman, 2009). Basically, the social network sites create

a virtual reality where its members can express, more or less freely, what they feel and think about products, services, brands, persons, and personalities, or any other issues.

Against this backdrop, practitioners and academics start to be interested in exploring and exploiting social media. So far, various studies have been conducted and they mainly focus on two lines of research, namely: (i) who tends to use social networks (Glynn, Huge & Hoffman, 2012; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012), and (ii) why are they using social networks (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Baek, Holton, Harp & Yaschur, 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012). The former state that social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Veoh, Dailymotion, MySpace, and Friendster are preferred by young adults and teens (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), and they represent an excellent marketing (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012; Glynn et al., 2012; Leung & Baloglu, 2015), and educational tool (Junco, 2012). The scholars who concentrate on the second stream of research bring forward social networks' capacity of facilitating interaction, active participation, resource sharing, status seeking and critical thinking (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Baek et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012). In other words, they focus on social network's users and effects, and neglect the internal processes; they emphasize who uses social networks and why, and oversight what happens within the boundaries of the social networks.

Thus, the research regarding what happens within the social networks is still in its infancy. A few attempts have been made (Leon & Dămășaru, 2016; Leon et al., 2017) but they concentrate on the business environment and overlook the fact that social networks are also used by higher education institutions since they support knowledge creation, dissemination, and use. At the academic level, they can foster intergenerational communication, and also the creation of an emotional connection between the faculty and its students. Just like a business unit, a higher education institution can use a social network site in order to get closer to its stakeholders, to establish an affective relationship with the members of its community, to capture and share emotions, information, and knowledge among the members of its community.

This gap is filled by the current article which aims to emphasize how emotions are shared on the public online social network of a business faculty, and it is organized around five sections. In the next section, several studies and articles are analyzed in furtherance of determining what type of emotions are usually disseminated among social networks and how do the higher education institutions use online social networks. Further, the methodological approach is brought forward and then the main results are highlighted. More exactly, section four underlines the type of emotions and the emotional flows that cross the Facebook page of the Faculty of Management (FM) from the National University of Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest, Romania. In the end, the article closes by drawing several conclusions and indicating the main theoretical and practical implications of this research.

## Literature review

The faster pace of technological progress facilitates communication across boundaries and, at the same time, increases individuals' and companies' connectivity. Due to Web 2.0 development, information not only travels from one continent to another in just a couple of milliseconds but data, information, knowledge, feelings, and emotions are shared in a virtual environment between individuals and organizations. Social network sites, wikis, chat rooms, forums, and blogs start to act as a bridge between individuals and organizations; on the one hand, they bring their members closer, and on the other hand, they provide a relatively safe collaborative environment in which their members can post what they think and what they feel, and they can share various media files (Xiang & Gretzel, 2009). Among these, Facebook is currently the most influential social network (Joo, Joung, Lim & Lee, 2015; McCole & Rivera, 2014; Stankov, Lazic & Dragicivic, 2010) and 85% of its users do not feel that their privacy is invaded by those who encourage its use for educational or business purposes (Roblyer et al., 2010).

In fact, various studies have been conducted in this area and they mainly focus on two lines of research, namely: (i) who tends to use social networks (Glynn et al., 2012; Mazman & Usluel, 2010; McAndrew & Jeong, 2012), and (ii) why are they using social networks (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Baek et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012).

Those from the first line of research state that social network sites like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Veoh, Dailymotion, MySpace, and Friendster are preferred by young adults and teens (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012), and they represent an excellent marketing (Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012; Glynn et al., 2012; Leung & Baloglu, 2015), and educational tool (Junco, 2012). Since Smith and Caruso (2010) proved that more than 90% of college students use online social networking sites and of these 97% use Facebook, more and more practitioners and academics started to engage in using social networking sites for educational and business purposes. Thus, Moran, Seaman and Tinti-Kane (2011) argue that 77% of the academics are using social media in their personal lives and only 4% of them have incorporated social networks into their courses curricula; however, McCole and Rivera (2014) go further and state that educators use Facebook to improve the pedagogical objectives of their courses. Although social network sites are mostly used for entertainment, they have already crossed the organizational boundaries and started to be used as business tools. Employees are using Yammer in order to share best practices among the team members (Leon et al., 2017) while brand managers adapted their advertising strategy so that it exploits the value added generated by Facebook and Twitter (Alba & Stay, 2008; Inside CRM, 2009; Stankov et al., 2010). So, those from the first line of research emphasize that social network sites are used by both individuals and business unites; the reasons that lie behind their actions are brought forward by the academics who concentrate on the second research direction.

Hence, the scholars from the second stream of research bring forward social networks' capacity of facilitating interaction, active participation, resource sharing, status seeking and critical thinking (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008; Baek et al., 2011; Lee & Ma, 2012). Unlike, Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009), who analyzed individuals' behavior, emphasize that people usually tend to look at others' profile (69.57%), read their news feed (54.35%), and read posts on others' walls (32.61%), they go further and concentrate on the motives that lie behind this behavior. Therefore, at the individual level, they argue that people: (i) write comments in order to relax, entertain and

interact with others (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011); (ii) share news links for information sharing motivation (Baek et al., 2011) and status seeking (Lee & Ma, 2012); (iii) like a post if its content contains similar personal experience, for social acceptance or for displaying belongingness (Shoenberger & Tandoc, 2014); and (iv) become members of an online community if they are loyal and committed to the firm, are open to receiving more information, and are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). At the organizational level, they prove that human resources managers and marketing managers tend to use Facebook and other social networks sites in order to: (i) keep track of their employees (Alba & Stay, 2008; Leon et al., 2017); (ii) stay up with their competition (Alba & Stay, 2008; Coulter & Roggeveen, 2012; Leung et al., 2015); (iii) attract potential customers (Alba & Stay, 2008; Leung et al., 2015; Palmer & Koenig-Lewis, 2009), and (iv) virally spread brand image and advertisement (Alba & Stay, 2008; Inside CRM, 2009; Stankov et al., 2010).

Synthesizing, the research developed so far focus on social network's users and effects, and neglect the internal processes; they emphasize who uses social networks and why, and oversight what happens within the boundaries of the social networks. They disregard the fact that people are involved in using social network sites and each person is a sum of attitudes, emotions, and feelings. In other words, once they become part of an online community, they post or comment on a page, they are not just sharing information but they are exposing their emotions, feelings, and beliefs. At the same time, once they access the page of another user or an organization they expose themselves to an "emotional contamination"; they get in touch with the emotional content of the post, process it based on their internal cognitive structure and then react.

The emotional connection is even more important within the educational framework due to the fact that higher education institutions aim to foster individuals' intellectual and personal development. This process of development requires the creation of an environment in which the future human resources feel that they are psychologically safe; this feeling must be endured within and behind the classroom boundaries since learning occurs in both real and virtual environments. If several studies have been conducted about students' psychological safety in the classroom (Baeva & Bordovskaia, 2015; Williams, Woodson & Wallace, 2016; Zinsser & Zinsser, 2016), not the same can be claimed about the online educational communities. So, since this issue is not yet addressed in the specialized literature, the current paper aims to fill this gap by analyzing the emotional flows that cross an online social network of a higher education institution.

## **Research methodology**

The research concentrates on describing how emotions are shared on the public online social network of a business faculty. In other words, it aims to: (i) identify the relationships established among the members of an educational online community; (ii) analyze the emotional content of the faculty's posts and the comments of the online community's members; (iii) determine the type of emotions that are shared on the Facebook page of a business faculty; and (iv) analyze how the emotional flows cross the public online social network of a business faculty.

Since the focus is on answering to “how” questions, a case study strategy is employed; this is the most appropriate research strategy for analyzing a real phenomenon within its natural framework (Järvensivu & Törnroos, 2010; Yin, 2014). Furthermore, due to the fact that the purpose is exploratory and the research focuses on determining what is possible rather than what is common (Antai & Olson, 2013; Mook, 1983), a single case study is undertaken. As Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, p.30) state “single cases can enable the creation of more complicated theories than multiple cases because single-case researchers can fit their theory exactly to the many details of a particular case”.

Against this backdrop, the current article aims to analyze the type of emotions and the emotional flows that cross the Facebook page of the Faculty of Management (FM) from the National University of Political Studies and Administration, Bucharest, Romania. The posts and comments posted on faculty’s Facebook page, during the academic year 2016 – 2017 (from October 1, 2016, until June 30, 2017), are extracted. Thus, 456 posts and 118 comments are analyzed based on a content analysis.

Both posts and comments are processed by using social network analysis and sentiment analysis; the former is used for emphasizing the relationships established between FM and the members of its online community while the latter brings forward the type of emotions that are disseminated within the FM online community.

### **Results: Sharing emotions on faculty’s Facebook page**

Analyzing the messages and comments posted on FM’s Facebook page, during the academic year 2016 – 2017, it can be noticed that FM’s online community is highly active (Figure 1). More than 3.739 connections are developed and organized around 62 topics.



***Figure 1. The general relationships established among the posts and comments published on FM’s Facebook page, during the academic year 2016 – 2017***

If members’ appreciation is taken into account, a top ten list of topics can be extracted (Table 1). All these posts are made by FM and although they aim to share mainly good

news (students' career achievement, faculty's events, and organizational progress), their emotional content ranges from negative to positive. For example, the post regarding the progress made by FM in October 2016 had a negative emotional content despite the fact that it mainly celebrated an institutional development; it basically brought forward the fact that: (i) several entrepreneurs were invited to a master program; (ii) an international conference was organized; (iii) a lecture was given by an international partner; (iv) a new issue of faculty's international journal was launched; (v) two new courses were introduced at the master programs; and (vi) a workshop on digital marketing was performed. Each and everyone of these represents a milestone in the development of any business school. However, the message was constructed in such a manner that its overall emotional impact was negative. This result appeared due to the excessive use of words with neutral (like, "numbers", "talk" etc.) and negative background (such as, "a/ an", "single" etc.).

**Table 1. The most appreciated posts that appeared on FM's Facebook page, based on the number of likes they received**

Topic	Number of likes	Sentiment Analysis Score	Emotional content
Faculty Open Days	780	0.981	Positive
Selfie from the future contest	517	1.418	Positive
Secret Santa. Christmas party!	349	0.409	Positive
Promoting an international conference: <i>Entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship. Challenges and Opportunities in the 21st Century</i>	264	0.484	Positive
October 2016 month review	183	-0.699	Negative
New master programs launching	177	0.000	Neutral
Students' career achievements	168	0.300	Positive
Freshman career achievements	165	0.000	Neutral
Graduation Day	132	0.500	Positive
Culture Mix launching	114	0.400	Positive

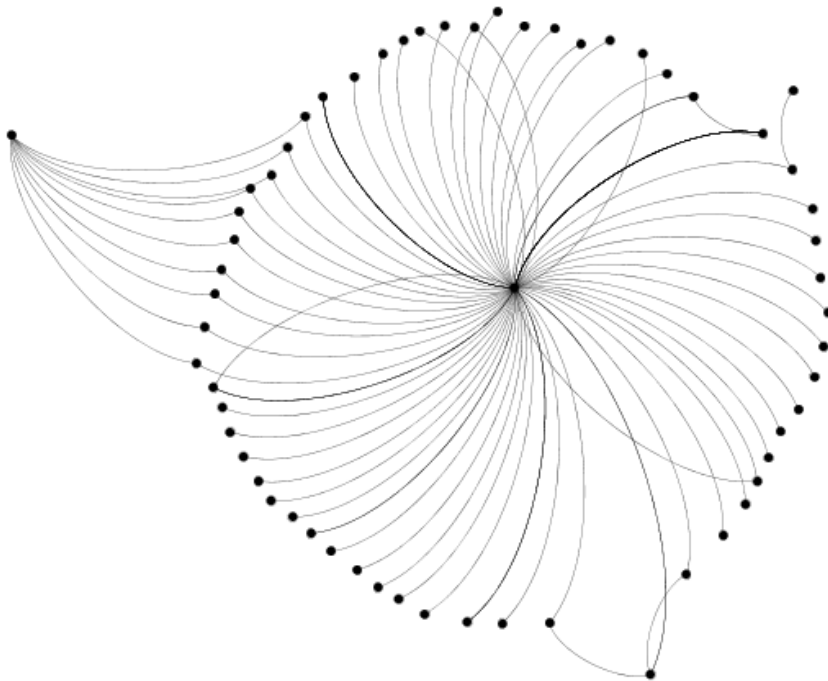
On the other hand, it must be taken into consideration the fact that most of the messages posted on FM's Facebook page do not remain there as if they were distributed into a private community; on the contrary, they are shared outside FM's community boundaries. Against this background, the posts intensively shared outside FM's community are analyzed, and as it can be noticed from Table 2, most of them have a positive emotional content and focus on the opportunities students have for their personal and professional development.

Nevertheless, FM's online community should support members' connections and interactions; its members should act as both receivers and generators. They should assimilate the emotions and content distributed by FM but they should also express their own ideas, thoughts, and emotions. In line with this, the interactions established among FM and its members are brought forward (Figure 2). First of all, it must be noticed that, from a total of 3200 members, only 60 persons actually interact with FM and with one another by posting their comments, thoughts, and ideas. As a consequence, network's diameter equals 3 and the average path length is 1.821 (Table 3); the former emphasizes the largest distance between two members while the latter

highlight the average distance between the two. Within this framework, it may be stated that information circulates easily from FM to its members; in the worst case scenario, in order for the information shared by FM to get to its final receiver, it must pass only through one intermediate member.

**Table 2. The posts that appeared on FM's Facebook page and were highly shared by community's members**

Topic	Number of shares	Sentiment Analysis Score	Emotional content
Faculty Open Days	22	0.981	Positive
Selfie from the future contest	17	1.418	Positive
Events	13	0.000	Neutral
Students' projects	11	0.600	Positive
Secret Santa. Christmas party!	11	0.409	Positive
Students' academic conference	10	0.000	Neutral
Promoting the master programs	10	0.000	Neutral
Round table: Private sector perspective: new business models in the digital age	10	0.227	Neutral
Workshop on digital marketing	10	0.000	Positive



**Figure 2. The relationships established among the members of the FM community, based on their posts and comments**

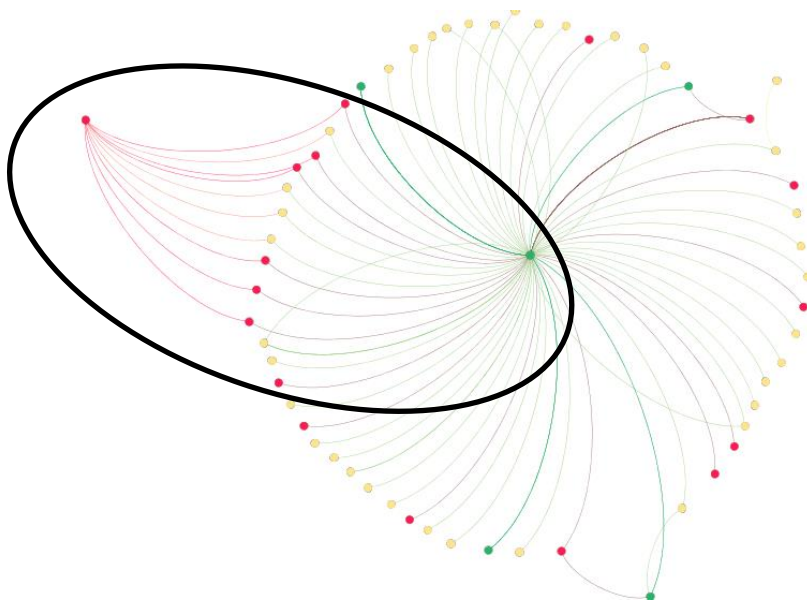
Second of all, FM remains the main emotional and content generator while its members act almost exclusively as receivers; network density is 0.026 and the average clustering coefficient equals 0.029. Therefore, it may be argued that FM's online

community is a “small world” in which only 2.60% of the potential connections are established.

**Table 3. Network's characteristics**

Characteristic	Value
Average Degree	3.115
Average Path length	1.821
Diameter	3.000
Density	0.026
Average Clustering Coefficient	0.029

In this “small world” represented by the active part of FM's online community, neutral, negative and positive emotions are shared. Except for FM and four other members who share all three types of emotions (neutral, negative and positive) through their posts and comments, all the other members maintain constant the emotional content of their posts and comments (Figure 3); they are either distributing neutral or positive emotions. Still, a special attention should be given to the emotional flows that appear on the left side of Figure 3; if there is a high similarity between the emotions distributed by FM and those shared by the members who are directly linked to it, not the same happens with the “satellite” member. He/ She is a member of FM's online community but he/ she does not comment on FM posts; he/ she is among the ones who use FM's online community in order to interact with other members and not with FM. Regarding the emotional content of his/her posts, it can be remarked that both the received and distributed emotional flows are positive.



**Figure 3. The emotional flows that cross FM's Facebook page**

Synthesizing, FM's Facebook page represents a safe environment in which emotions flow from one member to another. However, when it comes to emotional content, FM remains the main generator while its members act as receivers. Only 60 members



(1.87% from the total community) use the platform to express their emotions, ideas, and thoughts, and only 18 persons (0.56% of the total community) interact with other members through FM's Facebook page. Besides, most of them chose to distribute neutral emotions.

### **Conclusions and further research directions**

The research concentrated on describing how emotions were shared on FM's Facebook page, during the academic year 2016 – 2017. It basically aimed to: (i) identify the relationships established among the members of FM's online community; (ii) analyze the emotional content of the faculty's posts and comments; (iii) determine the type of emotions that are shared on FM's Facebook page; and (iv) analyze how the emotional flows cross FM's online community.

The results proved that FM's Facebook page serves as a tool for the faculty to share its achievement and events, and although it supports members' interactions, these do not occur very often. From a number of 3200 members, only 60 of them used FM's Facebook page to share their ideas and thoughts through posts and comments and only 18 of them commented on other members' posts. Therefore, it can be argued that FM's Facebook page acts more like a communication tool than as a social network that supports knowledge sharing among community's members.

Second of all, it had been noticed that all the posts and comments have an emotional content. The emotional content of FM's posts and comments range from negative to positive while the members distribute mainly neutral emotions. Still, FM remains the main generator while its members act as receivers.

These results have both theoretical and practical implications. On the one hand, it links the social network theories with the ones from the educational area and knowledge management field. On the other hand, it offers a tool for the educational institution management and it sheds light on the emotional content of posts and comments. As it had been demonstrated what should have been a positive post turned to have a negative emotional impact due to the excessive use of words like "only", "a/an" etc.; although these aimed to emphasize the unique character of the event, their emotional background is negative since it is easily linked with loneliness.

Starting from these, further research directions are identified, namely: (i) to analyze how emotions flow outside the online community boundaries; (ii) to determine how does the emotional content of members' posts and comments influence their behavior; and (iii) to bring forward how does the social media activity of a business school affect its visibility and performance.

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