

THE IMPACT OF POSTS ON INTEREST IN A DEPARTMENT OF CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT FACEBOOK PAGE

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Universities, and units within, use social media to communicate with their respective publics, for varying reasons, namely to promote interest in a page and the related ‘owner’, to promote events and opportunities, to ‘educate’, and create awareness. Experience and anecdotal evidence indicate that visitors to Facebook pages find certain posts more interesting than others, which reality administrators of Facebook pages must contend with. The purpose of the study reported on is to determine the impact of a series of posts to determine, which attract the most interest. The research method can best be described as experimental in that posts pertaining to different subjects were undertaken periodically. Posts were constrained to construction, tertiary construction management education, and related issues such as conferences. The salient findings include that graduation publicity in the form of photos, predominates, followed by project related photos, and events in the form of conferences, presentations, and summits in terms of interest. Based upon the findings it can be concluded that certain posts are of greater interest than others. It is recommended that Facebook page statistics be regularly reviewed to determine the impact and relevance of posts. Facebook page administrators must evolve a ‘cocktail’ of posts to optimize the impact of their pages, which includes promoting interest in a page and the related ‘owner’.

Keywords: Social media, Public relations, Communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

Black (1993) defines public relations practice as “The art and science of achieving harmony with the environment through mutual understanding based on truth and full information.” He states that there are two distinct branches of practice, namely the reactive and proactive sectors. Reactive includes reacting to problems, dealing with crises, and managing change, and the proactive includes planned programs that serve both the organisation, and the public’s interest. Black (1993) describes the role of public relations by presenting the hexagon model, the six sides representing the several factors which influence the role and scope of public relations: the publics of concern; issues of concern; media; the nature of the organisation; situational timing factors, and resources. This paper focuses on the media ‘side’, and more specifically social media in the form of Facebook.

Then, public relations are frequently ‘confused’ with marketing. Black (1993) refers to The Chartered Institute of Marketing’s definition of marketing: “The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customers’ requirements profitably.” Marketing and public relations share many characteristics; however, marketing is an exchange

process, which involves four stages, namely: seeking the understanding of the ‘other’ party; creating value as perceived by the other party; sharing ideas regarding the value of products or services and delivering the goods or services through an actual transaction.

Wright and Hinson (2009) state that social media deliver web-based information created by people with the intention of facilitating communication and now represent one of the world’s major sources of social interaction as people share stories and experiences with each other. However, research indicates that public relations practitioners should measure the amount of communication that is being disseminated with respect to their organizations (or client organizations) through blogs and other social media (4.2/5.0), and/or analyze content of what’s being communicated with respect to their organizations (or their clients) in blogs and other social media (4.4/5.0). Given the aforementioned, a study was conducted to determine the impact of a series of posts on the Department of Construction Management Facebook page by reviewing issues such as ‘reach’, ‘clicks’, ‘reactions, comments, and shares’.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 The Advent of Facebook

Deckers and Lacy (2011) relate that in 2004, Mark Zuckerberg, a Harvard sophomore, began developing a new kind of web site for fellow students to track their social lives. It became popular, and membership first expanded to include Stanford, Yale, and Columbia universities, and then most universities across Canada, and the United States of America (USA). By 2006 the site was named Facebook, and any person globally, could become a member of the social networking phenomenon. In July 2010, Facebook announced that it had more than 500 million users (Deckers and Lacy, 2011). Kabani (2012) states “With 750 million users, and growing, this giant can’t be ignored.” Deckers and Lacy (2011) refer to Facebook as an incredibly powerful tool for personal branding and contend that the main purpose for using Facebook is to create a community and connect people, which helps fuel the influence behind the brand. Furthermore, influence creates viral marketing within a community. Kabani (2012) states that people use facebook to showcase their own identity, which includes both who they are and who they want to be perceived as.

2.2 The Impact of Social Media

Wright and Hinson (2009) conducted their fourth study among public relations practitioners globally. Respondents represented, *inter alia*, a wide variety of segments of the public relations industry, *inter alia*, small agencies or consultancies (25%), corporations (20%), and educational institutions (20%). Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which they agreed that the emergence of social media (including blogs) has changed the way their organisation, or their client organizations: communicate(s) (3.9/5.0); handle(s) external communications (3.7/5.0), and handle(s) internal communications (3.3/5.0). Other findings include: social media have enhanced the practice of public relations (4.0/5.0); and blogs have enhanced the practice of public relations (3.8/5.0), and social media offer organizations a low-cost way to develop relationships with members of various strategic publics (4.0/5.0).

2.2 Current Reality

Evans (2011) states that before the advent of the internet, audiences had to endure listening to or seeing advertisements repeatedly, and that the advertisements were in control of the media that people listened to or watched. Then, in the 1990’s the internet evolved, and audiences no longer

had to endure commercials, as they could fast forward through commercials, and ignore the ‘noise’ of marketing. Audiences now turn to communities of likeminded individuals to acquire knowledge of products or services that interest them. Social media provides the forum for people to acquire this information in a natural and more honest way than being subjected to marketing messages. Target audiences can be reached through user-generated content sites, and social media communities. The reality is that the users and community members are now in ‘control’, and do not want to be ‘drilled’ with marketing messages. Hajli (2014) cites Senecal and Nantel (2004), who contend that consumers have access to many various sources of information and experiences, which have been facilitated by other customers’ information and recommendations courtesy of the internet.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research method can best be described as experimental in that posts pertaining to different issues were undertaken periodically by the author, the page administrator. Posts were constrained to construction, particularly construction health and safety (CH&S), and in addition, tertiary construction management education, and related issues such as conferences. In terms of the review of the degree of interest, the review spanned the year 2017, and addressed issues such as ‘reach’, ‘clicks’, ‘reactions, comments, and shares’. Reach is the number of people who saw any of the page posts. Reach can be broken down into people who saw the posts with or without advertising (paid or organic posts). All posts were organic.

4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Table 1 presents the Schedule of Department of Construction Management Facebook posts for the year 2017. Reactions, comments, and shares are presented in the extreme right-hand column (R, C, S). A total of 48 posts were made during the period 22 January to 11 December 2017, which resulted in a reach of 14 982, 1 575 clicks, and 444 reactions, comments, and shares. The totals equate to an average reach of 312.1, 32.8 clicks, 9.3 reactions, comments, and shares. The highest reach (2 316) was relative to a BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting a graduate and the author on 08/04/17, followed by a BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting two graduates and the author on 08/04/17 with a reach of 1 478. The next highest reach was relative to an ACHASM EC Meeting announcement on 13/03/17 with a reach of 628, and then a PhD graduation photo depicting a PhD graduate and the author on 08/04/17, with a reach of 535. The lowest reach (73) was relative to the ‘University www address change’ on 18/08/17, which was attributable to the change of the name of the university from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University to Nelson Mandela University. The highest number of clicks (288) was relative to the BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting a graduate and the author on 08/04/17, followed by the BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting two graduates and the author on 08/04/17 (157). The next highest number of clicks was relative to photos depicting Cape Town construction on 24/02/17 (99), and then photos of a mall project on 30/06/17 (85). The lowest number of clicks (1) was relative to the ACHASM Summit reminder on 06/10/17 and the W99 & TG 59 Conference (registration form) on 27/05/17. The highest number of reactions, comments, and shares (141) was relative to the BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting a graduate and the author on 08/04/17, followed by the BSc (Honours) graduation photo depicting two graduates and the author on 08/04/17 (124). These findings reinforce the contention of Deckers and Lacy (2011) that the main purpose for using Facebook is to create a community and connect people. There were zero reactions, comments, and shares relative to twelve posts.

Table 1. Schedule of Department of Construction Management Facebook posts for the year 2017.

Date	Post	Category	Reach	Clicks	R, C, S
11/12/17	Melbourne buildings and construction H&S (CH&S)	Photos	124	13	3
11/12/17	Saioh bursary funding	Announcement	105	19	0
26/11/17	New York CH&S	Photos	173	26	4
06/10/17	ACHASM Summit reminder	Announcement	190	1	0
02/10/17	ACHASM Summit final programme	Announcement	143	12	1
24/09/17	ACHASM Summit reminder	Announcement	320	10	5
21/09/17	EPPM Conference banner	Photos	117	3	0
17/09/17	ACHASM Summit flyer	Announcement	150	24	0
12/09/17	Construction & water usage	URL referral	109	5	1
05/09/17	ACHASM Summit alert	Announcement	150	21	3
26/08/17	Publication of book (Property)	Announcement	250	4	2
18/08/17	University www address change	Update	73	3	0
17/08/17	10 th cidb PG CID conference	Announcement	234	32	0
16/08/17	Publication of book (Valuing People in Construction)	Announcement	239	8	0
10/08/17	Women in construction	Awareness	276	12	6
09/08/17	Bridge collapse	URL referral	130	6	0
03/08/17	W99 & TG 59 Conference	Feedback article (magazine)	276	13	1
25/07/17	ACHASM Chapter presentation	Announcement	263	8	2
11/07/17	ACHASM Summit alert	Announcement	228	10	0
07/10/17	Melbourne CH&S	Photos	236	67	4
30/06/17	Mall project	Photos	408	85	9
04/06/17	W99 & TG 59 Conference	Announcement	161	43	0
02/06/17	Mall project	Photos	334	32	12
27/05/17	W99 & TG 59 Conference	Registration form	114	1	0
21/05/17	W99 & TG 59 Conference alerts 1 - 4	Announcement	181	23	1
28/04/17	World Day for Safety at Work	Awareness	228	32	2
24/04/17	Hong Kong CH&S	Photos	126	40	2
22/04/17	ICC building, Hong Kong	Video	199	2	1
12/04/17	Honours Team Building Event	Photos	256	17	2
12/04/17	Honours Team Building Event	Photos	250	21	0
12/04/17	Honours Team Building Event	Photos	212	7	1
10/04/17	Honours Team Building Event	Photos	337	34	9
08/04/17	BSc graduation	Photos	369	69	14
08/04/17	BSc graduation	Photos	324	20	5
08/04/17	PhD graduation	Photos	355	37	10
08/04/17	PhD graduation	Photos	535	46	24
08/04/17	BSc (Honours) graduation	Photos	1478	157	124
08/04/17	BSc (Honours) graduation	Photos	2316	288	141
06/04/17	Prize giving	Photos	308	30	6
06/04/17	Port Elizabeth construction	Construction	309	39	3
29/03/17	Port Elizabeth construction	Construction	224	20	3
23/03/17	NHLS tuberculosis (TB) Day	Awareness	263	10	2
14/03/17	W99 & TG59	Announcement	409	13	9
13/03/17	ACHASM EC Meeting	Announcement	628	31	14
13/03/17	ECMBA H&S Conference	Announcement	316	38	8
09/03/17	Johannesburg construction	Construction	135	24	3
24/02/17	Cape Town construction	Construction	264	99	4
22/01/17	Temple at Ta Prohm, Cambodia	Archaeological	157	20	3
Total			14982	1575	444

5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon the findings it can be concluded that certain posts are of greater interest than others. The reach relative to the graduation photos clearly indicates the importance of student related posts, ‘personalization’, ‘recognizing of achievement’, and ‘celebration’. Project related photos and events in the form of conferences, presentations, and summits also realized substantial reaches, and are clearly of interest. The clicks, and reactions, comments, and shares relative to the graduation photos allude to ‘communal celebration’.

It is recommended that Facebook page statistics be regularly reviewed to determine the impact and relevance of posts. Facebook page administrators should evolve a ‘cocktail’ of posts to optimize the impact of their pages, which includes promoting interest in a page and the related ‘owner’. Future Department of Construction Management Facebook page posts should focus on various forms of student activity at undergraduate, honors, masters, and doctoral level. Possibilities include first-year orientation, first-year team building, bursary announcements, vacation work opportunities, graduate employment opportunities, and graduate updates.

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