

Social Networks in Professional Development of Educators

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Abstract—With the development of digital technology, numerous Internet portals are being developed that serve the socialization and communication of users under the common denominator - social networks. The constant development of digital technologies is changing the very social networks that seek better and higher quality forms of communication between users. There are a large number of different social networks, all of which represent a theoretical construct for studying the relationship between individuals, groups or the whole society. Social-networking platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Twitter allow their users to communicate with one member or a group of members. Communication is defined by rules that each member respects in accordance with their individual characteristics that determine an individual as a user of a particular social network. Social networks have been analyzed from the segment of their representation in the communication process in institutions for early and pre-school upbringing and education among the educators. The forms of communication offered to users range from one-way exchanges of written messages, photos and videos up to a two-way communication that implies interpretation of information through text, photo or video analysis. The aim of this paper is to examine the habits of educators in choosing and using social networks in the context of professional development. This paper presents the results obtained by quantitative research methodology related to the habits of educators in the selection of social networks. N = 342 educators of young and pre-school children were involved in the research.

Keywords—Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Twitter, information, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

According to *Internet World Stats* (2018) research from 2017, there were 4,159,440,684 Internet users in the world, and 3,787,838 of those were users in Croatia, which is 90.9% of the total online population in Croatia [3]. Therefore, we can say that digital technology is an integral part of every individual's life, whether a private or a business one. Institutions of early education and education that seeks to monitor social digital trends are no exception to this.

Digital technology has a strong influence on the everyday changes which can be found in all segments of functioning of an early and pre-school education. Each institution has its specifics defined through the curriculum

of an institution that is built by individuals with all their specifics, knowledge, skills and interests. It is precisely the interest that we can define as a motivating driver that enables the growth and development of the institution and of all the individuals residing therein. One of the output competencies, according to the National Curriculum, is digital competence, which needs to be upgraded on a daily basis in accordance with the changes that take place in digital technology. The most important role of digital technology is based on facilitating and improving people's lives and building their social status. It strives to increase business productivity as a result of improved communication [2]. In line with the needs of a modern educator, the need for social networking in the business context has increased. Connectivity over the Internet and digital devices enables faster and better data transfer, and it can be concluded that this means faster and better communication and access to information. In this process, the educators' digital, information and communication competencies are extremely important and emphasized, and are considered as a constructor of knowledge for the development of better use of digital technologies in terms of communication development, with the broader social community and faster and easier access to information.

In recent times, the social segment of digital technologies, including social media such as *Facebook*, *LinkedIn*, *Pinterest*, *Twitter* and others, is becoming increasingly apparent. Educators use different sources of information for their work, and one of the fastest forms are social networks that bring together people with the same interests and allow them to exchange information and ideas that will enable them to improve their educational work. According to *Internet World Stats* (2018) the number of *Facebook* users in Croatia is 47.5% of the total number of Croatia's Internet users [3]. The specificity of *Facebook* is the widespread of opportunities it provides its users. According to Kaya and Bicen (2016), *Facebook* is the most popular social network; N = 356, 98% of respondents shared that opinion [1]. When it comes to the segment of business communication in the educator's population, they are using *Facebook* to communicate with other members of their profession by gathering different information related to the profession, and sharing ideas for direct use in practice. Rogulj (2016) in the research of the city's kindergartens' website in the city of Zagreb showed that 10% of kindergartens used a profile on *Facebook* as an

additional opportunity to communicate with the local community as a whole [8]. When creating a *Facebook* profile, users can choose whether they would like their profile to be public or private. The openness of a profile allows access to content globally approved, or approved by the users of the educational institution and individual groups that gather only parents of specific groups within the institution [7]. Social network *Facebook* has a significant part in the communication process between parents and educators [6]. *Facebook* provides the ability to exchange photos and videos, which educators use to enable parents to have a direct visual display [9]. *LinkedIn*, as a platform for accessing to general information, is not comparable to *Facebook*.

The main feature of *LinkedIn* is the business segment, respectively information on market demand, different trainings etc. *LinkedIn* is a business network which allows individuals to be placed on the labour market. In its database, there are over 500 million members' data used to search for the highest quality worker for a particular job, according to his knowledge and skills [4]. At the end of 2009, a new social network, *Pinterest*, emerged, which reached 10 million registered members in only nine months, while it took 28 months for *Facebook*, and 26 months for *Twitter* to reach the same number [5]. *Pinterest* is abundant in various types of content that dominate topics related to the decoration of the apartment, fashion, food and handmade items. This is seen as a reason for 50% of its users to be women aged from 25 to 44, according to ComScore user statistics. *Pinterest* lets you connect to a profile on *Facebook* or *Twitter*. Unlike *Pinterest*, *Twitter* is a social network designed to send short messages and news, which are called 'tweets', derived from the name of the network. It is used for both private and business purposes, such as products promotions.

Based on the characteristics of social networks, there is a zero hypothesis (H0) which states the following: social networks enable the awareness of educators in the context of professional development.

There are two hypotheses following from the H0:

H1 – Statistically, there is a significant difference in the choice of the social networks according to educator's age;

H2 – Statistically, there is a significant difference in the choice of social networks according to the educator's level of education.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study involved N = 342 educators who voluntarily approached the survey via questionnaire. The highest number of subjects encompasses aged 31-40 (N = 124, 36.2%), 51-60 (N = 89, 28%), 41-50 (N = 71, 20.8%), 21-30 (N = 47, 13.7%) and 61 (N = 11, 3.2%). When it comes to the educator's level of education, the most represented category is Higher Vocational Training, which is designated for the educators, according to the law. Of the

total number of respondents' N = 257, 75.4% have Higher Vocational Training, N = 43, 12.6% have received college education and N = 39, 11.4% have secondary vocational qualifications, while N = 3, 0.6% have either Master's degree or Ph.D.

When talking about acquiring digital literacy formally, only 29.7% or N = 102 educators have had courses in digital education related to the acquisition of digital competence. While N = 269 educators, i.e. 78.9% of them acquired their digital competence through self-education. When talking about using digital technology, N = 302, 87% are using some of the digital devices, desktop computers, laptops, and smartphones. Devices allow them to access social networks such as *Facebook*, *Pinterest*, *LinkedIn*, and *Twitter*.

The results of the study, with the factor structure, confirmed the reliability of the questionnaire (Cronbach alpha coefficient 0.876).

III. DISCUSSION

In the analysis of data related to the selection of the social network, Fisher's exact test was used for a small number of samples scattered across several contingency fields. By analysing the data, statistics have been found to be important in the educator's selection of social networks. Educators primarily choose social networks that provide them with the source of certain information and ideas they can use in their work. *Facebook* and *Pinterest* are used by more than 50% of the examinees, while *LinkedIn* and *Twitter* are used by less than 10% of the examinees (Table 1).

TABLE I. SOCIAL NETWORKS

Variables	N	No %	Yes %	Exact p	φ
Facebook	342	41,2	58,8	,000	,150
Pinterest	342	46,6	53,4	,000	,282
LinkedIn	342	91,8	8,2	,000	,299
Twitter	342	97,1	2,9	,000	,178

Analysis of the results determined the correlation between the scales. The connection varies from the slight to a good one. The variable *educator's age* is related by the level of significance $p \leq ,01$ with variables *Facebook* ($r = -,280$) and *Pinterest* ($r = -,223$). The variable *educator's age* is related by the level of significance $p \leq ,05$ with variables *LinkedIn* ($r = -,129$) and *Twitter* ($r = ,109$), whose connection varies in a range from any to minor connections.

The variable *level of education* is related by the level of $p \leq ,01$ with variables *LinkedIn* ($r = ,228$) and *Pinterest* ($r = ,147$), while for other variables there is no statistically significant difference between the level of education and

social networks, *Facebook* ($r = ,098$) and *Twitter* ($r = -,008$).

Based on the data analysis it can be said that the null hypothesis (H0) that claims: “social networks enable the information of educators in the context of professional development” has been confirmed.

Hypothesis H1 – “Statistically, there is a significant difference in the choice of the social network according to the educator's age”, based on data analysis it can be said that it has been confirmed. While the hypothesis, H2 – “Statistically, there is a significant difference in the choice of social networks according to the level of education of the educator” has been partially confirmed.

IV. CONCLUSION

Paul Watzlawicki (1967) brought one of the most modern theories of communication, that is, views on communication flows, and emphasizes that it is impossible not to communicate [10]. Social networks are an innovative form of communication that takes more and more time in private and business manners.

Of the strategic importance of professional development is the openness to accepting novelty and monitoring the development of technology and its capabilities in the form of different social networks. The systematized results of the research have contributed to the conclusions that are based on the importance of social networks in the professionalization of the educators. According to these results, a preliminary conclusion can be made that educators use social networks for their own professional development.

The choice of social networks has been determined by the age of the educator, while the education has only partial influence. Age of educator and choices of social networking may be associated with work experience that may have an impact on the growing need for new

information. Therefore, there is an increased need for using different social networks.

In addition to the fact that Croatia does not have legally regulated use of digital technology, the use of the opportunities it provides is left to the choice and personal affinities of each individual educator.

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