

FACEBOOK AS A TOOL FOR MARKETING MEASUREMENTS (By the example oftelecommunication operators in Bulgaria)

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Abstract:

This article delves into measuring the dynamics of fan activity on the Facebook pages of telecoms in Bulgaria by key indicators for 2016/2017. In order to determine the overall performance of the selected group of pages a comparison between them and a leading Facebook business page in the same category is made. On that basis, some key conclusions are drawn and social network media marketing strategy guidelines are presented

Keywords -Facebook page, Facebook activity, fan page, content, likes, comments, shares, social networks

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade the impact of information and communication technologies has completely changed the way people disseminate information about organizations, brands and products. Businesses are willing to spend a significant amount of resources to acquire this type of informal data in order to improve their marketing strategy. In practice, organizations can rely on consumer feedback provided by different web sources. However, in many cases the information is not qualified and quantified properly for direct exploitation. Classifying it requires human effort, time and financial investment. There are software solutions to overcome that challenge, but they possess a certain error percentage, which requires further processing and oversight.

On the other hand, social networks provide the aforementioned possibilities for data gathering and categorization at a relatively low cost. Also, some researchers consider social networking sites a powerful tool for word-of-mouth because consumers freely create and spread brand-related information through family, friends, colleagues and other acquaintances [1]. A prominent example in this field is Facebook, which has become a media stage where organizations vie for consumer attention, politicians discuss matters of importance with their electorate and the mainstream media looks at for general feedback.

Aside from generating a large amount of data, Facebook allows ease of classification. Pertaining to its basic user-generated content categories of "likes", "shares" and "comments" – they can be measured and used as a basis for marketing strategies. Regarding the category that reflects the ability of users to freely express their opinions (through commenting), there appears to be a certain limit to the number of characters that a post can, potentially, contain which ultimately makes data processing easier. This factor is also represented in the main social media alternative of Facebook – Twitter, where the short length of the post plays a pivotal role for the message the user is trying to send.

Concerning Bulgarian social media fragmentation, Facebook covers more than 98%, while Twitter represents only a mere 0.54% of social media users via mobile [2]. Moreover, statistics show that from (circa) 4,155,050 internet users in Bulgaria, 3,300,000 are registered on Facebook [3]. According to those observations it becomes clear that Facebook is the social media platform users generally prefer, thus making it the focus of this research paper.

Organizations from the field of telecommunications are assumed to be more interactive on social networks in general, because outreach plays a big part in the communication industry, which makes them ideal for the purpose of this research.

Therefore, **the main goals of this research paper are:**

- ✓ To objectively measure and establish the level of fan activity on the given telecommunication operators' pages, and based on the results – draw conclusions about the social network outreach of these organizations and their products;
- ✓ To find the difference in the level of Facebook diffusion for the selected organizations;
- ✓ To establish which marketing strategies and practices have been more successful for public outreach.

METHODICAL FRAMEWORK

The current research is based on the methodological framework described in detail in a previous paper by the same authors [4] and for interpreting the data the following formulae will be used:

$$\text{Facebook}_{MA} = \frac{1. \text{ Average monthly fan activity}}{\text{total number of fans (for a month)}} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Facebook}_{\text{AAP}} = \frac{2. \text{ Average monthly fan activity per post}}{\frac{\text{likes + comments + shares (for a month)}}{\text{total number of posts by the organization (for a month)}}} \times 100 \quad (2)$$

$$\text{Facebook}_{\text{DIF}} = \frac{3. \text{ Facebook diffusion}}{\frac{\text{total number of fans (for a month)}}{\text{total registered Facebook users from Bulgaria}}} \times 100 \quad (3)$$

For the purpose of the research two telecommunication operators from Bulgaria have been selected: Mobiltel (in short: Mtel) and Vivacom, and for comparison purposes with an exemplary page, in terms of outreach – the Facebook page of Samsung Bulgaria - is used.

The calculation of said indicators requires the collection of data containing the distribution of “likes”, “shares” and “comments” on the observed Facebook pages for the months of December 2016 and January 2017. Firstly, December has been chosen for the fact that there is a tendency of increased turnover and sales as a whole, concerning products sold by the telecommunication operators like mobile phones, which is a premise for increased organization activity and strive to employ various marketing instruments to attract the attention of potential consumers. Secondly, December happens to be the month during Christmas and New Years’ holidays, which is a further a prerequisite for consumers and potential fans to spend more of their free time in social networks.

To avoid confusion and track the effects of promotional content, the month of January has also been selected for the analysis. It is used to show if the given pages have been able to attract and retain new customer attention after the holiday season.

Finally, there is a comparison between posts on the main observed pages for the month of January 2017. We focus on the worst and best performing posts on each Facebook page, accompanied by an analysis of their nature, and thus draw conclusions about the connection between the nature of the post and its results in terms of feedback activity. This is used to provide proper recommendations about the social media marketing strategy for organizations working in the same field.

RESULTS

It is important to note that both pages have above average fan base for business Facebook for Bulgaria – Vivacom’s page has 271017 and Mtel’s-304948. During the research of the two main observed Facebook pages [5, 6] the following data has been processed:

Table 1: Fan activity on Facebook fan pages for the brands "Vivacom" and "Mtel"

Indicators	Month	Vivacom	Mtel
Average fan activity per month	Dec 2016	3,18%	3,41%
	Jan 2017	3,21%	3,41%
Average monthly fan activity per post	Dec 2016	0,05%	0,04%
	Jan 2017	0,05%	0,04%
Total fan activity		6,39%	6,82%
Total fan activity per post		0,05%	0,04%

From the data in the Table 1, it becomes clear that monthly fan activity is generally low, only reaching levels of around 3 % for each of the two chosen brands and the Mtel’s Facebook page holds slight advantage over the other. An adequate explanation of the variation points to the larger fan base of Mtel. Moreover, when it comes to the average monthly activity per post, Vivacom has a small advantage (0.01%) which confirms that they are more successful in grabbing the audience attention. Based on the data, it is safe to conclude that both compared brands are achieving similar results when it comes to Facebook fan activity and both have a tendency for improvement.

As far as the other two indicators are concerned, the results are also similar. The total fan activity for the combined 2 months is around 6% for both telecom operators’ pages and the total activity per post is lower than 1%.

The main conclusion from the analysis is that overall, the observed pages share a certain similarity in their relatively low fan activity. Knowing the aforementioned activity consists of likes, shares and comments, the following recommendation can be proposed - both organizations should strive to increase their fan activity to employ a larger part of their fan base by improving content variety.

To enrich the analysis of where said organizations stand as a whole, a model business pages from the Bulgarian Facebook scene has been selected according to two criteria - operating in a similar industry (or having similar products) and the other is possession of the largest fanbase. According to Europe-based social media research agency Social Bakers [7], the page of Samsung Bulgaria happens to be the best fit to the criteria.

The performance of Mtel’s and Vivacom’s pages, as seen through a comparison with Samsung, can be followed on the graph below:

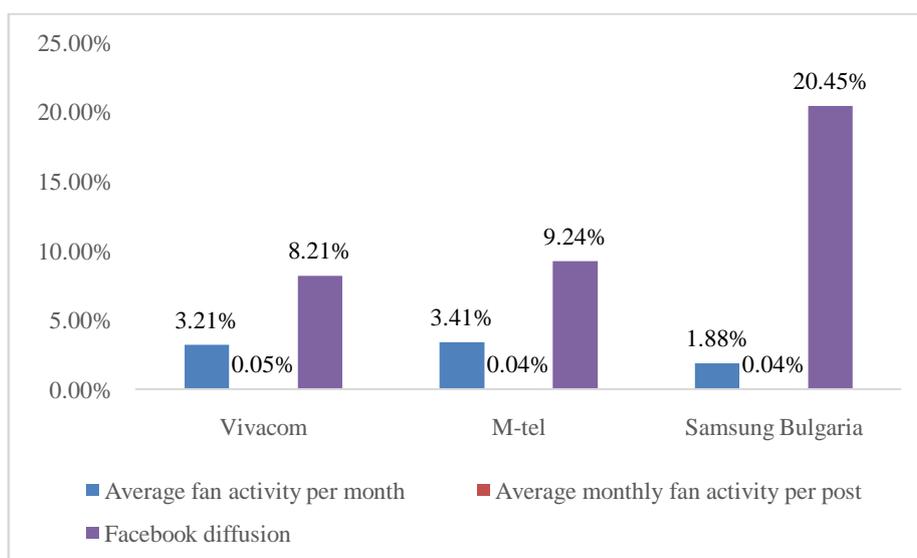


figure 1: fan activity for January 2017, Vivacom, Mtel and Samsung Facebook pages

The disparity in Facebook diffusion between the model page and the two observed pages is evident in Fig. 1, with Samsung Bulgaria’s page leading by approximately 10 times, having 20.45% of all Bulgarian Facebook users as fans. However, the model page’s average monthly activity for January 2017 equals 1.88%, which compared to both main researched pages performance by this criteria is relatively low, with both other pages reaching slightly over 3%.

In the case of Samsung Bulgaria an argument can be made that the relatively low percentage calculated for the average monthly activity is the result of the larger fanbase. At the same time the total amount of registered fans for Mtel and Vivacom are in approximately a thousand fans difference and it is evident they have similar success in social media marketing over Facebook.

As a whole, all three of the depicted pages possess low average monthly activity per post. By this criteria, Vivacom leads on the other pages again with a difference of a minor 0.01%. Compared to the other observed month in this research, it can be considered a continuation of the tendency for low average monthly activity per post for all participating pages. This is evidence that fans react to engagement sporadically, and it is necessary to determine which posts of the telecom operators are engaging their fans and which are not. For this purpose an example posts and analysis will be provided in the Discussion part.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Importance of social media coverage for businesses has become an integral part of online marketing management. On one hand Facebook, as a relatively low-cost marketing alternative, provides a unique opportunity for smaller and medium enterprises. In general, mainstream marketing channels benefit businesses with a larger marketing spending budget, resulting in better exposure over their smaller competitors. However, in regards to social media, all organizations are faced with a level playing field at the get-go, and a bigger budget can help in reaching a larger fanbase quicker, but does not necessarily guarantee further engagement and interaction. Thus, social network mechanisms provide a more competitive environment with little to no barriers of entry. As far as telecommunication operators in Bulgaria - they are considered larger business organizations and tend to treat social networks as a supplementary marketing channel.

To analyze the posts of the two telecom operators only three categories have been selected - “like”, “share” or “comment”, the “reactions” category is included in the “likes” metric. The two contemplated categories of posts have been observed for the month of January 2017. The comparison is visible in Table 2:

Table 2: Examples of fan activity in selected posts on Vivacom’s and Mtel’s pages

Categories	Vivacom		Mtel	
	Best post	Worst post	Best post	Worst post
Likes	241	46	231	10
Comments	56	5	103	5
Shares	5	0	88	1

As seen in Table 2 above, the two Facebook pages have similar results in attracting audience in their best posts. The data for the 3 categories is, as follows: Vivacom – 241 likes, 5 shares, 56 comments; Mtel – 231 likes, 88 shares and 103 comments. On one hand, the advantage here is for the post of Mtel's page (for details check Annex I) and it could be due to its relation to a quiz, which requires response in the form of a comment. On the other hand, the post on Vivacom's page is promotional (new mobile phone) in nature. Compared to the worst posts from the same period, the differences become evident – Vivacom – 46 likes, 0 shares, 5 comments; Mtel's post has 10 likes, 1 share, 5 comment. Even though Vivacom's post is once again to the promotion of a mobile internet package (check Annex I), apparently this type of promotion didn't attract enough attention. Mtel's worst post is related to promoting a sports event on their private TV channel. The reason for their failure might be the low popularity of the given event among Bulgarian audience – Ice Hockey.

Overall analysis and comparison between the majority of posts on both pages leads to the general conclusion that posts related to new devices, games and quizzes are the most engaging and garner the most attention on the Facebook platform. To further support this hypothesis a Facebook overview comparison between the two main research pages has been done using SocialBakers [8] for the period of August – September 2017 and it confirms that posts about new devices or game-related ones are most successful relative to the others (Annex II holds some examples).

Excluding those posts, users that interact with the page on a regular basis, could be targeted by the companies' management as potential marketing "mavens" (or "brand ambassadors"). Researchers define marketing mavens as persons, who strive to find and spread information about new products on the market; they take pleasure in helping others and express themselves in the process. With that goal in mind, they actively search for market information, using various sources – both official and unofficial [9]. Such users, along with opinion leaders (the latter defined as informal experts with opinions highly regarded within their social group [10]) are of special interest to the company, acting as conductors for the spread of brand awareness. Social media engagement presents a good opportunity for engaging the public, and consequently identifying and contacting people of interest directly, be they marketing mavens or opinion leaders. On a side note - a new Facebook feature, currently being implemented, is the business chat recommendations within the Messenger platform, which guides individual users towards direct, informal communication with an organization's representatives, opening up a variety of new marketing possibilities. It will be up to the individual enterprises to prepare and utilize this new marketing channel to full effect.

CONCLUSION

As shown in the article, it becomes apparent that social media (Facebook in particular) presents a multi-faceted, dynamic environment, where active engagement from the viewpoint of a business is key for retaining attention, presence and building up brand loyalty. Applying a consistent marketing strategy towards social network media content has the potential of building additional brand awareness over time through informal marketing channels. Based on the overall analysis it is advisable for telecommunication service providers in Bulgaria to focus on engaging and enlarging their fanbase through different types of contests, puzzles, promotions, games using the opportunities provided by the social media platform, as these types of posts garner the most attention from their fanbase.

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ANNEX

I. Examples of best and worst posts on Vivacom's and Mtel's Facebook pages

Vivacom's post



СЕГА И В ЦВЯТ
BLUE CORAL

VIVACOM

Харесва ми Коментар Споделяне

241

Водещи коментари

Vivacom се чувства фантастично.
- 18 януари -

С EasyTraffic получаваш 5000 MB предплатен мобилен интернет само за 10 лв. Имаш и бонус при презареждане. <http://bit.ly/2j4bbFR>



Сърфирай на воля,
където и да си

С предплатен план Easy traffic вече имаха още повече **5000 MB** за сърфиране.

5 000 MB
само за 10 лв.

VIVACOM

Харесва ми Коментар Споделяне

46

Водещи коментари

Mtel's posts

Mtel
- 30 януари -

Кликнете на линка, отговорете и спечелете чудесни награди!

Гледайте телевизионния канал Da Vinci Learning през уикенда на 4ти и 5ти февруари, за да откриете невероятни факти за Дивия запад с нашите специални програми, посветени на това вълнуващо място, изпълнено с колоритни герои като каубои и шерифи, където правилата не важат >>> <http://bit.ly/2jif1j7>



Кое е откритието през 40-те години на 19 в., което е накарало хората да се втурнат към Запада?

А. Диаманти
В. Нефт
С. Злато

Da Vinci Learning

Харесва ми Коментар Споделяне

231

Водещи коментари

88 споделяния

Mtel
- 29 януари -

Предстои ни да видим мача на звездите от Националната хокейна лига. Гледайте го на живо от 22:30 часа единствено по Mtel Sport 1!



ALL-STAR
2017
HONDA

Харесва ми Коментар Споделяне

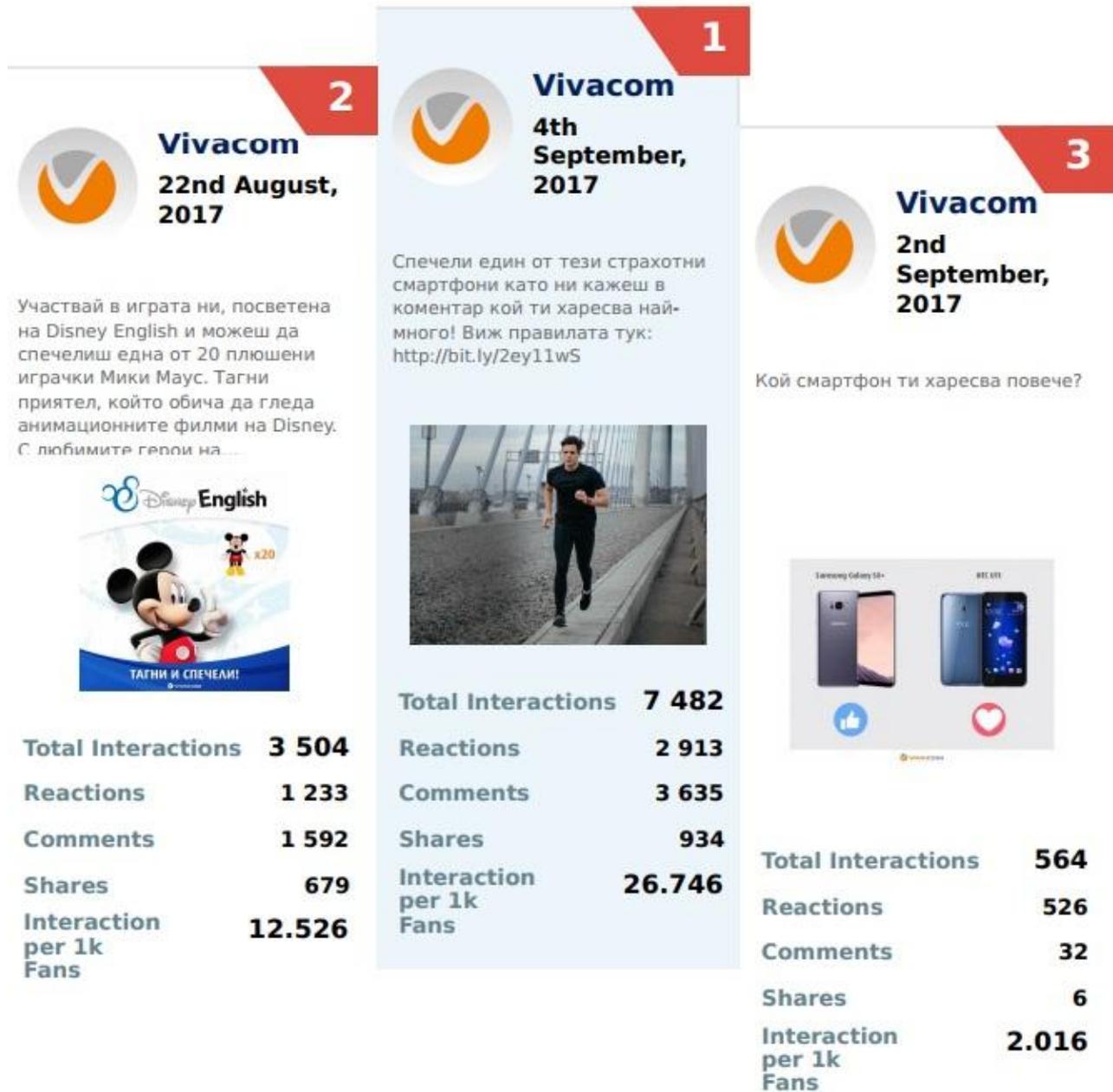
10

Водещи коментари

1 споделяне

II. Most successful content according to SocialBakers

Vivacom's page



Mtel's page

