

## The Impact of Facebook on University-Students Relationships

Sabina ȘTEFĂNICĂ

College of Communication and Public Relations  
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration  
6 Povernei St., Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania  
sabina.stefanica@yahoo.com

**Abstract.** *The advent of increased competition between higher education institutions (HEI) has resulted in a transformation within the education market. To survive in this internationally competitive and hostile market, HEIs must engage in mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders and tailor management practices in line with their vision. Thus there is a symbiotic relationship between the HEI, their stakeholders and the stakeholders' needs. This article aims to clarify the interests of the primary stakeholder, the Romanian student, by analysing their perception of the Facebook engagement strategies used by Romanian universities. In writing this case study we used a quantitative approach - online questionnaires - distributed to student stakeholders through the official Facebook accounts of the public and private Romanian universities. The research was restricted to 285 questionnaires; the number of valid questionnaires obtained during the time allocated for data collection. The intrinsic value of the study is its integrative approach to the theories and studies regarding the engagement strategies available to HEIs through social media and the research of a heretofore unexplored area in Romanian literature. The study has three key findings: 1) Students welcome an active official Facebook presence by their University and professors; 2) Students have a direct interest and strongly believe that they will derive benefit from the Facebook publication of academic and administrative information; and 3) Students would be highly supportive and appreciative of informal Facebook interaction. Finally we recommend further qualitative research to assess the totality of the impact of social media on the university-students relationship.*

**Keywords:** *stakeholders, higher education institutions, stakeholders' engagement, university management, student-university relationships, social media strategies, Facebook.*

### Introduction

The last three decades have been characterized by rapid advances in information and communication technology which have created tremendous opportunities for higher education institutions (HEI). According to Jongbloed et al. (2007, p.304), higher education institutions are undergoing a process of transformation; with particular emphasis being placed on a continual reassessment of the socioeconomic impact of their teaching and research. Higher education must meet socioeconomic expectations that refer to the knowledge and skills requirements of a graduate workforce in a knowledge-based economy, the demands for relevance in research and knowledge creation, and respectively to the access to education for different social classes, ethnic groups and geographical regions. (Castells, 1996, p.237; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993). Therefore, in order to secure their place in the modern, knowledge-based economy, universities must reconsider their role and relationship with their stakeholders or communities. This leads to the process of identifying stakeholders, classifying them according to their importance and understanding their needs before defining the strategies for each entity.

Education is a very socially oriented activity and quality higher education has traditionally been associated with professors having high degrees of personal contact with students. The use of ICT in education has led to more student-centred learning settings and to the shaping of a new generation, often referred to as "the millennials". Their involvement with technology exceeds any other generation and presents an enormous challenge for the HEI targeting this multi-tasking, hyper-connected group. The competition for these students is fierce and survival ultimately depends on engaging them through the use of social media and new communication tools. Thus,

universities are beginning to embrace social media and to realize to acknowledge the potential power and implications of using it as a component of their overall marketing mix.

The analysis of the role and importance of social media in academic communication has the purpose of clarifying the methods used by HEIs in order to engage with target stakeholders: students and potential students, alumni, teaching staff, institutions and academic communities, in the context of the digital revolution. Considering the fact that students are the main stakeholders targeted by HEIs, the aim of this study is to clarify the interests of Romanian students by analysing their perception of the Facebook engagement strategies used by Romanian universities. More specifically, the objectives include: (1) observing how students perceive the content published on the official Facebook pages of their universities or faculties; (2) evaluating if a constant communication flow between students and universities or professors exists; and (3) understanding what type of information students are interested in when following the Facebook page of their university. To this end, we chose a quantitative approach – opinion questionnaire – that allowed us to collect and measure factual data, essential information regarding the attitudes, motivation and interests of the subjects. The questionnaire was distributed online through the official Facebook pages of 24 state and private universities across Romania. The research is limited by the number of questionnaires that were obtained during the time allocated for data collection, 22<sup>nd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> of January 2013. The total number of questionnaires obtained was 420, of which only 285 were valid.

The value of the present study resides first, in the integrative approach of theories and studies regarding the engagement strategies of HEI through social media and secondly, in the research of an area unexplored in the Romanian literature. Further qualitative research is recommended to assess the impact of social media on university-student relationships.

## **University-stakeholder relationships**

### Stakeholder identification

In the context of the internationalisation of higher education, universities are under great pressure to maintain efficient management standards, while responsibly utilizing the resources allocated to them. According to Teichler (1999, p.3) internationalisation is the cornerstone for almost any higher education reform. Irrespective of the nature of the discussion on higher education; “direction, management, quality and relevance of research and study programmes, efficient resource utilization: higher education institutions must be constantly vigilant in these respects in order not to fall behind worldwide competition and to be successful according to international standards”. Within this climate of added responsibility, universities are required to allocate their human and physical capital to articulate strategies for understanding and managing relationships with their various stakeholders or communities.

Stakeholder theory proves very beneficial to complex organisations, such as universities, and may serve to explain the focus on varying communities in the environments surrounding these organisations as well as the relationships between organisations and communities. “A particular community is relevant for the university only if there is some expectation on both sides (i.e. the university and the community) that some service can be rendered or a mutually beneficial exchange (a transaction) can take place. This illustrates the fact that the concept of *community* is close to the *stakeholder* concept” (Jongbloed *et al.*, 2008, p.305). The *stakeholder* concept originates in business science literature and may be traced back to Adam Smith’s “Theory of Moral Sentiments”. Its modern use in management literature comes from the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) that in 1963 introduced the term to generalise and augment upon the notion of *stockholder* as the only group to whom management need be responsive. Originally, the

*stakeholder* concept was defined as “those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist. A more modern and integrative definition of *stakeholders* was provided by R. E. Freeman: “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (Freeman 1984, p.16). Friedman (2006) states that this definition is more balanced and much broader than the definition of the SRI. The phrase “can affect or is affected by seems to include individuals from outside the firm and groups may consider themselves to be stakeholders of an organization, without the firm considering them to be such”.

Samantha Miles (2011) observes that while the concept of the ‘stakeholder’ has become central to business, the hundreds of different published definitions and the lack of consensus as to what the concept of (a) *stakeholder* means, have led to conceptual confusion. In an attempt to reach a higher degree of elucidation various theorists have analysed the wide array of definitions of the term ‘stakeholder’ in the literature (Mitchell *et al.* 1997; Friedman & Miles 2006; Laplume *et al.*, 2008; Miles, 2011). The 435 different definitions of the expression identified by Miles (2011) have clusters around just a few definitions such as Freeman (1984), Clarkson (1995, p.92) who defines stakeholders in terms of their “direct relevance to the firm’s core economic interest”, and Mitchell *et al.* (1997, p.854) that formulated their theory of *stakeholder salience*. This theory distinguishes between three attributes of stakeholders: (1) the stakeholder's power to influence the organization (e.g. the growing pressure from students, parents and legislators to influence universities to reduce fees); (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the organization (legitimacy being defined as a generalised perception that the actions of an entity are appropriate within the socially constructed system of norms, values and beliefs), and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the organization, (urgency represents the degree to which stakeholder claims call for immediate action). For mapping the relationships with their external and internal stakeholders these three attributes can be used by university management, as they help identify (what are) the main stakeholder groups to deal with and therefore, which relationships should be maintained. Stakeholder classes differ in terms of their degree of salience, or, in other words, “the degree to which institutions give priority to competing stakeholder claims”. It is also important to note that “power, legitimacy and urgency can change; they are not static, but dynamic”. This implies that “particular stakeholders can move from one class to another by gaining or losing particular attributes”.

“Identifying stakeholder involvement in HEIs is a fundamental step towards establishing competitive advantage for the teaching institutions and also towards identifying their needs and the means to meet them. Meeting the needs of these individuals or groups is an important competitive factor for higher education institutions” (Dobni & Luffman, 2003, p.577). However, even this identification of the various HEIs target publics is no easy task given that the processes of providing educational services are diverse and involving differing participants whether acting directly or indirectly. In “*Going beyond labels: a framework for profiling institutional stakeholders*”, Joanne Burrows has created a map for the different groups that may influence or benefit from higher education in the USA, which can be adapted to Romanian HEIs. From the list we chose the stakeholders that reflect the Romanian higher education system: governmental entities and regulators (Ministry of National Education, National Council for Attesting Titles, Degrees, Diplomas and University Certificates, National Council for Financing Higher Education, fiscal authorities, research support bodies, etc.); management (rectors, vice-rectors, deans, etc.); employees (teaching staff, administrative and support personnel); clients (students, parents, social financing entities, employers, employment agencies); suppliers (high schools, former students, other universities and institutes, service suppliers, utilities); competition (direct: public and private higher education establishments; potential: distance higher education institutions, new alliances; substitutes: company training programs); communities (neighbouring, school systems, special interest groups); non-governmental regulators (foundations, professional associations), financial intermediaries (banks, fund managers, analysts); alliances and

partnerships (alliances and consortia, co-financiers of research and teaching services) (Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2010, p.85).

As can be seen from the above categories, teaching institution stakeholders are both diverse and difficult to quantify. Each individual or group has a greater or lesser influence over the institution and represents varying degrees of importance to the institution. Correspondingly, the HEI management holds responsibility for clearly defining just who the stakeholders actually are, their needs and their respective importance (Lam & Pang, 2003, p.83).

### Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder management is a complex mix of different strategic tasks that include “identifying, assessing, prioritising, managing the relationship, communicating, negotiating, and contracting with various entities that may have relevance to the organization’s interest. In recent years, the demand for enhanced disclosures, better communication and improved stakeholder dialogue have been fuelled by the increasing popularity of the stakeholder approach” (Boesso & Kumar, 2008, p.66). The last decade has witnessed a revolution in stakeholder engagement; organizations employ a wide variety of mechanisms in an effort to communicate with stakeholders, which may range from letter drops and meetings with local communities, to social media tactics. As observed by Jongbloed et al. (2008), in the case of universities, engagement involves a set of activities through which they can demonstrate their relevance to the society and be held accountable. Through community engagement universities can function as sites of citizenship and contribute to social and economic infrastructure, to the building of social capital, to the resolution of local issues, and supporting equity, diversity, and education for democratic citizenship. The goals of engagement are based on partnerships and mutually beneficial relationships. When explaining this relational paradigm Jahansoozi (2006, p.943) points out that it has moved the perspective away from the organization being viewed as the focal point in a stakeholder map; the actual interest lies instead with the relationships, “as these are considered important for maintaining the organization’s social license to operate”. Thus, the relationship becomes an autonomous system that does not belong to the organization in question or to its stakeholders and only through constant dialogue, commitment and trust, can the relationship thrive.

As explained in the previous section, the stakeholders of a university are diverse and can be classified as internal or external, individual or collective, academic or non-academic. The academic community may be considered as an important internal stakeholder category, without which the university would not function properly. For example, on subjects like medicine or engineering, the academics are in continual dialogue with professional associations, which reflect the close relationship between HIE and external stakeholders. University-stakeholder interaction is of both a formal and informal nature. In the case of the university-business environment interaction, the dominant channels are research publications, public meetings and conferences, research contracts, research staff acting as consultants, sharing of equipment, and students doing internships or on-the-job training. Some universities in the USA have started contract-based relationships or public-private ventures and patents since 1980, and nowadays many of them manage their intellectual property rights professionally. They have also set up “campus-based industrial extension services that are primarily aimed at the local and national business community as well as other facilitation mechanisms to increase university–industry interaction” (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000, p.481). According to the *“European innovation scoreboard 2008. Comparative analysis of innovation performance”*, a study which evaluates Romania’s private-public partnerships significance and the innovation performance indicator, Romania has recorded negative performance in the areas of intellectual property rights, lifelong learning, new capital in GDP, total (public and private) R&D expenditure, medium/high-tech manufacturing exports, and the overall innovation performance indicator was below the European average. The country

would require a constant effort for more than 50 years to catch up, but only by making education a national priority (Munteanu & Popescu, 2008, p.12).

The university's governance structure is another area where stakeholder relationships can be manifested. In some cases, in the USA and the Western-European countries, representatives of communities become decision-making bodies within universities. This action can prove very efficient and also democratic. Another form of showing accountability to the community is annual reporting, which is very common for companies, but also important for higher education institutions. In order to engage the local communities, universities can organize debates between academic representatives and external stakeholders, or can put in place contracts and agreements. The latter tactic would reorganize the relations between universities and the public sector in terms of customer-contractor relations.

Another key stakeholder category that can be considered as a customer of higher education institutions is the students. According to the study published by Mainardes et al. (2010, p.3), the student is the most important of stakeholders. "When duly satisfied, they recommend the institution to other potential students and also return for further study later in their careers" (Alves & Raposo, 2006). "According to Hennig-Thurau, Langer and Hansen (2001), former students are also an important stakeholder to universities as they may engage with their alma maters from positions of power within the labour market. Myriad factors, such as an anticipated decline in high school graduates, continued depopulation of rural areas, and dwindling state support will affect enrolment management strategies in the coming years and consequently university-student engagement strategies". According to the latest data issued by the Romanian National Statistics Institute, the number of high school graduates for the year 2010-2011 was of 202.000, decreasing since the previous year, and the number of higher education institution graduates was of 186.000, also slightly lower than the previous year. Therefore, competition to attract students will increase. In such a climate, traditional communication and advertising methods will not be sufficient to keep universities competitive, as the young demographic are less responsive to print, television and radio advertising than their predecessors.

But with change comes opportunity. Emerging technologies have the potential to breathe new life into existing engagement strategies. Social media has the power to affect recruitment and student loyalty and will further allow universities to respond to the challenges of the new age generation, *"the millennials"*. Yet few Romanian universities are prepared to or have already integrated these technologies into existing student engagement strategies, due to institutional unfamiliarity. So in order to qualify this statement we will present empirical research, by way of direct observation, addressing the social media engagement activities of Romanian universities. Any review of how Romanian universities utilize social media to engage with their primary stakeholders must be considered in the context of how Romanians use the Internet and more specifically the social media.

According to the data published in the Social Media Landscape report, made by the U.S. Department of State in cooperation with the E.U., by January 30<sup>th</sup> 2011 Romania had a record of 7,430,000 Internet users, equating to an Internet penetration rate of 33.4%. Of those, 41.5% accessed the Internet daily, 5.3% accessed it a few times a week, and 10.9% a few times a month; 67.3% use their personal computer for Internet access and only 4% use laptops. The most active age group is 18-24 years old, which represents 35% of the online community, followed by 25-34 year old (33%), and the 35-45 year old (32%). Regarding the education level of Romanian Internet users, 38% have higher education degrees, and post-graduate students represent 22% of the total. Relevant to the study is also the nature of the online activity of Romanian users, thus, they concentrate on collecting information (38.6%), e-mail (37.4%) and entertainment and social networks (34.1%). Social media is used by 33.8% of Internet users for the purposes of reading blogs, activity on social networks and distributing multimedia content. Of them, 60% have an

account on at least one social network and 35% have uploaded at least one video file on networks such as YouTube, Vimeo or Trilulilu.ro. Photo sharing is more popular than video sharing, as 73% of users are using Google Picasa or Flickr. The data recorded by SocialBakers.com, regarding Facebook usage in Romania, shows that by January 14<sup>th</sup> 2013, Facebook had 5.591.700 Romanian users, which represents 25.46% of the Romanian population and 65.18% of the total Internet users. Facebook is more popular among the 25-34 year old demographic (30.4%), followed by the 18-24 year old (30.2%). The above data reflects that while a third of the Romanian population is actively using the Internet, more than half of them have higher education degrees and the most active group is represented by youngsters. Therefore, the segment most interested in using social networks, primarily Facebook, is the students.

Presently there are no meaningful Romanian statistics available regarding the number of public or private universities that have embraced social media to engage with students. At the beginning of January 2013, we conducted an empirical study about the presence of Romanian universities on social networks. The study concluded that most of the Romanian public and private universities use Facebook as the main social network to engage with students, and to a lesser extent Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google +, Flickr or Picasa. Below is a table including the findings about the social media usage of 22 public and private Romanian universities, the data collected concerns their presence on Facebook, Twitter or other social networks and the number of Likes or followers they registered by Q1 2013.

**Table 1. Romanian universities using social networks**

University Name	Type	Social networks accounts	No. of likes/followers
University of Bucharest	public	Official Facebook page and Twitter account, both managed by the Public Relations department;	29,023 Likes 738 followers
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration - Bucharest	public	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives Facebook Group created by students;	1,826 Likes Facebook Group – 1,983 members;
Academy of Economic Studies - Bucharest	public	Official Facebook page and Twitter account, managed by university representatives	2,996 Likes 246 followers
Polytechnic Institute - Bucharest	public	Official Facebook page managed by university representatives, open to content contribution and official Twitter account	1,958 Likes 202 followers
Romanian-American University - Bucharest	private	Official Facebook page, Twitter, Picasa and blog, managed by university representatives	7,368 Likes 165 followers
The Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University - Bucharest	private	Official Facebook page and Twitter account, managed by university representatives	3,047 Likes 29 followers
Nicolae Titulescu University - Bucharest	private	Official Facebook page, Twitter, LinkedIn and Flickr accounts, managed by university representatives	1,298 Likes 12 followers
Hyperion University – Bucharest	private	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives, open to public contribution	1,533 Likes
Spiru Haret University – Bucharest	private	Official Facebook page, Twitter, Google+ and YouTube accounts, managed by university representatives	66,655 Likes 24 followers
Ecology University – Bucharest	private	Official Facebook account managed by students	890 friends

Al. I. Cuza University - Iași	public	Official Facebook page, Twitter and YouTube accounts, managed by university representatives	23,490 Likes 582 followers
Transilvania University - Brașov	public	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives	7,746 Likes
Ștefan cel Mare University - Suceava	public	Official Facebook page, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube accounts, managed by university representatives	8,820 Likes 208 followers
West University of Timișoara	public	Official Facebook page, Twitter and Google+ accounts, managed by university representatives	6,255 Likes 508 followers
Polytechnic University - Timișoara	public	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives	5,808 Likes
Dunărea de Jos University - Galați	public	Official Facebook account, managed by university representatives	740 friends
Petru Maior University - Târgu-Mureș	public	Various Facebook pages and groups, open to public contribution	1,965 Likes
Medicine and Pharmacy Grigore T. Popa University - Iași	public	Facebook page created and managed by students	3,223 Likes
Babeș-Bolyai University - Cluj	public	Official Facebook page, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn accounts, managed by university representatives and unofficial Facebook page created and managed by students	9,301 Likes (official page) 7,659 Likes (unofficial page) 238 followers
Technical University - Cluj-Napoca	public	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives	4,039 Likes
Medicine and Pharmacy University - Târgu-Mureș	public	Official Facebook page, managed by university representatives	2,907 Likes
Vasile Alecsandri University - Bacău	public	Various Facebook pages created by students	2,314 Likes

The **University of Bucharest** is a member of Facebook since December 2010 and the official page is managed by the university Public Relations Department. Compared to other public universities Facebook pages, it has recorded the highest number of Likes (29,023). With respect to communication activities, the flow is constant, at least one post per day and about 3-4 posts on special occasions (national holidays, academic community or university events, competitions). The stakeholder targeted is the student, with very few messages addressed to alumni. The content published on Facebook is centered on the following topics: administrative and academic information, national or international academic or scientific events, university or specific faculty events, offline or online student competitions and trainings or internships. Most of the messages include relevant pictures or video, links to articles or studies, and polls.

**Spiru-Haret University** in Bucharest – is a member of Facebook since January 2012 and the official page is managed by university representatives. Compared to both public and private universities, it has recorded the highest number of Likes (66,655). Regarding the frequency of posting, the flow is constant, at least 3-4 post per day. The target stakeholder is the student and the main topics regard administrative and academic aspects; other topics include university or specific faculty events, scientific studies, accomplishments of present or former students, and useful national news related or non-related to the university. The content integrates photo, video, links, and live streaming was used for the 2012-2013 academic year opening festivity.

The above examples of universities that have successfully integrated social networks in their communication strategies reflect that social media can foster a sense of community, leading to informal communication and to the development of professor-student relationships outside the

lecture hall. “Social network postings, instant messaging, and Tweets allow educators to reach out to students beyond the classroom. Accessibility to podcasts and blogs can supplement the traditional syllabus, providing a greater breadth and depth of knowledge via a variety of learning channels” (Merante, 2009, p.9). Social media should also be used by Romanian universities during the recruitment process, for both image creation and prospecting. Social networks like Facebook and Twitter allow universities to start relationships with prospective students much earlier than traditionally possible. For image creation, an active presence in social media allows universities to differentiate from the competitors, by clearly defining their goals, mission and strengths, which ultimately can help undecided students to make the school selection decision with greater ease.

The short list of Romanian universities that have incorporated new methods into existing strategies reflects that while some institutions have moved forward, Romanian universities in general are not yet ready yet to embrace the new communication technologies. The reason cannot be financial, considering many of them require low costs to participate. Time and labour may be the factors, but universities can find ways to leverage existing staff and student resources. The barrier is definitely the culture, the lack of business long-term vision. In the current economic climate, being unable to adapt communication and enrolment management strategies to new technology may lead to failure. Therefore, universities must prove creativity, innovation and willingness to integrate new digital technologies into existing strategies in order to guarantee survival.

## **The impact of Facebook on university-student relationships**

### Methodology

The analysis of the role and importance of social media in academic communication has the purpose of clarifying the methods universities use to engage with target stakeholders. Therefore, the aim of this study is to clarify the interests of Romanian students by analysing their perception of Facebook engagement strategies used by Romanian universities. The basis of the study is to validate or disprove two hypotheses: (1) the official Facebook presence of Romanian universities has increased student interest in their sponsored activities; (2) the communication activities of Romanian universities through Facebook have increased the student-university interaction in the online environment. To this end a quantitative approach was chosen – opinion questionnaire – that allows the collection and measurement of factual information, regarding the attitudes, motivation and interests of the subjects (Chelcea, 2001, p.73). The questionnaire was created with [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com) software and distributed online through the official Facebook pages of 24 state and private universities across Romania. The research is limited by the number of questionnaires that were obtained during the time allocated for data collection, 22<sup>nd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> of January 2013. The criteria for the selection of the sample size was the subjects that are Facebook friends or fans of a Romanian university. The two hypotheses were tested on 420 subjects, undergraduate and post-graduate students, attending public and private universities. From the 420 completed questionnaires, 285 were valid (68%), and 135 were cancelled due to the following reasons: the first two filter questions eliminated the respondents who graduated university, the ones that do not attend a Romanian university, and the ones that do not have a Facebook profile. From the remaining 285 questionnaires, 242 were 100% complete; the rest did not include the name of the university or faculty the respondents attend.

In creating the questionnaire the basic criteria were respected: moderate length (19 questions), completion duration of approx. 5 minutes, simple questions, clear answer options, and concise and unambiguous question phraseology/wording. The questionnaire gathered two data types: the first, factual data relating to the frequency of using Facebook, the devices used to access the platform and the location from where subjects connect to it, and the second, subjective data,



relating to the subjects perception about how universities use Facebook to engage with students. The questionnaire was pretested on 5 subjects (students of Romanian universities) with the purpose of identifying potential problems regarding the number, duration and clarity of questions. Pretesting resulted in two of the initial questions being removed and five answer options rewritten for the purposes of clarity. Regarding the design of the questionnaire, the easy and factual questions were placed at the beginning, the complex ones in the middle and the questions with low interest for the subjects at the end. Therefore, the questionnaire includes introductory, filter, semi-open, close ended and identification questions. The majority of the questions used were close ended so as to easily quantify the responses and to reduce the subjectivity of respondents in expressing their perception over the topic in discussion.

The methodology chosen, based on opinion questionnaire, ensured the premise of a quantitative research capable of generating a coherent and clear assessment of the student perception regarding the communication process between Romanian universities and students.

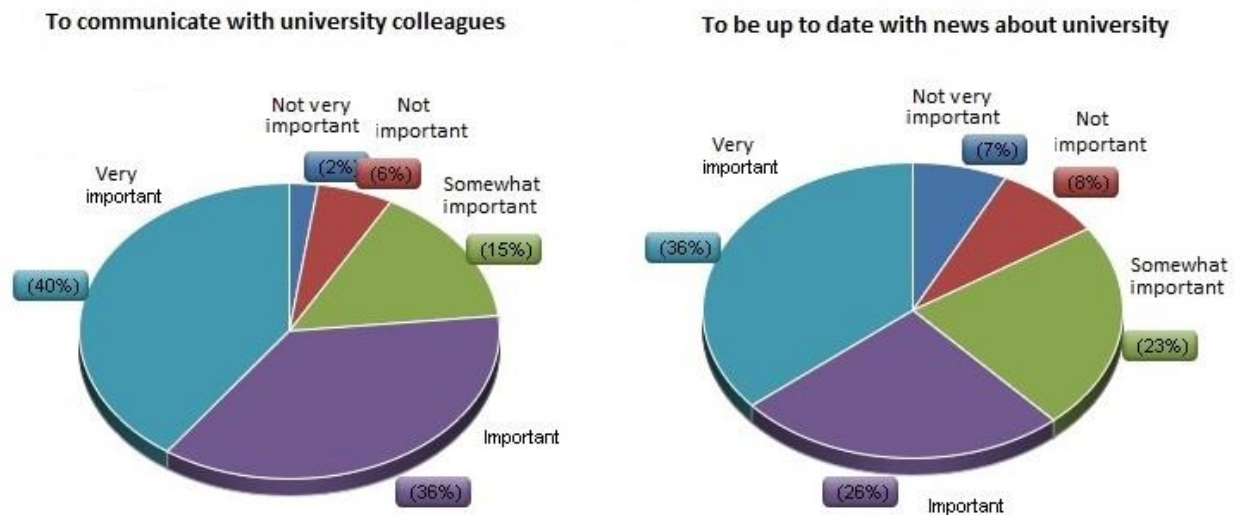
### **Interpretation of the research results through frequencies**

The first item of the questionnaire was formulated as a filter question, with the purpose of differentiating the subjects attending different levels of study in Romanian universities from those who are not currently students. The answer options included different study levels, such as graduate studies (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> year full-time and distance learning students), and post-graduate studies (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year masters degree full-time and distance learning students). The majority of the respondents (98%) attend universities, 30% of them are full-time 2<sup>nd</sup> year graduate students, 20% are full-time master degree students, 18% are 1<sup>st</sup> year full-time graduate students, 17% are 3<sup>rd</sup> year full-time graduate students and 2% are distance learning students; this latter result indicates this category of students is less interested in communicating via Facebook with their university.

The second item was also formulated as a filter question, in order to separate the subjects who have created and use a Facebook profile, from those who do not use Facebook. The results reveal that 99% of the respondents use Facebook, which reflects the importance of this social network among students. Items 3, 4 and 5 had the purpose of gathering factual data and refer to: Facebook usage frequency - 91% access Facebook several times a day, 5% access it once a day and 2% once every 2-3 days - and location and type of device used to access Facebook - 85% prefer to access Facebook from home, using their personal computer and 13% of those who access Facebook several times a day, use their mobile phones.

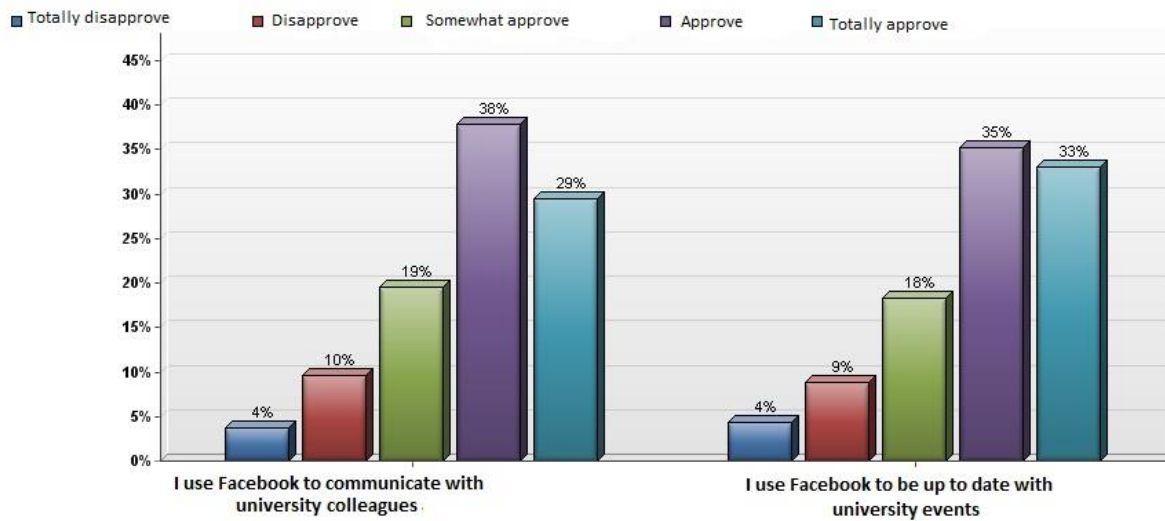
Item 6 opened the series of questions regarding opinions and motivations and analyzed the subjects' motivation to create a Facebook profile; the answer options consisted of nine statements, measured on a five point scale ("Not very important", "Not important", "Somewhat important", "Important", "Very important"). The first statement, "Everyone uses Facebook", had the purpose of identifying whether the subjects were influenced by the behavior of the majority for making the decision of creating a Facebook profile. The results indicate that most of the respondents (47%) consider this aspect "Not very important" and "Not important" and 27% were indecisive and considered it "Somewhat important". The following item brings curiosity into discussion and the results show that 45% of the respondents considered it "Important" and "Very important" and again many subjects (33%) opted for the "Somewhat important" answer option. The results recorded for item 6.3 show that 39% of the subjects considered important the reason of being up to date with the new technologies. Item 6.4 takes into consideration the motivation of getting in touch with old friends and colleagues - 63% of the respondents consider it important. Items 6.5 and 6.6 concentrate on the motivation to communicate with friends - 78% positive results, and with university colleagues - 76% positive results. The results recorded by these two items reflect

that the relationships created in the offline environment are maintained in the virtual world, by communicating through Facebook. Item 6.7 evaluates if entertainment is the main reason the subjects created Facebook profiles and the results show that most respondents consider this aspect "Somewhat important", while 37% concluded this was not an important reason. Item 6.8 had recorded similar results, which reflects the subjects were not motivated by the possibility of using Facebook as a self-promoting channel (55%). The results of item 6.9 are very relevant to the study, showing that 62% of respondents expressed that their decision of creating a Facebook profile was motivated by the possibility of being up to date with academic information and being able to communicate on topics related to the university.



**Figure 1. Results of item 6**

Item 7 had the purpose of verifying the validity of the results recorded for the previous item and investigated the motivations behind the usage of Facebook among students. The results reflect that 54% of respondents use Facebook to be up to date with their friends activity, while very few (14%) are interested in making new friends, which reinforces the theory presented by E. M. Vătămănescu (2012, p.163) that the architecture of virtual communities is based on the architecture of communities created in the offline world, and online friendships are determined by the friendships created through direct social interaction. Results show that the two main reasons why respondents use Facebook are to communicate with their university colleagues (67%), and to be informed about the events organized by their university (68%). Other reasons, less important to respondents are: to find internship or job opportunities (49%), to share news and useful information (48%), to get informed about the celebrities or the companies they like (22%), to play games (21%), and to promote themselves (19%). These results reflect there is a myriad of factors motivating students to use Facebook, though their interest is focused on maintaining a connection with academic life.



**Figure 2. Results of item 7**

In what concerns the interaction between university teachers and students, item 8 results reflect that 79% of respondents have at least one professor in their Facebook friends list and up to 33% of respondents have more than 5 professors. By identifying the percentage of students that are connected with their professors through Facebook, we can assess their interest in maintaining non-school-related relationships. Also essential to understanding university-student relationships in the online environment, the following item analyses to what extent students use Facebook to communicate with their university professors or with their colleagues.

Item 9.1 shows that 76% of respondents are members of Facebook discussion groups on topics concerning the university. These groups include both their university colleagues and professors, and the discussion topics are academic, regarding courses, projects and administrative aspects.

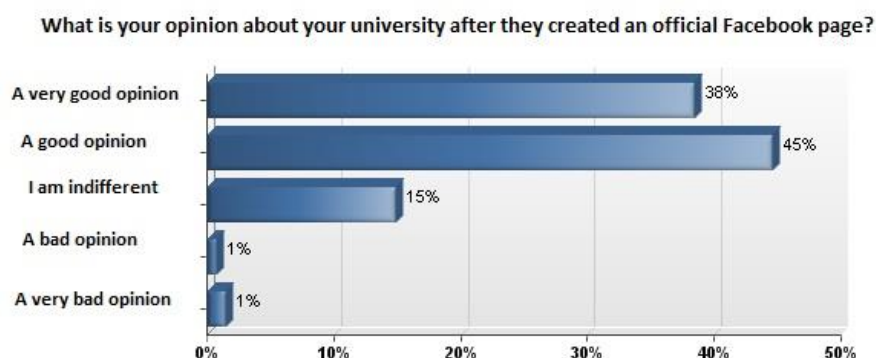
The majority of respondents expressed interest in the content published by their colleagues, about academic topics (79%), and by their professors (62%). Respondents are also interested in the content published on their university official Facebook page, 64% follow it, which reflects they welcomed the presence of their university on Facebook by Liking the page or adding it in their friends list. Regarding the communication flows between respondents and their colleagues, 79% communicate about administrative aspects and 75% about academic subjects. A small percentage of respondents communicate with their professors about academic subjects (26%) and even fewer respondents communicate about non-academic aspects (20%), according to the data supported by the results of the study conducted in 2013, on the students attending the Faculty of Communication and Public Relations, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Pînzaru & Mitan, 2013, p.235). The semi-symmetrical percentage distribution of the two items concerning student-professor communication reflects students are reluctant to initiate a dialog with their educators on Facebook, and consider it a rather informal and personal communication channel.

Item 10 analyses the respondents' perception about Facebook as a communication channel between university and students; it includes four statements, regarding the methods universities should use in order to communicate with students through Facebook, measured on a five point scale ("Totally disapprove", "Disapprove", "Somewhat approve", "Approve", "Totally approve"). The first statement: "Any university/faculty should have a constantly updated official Facebook page" recorded a very high positive percentage, 83%. This result reflects, without any doubt, that

the majority of respondents are interested in being connected on Facebook with their university/faculty, thus they believe an official Facebook presence is necessary. The second statement investigates whether the subjects consider their educators should also create official Facebook accounts, in order to post academic information. Results show most of the subjects were in favour of that, 69% would be interested in engaging with their professors on Facebook, should they have an official account. The following statement brings into discussion students' interest in communicating with university administrative staff or professors on officially created Facebook groups. In this case, 62% of respondents would prefer to communicate with university representatives about administrative and academic subjects on officially created Facebook groups; such results indicate students' interest in a more formalized and focused approach of Facebook communication. For the last statement, "Professors should contact students through Facebook, rather than e-mail, on formal subjects about courses", results are not very clear, due to the percentage distribution on the neutral category, 34% of respondents "Somewhat approve", while 44% "Totally disapprove" and "Disapprove". The high percentage of respondents, who chose to be neutral, reflects their reservation to choose between e-mail and Facebook, due to the fact they are used to communicating with their professors on formal topics by e-mail, but they frequently use Facebook to communicate with everyone else.

Item 11 concerns the type of information the respondents are interested in reading (about) on their universities official Facebook pages; it includes four categories (administrative information – courses, taxes, scholarships; information about the events organized by the university – conferences, workshops, festivities; information about student performance; information about non-academic activities – student organizations, cultural events, interesting books and movies, internship and job opportunities), their interest is measured on a five point scale ("Very low/None", "Low", "Moderate", "High", "Very high"). Results show the respondents are very interested in the events organized by their university (83%), in non-academic information (80%) and in administrative information (77%). A lower percentage of respondents are interested in information about student performance, 40%. These results indicate that students consider their university Facebook page a trustworthy and useful information and communication channel, where they can find information that could help their professional and personal development.

Item 12 had the purpose of investigating respondents' perception about their universities, after creating an official Facebook page. Results show that 83% of respondents have a "Very good opinion" and a "Good opinion" about their university and 15% are neutral; these results reflect the fact that students appreciate that universities have embraced the digital world and are now ready to interact through Facebook, the most popular social network among Romanian students.



*Figure 3. Results of item 12*

Item 13 opens the series of socio-demographic questions that classify respondents according to their gender, age, social status, country of residence, rural or urban area, income, the university

and faculty they attend. Results show that 75% of the respondents were female, 66% did not have a job and 93% live in Romania, in the urban area. The majority of the respondents were in the 18-24 year old demographic (83%), followed by 25-29 year old (13%).

Regarding income, a lot of respondents (36%) preferred not to mention it, and 31% have a low monthly income, 18% have a low-medium monthly income, 11% have a medium monthly income and 4% have a high monthly income. The results regarding income and employment can be compared to the results regarding the location and device used to access Facebook, which means that the frequency of accessing Facebook is determined by the subjects' capacity to acquire the equipment necessary (e.g. laptop, smartphone) and the amount of time they can dedicate to use it. Therefore, we can conclude that the unemployed subjects can spend more time on Facebook, but access it from home or school, while the employed subjects have less time to spend on Facebook, but can afford to buy the necessary devices that will allow them to access it anytime.

The last two items had the purpose of classifying respondents according to the university and faculty they attend. The majority of the study participants attend the following universities: National University of Political Studies and Public Administration Bucharest (SNSPA), University of Bucharest, University of Economic Studies Bucharest (ASE), Romanian-American University, Ecology University, Ion Mincu Architecture and Urbanism University and Spiru Haret University, and a relatively small number of subjects attend the Polytechnic University of Bucharest, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași, Babeș Bolyai University in Cluj, Petrol and Gas University in Ploiești, Valahia University in Târgoviște, Technical University in Cluj-Napoca and Grigore T. Popa Medicine and Pharmacy University in Iași. Most of the respondents did not mention the faculty they attend (49%), 25% attend humanities, 16% attend business and economy based studies, and 10% attend IT and science studies.

**Table 2. Respondents rate from the Romanian Universities investigated**

University	Percentage of respondents
SNSPA	27%
ASE	11.60%
University of Bucharest	16.60%
Romanian-American University	21.25%
Ecology University	5.41%
Ion Mincu Architecture and Urbanism University	4.16%
Spiru Haret University	4.16%
Al. I. Cuza University Iași	2.91%
Polytechnic University Bucharest	2.08%
Others	4.58%

### **Interpretation of the research results through correlations between variables**

For the purpose of further analyzing the interest of students in their universities Facebook presence, the chi-squared test was conducted. This test was used to compare data observed with data we expected to obtain according to the two hypotheses. Therefore, we will further correlate the percentage of respondents who attend the following universities: University of Economic Studies (ASE), National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), University of Bucharest (UB) and Romanian-American University (RA) with the results of item 7.7 ("I use Facebook in order to be up to date with university/faculty events) and observe whether the university students attend influences their decision to use Facebook for the purpose of

keeping track of university events.

**Table 3. Correlation between student attendance and item 7.7**

Scale	The Universities respondents are attending				Total	Percentage
	SNSPA	ASE	UB	RA		
Very important + Important	50	17	40	28	135	69.23%
Somewhat Important + Not Important + Not very important	17	12	6	25	60	30.77%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4. Results of correlation between student attendance and item 7.7**

Scale	Observed frequency (fo)	Expected frequency (fe)	(fo - fe) <sup>2</sup>
			fe
Important + Very Important SNSPA	50	(67 * 69.23)/100 = 46.38	0.28
Important + Very Important ASE	17	(29 * 69.23)/100 = 20.07	0.47
Important + Very Important UB	40	(46 * 69.23)/100 = 31.84	2.09
Important + Very Important RA	28	(53 * 69.23)/100 = 36.69	2.05
Rest SNSPA	17	(67 * 69.23)/100 = 20.60	0.62
Rest ASE	12	(29 * 69.23)/100 = 8.92	1.06
Rest UB	6	(46 * 69.23)/100 = 14.1	4.65
Rest RA	25	(53 * 69.23)/100 = 16.3	4.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>		<b>15.87</b>

$\alpha = 0.05$  (predetermined alpha level of significance)

$df = (2-1)(4-1) = 3$  (degrees of freedom)

$X^2$  calculated = 15.87

$X^2$  critic = 7.82

$X^2$  calculated >  $X^2$  critic => the null hypothesis is rejected with a probability of 95%

The results of the chi-squared test for item 7.7 show the null hypothesis is rejected with a probability of 95%, which reflects there is no relationship between the university the respondents attend and their interest in following the events organized by their university on Facebook.

In order to assess if the universities the respondents are attending influenced them in communicating with their professors through Facebook about academic aspects, we correlated the percentage of respondents who attend the following universities: University of Economic Studies (ASE), National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), University of Bucharest (UB) and Romanian-American University (RA) with the results of item 9.7 ("I communicate on Facebook with university professors, about academic aspects").

**Table 5. Correlation between student attendance and item 9.7**

Scale	Universities respondents are attending				Total	Percentage
	SNSPA	ASE	UB	RA		
Very important + Important	13	2	16	13	44	22.56%
Somewhat Important + Not Important + Not very important	54	27	30	40	151	77.44%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 6. Results of correlation between student attendance and item 9.7**

Scale	Observed frequency (fo)	Expected frequency (fe)	(fo - fe) <sup>2</sup>
			fe
Important + Very Important SNSPA	13	(67 * 22.56)/100 = 15.1	0.29
Important + Very Important ASE	2	(29 * 22.56)/100 = 6.54	3.15
Important + Very Important UB	16	(46 * 22.56)/100 = 10.3	3.15
Important + Very Important RA	13	(53 * 22.56)/100 = 11.9	0.1
Rest SNSPA	54	(67 * 22.56)/100 = 51.88	0.08
Rest ASE	27	(29 * 22.56)/100 = 22.45	0.92
Rest UB	30	(46 * 22.56)/100 = 35.62	0.88
Rest RA	40	(53 * 22.56)/100 = 41.04	0.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>		<b>8.59</b>

X<sup>2</sup> calculated = 8.59

X<sup>2</sup> critic = 7.82

X<sup>2</sup> calculated > X<sup>2</sup> critic => the null hypothesis is rejected with a probability of 95%

This second test shows, once again, that the university students attend does not influence their attitude towards university professors, nor their decision to communicate with them through Facebook, about academic aspects.

The purpose of the third test is to assess whether the universities respondents attend influenced their perception of universities after creating an official Facebook page. We correlated the percentage of respondents who attend the same universities as in the previous tests with the results of item 12 ("What is your opinion about the university you attend after they created an official Facebook page").

**Table 7. Correlation between student attendance and item 12**

Scale	Universities respondents are attending				Total	Percentage
	SNSPA	ASE	UB	RA		
Very good + Good	54	21	41	43	159	81.50%
Indifferent + Bad + Very bad	13	8	5	10	36	18.50%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 8. Results of correlation between student attendance and item 12**

Scale	Observed frequency (fo)	Expected frequency (fe)	(fo - fe) <sup>2</sup>
			fe
Very good + Good SNSPA	54	(67 * 81.5)/100 = 54.6	0.006
Very good + Good ASE	21	(29 * 81.5)/100 = 23.6	0.28
Very good + Good UB	41	(46 * 81.5)/100 = 37.49	0.32
Very good + Good RA	43	(53 * 81.5)/100 = 43.19	0.0008
Rest SNSPA	13	(67 * 81.5)/100 = 12.39	0.3721
Rest ASE	8	(29 * 81.5)/100 = 5.36	1.3
Rest UB	5	(46 * 81.5)/100 = 8.51	1.44
Rest RA	10	(53 * 81.5)/100 = 9.8	0.004
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>		<b>3.72</b>

X<sup>2</sup> calculated = 3.72

X<sup>2</sup> critic = 7.816

df = 3

$p = 0.05$

$X^2$  calculated <  $X^2$  critic => the null hypothesis is accepted with a probability of 95%

The results of the test reflect that the universities respondents attend did influence their perception of universities after creating an official Facebook page. The results indicate that the highest number of students who expressed a “Good” and “Very Good” opinion about their university after using Facebook attend SNSPA.

## Conclusions

In conducting the study, the first step was a research about the Romanian universities that have an official Facebook page and update it constantly. The universities with up to 200 Facebook fans were selected and contacted for the purpose of posting the questionnaire on their official page and informing their students of the study. Thus, the questionnaire was distributed to students through the official Facebook pages of 24 HEIs in Romania. Selecting the official Facebook pages of the universities for distributing the questionnaire was instrumental in ensuring that the participants to the study were attending Romanian universities and were following the content posted on their university Facebook page.

The results of items 9.1, 9.3, 9.4 regarding the respondents’ opinion about the content published by university representatives on the official Facebook pages or by professors on their personal Facebook profiles, compared to the results of item 10.1 regarding the presence of Romanian universities on Facebook, reflect the respondents’ interest in keeping up with the news and academic information universities communicate through Facebook. In addition to that, these results confirm the first hypothesis of the study stating that the official Facebook presence of Romanian universities has increased student interest in their sponsored activities. Regarding the type of information students are interested by following on the universities Facebook pages, the results of items 11.1, 11.2 and 11.4 reflect the fact that students appreciate a variety of topics, not only administrative and academic, but also non-academic information, such as extra-curricular activities, workshops, internships and job opportunities, interesting movies and books, etc.

Although students are reticent about communicating with university professors on Facebook, the results of items 9.7, 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4, show students are interested in developing a more informal relationship with their professors through Facebook and would welcome their educators’ initiative to create discussion groups and engage with them online. These results, combined with the results of item 12 (regarding students’ perception of their university after creating an official Facebook page), confirm the second hypothesis of the study, that states that communication activities of Romanian universities through Facebook have increased student-university interaction in the online environment.

Concluding, Facebook is used by students mostly for the purposes of maintaining relationships with friends and university colleagues and for keeping up to date about the activities organized by their university. Students are interested in creating online discussion groups on topics concerning academic life, and in participating in both formal and informal discussions with university representatives and professors. The most important contribution of Facebook to university-student engagement resides in the opportunity to maintain the relationships created through direct social interaction in the online world.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to express my deep gratitude to Associate Prof. Dr. Alexandra Zbucea my research supervisor, for her patient guidance, enthusiastic encouragement and useful critiques of this research work. My grateful thanks are also extended to Ing. Drd. Mihaela Roxana Nicolai for her help in calculating the chi-square coefficient, data which was instrumental for the results of this study.



## References

- Alves, H., and Raposo, M. (2006). Conceptual model of student satisfaction in higher education. *Total Quality Management*, 18(1), 571-588.
- Boesso, G., and Kamalesh, K. (2008). An investigation of stakeholder prioritization and engagement: who or what really counts. *Journal of Accounting and Organizational Change*, 5(1), 62-80.
- Castells, M. (1996). *The information age: Economy, society and culture: Vol. 1, The rise of the network society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chatterton, P., and Goddard, J. (2000). The response of higher education institutions to regional needs. *European Journal of Education*, 35(4), 475-496.
- Chelcea, S. (2001). *Tehnici de cercetare sociologică [Techniques of sociological research]*. Bucharest: SNSPA Publishing.
- Clarkson, M.E. (1995). A stakeholder framework for analyzing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 20(1), 92-118.
- Dobni, C., and Luffman, G. (2003). Determining the scope and impact of market orientation profiles on strategy implementation and performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 24(6), 577-585.
- Freeman, R.E. (2010). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Friedman, A.L., and Miles, S. (2006). *Stakeholders: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Langer, M., and Hansen, U. (2001). Modelling and managing student loyalty: an approach based on the concept of relationship quality. *Journal of Service Research*, 3(4), 331-344.
- Jahansoozi, J. (2006). Organization-stakeholder relationships: exploring trust and transparency. *Journal of Management Development*, 25(10), 943.
- Jongbloed, B., Enders, J., and Salerno, C. (2008). *Higher education and its communities: interconnections, interdependencies in higher education. Looking forward: Themes on the Changing Relationship between Higher Education and Society*. European Science Foundation. Retrieved from <http://www.cied.uminho.pt/uploads/HELF%5B1%5D.pdf>.
- Lam, Y., and Pang, S. (2003). The relative effects of environmental, internal and contextual factors on organizational learning: the case of Hong Kong schools under reforms. *The Learning Organization*, 10(2), 83-97.
- Laplume, A.O., Sonpar, K., and Litz, R. A. (2008). Stakeholder theory: Reviewing a theory that moves us. *Journal of Management*, 34(6), 1152-1189.
- Mainardes, E. W., Alves, H., and Raposo, M. (2010). An Exploratory Research on the Stakeholders of a University. *Journal of Management and Strategy*, 1(1), 76-88.
- Merante A.J. (2009). *The Digital Frontier: The Implications of Evolving Technology on Strategic Enrollment Management*. Retrieved from [http://www.blackboard.com/resources/Connect/HED\\_Trends\\_EnrollmentManagement.pdf](http://www.blackboard.com/resources/Connect/HED_Trends_EnrollmentManagement.pdf).
- Miles, S. (2011). Stakeholder: Essentially Contested or Just Confused. *Journal of Business Ethics*. DOI 10.1007/s10551-011-1090-8.
- Mitchell, R.K., Agle, B.R., and Wood, D.J. (1997). Towards a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853-886.
- Munteanu, R., and Popescu, S. (2008). *Analiza diagnostic "Universitățile și mediul socio-economic. Proiecte strategice pentru Învățământul Superior" [The diagnosis analysis "Universities and the socio-economic environment. Strategic projects for Higher Education"]*. Retrieved from [http://edu2025.ro/UserFiles/File/LivrabileR1/diagnostic\\_panel3.pdf](http://edu2025.ro/UserFiles/File/LivrabileR1/diagnostic_panel3.pdf).
- Pînzaru, F., and Mitan, A. (2013). Generation Y Students: Using Facebook for Communicating with University Staff and Professors. *Management Dynamics in a Knowledge Economy*, 1(2), 233-236.
- Shavit, Y., and Blossfeld, H.-P. (Eds.) (1993). *Persistent inequality: Changing educational attainment in thirteen countries*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Teichler, U. (1999). Internationalisation as a Challenge for Higher Education in Europe. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 5(1), 5-22.
- Vătămănescu, E.-M. (2012). *Similaritatea în cadrul comunităților virtuale [Similarity in virtual communities]*. Bucharest: Universitară Publishing.
- Romania Facebook Statistics (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/romania>.
- U.S. State Department Social Media Landscape: Romania. (2011). Retrieved from <http://publicintelligence.net/ufouo-u-s-state-department-social-media-landscape-romania/>.

Yearly Education Report (2011). Retrieved from

[http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar%20statistic/08/08%20Educatie\\_ro.pdf](http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/Anuar%20statistic/08/08%20Educatie_ro.pdf).