

## Facebook-сторінки латвійських порталів новин: ефективність використання функціоналу

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Facebook вже давно розглядає ЗМІ як партнерів, а тому створює різний інструментарій для роботи з їх аудиторією. В свою чергу, медійні компанії та контент-провайдери використовують Facebook не тільки для збільшення трафіку, але й для того, щоб якнайкраще зрозуміти своїх користувачів. У даному дослідженні порівнюються сторінки трьох провідних новинних порталів Латвії (Delfi.lv, Apollo.lv та TVNET.lv) з метою їх дослідження щодо ефективності використання всіх можливостей, які надає функціонал соціальної мережі. Застосовуючи конверсаційний аналіз для побудови типової комунікативної моделі та враховуючи характерні особливості соцмережі, встановлено, що тип контенту істотно впливає на дії користувача. Виявлено, що функціонал соцмережі має характерні особливості, серед яких комунікаційна та розважальна складова, а також соціалізація та самопрезентація. З метою отримання кількісних показників, необхідних для моделювання, був використаний веб-сервіс аналітики контенту соціальних мереж: для аналізу глибини занурення, частоти відвідання і з метою зіставлення Facebook-сторінок, були застосовані метрики ER, LR, TR. Отримані результати свідчать про низький рівень поведінки користувачів на сторінках досліджуваних порталів в Facebook. Рівномірний розподіл уваги відвідувачів між фото, текстом та гіперпосиланнями не дозволяє виявити пріоритетні формати. Встановлено, що сторінки в Facebook новинних онлайн-ресурсів – це, скоріш за все, непріоритетна медіаактивність, задача якої забезпечити присутність ресурсів у системі соціальних медіа та підвищити інтенсивність інформаційних обмінів. Дослідження свідчить, що системна робота з комплексного представництва новинних латвійських порталів Delfi, TVNet та Apollo в Facebook не ведеться. Редакції не адаптують публікації під специфіку соціальної мережі, не форматують контент, а займаються здебільшого популяризацією посилань, які ведуть на офіційний медіапортал. Загальна відсутність системи хештегів говорить про мінімальну оптимізацію контенту редакції під соціальну мережу Facebook.

**Ключові слова:** функціонал соціальної мережі; сторінка Facebook; контент; Delfi.lv; Apollo.lv; TVNET.lv.

### 1. Introduction

**Problem statement.** Open horizontal structures (social networks) using modern communicative technologies are a habitual component of the media system distinguished by specific Internet qualities: hypertext, multimedia, interactivity and multiple channels. The model of news selection by importance does not work any more. The information is not looked for now, it is consumed within one social network. The most media presented on the network also have a page on Facebook. The user who has an account can easily set up his page so that the information supplied by media immediately appears on his page. A page on a social network actually accepts the media functionality. The most frequently visited Latvian news resources and pages of these portals on Facebook are selected for further analysis. An attempt was made to describe the existing communicative

infrastructure and opportunities offered by this social network on the basis of these sources.

**Article objective** is to determine the efficiency of Facebook social network functionality utilization by leading Latvian media.

**Study object** is official Facebook pages of the Latvian news portals Delfi, TVNet and Apollo.

**Analysis of the last studies and publications.** An active scientific discussion of the distinguishing features of social network functioning began actually immediately after organization of the first effective system of social media. Darel Berry used the term 'social media' to describe 'software systems enabling a joint construction of common and subjective experience of divided 'space' through electronic media' in 1995, the year of launching the American social network Classmates.com (quoted after [1]). In 1997, L. Garton, C. Haythornthwaite and B. Wellman offered several approaches to social network investigation [2].

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Several approaches investigating social networks both as independent units and components of a complicated multicomponent system exist in the modern scientific discourse. The second edition of a complex research by Larisa Hjort and Sam Hinton *Understanding Social Media* was already published by SEGA publishing house in 2019 [3]. A successful review of studies in this field is presented in the scientific article K. Kapoor, K. Tamilmani, N. Rana, et al. *Achievements in Social Media Studies: the Past, the Present and the Future*. We find a sufficiently capacious and relevant definition of the concept there: '*Social networks consist of various user-operated platforms promoting the dissemination of attractive content, creation of dialogs, and communication with broader audience. In fact, this digital space created by people and for people and providing an environment promoting interaction and networking at various levels (for example, personal, professional, business, marketing, political and public level)*' [4].

Today's social networks are an object of cross-disciplinary studies affecting psychological aspects [5–8], Big Data analysis in networks [9–10], and safety issues [11–13]. A careful investigation of social media functionality and social networks is typical of market studies [14–16]. The media aspects of this sphere are investigated from the point of view of news exchange [17–18], its technological potential [19], etc.

**Investigation methods.** A whole complex of scientific methods was used in this study. The descriptive and historiographical methods were used to analyze the modern scientific discourse. The authors proceed from that fact that the global media backbone Facebook.com is a social network, one of the most popular platforms in the world rating. According to Similarweb as of early 2020, the network occupies the third place by website traffic after Google and YouTube with over 1.6 billion daily active users [20]. This study is focused on accounts of those mass media that possess pages on this social network for more than one year. Therefore, exactly Facebook.com was chosen for investigation and comparison of pages belonging to popular Latvian news resources. It is all the more so that Facebook considers media as partners for a long time already, and creates various tools facilitating the work with audience. The media companies and content providers, in turn, use Facebook not only for increase the traffic, but also to better understand the audience.

The article is dedicated to investigation of efficiency of utilization of Facebook pages belonging to the most popular Latvian news portals. The results of a Latvia's population media literacy study commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and conducted by Latvijas fakti [21] show that the most popular resources in Latvia are news portals, and they enjoy the highest trust among readers at the same time. The respondents have recognized Delfi portal as the most popular source of news (27 % of respondents). The top three also included TVNet (16 %) and Apollo (10 %) followed by telecasts and channels (Panorāma, LTV1, LNT, Channel Baltic One, TV3 and LNT Ziņas).

The conversational analysis was used to build a typical communicative model of the Facebook pages of the three most popular Latvian online news type resources. popsters.ru social network content analytics web service was used to obtain the quantitative indicators required for modeling. The relative activity of the audience was determined during the period from December 20, 2019 to January 20, 2020. The popsters.ru metrics were used for post analysis:

- ER (Engagement Rate): ER day is total percentage user engagement rate for all records published per day; ER user is percentage engagement rate for a specific post)

- LR (Love Rate, attractiveness level)

- TR (**Talk Rate, sociability level**).

The metrics are calculated using the following formulas:

$$ER \text{ day} = \frac{\sum \text{likes per day} + \sum \text{shares per day} + \sum \text{comments per day}}{\text{number of subscribers}}$$

$$ER \text{ post} = \frac{\text{likes} + \text{shares} + \text{comments}}{\text{number of subscribers}}$$

$$LR = \frac{\text{number of likes}}{\text{number of subscribers}}$$

$$TR = \frac{\text{number of comments}}{\text{number of subscribers}}$$

When calculating the indicators for an average publication, the number of entries is added: reach is the number of people who have had at least one contact with the publication (or advertisement); views are the publication viewership (more details are provided here: [22]).

## 2. Results

**Characteristics features of social networks.** When analyzing the distinguishing features of social networks, it is worth to first mention the fact that they purposefully and significantly consolidate horizontal relations, which is not surprisingly given their nature and functionality. However, online networks also affect the system of vertical information relations at the same time, which was actively discussed already in early 2010th. So, the authors of the collective monograph *Social Networks as a Factor of Civil Society Development* say that networks '*improve relations between social groups in these groups, between their members, generate opportunities of active public pressure for violations in the sphere of business and politics, reduce the level of uncertainty in business and politics, and increase the information service quality and information exchange intensity. Horizontal social networks enable a more effective interest representation not only for social groups, but also for whole social layers such as employers, employees, consumers, etc.*' [23, p. 23]. The social network functionality is reflected in characteristic features. The researchers mention the communicative and entertaining components as well as socialization, self-presentation, self-expression, 'notebook', psychological relaxation among them [ibid., p. 24–26].

**Characteristic features of a social network: the level of content consumer.** Facebook has become the first social

network offering integration in the form of social plugins to third-party websites, including news websites. The social network websites enables having the entire information 'before eyes'. The audience takes part in the Facebook communicative model by means of a set of actions: Like (I like), Share (Repost), Comment (Comment), and so obtains an opportunity to leave a response on an external website or to send information about the visited site to their pages on Facebook. And, according to D. Munting, M. Murman and E. Smith, there exist three levels of behavior in a social network: consumption, assistance and creation [24]. Consumption is the lowest level including a behavior based on participation without creating a content, i.e. reading or viewing. The middle level is assistance, i.e. interaction between the user and content as well as between other users. Creation is the highest level including content production and publication. Each behavior requires unique cognitive efforts. The network assesses behavior options depending on action, and determines what should be further shown on the user's screen. Adam Moressi, the head of a news line in Facebook, said in 2018, after the next in turn algorithm modernization, that comments are usually more significant than likes and that *'longer comments are usually more significant for the recipient than short ones'* [25]. Thus, the volume of cognitive efforts spent affects further content consumption.

**Characteristic features of a social network: the level of professional content producer.** We will consider mass media addressing the audience by means of an official account or page on Facebook to be the professional content producers in this study. According to A. Larsson, the network offers two main options of involving the audience to such users. First, it enables providing what is regarded as a certain confirming reaction to a specific post. Facebook diversifies the 'like' button functionality in a series of reactions ('I like it', 'super', 'ha-ha', 'wow!', 'I sympathize', 'shocking') expressing five feelings: love, laughter, surprise, grief and indignation. Although reaction weight is greater than that of a usual like in the algorithm, the user's behavior as way of interaction by one click has not change [26]. On the other hand, the modified Facebook newsfeed algorithm relies on 'relevance account', i.e. it forecasts the user's behavior during interaction with a post in the news line: assigns a like, makes a click, gives a comment, shares it or marks the publication as spam. A complicated principle of post selection to the feed and their ranging exists at the same time, which was determined by three indicators in the past, i.e. reactions, comments, reposts, and now mainly depends on comments.

Roughly speaking, mass media must 'force' users to comment on posts in order to remain in their newsfeed.

The described characteristic features of social networks and results of previous audience activity studies in relation to news suggest that the content type significantly affects the consumer's actions. A. Larsson claims that the Facebook audience more willingly interacts with 'soft' news, and news supplier's priorities not always coincide with those of their consumer [27]. This point of view is also supported by M. Bastos who has discovered on the example of The Guardian and The New York Times Facebook accounts that media more willingly publish information on sports, entertainments or celebrities ('soft' news) in social networks, and users prefer to share 'hard' news [28]. Such situation is observed with the leading media resources of the world that perform an active work on creating content that is optimized to social network requests to the maximum extent with due regard to their multimodal, hypertextual, interactive, synchronous and quasisynchronous features in addition to effective information and communicative activity. The situation is even less predictable with less effective media. However, some scientists are of the opinion what news digitization will open an era of improved journalism and space for a lot of content.

### 3. Discussions

The news portal Delfi.lv was created on November 26, 1999. Delfi.lv is the main source of validated information for many residents of Latvia. The most frequent answers to the question *Why do you consider this medium one of the most reliable ones?* were that it *'provides the most popular information faster than others'*, *'there is no unnecessary information'*, and *'neutral presentation of information'* [21].

The official Facebook account page Delfi @Delfi.lv was registered on September 12, 2010. There are 141 thousand subscribers. The resource relates itself to the News and Media rubric and describes itself as a media material producing and broadcasting company. The Information section says that this is Latvia's leading mass medium: *'...DELFI has been the unsurpassed leader in the online media for 17 years. Immediate news about politics, business, the world, sports, culture, and many other things. Running commentaries, journalistic investigations, descriptions, expert opinions. Many photos, video, reader uploads and opportunities to learn something new and to entertain oneself'*. Slogan: *'One has to know before judging'* (the translation from Latvian here and below is ours – **O. F.**) [29].

These page contain active links to the web portal and social networks [twitter.com/delfilv](https://twitter.com/delfilv) and [draugiem.lv/delfi](https://draugiem.lv/delfi)

**Table 1. @Delfi.lv page entry characteristics According to popsters.ru over the period of 20.11.2019–20.12.2019**

Total entries	Subscribers	Total likes	Average number of likes	Total reposts	Average number of reposts	Total comments	Average number of comments	ER day, %	ER post, %	LR, %	TR, %
750	141037	40131	54	36425	49	9910	13	2.114	0.082	0.038	0.009

**Table 2. @Apollo.lv page entry characteristics  
According to popsters.ru over the period of 20.11.2019–20.12.2019**

Total entries	Subscribers	Total likes	Likes on the average	Total reposts	Average number of reposts	Total comments	Average number of comments	ER day, %	ER post, %	LR, %	TR, %
539	51703	38908	72	21453	40	7855	15	4.123	0.245	0.140	2.028

where pages of this mass medium can be found as well. The page functionality is expanded (in addition to standard rubrics Main, Information, Video, Photo, Publication), and the Events, Groups, Community – Delfi ziņas section is also present with 764 participants, Iconosquare. The page of the main portal is presented in Latvian. Facebook also contains a Russian page (rus.delfi.lv), but the content is absolutely different on these pages.

The number of publications on the page is three per hour. The presentation is standard. The main macrogenre of the page is infotainment, a mix of political and economic news with cooking recipes and notes from the life of show business stars. The posts include a cable line and a rhetorical question which play the role of eyeliners to a hyperlink leading the user to the Delfi.lv news portal.

We use the above described characteristics of social networks to determine that the main Delfi.lv page function is information exchange intensity. The laconic posts and rather active newsfeed updating stimulate the activity of the audience. However, the fact that the comment and reaction are personified and open to the community makes users to prefer jumping from the page on Facebook to the main www.delfi.lv portal, and to anonymously comment on or react to publications there without trotting out their opinions.

Apollo.lv was the first resource from the analyzed ones to register a page on Facebook (@Apollo.lv). The Information section specifies the date of registration as August 30, 2000. The resource relates itself to the News and Media rubric and has nearly 52 thousand subscribers.

The page is presented in Latvian. The Information section states: *'More than news! An informative entertainment portal showing emotions, adventures and secular events'*. It is one of the few media where the mission is also stated: *'Delivery news for people. In a human way'*. The About Us

section says: *'The fastest-growing news portal in Latvia'* [30]. About two posts per hour are published on the page.

The page almost does not differ functionally from Delfi, and uses the same tool kit. A post most often consists of one or two sentences followed by a hyperlink to a text published on the www.apollo.lv portal. The same information exchange intensity is the fundamental principle of keeping a page in a social network. The metric page data is presented in Table 2.

TVNET specifies the date of @tvnet.lv page registration as September 1, 2000. Similar to the previous resources, it relates itself to the News and Media rubric and has nearly 91 thousand subscribers.

The mission as stated on the page reads: *'We quickly respond to everything related to our society, highlighting achievements and ruthlessly exposing unfair and unethical behavior. We comment on current events from 'flash points', listen to experts, and express our views on TVNET'*. The Information section says: *'TVNET – Learn everything that has happened in Latvia and the world'*. The About Us section contains only one phrase: *ĪSTAS ZIŅAS* (Latvian for 'real news'). And further: *'We want everyone to feel comfortable when using this website, and therefore comments with threats, slander or insults will be removed, and repeated violators will be blocked. User comments do not reflect TVNET views. If you face something inappropriate, report it to us'*. Such note about writing comments can only be found on the page of this edition. The 'Products comfortable states: *'Latvian and foreign news portal'* [31].

A distinguishing feature of building posts on the page is that there is virtually no text or it is present in the form of a single sentence. An active link to a publication located on www.tvnet.lv portal follows. The page is presented in a standard way, there are no additional sections except Livestream, however it is inactive at present. The metric page data is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. @tvnet.lv page entry characteristics  
According to popsters.ru over the period of 20.11.2019–20.12.2019**

Total entries	Subscribers	Total likes	Likes on the average	Total reposts	Average number of reposts	Total comments	Average number of comments	ER day, %	ER post, %	LR, %	TR, %
448	90892	35951	80	15566	35	9491	21	2.098	0.150	0.088	0.023

**Table 4. Comparison of @Delfi.lv, @Apollo.lv and @tvnet.lv Facebook page content**

	Relative activity by type of content				ER by text length		Likes (on the average)	Reposts (on the average)	Comment (on the average)
	Photo	Video	Text	Link	<160 characters	160-1,000 characters			
@Delfi.lv	15.8 %	54.3 %	14.4 %	15.5 %	0.08	0.12	54	49	13
@Apollo.lv	28.1 %	15.5 %	28.1 %	28.3 %	0.24	0.23	72	40	15
@tvnet.lv	23.9 %	33.6 %	21.3 %	21.2 %	0.151	0.111	80	35	21

The analysis of the types of content represented by three largest Latvian online editions on their Facebook pages and levels of interaction with content by visitors of these pages enabled obtaining the results presented in Table 4.

The results obtain show the prevalence of low user behavior level (consumption) with the first level of involvement (reaction) on all three pages. The uniform distribution of Facebook page visitors' attention between photos, text and hyperlink does not allow to highlight priority formats, and an accent or neglect in respect of one of them (as in the case with video in Table 3) does not affect the ER value. As for published text length, the investigation of three chosen Latvian media accounts has shown that the publication (post) should not exceed 160 characters. The brevity in the news seems to be correlated with a constant emphasis on reposting 'soft' news, which confirms A. Larsson's theory. Low content is attractive and audience sociability coefficients can be explained by the fact that the audience follows the link to the publication on the news portal website, and so obtains an opportunity to make anonymous comments. On the one hand, this function reduces the chances of posts on the analyzed pages to occupy the priority places in user newsfeeds; on another hand, it increases traffic on official online portal websites.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Facebook pages of the analyzed Latvian news portals are most likely a low-priority media activity intended to ensure the presence of resources in the social media system and to increase information exchange intensity. As for functional components, the emphasis is made on self-presentation and communicative factor. This study has shown that no system work is carried out on a complex presentation of Latvian Delfi, TVNet and Apollo news portals on Facebook. The editorial offices do not adapt publications to the distinguishing features of this network, do not format the content, and are mainly engaged in promoting links accompanied by a minimum description (93% of total of posts contain less than 160 characters). There is no hashtag system either, which suggests a minimum content system for Facebook system.

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## Fedorova O. Facebook pages of Latvian news portals: functionality utilization efficiency

Facebook has long considered media as partners, and therefore creates various tools to work with their audience. In turn, media companies and content providers use Facebook not only to increase traffic, but also to better understand their users. This study compares web pages of the three leading Latvian news portals (Delfi.lv, Apollo.lv and TVNET.lv) in order to study the effectiveness of using all the features provided by functionality of a social network. Applying conversionary analysis to build a typical communicative model and taking into consideration characteristic features of social network, it is established that the type of content significantly affects the user's actions. It is revealed that the functionality of social network has characteristic features, among which is communication and entertainment component, as well as socialization and self-presentation. In order to obtain quantitative indicators necessary for modeling, we have used web service of content analytics of social networks: ER, LR, TR metrics are used to analyze dive depth, visit frequency and Facebook page mapping. The obtained results indicate a low level of user behavior on the pages of the examined portals in Facebook. The uniform distribution of attention of visitors between photos, text and hyperlinks does not allow to identify priority formats. It has been established that Facebook pages of online news resources are likely to be non-priority media activity, the task of which is to ensure the presence of resources in the system of social media and increase intensity of information exchange. The study shows that there is no systematic work on integrated representation of Latvian news portals Delfi, TVNet and Apollo on Facebook. Editorial offices do not adapt publications to the specifics of the social network without formatting content, but mainly promote links that lead to the official media portal. The general lack of hashtags system indicates minimal optimization of editorial content for the social network Facebook.

**Keywords:** social network functionality; Facebook page; content; Delfi.lv; Apollo.lv; TVNET.lv.



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