

Social Networks as a Communication Tool in Social Supermarkets

Blazenka Knezevic

Department of Trade
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business
Zagreb, Croatia
e-mail: bknezevic@efzg.hr

Vida Davidaviciene

Department of Business Technologies and Entrepreneurship
Vilnius Gediminas Technical University, Faculty of
Business Management, Lithuania
e-mail: vida.davidaviciene@vgtu.lt

Petra Skrobot

Department of Trade
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Economics and Business
Zagreb, Croatia
e-mail: pskrobot1@efzg.hr

Abstract— Social supermarkets are a form of non-profit organizations, which use the workforce of volunteers and generated income (if there is any) is used for charitable activities. Their main purpose is to serve to customers which are in material deprivation. By definition, their operational activities include: (1) collecting donations in money, (2) organization of acceptance of donations in form of food and toiletries from traditional supply chains, (3) acquiring food and other stuff from other sources and (4) distribution of food, toiletries and other stuff for free and/or (5) selling goods at extremely discounted prices to socially endangered people. In their operational activities, there are numerous possibilities of social networks implementation in various stages of their everyday business. The aim of this paper is to analyze application of social networks in communication with donors, volunteers, end users and general public in case of social supermarkets. In the paper, we will analyze some real examples of application of social networks in active social supermarkets.

Keywords - *social supermarkets; social networks; digital communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social supermarkets emerged as the answer to the recent economic crisis across Europe. Their main purpose is to serve those groups of customers which have low income or which are in severe material deprivation. The purpose of social supermarket is twofold: (1) the poverty reduction through distribution of food and toiletries to needy people and (2) reduction of inefficiency in traditional (dominantly food) supply chains through removal of surpluses of produced food (and other goods). Intensive communication with end users, volunteers and donors increases operational efficiency of social supermarkets.

The penetration rate of Internet and mobile phones within population of EU-28 exceeded 60% of inhabitants. Therefore, digital communications already play a significant role in promotional activities of social supermarkets.

However, in literature, the scope and role of digital communication usage in social supermarkets is not adequately analyzed and described.

The aim of this paper is to show how social supermarkets use social networks as a communication tool for interaction with interested publics.

Paper is divided into three sections. In Section 2, we are going to define social supermarkets, in Section 3, we will explain what social networks are and what is the level of their development and in Section 4, based on a primary research we are going to explain good practices of social network usage in everyday operation of social supermarkets. The primary research is done by case study method on three practical examples in Croatia.

II. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL SUPERMARKETS

Across Europe there are many different types of social supermarkets but their level of existence and development is very different from country to country. Level of existence and development of social supermarkets is influenced by the economic situation of the country and countries level of development. According to previously mentioned issues, there is no common definition of social supermarkets because it should be broad enough to integrate all the variations which are developed and existing on different markets. As a relatively new phenomenon, social supermarkets are not sufficiently analyzed in the literature, but still we can find a lot of different definitions and determinations of a term social supermarkets.

A social supermarket is defined [1] as “a small, non-profit oriented retailing operation offering a limited assortment of products at symbolic prices primary in self-service manner. Authorized for shopping are needy people only. The products are donated by food production and retail companies free of charge as they are edible but not marketable due to small blemishes. Achieved profit is reinvested into social projects”. Another definition [2] states that “social supermarkets are organizations, which provide

food that is no longer useful for the common trade cheaply to people who are in situations of poverty”.

According to [3], social supermarkets is a new retail format that fosters positive social change by fulfilling material needs of the socially disadvantaged groups and giving them an opportunity to preserve their dignity in an environment where they can choose various kinds of goods at extremely low prices.

All definitions of social supermarkets put the emphasis on selling or distributing goods to people in severe material deprivation. In addition, according to analyzed definitions, social supermarkets can be viewed as a new type of intermediaries within the food distribution chain because they have been developed in order to transfer surpluses of food or products to people in need.

When analyzing social supermarkets, some benefits should be pointed out [4] emphasize three types of benefits of social supermarkets: (1) social benefits such as: reduction of food insecurity and life quality improvement of socially endangered citizens, improvement of their social inclusion, growth of self-confidence in communication with others and fostering feeling of belonging to a certain community by treating their users as clients rather than charity users, what strengthens their sense of dignity, (2) environmental benefits which are related with food waste reduction throughout distribution of food surplus from companies and individuals to final users, and (3) economic benefits which are related with better reallocation of scarce budget because users can make by purchasing products at lower prices in social supermarkets and then to use those assets to acquire other necessities.

As initially is emphasized, there are different models of social supermarkets. Main distinctive characteristics are: (a) workforce organization because some social supermarkets have paid employees, while others function only through usage volunteers as a workforce. (b) type and layout of shops (c) assortment offered, (d) sourcing and fundraising activities, (f) availability and implementation of various technologies starting from distribution organization to communication with users.

Social supermarkets mostly rely on volunteers as the key part of the workforce of volunteers, but some of them have paid employees as well. Even though, social supermarkets are trying to develop stores to be as similar as possible to regular supermarkets, due to the lack of resources, some of them are very simple and unrepresentable in layout and interior design. Mostly their assortment contains food, as well as other basic products like hygiene products, cleaning detergents or clothes. But, it is necessary to point out that assortment in social supermarkets heavily depends on success of donations and fundraising activities. Mostly the products are donated, but in some cases surpluses are bought directly from producers at discount prices. Usually, they rely on public subsidies or support from other charities in their operations, but there are some examples of private initiatives in Switzerland and United Kingdom, which aim to develop total commercial sustainability (see [4]).

Some authors claim that role of social supermarkets can be beyond the redistribution because they can offer some

complementary activities to their users in order to improve public recognition and to foster involvement of end users in their everyday operation. For instance it is known that some social supermarket in France organize skills workshops for their users, while some social supermarkets in Austria provide lunch offer within the coffee area of their store.

However, Klindzic et al. [5] point to some characteristics which are specific for social supermarkets as an emerging retail format: (a) number of stock keeping units (SKUs) in their assortment depends on donations, while food accounts for approximately 90% of their assortment; (b) goods are usually distributed to the most vulnerable social groups for free; in some cases, if goods are not given for free, then every day low price policy (EDLP) is applied with prices lower by more than 30% compared to other stores; (c) service is provided by volunteers and/or previously unemployed persons, (d) opening hours are limited, (e) promotional activities are scarce and are done via welfare centers, citizen associations and religious organizations, (f) more intensive promotional activities are done for the benefit of donors through various activities of citizen associations, religious organizations and supporting media.

III. SOCIAL NETWORKS AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Business processes changed in the XXI century, and one of causes is the Internet, which has become a necessary business communication tool. Development of social networks goes in line with development of Information and Communication technologies (ICT) and Internet. Social networks extremely useful as consumers are deeply involved in creating information and using it in various situations, such as buying decisions making, leisure and entertainment, advertising, etc. [6]. Hubspot reports that 70% of business-to-consumer marketers have acquired customers through Facebook [7]. Research of social networks are focused and run in different areas such as B2C communication [8]–[12], B2B communication [13][14], role of social networks in e-marketing, e-commerce [7][15][16]. Cultural differences in social networking site use were presented in the study of Jackson and Wang [17], the peculiarities in China and the US were presented. The study of the impact of social media on consumers was presented by Hajli [18] where he examined the role of social media in the adoption of e-commerce and social commerce. AI sources confirms the importance of social networks, so nowadays attention to trends and market peculiarities should be emphasized.

Social networks could be classified according to the main purpose and target audience: personal (e.g. AsianAve, Badoo, Facebook, Google+, Hi5, Highlight, Instagram, Myspace, Odnoklassniki) and professional (e.g. Brainly, LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Sciencescape) [6].

It should be emphasized that specialized categories, such as vertical social networks and linked to portals networks were declined in this research, as all types of business organizations were decided to be included in the research, and such networks are more likely to be related to one or

other activity. The results of analysis and comparison of social networks are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social network	Users	Percentage of marketers that use the social network	Percentage of brands that have a presence in the social network	Top countries using the social network
Facebook	1.490 million	No Data	No Data	US (25 %), Other (75 %)
Google+	375 million	40 %	70 %	US (55 %), India (18 %)
Instagram	302 million	No Data	No Data	US (40 %/ 77.6M), Other (60 %)
LinkedIn	336 million	No Data	No Data	India (27M), Brazil (18M), US (16M), Canada (9M), France (8M), Italy (7M), Mexico (6M), Australia (6M), Spain (6M), China (5M), the Netherlands (5M)
MySpace	50 million	No Data	14.2 million artists	No Data
Pinterest	100 million	0.5 million; 67 % of content	No Data	US (47 %)
QZone	755 million	No Data	No Data	Mostly China
Sina Weibo	600 million	No Data	No Data	Mostly China
Snapchat	115 million	1 % of marketers	No Data	4 % of adult Internet users
Tumblr	425 million	No Data	No Data	No Data
Twitter	645 million	12 % of US businesses 85 % of B2B marketers	63 % have multiple accounts	US (53M)
Vkontakte	100 million	No Data	No Data	Russia and NVS countries
YouTube	1.300 million	9 % of US SMEs	No Data	US (20 %), Other (80 %)

Source [1]

The dominance of Facebook was observed all over the globe, and of course new social media sites were becoming popular and competing for consumers such as QZone, SnapChart, QQ, etc. [19]. Of course, Facebook should be treated as the leader since it is still the most powerful social media channel. More than 1.5 million local businesses have active pages on Facebook. An average user of Facebook spends there more than 55 minutes per day. 22% of teenagers

connect to Facebook at least 10 times per day; 48% of users in the age group of 18–34 years connect in the morning (just waked up), and 28% connect before going to sleep [20].

The point is that it is not enough to know the types and possibilities of various social networks, the understanding of peculiarities and consumer perception of each is necessary as well. This is a challenge because of dynamics of the sector, and organizations should still consider the field of activities, potential consumers' habits and follow novelties in social networks.

Therefore, in advance we will focus to application of social networks, especially Facebook, in operation of a specific type of organization, i.e., in social supermarkets.

IV. EXPERIENCE OF ACTIVE SOCIAL NETWORK USE IN SOCIAL SUPERMARKETS IN CROATIA

Upon conducted in-field research and deep interviews with social entrepreneurs in social supermarkets in Croatia, which were done from June 2017 till nowadays, there are more than 15 social supermarkets located in various cities dominantly they are run by non-profit organizations. In this paper, we will analyze case of social supermarkets in Rijeka, Osijek and Varaždin as examples of good practice for active and effective usage of social networks in communication with various types of users. Firstly, we will give a profile of each social supermarket. Profiles are done according to in-field visits and interviews with social entrepreneurs who are responsible for social supermarket's operation and upon information available in public sources where available. Secondly, we will analyze how they implement social networks as a mean of communication with their stakeholders.

A. The profile of the social supermarket in Rijeka

Social supermarket „Kruh sv. Elizabete“ (in English: St Elisabeth's bread) in Rijeka is the first social supermarket opened in Croatia. It was established in 2001. Even though it is conceived by the Franciscan Order and their volunteer, it is a separate non-profit organization which consists of three coordinated departments dealing with [21]: (1) end users and donors, (2) clothing/footwear and finance and (3) food, volunteers and media.

The Rijeka social supermarket has more than 50 regular volunteers and around 400 occasional volunteers who distribute approximately 800 packages each month to the 500 most socially endangered families in the local community, i.e., it has around 2000 users.

The most important donors are individual citizens and fundraising actions are organized at three levels [21]: (1) the annual “Young against hunger“ initiative (2) Saturday fundraisers at traditional retail chains stores, and (3) participation in local city events. “Young against hunger“ is the key fundraiser and it is organized in cooperation with regional elementary schools where children are asked to voluntarily give one product in order to learn how to practically show solidarity with citizens in need. In addition, “orange“ volunteers of the social supermarket Rijeka are present in one of the shopping malls each and every Saturday

during the whole day. Occasionally, the Futsal tournament is organized. It takes place in the Hall of youth on Trsat under the motto: "entertainment for us, rescue to others" because each registered futsal team, instead of paying the registration fee in cash, is "paying" in food donations to the social supermarket. Also, the anniversary celebration of Social Supermarket Rijeka is an important and open door event for all stakeholders in the local community. At the event a joint lunch is served bringing journalists and citizens together with volunteers and homeless people of Rijeka.

Due to numerous events and fundraising activities, the social supermarket Rijeka is very exposed to traditional and electronic media. For instance, newspaper Novi list, magazine JaTrgovac and numerous portals are covering their activities in positive manner on regular basis.. Therefore, this social supermarket is very well known both on local and on national level.

B. The profile of the social supermarket in Osijek

Social supermarket in Osijek is operated by Civil Association "River of Love" (in Croatian: Udruga Rijeka ljubavi). It has regular working hours during the week. Additionally, each month to each household a "package of life" containing 14 food products sufficient for 10 days is prepared and distributed to households in need [22]. Dependable on quantity of donation special distribution events are organized, for instance donations for kids during the Christmas or Easter period. The social supermarket serves to approximately 1000 households, i.e., around 4000 end users (persons). Approximately 15 volunteers are fully engaged in everyday activities.

Data on end users are kept in database and are updated regularly upon data on financial census collected from the City Government welfare office and local employment service. Operation space is donated by the Osijek City Government and there is an occasional cooperation with Croatian Army for hosting large donation events.

The donation structure includes: 80% of individual donations, 10% donations by local companies and 10% donations collected throughout cooperation with schools and universities. Social supermarket forces active interaction with local public, actively promotes its operation through national traditional and electronic media, but also intensively uses all sorts of digital communication including social networks.

C. The profile of the social supermarket in Varaždin

According to the interview done with the managerial team, social supermarket "Kruh Sv. Antuna" (in English: St Anthony's bread) in Varaždin is founded by Franciscan Order and their volunteers. It functions as a project within the Roman Catholic Church and it is not registered as a separate non-profit organization. It serves to approximately 1100 households, i.e., 3000 users. The social supermarket in Varaždin operates in space donated by the local government. Dominantly foodstuff and toiletries are distributed to households on a monthly basis and occasionally when some large donation of perishable goods is received (such as milk products or dairies). Users have to come to pick up goods

and no delivery is organized. Data on users are kept in database according to legal rules for non-profit organization in field of social services and each user has to renew the status each six months.

There is defined dynamics of donation collection that is organized each Saturday in local Churches. Operation is supported by local companies in donations and in discount rates or transport organization when foodstuff and toiletries are purchased from traditional supply chains (producers, wholesales companies and retailers).

However, individual donations are dominant (almost 80%). On monthly basis, around 50 volunteers are actively involved in social supermarket's operation. This social supermarket actively uses all means of public communication such as leaflets, traditional and electronic media reporting (newspapers, journals, TV, radio etc.), organization of events in local churches, schools and Universities. In addition, they organize open-door day in order to promote their activities within the local community.

D. Usage of Social Networks in Chosen Social Supermarkets

Social supermarkets in Rijeka, Osijek and Varaždin intensively use social networks, especially Facebook, as the vital communication channel in their everyday operation. Therefore, we analyzed their Facebook pages in order to explain the means of use of this social network and its suitability in operation of social supermarkets. Results of analysis are shown in Table 2.

All analyzed Facebook pages are in Croatian language only, but this is expected as social supermarkets, per se, are oriented towards narrow, local geographic area such as city or county. Social supermarket Osijek is the most active according to number of followers, number of published pictures and video materials, but also according to interactivity level with the community (because there are between 5 and 10 comments given by followers per one published status). Besides Facebook page, only Rijeka has active YouTube channel at which activities are promoted. However, video materials published directly at Facebook page are more frequently viewed in Osijek's case.

In social supermarkets, there are three groups which can be communicated via social networks, those are: (1) end users, (2) volunteers and donors, (3) general public. In Table 3, ways of communication with all groups is shown. Even though, end users are people in severe material deprivation, social supermarket Osijek uses Facebook to reach them and to share information on package distribution and distribution of unplanned large donations of perishable goods. Also, social network is used to communicate events being organized for end users as well. In addition, during the in-field interview we asked manager of social supermarket Osijek does it make sense to use social networks in communication with end users in case of social supermarkets and she responded: "If the end user does not possess a cell phone or a computer to see the announcement on his or her own, some of their neighbors will pass them information. After all, Osijek is, known for its solidarity and information

sharing culture. And this way of information sharing functions perfectly". Regarding communication with volunteers and donors the most active is social supermarket Rijeka, but this is due to their wide base of volunteers (50 regular and 400 occasional volunteers). However, Osijek is striving to give online individual appraisal for each donation and for each donation they publish the report and acknowledgement with the clear "thank you" notice for the donor. The reports are always illustrated by numerous photos.

TABLE 2. COMPARISON OF FACEBOOK PAGES OF SOCIAL SUPERMARKETS

Title (page name)	Socijalna Samoposluga "Kruh Elizabete" Rijeka	Rijeka Ljubavi	Socijalna samoposluga "Kruh Antuna" Varaždin
Location; Phone number; E-mail address, Messenger address	+	+	+
Web address	+	+	-
Working hours	-	-	+
Keywords	3 keywords (includes social supermarket and/or grocery retail)	2 keywords	2 keywords (includes grocery retail)
Description	+	Only goal	+
Story	+	-	+
Other	Rewards	-	-
Frequency of publishing	At least once a week; last status published this week	Almost on daily basis; last status published yesterday	2-3 status per month, last status one month ago
Followers	1662	4689	760
Page likes	1681	4744	778
Check in on physical location	112	156	44
Cover pictures	6	7	2
Profile pictures	4	5	2
Pictures in Gallery	More than 100	More than 3000	More than 100

Note: + available information, - unavailable information; presented data is the result own analysis of Facebook activities of selected social supermarkets in Croatia on 30th August 2017

Also, Facebook is recognized as a tool for communication with the general public. All analyzed social supermarkets publish announcements on events and/or reports on organized events. But, usually, events notifications are done via Facebook status publication and, therefore, the functionality is not at the same level as it would be if the event is announced by entering Facebook event. If the event information is published as a status, followers cannot easily invite participants, nor export event to their personal calendars. Therefore, there is a place to improve this segment in the future. Regarding information sharing, we found that links to other Facebook pages are shared only in case of Rijeka social supermarkets, links to other portals (such as newspapers and magazines) are done at all social

supermarkets, especially to articles regarding operation of the certain social supermarket.

TABLE 3. FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION WITH RELEVANT GROUPS

Information	Rijeka	Osijek	Varaždin
Announcements on package distribution to end user	-	Frequently	-
Announcements on the urgent distribution of unplanned / large donations	-	Frequently	-
Announces future events organized for end users	+	Frequently	-
Call for volunteers	Frequently	-	Rarely
Requests for donations	Frequently	-	Rarely
"Thank you" notices for donors	Periodically but not individualized	Frequent per individual donor	Occasionally, Individual and general
Announcement of events	Periodically, on the FB wall, only a few created events	Very intense, on the FB wall, not as FB events	Occasionally, as a status not created event
Events Reports	Occasionally	Very intense, photos always included	-
Own video	More than 30 shots, some are also available on your own YouTube channel	More than 50, highly visited, an average of over 10000 views per video	-
Links to other Facebook pages	+	-	-
Links to other portals (such as newspapers and magazines)	Rarely, only publications regarding this social supermarket	Approximately one per month, only publications regarding this social supermarket	Rarely, publications regarding this social supermarket and publications on poverty and sharing
Links to video produced by others	Approximately one per month	Approximately one per month	Rarely
Specifics	Own Youtube channel „Socka na YouTube-u“	Intensive comments of followers; 5-10 comments per status; on home page FB messenger chat	Motivational pictures and quotations on giving, poverty, nobility and sharing

Note: + available information, - unavailable information; presented data is the result own analysis of Facebook activities of selected social supermarkets in Croatia on 30th August 2017

In case of Rijeka and Osijek video materials produced by others is shared regularly if it is concerned with the operation of given social supermarket.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Social supermarkets as new intermediators emerged due to the economic crisis in Europe. Their main function is to

efficiently distribute surpluses of products from traditional supply chains to people in severe material deprivation. As good examples, we analyzed the usage of social networks in three social supermarkets in Croatia, particularly Rijeka, Osijek and Varaždin. All three analyzed social supermarkets use Facebook as the social network suitable for public relations. Upon given examples we isolated 3 groups of social supermarkets' stakeholders addressed through social networks, those are: (1) end users, who search information on time, place and means of distribution of necessary goods within the supermarket (2) volunteers and donors to whom we can place various calls and requests, but also to whom we can make public appraisal via social networks, and (3) general public to whom we can share information on events, fundraising activities, give report on previously organized events, share links to other media and other social networks etc. All social supermarkets analyzed in the case foster active communication and share multimedia via social networks. They promote their activities and events on regularly basis, but relation to donors, volunteers and end users could be more improved in a near future. However, in order to explain the real efficiency of social network in everyday operation further research have to be done, this research could consist of survey within social network users population and further interviews with social supermarkets' managers. In addition, there are some raising questions to be addressed in the future papers and discussed both on national and international level. One of them is protection of privacy of individuals, especially end users, who, as socially endangered group of people, attend donation events and without their expressed will their pictures appears at social network pages of the social supermarket. The question of privacy protection is even more problematic if we know that some events are organized for children. Therefore, in the near future, in-field interviews and focus group research could be applied to address those questions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work has been supported by Croatian Science Foundation under the project UIP-2014-09-4057 "Potentials and obstacles of Social Supermarkets Development in Central and Eastern Europe

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