



## A SOCIAL WAY TO EXPERIENCE EVENTS – THE USE OF FACEBOOK AT THE CELEBRATION OF THE 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL SPORTS ACADEMY “VASSIL LEVSKI” – SOFIA

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### ABSTRACT

The widespread use of Internet technologies has been fundamental in changing how people communicate daily and professionally. The social media revolution has completely changed internet user behavior. One of the social networks that is widely used is Facebook, which currently has more than 2 billion active users. The events with which the NSA "Vassil Levski" celebrated its 80th anniversary include the 3rd International Scientific Congress "Applied Sports Sciences", Round Table with the participation of Maria Gabriel, the gala-performance "Flight to the Stars" and more. The research aims to analyze the use of Facebook before and during these events.

All Facebook posts from the NSA "Vassil Levski" were analyzed in the study in the period 29.08.2022 - 20.12.2023. Based on the content analysis, data was extracted, and it was concluded that the institution's Facebook page highlights its significant role in both digital positioning and its place in building brand communication strategies.

**Key words:** digital marketing, social networks, events.

### INTRODUCTION

Many people, including millions of sports fans and consumers, have turned from traditional mass media to the more interactive communication and commercial interfaces provided by the Internet.

Over the last few years, we have seen increasing interactions between organizations and their consumers through the use of social media. On the one hand, organizations, including those in the fields of education and sports, are taking advantage of social media platforms to extend the geographical reach of services (2) to create closer connections and relationships with their users (8). On the other hand, people are

increasingly empowered by social media through the ability to actively participate in the communication process, taking control of content creation, community interaction, and opinion expression through comments and reactions (3)

The social media revolution has completely changed internet user behavior. Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and WeChat have played a key role in the change that has abolished the need for users (fans) of sports products and services to visit the events live or watch them on TV to experience the emotion. They all offer various attractive, innovative web-based services (1, 10).

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Social networking can be defined as a web-based communication platform that aims to connect people and develop social relationships (11). It has become a widespread mechanism for interaction and the most popular online activity

in recent years, especially for people of age (18-32, 4).

In a marketing context, social media are platforms where people network and share information and moods (5).

More and more attention is being paid to using social media as a significant component in the online marketing strategy of corporate and sports organizations (7). The digital marketing business model has now changed the marketing concept used to use the direct model.

## METHODS

### AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The study aims to analyze the use of the social network "Facebook" during the organization and conduct of key events related to celebrating the 80th anniversary of the NSA "Vassil Levski".

The research objectives related to the goal are:

1. Study of literature and documental sources on the research problem - the use of social networks as a tool in online marketing strategies.
2. Analysis of quantitative indicators related to Facebook posts before, during, and after the International Scientific Congress "Applied Sports Sciences".

### APPLIED METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

In order to implement the overall study, a scientific research methods was used:

#### 1. Content analysis - research and theoretical analysis of specialized literature sources, including:

- - Scientific literature related to online marketing tools (specificity, diversity, applicability).
- Online resources related to Facebook use before, during, and after the Congress. The study analyzed all posts on the social network between August 29, 2022, and December 20, 2023. Based on the digital content analysis, data related to post topic, date, number of shares of posts, number of likes, number of mentions, and presence of comments were extracted.

2. Case study – used to describe a specific management situation related to the study of forms of communication and user activity during the organization and conduct of events.

3. Digital content analysis - the method was applied in order to extract and analyze Facebook page content.

## RESULTS

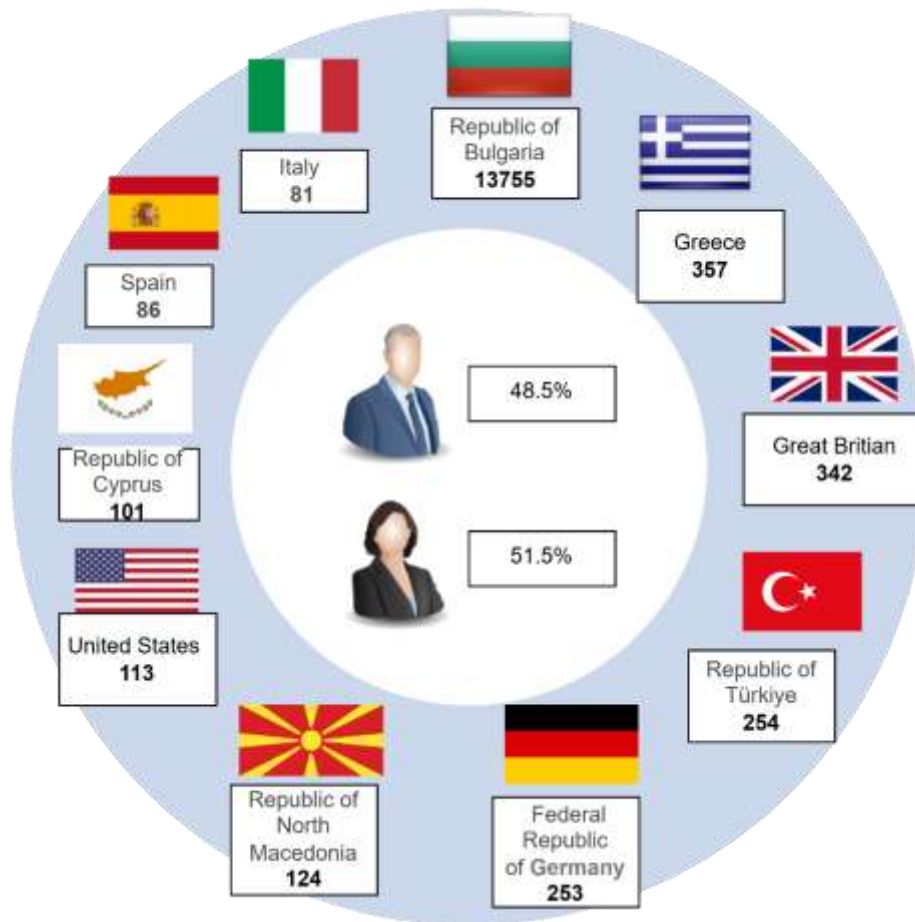
Facebook, which was initially designed as a social networking site for students, can now be mapped to the key tools of digital marketing strategy. Content analysis of specialized sources allowed us to extract some of its characteristics:

- Build awareness by engaging the consumer audience: Facebook serves as an excellent platform to generate brand awareness for business and sports organizations;
- Ability to target advertising messages, social causes, etc., to the right people, which allows sports and business entities to reach the right audiences according to demographics, behaviors, interests, etc;
- Digital marketplace - interaction between producers and multi-million audience. Opportunities to generate leads, increase sales, and more;
- A tool to promote products, services, and ideas.

Along with Facebook's undeniable business advantages, it is also widely used in education, healthcare, culture, and sports.

In the current dynamic and digital environment, the commitment of different user groups to an institution is becoming increasingly crucial. The methodology applied enabled us to report on online user activity concerning the Academy's 80th-anniversary celebrations. The use of special events can be a crucial tool for implementing communication strategies by the National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski" in the future.

During the study, a socio-demographic profile of the active online users of the NSA Vassil Levski Facebook page was made (Figure 1). The age characteristics of the surveyed persons show a predominant presence of people between 25-34 and 35-44 years of age. In terms of gender, we register a slightly higher percentage of active females compared to males. Defining the audience is essential in establishing follow-up tools to increase the engagement of direct and indirect users.



**Figure 1.** Distribution of users by gender and location

**RESULTS ANALYSIS**

The total number of publications on the topic of celebratory events that were analyzed is 15, and they are detailed in **Table 1**. The type of materials are both directly published on the Facebook page of the NSA Vassil Levski and shared publications from sources external to the NSA. For a more meaningful analysis of the results, an analysis of the top 5 posts with the highest number of engaged readers reached, and the 5 posts with the highest number of reactions to the posts was made.

The digital content analysis shows that the posts on the Facebook page were most interested in the feedback from the Academy's 80th-anniversary gala performance (the post reached 76416 people). In second place is the Congress opening by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Rumen Radev, with 23120 readers reached, and in third place is the announcement of the Congress during the opening of the school year at the NSA Vassil Levski, with 13541 readers. The fourth and fifth

places are oriented to the volunteer activity on the part of NSA students and faculty, namely, the presentation of certificates to the volunteers who participated in the celebratory events around the anniversary (9558 readers) and the thanks of the Academic Leadership to the volunteers in the celebrations (9144 readers), respectively.

These results are rather logical, as the people who were interested in the performance, organized by the NSA lecturers and students, actually had the opportunity to experience it, both by attending the event itself and through the direct broadcast of the performance on the Bulgarian National Television. This is also tied to the third position in which many students and their relatives are interested. Logically, the second position will be for the opening of the Congress, which President Rumen Radev also attended. Since he is a highly popular personality, the readers have taken the time to read the article about the event he attended, which he honored with his presence.

**Table 1.** Description of the posts made on the NSA Vassil Levski Facebook page in connection with the celebrations

| Type of publication and date of publication  | Number of users to whom the post appeared on the screen | Number of users actually reached by the publication | Number of users staying engaged with the content | Number of reactions (likes, expressions of love, laughter, sadness, anger, surprise) | Number of comments | Number of shares | Number of visits per link |
|--|---|---|--|--|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| 22.10.2022 - Interview by prof. Tatiana Iancheva presenting the Congress for DSport  | 6063  | 5919  | 702  | Total number of reactions- 118   | 5                  | 8                | 298                       |
|  |   |   |  | Likes - 114  |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Love - 1   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Laughter - 1   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Surprise - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Sadness- 2   |                    |                  |                           |
| Anger- 0   |   |   |  |  |                    |                  |                           |
| 29.08.2022 - Opening of the academic year at the NSA and announcing the Congress on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the NSA. | 16498   | 13541   | 1730   | Total number of reactions- 398   | 7                  | 19               | 103                       |
|  |   |   |  | Likes - 391  |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Love - 7   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Laughter - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Surprise - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Sadness- 0   |                    |                  |                           |
| Anger- 0   |   |   |  |  |                    |                  |                           |
| 29.09.2022 - Congress information and volunteer recruitment announcement   | 4401  | 3880  | 131  | Total number of reactions- 54  | 0                  | 9                | 21                        |
|  |   |   |  | Likes - 53   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Love - 1   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Laughter - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Surprise - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Sadness- 0   |                    |                  |                           |
| Anger- 0   |   |   |  |  |                    |                  |                           |
| 28.11.2022 - Share the Event Page  | 2574  | 2376  | 142  | Total number of reactions- 35  | 0                  | 0                | 51                        |
|  |   |   |  | Likes - 35   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Love - 0   |                    |                  |                           |
|  |   |   |  | Sadness- 0   |                    |                  |                           |

|  |       |       |      |   |    |    |     |
|--|-------|-------|------|---|----|----|-----|
| <p>29.11.2022 -<br/>News about the<br/>upcoming gala<br/>performance in<br/>Hall 1 of the<br/>National Palace<br/>of Culture</p> | 5021  | 4816  | 1110 | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>596</p> <p>Likes - 538</p> <p>Love - 51</p> <p>Sadness- 0</p> <p>Laughter - 0</p> <p>Surprise - 8</p> <p>Anger- 0</p>   | 21 | 52 | 368 |
| <p>29.11.2022 -<br/>News in the<br/>newspaper "Trud<br/>"on the occasion<br/>of the NSA<br/>celebrations</p>                     | 3393  | 3154  | 489  | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>165</p> <p>Likes - 161</p> <p>Love - 4</p> <p>Sadness- 0</p> <p>Laughter - 0</p> <p>Surprise - 0</p> <p>Anger- 0</p>    | 5  | 16 | 195 |
| <p>02.12.2022 -<br/>Interview of prof.<br/>T. Iancheva for<br/>the Bulgarian<br/>National Radio</p>                              | 3366  | 3255  | 228  | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>120</p> <p>Likes - 118</p> <p>Love - 1</p> <p>Sadness- 0</p> <p>Laughter - 1</p> <p>Surprise - 0</p> <p>Anger- 0</p>    | 0  | 8  | 77  |
| <p>02.12.2022 -<br/>Attendance of<br/>President Rumen<br/>Radev at the<br/>opening of the<br/>Congress</p>                       | 28503 | 23120 | 4752 | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>1218</p> <p>Likes - 1189</p> <p>Love - 26</p> <p>Sadness- 0</p> <p>Laughter - 0</p> <p>Surprise - 3</p> <p>Anger- 0</p> | 48 | 79 | 41  |

|  |              |              |              |   |            |            |            |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|---|------------|------------|------------|
| <p>03.12.2022 -<br/>News about the<br/>NSA gala-<br/>performance at<br/>Bgs swim.com</p>   | <p>5163</p>  | <p>4694</p>  | <p>1342</p>  | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>635<br/>Likes – 592<br/>Love - 26<br/>Sadness- 0<br/>Laughter - 1<br/>Surprise - 3<br/>Anger- 0</p>         | <p>34</p>  | <p>40</p>  | <p>306</p> |
| <p>04.12.2022 -<br/>Information on<br/>the second day of<br/>the Congress<br/>(round table with<br/>Commissioner<br/>Gabriel and<br/>poster session)</p>   | <p>9353</p>  | <p>6991</p>  | <p>1193</p>  | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>320<br/>Likes – 314<br/>Love - 5<br/>Sadness- 0<br/>Laughter - 1<br/>Surprise - 0<br/>Anger- 0</p>          | <p>3</p>   | <p>8</p>   | <p>23</p>  |
| <p>04.12.2022 -<br/>Feedback from<br/>the NSA Gala-<br/>performance<br/>with more than<br/>50 photos</p>   | <p>93961</p> | <p>76416</p> | <p>14879</p> | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>4714<br/>Likes – 4211<br/>Love - 485<br/>Sadness- 1<br/>Laughter - 2<br/>Surprise -<br/>15<br/>Anger- 0</p> | <p>157</p> | <p>266</p> | <p>168</p> |
| <p>06.12.2022 -<br/>Interview by<br/>prof. Krasimir<br/>Petkov for<br/>Eurocom TV on<br/>the occasion of<br/>the 80th<br/>anniversary<br/>celebrations</p> | <p>4977</p>  | <p>4505</p>  | <p>424</p>   | <p>Total<br/>number of<br/>reactions-<br/>206<br/>Likes – 201<br/>Love - 5<br/>Sadness- 0<br/>Laughter - 0<br/>Surprise - 0<br/>Anger- 0</p>          | <p>1</p>   | <p>8</p>   | <p>68</p>  |



|  |       |      |      |   |   |    |     |
|--|-------|------|------|---|---|----|-----|
| <p>07.12.2022 -<br/>Appreciation<br/>from the NSA<br/>academic<br/>authorities to the<br/>volunteers in the<br/>celebrations</p>                       | 10226 | 9144 | 1506 | Total<br>number of<br>reactions-<br>491 | 9 | 16 | 435 |
|  |       |      |      | Likes – 403                             |   |    |     |
|  |       |      |      | Love - 63                               |   |    |     |
|  |       |      |      | Sadness- 0                              |   |    |     |
|  |       |      |      | Laughter - 0                            |   |    |     |
|  |       |      |      | Surprise - 0                            |   |    |     |
| Anger- 0   |       |      |      |   |   |    |     |
| <p>20.12.2022 -<br/>Congratulations<br/>from the<br/>Leadership and<br/>awarding of<br/>certificates to the<br/>volunteers in the<br/>celebrations</p> | 12461 | 9558 | 2214 | Total<br>number of<br>reactions-<br>322 | 5 | 7  | 52  |

In terms of readers' expressions of their reactions, there are slight differences and shifts of positions. The total number of reactions to the publication is 4714. The highest number of likes and expressions of affection is again found in the publication concerning the reviews of the NSA "Vassil Levski" gala performance, respectively 4211 people liked the publication, and 485 put "heart" as reactions. In this post, there is also a great variety of reactions - sadness (1), laughter (2), and astonishment (15). This is also the post that people have expressed an opinion on by posting comments - 157 comments. As discussed above, this post has impressed people the most, and has responded positively to it, which is tied to their engagement with the event. Such a type of performance involving students and faculty from the institution is an excellent example of side celebratory events that leave lasting memories and positive emotions in people. This conclusion can be drawn as the post is from the day after the celebrations ended, 04.12.2022 and does not invite people to participate but aims to reflect what happened.

The second publication, with many reactions from readers, remains about the opening of the Congress by President Rumen Radev. In this case, the total number of reactions is 1218, including 1189 likes, 26 expressions of love, and 3 expressions of surprise. The comments on this post were significantly less, with 48

comments. This result is again entirely logical, as significantly fewer people are engaged and relevant to a scientific congress. The President's personality is more prevalent in the comments, which is entirely logical.

Thirdly, a brand new publication, not among those previously listed, appears in terms of readers reached. This news item is again about the show but is published on the day of the show. It has a total of 635 reactions, including 592 likes, 26 expressions of affection, 1 laugh, and 34 comments. This post was covered by the online magazine BGSwim.com and shared on the NSA Vassil Levski website. In fourth place with a large number of reactions is again a post related to the show, which is a few days before the event - 29.11.2022. It was posted on the NSA website, and the total number of reactions was 596, including 538 likes, 51 expressions of affection, 8 expressions of astonishment, and 21 comments.

The fifth position remains unchanged, namely the expression of gratitude by the academic authorities to the volunteers involved in the celebrations. As of this posting, there are 491 responses in total. Of them, 403 likes, 63 expressions of affection, and 9 comments. The inclusion in the top 5 posts on this topic could be explained by the fact that both the NSA expressed gratitude and the students themselves expressed gratitude and satisfaction for taking

part in this significant moment for the Academy.

An interesting fact is that publications on celebrations and dissemination of information about upcoming events published in the newspaper "Trud" and interviews in the Bulgarian National Radio and TV Eurocom remain with a smaller number of readers reached than those concerning publications directly on the Facebook page of the NSA, on the spectacle and congress events. This reaffirms that people's direct or indirect engagement with the events and their Alma Mater is of great importance for the successful celebration.

## DISCUSSION

Digital communication tools have become global and popular marketing channels through which companies can communicate with their target audience directly, quickly, and continuously (9).

The advantages of Facebook Market Place as a digital communication tool for building an online marketing strategy are indisputable (7). One of the critical aspects of marketing communication is creating brand recognition. As a business-oriented tool, the characteristics of Facebook help achieve this process successfully. The authors emphasize the advantages of the social network: 1) Facebook is an affordable marketing strategy, 2) The social network is among the leaders in terms of users, 3) The use of information indicators (consumer location and preferences) as tools in market segmentation, 4) Easy access in the presence of the Internet, 5) Easy communication without restrictions in communication between companies and consumers, 6) The availability of feedback on products offered online by giving suggestions and criticism from consumers.

The use of the Facebook page of the NSA "Vassil Levski" as a digital communication tool has the following purposes: 1) increasing the awareness of the active online users, 2) opportunities for real-time feedback, 3) attracting the attention of potential groups of users in the educational qualification levels of Bachelor and Master. 4) creating a positive image, 5) increasing the brand recognition of the educational institution. It is important to emphasize that for quite a few entities (educational, sports, business-oriented), the more significant challenge is not initiating

social media campaigns but combining their advantages with their marketing strategy to engage consumers and build valuable and long-term relationships with them.

In the context of marketing communications, it should be emphasized that consumer awareness is among the leading functions pursued by several entities. To this, Kotler & Keller (2016) add persuasion and remind consumers about the products and services that are offered directly or indirectly (6). Through the lens of this study, we should share that educational institutions developing in a competitive environment can also be defined as business-oriented organizations aiming at attracting real consumers for their educational services.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it should be highlighted that the emergence of new tools (reviews, ratings, discussions, blogs, apps, videos, etc.) that social media provides opens up entirely new ways for users to interact, be present, and communicate in the community. The unique thing about social media is that users are the ones who control the flow of information and have the power to direct marketing messages. Such a flipped approach to communication appeals to people because they have the ability to generate, share, and ignore content across all digital platforms. This allows many organizations to monitor their attitude and mindset towards their brand.

The results of the study showed that the NSA Vassil Levski's Facebook page highlighted its significant role in both the digital positioning of the institution and its place in the development of brand communication strategies. Using events of different natures and scopes allows any organization to develop and improve relationships with its audiences - employees, direct and indirect users, and partners. An essential condition for the success of such initiatives is the prior knowledge of the interests and needs of the different parties interacting in the standard process of strategic digital positioning. Direct and indirect engagement with the organization also positively impacts the marketing strategy.

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