

# MEANS OF INFORMATION IN THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT

Tasente, Tănase<sup>1</sup>, Nicoleta, Ciacu<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** *The research aims to approach the issues related to the use of the new technologies of Web 2.0 in informing the academia. We aim to identify students' opinions about the means of information used by universities, the frequency of accessing the official websites and the Facebook page of universities. Another objective of the study is to investigate the interaction of the students on the university's official Facebook page. The research method used is an online survey on a sample of 100 students of the major fields of study: Journalism, Communication and Public Relations from "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University of Pitești (University Center of Brăila) and "Andrei Șaguna" University of Constanța. The relevant result of the research is given by the fact that, despite the frequent accessing of their university's Facebook page, the feedback given by the students is modest, only 35% have used a simplistic form of feedback, the "like" button. Information is an important link in the process of creating and maintaining the organizational image, therefore, the investigation of the means of information used by universities in the context of the new technologies becomes part of the university management strategy.*

**Keywords:** *university, students, internet, website, facebook*

**Classification JEL:** Z

## 1. Research context

Using the Internet and the new information and communication technologies has become extremely important in the communication and promoting strategy of any university. Communication in the University represents one of the basic elements for building the relationships between student, professor and university. The motivation of the communication approach in the academic environment assumes that most often students' performance in learning and integration in the academic space is determined by the way in which information is performed by the universities.

From a theoretical perspective, we place the communication performed between a university and its students in The Bilateral Symmetrical Communication Model (Two-Way Symmetric Model). The model proposed by James Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984 is based on "creating mutual understanding between the management of an organization and the publics that affect the organization" (Pricopie R., 2011). This feedback is used not only as a tool for achieving organizational goals and to identify the needs of the public, but also the ways to satisfy them. The public interest counts equally for the organization as well as to its own interest. Thus, it comes to the possibility of establishing a long-term partnership between the organization and the public in which each one takes on the specific responsibilities. Communication can be initiated by the organization or public and we cannot any longer talk about a strict control of one party, which justifies the bi-directionality and the symmetry of the model.

The organization, in this case the university, is no longer seen as a source of communication and the public, namely the students as recipients, but as two entities involved in a transaction. Grunig and Hunt estimated that about 15% of organizations, especially those that are aware of the social function they have to perform, practise this type of public relations. Most often, however, the model is applied by organizations seeking confidence that communities benefit from their services.

The Internet has had a significant impact on the traditional way of communication between university, professors and students. Thus, many universities have invested in

---

<sup>1</sup> Tănase Tasente, Doctoral student, Professor's teaching assistant, "Andrei Șaguna" University of Constanța, Faculty of Communication Sciences and Political Sciences, nicoleta\_ciacu@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> Nicoleta Ciacu, Doctoral student, Professor's teaching assistant, "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University of Pitești, Faculty of Administrative and Communication Sciences of Brăila, nicoleta\_ciacu@yahoo.com

online communication facilities to maintain a level of social interaction in the online environment so often used by young people. Websites and profiles on social media sites are a way in which the modern world communicates, evaluates the information and forms an image about an organization or another.

In one of the articles dedicated to the adaptation methods of the university education to the crisis conditions, the authors mention information and communication technology as one of the major vectors in changing contemporary higher education (Dugan, Gănescu, Pepenel, 2010).

Nowadays students use multiple methods of communication seamlessly transitioning from “face to face” communication to the online one. A few years ago, parents and teachers were concerned about the hours spent by young people in front of the computers. Nowadays, because of the technological developments, the internet can be accessed on portable devices, smartphones, tablets, electronic notebooks, and so many young people are constantly “online”. Therefore, the possibility of online information about their respective activities as students is more than appreciated by them.

The basis of the current research has been made with the achievement of a research in 2010, which aimed at the “Implications of Internet use in curricular and extracurricular activities of students” published in *Managerial Strategies*, no. 4 (10) / 2010. One of that research findings aimed at the number of hours spent by students on Internet. Thus, most students said that they spent between 1 and 3 hours on the Internet, arguing that they used the Internet usually for information (49%). In the same context, 72% of the surveyed students said that when they drafted a project for school, they searched first of all on the Internet the information necessary to achieve it (Ciacu, Taseu, 2010).

Based on this information, the current study aims to approach the “morphology” of the communication made between the university and the students in a comparative perspective. The two universities that were the basis of our research sample are: “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University of Pitesti and “Andrei Şaguna” University of Constanţa.

The communication tools used by the two universities are helping them to build and crystallize their image, but also to strengthen a sustainable organizational culture. Also, we want to find out students’ opinions on the effectiveness of the communication tools used by universities and highlight the preferred mode of interaction with the university in order to obtain relevant information for the university’s communication strategy.

## **2. Research objectives**

1. Identifying student opinions about the means of information used by universities.
2. Determine the frequency of accessing the websites of universities and official Facebook page.
3. Identifying information that students frequently seek on university website.
4. Investigating the interaction of students with the university’s Facebook page.

## **3. Hypotheses**

1. It is assumed that the university’s website is an important tool in the academic information.
2. It is assumed that the social network Facebook is an effective means of information about the activities of the university.

## **4. Research methodology**

The research was based solely on quantitative methods of investigation. To attain the objectives set, we designed a questionnaire that was applied online. The questionnaire was available at [www.tashy.ro/students](http://www.tashy.ro/students) and was promoted both by teachers as well as online. The

study was conducted during November-December 2012. The sample was relatively spontaneously formed because out of the total number of students only those who were ready to respond answered the questionnaire.

The sample was made up of 100 students from two Romanian universities, “Andrei Șaguna” University of Constanta (ASU) and “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University of Pitesti (CBU). The students are aged between 18 and 57 (the average being 23 years old). Of the total sample 77% of respondents are female and 23% are men.

The sampling was undetermined, the only criterion for selection of students being the quality of student at the specialization of Journalism, Social Communication and Public Relations at the two universities. Out of the 100 respondents, 50% came from the Journalism specializations at “Andrei Șaguna” University of Constanta and 50% from the specializations of Journalism, Social Communication and Public Relations from “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University, University Center of Braila.

The questionnaire included a number of eight questions corresponding to the four objectives listed. In constructing the questionnaire we used a variety of questions. Therefore, out of the eight questions, only one is a closed question where students are asked to answer “yes” or “no” on the usefulness of social network Facebook in the transmission of information about the activities of the university. The remaining questions were multiple response options that allow respondents to choose one answer from several options possible (between 5 and 9 answers).

The questionnaire was structured according to three dimensions:

-using traditional media in the academic environment: 1. Which are the tools you use most often in order to get information about university activities? 2. To what extent does the university inform you about its activities?

- The use of Web 2.0 technologies by universities: 3. When did you last access your university website? 4. What information are you looking for most commonly on the site of your university?

- The use of social networking (Web 3.0) in the university environment 5. Do you think that the social network Facebook is an effective means of information about the activities of the university? 6. When did you last access the official Facebook page of your university? 7. Have you ever commented or distributed any information posted on the university’s Facebook page? 8. What information do you appreciate on the university’s Facebook page?

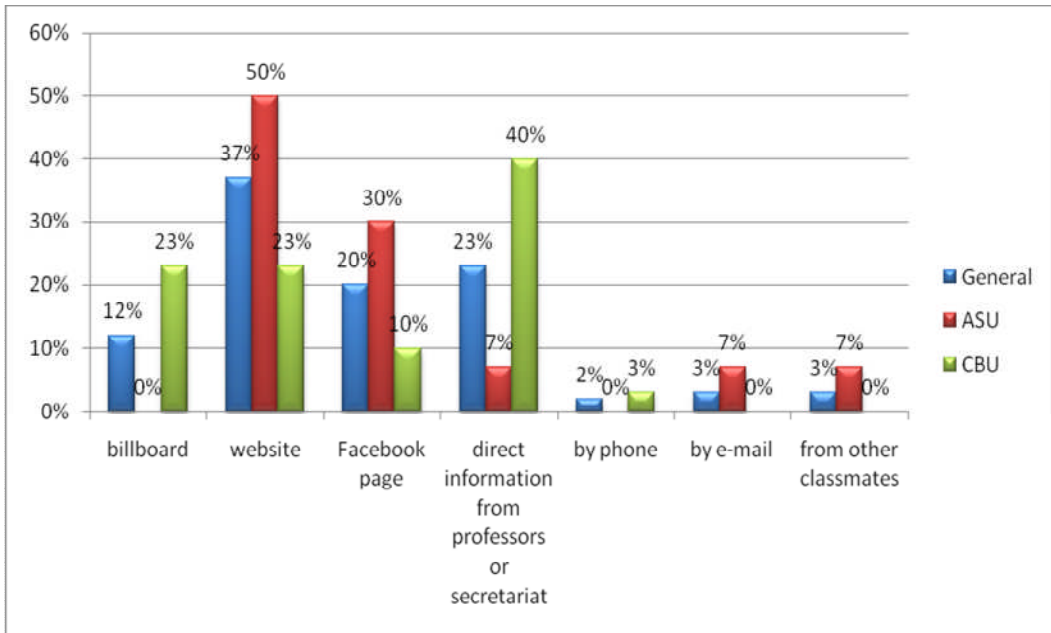
## **5. The research results**

According to the 100 students surveyed from the two universities, the most frequently used channel to inform about the university activities is the official website of the institution (37%), followed by direct information from the professor or secretarial office (23%), the institution’s Facebook page (20%) and the notice board (12%). Information means, such as e-mail, phone or group colleagues are used in very low extent (2-3%).

Relating separately to the responses of the students from the two universities, we find large discrepancies. Thus, we find that online means of information such as websites or Facebook pages are used by 80% of the students from “Andrei Șaguna” University (ASU) compared to the 33% of the students from “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University (CBU), that are using the same means.

On the other hand, the direct information from the professor or secretary is the option for 40% of the students from CBU, as compared to the 7% of the students from ASU. Traditional means of information, such as notice board, are popular among the students

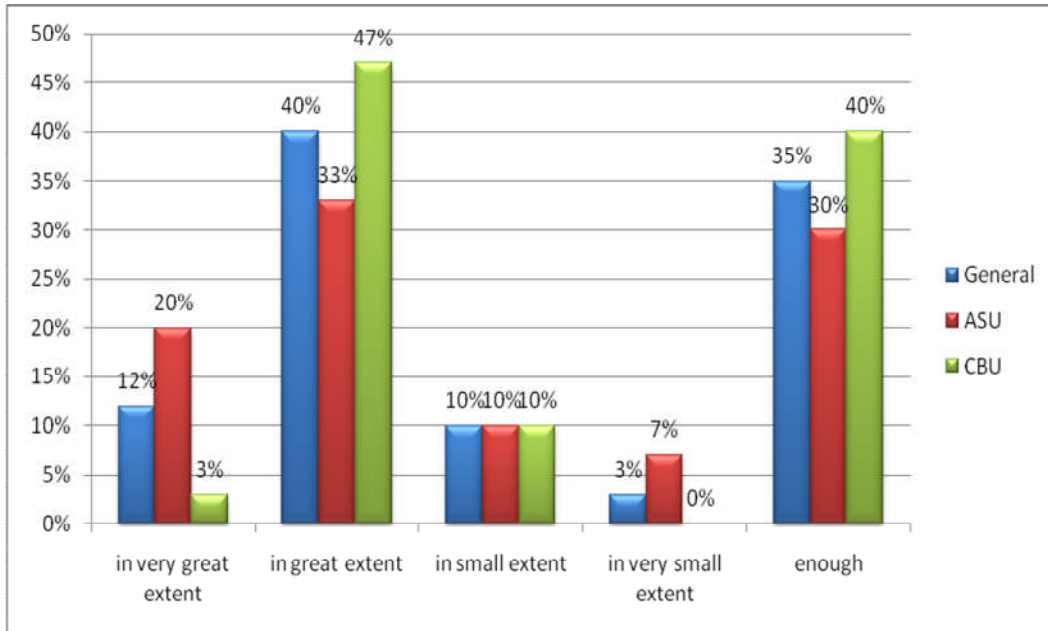
from CBU (23%), while the students from ASU choose to get informed from their colleagues (7%) or by e-mail (7%). (Figure 1)



**Figure 1 - ITEM 1. What are the tools you use most often in order to get informed about the university activities?**

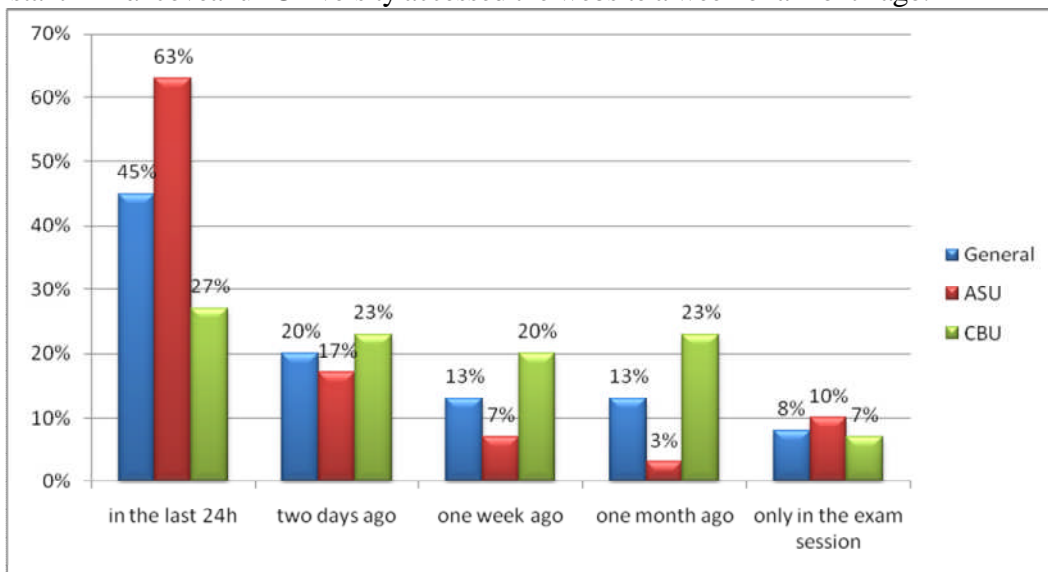
More than a half (52%) of the students surveyed said that the university informs them in a large and very large extent, while 35% of them said that they are sufficiently informed. Only 13% of students believe that the university informed them about its activities in a small and very small extent. The percentage is explained in the context of the existing market competition and competitiveness of private universities in Romania, so that universities often ensure good communication with students.

Relating separately to the two universities, we find that 53% of the students at “Andrei Şaguna” University are informed well and very well, as compared to 50% of the students at “Constantin Brâncoveanu”. In contrast, no student from “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University is totally dissatisfied with the information provided by the university, compared to 7% of students at “Andrei Şaguna” who said this.



**Figure 2 - ITEM 2. To what extent does the university inform you about its activities?**

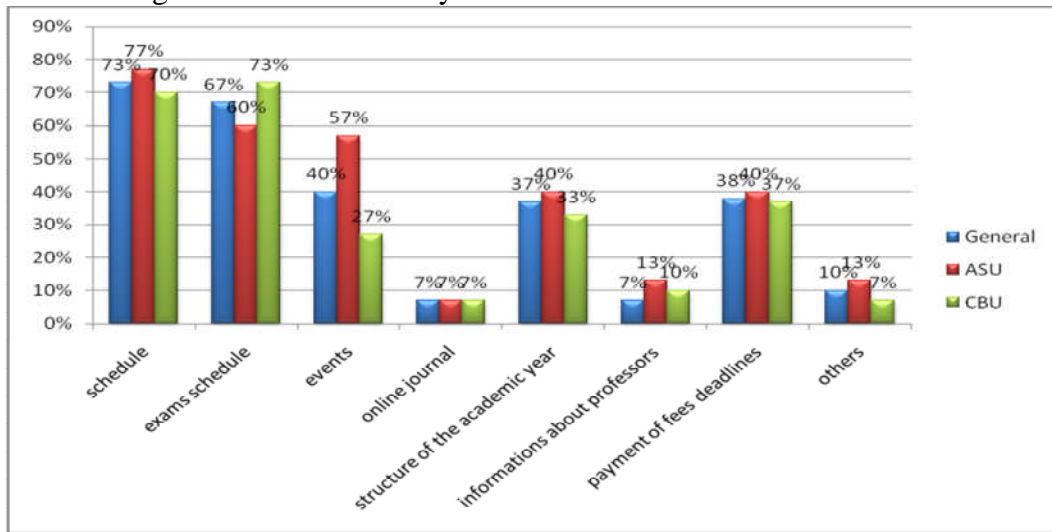
University websites are accessed frequently by students, 45% of them saying they last accessed it in the last 24 hours, and 20% two days ago. Only 8% of students were accessing the university website during the examination session. Analyzing separately, on universities, 63% of the students at “Andrei Şaguna” University accessed the website in the last 24 hours vs. the 27% students from “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University. We also found that 43% of the students from “Constantin Brâncoveanu” University accessed the website a week or a month ago.



**Figure 3 - ITEM 3. When did you last access your university website?**

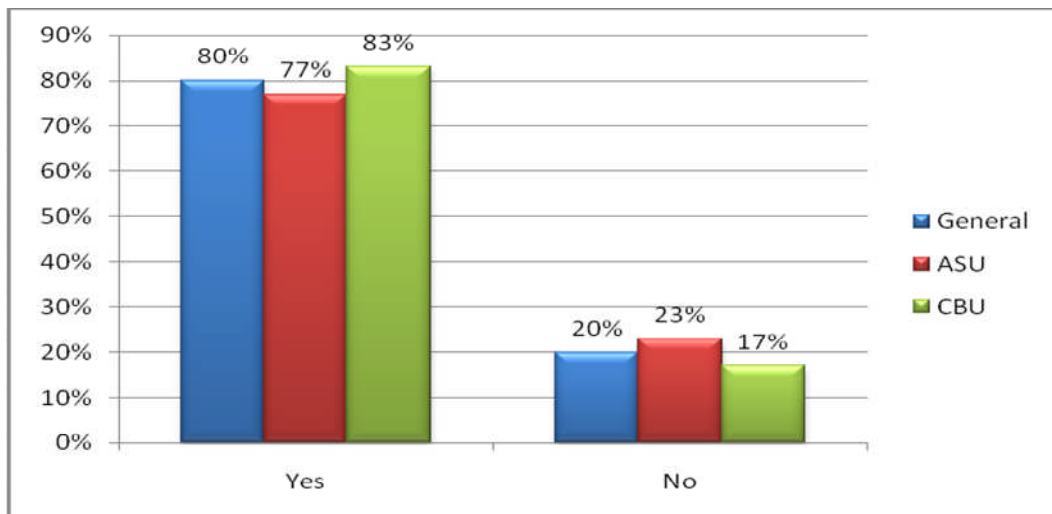
The most sought information on the website of the university is that regarding the schedule (73%), scheduling exams (67%) and university events (40%). Approximately 38% of students believe that the important information for them is that about the structure and of the academic year and the terms on tuition fees. Analyzing comparatively, students at ASU are more interested in the schedule and less in the scheduling of examinations as compared to the students at UCB who consider scheduling for examinations from sessions a priority of online information. Information about events organized by the university is of interest to 57% of students at ASU, compared to only 27% of students at CBU. Other pieces of information reported by the students as being important to them are those

regarding the students' practice, the exam results displayed on UMS platform, scholarships and downloading courses electronically.



**Figure 4 - ITEM 4. What information are you looking for the most commonly on the site of your university?**

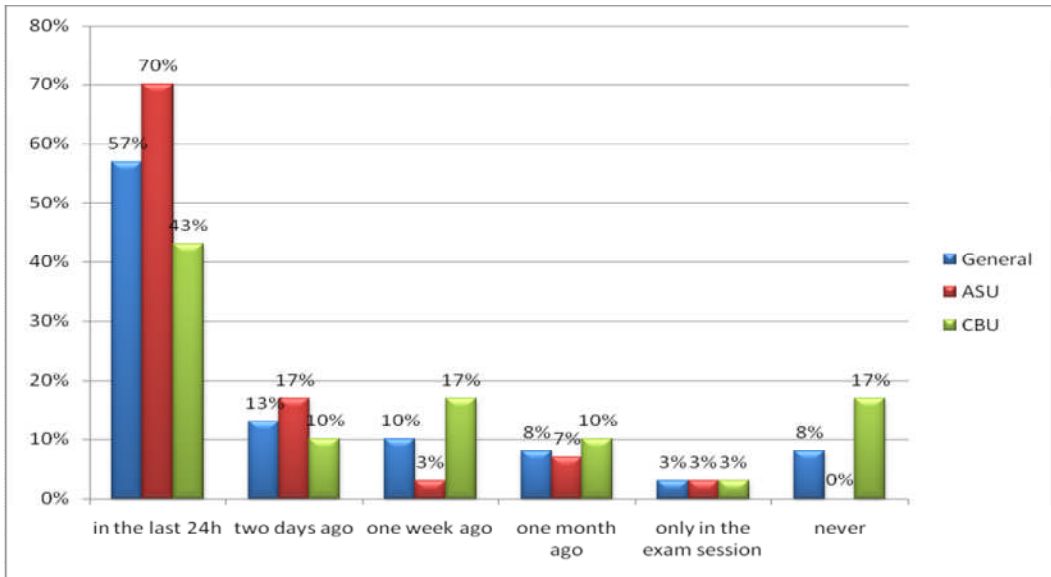
80% of the students surveyed believe that the social network Facebook is an effective means of information about the activities of the university. In comparison, several students at CBU (83%) believe that Facebook is effective when it comes to information about the university, versus 77% of the students at ASU.



**Figure 5 - ITEM 5. Do you think that the social network Facebook is an effective means of information about the activities of the university?**

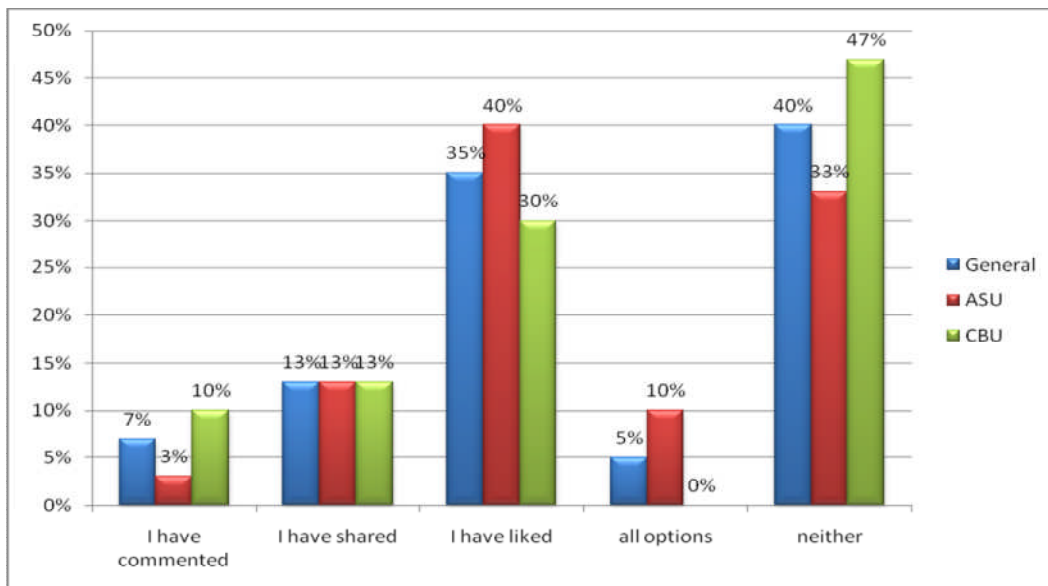
The social platform Facebook is a widely used medium by students, not only for socializing, but also for information about the activities of the university. Therefore, 57% of the students surveyed said they had consulted the university's Facebook page in the last 24 hours, 13% of them in the last two days, 18% in the last week or month and only 8% of the investigated students have never accessed it.

In a comparative analysis, the students from "Andrei Şaguna" University access more the Facebook page of the Institution as compared to those from "Constantin Brâncoveanu" University. Therefore, 70% of the students at ASU have accessed the Facebook page in the last 24 hours, compared to only 43% of the students at CBU. In contrast, 17% of the students at CBU have never accessed the Facebook page of the university compared to the students at ASU who claimed to have accessed this page at least once.



**Figure 6 - ITEM 6. When did you last access the official Facebook page of your university?**

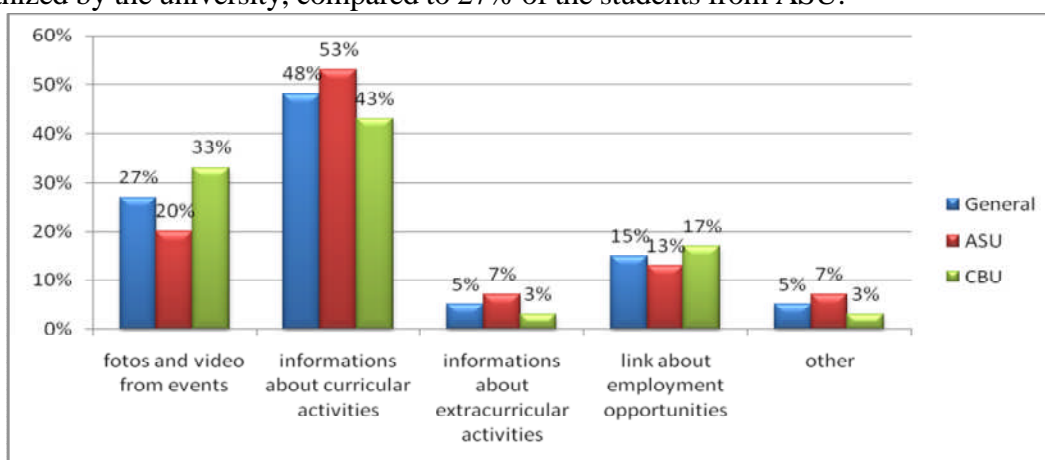
Even though they access very frequently the Facebook page of their educational institution, the students give rather weak or irrelevant feedback. Therefore, 40% of the interviewed students from both universities have never interacted with the institution’s Facebook page, 35% have used a simplistic form of feedback, the “like” button, 13% of them redistributed posts published by the university to their group of friends, while 7% of the students commented on the content posted on the official Facebook page of the universities. In a comparative analysis, we see no major differences between the students at the two universities. The only notable differences are that only 3% of the students at ASU comment the posts, compared to the 10% of the students at CBU who interact in this way and 40% of the students at ASU give “like,” with 10 percent more than the students at CBU.



**Figure 7 - ITEM 7. Have you ever commented or distributed any information posted on the university’s Facebook page?**

Most students (48%) appreciate information on curricular activities (schedule, scheduling exams, etc.) on the Institution’s Facebook page, 27% of them appreciate photos and videos of the events organized by the university, 15% consider important the links about employment opportunities and only 5% of the students appreciate information on extracurricular activities

(junior prom, sports, etc). Comparing, several students from ASU respectively 53% consider important information on curricular activities, compared to 43% of the students at CBU. On the other hand, 33% of students at CBU appreciate posts with photos and videos from events organized by the university, compared to 27% of the students from ASU.



**Figure 8 - ITEM 8. What information do you appreciate on the university's Facebook page?**

## 6. Conclusions

Summing up, we see that the first objective of the study, which aimed to identify the views of the students about the means of information used by the universities, was validated. 52% of students surveyed claimed that the university is informing them in a large and very large extent.

The second objective of this paper aimed to determine the frequency of accessing of the universities' websites and their official Facebook pages. The universities' websites are accessed frequently by the students, 45% of them say that they have accessed them in the last 24 hours, and 20% in the last two days. The official Facebook pages of the two universities are frequently accessed by students, so 57% of the respondents said they consulted the university's Facebook page in the last 24 hours, 13% in the last two days, 18% in the last week or month and only 8% of the investigated students have never accessed them.

The third objective aimed to identify the information that students frequently seek on the university's website. The most sought information on the website of the university is about schedule (73%), exams scheduling (67%), academic events (40%). Approximately 38% of the students believe that for them the important information is about the academic year structure and about the terms of the annual tuition fees.

Investigating the interaction of the students with the University's official Facebook page was the fourth objective of the research. Thus, we found that, despite the frequent access to their educational institution's Facebook page, the feedback from the students is quite weak or irrelevant. 40% of the interviewed students from both universities have never interacted on the Facebook page of the institution, while only 35% have used a simplistic form of feedback, the "like" button.

The students are considered image multipliers of the university, in other words they are "ambassadors" of the university in their circle of friends. For this reason, the percentage of 13% of those students who share the university's posts to their group of friends, we consider it very relevant. The behavior in the social media of the surveyed students has revealed that 7% of them are commenting the content of the posting on the universities' official Facebook pages. The percentage is relatively low and can be considered modest, but we should keep in mind that even if the process of communication between university and student has moved into social media, the style of communication remains formal, the students receive notification about posts on the Facebook page of their university, but not always resonate with them, thus keeping within formal communication.



Both research hypotheses were confirmed. Both the website and the Facebook social network are in the students' opinion relevant means for academic information. However, the traditional means of information, as notice board, are still appreciated by the students from CBU (23%), while their colleagues from ASU choose to be informed from other colleagues (7%) or by email (7%). The option of the students from CBU for traditional means of information is explained if we compare the results of the research that we have done on the same basis of sampling in 2010. Then we found that students at CBU spend less time on the Internet than those from ASU.

The means of information used in the academic environment are in the process of reconfiguration and development. In the near future, the access to the information provided by universities will be multimedia, mobile and miniaturized. More and more universities adopt coherent strategies for the integration of technology in education and the media used for internal and external communication tend to migrate towards the online communication.

### **Bibliography:**

- 1.Pricopie Remus, *Relațiile publice, evoluție și perspective*, București, Editura Tritonic, 2005, p.41
- 2.Dugan Silvia, Gănescu Cristina, Pepenel Madelaine, *Metode de adaptare a învățământului universitar la noile condiții determinate de criza economică actuală*, Revista Strategii manageriale, nr. 4 (10)/2010
- 3.Ciacu Nicoleta, Tasește Tănase, *Implicațiile utilizării Inernetului în activitățile curriculare și extracurriculare ale studenților*, Revista Strategii Manageriale, nr. 4 (10)/2010