

The Use of Digital Media in Equestrian Clubs in Croatia [†]

Maja Gregić * , Tina Bobić, Ranko Gantner  and Vesna Gantner

Department of Animal Production and Biotechnology, Faculty of Agrobiotechnical Sciences Osijek, University of J. J. Strossmayer Osijek, V. Preloga 1, 31000 Osijek, Croatia; tbobic@fazos.hr (T.B.); rgantner@fazos.hr (R.G.); vgantner@fazos.hr (V.G.)

* Correspondence: mgregic@fazos.hr

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Abstract: This paper aimed to analyze the use of digital media, and the research was conducted via a web survey sent by e-mail to equestrian clubs in Croatia. Social media has significantly altered the way of communication and the availability of information in all segments of life and work, including horse breeding. Within digital media, an extremely large amount of information is available that is not necessarily relevant and true. To prevent the use of inadequate information, in 60% of equestrian clubs in Croatia, certain persons are responsible for the content. Less than 50% of the respondents follow influencer posts. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents believe that digital media is an excellent tool that can help in the work of equestrian clubs, while 80% of the respondents believe that it is currently underutilized.

Keywords: equestrian clubs; digital media; information exchange

1. Introduction

New media habits in the era of digitization are challenging previous understandings of who and what receive media attention. Definitions, interpretations, and understanding of social media have been the subject of debate and frequent corrections over the past 20 years. Ref. [1] claims that social media is a dynamic and contextual concept and understanding social media is temporally, spatially, and technologically sensitive. Furthermore, the content on social media is variable and does not objectively represent one time period or locality in its entirety. Social media has dramatically changed the dominant way of communication, and today everyone can share content beyond the “gatekeeping” function of traditional media and with the help of new, relatively cheap technologies [2]. In recent years, the influence of social media on the spread and quality of knowledge has become increasingly evident. The development of social media represents a challenge for traditional sources of knowledge and raises questions about how we should interpret and evaluate available knowledge. Social media platforms provide enormous opportunities for people to communicate with each other and allow for the distribution of misinformation to flourish [3]. The presence of fake news in the media has become a global problem, being especially prominent during the coronavirus pandemic, but it is not present in all countries to the same extent. For example, Croatia is a country whose inhabitants know how to recognize and avoid fake news. According to the research of [4], the most reliable sources of information in Croatia are television and radio, while the Internet (excluding social networks) is in second place. Although Croats are considered to be successful in identifying fake news, their actual ability to recognize it does not reflect this. Furthermore, social media has become a well-established way of communication; for example, football clubs from the UEFA League communicate with their fans through the Facebook application [5]. Ref. [6], in their research, used the Facebook application as a tool to conduct a survey related to horse welfare. Furthermore, a relatively new term related to social media is influencer. An



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influencer is considered to be a person who has an influence on other people and thus can influence their views on various things. Descriptions of influencers usually focus on what influencers do. Ref. [7] emphasizes that influencers on social networks “gather” followers through blogs, vlogs, and similar content, presenting their everyday life in text and images and promoting various products and services through advertisements [8]. Ref. [9] states that influencers play an important role in consumption processes. Digital media users perceive themselves to have a close relationship with influencers, so they are more likely to be motivated by social media marketing than traditional advertising. Furthermore, influencer marketing is often not perceived as advertising but as a recommendation from a friend [9]. According to Radmann et al. [10], influencers in horse breeding mainly focus their communication on issues related to horses, and their (and their followers’) love for horses creates the intimacy necessary to form a basis for other messages (knowledge and advertising). Intimacy and authenticity are strengthened in the interaction between followers and influencers, and they receive positive feedback for their way of working with their horses. The feeling gained from this kind of communication is likely to make commercial recommendations less visible and more compelling for consumption. Croatia, with 70 registered equestrian clubs in the Croatian Equestrian Federation [11], is not a large market for digital media. The size of the Croatian market is particularly evident in comparison with that of Sweden, which has 900 horse-related clubs, of which about half are riding schools; or Norway, whose Norwegian Equestrian Federation (NRYF) is the 13th largest sports federation in the world, with 30,000 active members in 340 registered clubs [10,12,13]; and Germany, where equestrian sport ranks 8th in terms of the number of members in equestrian clubs [14]. The interest in riding and equestrian sports is not only expressed by the number of members of a country’s equestrian associations but also by activities on social networks. Numerous blogs as well as accounts on different applications (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) are dedicated to horses. Analysis of the content on social media shows that young riders analyze and harmonize their qualities in working with horses in relation to the content published by their role models (influencers) on social media [15]. Furthermore, social media often presents an ideal image of the interaction between man and horse, which creates pressure and discomfort in the follower. Considering the increasing importance of digital media in all aspects of life and work, the aim of this paper was to analyze the use of digital media in equestrian clubs in Croatia.

2. Methods

This research was conducted via a web survey sent by e-mail to equestrian clubs registered in Croatia. The questionnaire included questions related to the use of digital media in the work of equestrian clubs, means of communication with their members, and their creation and monitoring of digital media. All clubs were members of the Croatian Equestrian Association, and the questionnaire was filled out by the presidents of the equestrian clubs. In terms of age, 55% of survey respondents were over 41 years old. The web survey was conducted over 14 days, in the period from 31 January 2022 to 13 February 2022. The results of the web survey are presented graphically (MS Excel).

3. Results and Discussion

Members of equestrian clubs in Croatia combine the use of various digital tools for exchanging information, among which the most represented are WhatsApp (80%), calling (75%), and Viber, while those with less representation include publications on websites (40%) and sending SMSs (40%) (Figure 1). Changes in communication with members of equestrian clubs have occurred in parallel with the development of technology. The same trends in changes in the type of communication are happening all around the world, and WhatsApp is currently one of the most popular communication platforms [16].

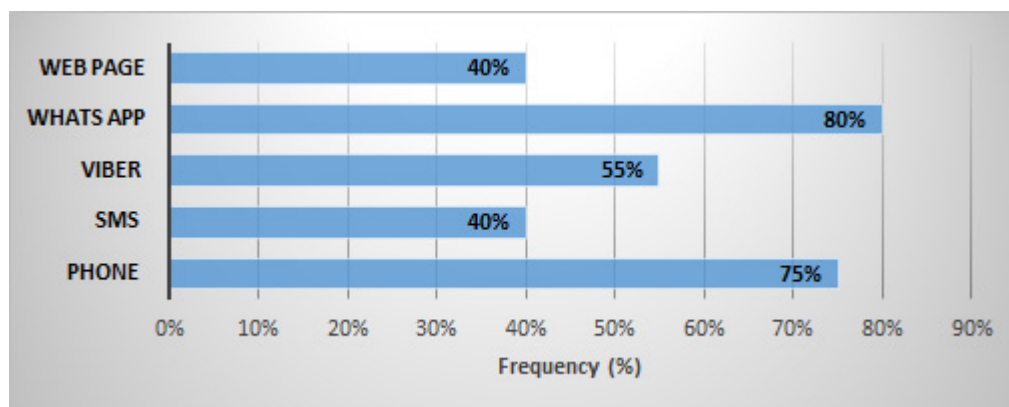


Figure 1. Frequency of use of certain communication tools among members of equestrian clubs in Croatia.

Monitoring and managing digital platforms are common practices in all countries, given that the visibility of posts has no limits and information reaches users quickly, but on the other hand, there are no reviews, so the credibility is questionable. The most popular digital media is Facebook (100%), which was used by all the studied equestrian clubs in Croatia. It was followed by Instagram (65%), while blogs and YouTube appeared sporadically in 5% of cases (Figure 2). Equestrian clubs in Croatia follow the trend of representation on Facebook (Vale and Fernandes, 2017), which contributes to the welfare of horses [6].

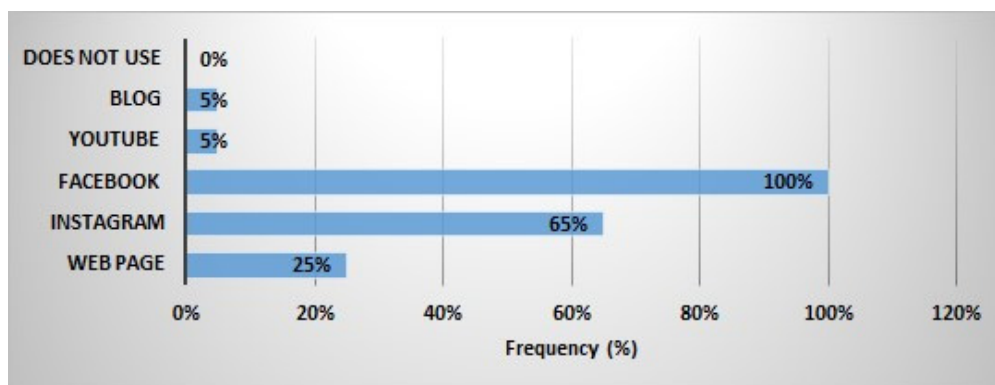


Figure 2. Frequency of use of digital media (networks) used by equestrian clubs in Croatia.

The accuracy of posts on official digital platforms should be satisfactory considering that 60% of the equestrian clubs assigned a person to create and publish content on them, while 35% of the clubs assigned multiple persons. Furthermore, in 10% of the equestrian clubs, content on digital media could be created by all club members (Figure 3). In reducing the number of content creators on digital media, the possibility of spreading fake news among equestrian club members also decreases [4,10,17].

In the case of particular problems at work (health, training, equipment, etc.), 100% of respondents said they would ask for the help of a professional, but in 35% of cases, respondents would check and find information on the Internet, while 20% of respondents would use books and 5% scientific papers. The development of social networks poses new challenges to traditional sources of knowledge and raises the question of how we should interpret the available information. Based on the conducted research, it is evident that expertise is valued in equestrian clubs, given that in the case certain problems arise, members first contact experts in the reference area. The above indicates that there is no disruption in the understanding of information [3]. Influencers in the equestrian world in more developed countries are well positioned [10], while in Croatia, 45% of respondents

said they follow them constantly, 5% occasionally, and 50% of respondents do not follow influencers' posts at all. In addition, 10% of the respondents were considered influencers in equestrian clubs in Croatia. Furthermore, 90% of the respondents believed that digital media is a helpful tool and that its use improves their work in equestrian clubs. A total of 80% believed that digital media is not used enough in the "equestrian world". Equestrian clubs in Croatia follow world trends in horse breeding in 15% of cases. It is believed that the younger population is more inclined towards social media usage, more technically skilled, and uses digital media more often [18–20].

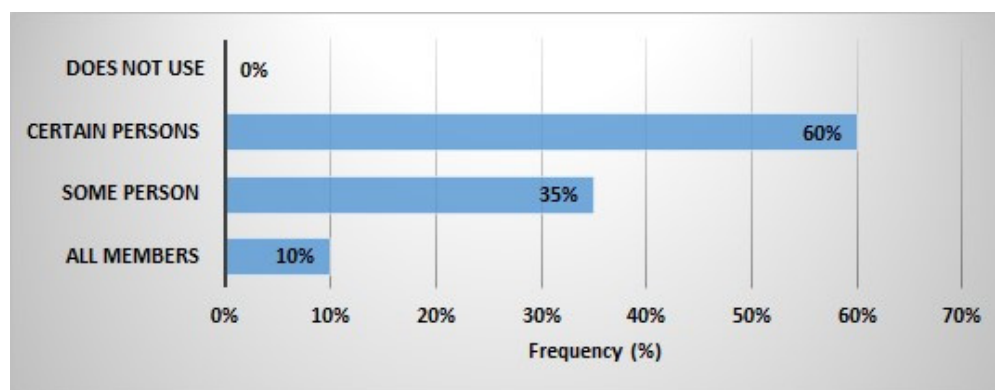


Figure 3. Creation of content on digital media under the authority of equestrian clubs in Croatia.

4. Conclusions

At a time when digital media has almost completely taken over most means of communication and is becoming one of the main sources of information in all segments of life and work, equestrian clubs in Croatia are also following this trend. The complexity of running an equestrian club is greatly facilitated by the use of digital media, which club managers have recognized. Furthermore, false data and unverified information represent major global problems to which special attention should be paid, and systematic work should be carried out to reduce their spread. To increase the accuracy of information, 60% of equestrian clubs in Croatia assign specific persons to the creation of content. Less than 50% follow influencer posts. Also, digital media represents an excellent tool in the work of equestrian clubs in Croatia (in the opinion of 90% of respondents) if used rationally and in a controlled manner, but currently, it is not used enough (in the opinion of 80% of respondents).

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