ICT for the promotion of international business academic programs

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the level of use and the benefits offered by information and communication technologies (ICT) for the international business academic programs in the universities. For this purpose, a perception study in 14 universities of Antioquia, Colombia is carried out. Based on the results, it is concluded that websites and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are the ICT with the highest level of use and development, and they allow the promotion and positioning of the academic programs, facilitate the learning process and communication with stakeholders, and offer job opportunities to students and graduates.

Keywords: ICT, international business, websites, social networks, universities, academic programs.

TIC para la promoción de programas académicos de negocios internacionales

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar el nivel de uso y los beneficios que ofrecen las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación (TIC) a los programas de negocios internacionales en las universidades. Para esto, se llevó a cabo un estudio de percepción en 14 universidades de Antioquia, Colombia, que ofrecen el programa de negocios internacionales. Con base en los resultados, se concluye que las TIC más usadas y desarrolladas son los sitios web y las redes sociales, las cuales promocionan los programas de pregrado, facilitan el

proceso de enseñanza y comunicación con públicos de interés, y ofrecen además oportunidades laborales a estudiantes y egresados.

Palabras clave: TIC, negocios internacionales, sitios web, redes sociales, universidades, programas académicos.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years the use of ICT in universities has grown significantly (Guerra, González and García, 2010), and the communications means between humans have evolved, giving rise to new social behavior patterns associated with the use of computers, with millions of users worldwide, which a 55% belongs to developing countries (*International Telecommunication Union [ITU]*, 2014).

Parallel to the changes generated by ICT, organizations and universities can influence the purchasing decisions of products and services among users, for which these organizations suit promotional processes with customized and updated content for users who use internet,either through websites or social networks that offer exclusive spaces for information and communication management (Beer, 2008). As a result, exclusive and interactive web spaces increase belonging sense in users, since they value the content and services that stimulate the decision-making process. In this regard, online content related to academic programs can target users in order to persuade and strengthen relationships and interactions among them (Franco and Villarejo, 2004).

For the education sector, the most appropriate online services are those that enable the creation of social relationships, generate selected

groups of users and replace traditional communication channels (Rai, Yadav, Yadav and Prasad, 2008). These services are created to innovate in promoting university programs, considering that a virtual community represents new opportunities to interact, participate and engage stakeholders (which includes active students, graduates, potential students, teachers and others); improving the promotion of strategies for universities and its programs, including postgraduate programs(Atalah and Muchemedzi, 2006).

The cost required to participate in the cyberspace and to gain a level of visibility is lower compared with the cost of traditional promotion media(De la Rica, 2000),and one of the reasons why organizations, including universities, do not use ICT is due to the ignorance of the benefits that these technologies offer(Cano and Baena, 2015)(Briceño and Castellanos 2016)(Cano and Baena, 2017).

Therefore, this article aims to identify the use of ICT and benefits offered by web-based technologies implemented in international business academic programs. To do so, the main concepts related to the benefits of ICT to organizations, and concepts of web-based technologies will be introduced in the second section of the article; in addition the methodology used to conduct the field study in 14 universities of Antioquia, Colombia, is presented. Based on the data obtained in the field study, the main findings will be exposed in the results analysis section; and finally the conclusions of this research will be shown.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

ICT and its benefits for organizations

The efficient use of web based ICT, including websites and social networks, brings benefits to organizations by streamlining and innovating service delivery, increasing brand positioning, influencing positively the perception of users, and reducing advertising costs. Similarly, these technologies benefits users by offering them access to updated information, facilitating document management activities, among others related even with social inclusion(Kramer, Jenkins and Katz, 2007) (Cogo,Dutra-Brignol and Fragoso, 2015).

In a research conducted by Echeverría (2008), it was determined that ICT are booming due to the frequent use by society, and asserts that the number of ICT and internet users increase considerably. The acceptance of ICT is due to the fact that they offer possibilities for creating new forms of reproduction, transmission and dissemination of knowledge between users and organizations (Gaete and Vásquez, 2008). Also, it is possible to affirm that individuals and organizations with better connection are those who enjoy greater benefits and competitive advantages from ICT, as happens with the online education nowadays (Luu and Quan, 2010).

Likewise, the *ITU*(2005)recognizes that effective application of ICT will empower economic growth and job creation worldwide. Therefore, the development and implementation of ICT is a priority for

organizations to allow them overcome geographical barriers, interact with users, improve relationships and increase the interest of the stakeholders (Martínez-Valerio, 2012).In addition, according to Kramer et al. (2007), Figure 1 shows some benefits and contributions of ICT in organizations, including universities.

Figure 1. Contributions of ICT for the organizations
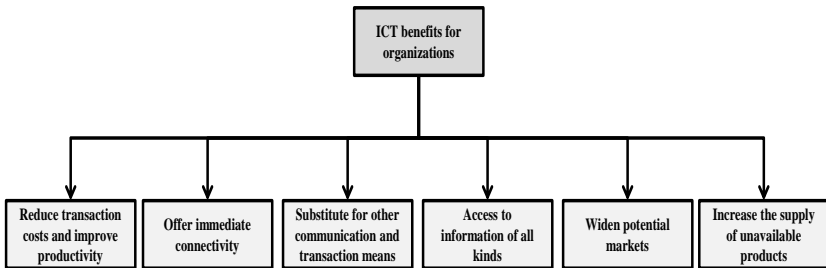
However, Fleming and Alberdi (2000) consider that in order to enjoy the advantages of these new communication alternatives, it is necessary to identify the differences between traditional advertising and web advertising. In this sense, digital marketing allows an organizational leverage by creating spaces with relevant, entertaining and timely contents that provide knowledge and persuade the user through web-based media (González-Fernández-Villavicencio, 2015).That is why ICT such as social networks, educational platforms, websites and blogs have become the most highly used communication technologies and the integration of these ICT to educational processes has allowed students to develop competencies and skills (Del Moral,Villalustre and Neira, 2014).

Hence, for organizations and especially for universities, it is necessary to implement strategies through social networks and websites to attract the interest of users, send messages that strengthen loyalty and provide better service to academic programs users; and even to internationalize these programs(Guerra, González and García, 2010).According to Baelo and Canton (2010), it is important to integrate ICT into universities processes because these technologies have become essential elements for education access and to generate curricular innovations.

The websites are one of the principal means to relate different enterprises with several target audiences, allowing users to search information more actively than with traditional media, allowing two-way communication for users and organizations and promoting promotes personalized and cooperative learning networks (Lévy, 2007; Díaz, Martín-Consuegra andEsteban, 2008). ICT represents a fundamental element for the universities performance measurement, even some university rankings, like the QS ranking for Latin America and the Arab Region, includes within its methodology a factor called online impact, which evaluates the effective use of new web technologies (*QS*, 2015).

Web based ICT: websites, social networks and blogs

Websites are electronic documents that are part of the world wide web and form a set of interrelated information available on internet; it is formed by servers and domains (logical names associated with institutions

or companies, issued by official register companies) (Quinn, 2000). A website can be static when its content is always the same, or dynamic when its content is built with information entered by users, allowing the entry of text, images, audio, animated objects, hyperlinks, meta tags and cascading style sheets; all this configuring a system that can detect trends, supply benchmarking information and publicize products worldwide (Molina, 2001; Llopis, González and Gascó, 2009).

On the other hand, social network sites can be defined as platforms for network communication, that enable users to build and adapt a profile to a unique identification, which is created by a combination of content produced by the user, other users and systemic data. Users are connected by one or more relationships, such as friendship, labor relations, financial exchanges or other common interests. The users can exhibit their profile information, controlling the scope to be viewed by others; and can access to information contents (combinations of text, photos, videos, data and new links) provided by their contacts and other users (Beer, 2008).

Thanks to the ability of the social networks to communicate and disseminate information, a large number of users and organizations are using them for various purposes, such as building relationships, finding and engaging in dialogue with others, discussing various topics, organizing meetings, publicizing events, congresses and conferences, and confirming attendance or absence to these events (Raiet al., 2008). Table 1 is based on the contributions of Guzmán, Del Moral, González and Gil (2013) and shows a summary of the benefits generated by social networks at universities.

Table 1. Benefits of social networks at universities

General Advantages	
⁻ Dissemination of promotional campaigns to position universities and educational offers. ⁻ Promotes communication, stimulates creativity and imagination. ⁻ Agile, entertaining and motivating communication with students and stakeholders. ⁻ Fosters discussion and cooperation on projects and the evaluation by experts.	⁻ Teachers and students participate in micro debates on various subjects. ⁻ Improves the interaction among members of the educational community. ⁻ Catalyzes the process of teaching and learning. ⁻ Invites the educational community to participate in activities of social interest. ⁻ Generates interest and encourages participation to share experiences and opinions.

Social networks are based on the web 2.0, which is a web model supported by a community of users, and covers a wide variety of social networks, blogs, wikis and networked multimedia services, whose purpose is to exchange information among users and to collaborate in the production of contents. Thus, all these ICT based on the web 2.0 uses collective intelligence to provide interactive services on the web, where the user has control to publish and share their data with others (*Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías Educativas y Formación[INTEF],* 2010).

Table 2 describes the main features of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Blogs, which are the most, accepted and used social networks in organizations, and particularly in universities.

Table 2. General features and services of social networks

Facebook	Twitter	Blogs
Enables organizations and institutions to promote their products and services through specialized websites and advertising campaigns. Determines groups and pages of people with common interests and specific purposes to facilitate an effective communication with a desired target audience. Allows locating and adding contacts through search tools and friends' suggestions. Profiles and pages allow share images, videos, and audios, and information of highlighted activities, with other registered users. Exerts content regulation and provides a channel for complaints, claims and prohibitions. It allows for the development of games, applications and advertising campaigns.	Enhances corporate image, optimizes service strategies and encourages participation of the educational community. Users can create and share contents to update their profiles and to interact with other users, obtaining a quick and direct feedback and retransmission. Fosters communication of higher education institutions thanks to the flexible interaction between the institution and the students. Uses tweets, which are short sentences of a maximum of 140 characters, reflecting personal opinions that may include links, photos and videos. Uses hashtags, which are words or phrases that begin with the "#" symbol, and allows discuss about issues, trends, events, conferences, seminars, among others. Registers conversations and generates detailed statistics about data traffic, number of followers by periods of time, and analyzes trends generated by the hashtags.	Facilitates building of meaningful social connections and virtual communities around topics of interest. Chronologically organizes user generated contents (entries or posts), including comments, links, text material, audio, video, images and downloadable files. Generates a unique address for each of the entries or posts; and allows these to be referenced from any other website. Allows users to subscribe, receive notifications, write articles collectively and comment on the author's publications. Stores information securely in different formats and generates website traffic statistics.
Authors: (Rodrigues andOakley, 2009; Farahani, Aghamohamadi, Kazemi, Bakhtiarvand, and Ansari, 2011; Tuñez and Sixto, 2012; Apaolaza, Hartmann, He, Barrutia and Echebarria,2015)	**Authors:** (Guzmán et al.,2013; Morales, Borondo, Losada and Benito, 2014; Lipizzi, Iandoli andRamírez, 2015; Chatfield, Reddick and Brajawidagda, 2015)	**Authors:** (Fumero, 2005; Uzunoğlu andMisci, 2014; Nianlong, Xunhua, Jin, Guoqing and Nan, 2015; Bâldea, Maier, and Simionescu2015; Chena and Lin, 2015)

It is important to note that the ICT mentioned in Table 2 have a high acceptance in the student community, therefore, it is suggested that

universities should share the academic contents on websites and social networks because students and other stakeholders of the university tend to use these technologies (Tuñez and García, 2012).

Both, websites as well as social networks represent opportunities to improve academic programs in universities, allowing the publication of program costs, graduate profiles, curriculums, scholarships, direct and dynamic information. These technologies allows to send direct messages to desired user profiles, and strengthen the effectiveness of communication with the use of pop-ups, emails, images, audio and video; all of this taking into account the easy access to web content via electronic devices such as desktops, laptops, tablets and smart phones.

To carry out the field study to identify the operation and the main benefits of ICT in international negotiations academic programs, the databases of the National Information System for Higher Education of Colombia (*Sistema Nacional de Información de la Educación Superior - SNIES*)were consulted, identifying that there are 18 universities offering international business programs in Antioquia, Colombia (*SNIES*, 2014). The next step was to determine the sample size that represents the number of universities to contact and to apply the research instrument. For this purpose, equation 1represents the statistical formula of a simple random sampling applied to a finite population. The data used and the sample size results are shown in detail in Table 3.

$$n = \frac{z^2_{\propto/2} \times P \times (1-P) \times N}{z^2_{\propto/2} \times P \times (1-P) + (N-1) \times E^2} \qquad \text{Equation (1)}$$

Table 3. Definition and values of the parameters for the calculation of sample size

Parameter	Definition	Value
N	Population size	18
E	Estimation error, maximum acceptable error	10%
P×(1-P)	Variance of sample	25%
$Z\alpha/2$	Probabilistic factor given by a 90% confidence level	1,64
N	Sample size	14

With the sample size, equivalent to 14 universities, that covers 80% of the total population, the research instrument was applied in the first semester of 2015. This instrument is based on an online survey, designed in Google Drive to facilitate sending the instrument to the directors of the academic programs and to expedite the tabulation of results. The online survey was structured to identify the ICT used for the promotion and communication of the academic programs, and to identify the advantages and uses that websites, social networks (Facebook, Twitter) and blogs offer.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

The main findings obtained with the research instrument are presented in this section, and includes the means of communication used to promote international business programs, the most used ICT and its update frequency, ICT role and the benefits to the academic programs. According to Figure 2, the most used media for the promotion of academic programs are websites and social networks, which are used by 79% of universities. Other communication means used are physical advertisements, advertisements on radio stations and flyers, which are used by 57%, 43% and 36% of universities respectively.

Figure 2. Communication means used to promote academic programs
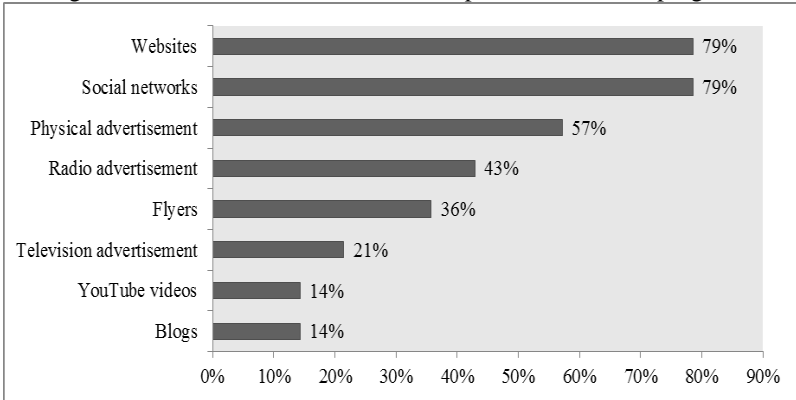

It is also noted that the less used communication means are television advertising, YouTube videos and blogs. These results indicate that the trend in international business programs is to use web-based ICT, prioritizing them above traditional communication media. Figure 3 presents a detailed analysis of the ICT used, and it is concluded that the most used technologies are the websites and Facebook, which are used and accepted by over half the academic programs. Ranked below, Twitter and other ICT are used and accepted by less than 30% of the programs.

Figure 3. ICT used by international business academic programs
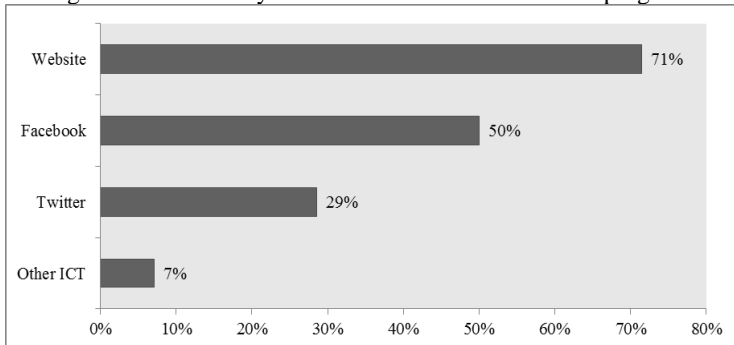
The study also investigates the ICT that are going to be implemented or improved to support the promotion and visibility of international business programs. Figure 4 shows that the websites have a higher priority to be implemented or enhanced, because many of these technologies are already in use within the academic program, and it is desirable to optimize these acquired communication means.

Figure 4. ICT to be implemented or enhanced
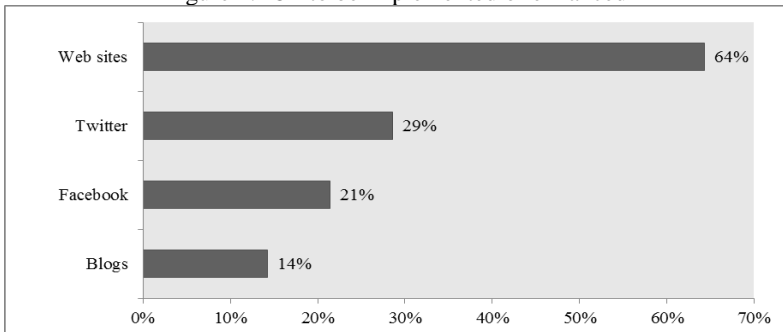
Regarding social networks, it is desirable implement or enhance Twitter in a greater extent compared to Facebook and blogs, largely because less than a third of international business programs make use of Twitter. However, there is evidence that blogs are poorly embraced by the academic programs, and have a low participation in terms of intentions for implementation or enhancement.

To verify whether the international business programs make active use of ICT, the study inquires about the frequency of use and updates, and it was found that ICT are used and updated at least weekly; in more detail, 64% of

the programs uses and updates these technologies daily, while 36% do so weekly.

In consequence, the research investigates the role and functionality provided by these technologies to the international negotiation programs. Figure 5showthat 71% of the academic programs use ICT to promote their academic programs; in a smaller proportion, 57% of universities also use ICT to facilitate the students learning process and to inform the students about novelties in the program. The function of disseminating basic information related to the program is acknowledged by 43% of the programs.

Figure 5. Functionality of ICT in international business programs
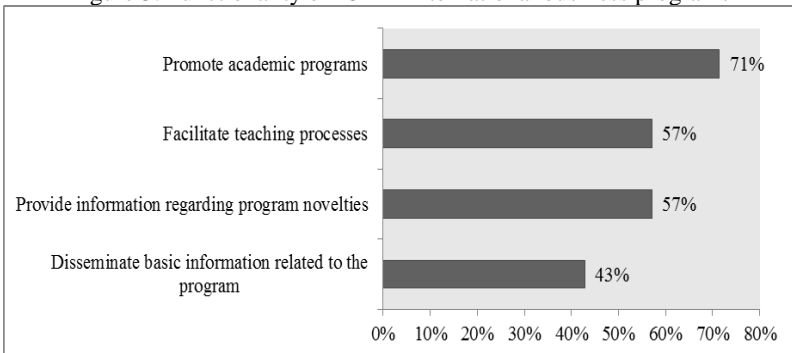
Program directives were asked if they considered that these technologies are important to the development and promotion of international negotiation programs, and according to this,93% of directives considered that ICT are important and necessary to effectively advertise the programs that they direct.

In addition, the research assesses the advantages and benefits that ICT brings to the international business programs. For this, Figure 6 presents a quantitative analysis based on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents the lowest value and 5 represents the highest value in importance for each benefits mentioned there.

Figure 6. Advantages of ICT for international business program
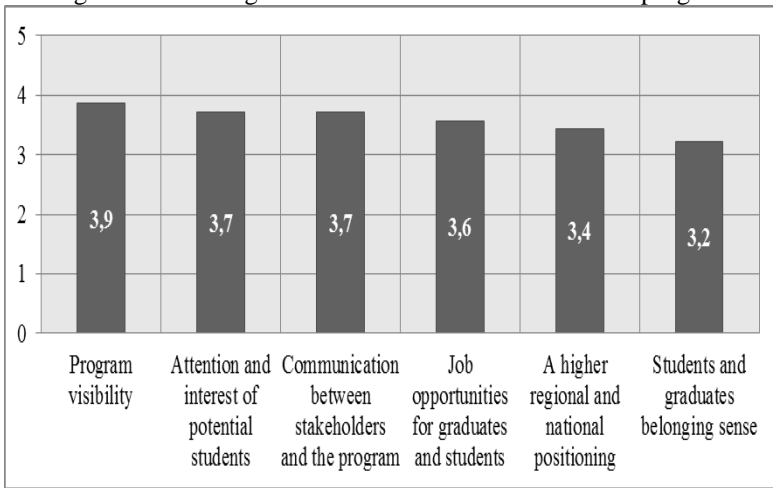
Using arithmetic averages for the values obtained, it is find that the most valued advantages are: increase the visibility of the program (3.9); attract attention and promote the admittance of potential students (3.7); generate a direct communication channel between the program and stakeholders (3.7); provide employment opportunities for graduates and students (3.6); obtaina greater positioning of the program at a regional and national level (3.4); and finally increase the belonging sense of students and graduates with the academic program and the university (3.2).

CONCLUSIONS

This research identified that international business academic programs use actively web-based ICT such as websites and social networks, being used and updated daily or weekly. This reflects the usefulness and functionality that ICT offer to academic programs, especially in processes related to the promotion of programs, facilitation of the teaching process and dissemination of information related to program novelties.

The use of these technologies has higher priority over other traditional communication media such as physical advertisements, radio communications, advertising leaflets (flyers) and television advertising. It was found that websites and social networks like Facebook and Twitter, can generate a higher service level to meet the needs and requirements requested by stakeholders of international business programs. Contrary to the above, blogs have a very low level of use and development among these programs.

Therefore, it was possible to demonstrate in this article that the directives of international business programs consider important and necessary the use and implementation of ICT, and see opportunities in these technologies thanks to the advantages, benefits and results obtained. Among the most important advantages offered by websites and social networks it can be mentioned the increased visibility of the programs, a higher number of new students, creation of direct communication channels

between the program and stakeholders (potential students, active students, teachers, graduates), and job opportunities for graduates and students.

For future lines of research, it is recommended to reproduce this study at a national and international level, and similarly replicate the methodology presented in this article in other academic programs, in order to recognize whether the level of use, acceptance, functionality and benefits offered by ICTs varies according to the characteristics of each program.

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