# DIFFERENT USES OF QR CODES IN MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

**Šarlauskienė L.[1], Šarlauskaitė V.[2]**
[1]Kauno kolegija / Kaunas University of Applied Sciences
[2]Kaunas University of Technology

**Abstract**

To ensure contemporary and interactive communication it is necessary to select suitable interaction techniques. One of them is QR code usage which connects physical world with interactive world and allows getting information fast and handily. QR code can be used for product or service advertisements, to direct consumers from leaflets, billboards or other traditional measures to mobile devices that have more information and interactivity. Consumer can preserve information, reach necessary internet page and watch video clips or pictures. QR code can be used not only for advertisement but also for wider marketing activity, consumer information and education. Such physical and interactive world connection creates new communication dimension. This study analyzes QR code features, usage possibilities and practical usage in marketing and academic library activity.

**Keywords:** *QR codes, marketing, library services*

## QR code concept

QR (Quick Response) code is a two – dimensional barcode that encodes information (Lin, Luo & Chen, 2013). It ciphers information fast and effortless. Soon (2008) states that QR code was created by one of the ''Toyota'' group company – "Denso" in 1994. Company used code in vehicles parts manufacturing. Later QR code was started using in other fields as it was commercialized when the growth of telecommunication started in 2011 (Singh & Bamoriya, 2013). The usage of QR code is fast and simple. First, a consumer must scan a QR code with a mobile device. Right away user is directly brought to some form of online content (Probst & Brokaw, 2012). Usually this process takes a few seconds. As a result, user can search for information online.

## QR code advantages and disadvantages

The most important QR code advantage for users and companies is price (Dou & Li, 2008). In order to scan two – dimensional barcode, users have

to download app that encodes QR code. As these apps are free, the ability to use QR codes is free for users. Likewise QR code usage is free for companies as there are free, legal websites on the internet which allow generate QR code. Another benefit is that code gives the ability to integrate traditional media with interactive media more quickly. Dou and Li (2008) state that when using QR code, users initiate communication between the consumers and company and they have the ability to choose the moment to access online page. As a result, usually users are more satisfied. According to Singh and Bamoriya (2013), QR code stands out from other similar codes because it is able to accumulate ten times more information and can be scanned from different positions. Therefore, companies are able to adapt more information for consumer and integrate QR code in various places. Mentioned scientists state that even when QR code is damaged up to 30%, mobile devices are able to restore code and directly brought user to some form of online content. Moreover, two – dimensional barcodes are convenient for marketers and designers as codes are versatile and can be adjust to different size surfaces. It is important to mention that QR code can be used as a tracking device (Singh & Bamoriya, 2013). Marketers can track the number of scans from each scans and in this way to collect information if channel is efficient or not. Furthermore, QR codes can be adapted and placed on any kind of surface, for example, on newspapers, billboards, product packaging and many others. According to Probst and Brokaw (2012), two – dimensional barcodes not only give information for consumer but also well designed QR codes can be used as a way to engage consumer to buy products or services by creating the interest. Lastly, QR code are more convenient for consumer than typing URL code because scanning code can eliminate mistakes that consumer make when typing the URL. Consequently, users save time and remain satisfied.

On the other hand, QR codes also have disadvantages. Despite that apps which scan QR codes are free, users who use older mobile devices are forced to download a special app which scans the QR code and it becomes a barrier in QR code usage (Dou & Li, 2008). Also, Singh and Bamoriya (2013) confirm that in order to use QR code, users have to be connected to the internet and it becomes another barrier in QR code usage.

**QR code usage**

According to Lin, Luo and Chen (2013), if companies want marketing strategy to be effective, they have to invoke integrated marketing. That is why a lot of companies are using QR codes. It allows integrate digital information to traditional marketing tools such as print and outdoor advertise-

ments, product packaging or services. Mentioned QR code usage techniques are the most effective, therefore it will be discussed in following sections.

**Print advertisements**

Print advertising is one of the oldest promotion tools. Possibly that is why QR code usage in printed advertisements is one the conventional and basic strategies. Usually QR codes in printed media are used in order to provide more information about product, service or company. It allows companies to integrate digital information to traditional media and to provide users more information. As a consequence, companies websites attendance increase. For the most part, QR codes as a marketing tool are used in magazines, flyers, newspapers or in letters, catalogs (Dou & Li, 2008). According to Singh and Bamoriya (2013) research, the product categories that mainly use QR codes in print advertising is home care product, jewelry, electronics and automobiles. The analysis suggest that online content of QR codes used in print advertisements is informative as one third of QR codes led to a corporative website, one third led to a brand's website. For example, big brands such as Calvin Klein or Ralph Lauren are using QR codes in fashion magazines as one of the key marketing strategy components (Ashford, 2010). Another great example is "Metrokane" company. In 2011 wine company created print ad in magazine with QR code in order to demonstrate how wine products work <https://goo.gl/VoM24P> (Figure 1). "Metrokane" strategically placed QR code and added an engaging message "Scan the code and place your phone within the dotted area". In this case, a lot of people used QR code as it was provocative. Despite the fact that even two-thirds QR



*Figure 1. Companies "Metrokane" ad in magazine*

codes are linked to informative content, Dou and Li (2008) claims that there are only 11,4% QR codes in print advertisements that are linked to some kind of incentives.

**Outdoor advertisements**

QR code usage in outdoor advertisements is very similar to QR code usage in print ads. Codes are also used in order to provide more information. Although, outdoor advertisements are available to more people and can reach a bigger audience. The most popular outdoor advertising options are billboards, posters, bus advertisements (Dou & Li, 2008). One of the best QR code appliances in outdoor advertisement examples is Calvin Klein marketing campaign in 2010. Company decided to create billboard with an enormous QR code in order to stand out <https://goo.gl/AySSvo> (Figure 2). People were triggered to use QR code as QR was linked to a short company's promo video. At the same time user were encouraged to share information in social networks. Advertisement helped to remind people about company and stimulate sales.



***Figure 2***. *"Calvin Klein" billboard*

**Product package**

Product packaging is one of the main product components. It allows promote product and helps consumer to separate product from others (Jasevičiūtė, 2011). Therefore, a lot of companies are using QR code on product packaging. While print and outdoor advertisements purpose mostly is to remind and inform consumers about company, QR code usage on product packaging provides users information about product itself. Another difference is that QR codes in print and outdoor advertisements are used before using product or service and information linked to QR code stimulates consumer to buy product or service. While QR code on product packaging usually is used after buying a product to find out more information. Great example is "McDonald's". Well-known company uses QR code on all products packaging (Figure 3). As most of the companies, "McDonalds" use QR code to provide consumer more information about products, in this case, product nutrition and other facts. Unfortunately, a lot of marketing experts state that QR codes are not necessary in "McDonald's" marketing strategy as usually consumers use QR after they already ate and nutritional facts are not relevant any more. Also, understanding what kind of food person ate, do not stimulate consumers to use "McDonald's" services in the future <https://goo.gl/0ym1RP>.



*Figure 3. McDonald's packaging with QR code*

**Services**

QR codes can also be used in services. A lot of codes are used in public services, for example, in bus stops, museums, libraries and elsewhere. Likewise, QR codes are used in shopping malls (Dou & Li, 2008). Usually codes are used in services in order to encourage consumer to use services buy products. For example, QR codes are used in Kaunas city bus stops in order to provide necessary information and help people <http://www.kaunas.lt/transportas/viesasis-transportas/> (Figure 4).



*Figure 4. Kaunas city bus stops*

**Stimuli that motivate people to use QR code**

Creative QR code usage in many different ways is very important to increase sales and brand notoriety. None the less, stimuli which encourage consumers to scan QR code is very important (Probst & Brokaw, 2012). First of all, people feel stimulation to use codes if there is perceived benefits. If user fined QR code usage to be easy to use, they will be triggered to use it in the future. Also, a lot of people use QR codes as entertainment (Jung, Somerstein & Kwon, 2012). Probst and Brokaw (2012) state that if QR code lead to some kind of entertainment to relieve boredom and pass time, consumers will feel encouraged to use code and share link with other people. As discussed, most consumers scan QR codes in order to find out some useful information. But innovativeness is also very important as online content characterized by a high degree of innovativeness is usually used

often. Another stimulus is social influence. People's behavior is influenced by others: friends, family. That is why consumers are using QR codes that are suggested by relatives, usually by social networks. Last stimulus is previous experiences. Scientists claim that people tend to behave similarly. In this case, previous experiences using QR code becomes very important as it shapes person's perception.

**Using QR code to promote library services**

Considering QR code usability, two – dimensional barcodes can be adapted to publicize library's services. It only depends on librarian's creative potential how QR code will be exploiting. According to Pulliam & Landry (2010), QR code can be used in order to make information resources more accessible, to inform society about services, events and create digital "wayfinders" in the stacks. Ashford (2010) specifies more ways of using QR code. For example, it can be used to publicize exhibitions, surveys and competitors. QR code also can be linked to library audio tours, video tutorials. It can be added to print handouts for additional information on mobile friendly sites, placed on study room doors connecting to room reservation forms, placed on staff directory pages and research guides that go to mobile friendly sites for later reference. Moreover, two – dimensional barcodes can be placed in the library stacks or journal areas that point to online electronic holdings of print materials and in catalogue records to offer patrons basic info about an item, including the location and call number.

QR code is practically used in Kauno kolegija library in order to connect physical library space and print resources with institutions virtual library and digital services. It was noticed that students are more often using visible information resources and they usually do not know that some resources are available in digital format. Also, students frequently do not know that information about books borrowing can be found in electronic catalogue or that they can get cited resource inventory in various databases. Digital resources and services publicity using ordinary forms do not receive needed attention because these forms are not as effective as QR code usage which can be linked to useful information. QR code usage is a way of transforming physical library into virtual interactive library. To sum up this aspiration, students in Kauno kolegija library was motivated to use digital resources by slogan "Discover virtual library!" used next to library QR code (Figure 5).

## Scan QR code, discover the library!

Real
Virtual
Interactive

LIBRARY

*Figure 5. Example of Library QR code*

Accomplishing this aspiration, QR codes were linked to interactive map of library, e-catalogue, institutional virtual library and our library's tutorials video playlist on YouTube, code placed on library shelves to link to online standards and journals access. Some of the library books students can read in digital format and in order to motive student to use digital formats to most of physical books there was added bookmark with information and QR code linked to e-book. As fast as person scans QR code, consumer can read and use e-book. In the future it is planned to use QR codes linked to short information about terms used in libraries. It is also planed to present consumers some fun and possitive content QR codes which provokes amazement and possitive mood.

**Conclusions**
- QR code usage survey showed that QR codes can be successfully used in marketing and communication. QR codes are uniques as it is free and simple to use. Also, because of interactivity it is used to connect physical and virtual spaces. In order to get effective result, QR codes should be used not only as mediator but also to provoke people by using provokative and interesting content.
- Practical QR code usage is very suitable to motivate library users to use digital resources, publicize services and offer interactive consulting. Successful QR code integration is possible in all communication areas.

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