SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEANS OF E-COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

ANCA JARMILA GUȚĂ [*]

ABSTRACT: *The paper presents how social media has led to an important transformation of the way of communication and interaction through social platforms, allowing citizens to develop communication communities that significantly influence the activity within public institutions that are part of the public administration. The paper aims to synthesize some peculiarities of the concept of e-communication from the perspective of several researchers in the field, but also the main features regarding the functionality of social media platforms from a historical perspective and up to the present moment. The importance of integrating various forms of social media into the field of public administration is unquestionable in the current context of e-communication.*

KEY WORDS: *public administration, social media, Internet, digital technologies, connectivity, social roles.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *M16, H23.*

1. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid expansion of the Internet and social platforms, the communication activity of organizations has, in an overwhelming proportion, passed into the online environment. The traditional, static and passive site is no longer enough for organizations' publics. Since the beginning of the 21st century, social networks have become increasingly popular. The new communication platforms stand out through the new valences of user-generated content, the accessible and easy-to-use way, but also through interoperability. The new online communication platforms for the Web 2.0 generation are moving from the read-only concept to the new read-write model, in which each user can be, one at a time, both receiver and author.

Social media has transformed the way we interact and communicate globally. Social networking sites have become very popular and present in everyday life for a very

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[*] *Assoc. Prof., Ph.D., University of Petrosani, Romania, gancajarmila@yahoo.com, gancajarmila@gmail.com*

large number of people. They have already created a significant impact on individual life, becoming a component of everyday existence.

Social networks have become part of communication and positioning strategies for organizations that aim to achieve goals in this regard. The constant expansion of social networks creates an increasing impact on organizations, social media becoming, day by day, a means of information, but also an environment for building and confronting opinions. Social networks open up new perspectives of business, communication, creating a new position in the public environment, or changes in consumer behavior.

Contemporary literature abounds in expressions such as "we live in a connected world", a "connected era", a "human network" and a "web society". That is why the rapid expansion of social networks and their enthusiastic reception by the public in everyday life seem to promise an imminent revitalization of democratic processes, social networks allowing people to gather and develop communication communities in a virtual public sphere.

The fact that new media allow citizens, employees and consumers to be better informed, to have more direct communication and to participate in decision-making in institutions should, in principle, strengthen democracy. On the other hand, because technology is likely to control from above, democracy could be threatened.

The participatory society of our millennium is a society of interconnected publics – networked publics, in which the key concepts that infrastructure the economic and socio-cultural functioning are represented by internetcentrism, collective intelligence, peer production.

Digital technologies have generated new ways for people to communicate, manage social relationships, and address friendship, love, work, entertainment, health, and social inclusion. learning, politics and citizenship. This new approach brings challenges in terms of text design, social interaction, and even the nature of the language used in the digital environment.

The availability of digital means ensures the development of texts that challenge analytical paradigms based primarily on written or verbal communication. The interactive space of written communication, such as blogs and websites, social networks, makes possible the manifestation of various forms of communication and social interaction, combining face-to-face conversation with traditional written texts, but also with various semiotic systems.

The technological development and the emergence of new communication media in the Internet era "allowed direct communication to citizens, and in the Web 2.0 era with citizens," which led to a radical transformation of the way organizations relate to their audience, as highlighted by Rodica Săvulescu and Alexandra Viţelar (2012): "with the advent of new media, especially social networks, information consumption has changed its patterns, in the sense that today people demand more than traditional media can provide: accessible information, instant news delivery, authenticity and personalization of speech, possibilities for interaction and feedback."

2. SOCIAL MEDIA AS A MEANS OF E-COMMUNICATION, CONCEPT AND FUNCTIONING CHARACTERISTICS

The growth of connectivity in the network society has both social and technological characteristics, the social change being the widespread expansion of social relations in modern society, with an increasing number of weak and strong long-distance connections, while technological changes are represented by the improvement of transport, the increase in the number and coverage of the media and the explosion of the use of telephony and email. The main consequence of these increasingly direct relationships is the creation of a connected world that becomes more organized, more unitary and more coherent. Both technology and new communication models have led to a progressive shift toward new paradigms, which highlight the views of different audiences, thus favoring new ways of managing relationships, focused on social media values.

Social media has changed the way organizations communicate, both internally and externally. Since the beginnings of social media, organizations have been in a workplace training environment, learning to navigate the changing landscape of technology and strategic communication, public relations practitioners were among the first to adopt social media technologies and use them to achieve organizational goals. Understanding the role of social media in an open system of public relations can help practitioners identify functions that can contribute to an open systemic approach to public relations and ultimately to the survival of an organization.

Through their presence on the Internet, people learn to communicate, faster and better, their personal and professional concerns, traditions and customs are constantly changing: "Virtual communities" are established, based on common benefits or contact and collaboration between organizations are facilitated; create contacts with multiple people - individually or in groups - in an easy way and new channels of collaboration can be developed; access to information is made differently, and it is important that it is received quickly, in different forms and from multiple sources.

Amy Reitz (2012) mentions that McQuail (1983) identified four reasons why people generally use media: Getting information, creating personal identity, social integration and interaction, and entertainment. The researchers began to carefully analyze various reasons why individuals use social media and suggested the following reasons: Searching for information, building social capital, communicating with others, connecting with others, tracking other people's activities, engaging in social networks. they concluded that social media strengthens links, both between users and between users and organizations. Social media is an "open platform, like a fusion of sociology and technology, changing communication from monologue (one to many) to dialog (to each other) and turning people from content readers into publishers."

Social networks have changed the nature of everyday communication, providing a platform for both individuals and organizations to engage in a dynamic, synchronized and multidimensional dialog that represents diverse voices. Among the most important ways organizations engage social media to fulfill their mission are: Internal and management communications, promoting social responsibility of organizations, crisis communication, public relations, and building brand communities and brand loyalty.

Social media can perform several functions for the organization-public relations system, and knowing these functions can allow the system to adapt to its external environment, which can ultimately contribute to the survival of the organization. Organisations can benefit from public participation in this new environment. For example, user comments can contribute to product development through suggestions, opinions and preferences that may have the power to overcome the product/development in traditional models.

Social media can be considered a space that facilitates communication between citizens and politicians, authorities, or a place where issues can be discussed or opinions shared to a much higher degree than conventional means of communication. In other words, social media could become an important arena for debating public issues, a space where the voice of the public can be "heard" and politicians and authorities can present themselves in a transparent way. Social media is also a space where politicians inform and mobilize voters, in order to directly increase electoral chances. Social media are not just information sites or action sites, but also one and the other, briefly platforms for information exchange and direct communication links. The development of Web 2.0 has generated public services such as social sites, blogs, content sharing within virtual communities, and even a host of virtual worlds that contribute to the continuous development of the domain. The social media space has become ubiquitous due to reliability, stability and instant character, and plays an essential role in communication strategies. Social media allows organizations to share information, ideas, opinions and communicate online with current and potential audiences. Social media users differ in many ways, and for this reason, the purposes for which they use social media are also different. Some use social networks to communicate with others, others for entertainment, and others to express their political ideas and opinions, social networking takes place "in a space analogous to a mall and not in one associated with the romantic notion of Agora or even the intimate space of a home or social club."

Social media provides organization members with communication channels to exchange information with each other and with different stakeholders, and also in the age of globalized media, social media provides organizations with dialog communication and an ideal forum to reach transnational audiences. At the same time, social media is, for organizations, an interactive and participatory tool, perfectly integrated in strategic communication, which allows them to become social learning systems internally and externally. Online communication strategies focused on five fundamental principles – information, connectivity, participation, mobilization, interactivity – were discussed by foreign researchers in the field of organizational communication and by Romanian researchers.

Information. In recent years, researchers have criticized communication on the website because of its unidirectional character, considering that the presence of actors in the online space is aimed, in the long term, at developing relationships rather than presenting content in one form or another. Politicians' websites in particular have been criticized for the failure to function only as a one-way communication channel, designed as if to inform and convince website visitors about their policies. Information is therefore seen as a key function, consistent with Web 1.0 communication, through which information can be provided that can help organizations achieve their goals. Regarding online information, expectations are not aimed at reducing the amount of information

given the tendency to provide, on the contrary, a very large volume (big data, megadonnees), but at presenting it in a way that is as attractive and easy to assimilate as possible.

Connectivity, which is originally a hardware term, refers to the socio-technical capabilities of online communication platforms to connect content to the activities of users and advertisers. In particular, the communication platform always mediates the activities of users and defines how connections are formed, even where users can exert considerable influence on the content. Connectivity also emphasizes the mutual formation of users, platforms and, in general, high-performance online environments and can be seen as an advanced strategy for connecting users-content, users-users, communication platforms-users, and platforms-platforms. Van Dijck and Poell (2013) draw attention to the fact that the boundaries between human links and commercial and technological activities are increasingly being violated, exemplified by automated links between users and products in the case of likes on Facebook, which helps advertisers use referral tactics to promote products to "friends", even if users are not aware of their use for these purposes.

Participation refers to features that encourage visitors to participate in a range of interactions, including viewing content, accessing links, sharing information and promoting links through social networks, and Web 2.0 introduces significant differences in understanding these terms. Participation can be linked to the notion of adhesion and involves some features that make the site an experiential, attractive and valuable tool. Websites have become more technologically advanced precisely to become more attractive to visitors. Various audiovisual elements, such as videos, images, sounds and music, graphics and animation, can be presented to provide more entertainment, even though they can also act as a distraction from the content.

Mobilization involves active participation of users, as activists or supporters in actions such as fundraising, sports or political demonstrations, support for various initiatives and proposals. Mobilization is a key function, especially in the case of political websites, where mobilization is directly proportional to the size of the party, its experience and its ideology.

Interactivity is a concept placed at the center of discussions about Web 2.0 applications. The concept was defined by O'Reilly in 2005 as the "architecture of participation". Interactive elements can be defined as elements that allow visitors to interact with the host or other visitors. While in the Web 1.0 era there were reduced elements of interactivity, the Web 2.0 era provides a richer experience for visitors and potentiates conversation between host and visitor, as well as between visitors, so that ideas and opinions can be discussed directly through blogs, forums and social networking sites. O'Reilly (2005) describes Web 2.0 by mentioning six trends: Programs that become platforms, leader awareness, insider data, user content integration, ubiquitous and dynamic conditions, independent search engines. In this regard, social media, compared to previous web applications, allows for fast mass creation and interactive exchange of user-generated content.

In contemporary society, different social roles tend to converge in different social spaces, with the boundaries between public and private life, as well as between work and home becoming blurred. This means that social media like Facebook are social

spaces where roles tend to get closer and become integrated into unique profiles. The interest in studying the use of social networks, manifested on a large scale, is due, first of all, to the novelty, but also to the impact and the rapid expansion of networks and blogs such as Facebook, Twitter, networks that tend to change the way social interaction is done. More and more organizations are becoming aware that social networks are a very important communication channel, and even one that is about to become essential. A study conducted by Alexandra-Petronela Grigore (Isbasoiu) (2015) revealed that "over 60% of the time allocated to online presence by Internet users is dedicated to social networks, for an important segment of them the time allocated to online presence is synonymous with the time spent on Facebook".

While initially the Internet contained a static collection of documents – "read-only web", to a large extent – the era of Web 2.0 offers, instead, a wide range of possibilities to generate content and collective intelligence. Some authors consider this change so important that they call it a "digital revolution" or a "paradigm shift". Recently, researchers propose articulating the structural and strategic aspects of social media for an integrated managerial and PR approach. Anne Linke and Ansgar Zerfass (2013) observed that of the total organizations participating in a study conducted in Germany in 2012, 53.1% had already established specialized departments for the coordination and conduct of social media communication activities; 32.0% used social media spontaneously and experimentally, 22.9% treated social media activities independently of the other activities of the organization, 18.5% were not very clearly defined, 14.7% had interdisciplinary teams or management members with responsibilities in managing their activities on social media, 14.2% had separate structures for social media activities, 11.1% had specialized teams and support provided by consultants, and in 4.2% of the total participating organizations, communication in the social media space is strictly regulated. Only 2.9% of organizations said that each employee is free to act autonomously, independently of hierarchy or department.

3. CONCLUSIONS

In 2023, we can already say that we are witnessing the unfolding of a vast revolution in communication, a transformation that affects companies, organizations, but also public institutions, as well. where the consumer/citizen has become a communicator. Every citizen with a Facebook or Twitter account can publicly interpate an institution or company, asking questions, criticizing or asking for explanations, imposing a radical change in the way organizations communicate. "The one-way approach like we're talking, and you, the consumer, are listening, it's no longer working." this requires a new approach to communication, based on interactivity elements, i.e. those elements that "allow visitors to interact in some way with the host or other visitors".

The use of advanced digital technologies transforms organizations, both public and private, into type 2.0 organizations whose principles are openness, collaboration, distribution and global action. The role and functions of social networks have been explained through correlation: Knowledge, communication, cooperation. A first theory of social integration considers that social networks allow the convergence of the three

elements, knowledge, communication and cooperation, through a process of social integration, which means, for example, that on Facebook, a person can create multimedia content that he publishes, so that other people can comment, manipulate new content and remix it, creating new material with multiple authors. Another theory of role integration believes that social media, such as Facebook, is based on the creation of personal profiles that describe different roles of a human being.

With regard to social change, there are some clear advantages to communication through social networks. Different roles and social activities tend to converge, for example, to the situation where a job is the same as a playground. The communication process combines the multimedia network with the social processes around it.

The integration of different forms of social and social roles requires the existence of a multitude of functions that social networks already have. In addition to successful integration into the social media space, organizations should avoid the following dangers: The absence of adequate strategic planning; similar use of all platforms (by duplicating content); the choice of instruments not suitable for a specific customer; creating content that is primarily focused on your own organization, without the intention of sharing or collaborating with other organizations. Even though the future of social media in the functioning of organizations and the expansion of public relations is an indisputable reality, researchers do not forget to mention the importance of rhetoric, narrative, and the importance of social media. the future of social media is represented by their conception as tools capable of solving problems and mobilizing audiences on important issues "the future of social media and public relations is a future of stepping past the technologies as marketing and advertising tools and bringing them together as tools capable of solving problems and engaging publics in real- world issues."

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