

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE COMMUNICATION IN PUBLIC SECTOR ADMINISTRATION IN ROMANIA**

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### **Abstract**

*Social networks first came to revolutionize communication in the private sector, that will soon become a necessity in the public domain, due to the need for increased information and interaction of citizens. So, in a few years from the occurrence of this phenomenon, we can talk today about a new paradigm of communication. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Youtube, blogs and many other diverse digital channels, represent key tools in public institutions communication with citizens. A strategic approach, well defined, concrete actions and initiating programs using social networks that can greatly enhance the work of public institutions in Romania and beyond. This article aim is to present the status of social networks usage in public administration institutions in Romania, but also the benefits of this new form of online communication for institutions and their citizens.*

**Key words:** *social media, public administration, e-administration, online communication.*

**JEL classification:** *D83, H83.*

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### **1. Introduction**

The online environment is constantly expanding and evolving and institutions participating in this kind of communication with practice and dedication, can make them a true model of online communication.

Communication via social networks has become a natural extension of traditional communication for public sector institutions today, and official due to the institutional responsibility to submit information but considering the rules and techniques of a new, and different type of communication.

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In recent years the European Union has spent more than 190 million euros to fund various projects to encourage civic participation through online environment. Although, according to Business Insider, Europeans use more social networks than Americans (in Italy, 77 % of the population spends more than 30 minutes each day on social media) and these networks can mean an easy way to transmit useful information for citizens, to interact with them, but public institutions do not always know the correct ways that can be effectively use for online communication environments.

Benefits of using social networks for both institutions and citizens alike are multiple and of medium and long term, but important is how the administration chooses to achieve communication objectives and strategy of such online communications. However this act involves major organizational changes because of the speed of change in terms of functionality and social networking applications, involving rapid adaptation, so the organization is forced to conduct an adequate and effective communication model. There are some risks not only benefits, such as internal rules on communication and change their rigidity, lack of human resource to achieve and monitor this type of communication, constant interaction with the public.

## **2. Social networks: concept and evolution**

Definitions of social media are numerous, according to the benefits that each of them brings to its users so that they can be regarded as a social interaction, dialogue and even interactive marketing tool.

Real-time interaction occurs between people who can be in any part of the Earth, which increases the intrinsic value of such a group.

So we can say that there are several types of social media:

Facebook and LinkedIn are the most popular when it comes to interests and common needs;

Blogs and Forums - communication between users is done by posting messages dedicated to the main theme of the discussion forum or the main message expressed in the blog.

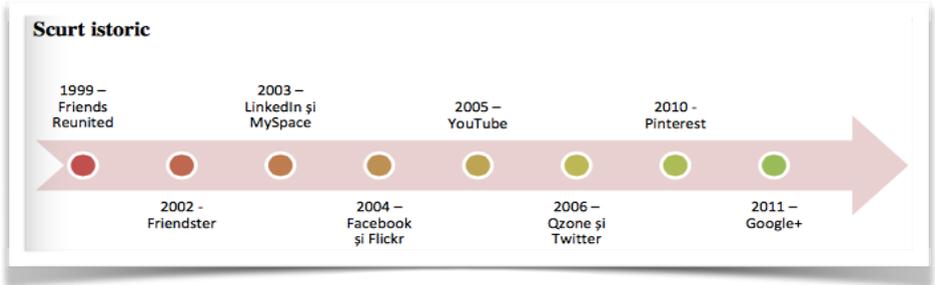
Microblogs - is a type of blog through which users can publish short updates; Twitter is the most popular platform of this kind.

YouTube and Flickr - users can download, share, watch or listen to media content (music, movies, photos), while having the opportunity to assess or comment on the material.

Bookmarking sites, etc.

History shows social networks, the timeline, the emergence of Facebook's first in 2004, followed in 2005 by YouTube, Twitter and much later, in 2011, Google +.

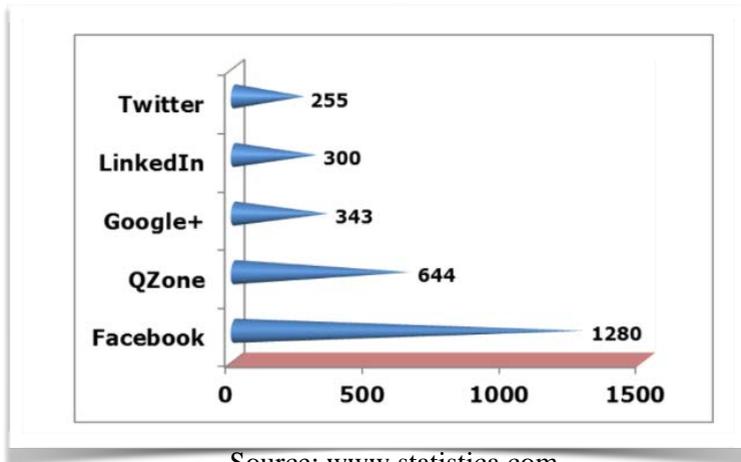
**Figure 1: Social media hystoric**



Source: <http://www.agenda21.org.ro/download/Suport%20de%20curs%20pentru%20functionarii%20publici%20Transparenta%20si%20calitate%20in%20administratia%20publica%20prin%20social%20media.pdf>

Facebook ranks I when it comes to frequency of use, followed by Qzone, Google+, LinkedIn and Twitter.

**Figure 2: Social networks with the highest number of active users**



Source: [www.statistica.com](http://www.statistica.com)

### 3. Social networks and their importance to public sector institutions in Romania

#### 3.1. Social networks and global communication

Social networking is an important dimension of global communication through digital technologies and the latest statistics show that a significant number of the population is active in social media. Moreover, most social networks continues to grow, while other social networks are developed constantly.



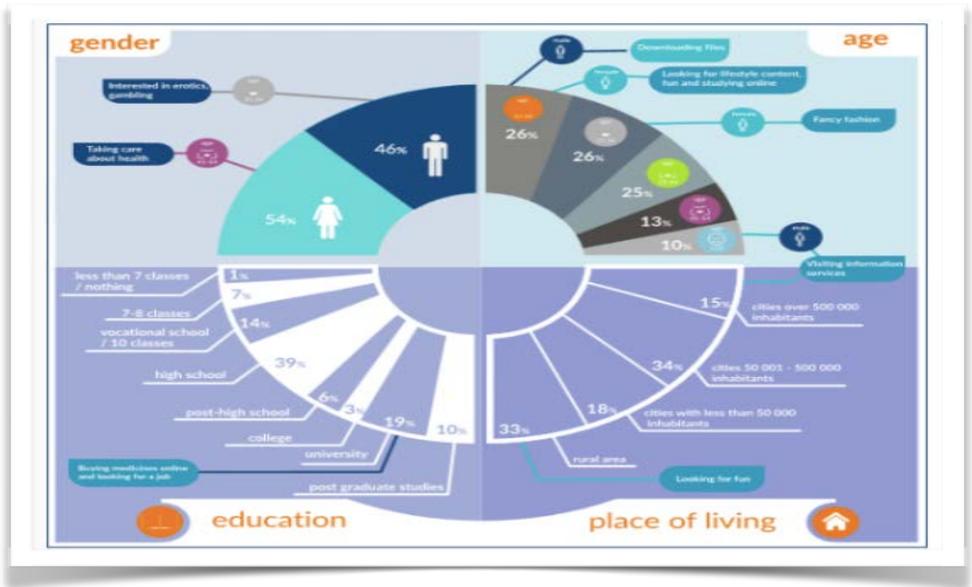
**Figure 3: Social networks evolution**

Source: <http://www.digifloor.com/social-media-marketing-as-cogent-marketing-tool-21>

According to a study by the Online Landscape: South East Europe in June 2014, Romania is the largest country in South East Europe on the number of internet users. 54 % of Romanians have access to the internet and from the point of view of the dynamics of the number of Internet users in recent years, the tendency is increasing rapidly.

Profile of internet users in Romania show that 33 % come from rural areas and 34% in urban areas; 39% from high school and 19 % have university studies.

Figure 4: Profile of internet users in Romania



Source: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz2vzkOQH8T9QW4zTThqZzdrS0E/view?pli=1>

The well known sites in Romania, according to the same report, are Google, Facebook and Yahoo each with 86 %, 80 % and 73 % of total users.

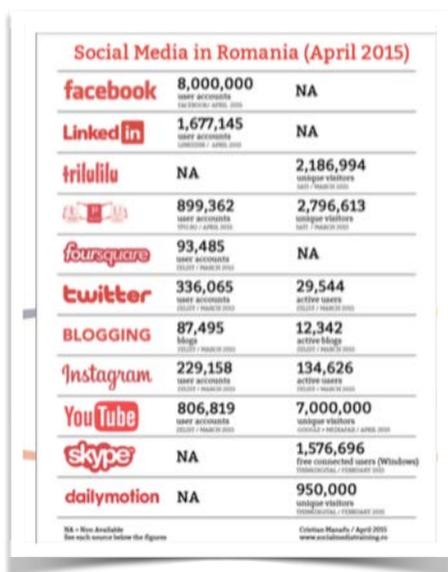
Figure 5: Popular sites in Romania

	Top 10 commercial publishing websites	Real Users <sup>6</sup>	Reach
1	google.ro/.com	7 546 211	86%
2	facebook.com	7 022 396	80%
3	yahoo.com	6 405 519	73%

Source: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz2vzkOQH8T9QW4zTThqZzdrS0E/view?pli=1>

The presence and activity of public institutions in Romania on social networks has been extensively discussed in meetings with experts. Currently, the majority of central government institutions in social media, on at least one social network, and Facebook has emerged to be by far the favorite social network for institutions.

**Figure 6: Social Media and Public administration in Romania**



Source:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz2vzkOQH8T9QW4zTThqZzdrS0E/view?pli=1>

### 3.2. Legislative and online presence of public institutions in Romania

In conjunction with the review of studies and examples of good practice internationally, the national context must adapt to Internet penetration and different levels of web development of Romanian public institutions, both at central and local levels.

So, according to the latest data published in March 2015 by the Romanian Audit Bureau, 68% of the active population of Romania, between 14 and 64 years (about 10.3 million people) use the Internet. Although the percentage in urban areas, over 75% is not surprising, the same study revealed

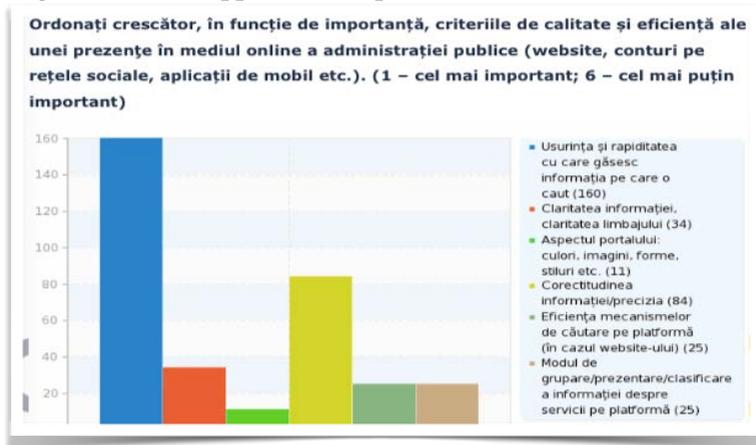
that over half (59%) of the population of 14-64 years in rural area (approx. 3.7 million people) and it uses the internet including mobile access.

Although in terms of purpose of use, entertainment prevails for those in rural areas, compared with the need to save time and easy access to services to those in urban areas, this could change rapidly in the coming years.

The high degree of Internet penetration in Romania, the percentages higher for accessing it from mobile platforms and the growing interest of the population for digital services, access to useful and transparent information represent important elements in public administration, which is forced to keep pace with these developments. Preferably as a proactive approach, anticipating these trends and applying a structural review of this web of all public institutions.

Thus, the results of the survey conducted by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, entitled *Preparing National System e-Administration in Romania*, shows that the majority of respondents, when referring to this public administration in the online environment, including in the social networks, appreciate the easy way and speed with which they find the information sought, and second in respondents' preferences, but a pretty big difference of the percentages, is the correctness of the information presented.

**Figure 7: Online appearance of public administration in Romania**



Source: <http://www.e-administratie.forhe.ro/rezultate-obtinate>

In terms of legislation, the principal rules and bills governing the web presence of public institutions in Romania are:

Law 544/2001 which provides free and unrestricted access to any information of public interest, each having authority or public office shall communicate certain information public.

Law 161/2003 indicating types of digital services that can be provided to individuals or legal entities, while ensuring transparency in the exercise of public duties.

National Strategy on the Digital Agenda for Romania (adopted by the Government on April 7, 2015), which comprises four main areas of action, the first "e-Government, Interoperability, Cyber Security, Cloud Computing, Open Data, Big Data and Social Media" to increase efficiency and reduce costs in the public sector in Romania by modernizing the administration.

Although there are, as you can see, legislation, after a careful evaluation of the current situation of the online presence of public institutions in Romania, it appears that projects do not show the same clarity, for which it takes uniformity of their structure, design, and navigation mode for easy accessibility and tracking public message.

### ***3.3. The benefits of using social media in public administration***

In this article, the authors considered it important to list some of the principles underlying the concept *Government 2.0* on the benefits that social networks have on carrying out the activity of public administration:

- Online commitment to collaboration and consultation which involves changing mindsets, creating a culture online in their own institution and leadership;

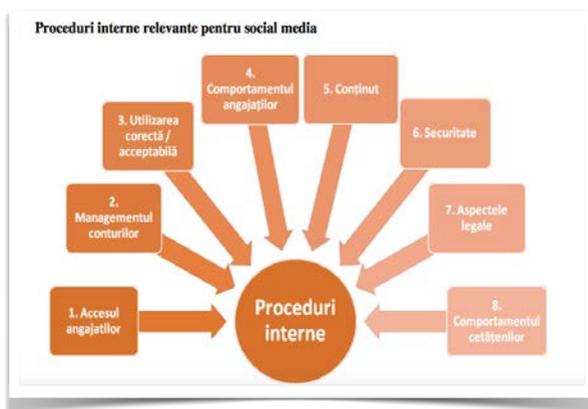
- Openness, which means that the administration must build a bridge between it and citizens, to be ready to engage and consult them. Although the Romanian Government signed since April 2012 a memorandum of accession to the Partnership for open government, hitherto strategy drafted by the government is limited, mainly due to budgetary constraints, a set of good intentions, as proposed in the Digital Agenda target projects large (Cloud technologies) that involve very high costs;

- it facilitate citizen participation in decision making. New technologies, the huge amount of information available online, the ability of citizens and groups to come together can lead to joint services. Social media tools provide flexibility and capacity of public institutions to acquire and

distribute information quickly. Through social media, public administration can achieve the following benefits:

- increase interactivity in government relations with citizens, partners and stakeholders;
- increasing the speed of information dissemination to the public and receiving feedback
- adjustment or reorientation rapid communication module, when necessary, especially in crisis situations where rapid communication is required;
- improving the image of the institution or public authority;
- increasing the credibility of public institutions, and government in general, by distancing the official media channels;
- public authorities and institutions to improve access to their specific audience and communication specialist with the various beneficiaries of public services;
- it reduce dependence on traditional media administration and increased ability to counter inaccurate information provided through them.

**Figure 7: Internal procedures of public institutions for social media**



Source: <http://www.agenda21.org.ro/download/Suport%20de%20curs%20pentru%20functionarii%20publici%20Transparenta%20si%20calitate%20in%20administratia%20publica%20prin%20social%20media.pdf>

Summarizing, we can say that the main benefits identified effective use of social media such as rapid transmission of information; facilitating a dialogue between institution - citizen; monitoring events and identifying opinion leaders; create communities around a theme; lower cost than traditional media channels.

One of the most controversial topics of discussion included in the survey conducted for the general public, has been linked insofar as the online communication is and should be considered official by both institutions and the general public.

All these sensitive issues when it comes to online communication in any institution with citizens involves the internal procedures adaptation, that must be respected in order to implement a fair social networks. So as you can see in the picture below, the first aspect to be considered is the institution employees' access to the platform, followed by account management, correct use of information etc. As important as security, are legal issues and behavior.

Equally important, public institutions are the selection criteria for social media channels and types of content to be published on them. When choosing suitable platform, the institution will consider the type of content that is to be published, the purpose for which you wish publication of the message or purpose of the campaign, which is the number of users covered, forming a target group for the issue debated, and not Finally will be analyzed institution has the resources available for the creation and efficient use of the platform.

**Figure 8: Creating a platform for social media**



Source: <http://www.agenda21.org.ro/download/Suport%20de%20curs%20pentru%20functionarii%20publici%20Transparenta%20si%20calitate%20in%20administratia%20publica%20prin%20social%20media.pdf>

As was already pointed out, the type of content should be chosen with care and can be written, video or visual.

- Content writing: This is the most flexible type of content that can adapt to any network requirements can be broken easily can be created links to it, it is easily optimized for mobile devices.

- Video content: Video content is no longer just the preserve of the entertainment industry and news agencies. Corporations use it to send messages to educate consumers or as employees, non -profit organizations and public use to attract public attention on relevant topics that should be conscious.

- Visual Content: This includes images, photographs, infographics. Visual content combine very well with the writing, providing supportive message.

#### **4. Legislative projects and results in order to implement national e-Administration system in Romania**

In the month of January 2015 the European Commission published a series of reports containing information about activities *eGovernment* strategy in those countries as well as e-Government, relevant legislation, the main institutions responsible for infrastructure or services required by citizens using online environment. After a synthesis report conducted within the European project conducted by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation, entitled Preparing National System e-Administration in Romania, has revealed some interesting findings regarding Romania's situation, issues which we considered of interest to this research:

- 61% of households in Romania have Internet access compared to an EU average of 75%

- only 10% of citizens interacted online with public institutions in 2014 compared to 45% as is the European average

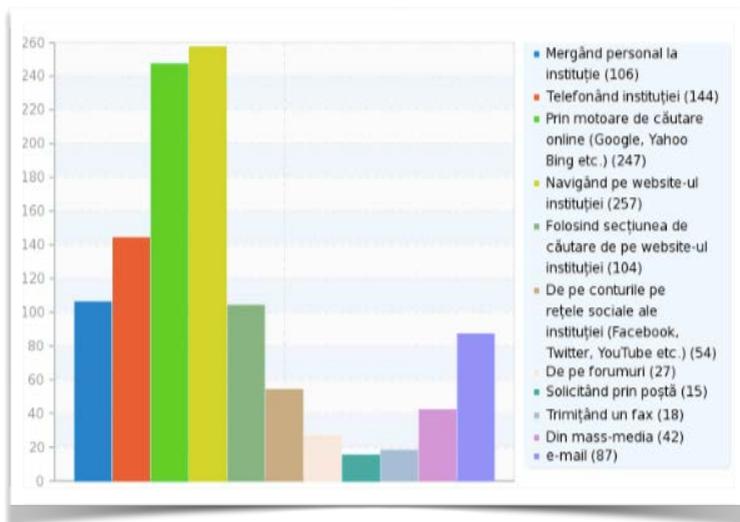
- only 9% of citizens use the Internet to obtain information from public institutions compared to the European average of 45%

The project was carried out a questionnaire on the platform U.E.F.I.S.C.D.I. order to present a public asset in the online environment on this web Romanian institutions, questionnaires that were answered by a total of 342 citizens in the period 21 March to 21 April 2015.

The answers showed that the institution's website is the main information point for citizens, and those who access the websites of

institutions mainly seeking information for contacts, information about the work and management of the institution, but also for online services.

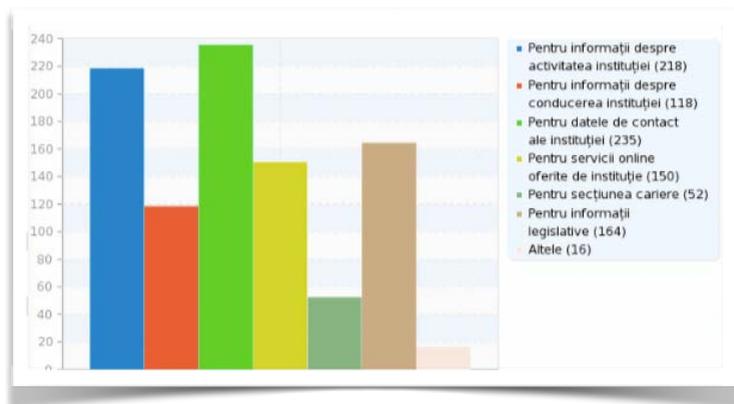
**Figure 9: The way to get information by citizen**



Source: <http://www.e-administratie.forhe.ro/rezultate-obtinate>

Although according to the results obtained from the questionnaire, most citizens access the websites of institutions to obtain contact information or the institution's activity, activity on social networks involves not only promoting messages or actions of the institution, but also answers the institution messages of citizens and involvement in discussions of common interest, thus creating a bridge with the community.

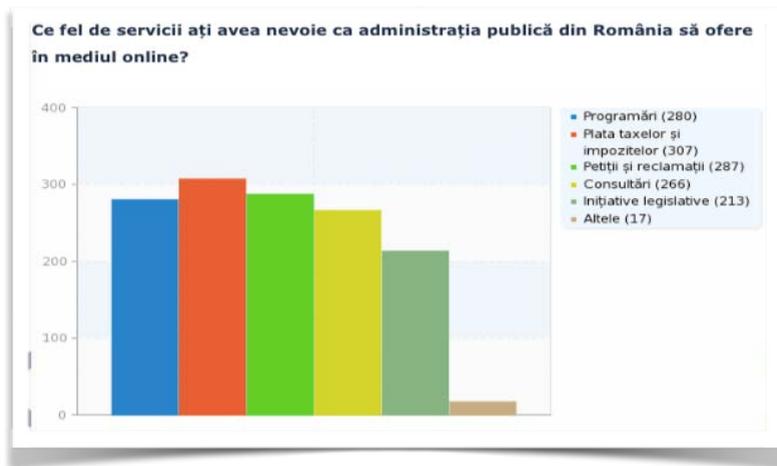
Figure 10: Why citizens access the website of the institution



Source: <http://www.e-administratie.forhe.ro/rezultate-obtinate>

In this way, the prevailing opinion today, affirming that public institutions are not interested in concrete problems of citizens, could be eliminated.

Also in early 2015 the European Commission published the findings of a new index of digital economy and society. The report provides snapshots for each country, of connectivity (how to use, fast and affordable are broadband connections) of competence in the use of the Internet, the take up activities online, from reading news from buying products, in development of key digital technologies (electronic invoices, cloud services, e-commerce) and digital public services, such as online administrative services (e-government) and e-health services. Most of the data used relate to the years 2013 and 2014 and provides an overview of the level of digitalization of Europe, including a ranking of countries with the best results in the field.



**Figure 11: The services offered by public institutions through online channels**

Source: <http://www.e-administratie.forhe.ro/rezultate-obtinate>

## Conclusions

A unified system to adjust relationship that public institutions have with citizens through online media would contribute to reducing disparities between how they communicate at the central structures subordinate local administration, etc. and it allows creating websites performance of institutions that also have an adapted version for mobile devices and the ability to support different web applications.

In terms of audience, a key factor in this discussion, such a structure would enhance the browsing experience online, with direct effect on increasing confidence in public administration. As about social networks, most experts were of the opinion that public institutions should be active on social networks. Such a presence making communication with citizens, becoming interactive and bidirectional.

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