PUBLIC ADMINSTRATION AND THE NEW MEDIA

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Abstract: *The public administration institutions from Romania tend to use more and more the new media in their communication with the citizens and the other categories of public that they serve. This work represents a radiography of the way and measure in which the public organizations use the instruments of communication specific to the informational society. Among the most important new media used by the local and central public administrative institutions, are the websites, social communication internet pages, like Facebook, the blog, as also the Internet and Intranet.*

Key words: *electronic services portal, Facebook, Internet, Intranet, new media, public administration, website.*

Nowadays, more than ever, to fulfill their mission and objectives, the public administration institutions must permanently communicate and be open to the dialogue with all types of public interested in their activity. In these communications, information of public utility is being transmitted firstly to the citizens, who represent the most important audience outside the public organization. Citizens are the ones who justify the existence of the institution, since they are the major beneficiaries of the administrative act and partners of the public administration.

The communicational effort of the institution must be also headed for the social actors with which the public organization collaborates for the well being of the community, more specific with the undertakers, non-profit organizations, associations and organizations of the civil society, parties and political organizations.

The communication of the administrative organizations, local and central, now not limited to the activity of public informing. Now, these organizations are expected to participate in the life of the communities, to get involved in solving their problems, to anticipate the tendencies of social evolution. As a result of the new perspective, the public institutions are obliged to get close to their social partners, to know their needs and wishes, to meet them with initiatives and projects.

In such context, the new media are the essential instrument through which the institutions from the public sector can accomplish the new goals and provocations that lie in front of them.

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The new media are communication media specific of the times we live in, of the informational society and they are the result of the convergence of three domains: information technology, communication technology and multimedia production. As written in „The dictionary of journalism, public relations and publicity", the new media are in direct connection with the implementation, at a quasi-planetary scale, of the telecommunication satellites and of the computer. The mobile phone, PC-s, optic fiber, television, and radio directly from satellite, high definition television, CD-ROM, teletext, videotext, on-line, they are a series of technological realities that compose the new media. In conclusion, the new media are the means of modern communication. In the present, the most important new media are: the Internet, the Intranet and social media.

The Internet is a computer network that embraces the whole world, inter-connected using certain rules of communication [2]. The applications of the Internet are various, firstly, the discovery of text, image or sound form informations, then we have the electronic mail, the folder transfer, the chat, phone on demand, Internet television, e-commerce, surveys, space for news dispersion, space for all types of graphic and music, the start of a working session at distance, discussion groups on pre-establishes themes, interactive games on network, communication groups, games, banking solutions etc.)

The nowadays Internet network, that has conquered the entire Earth, became possible because of the permanent development of the initial network, Arpanet. Today, on Earth, exists only one Internet, that is enormous; it offers to its users a series of information and services,

as the e-mail, www, FTP, web hosting and others, some of the services being under cost. The term "Internet" needn't be confused with the internet service *World Wide Web* (www); this being a service offered by the Internet.

As written in a release of the ECDL foundation, in 2008, approximately 83 % from the global population didn't use the Internet, and, after a study made by the on – line research institution InternetWorldStats, in November 2007, the rate of entrance of the Internet in Romania had reached the level of 31,4 % from the total number of the population, estimated to 22,27 milion of people, and the number of broadband connections was 1.769.300. Between 2007 - 2011 the number of Internet connections in the Romanian houses had risen from 22 % to 47 %; the numbers,at European level, were 54 % and 73 %.

The Intranet represents the implementation of the Internet technologies in an institution. The Intranet network is for an institution public or private, a solution of facilitation of intern communication [3]. Also, the Intranet can be a mean of feedback for the institution, by which it can be found out the employments opinion, and, not at last, the Intranet can sustain and enforce the organisational culture.

The new media are electronic media. Among them comes the Internet, the Intranet, websites and social media. The social media category comprises the online communication channels in which big communities of participants can collaborate by producing and exchanging text, photography, audio and video material, that are rebroadcasted from one user to another [4]. Through the new media people talk, create information, comment,

interact, vote etc. The most important platforms of social media are: blogs, forums (forum.softpedia.ro, for example), microblogs (Twitter – that was extremely useful in Barack Obama's campaign or in East Europe, in waging the street protests from Chisinau), social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, hi5 etc.), Wiki (Wikipedia etc.), favorite sites (StumbleUpon, Google Reader etc.), multimedia (YouTube, Google Video etc.).

In the present, we are considered to live a social media revolution, camparable, in therms of development and effects, with the Industrial Revolution, but this time, being faster [5]. The reader becomes a producer of information, in a new public space, where our perception of reality are radicaly modified, the inter-human relationships begin a new phase, of multidimensinal communication, and the social interactions are being made in a virtual world, that overlaps the real one and hides it.

The social media generation consider old the e-mail. An example for this thinking is the announce, by which, in 2009, Boston College was forbidding the future students to send informations by mail.

It is interesting to observe that the social media platforms in Romania have a three times bigger traffic than the newspaper sites („Cancan" şi „Libertatea", number one in the top of print sites) or even than the news television sites (realitatea.net), fact that determined the authors of the study IAB Europe, made in 2010, to sustain : "The romanian users are pasionate about socail media, they like to make new friends and to have fun. This explains the real success of the social networks in Romania".

The Internet revolutionised the public relationships. Its users are now editors, critics and even media itself. They detain control, and their opinions generate changes of acting. Many of them have a big influence upon the things they buy, think, or do. For the first time in the history of comunication, everytone has a voice, and each voice matters. By using social media, this voice can be extremely powerfull and can force individuals, institutions or comunities to change their way of behaving. What an enployer says, or any other person, can be more trustfull than the opinion of a larger number of persons. The individual voice on Facebook, Twitter and blogging is more important than any other kind of voice of the public.

The PR agents must now reivent and rethink their way of comunication in social media. From soliloquizing to carrying conversations. In social media does not exist anymore a market prepared to receive the message, does not exist enymore a public that expects a message. People now have access to a such various content and have so many ways of collecting information, that they needn't control the conversation in social media and needn't rise their voice to get listened. All you can do is to enter in conversation with the public, to find out what it needs and to offer it that thing from point of view of the comunication.

The professional in public relationships must position himself as a vector of creating and dispersing the discussions. He must concentrate on the dialogue with all interested in the organization and not to assalt them with messages.

Also, the comunication in social media must not take place at an interpersonal level.A mistake frequently met in Romania, and not only, is that the organizations decide to talk to the clients

from institutional positions.You cannot become friends with an institution! The organization must pe represented by an employer whom, by his actions,can personalise the comunication.

The public administration from Romania has gradually adapted to the new technology of communication. Especially during the last years, the amount of new media in the totality of communication has incresead significantly in the public sector. If, 5-6 years ago, as a result and according to Law no. 52 contents in 2003 regarding the decisional transparency in public administration, it was normal that a city hall or a county council, to have it's own site, now this being a normal fact that such kind of institution to use Facebook to maintain the contact with the citizens. And more, some public institutions have created their own web portals for electronic services for citizens.

The leading factors of the administrative organisations have quickly understood the advantages of using the new ways of communication [6]. As for that, for the public institution the new media permit:
- the wide access to big amounts of information;
- the possibility to maneuvre a big volume of dates;
- good conditions for assuering the institutional transparency;
- creating distance activities.

For the citizens, the use of the ways of communication of the informational society by the public administration, mean:
- a better and wider information about the activity of the administrative institution;
- a tight and permanent relationship with these instistions;
- a gain of time and confort, by replacing, in legal and secured conditions, the

tranzactions and the physic interraction between these civil servants.

The most frequently used „new media" by the public administration in Romania are: the websites, the Internet, the Intranet, the Facebook pages and the web portals of electronic services.

The website is the new generation's communication way, which is used by most of the public institutions. The content and the aspect of the sites are different due to the communicational necessities, but also to the financial resources of the institutions that the site represents. Usually, this kind of web page holds: information about the administrative institution (the organigram, the departement structure, the leading stuff, the regulations etc.), information and documents reffering to the organization's activity (financial situations, decisional projects, activity reports, projects etc.), public documents (of urbanism, construction autorizations etc.), the description of the space where the institution is places, photo galleries, and last but not least, news and anouncements.

Some sites, especially of bigger administrative unities, have on their web page a *electronic services portal*. For example, the portal of Brasov's city hall [7] offer from the menu „E-functionar" the next electronic services for the citizens and for the business environement:
- download of forms or deposing documents regarding different claims (release of certificates, of autorizations etc.);
- the consult of the payement obligations and their on line payement with bancking cards;
- the reception of automatic notifications regarding the stade of resolving the demarches;

- signing up for audience, transmitting of petitions and complaints.

Recently, the web portal of the City hall of Brasov was completed, in the section „Interact online", with a map of incidents, facility through which the citizens can point out incident from the public domain of the city (lack of a canal lid, malfunction of public illumination, fallen tree etc.). The map can be viewed by any citizen, even if he is not authentified.

Two problems must be reminded when, the way in which the communicational media are used by the administrative institution, is analised: one, regards the management of the activity on the site and, the other, some aspects of the virtual reality. Once made, a site will have to be permanently updated with data and material. This means that certain people from within the organization will be designated this task. On another hand, it is a well known fact that many websites of institutions, not only those belonging to the public administration, are not official, but only have similar names. That's why the factors responsible for the organizational image must comunicate, to the citizens and other interested public, the correct web adress.

The social network *Facebook* has expanded the degree of closeness and interaction between the public institutions and citizens, has humanised the information, favoring the informal communication betweent the two parties.

Facebook is also in Romania the leader of all times social media platform. The Facebook network had, in 2011, 3.206.440 romanian users. The Romanian Facebook users have ages between 18- 24 years, (33,7%), 25-34 years (30,8%), 13-17 years (16,3%), 35-44 years (12,8%), 45-54 years (3,8%) şi 55-64 years (1,8%). Persons over 65 years represent 0,8% from the total number of romanian Facebook users.It is interesting to remark the fact that in November 2009, Facebook had 420.000 users in Romania. After only two years, the number reached 3.206.440 users.[8]

More and more administrative organizations of Romania use this particular social network. Facebook is used by commune city hall, like the one of Dragus (county Brasov) and has over... 2000 friends! The material, the commentaries, the likes and tens of photographs from the events of the commune (The Day of the commune, „Sufletul satului" Fest etc.) posted on the electronic page of the network represents just as many ways of coagulation of the community. Also, the facebook page of the town of Brasov, launched in may 2013 [9], contains mostly information on the activity of the City Hall, on the cultural events organised in the town by the city hall or by partners, photographs from Brasov or from these events and other useful information [10]. But not only the City Halls are connected to Facebook, other institutions of local and central administration are, as well. Refering still to the county of Brasov, the County Council Brasov can also be found on facebook [11], page which on the 16th of may 2013 registered 3319 friends. On the county administrative institutions's facebook page can be found, along with news and information, photographs that surprise moments from the activity of the instutions and its administration and audio-video material prom press conferences.

The Romanian Government hasn't remained behind either, having a very well done page [12], starting with February 2013, with links to the page and account on Twitter of the institution and premier Victor Ponta. „We wish that this would be

the place in which we present you the most important decisions of Government of Romania, to discuss them constructively, toghether" are the word posted on the page as a motivation of the governmental communicational demarche. The Facebook page of the government contains, among others, news, positions of the prime-minister or other members of the central administrative aparatus regarding the burning matters of the day, reports and photographs from events and travels etc. Facebook users can leave messages and comments, can give likes. On the 16th of may 2013, the romanian Government's facebook page recorded 2895 likes and 293 people „talking about this".

Still, the Facebook social network has the same operating problems as websites: unofficial pages (pages hiding under accounts with similar names) and the necesity of having personnel dedicated to ensure the propper deployment of the socialising activity. From this point of view, at least one person is needed to monitor the traffic on the page, to give answers to the questions, commentaries and critics given by users, to moderate the discussions and even to remove those messages that counter the rules from the user's Guide of the page.

The *Internet*, through the far-reaching resource of information available, is firstly a sourse of data and information for the public administration institution, regardless of their level.

On the internet one can find, using the search engines, precious information for documenting and realisation of social projects. Internet is also a good way of exchanging information between the public institutions [13]. For example, a city hall or the town council could find out, by accessing the decisions of the Local Council,and of the City Council of other city hall or county, how it was rezolved a similar problem. It doesn't have to be forgotten the fact that the universal computer network, named Internet, is being used by the administrative organisations from everywhere as a support for the public information. And, last but not the least, the public servants use frequently the electronic poste assured by the Internet, in their correspondance with the citizens and with their economic and social partners.

The *Intranet* is also extremelly used among the local and central institutions of public administrations in Romania.

For the institutions of public administration, the Intranet can be used for:

- the necesary information for the managerial activities, that favor a faster way of decision taking. So that a town hall can receive faster the necessary information from all directions that belong to it and from any other institution connected to the Intranet network (The County Council, the Sanitary Direction etc.)

- it gives the citizen al the necessary public information (for example, decisions from the County Council etc.)

The advantages of using the Intranet are:
- faster communication;
- an easy network management;
- easier way of getting information;
- free or controled access to the data base of the institution;
- major financial economy.[14]

The intranet technology cand be found, for example, in the City Halls (being interconnected departments and the Center for information for the citizens); it's used by the prefectures (for example, the Prefecture of Valcea, through a program

with European Funds, made an intranet network with the city halls of the county, for a faster and easier communication), and also by the ministers (we'll give as examples the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finances).

A special mention must be made about the financing project of the network „Intranetul statului", that's being worked on since 2011 [15]. Through an urgent ordonance by the Government (OUG nr.117/2011) it was tried the creation of a common infrastructure of electronic communication of the state, destined to the exchange, free of charge and in straight conditions of security, of date and documents in electronic format within and between the authorities and public institutions, but also between the autonomous organisatios and national companies or controled by the state. The communication support will be ensured by elements of infrastructure from the National Society of Radiocommunications (NSR), Teletrans, Transelectrica and Telecomunications, Romanian Railways, and the tehnical integrator will be the Special Telecommunications Service (STS). But on 26th of June 2012, the deputees rejected this urgent ordonance [16] and the project is currently suspended.

Despite the multiple advantages that come with using the new media within the public administration, this is not absolutized. The traditional ways and means of communication of the administrative institutions, namely direct communication, at the counter or the citizens information center, phone communication (through a call center), display of announcements at an motice board of press events (press conference, radio or television shows), will keep their importance and utility, the more so as not everyone uses the Internet. Still, the future belongs to the new media, at least as long as the public administration is asked, in order to be efficient, to maintain a close contact with the citizens.

With the help of the new means of mass comunication, the administrative organization, as any other kind of public organization, can now easily and efficiently fulfill the expectations of a modern public comunication, that resumes to three aspects:
- the experience (the comunication based on activity);
- the existence (public relations);
- the informing (comunication by promoting)[17)].

It remains, for the future, fo us to see how the Romanian, and from everywhere, public administration institutions,will adapt to the transformations that the new media will stand.Studies show that the desktop and the laptop will be abandoned, and the information will be produced and put on-line by mobile telephony.

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