WEB 2.0 IN GOVERNMENTAL AND NGO COMMUNICATION IN EUROPE

EUPRERA Spring Symposium Berlin, Germany | February 17th & 18th, 2012

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Competitive Papers Parallel Sessions
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Creating Engagement Through the Social Web: How an organization from the Portuguese NGO sector made a difference

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NGOs have an important role in the creation of a social conscience and Public Relations (PR) are an essential part of their success. PR contributes to a greater empowerment of citizens, and even more opportunities rise from the digital revolution of online communication.

When we evaluate the Portuguese NGOs sector, it is self-explanatory that these organisations face significant communications and recognition problems, being their efforts in this area not enough for the development of their activities. They seem to think that to assist the poorest and the homeless, to provide medical assistance, to educate for development is enough to be known or recognised (cf. Eiró-Gomes, 2005). With this in mind, it is urgent that they recognize that it isn’t and the lack of a communication strategy to create meaning, identification and understanding is creating barriers to the empowerment and advocacy of stakeholders to their causes.

One of the biggest challenges NGOs in Portugal face relates to the participation of the civil society and the recognition of their activity as something important. And even that we know that meaningful participation cannot occur without communication, unfortunately too many development programs, including community-driven ones, seem to overlook this aspect and, while paying attention to participation, do not pay similar attention to communication, intended as the professional use of dialogic methods and tools to promote change (cf. Mefalopulos, 2008). And if participation is increasingly recognized as a necessary part of sustainable development strategies worldwide (cf. World Bank, 1994), the Portuguese case of NGOs can’t allow to be an exception.

Online Public Relations is a powerful way to empower the community, create participation and a sharing space of mutual understanding, as it “[…] allow (or have the potential to allow) organizations an effective environment through which to create dialogues and communicate directly with publics and stakeholders (without the
mediation of traditional gatekeepers)" (Phillips, Young, 2009, p. 7). This potential opens new opportunity for NGOs in the development of communication strategies that can share common values that both can advocate. We argue that common values in the sharing space can be created by what we call attraction poles, that have the ability to connect people with causes and engage them in more participation and commitment in the advocacy of those values. So, we can say that when we talk about communicating causes in the digital era, we can unlock its full potential with the combination of attraction poles and the capabilities of the web to create, share and comment content, allowing the dialogue to spread through the arena of values where people relate to each other, trough the hybrid reality where online and offline converge into one.

This paper also presents a Case Study about the project Por Um Objectivo (For One Goal), related to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, from the Portuguese NGDO Platform, as an example of good practice, showing how this organization created a successful campaign combining the capabilities of the Social Web with an attraction pole – music – to create engagement and stimulate the participation of citizens and other organisations, that wouldn’t be possible otherwise. This work, standing on an interpretative perspective, explores the literature about the Portuguese NGO sector and Online Public Relations, to build an approach through witch we analyse the presented Case Study about the campaign Por Um Objectivo. This paper aims to contribute to the practice of Public Relations in the NGOs sector, and to the academic study of PR, by presenting and example of how an organization that works with Causes, that has lack of resources – both human and financial – has built a successful communication project by creating a strategy that used the viral capabilities of online social networks combined with and attraction pole.
Today the social networks are an integral part of our daily communication. Indeed, they became a new way of communication and interaction between the individuals. Several led studies reveal that the social networks are more and more used by the Internet users (Pignard Cheynel and Haberdasher, on 2011). According to the poll CSA (FRENCH BROADCASTING AUTHORITY) realized for the Orange / Terrafemina look-out post, in September, 2011, Facebook became well established in the practices of the Internet users: 53 % are subscribed to it (Pignard Cheynel and Haberdasher, on 2011). The search for information on the Internet is very widespread henceforth: 76 % of the French Internet users declare " to consult the information about an Internet portal " (32 % "often", 44 % "from time to time"). Furthermore, 70 % consult " the information about the web site of the big media " (32 % and 38 %) (Pignard Cheynel and Haberdasher, on 2011).

Themes treated on these networks are diverse and varied, and we can see today appear feminine networks. The objective of this communication is to wonder about the influence which these feminine networks can have on the political communication? Do they build a more feminist or feminine political belief?

Numerous studies (Fouquet, on 2005; Laufer and Fouquet, on 1997; the Pors and Milewski, on 2003; Paoletti, on 2005) have to show that to be a woman in typically male domains as the politics, drags different strategies and processes of communications. By studying politicians' networks, we will try to perceive if a "communicologie" (kind of communication) piece of news (Ashcraft and Mumby, on 2004) more based on feminine values (network, consensus) appears (de Ceglie and Fauré, on 2011). For us, gender is social construction which is not elaborated according to the biological sex of the individuals but by the social interactions which the individuals establish.

Scott defines the notion of kind as allowing to reconcile two propositions: the kind is a constituent element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the kinds; and the genre is a means to mean relations of power (Scott, on 1987, 1067). Can the kind thus be a means of construction of the political opinion? By
analyzing women’s social networks in politics, we will try to understand how elaborate these networks, that they are the interactions and the mediations which build themselves and how these last ones act on the communications strategies within the politics. The interest of this communication is to observe the forms of communication existing in the feminine networks, to advance if there are identical typically feminine political forms of communication or different ones from those made by the men.

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In the literature, political communication is regarded as a not clearly defined research topic that transdisciplinary stretches out between communication science and political science. The image of political communication is influenced by numerous subtopics: media and communication policy, campaign communication and lobbying are only a few facets of this diversified subject area. This paper will first highlight the correlation between political communication and legitimacy and then describe the different dimensions and arenas of politics in Germany. Sarcinelli (1998:11) already stated in 1998 that the term political communication implied that every democratic system needs specific procedures to convey politics from the government to the governed. The institutional requirements and the conduct as the set of conditions for political communication in the media society, however, have changed considerably. According to Lauth & Wagner (2002:22), three fields of politics can be distinguished: polity, politics and policy. Sarcinelli (2011:263) categorizes the preparation of political decisions and their presentation.

The next part of the article will specify how the Federal Government puts political communication into practice. In order to facilitate the communication of the government and the Office of the Federal Chancellor, a supreme federal authority was established, the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (BPA). Jarren & Donges (2002:81) consider the BPA to be the biggest PR organisation of the Federal Republic of Germany. Sarcinelli (2011:293) points out that for every acting Chancellor the “legitimation by communication” is both a political maxim and a power factor in a particular way. Subsequently, the authors of this paper will show how the German government communication uses social media. Koopmanns & Zimmermann (2010:171) observe that the internet allows anyone to present and search information without being affected by the selection mechanisms of traditional mass media. Caramani (2008:489) states that established versions of the mass media were reproduced on the internet at the beginning of the age of political online communication in the mid 1990s. In the middle of the following decade the “point-to-mass” model of communication distinctly changed and ushered in a new era of digital
information exchange. In Caramanis view, only those who authentically reach their target groups in the social spheres of the Web 2.0 era will successfully communicate their political message.

According to de Vreese (2006:18), researchers of political communication can be divided into cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. The former assume that a direct online-democracy comprises an extensive involvement of the population, the latter proclaim the end of a rational political argument because of the internet. Nevertheless, today there is no denying the fact those political institutions and organizations progressively make use of the chances offered by Web 2.0. As shown by the (N)Onliner-Atlas 2011 (10), in Germany about three quarters of the population are online by now. The persons responsible for government communication in Germany very well take the citizens’ increasing use of the internet into account, regarding conversational communication, however, only little action has been taken. Furthermore, the SWAI-Benchmark-study 2011 reveals that, in relation to the usage of social media, the Federal Government focuses on quantity and presents the widest range of products compared to the federal states (2011:15). Even so, this analysis also indicates that, concerning the quality of its offers, the Government lies behind. Current data prove that the German population only uses the internet for political information to a small extent. Donsbach (2011:123) demonstrates that in 2010 only nine percent of the online-users availed themselves of political information and news on the internet. Therefore, this paper deals with the question whether there simply were only very few choices up to now or whether the small number of choices is due to the reluctance of the population to catch up on political subjects through these channels. Finally, the authors will explain that future studies should analyze to what extent the first supply of conversational communication is accepted by the users and how far a real dialogue can take place here. Transdisciplinary research projects with the involvement of communication science and political science promise interesting results pertaining to this issue.
References


Many local governments have started to experiment with a range of social media tools for government-citizen service delivery, public policy and law enforcement. These initial experiences show the opportunities of social media for local government but they also raise a host of new questions. For example: “Are we ready to adopt social media?”, “How best to prepare our municipality to successfully work with social media?”, or “What are the conditions for achieving successful social media government initiatives?”

Only a few studies have addressed such issues and research on the guiding principles for successful uses of social media in local government is still emerging. Yet, if we want local governments to make the utmost use of social media, it is essential to identify a set of preconditions or success indicators for social media initiatives.

In this European project we want to show how social media provide opportunities and challenges for local governments to re-invent themselves in this new social media environment. A specific goal of the project is to demonstrate to local governments the appropriate strategic and organizational responses to successfully take advantage of social media in service delivery and in interaction with citizens and businesses. Therefore, this paper aims to develop a broad framework for the adoption of social media in local government. Our goal is to determine several critical success indicators which local governments should take into account when seeking to develop and implement social media government initiatives.

Our starting points for the development of the adoption framework were (a) an inventory of the characteristics of social media which make it a transformative medium, and (b) a review of existing social media maturity or adoption models. Rather than being merely a new tool of technology or communication, social media signify a paradigm change, which challenges classic ways of knowledge sharing and
creation, participation and organization. Taking on social media therefore is a big challenge for governments and civil servants, because it implies taking on a new government culture in all its domains and a real transformation in dynamics and ways of organizing (Frissen, van Staden, Huijboom et al., 2008; Millard, 2010; Osimo, 2008; Plomp & te Velde, 2011; Van Berlo, 2008, 2009). Second, according to several social media maturity models, organizations have to make several decisions about integrating social media in their organization processes, goals and structure when moving up the social media adoption ladder (Van der Kooi, 2010, 2011, Smiciklas, 2011).

Summarizing, the proposed path to successful adoption of social media in local government can be modeled along two axes (figure 1): the horizontal axis presents a cultural change in local government or a change toward the 'social media way of thinking and doing' and the critical success indicators related to that. The vertical axis represents a change in integration of social media. As a local government progresses along these axes, social media are strategically, tactically and operationally integrated and a social media way of thinking and doing (culture) is being adopted. Generally local governments will go through several stages of change as they integrate social media and cultivate a social media culture. This framework describes four 'stages of growth' to a fully functional social media engaged local government: (1) ad hoc/emerging stage, (2) experimental stage, (3) integrated stage, (4) transformative stage.

The implications of this adoption framework can be twofold. First, local governments can use these indicators as a frame of reference to facilitate the uptake of social media and to enhance the effectiveness of their social media initiatives. The indicators can assist local authorities in developing a clear strategy for realizing the potential benefits of social media. Second, these general indicators can provide a starting point for the development of a social media readiness measure in a further stage of the project. This readiness measure will allow local governments to identify the degree to which they are ‘ready’ to engage in social media. It will offer them a balanced view on their strengths and weaknesses across each of the success indicators and it will pinpoint areas to improve before or during the uptake of social media.
Figure 1: Framework for the adoption of social media in local government

References


"Our vision is an empowered society. We want to convey that through more participation and transparency in politics." That is the mission statement of an independent German NGO that uses the Internet as a medium for exchange between citizens and politicians. Can a NGO-website foster democracy? Can it empower people online by using a website? At www.abgeordentenwatch.de citizens can ask questions to their representatives (and during election times also the candidates). Profiles of all politicians and a search function help citizens to find the right politicians for their concern. All questions and answers are permanently documented on the website and thus become a kind of “digital memory” for the voters. In addition, Abgeordnetenwatch documents voting behaviour, additional income and other activities of elected politicians. In a blog the NGO also publishes investigative articles about current parliamentary developments and the behaviour of representatives. The website is frequently used as sources by journalists from different media.

Model for Abgeordnetenwatch was the American website Vote Smart, but the German NGO took that idea one step further and is not limited to the mere presentation of information available, but focuses on the exchange. Abgeordnetenwatch uses the web 2.0 logic by offering a platforms that allows users to create content, even though the questions of citizens are not transferred immediately to the platform. A team of moderators checks all incoming questions in order to avoid any racist, sexist or otherwise defamatory questions, based on a code. When the moderators are in doubt, the question is referred to a curatorium that – like a jury – decides on the matter. The politicians themselves will get all questions, even those that are not published online.

Abgeordnetenwatch offers its service for the national German parliament and for the German representatives in the European parliament as well as for a number of federal state and local parliaments. Being dependent on donations and membership fees, the number of parliaments and elections that can be covered depends on the financial means available.
Of course the NGO and its website are also criticized and by all means not all politicians it as a good opportunity for an exchange with their constituents. Critics argue that the websites put the politicians under pressure as it is public for everyone to see if they answer questions.

Another recurring criticism is that questions and answers are documented permanently online, forming the aforementioned “digital memory” and thereby force politicians to justify a change in opinion. But it is not the intention of Abgeordnetenwatch to criticise this kind of behaviour as such. It wants voters to learn that politics requires compromises and for parliamentarians to explain why they have changed their position and thereby explaining the functional principles of a representative democracy.

Abgeordnetenwatch is not the platform for the big politics and big debates. This will remain the domain of traditional media. Abgeordnetenwatch is primarily the playground of the backbench members of parliament who are hardly in the spotlight. They are highly prepared to respond to requests and to provide substantive information. So there is a kind of alliance between Abgeordnetenwatch and the back bench – quite parallel to the Internet often associated with the empowerment of the user who has no other opportunity for articulation.

Abgeordnetenwatch can be seen as a unique and new approach, adopted already in several other countries like Austria, Luxembourg and Ireland. And even though those countries show different conditions in their political systems, the idea of Abgeordnetenwatch can be easily adjusted to function in new environments. Abgeordnetenwatch is the result of a radical understanding of parliamentarism, where the member of parliaments has a mandate from the citizens. He is the representative and should shape policy, but also needs to convey the details to the citizens. He isn’t forced to do it, but if the answer is denied, he runs the risk that one assumes his lack of effort.

But Abgeordnetenwatch also has its limits. It only works in a representative democracy. If citizens fight for more direct democracy and decision are made by means of direct democracy, then Abgeordnetenwatch has no function any more.
Therefore Abgeordnetenwatch is – despite the radical nature in which the representatives are called to account – an instrument for strengthening representative democracy and it doesn’t work on its abolition. In this sense Abgeordnetenwatch is not only radical but also quite conservative, because it holds on to the vision of a representative working in the name of citizens.

Abgeordnetenwatch wants to ensure, by using the new possibilities of Web 2.0, to hold representatives accountable and make them explain what they do on behalf of the citizens. This paper and presentation will address the questions of whether such an online instrument can revitalize representative democracy and what problems an NGO faces when trying to foster the exchange between citizens and politicians.
Opportunities offered by Web 2.0 have significantly shaped the practice of public relations. Kelleher (2010) suggested that both public relations and the social media can be characterized by terms such as “engagement, participation, two-way communication, and interactivity” (p. 239). Because of these common characteristics, public relations and the social media are “deeply intertwined in both theory and practice” (p. 239).

It is expected that the role of Web 2.0 will continue to increase. The European Communication Monitor revealed that “coping with the digital evolution and social media” is perceived as the second most significant issue by European public relations practitioners (Moreno et. al, 2010). In the future the respondents expected “a loss of power for traditional media alongside a continued increase in the presence of new media” (p. 103).

The public relations scholarship has revealed many aspects that testify to the importance of Web 2.0 to public relations. A vast body of knowledge describes the applicability of social media to dialogic communication and relationship building. Other areas of public relations that are linked to the social media include crisis communication, image and reputation management, litigation public relations, international and intercultural public relations, CSR, health communication, employee communication, fundraising, and so forth.

Although lately there has been an increase of research studies on ways that non-profit groups and government institutions use Web 2.0, most research has focused on the corporate sector. In addition to the predominant focus on the corporation, most knowledge about online communication is U.S.-based. The leading academic journals reveal only a few examples that investigate organizational online efforts in other parts of the world. None of these examples contain a discussion on online public relations in East Europe.
To overcome the above identified gaps in the research literature—little knowledge about the non-corporate sector and non-U.S. environments—this paper will aim to understand the use of Web 2.0 by public and civil society organizations in three Baltic countries: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The proposed paper will address the following research questions: (1) What, if any, Web 2.0 applications are used by public sector and civil society organizations in three Baltic countries?, (2) What public relations goals are Baltic public sector and civil society organizations trying to reach by including Web 2.0 in their communication efforts?, (3) How, if all, is Web 2.0 integrated in the overall mix of communication channels in Baltic public sector and civil society organizations?, (4) How, if at all, the use of Web 2.0 by Baltic public sector and civil society organization has changed over time? (5) How, if at all, does the use of Web 2.0 differ among public sector and civil society organizations in three Baltic countries?

The research questions will be answered through a qualitative content analysis of materials submitted by Baltic public sector and civil society organizations, or agencies representing them to the annual Baltic PR Awards competition. This event, organized by four professional associations, promotes the best public relations practice in the region. The analyzed materials will include audiovisual campaign presentations and case summaries containing campaign overviews, goals, research activities, target publics, strategies, communication channels and results. This study will investigate the top three contenders, approximately 45 campaigns, in various award categories between 2006 and 2011.

A preliminary study of campaigns 2011 revealed that most organizations used such Web 2.0 applications as informative and/or interactive websites, blogs, social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). Few organizations relied only on the traditional media and face-to-face meetings. In these instances Web 2.0 skills of target publics were low.

The public relations goals of organizations that took advantage of Web 2.0 included information and engagement. For example, a website of a Latvian osteoporosis association contained a one-directional delivery of information. The same applied to an Estonian government website, created to motivate Estonian households to switch
from analogous television to digital, which advised its visitors to call a toll-free number to receive feedback. However, several organizations emphasized the goal of participation. AirBaltic, a state owned airline, heavily relied on Facebook and Twitter for the purposes of “information sharing and engagement of customers” during the Icelandic volcano eruption in 2010.

Baltic organizations used face-to-face communication, traditional media and online media channels. With few exceptions, most organizations integrated the online media in their mix of communication channels. Some of them preferred face-to-face communication and/or the traditional media over online channels, whereas others balanced the used of the online media with other communication channels. The choice of channels was mostly determined by the social media skills of target publics and campaign implementers on the grassroots level.

Although a preliminary study of campaigns 2011 did not identify any significant differences in the use of Web 2.0 among Baltic countries, since 2006 Baltic organizations have increased the application of online channels. In addition to one-directional delivery of information, over time Baltic organizations have integrated the engagement of publics in their communication efforts.

References


A lot of research has been realised the last years on different aspects of social media: on the general reasons of its use (cf. e. g. Brandtzaeg/Heim 2009; Correa et al. 2010; Hargittai/ Hsieh 2010 and Kwon/Wen 2010), on communication theories applied to it (cf. e. g. Raacke/ Bonds-Raacke 2008; Walther et al. 2009; partly also Stegbauer 2010), on the social interaction and the social lives of users linked to it (cf. e. g. Amichai-Hamburger/ Zack 2011; Haridaki/ Hanson 2010), on its psychological impacts on personality (vgl. e. g. Back et al. 2010; Boyle/ Johnson 2010; Schiffrin et al. 2010), even already on trends and changes within it (cf. e. g. Patchin/ Hinduja 2010 as well as Wang/ Wellmann 2010). But if comes to areas of use, most is focused on brand and marketing communication (cf. e. g. Beißwenger 2010; Safko 2010), only some books have been published on corporate communication (cf. e. g. Bernet 2010; Huber 2010; Jodeleit 2010; Postman 2008) and some more on the use within the special situation of political campaigning (cf e. g. Harfoush 2009, Harris et al. 2010). But there has, as also stated in the call for paper for this symposium, been little attention paid to the questions of how governments currently use social media in their official communication.

To fill this important knowledge gap partly, this paper will for the first time present the results of an international web based content analysis of the social media use of the national governments of ten selected European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom. This content analysis will be realized within three steps, represented by three codebooks - already developed and being filled with data until end of January. The focus of the consecutive codebooks are as follows:

(1) The first codebook is looking at the five different types of national government homepages (e. g. the general entry pages of the government like http://www.bundesregierung.de or the pages of the site of the head of
government like http://www.number10.gov.uk ) within each country and is measuring if and how social media services are mentioned and/or interlinked on these webpages.

(2) The second codebook has the individual pages of these social media services found within (1) as object of the analysis, e. g. http://www.facebook.com/DavidCameron. For this social media services, all the basis data are counted: like what is the type of page, when was it started, how many “fans” or “friends” has it, when where the last updates as well as what is the general content level.

(3) The third and last codebook looks on the detailed content and structure of each individual text and picture element of the social media services given by (2) within a clearly defined research period around the last EU crisis summit at the beginning of December 2011. Here, the subject of each element is also observed like its message (positive/negative/neutral) and its number and nature of comments or questions.

The results of all three codebooks will be presented within one paper in a multi-national comparative approach. Two special aspects of the survey mainly in part (3) will be

a) the political dimension addressed according to political theory, i. e. if the content is concerning policy, politics or polity (cf. Heidenheimer 1986) and

b) the PR model followed, i. e. if the approach is publicity, public information, two-way asymmetric or two-way symmetric (cf. Grunig/Hunt 1984).

One main research question to be analyzed will be if there is a correlation between political dimension addressed and PR model followed. When is the head of government only answering the questions of “his” citizens like in former times a king, when is it all about transparency and when is a real dialogue intended – at least with his or her political advisors?
References


The importance of the on-line PR in building a country or a regional brand was recently proved by an unusual campaign for a tropical island off the Queensland coast. The campaign was promoting not only a region or an island, but a job: the best job in the world.

Anthony Hayes, Chief Executive, Tourism Queensland, said: "We are looking for someone to tell the stories of the Great Barrier Reef and we have come up with what we think is the dream job." The post is being advertised as "caretaker" on Hamilton Island in Australia's Whitsunday Islands.” The salary and all the other facilities were making the difference: “No formal qualifications are needed but candidates must be willing to swim, snorkel, dive and sail. In return, the successful applicant will receive a salary of A$150,000 ($103,000, £70,000) for six months and get to live rent-free in a three-bedroom villa, complete with pool. The new recruit will work for just 12 hours a month. Duties include feeding some of the hundreds of species of fish and collecting the island's mail.”

Not so bad. It’s clear that within the “recommendation economy” this offer has rapidly turned into a viral. You tube and other social networks were also best channels for spreading the news but also for building a strong and coherent brand of a small island with a huge visibility and a low budget.

But this example of good practice and of understanding the role of the web 2.0 in creating buzz is not so common. Most of the countries prefer traditional integrated campaigns mixing ATL and on-line branding that are not able to create a strong differentiation.

The goal of the following paper is to analize some strategic aspects related to the most recent country rebranding of Romania that was repositioned as the “Carpathian
It’s interesting that the comments were not referring to the “official” strategic platform, but rather to some “insights” generated “on-line”. As a consequence, the same article was underlining: “Romania’s tourism minister, Elena Udrea, has decided to freeze payments to the company until the issue is resolved (although the image will continue to be used for the moment).”

It seems that the impact of the on-line comments was not so strong as in the recent rebranding of GAP (the company was obliged to give up the new logo because of the comments expressed by the users on facebook), but even so, it proved that when we are talking about country branding we are dealing with identity and this may turn the citizens into high-involvement consumers.

The present paper aim is to identify through a qualitative research the relation between the “user generated content” and the “governmental” generated content trying to identify the differences of vision but also the contact points. Comparative methods will be also used in the interpretation of results in order to put forth the best practices.

The corpus will include both youtube uploads but also some other user generated content as for example a country description uploaded some years ago on eBay when Romania was, for one day “on sale” on eBay with the following item description: "The government of Romania's biggest fear is to "sell the country." (...) And we thank eBay and the rest of the capitalist world for making it possible. Hence, for sale is a non-functional eastern-european country named Romania. The item is sold AS IS, for parts or repair, absolutely NO RETURN or warranty of any
kind! It's a broken country! Don't come back to me and say I didn't stated it clear enough, or that you just changed your mind. All parts may or may not be there. Many are rotten, and will need replacement (see government). Many parts will need to be refurbished (see large percentage of population). But make no mistake! If you fix it, this could be one GREAT COUNTRY, and one GREAT PEOPLE..” The tender has started from one dollar the second offer was $2,25, in the afternoon the price reached: $10.700, but the last offer was $99,9 milions.

The conclusions of the paper will put forth that the country identity becomes a part of the personal identity of the people, so the consumers may turn easily into prosumers. Youtube displays dozens of examples of private versions of country branding uploaded by all sorts of users.

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Governmental actions of nowadays are facing the sustained development of the online communication. The online space supposes a high frequency of interaction and also a high level of requests of information directed to main actors on the public stage. Publics abandoned the passive attitude and ask for direct communication with the elected representatives. In the future, it is possible that the public figures will be legitimized through their openness in communication. On the other hand, anonymous online presence is a threat, since the anonymous attacks may harm the reputation of public figures and even start a communication crisis. Public actors have to respond to these imperatives by designing appropriate communication channel with publics, and by managing these channels in order to be used also for current communication and for preventing crises. Governmental actors are a particular subject to this process, since European democracy became flatter in the last years, and the subjective distance of citizens to power positions decreased. The reputation of governmental actors and institutions became fragile and difficult to maintain.

The attempt to solve the communication problems raised by Web 2.0 development through a comprehensive vision found that social networks are the most effective tools for optimizing the communication of governmental actors. Social networks are a friendly environment, which could allow the development of a new kind of relationship of governmental figures with publics and media. Moreover, social network users could have later a positive contribution in the maintenance of a positive reputation for a governmental actor.

Another premise for developing an online communication program for governmental actors refers to the strategic dimensions and the contents promoted. Lately, the online audiences prefer public, social and environmental issues, and reject political and institutional issues. In other words, publics receive the contents tied with direct impact on the quality of their life and eliminate formal institutional matters.
These were the main premises that oriented the empirical study presented in the paper, based on a part of a larger project of online reputation management, created and developed by the author of the paper. The program has been designed and implemented for the Romanian Minister of Regional Development and Tourism. The research was conducted between January 2011-March 2011, and the implementation started with May 1, 2011. The empirical data are based on the implementation of the project, during May and August 2011. The social networks used in the implementation of the project were Facebook and Twitter.

The main method used was the content analysis in several variants (as the image analysis and the frequency analysis). Also, for calculating external impact of Facebook communication, there has been registered the frequency of the articles which were taken over by the press. And finally, as audience statistics were used the internal graphics provided by a Facebook page.

As quantitative result of the study, the account of the Minister of Regional Development gained a leader position on Romanian Facebook, overlapping the position of the other active politicians and governmental actors in social networks. Also, the Twitter account improved in a consistent manner, being the only account of a governmental actor which interacts with regular users. Table 1 shows the raising audience on Facebook during May and June 2011; table 2 shows the frequency of take-over of the Minister’s Facebook messages as subjects for press articles in the first seven weeks of implementation.

Table 1: Evolution of audience for Minister’s Facebook account
Table 2. The take-over of Facebook messages from Minister’s account in the press

The premises were confirmed through the empirical findings. Social networks, when handled in a flexible and adaptive manner, are a powerful environment for developing a positive relationship with publics. Second, social networks are a very strong communication channel, which could be used not only for building a direct relationship with publics and distributing messages to a large segment of audience, but also for influencing the press attitude and agenda. (The findings in these areas were even more generous than the initial premise regarding the potential of social networks as communication channel.) The third premise, regarding the orientation of strategic dimensions and content of communication was verified too.

The main sources of inspiration used for interaction model and contents were the social networks accounts of American politicians (Barack Obama, Sarah Palin, Hillary Clinton), which provide in content a preference for social and public issues, expressed in an accessible manner. The implementation of these features in the Romanian Minister’s messages had a visible impact on audiences and revealed itself as a future “receipt” for governmental actors in online communication. As a final conclusion, the implementation of project and the empirical study showed that marketing communication model, when applied in Web 2.0 governmental communication, could be successful.
Within the social media mix, Twitter is a tool that is ‘integral’ to nonprofits (Kanter and Fine, 2010 p5). This free service facilitates succinct public or direct communications of 140 characters (including spaces) with Twitter being described as the ‘champion’ of microconversations (Solis, 2010 p. 84), having reached 100 million users worldwide (Kiss, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how NGOs, in the UK, are communicating via Twitter as there is a comparative lack of scholarship in this area. Books focussing on Twitter, such as Twitterville: How Businesses Can Thrive in the New Global Neighborhoods by Seth Israel (2010) and Twitter Power 2.0: How to Dominate Your Market by Joel Comm (2010) often gravitate towards the commercial sector despite including some information on NGOs. Facebook tends to receive more attention from researchers investigating social media than Twitter (Chen, 2011) but the benefits for using Twitter have been usefully identified. These include: listening (Israel, 2010); starting conversations (Kanter and Fine, 2010); building awareness (Bruce, 2011; Beer, 2010); relationships (Bruce, 2011; Beer, 2010) and communities to secure social change (Kanter and Fine, 2010), and fundraising (Kanter and Fine, 2010; Isreal, 2010 p6; Solis, 2010). Whilst there has been research in the use of Twitter by NGOs in US (for instance: Waters and Jamal, 2011; Kanter and Fine, 2010), there has been little published analysis of the content of tweets in the UK and little quantitative analysis of the authenticity of NGO account profiles in the UK.

In this study, firstly, the status and credibility to NGO profiles on Twitter are investigated. Such elements include transparency of authorship. Solis (2010 p. 84) states that ‘dialogues with “real people”’ are fundamental to Twitter. Hence, profiles need to have named authors (Kanter and Fine, 2010 p54; Solis, 2010). The validation of the accounts and numbers of followers is also determined.
Secondly, the content of tweets is considered including quantification of the use of hashtags and links with other digital media (Lamb, 2010 p154). According to Solis (ibid. 84), ‘More links are shared via micromessages than on any form of digital media.’ The friendliness of tone is also explored.

**Method**

The charities chosen for this investigation were the top 50 funding raising income charities in the UK, identified by nfpSynergy (Hargrave Murphy and Larking, 2011) in its ‘Social Media League Table’. Using a bespoke application for this study, the researchers identified 63 official twitter accounts of these 50 charities in November 2011. The accounts’ start dates, and total number of tweets and followers were ascertained. The charities’ Twitter profiles were examined to identify individual authorship and external validation of charity status from indicators such as number of followers. The charities’ tweets over a one-week period (31st October to 6th November 2011) were also collected and analysed to identify common words used, retweets, links and hashtags.

**Results**

The account creation dates ranged from 7th April, 2007 (Shelter) to the 14th June 2011 (Church of Scotland). The average number of tweets per charity was 2,634 (range of 12,887 to 46) and the average number of followers was 19,201 (range of 466,824 to 198). Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficients were calculated and strong, positive correlation was found (rho 0.77) between the number of tweets posted and the number of followers that account has, and moderate, positive correlation (rho >0.5 and <7.5) between the number of followers a charity has and the number of users they follow and between the number of followers and the number of tweets posted. There was also moderate, positive correlation (rho 0.68) between the age of the account and the number of followers that account has. Of the 2,241 tweets collected during the first week of November 2011, the most prolific twitter account was the National Trust with 349 tweets; the lowest number was 1 (by 2 accounts). Content analysis of all tweets revealed that some of the most common words used by charities in the period under review included the words
‘thanks’ (720 instances), and ‘thank’ (525 instances). The data from the profile examinations will also be reported on, and further analysis and conclusions from this data will be discussed.

References

Books and Journals


Report

Murphy, H.C. & Larking, R. (2011) Social Media League Table April 2011. nfpSynergy.

Online

When it comes to the question of how the internet and web 2.0 is changing the political communication, some are extremely enthusiastic, some are extremely skeptical. One thing that for sure has changed dramatically is grassroots campaigning. In the past, NGOs collected signatures for petitions on the street or asked people to send postcards to politicians. But this kind of mobilization was time-consuming and quite costly. The internet enables even small organizations or single persons to mobilize high number of people with little more than a website. Today writing an e-mail to a politician, joining a Facebook group or signing an e-petition seems to be an easy way to protest and articulate a political opinion. In addition Germany, Scotland and a number of other countries have installed e-petition platforms on the official parliamentarian websites and thereby offering a new tool for grassroots campaigning.

With the paper and the presentation I will try to offer an overview about current developments in this field and examine how NGOs and other intermediary organizations but also commercial actors use the internet for grassroots campaigning and if and how they make use of the participatory potential of web technologies. It will take a look at examples from Germany as well as from other European countries. The paper will examine the impact this new online campaigning and the rise of numbers of these campaigns have on traditional NGOs and other intermediary organizations. MoveOn in the USA was the forefront of a new kind of hybrid organizations who focus on online action in order to influence the political process. Today similar organization can be found in a number of countries, like Campact in Germany, 38degrees in the UK or Avaaz on the international level. These kind of organization usually don’t work on issues continuously but pick up issues that are current and have potential to attract a high number of people. On the one side these hybrid organizations are strong competitors for traditional NGOs, on the other side they offer a fluid kind participation that attracts people. Some traditional NGOs have already reacted and offer new forms of online participation.
The paper will also look at the special dynamics of online campaigning since not all campaigns originated in planned campaign activities by political actors. The case of Guttenberg in Germany is a good example for this kind of unplanned campaigning that is only possible because of web 2.0 technology.

The paper and the presentation will also look at the effectiveness of online grassroots campaigning by looking at the reactions of representatives. I will depict research results from a survey conducted among German members of parliament. These results show that not all campaigns have the same effects and that the rising number of these kind of grassroots campaigns can also be seen as problematic. Also the fact that online grassroots campaigning is used by lobbyists, sometimes disguising their true identity and intentions, is a threat for the legitimacy of this kind of protest.
This article aims to depict to what extent intermediary organizations in Germany are already part of and influenced by a social medialization process. The presented hypotheses have been derived from a neo-institutional perspective and tested with guided semi-standardized interviews with representatives of German associations.

Social medialization - the end of medialization as we know it?

Medialization of intermediary organizations is a “favourite topic” (Meyen 2009: 23) of communication science. Even more it is considered as verified for intermediary organizations (Hackenbroch 1998) especially by empirical studies focusing on political parties (e.g. Donges 2008) as well as their interest groups (e.g. Baringhorst 1998).

The specific societal functions and organizational structures of intermediaries point towards limitations of their medialization: addressing agendas publicly (Weber 1981), recruitment and relationship management of members (Streeck 1987), particular member interests and overarching interests (Schmitter/Streeck 1981).

The neo-institutional perspective emphasizes this organizational ambivalence. Organizations much less structure themselves following an efficient/effective logic, but rather seek for orientation in the presumptions of their environment, how an efficient/effective organization is likely to look like (Meyer/Rowan 1977). In this article we distinguish between the medialization in the sense of the orientation of an organization towards mass media (Mazzoleni/Schulz 1999) and the social medialization in the sense of the orientation of an organization towards social media.

Intermediary organizations invested in social media activities such as facebook in the last years (Voss 2010). The question remains which relevance is assigned to social media and to what extent are established structures already subject to catalyzed change. Whether the relatively young social media are to be categorized as institutions, in the sense of binding rules, will be matter of discussion (Senge 2011).
Even though discursive publics have always been established their characteristics in social media are likely to differ.

Social Media shall be understood as networks and communities that enable social interaction. As platforms social media foster exchange of the user’s opinions, impressions and experiences (Pleil 2010: 93). As social media usage matures we observe private and public communication modi as well as user-generated and professional contents being mixed up. Social media are also used following mass media logics as the number of members and usages rise (e.g. Gusko 2010). These developments raise opportunities for associations to counteract limitations of their medialization.

The institutionalization process will be analyzed based on the process model by Tolbert and Zucker (1996). It describes in which of the phases (habitualization, objectivation, sedimentation) social media is located and to which consequences that may lead.

Empirical research

The research design is a qualitative bi-methodological approach that interlinks perception with phenomenology of social medialization. It includes guided interviews (semi-standardized questionnaire) with intermediary representatives for classical media relations and social media. Secondly qualitative research of the social media activities was conducted. Among others corporate associations (e.g. BDI), labour unions (e.g. DGB) and non-profit-organizations (e.g. Greenpeace) are represented equally in the sample to allow for a broad mapping of phases.

References


