

The Use of Social Media in Public Administration: The Case of Slovak Local Self-Government

ONDREJ MITAL', PAVOL JOZEF ŠAFÁRIK UNIVERSITY IN KOŠICE, FACULTY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION,
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Abstract

Regarding the constantly growing importance of social media, public administration tries to find optimal solutions, which might help to increase the qualitative aspects of governance processes. The aim of this study is to analyze Facebook profiles of regional cities in Slovakia, focusing on the general features of social media usage, content and the purpose of posts published between 2016 and 2019. The selected methodology aims to perform an in-depth analysis of Facebook page usage in the long term. The main finding is based on the statement that selected official Facebook pages mostly include informational posts and selected cities do not use Facebook to ask citizens' input or participation. Simultaneously, the benefit of the article is associated with fostering an interest in examined issues of social media usage, which we hope might improve the quality of social media policies and benchlearning in other Slovak cities and hopefully other local self-government units in the European territory. Finally, various limits and perspectives of social media use are discussed in the final part of the article.

Key words: public administration, local self-government, governance, information technologies, social media, Facebook, Slovakia

1. Introduction

As digital transformation consolidates, we are being forced to readjust the ability of public administration to satisfy citizens' needs. Public administration, as sophisticated and planned executions of irreplaceable functions of democratic states, has a decisive position in contemporary governance. Experts on public administration mostly argue that public administration organizations ensure the relationship between politicians and the public service, guarantee the interface between state and society, weigh the participation of citizens in general elections and the engagement of citizens on a daily basis, as well as make it possible to engage in policymaking beyond legally defined tools (Murray Svidroňová et al. 2018; Peters and Pierre 2018; Shafritz et al. 2017). In this sense, we might argue that modern technologies transform various aspects of governance. According to Filipec (2018), information technologies could be the source of prosperity, but simultaneously could be misused as a tool of control and weapon. The benefits and threats of information technology implementation must be considered in parallel, weighing their consequences. Various positive, negative and contradictory impacts of information technologies can be discussed for a long time, but most of them relate to the fact

that the role of information technologies is irreplaceable. As was stated by Iosifidis and Wheeler (2016) the widening access to modern technologies has laid the foundation for an informed citizenry capable of effective participating in political and public affairs. However, almost every technical, social, political or economic improvement of our society could be misused. Informed citizens can collaborate with public administration to achieve better quality of public services and higher quality of life, and this impact of information technologies is indisputable.

E-government, e-services or the concept of the smart city might be perceived as a stable part of contemporary discussions associated with current challenges of public administration. The quality of information shared by public administration seems to be more important than in the past. Put differently, technological changes have opened new dimensions of fundamental aspects of democratic societies. Regarding the growing use of innovative and modern tools, public administration has started to use social media as an alternative communication platform. The implementation of these new platforms with positive impacts on participation and engagement of citizens has not been examined deeply so far. On the other hand, the use of social media might be characterized as a crosscutting problem of contemporary governance. Social media usage and sharing information must be analyzed in its connection to transparency and openness. The legitimacy of retrieved opinions cannot harm the ideals and principles of democracy. Using the words of Kim et al. (2014) researchers have recently begun to explore social media as a formidable medium for social movements.

The purpose of this study is to examine selected aspects of social media usage focusing on local self-government units in Slovak Republic. More precisely, the paper is focused on the Facebook page usage of eight regional cities between 2016 and 2019. Besides that, the article tries to provide theoretical and practical insight to the use of social media in public administration. Regarding the importance of social media in public administration the paper focuses on Facebook usage. Facebook is currently the most popular social networking site in the world (Mergel 2013; Shafritz et al. 2017). The selection is underlined also by the popularity of Facebook and its use by organizations from the private, public and non-government sectors. Public administration uses Facebook as a tool which could make communication with the public more effective (Lee and Reed 2015; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015).

The paper consists of three parts. The theoretical introduction regarding the potential of information technologies concentrates its attention on the importance of new forms of communication and use of social media in the sphere of public administration. The second part examines selected aspects of social media usage in the conditions of regional cities in Slovakia. Regarding the findings the article ends with a discussion about the perspectives and limits of social media usage in the public administration.

1.1. The Role of Social Media in Contemporary Governance

The impact of information technologies is a decisive challenge of contemporary governance. According to Mergel (2013) these technologies increase transparency, support interorganizational and intraorganizational collaboration, and enable innovative forms of participation. Presumably, public administration represents an important entity in governance processes. However, the position and importance of an active public is irreplaceable as well. Participation and engagement of citizens are fundamental attributes of healthy and vital

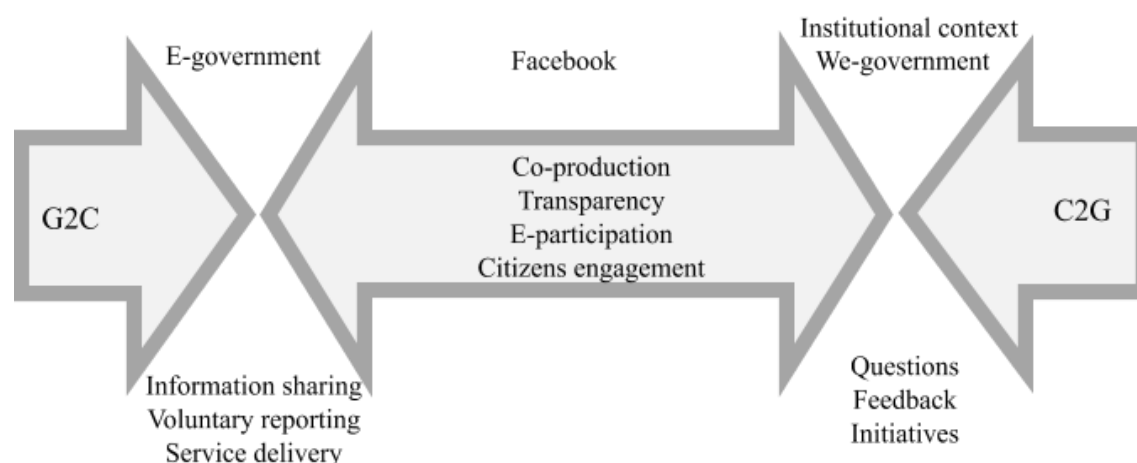
democratic societies. Regarding the contemporary crisis of democracy finding the new forms of citizen participation is a permanent process. The phenomenon of e-participation becomes an imperative in democratic societies, because e-participation increases participation through the information technologies, gives citizens the ability to take a role in the decision-making processes and represents the newest way how to foster the process of democratization (Abu-Shanab and Al-Dalou 2012; Džatková 2017).

Information technologies, e-participation and engagement have mostly been discussed in their connections to social media in the last few years. The use of Web 2.0 applications transforms activities of public administration, especially through its potential to enhance government operations, policy-making, and administration (Reddick and Aikins 2012). Social media and their impacts on society continue to grow, and there is no evidence that this popularity is slowing or stopping (Siena et al. 2019; Toscano 2017). This statement is intensified by the argument mentioned by Mergel (2017) that social media are free and do not need to build and maintain the technological background. The power of social media to connect people and information in real time is increasing the capacity of people to exercise power and mobilize into action, because a large number of groups can be reached very easily, but on the other hand, they have the potential to split the persons living in one joint household (Miňová 2020; Sihi 2018; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015; Bourgon 2011).

Social media should be perceived as a tool which helps public administration to serve citizens more effectively, give them a voice, and at the same time helps public organizations to reduce administrative costs (Khan 2017). Moreover, public administration and citizens could use social media in ways that foster participation, deliberation, and collaboration (Brainard 2016). Public administration should listen more systematically to the voices and needs of the digital public in order to improve mutual communication through innovative social media tools, such as social media statistics and insights, online surveys or customer satisfaction questionnaires of target groups (Lovari and Parisi 2015). In this sense, social media bring sophisticated mechanisms, which can enrich communication and interactions between public administration and citizens.

Social media are not only a platform for two-way communication between public administration and citizens. Social media have the potential to create an environment where citizens feel more involved in the management of organization, measurement of its performance and at the same time feel more responsible for a concrete territory (Hartmann 2019; Dimitrijevska-Markoski 2018). In this sense, social media have the potential to raise public awareness of the execution of public administration functions. This can help citizens and governments, as partners, to be more informed and make socially responsible decisions (Bonsón et al. 2015). Figure 1 shows the role of the most used social media site on two-way communication between public administration and citizens. Put differently, social media represent a brand new communication platform between public administration and the public, which is extremely different from interaction tools used so far.

Figure 1. The role of Facebook on G2C and C2G communication.



Source. Bonsón et al. (2015)

The importance of social media in public administration could simultaneously be identified in the daily execution of public administration functions. The use of social media is expected to contribute to the fulfilment of goals and imperatives, such as cost saving, improvement of public services, citizen satisfaction, transparency, accountability, citizen participation or cooperation. In this sense, social media usage seems to be very attractive and promising (Sobaci 2016). According to Shark (2015) public organizations could very easily create their official Facebook pages, but at least the following aspects should be considered: social media policy with goals, tools and objectives, staff to make sure that content is up to date, the ability to protect and monitor the site to secure the site is not abused or hijacked. What is more, the specific character of public administration must be considered. As was stated by de Kool (2014) specific contradictions needs to be reconsidered: (1) the open character of social media versus the closeness of public organizations, (2) the self-organizing capacities of social media versus the focus of public administration on strict control, and (3) the horizontal character of social media versus the hierarchic structure in public administration. Obviously, some important challenges and differences must be solved. Otherwise, the ideal of public administration, cooperating with the digital and informed public through the modern technologies, would not be reached.

1.2. Social Media: The Missing Link between Public Administration and Citizens?

The implementation of social media is a very complex process in public administration organizations. According to Khan (2017) the simple presence on a social media site is not enough, because achieving full benefits of social media requires a culture of sharing, transparency, openness, and collaboration (STOC Culture). Besides, the implementation of social media should be based on an openness to share, a clear understanding of transparency, a desire to work collaboratively and a new literacy of how social media work (Miller 2011). Regarding the need of a systematic approach these activities should be based on a sophisticated strategy. As the use of social media increases, the need for rules, regulations and standardization has increased as well (Mergel and Greeves 2012). We might agree with R. Laforest (2013) that social

media strategies need to be a part of a larger institutional framework for engagement policy that helps democracy work. Using the words of Hrdinová et al. (2010) the core elements of social media policy include employees' access, account management, acceptable use, employees' conduct, content, security, legal issues, and citizens' conduct. In this sense, social media activities need to be considered in wider circumstances.

The use of social media offers various types of opportunities for improvements in the sphere of public administration. However, the ability of public administration to reflect contemporary trends is quite limited. As was stated by Fyfe and Crookall (2010) there is considerable pressure on public administration to implement social media, because there is a legitimate fear that public administration will be left behind; thus social media might improve the decentralization of the decision-making process, empower collaboration, and achieve a better quality of services. Put differently, citizens' engagement and participation does not rely on traditional mechanisms but is based on authentic and interactive dialogue, which produces positive effects on decision-making, citizenship, and governance (Laforest 2014, Denhardt and Denhardt 2015). This interactive dialog is possible thanks to social media. What is more, social media bring along interactivity, which distinguishes social media pages from traditional websites; thus these connections can contribute to a sense of engagement and loyalty among users (Bregman 2012).

Social media represent a platform which is not connected solely with communication and information sharing. According to Jukić and Svete (2018) public administration uses social media mainly to improve service delivery and the organizational image, as well as to prepare more inclusive policy processes. Social media should be used to share citizens' opinions and ideas to improve public services, governmental effectiveness, and the quality of life (Alcaide-Muñoz and Rodríguez Bolívar 2019; Špaček 2018).

The importance of social media is growing in the local context. In this sense, especially local self-government units should improve local circumstances and improve the quality of life. According to Nilssen (2019) local government should use a combination of technology, human resources and interactive governance to promote local development. Social media help to create informational campaigns, create images of places where citizens live, exchange a realistic view of contemporary city life, and renew the sense of community and belonging (Paganoni 2015). An engaged community can lead to a better functioning, more effective and smarter city, which considers the needs of the local community (Ručinská and Fečko 2020). Besides, Bonsón et al. (2015) suggest that social media may have a better impact if relevant entities ensure that content posted is specially focused around topics of interest and significant to local citizens, rather than being of broader organizational interest. In this sense, social media should be managed by persons who are suited to prepare local awareness campaigns, interactive sessions and suitable content (Vinod-Kumar and Bimal 2015). Social media help to create an environment where citizens feel more involved and responsible for their city and its transformation into a smart city (Hartman 2019). Summing it up, social media represent important aspect of cities' effort to become modern, inclusive and smart.

1.3. Content and the Purpose of Information Published on Social Media

Contemporary public administration provides various types of information to the informed public. Innovative forms of communication, especially social media, represent a unique platform for two-way communication, while the value of information stands at the beginning of this process. In this sense, content published on official Facebook pages could be perceived as a fundamental attribute of public administrations' effort to foster the participation and engagement of citizens. If information is something that gives the recipient a new piece of knowledge and reduces the state of uncertainty, then information shared by public administration through social media can create a state where citizens feel more engaged and involved in processes of governance. Based on the abovementioned benefits of social media to enrich participation and engagement, the paper concentrates its attention on the content and purpose of information shared by public administration.

The impact of social media usage on participation and engagement is also very interesting in the context of the participation rate or increased direct real-life actions of citizens. But the paper concentrates its attention on the character of information published by selected cities in Slovakia. In this sense, the purpose of the study is not to examine reactions of citizens on actions of selected public administration entities. This decision was also based on the fact that the quality of information, the character of information and the purpose of publication stand at the whole process of fostering participation and engagement of citizens.

As was mentioned many times before, the paper is focused on the analysis of the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities in Slovakia. Regarding the principle of subsidiarity local self-government is a key part of public administration. Local self-government is a specific public activity different from the state, which is focused on public issues, has a powerful impact on living standards and serves to promote the democratic values of society (Alman and Volochová 2020; Župová 2020; Lentner and Hegedűs 2019; Jesenko 2017; Mäeltsemees et al. 2013). Selected regional cities are mostly perceived as initiators of innovative solutions in Slovakia. Besides, each of the eight selected region cities has a higher population than any other local self-government unit in Slovak Republic. It must be stated that there are only eight regional cities in Slovakia. Regional cities represent more than one-fifth of the total population of the Slovak Republic. The status of being a regional city is not associated with any special or unique legal position of these cities. According to legal norms, each local self-government unit has the same competences. The main difference between cities and other units is determined by the fact that cities realize key activities focused on the production of public services both for their own residents and residents from the nearest territory. Besides, selected regional cities are the headquarters of local self-governing regions and mid-level offices of state administration. Regional cities were also selected because of the high fragmentation of local self-government in Slovakia. According to the official statistics, local self-government consists of 2,933 units (Government Office of the Slovak Republic 2020). Altogether there were 1,919 units with a population under 1,000 inhabitants and 1,145 units with a population lower than 499 inhabitants (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2019).

We must admit that the number of similar studies, based on content analysis and in-depth empirical evidence, has increased at all levels of government in the last few years, such as analyses of Facebook usage in local self-government units (Jukić and Svete 2018; Murray Svidroňová et al. 2018; Gesuele 2016; Bonsón et al. 2015; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015), measuring

the use of social media by self-governing regions (Špaček 2018) as well as the use by state administration (Callejo-Gallego and Agudo-Arroyo 2019; Jukić and Merlak 2017). The mentioned papers examined social media usage mostly in a short period, while our paper analyzes posts published in a period of four years. Besides, the main focus is put on the content included in the posts, which means that the centre of the paper's attention is the activity of cities on their official Facebook pages, while most previous studies concentrated their attention on interactions with citizens, the content and motive for information sharing was left behind. In our opinion, the purpose of published content and spheres of social life represent an aspect of social media usage which needs to be examined more deeply in future research to understand the ability of social media to foster the participation and engagement of the public.

2. Research Design and Methodology

The aim of the paper is to analyze the Facebook pages of selected local self-government units, focusing on the general features of social media usage, content and the purpose of posts published between 2016 and 2019. At the same time, the paper tries to highlight the rise of innovative communication solutions and provides theoretical and practical insight to the application of social media in public administration. The hypothesis is based on the statement that selected cities use their official Facebook pages primarily to foster participation and the engagement of citizens. In this sense, the paper tries to answer these research questions: What are the general features of the selected official Facebook pages? Which content is included in the posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities? What is the purpose of posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities?

The research sample was selected intentionally. The study analyzes the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities in Slovakia (Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, Košice, Nitra, Prešov, Trenčín, Trnava and Žilina). The selection of cities was determined by the fragmentation of local self-government and the importance of regional cities in Slovakia. Data were collected between 1 January 2016 and 31 December 2019. All data were obtained by analyzing the official Facebook pages of regional cities in Slovakia. The acquired data were processed by using methods of descriptive statistics. Each post is assigned only one purpose. Besides, one post might include information about various spheres of social life. Altogether 15,508 posts were analyzed, and all of them were checked manually. The selected period of four years made it impossible to use free and often used sophisticated tools (for example QUINTLY).

The selected groups of indicators (Table 1) were inspired mainly by the methodology of Jukić and Svete (2018), Lappas et al. (2018), Murray Svidroňová et al. (2018), Špaček (2018), Jukić and Merlak (2017) and Lev-On and Steinfeld (2015). However, the method was slightly adjusted to conditions of Slovak cities. The spheres of social life included in the table are based on original and assigned competencies defined by relevant legal norms. The selected methodology aims to perform an in-depth analysis of Facebook usage in the long-term period, concentrating mainly on spheres of social life included in posts and the purpose of posts published on the official Facebook pages of regional cities. Indicators presented in the table are precisely defined in the findings chapter. Put differently, the centre of our attention is the character of the information shared by selected cities.

Table 1: Set of indicators

Group	Indicator	Indicator's value
General features of Facebook page usage	Existence of official FB page	Yes/no
	Availability of link to the official FB page on the city's web page	Yes/no
	Availability of link to the official web page on the official FB	Yes/no
	Creation of official page	Year
	Number of fans (31 December 2019)	Number
	Number of posts, reactions, comments, shares	Number
	Number of inhabitants	Number
	Ratio of fans to number of inhabitants	Number
Character of information included in analyzed posts published on Facebook pages	Purpose of the posts	Calling for participation
		Calling for opinion
		Information on future events
		Information on live events
		Information on past events
		Service posts
		Passive posts
	Spheres of social life included in posts	Environmental issues
		Order and safety
		Social issues
		Education
		Traffic
		Public infrastructure
		Sport
		Culture
		Self-government issues
		Other

In the paper, content analysis was used to analyze posts published on official Facebook pages. Content analysis was selected because of its potential to convert qualitative data, published on official Facebook pages, into quantitative data. Abstraction was used in the context of filtering those aspects of published information which are relevant for our research. The attention was directed to specific selected indicators, which were measured in selected years. Comparisons were made between both the selected Facebook pages and findings with relevant research. A synthesis was used to draw conclusions resulting from the analysis.

3. Findings

The paper focuses on the character of information published between 2016 and 2019. Based on the methodology, the analysis was dedicated to general features of Facebook usage, spheres of social life mentioned in published posts and purpose of published posts.

3.1 General Features of the Official Facebook Pages

General features of the analyzed official Facebook pages represent the introductory part of our research. Basic attributes of Facebook page usage are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: General features of Facebook usage

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina
Creation of Facebook page	2012	2011	2012	2015	2015	2011	2009	2012
Number of fans	12,158	33,450	16,834	16,516	17,780	11,680	24,137	10,361
Availability of link to the web page on the Facebook page	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of link to the Facebook page on the web page	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of official contact	Yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Availability of link to other social media	No	no	no	no	no	no	yes	no
Number of inhabitants	78,084	437,725	238,593	78,559	85,784	54,696	63,768	82,870
Ratio of fans to inhabitants	15.57%	7.64%	7.06%	21.02%	20.73%	21.35%	37.85%	12.50%

Source: Author

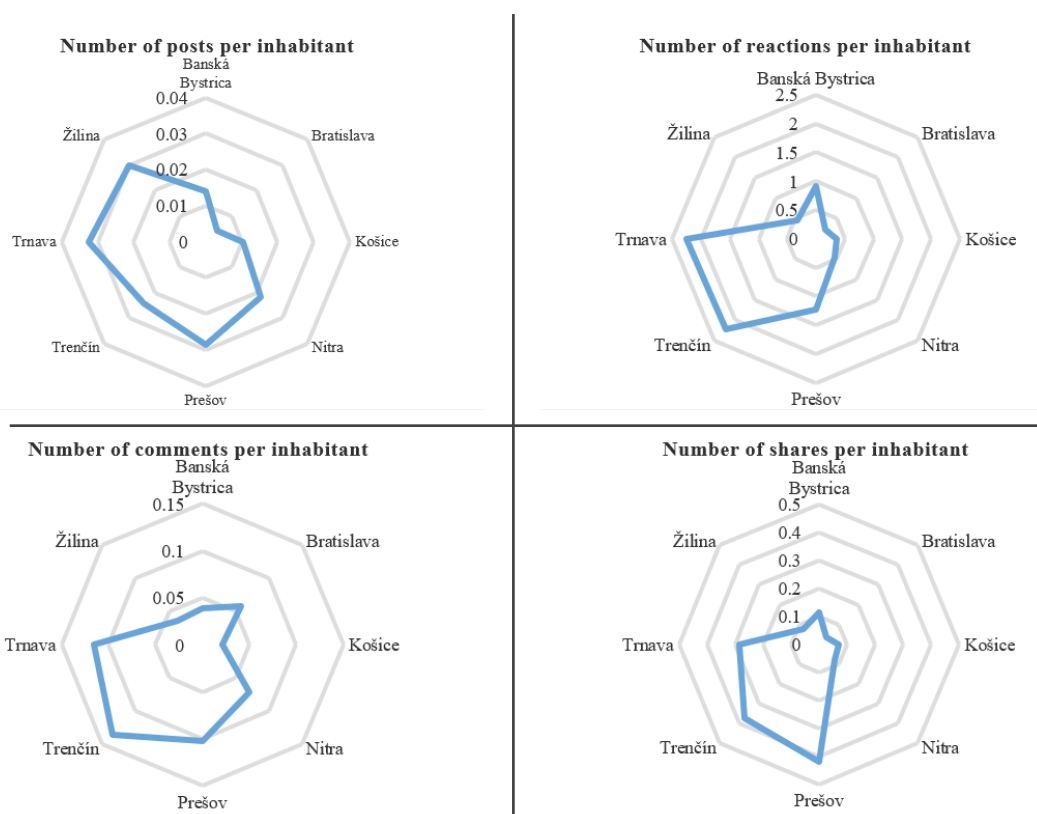
Every city maintained an official Facebook page during the selected period. Based on our analysis, Trnava founded its official Facebook page in 2009. On the other hand, the newest official Facebook page was identified in the case of the city Prešov. The rest of the official Facebook pages were created in 2011 and 2012. Another general aspect is associated with multi-channel features, put differently, whether cities add a connection to their web pages, a link to a direct contact or a link to other social media. According to our analysis, 100% of the selected pages contain a direct link to the official web page of city. A direct link to the Facebook page could be found on each web page of the regional cities. Only one page includes a direct link to another social media account.

Regarding the importance of transparency, the size of the audience is important in public administration. The highest number of fans was identified in the cases of Bratislava and Trnava. The official Facebook page of Trnava has more fans than the official Facebook page of Košice, which has almost 4 times more inhabitants. On the other hand, a relatively similar number of fans was identified in the cases of Banská Bystrica, Trenčín and Žilina, while these cities have the lowest number of fans. The ratio of fans to the number of inhabitants is another general feature which indicates the popularity of official Facebook pages. It must be said that Facebook pages

of cities with lower number of inhabitants achieved the highest percentage of this indicator (Trenčín, Trnava). On the other hand, Bratislava and Košice, the two biggest cities in Slovakia, reach the lowest percentage of the ratio of fans to inhabitants.

The activity of regional cities should be measured by the number of posts, number of reactions, number of comments and number of shares (Graph 1). The graph reveals general features of Facebook usage evaluated per inhabitant, which resulted in a higher relevance of the presented data.

Graph 1: Selected quantitative aspects of the use of Facebook by Slovakian regional cities



Source: Author

According to our analysis, the lowest number of posts in each year was identified in the cases of Banská Bystrica, Nitra and Trenčín. Three cities (Košice, Prešov and Žilina) use Facebook more often than the other cities with more than 2,400 posts. If we consider the size of the cities, the two biggest cities (Bratislava and Košice) are the two cities with the lowest value of posts per inhabitant. The highest number of posts in one year was reached by Žilina (709 posts in 2018) while the lowest number of posts was identified in the case of Banská Bystrica (214 posts in 2016). The comparison of citizens' reactions has shown big differences between the cities with higher numbers of reactions (Prešov, Trenčín, Trnava) and the lowest numbers of reactions (Nitra, Žilina). The highest number of reactions was identified in the case of Trnava (143,153). This result seems to be crucial if we consider that Trnava has the second lowest number of inhabitants. On the other hand, there was only 35,914 reactions on posts published by Nitra. A calculation to the number of inhabitants revealed that Žilina, Bratislava and Košice were the three worst-performing cities. The highest number of comments was identified in the case of Bratislava (25,453). This value seems to be more impressive if we consider the fact that there

were only 3,015 comments in the case of Žilina in all four years. The significant difference was revealed between the highest and the lowest value in the number of shares. The highest number of shares was identified in the case of Prešov (35,865), while only 6,392 shares were identified in the case of Žilina. Summing it up, Trenčín, Trnava and Prešov have reached qualitatively better results than other cities in the case of number of comments and number of shares per inhabitant.

3.2 Spheres of Social Life Included in the Posts

Another important part of our research was focused on the spheres of social life mentioned in the posts of the selected cities. Table 3 includes the occurrence rates of spheres of social life mentioned in the analyzed posts.

Table 3: Spheres of social life mentioned in the posts published by regional cities

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina	$\bar{x}$
Self-government issues	10.66	22.20	15.22	18.28	16.18	16.45	31.90	15.50	18.63%
Order and security	4.69	12.30	5.49	8.26	8.03	11.34	7.87	11.00	8.69%
Public infrastructure	14.98	20.63	8.55	9.26	9.74	22.39	11.53	3.90	11.59%
Education	4.41	4.61	4.40	7.15	10.84	6.84	12.64	7.27	7.52%
Social issues	6.89	8.38	7.90	9.96	11.01	4.21	17.28	10.04	9.89%
Traffic	7.08	17.75	10.26	6.33	6.52	15.33	6.81	4.50	8.98%
Culture	44.12	37.07	33.98	58.11	53.97	36.59	53.67	50.64	46.42%
Sport	21.51	8.59	10.95	12.71	15.53	11.19	9.75	13.29	12.55%
Environmental	9.10	13.93	4.88	8.03	5.34	12.02	13.27	7.99	8.94%
Other	24.54	26.13	39.64	15.99	17.69	33.51	17.57	18.51	23.97%

Source: Author

The research revealed that some spheres of social life are not mentioned very often by the selected group of cities. In this sense, we might identify spheres of social life with a lower average occurrence rate than 10%. Order and security, education, traffic information, social issues and environmental issues are not the centre of attention of regional cities.

The development of public infrastructure is a very complex group of posts (11.59% on average). This specific type of posts is closely connected with the development of the whole territory and is mostly associated with investments in the reconstruction of properties, the construction of roads, power or water delivery, as well as the maintenance of school, healthcare, and cultural facilities. It is difficult to say if the number of posts reflects the economic conditions of the selected cities. However, most cities reach an occurrence rate between 9 and 22% in the analyzed period of four years. An extremely low occurrence rate was identified in the case of Žilina (3.90%). On the other hand, an occurrence rate over 20% was identified in the cases of

Bratislava and Trenčín.

Sport is another important sphere which is included in the posts of selected cities (12.55% on average). The number of posts could not be compared with the dominant spheres of social life, but we might argue that sport posts represent an important part of cities' publishing activities. This statement is based on the fact that the lowest identified occurrence rate is 8.59% (Bratislava). Posts of this type mostly include information about various sport events and contests in the city, sport ceremonies, activities of the city's sport clubs, etc.

Another two spheres of social life should be characterized by high inconsistency. Self-government issues represent 18.63% of posts on average. The difference between two cities on opposite sides of the scale is more than 20% (Banská Bystrica 10.66% and Trnava 31.90%). An occurrence rate between 15.22% and 22.20% was identified in the case of the remaining six cities. This type of posts mostly includes information about activities of the city's office and elected representatives, local taxes, development of the territory or changes of opening hours. The group of posts called other posts is the most heterogeneous and the most inconsistent group. The difference between two cities on opposite sides of the scale is almost 25% (Nitra 15.99% and Košice 39.64%). Other posts mostly contain passive information, photos without text, information about the number of fans or a change of profile photo.

Finally, culture is the most frequently mentioned sphere in the posts of analyzed cities (46.42% on average). The lowest occurrence rate, identified in the case of Košice (33.98%), is higher than the occurrence rate of any other sphere included in posts of regional cities. This high occurrence rate is caused by the wide range of activities associated with cultural events and happenings, which were held by various entities in the analyzed cities. Very interesting is the fact that culture is included in more than half of all posts shared by Nitra, Prešov, Trnava and Žilina.

The in-depth analysis we performed of information included in posts allows us to create a word cloud with the 50 most frequently used words (Picture 1). The words "city", "will be", "day", "you" and "year" were the five words the regional cities included most frequently in their posts. The word cloud consists of words which were mentioned more than 1,000 times.

Picture 1: The 50 most frequently used words – word cloud



Source: Author

3.3 Purpose of the Posts

Based on the purpose of the posts published on the official Facebook pages, the activities of selected cities were divided into seven groups (Table 4).

Table 4: Purpose of the posts published by regional cities

	Banská Bystrica	Bratislava	Košice	Nitra	Prešov	Trenčín	Trnava	Žilina	$\bar{x}$
Call for participation	5.70	7.02	2.89	4.80	2.61	6.91	10.91	4.06	5.36%
Call for opinions	5.42	6.81	3.05	4.75	4.93	5.03	8.54	3.13	5.08%
Information about future events	37.22	42.67	30.44	52.26	39.38	40.05	50.58	57.07	44.03%
Information about live events	9.01	4.40	6.19	3.34	10.35	7.36	5.41	3.13	6.02%
Information about past events	31.43	29.58	23.89	27.01	31.63	30.58	16.70	16.87	25.17%
Service posts	1.75	2.15	1.10	2.17	1.22	1.05	0.53	2.17	1.50%
Passive posts	9.47	7.38	32.44	5.68	9.87	9.02	7.34	13.57	12.83%
Posts total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Author

Information about future events or activities are the most frequently mentioned type of posts. Altogether 44.03% of posts include information about events, happenings or activities which will take place in a certain city. Information about future events represent more than half of all posts in three cities (Nitra 52.26%, Trnava 50.58% and Žilina 57.07%). These group of posts mainly include invitations to future cultural, sport, social, educational, and other events. The second most frequently mentioned type of posts include information about previous events. These posts represent 25.17% out of all posts of the selected cities over the four-year period. The occurrence rate ranges around 30% in six cities. But we identified a low occurrence rate in the cases of Trnava (16.70%) and Žilina (16,87%). Another type of posts which is comparable to the previous two types is information about live events. The average occurrence rate of 6.02% is an outcome of different occurrence rates between 3 and 10%. The purpose of these three types of posts is associated with similar events which take place in the city, but information is published at a different time.

The official Facebook pages of the selected regional cities include posts which invite citizens to participate and engage. Both types of posts, posts calling for participation (5.36%) and posts calling for opinions (5.08%), reached a relatively low occurrence rate. However, posts focused on calling for opinions are more consistent than posts connected with the active participation of citizens. The highest occurrence rate was identified in Trnava (8.54%). Posts calling for opinions include requests for surveys and questionnaires, opinions of citizens about realized activities and emotions of citizens associated with the latest happenings. Posts calling

for citizens' opinions represent between 3 and 8% out of all posts. Posts calling for participation include information, the aim of which is to foster active participation of citizens, such as active participation in meetings of city councils, participation and engagement in preparing strategic and long-term documents, application connected with the participatory budget of the city, invitations to public discussions on key issues. Posts calling for participation vary between 2 and 7% in most cases. However, Trnava paid the highest attention to active participation of citizens and in this sense, 10.91% of the published posts try to foster the active participation of citizens.

The last two types of posts are not connected with the expected activity of citizens. Service posts represent a minimal part of the overall posts with 1.50% on average. This type of posts mostly includes information about the number of fans, change of title photos or any change of the site's propositions. Passive posts as another type represent 12.83% of all posts of regional cities. These posts mostly include passive photos with no other description or just simple greetings. The research revealed that data obtained from the official Facebook page of Košice (32.44%) show a high and enormously different occurrence rate in comparison to other cities. However, six out of the eight cities do not pay serious attention to passive posts (5–9%), except for Žilina with 13.57%.

4. Discussion

The local self-government units significantly affect the life of local communities in Slovakia. This fact is emphasized in the case of the selected regional cities, which should be perceived as the centres of wider territories. The ambition of the article was to examine impacts of information technology on public administration providing information, mainly social media. The analysis was focused on the official Facebook pages of regional cities, with an emphasis on general features of pages, purpose of shared posts and spheres of social life included in the published posts. As was stated in the introductory part, attention was put on the character of information published by regional cities.

The official Facebook pages of the selected cities are a relatively stable part of their image and can be perceived as an accepted communication channel. The analysis of general features revealed just fundamental informational basis. In this sense, even more impressive informational value connected with the activities of cities was gained through the content analysis of published posts.

Establishing an official Facebook page is not the key part of the success, because the content of the published information is the key attribute for fostering participation and engagement. If cities want to foster the participation and engagement of the citizens, published content cannot consist of passive information. Posts must include attractive and citizen-oriented information. We might argue that posts of the analyzed cities contain information about various types of spheres. The frequency of the presented spheres of life should be divided into three groups, spheres of social life with a frequency under 10% out of all posts, spheres of social life with a frequency between 10–19% and spheres of social life with a frequency higher than 20%. Based on our analysis, the type of posts with the highest frequency of posts are culture, other posts, self-government issues and sport. The occurrence rates of the mentioned spheres of social life usually reached more than 10% out of all posts on average. Simultaneously, we might identify

spheres of social life with an occurrence rate under 10% on average, such as social issues, education, traffic information, environmental issues, order and security. The research revealed that the occurrence rate of spheres of social life is relatively homogenous in the selected group of cities. Summing it up, culture, local self-government issues and sport represent the dominant spheres of social life mentioned in the posts shared by the selected cities. Cities should publish information which is perceived as important and attractive from the perspective of citizens. These spheres of social life should be assessed as the spheres which citizens identify with.

The quality of information is one part of the success, which must be complemented by an adequate purpose. According to our research, we might say that two types of posts reach higher occurrence rates than all other types of posts. The highest occurrence was identified in the type of posts with a strictly informational character. In this sense, most posts included information about future events or activities. An occurrence rate over 50% was identified in three cities. The second most frequent shared type of posts provides information about past events and activities. The creation of a platform which might foster engagement and participation of citizens is an important benefit, which results from the intersection of the rise of information technology and social media usage. In this sense, special attention must be paid to posts calling for participation and posts calling for opinions. These types of posts are not so frequent as informational types of posts. However, a higher occurrence rate was identified in the case of posts calling for participation. The research revealed that cities which often call for the participation of their citizens reach relatively similar numbers to the type of posts calling for opinions. It must be stated that Trnava is the leader in both types of posts. As was mentioned before, Trnava has the highest ratio of fans to citizens. In this sense, Trnava might be perceived as a good example how to use Facebook to inform citizens. The character of the information shared and the city's attitude to use the official Facebook page was evaluated as positive from the citizens' point of view. The types of posts focused on calling for opinions and calling for participation represent an important trend connected with challenges of the contemporary crisis of democracy. On the other hand, with the highest number of passive posts Košice has the lowest ratio of fans to inhabitants. In this sense, improving the quality of information and the sophistication of posts' purpose is the first step how to involve citizens into the decision-making process and improve the quality of public services.

Due to the intentional selection of the research sample, comparing the findings with existing research can only be superficial. Besides, differences between systems of public administration cause distinctions which make an exact comparison even trickier.

The discussion of general features of social media usage usually begins with number of fans, the number of posts or the presence on Facebook. The selected cities established their official Facebook pages many years ago. In this sense, this finding is in contrast with arguments that only 14% of the Slovenian state administration organizations established Facebook pages (Jukić and Merlak 2017). However, the soundness of this comparison is limited by the scope of the selected public administration units. On the other hand, all regional cities had established their Facebook page by the time when the analysis of Slovenian state administration organizations was performed. Besides, a relatively high adoption rate of social media by various types of local self-government units was identified in Slovenia 36%, Greece 53%, Israel 58.1%, Lithuania 77% and Romania 83% (Jukić and Svete 2018; Lappas et al. 2018; Sinkienė and Bryer 2016; Urs 2016; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015). The total number of posts, reactions, comments, and shares could not be compared adequately with the research realized so far. Our research was focused on a four-year period, while similar research mostly analyzed only a one-year

period. On the other hand, the average number of fans is another general feature which can be compared. According to previous studies, average number of fans reach 2,601 in Slovenian state administration organizations, 15,260 in Romanian local self-government, 1,877 in the case of Czech self-governing regions and 7,576 in Israel (Špaček 2018; Jukić and Merlak 2017; Urs 2016; Lev-On and Steinfeld 2015). The average number of fans reached in the regional cities in Slovakia is 17,864.

Our research revealed that culture is the most frequently mentioned sphere of social life in selected regional cities (46%). The analysis of the Slovenian municipalities also confirmed that culture is the most mentioned sphere with 44% out of all posts (Jukić and Svete 2018). Other posts represent part of shared content, which is the second most frequent both in the Slovak regional cities and the Slovenian municipalities. Altogether 24% of posts were not identified as belonging to the selected spheres of life and were categorized as other posts, while Jukić and Svete (2018) identified 21% of similar posts in the Slovenian municipalities.

According to our research, content published by regional cities is mostly informational, because 75.22% of posts just inform citizens about future, live or past events. In Slovenia, 57% of posts include just informational content, while only 0.41% of posts call for citizen participation (Jukić and Svete 2018). Altogether 5.36% of the selected cities' posts invite citizens to participate. These numbers were also confirmed by a statement from Murray Svidroňová et al. (2018). What is more, only 0.80% of posts shared by Czech self-governing regions invite citizens to participate (Špaček 2018).

The benefits of the performed analysis and the defined recommendations should be considered in connection to their limits. The use of Facebook by public administration represents a relatively unexplored field of study, and possible negative aspects have not been examined so far. The question of legitimacy is raised automatically when we talk about these new platforms. There are important issues which need to be considered by the management of public organizations, such as the number of reactions and the number of fans. Besides, it should always be taken into consideration that potential key actors might have missed an important call for participation or call for opinions. The exclusivity of social media usage at the expense of other communication channels is dangerous and nondemocratic in our opinion. Social media need to be perceived as complementary communication channels. However, there is no doubt that the importance of social media will rise in the coming years. The research sample was selected intentionally, and the paper examines the official Facebook pages of eight regional cities. According to this fact, the widening number of organizations could be very useful both for theory and practice. However, the paper tries to be an initial insight into the relatively new aspect of public administration activities on social media.

The paper could foster future research. In this sense, the paper tried to support an interest in deeper research both in local self-government and public administration in general. The benefit of the paper might be a comprehensive view, thanks to which local self-government units could implement better social media policies. Moreover, the paper concentrates its attention to Slovakian cities, but findings could be inspirational for public administration organizations around the world. In this sense, the international comparison seems to be very attractive. Besides, interesting findings might be revealed by examining specific situations, such as periods before elections, extraordinary situations associated with weather or environmental catastrophes, etc.

5. Conclusions

Regarding the significance of information technologies, the implementation of social media might help to improve the qualitative aspects of the contemporary concept of governance. The growing importance of social media usage in public administration has been confirmed not only by theoretical discussion, but it has also been proven by our research.

Summing it up, social media should be characterized as a new platform for communication between the public administration and citizens. We might argue that according to this fact, the official Facebook pages are a constant part of cities' images. The research revealed that the dominant part of posts aims to inform citizens about future and past events. According to content analysis, culture, sport and self-government issues were the most frequently mentioned spheres of social life in the conditions of the selected regional cities in Slovakia. The hypothesis has not been proven. The selected group of cities use their official Facebook pages mostly to share informational posts, while calling for opinions and calling for participation represents a significantly lower part of total posts. Improving the quality of information and sophistication of posts' purpose is the first step how to involve citizens into the decision-making process, enhance the relationship between public administration and citizens, and improve the quality of public services and quality of life. On the other hand, the unanswered question is if fostering participation and engagement can be perceived as a side effect associated with creating the image of a proactive, inclusive, innovative and smart city through social media.

To conclude, the benefit of the article is associated with fostering an interest in the examined issues of social media usage, which we hope might improve the quality of social media policies and benchlearning processes in other Slovak cities and hopefully other local self-government units in the European territory.

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Ondrej Mital', PhD, is now working as an Assistant professor at the Department of Public Policy and Theory of Public Administration, Faculty of Public Administration of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. His main research activities are focused on the impacts of globalization processes on local self-government, the implementation of ethical principles in local self-government, as well as the application of innovative tools, which might foster openness and transparency in local governance. Correspondence: Ondrej Mital', Faculty of Public Administration, Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Popradská 66, 040 11 Košice, Slovakia. E-mail: ondrej.mital@upjs.sk