

Opportunity of Using the Social Media Like a Business Development Tool

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In a competitive environment where all aspects need to be taken into consideration which contributes to the aim of a business organization and every participant that can influence its activity, the social media can be the link between the different business activities. Social media does not only have the role of communication channel between the different players that represent the business environment, but can also offer an image for the activities and for the needs of every single player that takes part in the economic process, allowing them to analyse and understand the other participants needs and offers. For all this participants, social media offers different tools through which they can achieve the objectives and with which they can improve their business. While the economy was trying to recover from the crisis, social media platforms, especially social networks grow exponentially (Hendler & Golbeck, 2008; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Based on these, to determine how the business activities can be improved through the use of social media it has been conducted an exploratory research, carried out online through a structured questionnaire posted on a free platform. The targeted research group was composed of young people which are more familiar with the applications offered by social media and that also have a job and an image formed on the activity of an economic environment. For a better business picture of the Romanian business activity were questioned both budgetary environment employees and those in the private sector. Through it we have identified a number of theoretical concepts on typology and modalities to use social media and we determined the main particular social media tools through which business activities can be coordinated and improved.

Within the economic activities there are more players that take part in the economic process. On one hand we have the producers that respond to the costumers needs, giving them products and services, and on the other hand we have the costumers that satisfy their needs through products and services that already exist on the market. Between this two there are the distributors that allow the intermediation between the producer and the consumer and the provider that maintains the producer's activity with providing raw materials or other related services.

Within the business organization we have employees that can take leading positions through the organization management or through its different

departments or have an executive role. Another group of participants that influence the activity of a business organization are the shareholders.

For all this participants, the social media offers instruments with which they can reach their goals and improve their activity. While the economy tries to recover from its crises, the media platforms and especially the social networks are exponentially developing. For example at the beginning of 2009 the global economy reaches its lowest since the Second World War, Facebook reached 100 million users (Stone, 2009).

The social media in connection with players of economic activity

Any economic activity is based on the connection between two partners, the offerer of products and services and the one that buys the products and the services. The manufacturer is one of the main participants of any economic activity. A manufacturer cannot exist and he cannot maintain its economic activity if he cannot identify as accurate as possible the needs and the preferences of his clients. The clients can be individual consumers as well as business organizations.

In this identification process of needs and preferences, social media can play a very important role. The social media can offer a number of instruments by means of which the manufacturers can analyze the needs and determine the client's expectations. At the same time there is a faster way to see if the products and the services that they offer reach the clients expectations.

The identification process for the client's needs and preferences can be developed due to more types of social media platforms.

The main instrument offered by the social media for the reach of this purpose is the discussion forum. Through this discussion forums that have been specially created with this purpose by the organization or through those existing, created by the consumers, they can reach their goals. By attending to discussions, with the help from the company experts, they can determine both the client's needs and their opinions regarding the products and the offered products. More than that they can influence the customer's opinions about their products and services.

Another tool with which the manufacturers can influence the costumers opinions about the offered products and services are the blogs. The strongest aspect of a blog is that it allows you to respond to a simple question: "*How can I serve my clients better?*" (Hayward, 2011)

The blogs can be built by the organization or by specialists in the field. The experts, who are listened by the consumers, can present the products and the services provided by the producer.

Another purpose of a blog is to evaluate the reactions of those that post comments to the articles published on blogs, thus it can have a faster and clearer imagine of the clients opinion about the offered products and services.

The file sharing platforms, whether video, audio or imagines are other instruments that can be useful to the producers in the work to promote and analyze the activity. In this case also, we can talk about promoting the products

and the services and at the same time analyzing the comments attached by those who have seen and listened those files.

Another role of this kind of platform is to educate the customer or even its own employees. Not only files belonging to the category of advertisement can be posted on these platforms, but also educational files. Thereby this kind of files can contribute to educating the audience, because of the direct access that users have to this kind of platforms and through their distribution on other social media platforms, like blogs, social networks, microblogs and others.

The pages created on social network can contribute themselves in the promoting process and also for a direct communication with the clients and even with their own employees. Even though the social network is the most noticeable platforms of social media, in the relation with the producer activity they have a lower part. They can influence this activity only by promoting the offer, but an analysis of the efficiency of such an action must be made carefully. Another role of the social network, created around some professional groups, like the LinkedIn case, is to be able to recruit specialized personnel that can contribute at the further development of the organization.

If until now we talked about the promotion of products and services offered to consumer, viewed as private or business, we must talk about communication function offered by social media. This function can be used by the producer as a part of awareness process or to educate the consumer or even their own personal (Onete, Dina, & Negoii, 2011), but can be a stand-alone activity in relation with the other players of economic environment.

The communication is an activity used to relate both the external environment –clients, consumers, distributors- as well as with employees and shareholders of organization. The communication process can be made using the platforms mentioned above or with platforms which offer office productivity tools. These tools are applications such as email, sharing documents platforms or even online communication tools-like chat, video or audio applications that allow conferences. These are some of the online office applications offered by social media that can be used in the communication process.

Social media a tool which sustains business activities?

Build on theoretical aspects described above, to determine how the business activities can be improved through the use of social media has conducted an exploratory research, carried out online through a structured questionnaire posted on a free platform. Targeted research group was made up of young people which are more familiar with the applications offered by social media that also already have a job and thus have an image formed on the activity of an economic activity. Gender distribution in our group of respondents was 67.72 % female and 32.28 % male.

Table 1. The structure of business activity of respondents

Commerce	35.43%
Services	14.17%
Production	4.72%
Education	2.36%
Marketing an PR	10.24%
Banks	1.57%
Accounting	1.57%
IT	4.72%
Transportation	0.79%
Do not work	15.75%
N/A	4.72%

Source: original, based on data from research

For a better image of the Romanian business activity were questioned both budgetary environment employees and employees in the private sector. The structure of business activity of respondents is not very heterogeneous, majority of respondents work in areas related services, just a small percentage of them work in production area. Unfortunately a rate of over 15% are unemployed, this high percentage is result of the fact that respondents are young, many of them students. Distribution on domains of activity is presented in Table 1.

To identify the most effective tools offered by social media which could be used in business activity or to promote it, we must find how both, consumer and employee, use social media. In this purpose, from research carried out, we selected to demonstrate most important three working hypothesis, which are set out below:

1. Romanian business organizations use more and more social media to promote their activity instead of traditional media,
2. Social networks are used more in personal purpose than to promote a business,
3. Free blogging platform are used in personal purpose and the paid are used for professional purpose.

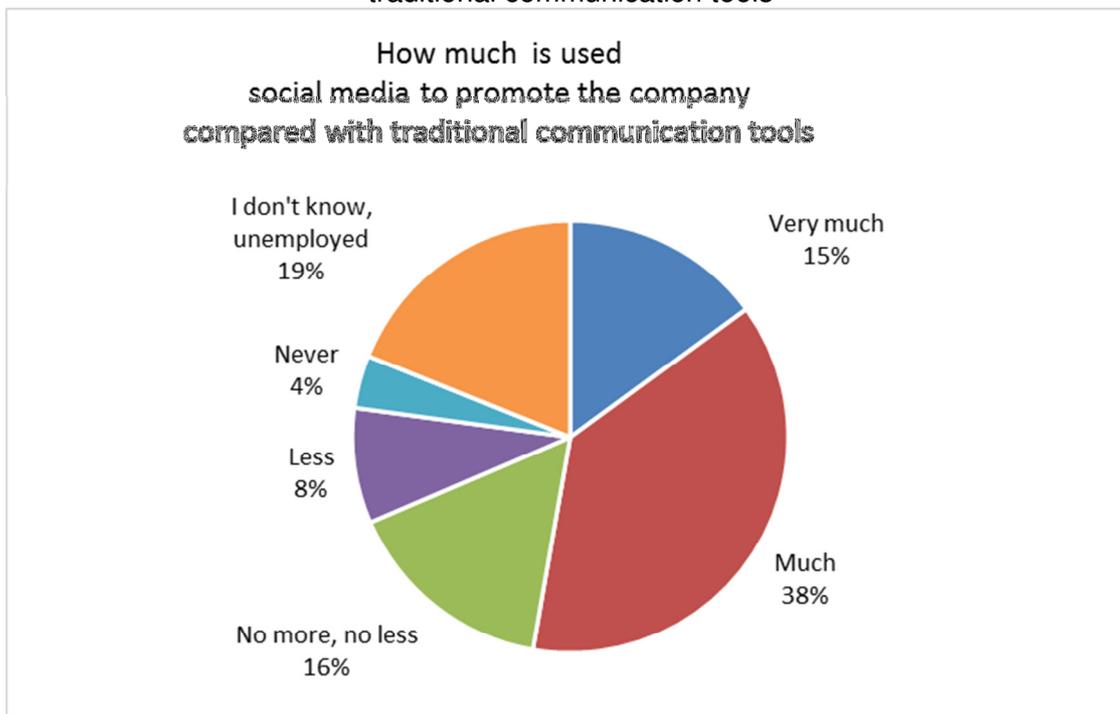
Social media vs. traditional media

Social media tends to replace traditional media in communication process of the values and qualities of products and services offered by business organizations. This tends to become the main channel of communication with customers. For this reason we wanted to determine how much social media is used in the Romanian business environment in relation to communication tools used by traditional media by the business environment. How social media is perceived by companies and how much is used is shown in Figure 1.

As it is seen social media are becoming the main tools used to promote business firms in Romania. Even if the percentage of those who use social media very much (15% of respondents) is not very high, it is still a significant proportion. If we consider the percentage of those using more (38% of

respondents) percentage exceeds 50%, which shows that social media tends to become the main means of promoting the values of companies and the communication between companies and customers. An explanation of these results may be that business organizations are starting to realize that using social media is more efficient and costs are lower.

Figure 1. How much is used social media to promote the company compared with traditional communication tools

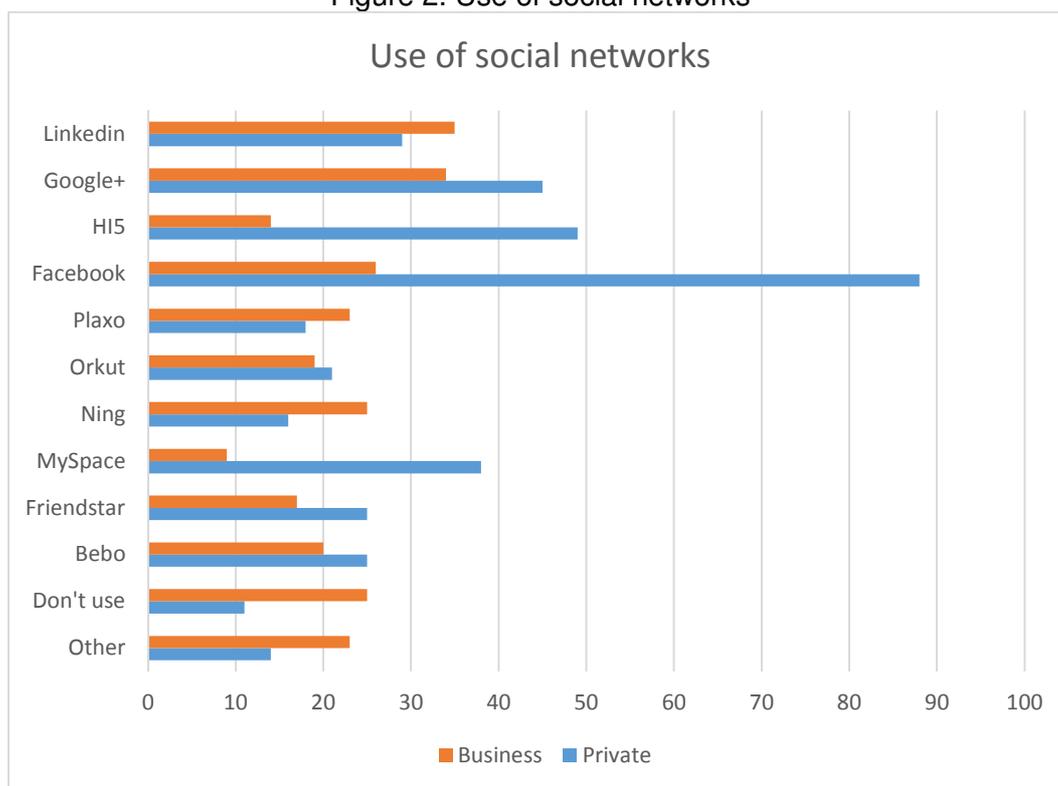


Source: original, based on data from research

Social networks – private or business

Social networks are used by most of the people who have access to Internet, for this reason companies begin to create promotional campaigns and awareness activities through thereof. Because of this we asked the interviewees if they use social network in personal or business purpose. Each respondent may choose from a list of most important social networks which network use and if is used for the company where work or for personal communication. The results are showed in Figure 2. The most significant result is Facebook is used more for personal reasons and LinkedIn and Google+ in business activities by the Romanian people.

Figure 2. Use of social networks

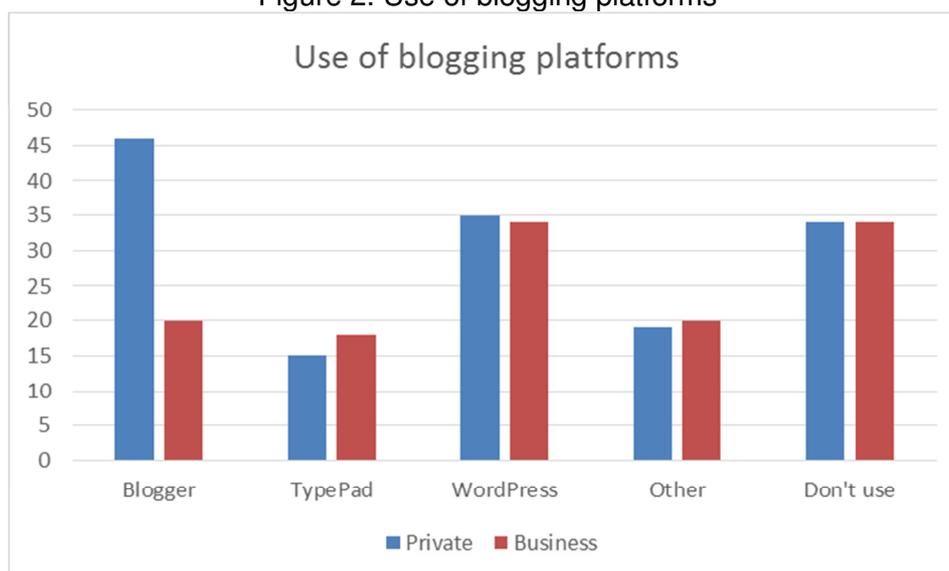


Source: original, based on data from research

Blogging for business or personal promotion

From the economic point of view the blogging platform could be used for the presentation of products or services offered by the companies or to earn awareness. This activities can be made by the employees or by independent experts. To find if this platforms are used by the respondents as employees or for personal hobbies we used the same methodology as in the case of social networks. WordPress and Blogger, which are mostly free platforms, are used more for personal posts and TypePad, which is a paid platform, is used for business activities. However WordPress is used by an almost equal number of people in both purposes. The results are showed in Figure 3 and confirm the assumption made above.

Figure 2. Use of blogging platforms



Source: original, based on data from research

Conclusion

In a competitive environment where all aspects need to be taken into consideration which contributes to the aim of a business organization and every participant that can influence its activity, the social media can be the link between the different business activities. Social media does not only have the role of communication channel between the different players that represent the business environment, but can also offer an image for the activities and for the needs of every single player that takes part in the economic process, allowing them to analyse and understand the other participants needs and offers. (Markova & Petkovska-Mirčevska, 2013) Social media is changing the way brands and consumers engage with each other. Each type of business has its peculiarities and is managed differently and social media offer many tools which can be used to ease the business process, so each one can choose the one which seems most appropriate. Romanian business environment start to use social media tools more and more, which may lead to their business efficiency.

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