Social Media and Organizational Communication

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INTRODUCTION

The online environment is a whole new channel of social interaction. For an organization, however, the online environment is a form of bidirectional communication, with the ultimate goal of gaining profit or various benefits from the image of such an entity. These aspects help us acknowledge the importance of using the Internet, as an organization, to maintain the relationship with both the public and the staff. Nowadays, when we think about the online environment, we automatically think about Social Media: social networks, Social Bookmarking sites, business blogs, and many other web pages where users can interact and can generate or access content, as well as static sites, generating unidirectional information.

Social Media is not only used to announce or promote a new product. This channel can also be used for direct sales, online advertising, maintaining the relationship with the public and especially for brand awareness. In addition to this component, that is specific to marketing, public relations or advertising, the online environment also plays an important part in human resources. With the development of Web 2.0, the selection and integration processes, as well as staff management, have become much easier, with the help of various online platforms offering professional services, as "organizations increasingly rely on online communication (social networks, blogs, official site, newsletter, digital marketing)" (Briciu, Briciu and Găitan, 2019, p. 44).

Therefore, public content management on the Internet becomes a specific activity for specialists in organizational communication. Thus, the organization involved in a Social Media campaign or simply existing in the virtual environment creates a presence that is meant to provide greater visibility and awareness. Through the channels it uses (website, blog, social networks, etc.), the organization maintains a permanent dialogue with its audience and uses its own resources to attract as many stakeholders of its virtual messge as possible.

This chapter's objective is to take into consideration the online environment as the new channel for social interaction, putting into focus the organizational communication and its development from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. The chapter will also discuss the implication of Social Media characteristics and defining the terms, such as social bookmarks, wikis, social networks, photo and video sharing, etc. The chapter will also include a case study discussing the communication strategy using Social Media channels of a renowned Romanian brand from the petroleum and gas industry.

Figure 1. Web 1.0 vs. Web 2.0 features

BACKGROUND

In the past decades, information technology developed significantly, both in terms of hardware and software. This has had a major impact in simplifying organizational communication processes, especially in the business sphere. Originating from the United States, the Internet is based on "a network of linked computers, each one connected to a set of others, supporting the electronic communication between computers around the world" (Henslowe, 1999, p. 87). In order to better understand the evolution of the Internet and the emergence of Social Media, we need to take into consideration the relevant distinction between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0, and especially between the concepts of static and dynamic (See Figure 1).

In the beginning of the '90s, with free access to the Internet globally, users accessed pages via Web 1.0. Subsequently, the transition to Web 2.0 was a subtle one, with users being able to interact through content generation. In Web 1.0 there is limited interaction between websites and users. "Web 1.0 is simply an information portal where the public passively receives information without being able to post comments and feedback." (Mitruț and Stoica, 2016, p.3). The content is static and the users cannot change it. Digital content is generated only by writing code in text editors. Users cannot generate content; they can only view the information that is displayed on the website by its administrator. "We can say that the transition to Web 2.0 was made when Content Management Systems emerged, allowing users to create their own web pages. They were open-source, and hosting was free." (Mitruț and Stoica, 2016. p.6). Web 1.0 is a static environment, a place where you could find information instead of a forum for sharing ideas or creating new products together. Moreover, Lincoln (2009) states that Web 1.0 is a world of simple transactions, opposing the emergence of Web 2.0, the new medium where "people can interact and participate rather than just read" (p. 8).". These can be categorized as dynamic sites. "This appears to be quite innocuous stuff, very open and honest, customer-orientated and very much in line with the way corporate should be behaving in a Web 2.0 world" (Brown, 2009, p. 36). Today, Web 2.0 is associated with a large range of tools and software used for viewing and developing the websites, but what is also important is allowing the user to interact directly with any web content in order to obtain custom products. As a short conclusion to what was presented above, Lincoln (2009, p. 8) strongly states that "because of the ambiguity of the term Web 2.0, many people prefer to use the term social media".

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