



Social Media Methods Used in Modern Teaching: A Case of Andrei Saguna University, Romania

Stefan Georgescu^{a*}, Cristina Gelan^b, Mihaela Munteanu^c, Tănase Tasențe^d,
Tabriz Garayev^e

^{a,b,c,d}Andrea Saguna University, Faculty of Communication and Political Science, Romania

^eBucuresti University, Faculty of Geography, Romania

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the importance of using and managing modern tools of teaching and learning, aiming at how students interact with these tools in the educational process. The relationship between educational process developed at the University "Andrei Șaguna" in Constanța (Romania) and the current size of the media industry is directly proportional to the rapid and continuous development of New Media. In this respect, this study will highlight, on one hand, a description of the methods seeking development of the skills needed throughout a professional elite career, and on the other hand, how these skills meet the current market requirements where students will work.

Key words: Media industry, new media, education process, university, methods.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to highlight the importance of using and managing modern tools of teaching and learning, aiming at how students interact with these tools in the educational process.

The relationship between educational process developed at the University "Andrei Șaguna" in Constanța (Romania) and the current size of the media industry is directly proportional to the rapid and continuous development of New Media. In this respect, this study will highlight, on one hand, a description of the methods seeking development of the skills needed throughout a professional elite career, and on the other hand, how these skills meet the current market requirements where students will work. In this period of time we try to observe the influence of these modern methods above the teaching process and to try to form a strategy in this domain for the next years.

1. The current context of the Internet development in Romania

In Romania, the number of Internet has grown from approximately 800,000 (internetworldstats.com) (3.6% of the population of Romania) in 2000, to 8,578,484 (internetworldstats.com) (39, 16% of the population of Romania) by the end of 2011. Further, Romania currently ranks 13th globally in a top of the countries with the highest download speed, with an average of 25.56 Mb/s, over the average of the European Union (15.95 Mb/s) (netindex.com).

* Corresponding author. Email: stefan102001@yahoo.com

In a ranking of www.netindex.com, a website specializing in Internet traffic calculations, in the top 30 cities in the world with the highest download speeds are found four Romanian cities: Bucharest is on the 5th place (32.72 Mb/s), Iași ranks 11th (27.88 Mbps), Timișoara - 15th place (27.26 Mb/s) and Constanța - 17th place (28.80 Mb/s).

2. Transition to Web 2.0 and Social Media emergence

The increase of the number of users and the number of online resources have established the premise to a new phase of Internet evolution, Web 2.0. This new level was described by Horia Mihai Bădău as being the liberation from the "Technology oppression" (Bădău, 2011), and was surnamed "The Users' Internet".

Web 2.0. developed a new model of mass communication, characterized by a high degree of interaction between sender/senders and online audience.

One of the essential features of Web 2.0. is accessibility. Increasingly more Internet users have the ability to create and share information or content. Tim O'Reilly, a researcher in computer-aided communication described the transition to Web 2.0 as "Internet evolution from a storehouse of information and communication technologies (represented by sites), which were cumbersome forms of communication, to a symmetrical communication space (a platform that supports knowledge and conversations transfer where people can meet and organize with ease)" (Bădău, 2011).

Web 2.0 has developed a new communication environment called Social Media. The most important Social Media social network is Facebook.

In April 2009, Romania had 110,000 users according to the study *Facebook Demographics: Trends* (authors: Ben Lorica and O'Reilly Research) (slideshare.net, 2012), occupying the 30th place out of 34 in a top of Facebook users by country in Europe, passing only countries as Luxembourg, Lithuania, Malta and Ukraine.

By the end of August 2012, Romania ranked 34 in the world, with about 5 million Facebook profiles (more precisely - 4,963,760 according to data from facebrands.ro) and the penetration rate in the general population was 22.58%, and the population with Internet access - 63.68%. Relating to age segments, 30% of the users were between 18-24 years old, 30% - between 25 and 34, and 15% - between 35 and 44%. In terms of gender distribution, it was symmetrical, 50% of the users are women and 50% are men (socialbakers.com).

Technological development and the increasing number of Social Media users aroused interest from academics, who proposed implementation of several methods of using new media in university education. This was achieved by developing online learning platforms (*Moodle* e-learning platform, blogs, online newspaper-school, and online TV and radio stations), social and learning networking, online discussion groups, etc.

3. Case Study: Social Media Instruments Used in the University Educational Process

3.1. General objective of the research

O: Identifying the main methods of using Social Media in the educational process at University "Andrei Şaguna" in Constanţa (Romania).

3.2. Specific objectives

O1: Using the online newspaper "Ecuri" and the media analysis site of "Observatorul European de Jurnalism" (The European Journalism Observatory) by students of Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management, for publication of their own media productions.

O2: Promoting and managing social networks: Facebook, Twitter and Google+ and creating a modern interactive framework for socialization and learning for students.

O3: Developing the students' practical skills needed for an elite professional career.

3.3. Research method

The research method used is descriptive analysis of online resources used by the teachers of the Faculty of Communication Studies and Political Science of University "Andrei Şaguna" in Constanţa, in the academic year 2011-2012, in the educational process.

The on-line resources under research are the following social networks: Facebook, Twitter and Google+, the online newspaper, the media analysis network "European Journalism Observatory" and on-line television and radio stations. In this respect, the case study aims reasoning the benefits to the educational process conducted within University "Andrei Şaguna" of Constanţa and their popularization by students and their media productions.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The data subjected to the analysis we are to perform refer to the online resources used in the specialty training of students in Journalism and Master of Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management from the UAS: social networks (Facebook, Twitter and Google+), news portals and media analysis (the on-line newspaper "Ecuri" and the website of the European Journalism Observatory), the streaming and video-sharing platforms (the on-line television station of the University).

3.5. Analysis of the own resources of "Andrei Şaguna" University in Constanţa (Romania)

3.5.1. The Facebook Profile, page and discussion groups of the University

The Facebook social network of "Andrei Şaguna" University includes a Facebook Profile, a Facebook Page and two discussion groups entitled "Student la Andrei Şaguna" (Student to Andrei Şaguna) and "Jurnalişti la Andrei Şaguna" (Journalists of Andrei Şaguna).

The Facebook Profile (facebook.com), with a database of 3,258 users, and the Facebook Page (facebook.com) (856 users) are used by the students of Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management specializations for publishing their multimedia creations (edited photos, video and audio editing), mass-media articles produced in practical courses, being an efficient instrument to generate and manage the feedback received from users. The students have also been trained to create the media message in order to stimulate the readers to forward it to other uses not in the database.

The Facebook social network of University "Andrei Şaguna" also includes two Facebook discussion groups "Student to Andrei Şaguna" (289 members) and "Journalists of Andrei Şaguna" (56 members). These groups are necessary teaching material to develop classes, besides the editorial group of online newspaper "Ecouri", the website of the European Journalism Observatory, with the purpose of approaching topics of interest to students and their future professional development.

3.5.2. The social network of micro-blogging type – Twitter

By means of the micro-blogging network Twitter, students in Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management monitor the latest news in the media using the editorial posts of national and international media as a model and write journalistic articles. For a better management of media communication, students master the necessary theoretical framework. For example, in terms of communication through Twitter, knowing theory that had been developed by the researchers in Social Media domain: Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2011), the one named "push-push-pull communication", has a great significance for students. That only by knowing this theory the students will be able to truly become real professionals, and will not resume to being mere users.

The communication mechanism that Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein had developed in the theory proposed concerns the fact that: since the receiver of a message deems a "tweet" (message) as being interesting, by pressing the "follow" button he can track all messages sent by the transmitter of that "tweet". This mechanism means that the author of the messages followed is "pushed" automatically on the main Twitter of for all "followers". Given the fact that messages are sent via Twitter to a wide audience, and not individually, receptors will miss "the personalization" of messages. Thus, the public receiver will tend to ignore these messages and public reaction rate will decrease because the messages have not been

addressed directly. However, there are not few cases where a receiver can find interesting information so that he feels compelled to "share" or to "push" further by "re-tweet". This creates an effect of "cascading" where the original message will be "pushed" from one receiver to another group of receptors, and so on. Ultimately, if the message follows the course of this messages transmission spiral by re-tweet method, reaching nearly every node of the social network, the message is "fired", retransmitted or commented on by other means of mass communication.

This communication mechanism has been implemented by UAS students in the classroom, observing as a percentage the degree of reception of a message of public interest by Twitter users and how it becomes a media product. Such experiments have led to understanding the importance of *the viral message* in communication.

3.5.3. Google+ social network

Google+ social network is used within "Andrei Şaguna" University as an efficient instrument in the educational process by means of Internet-aided teaching model. An example in this respect is the Video Duplex Boston - Constanţa, realized on February 23rd 2012 at the Faculty of Communication Studies and Political Sciences, where was held the book launch of "Cartea feţelor" (Ulmanu, 2011) (The Book of Faces), which was the pretext for debate on "Social Media - Friend or Foe?".

Google+ social network has been used as a teaching tool through which the students and the Romanian journalist and trainer Alexander-Brăduţ Ulmanu, located in Boston, USA, could discuss issues related to online journalism. This type of remote educational activity prepares future journalists on understanding the advantages and disadvantages of using social media in journalism.

3.5.4. The on-line newspaper "Ecouri" (andreisaguna.ro)

It is administered by a teacher of the Faculty of Communication Studies and Political Sciences and is one of the on-line learning teaching tools for students of Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management. This platform is used for the courses of: Introduction to Internet Technology, Multimedia, Online Journalism, Political Journalism, European Journalism, Production of Publications, Mass-Media Workshop, Investigative Journalism, etc..

The editorial office of the on-line newspaper is composed of 49 authors and 4 editors, Journalism students or graduates of the University "Andrei Şaguna". They prepare and publish journalistic articles in the newspaper's sections: News, Culture, Entertainment, Economy, Editorials, Interviews, Politics and Society. Video, audio or infographics made at the Multimedia class are published in the newspaper and promoted through Facebook and Twitter social networks.

3.5.5. The European Journalism Observatory

The European Journalism Observatory (EJO) is designed to build bridges between the European and U.S. journalism cultures, facilitating collaboration between researchers and media practitioners. The main objective of EJO is the accessibilization

of research findings on public media for the general public and learning "the best practices" in journalism. Analyzing the trends in the media industry, European Journalism Observatory (EJO - ro.ejo-online.eu) strives to improve the quality of journalism and a better understanding of the mass-media. EJO ultimate aim is to reduce the gap between theoretical research in the field of media communication and the journalism practice.

The students of Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management, together with specialized teachers from the Faculty of Communication Studies and Political Sciences work together in EJO Club using media analysis sources (www.paginademedias.ro, www.hotnews.ro, www.reportvirtual.ro etc.) to develop such articles, that are published on various EJO network websites in Romanian, English, Italian, German, Latvian, Polish, Albanian, Ukrainian and Serbian, managing to become known in Europe.

3.5.6. On-line TV and radio stations of "Andrei Şaguna" University

At the classes of "On-line Journalism", "TV Specialization" or "Radio Specialization", the students are trained to identify the differences between classic and on-line TV and radio stations, emphasizing their journalism independence.

In practical applications, the students develop and manage on-line TV and radio stations using the Livestream (livestream.com) platform and "SAM Broadcaster" software. The students manage the database by making and uploading video and audio materials based on which they will subsequently make TV or radio shows that can be watched by social networking. The production team changes with each show or newsreel made, which facilitates the access of students to any stage of the editorial production (managerial or executive function) and them undertaking any kind of role. Moreover, students deployed in the field to transmit a story are trained to use this platform via a Smartphone connected to the Internet wireless network. At this activity take place all students from Journalism specialization.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Web 2.0, Social Media and new technologies in the educational process can change and make more attractive the instructive educational process. As seen, the teaching and learning process for the specializations of Journalism and Media Communication, Public Opinion and Information Management at the University "Andrei Şaguna" of Constanţa was held in a very high percentage with the aid of Social Media instruments (own news and media analysis portals, "Ecuri" online newspaper and "The European Journalism Observatory", respectively the Facebook, Twitter and Google+ social networks). The results led, on one hand, to the development of skills necessary to an elite career for students and, on the other hand, to the promotion of journalism and multimedia products.

The feedback from readers has been managed to improve the relationship between Social Media instruments and teaching and learning process in the university system.

Another benefit of using Social Media instruments was development of journalism entrepreneurship at the "Andrei Şaguna" University of Constanţa. In the same time all these methods conduct to increase:

- the capacity of our students to product quality media programs.,
- the visibility of our students in regional market media (Dobrogea) with good result in their insertion on local labor media market,
- the visibility of our University in civilian society,
- the connection between theoretical activity and practical activity ,
- the attractive of the specialization

All of this conducts us to change academicals curricula in this way

REFERENCES

- Bădău, Horia Mihai (2011). *Social Media Communication Techniques*. Iaşi: Polirom.
- Kaplan, Andreas; Haenlein, Michael (2011). The early bird catches the news: Nine tilings you should know about micro-blogging, in *Bussines Horizons* (pp. 105-113), Volume 54, No. 1/2011, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, Indiana: Elsevier.
- Ulmanu, Alexandru-Brăduţ (2011). *Book of Faces. Facebook Revolution in Social Environment*. Bucharest: Humanitas
- <http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/ro.htm>
- <http://www.netindex.com/>
- <http://www.socialbakers.com>
- <http://www.livestream.com>
- <http://www.andreisaguna.ro/ziar/>
- <http://www.facebook.com/universitateaandreisaguna.constantat>
- <http://www.facebook.com/andreisaguna>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/oreillvmedia/facebook-demo-20090415>, accessed on September 1st 2012