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**SOCIAL NETWORKS – POTENTIAL AND
CHALLENGES IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

Original scientific paper

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Abstract

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with complex and asymmetrical structure (two entities, District Brčko, and cantons with own government and ministries), The number of ministries in the BiH is enormous. Coordination between so many governments and ministries is demanding while most of the citizens are completely lost in that institutional labyrinth. One of the possible ways how governments and their institutions could help citizens, ensure direct communication with them and improve mutual coordination is more intensive use of social networks (Facebook, Twitter). Social networks have potential to increase visibility and transparency of the work of governments and their institutions. Also, they could make policy processes more inclusive and increase confidence between governments and citizens. The main goal of the paper is to explore presence and activity on social networks in BiH government institutions, to discuss major challenges and to propose potential options for better implementation of social networks in these institutions.

Keywords: Social Network, Government, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION

Web 2.0, more specific, social networking and social media websites represent a significant shift in the everyday use of technology. Passive use (searching, browsing, reading) has been completely replaced by an active interaction of all participants. People are enabled to actively participate in creating and sharing diverse content with different media. The former information monolog “*one-to-many*” has been replaced by dialogue “*many-to-many*” (Bojorquez, Shores, 2009). As these authors emphasize, the mentioned technologies have enabled democratization of information, and transformation of people from content readers into content publishers providing rich user experience. The social nature of Web 2.0 technologies helps in building online communities of people who share interests, activities, or both, or people interested in exploring the interests and activities of others (Bojorquez, Shores, 2009).

The mentioned democratization of information, the social nature of Web 2.0 technologies and dialogue, significantly contributes to raising the transparency and openness that many authors have recognized as very suitable “partner” for achieving open government - a concept that says the government should be transparent, collaborative and participatory towards its citizens and encourages governments to provide their data open and make them easily available to the public.

Web 2.0 technologies, more specific social media have become new tools for the public sector to communicate with the public and to realize the idea of an open government that embraces transparency, participation, and collaboration (Gunawong, 2015, Chun et al., 2010). According to Chun et al. (2010) an open government incorporating transparency, participation and collaboration can be realized by adopting Web 2.0 technologies.

According to Klang and Nolin (2011), public agencies started to embrace social media around 2009. Since then, they have attempted to harness social media’s potential for public purposes, while various social media applications are being used as new communication channels between public agencies and the general public (Gunawong, 2015). For example, U.S. states and their governors have adopted and used Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, YouTube, RSS, LinkedIn, Ustream, and Scribd, with Twitter being the most popular application (Joseph, 2012). There are different examples of social media use, especially Facebook, in public sector in the USA. Florida Department of Health leverages Facebook ads for a tobacco-free Florida. Department of Veterans Affairs communicates with their users on Facebook. Henrico County (Virginia) uses Facebook for information distribution during inclement weather. City of Burnsville (Minnesota) hosts a virtual fire department ‘ride-along’ on Facebook. City of Evanston (Illinois) successfully uses Facebook for Q&A with Mayor. Oakland County (Michigan) Web site contains Web 2.0 components, such as podcasting, RSS feeds, video and blogging (Andrews, 2015; Center for Digital Government and Government Technology, 2008). Recently, social media has also been employed as a tool for city marketing as observed in various Chinese cities such as Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Xi’an (Zhou & Wang, 2014).

Many researchers investigated the government efforts in realizing the benefits of the open data initiatives (AlAnazi & Chatfield, 2012; Janssen et al., 2012; Neuron et al., 2013; Veljković et al., 2014; Zuiderwijk & Janssen, 2014, de Kool & van Wamelen, 2008, Kavanaugh et al., 2012, Linders, 2012, Sivarajah et al., 2014, Gunawong, 2015). Several studies tried to measure the breadth of usage of social media. However, none of the studies measured the depth, i.e. appropriately directed applicability to the open government imperatives (Srivastava, 2016).

Gunawong (2015) suggested the classification of published content based on the qualitative content analysis. According to him, messages on social media could be grouped into four types: announcement, public agency-related, news update, general news update, and social activity update (Gunawong, 2015). According to this author, the *announcement* is messages with hints or schedules about activities to be held by some government institutions or public agencies. Public agency-related news update is a message with news updates about the government institutions or public agencies as well as updates about official activities performed by the officers concerned (Gunawong, 2015). General news update is a message with general news updates (e.g., current news in the respective provinces or weather forecasts) and updates on nonofficial activities engaged by the officers concerned (Gunawong, 2015). Social activity updates are messages with greetings or congratulations to particular persons/organizations (Gunawong, 2015).

Open government and social media in BiH

The process of development and implementation of state ICT strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina has started in 2002 with the initiative of Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In 2003 Council of Ministers BiH signed Memorandum of Understanding for the development of ICT in BiH with UNDP (United Nations Developing Program), and as the result ICT Forum was established. ICT forum developed documents Policies, Strategy and Action Plan for the development of information society in BiH for the period 2004-2010. This document was adopted by Council of Ministers in 2004, and it defined general policies, strategic guidelines, and platform for practical implementation of Action Plan. (Council of Ministers of BiH, 2004).

Although BiH adopted relevant strategic documents, the implementation of defined goals has been challenging and slow, and some analysis (ReSPA, 2015; CPU 2015; Mediacentar, 2011) showed that the results were unsatisfactory.

ReSPA (Regional School of Public Administration) together with its E-Government Network members and relevant regional and international experts, conducted two comparative studies. In 2013 the first one was done: “ReSPA Regional Comparative E-Government Study” on a regional level devoted to e-government in the Western Balkan region. In 2015, the second one, follow up study - “Form E- to Open Government” was made. The results of these studies showed that Bosnia and Herzegovina is performing less well than the regional average on both e-government and open government. In BiH a decade has passed since ICT stakeholders got together but today there is no

central governmental body, and instead, several major players are involved in e-government. The country is however presently building a strategy for information society development in line with the Digital Agenda of the Europe 2020 strategy but without any central body responsible for coordination (ReSPA, 2015). Although BiH was formally joined the OPG (Open Government Partnership), the multilateral initiative which encourages governments from around the world to initiate reform in the area of transparency, citizens' participation in decision-making, the fight against corruption and the use of new technologies, there are no concrete results yet. It could be said that Bosnia and Herzegovina is on the right path, but due to the nature of complex state organization and political arrangements, it is hard to ensure centralized effort, and that is one of the key future challenges.

Very often central government establishes initiatives and promotes good practices, but obstacles are presented when these initiatives need to be propagated to the lower administrative levels. Furthermore, many of these efforts are driven by the international community and the NGO sector. The government should take the initiative and the lead in many of these efforts and adopt new policies and good practices. However, most limitations are related to complex administrative structure, conflict of responsibilities or unclear division of responsibilities between different government levels (state, entities, and cantons). ReSPA analysis related to the use of Web 2.0 and social media showed that there are only some examples of their use in individual BiH Ministries (ReSPA, 2015). Two years later, the authors wanted to check is there any progress in the use social media in governments and governmental institutions in BiH.

Purpose and structure of the paper

This paper presents the empirical research related to the BiH public sector's social media adoption and use. The main research questions are how social networks were adopted and used by government institutions, and are they active or passive users? Also, the results of research can be used for analyzing BiH related to the context of open government, and for the evaluation of previously taken activities on transparency and collaboration with citizens.

Paper consists of the following sections: introduction, methodology, results and discussion, and finally conclusions and implications for further research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The country Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has asymmetric state structure. It is comprised of the two entities: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F BiH) and the Republic of Srpska (RS); and of the Brčko District (BD) of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a separate administrative area. The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the entity made up of ten cantons, and these are: Una-Sana, Posavina, Tuzla, Zenica-Doboj, Bosnia-Podrinje, Central Bosnia, Herzegovina-Neretva, West Herzegovina, Sarajevo and Livno (Canton

10) cantons. Each canton in F BiH has its government and ministries. The entity Republic of Srpska has no cantons, just municipalities. Because of the complex state constitution, BiH has numerous governmental institutions, agencies, offices, centers and similar. Document with a schematic description of governance levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina (available at the official website of Directorate for European Integrations¹) is used as a base for forming of the research sample. Table 1 shows the number of governmental institutions per different governance levels included in the research sample. The governmental institutions: the Council of Ministers, federal and cantonal governments and ministries, autonomous administrative organizations at state end entity level made the sample.

Table 1

The share of governmental institutions in sample by government levels

	Number of government institutions
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)	37
Council of Ministers of BiH	1
Ministries	9
Autonomous administrative organizations	27
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F BiH)	39
Government of F BiH	1
Federal ministries	16
Autonomous federal administrations	3
Autonomous federal administrations' units	9
Cantonal governments	10
Republic of Srpska (RS)	48
Government of RS	1
Ministries	16
Republic administrations	6
Republic administrations' units	25
Brčko District (BD)	1
Government of BD	1
Total	125

Activities of selected state and government institutions on social networks were analyzed through two aspects. It was investigated whether the links to social networks were available on official websites and whether these links were valid and active. If the links were not found on the home page, it was checked whether they were available on the contact page. Availability of social networks was also checked directly by searching on the social networks.

The posted content (30 recent posts) and the frequency of posting were analyzed. The analysis was conducted between 20.4.2017 and 24.4.2017.

Descriptive statistical analysis (frequency and percentage) was performed with regard to the adoption and use of each social media application by the BiH government institutions and public agencies.

¹ http://www.dei.gov.ba/default.aspx?langTag=bs-BA&template_id=119&pageIndex=1 (accessed March 15, 2017.)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pattern consisted of 125 government institutions in BiH. But analysis showed that only 22, i.e. 17.6%, of them use social networks (Table 2). Concerning the governance levels, the highest share of social networks use is in Federation of BiH, although all shares are relatively small. Namely, a small number of BiH government institution is present on social networks.

Table 2
The share of BiH government institutions with social networks accounts

	NoGI	No%GISM
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)	37	8 (21.6)
Council of Ministers of BiH	1	1 (100)
Ministries	9	0
Competent authorities	27	8 (29.6)
Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (F BiH)	39	11 (28.2)
Government of F BiH	1	0
Federal ministries	16	3 (21.4)
Competent federal authorities	3	2 (66.7)
Competent federal authorities' units	9	2 (22.2)
Cantonal governments	10	4 (40.0)
Republic of Srpska (RS)	48	2 (4.2)
Government of RS	1	0
Ministries	16	2 (15.5)
Republic authorities	6	0
Republic authorities' units	25	0
Brčko District (BD)	1	1 (100)
Government of BD	1	1 (100)
Total	125	22 (17.6)
NoGI - Number of government institutions; No%GISM - Number (%) of Government Institutions with Social Media		

The analysis of the activities on social networks at the level of BiH showed that less than ¼ of institutions included in this research even use social networks, exactly, just 8 of 37 institutions. As Table 2 shows, the Council of Ministers of BiH uses social networks, both YouTube and Twitter. Neither one ministry at the BiH level has a link to official pages on social networks. The browsing of social networks did not confirm the existence of official profiles of ministries on those media. Concerning the competent authorities at the level of BiH, 8 of 27 have profiles on social networks: Agency for Statistics BiH, Civil Service Agency of BiH, Anti-Doping Control Agency of BiH, Public Procurement Agency of BiH, Market Surveillance Agency of BiH, Agency for Preschool, Primary and Secondary Education, Institute for accreditation of BiH, and Institute for Standardization of BiH.

Analysis of government institutions at the level of Federation of BiH showed that only 11 (28.2%) of 39 analyzed institutions use social networks. The Federal government does not have an official page on any social network. Considering federal ministries, just 3 (21.4%) of 16 use social networks (Federal

Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees, Federal Ministry of Education and Science, Federal Ministry of Trade). The analysis of cantons showed that 4 (40%) of 10 have links on their web pages to official profiles on social networks (Una-Sana Canton, Posavina Canton, Bosnia-Podrinje Canton, Livno, i.e. Canton 10). Two of three competent federal authorities use social networks (66.7%), as well as 9 competent federal authorities' units (22.2%).

The situation in RS is similar to those in F BiH – just 4.2% of analyzed institutions from RS use social networks. The Government of RS does not have any official profile on social networks, while 2 of 16 ministries in RS have a profile on social networks (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Trade and Tourism). Analysis showed that neither one of six republic authorities, as well as neither one from 25 Republic authorities' units use social networks (they do not have official profiles on social networks).

The government of Brčko District has an official profile on Facebook.

It is logical that a simply having social media/network accounts/channels cannot be considered a social media adopter. Therefore, Table 3 shows the number of institutions, both at the level of state and entities, which have profiles on social networks, together with a number of institutions which actively use social networks during previous three months. The analysis was made on 3 social networks: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

Table 3
Adoption of Social Network by BiH government institutions

	N	Number of government institutions – n (%)					
		FB		TW		YT	
		Created Account (A)	Actively Used (B)	Created Account (A)	Actively Used (B)	Created Account (A)	Actively Used (B)
BiH	37	6 (16.2)	6 (100)	6 (16.2)	5 (83.3)	3 (8.1)	1 (33.3)
F BiH	39	11 (28.2)	11(100)	4 (10.3)	4 (100)	4 (10.3)	4 (100)
RS	48	1 (2.1)	1(100)	-	-	2 (4.2)	1 (50)
BD	1	1(100)	1(100)	-	-	-	-
Total	125	19 (15.2)	19(100)	10 (8)	9 (90)	9 (7.2)	6 (66.7)
A – n (% of N); B – n (% of n(A))							

The results presented in Table 3 shows that most of the government institutions with official profiles/pages on social networks really use them. As Table 3 shows, all Facebook pages are actively used, while in the case of Twitter, 90% of profiles are used, and in the case of YouTube 2/3 of channels are used. The greatest number of created, but not used social network official accounts was found on YouTube.

Gunawong (2015) classification, mentioned in the introduction, was used as a base for analysis of published content during previous 3 months. The posts of government institutions in BiH, according to the content (support

to cultural, sport, religious associations, announcements of conferences, projects, information about celebrations, anniversaries, an organization of fairs, participation in fairs and so on) could be grouped similarly. Special cases are reports from the sessions available on the social networks pages of cantons in F BiH. Actually, for some cantons, those reports make most of the published content.

If social media activities of BiH government institutions and their posts are considered in the context of open government, then BiH is quite far from it. It is easy to conclude that governmental institutions in BiH have not recognized social media as a powerful tool for the government to listen to their citizens and for citizens to interact with their local government.

As highlighted in the introduction, the main driver for the use of web 2.0 technologies at all governmental levels should be, both fostering two-way communication between government and citizens, and ensuring transparent information about work of government and its institutions. As the results of research show, in the case of BiH, use of web 2.0 technologies in governments and their institutions is still at the beginning. Although the research showed that some government institutions use social networks, there is no two-way communication. That confirms the relatively small number of friends/followers/subscribers on social networks, relatively low number of comments/shares/likes because government institutions mostly publish information related to promotion of institutions which do not require any active participation of citizens.

If the results of the conducted research are perceived in the context of world trends - high level of information and computer literacy, a high share of highly educated people, business informatization, global digitalization – it can be concluded that BiH is still on the starting position. Leaders of government institutions should work harder to improve the use of information technologies, especially social networks, and to use it as a tool for closing to their citizens, for providing transparent work and better communication and collaborations, both between institutions and with citizens. In the end, the government should be there to its citizens, not for itself.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The presented research explored social media use in the BiH public sector, precisely in a government institution and public agencies. Results of the research show that social media, social networks primarily, have not been widely adopted and used by BiH public sector. There are two main groups of reasons for poor adoption of social media: general reasons applied to most of the public institutions all over the world, and reasons specific to public institutions in BiH. Public institutions all over the world use social media primarily for spreading information, while most of them are still looking for ways how to actively engage users. The reason for this may be lies in the culture characteristic of public administration where civil servants have no practice to

act proactively, nor to engage online with citizens. The another issue is that social media communication is less formal and public administration is not trained how to deal with it. The reasons specific for BiH public institutions are the complex administrative structure of the country, conflict of responsibilities or unclear division of responsibilities between different government levels (state, entities, and cantons), lack of coordination mechanism and challenges in the propagation of strategic goals to the lower administrative levels. Till today, the main initiatives for social media adoption in public sector have been driven by the international community, NGO sector, and industry in BiH. But the results will not be satisfactory until governments at all levels understand that open dialog, collaboration and citizens' participation in decision-making are crucial for establishing a democratic society and the important request in the process of European integration. The presented research showed that the use of web 2.0 technologies in governmental institutions in BiH is still at the beginning. Therefore, it is a lot of space for further improvement, but this and similar research can contribute to raising the awareness of the advantages of social networks in fostering two-way communication between government and citizens.

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