The role of social media for media companies

Georgeta Drulă

Faculty of Journalism and Communication Studies,
University of Bucharest,
Bd. Iuliu Maniu nr.1-3, sector 6, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: gdrula@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper shows how media companies implement the social media strategy for their journalistic products. The objective of research is to identify approaches in which the Romanian media companies expand their production and business by considering user-generated content and social media platforms, with the purpose to draw a new online audience, and to create new media products. The media companies subject to the study, supply online general news. The methodology is based on SWOT analysis, quantitative and qualitative methods. While other studies show the user’s activities on social media platforms, this study presents the interest of the media companies for social media platforms and users’ content. The conclusions of this study show that the management methods and practices have evolved differently through the implementation of the social media platforms; in this way the solutions picked up by the media companies are different.

Keywords: media companies; social media strategies; implementation of social media strategy; media management; corporate strategies; role of social media.

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Biographical notes: Georgeta Drulă is an Associate Professor at University of Bucharest. She holds a title of Doctor in Economy and teaches courses in digital media and communication field, under the titles: Multimedia, Communication studies and new technologies; Online multimedia production, and Online corporate communication. She gained grants and led national and international research projects, contributed with articles published in peer reviewed journals and conferences proceedings. She is member of RO-HCI (Romanian Association of Human-Computer Interaction), AFCOM (Romanian Association of Trainers in Journalism and Mass Communication) and ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association). She coordinates the master programme ‘Multimedia and audio-video production’.

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1 Introduction

Users are more and more important for the media companies, they are all the more interested in being as close to the public and its information needs as possible. The large quantity of information users have at their disposal on the internet raises the problem related to the manner in which the company must offer this information so as to be perceived and accepted by the users. On the other hand, the media companies are forced to adopt new solutions regarding their production and distribution activities taking into consideration the multimedia content offered by the users. The users’ community and their content become resources and also a strategic solution for the media companies.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define and study social media applications and platforms, and make some advices for companies to use them. The relationship between companies and social media is a continuous preoccupation both for researchers and also for practitioners in the companies (Greenwald, 2010; Parsons, 2011; Rezab, 2011). The digital economy with its topics such as business models on web (Rappa, 2010), and audiences and markets (Flew et al., 2009) requires new business strategies. In terms of corporate social media strategy, several aspects are important:

- The manner in which these communication channels are chosen.
- The motivation for their use. Most often, the companies invoke reasons such as: recruitment and selection; employee motivation and involvement; attracting clients/audiences; improving brand visibility (Holtz, 2008). Joinson (2008) presents some motivations for Facebook usage in companies.
- Their manner of adoption and use by the company.

The emergence of social media has also brought into discussion, additionally to the economic, business, profitability dimension, the social dimension, which relates to the public involvement and participation in the company activities. The reasons for which a media company is using the social media are mainly connected to the public relation activities, to company site optimisation on the search engines or to online marketing.

Most of the times, according to the specialised works, the new media strategy of a company is based on pillars connected to business efficiency and the social media platforms most visited by the users. The importance of social media for a company or a product is assessed by way of the influence shown by them. The influence is often assessed by way of indicators related to the degree of communication/conversation on these platforms, to the users’ involvement or to the development of communities around the company or product (Weil, 2010).

Social media strategy of a company is related with a business objective. In this case, the business objective is defined by the media product. The outcome of the social media strategy application are measured directly on their platforms by way of specific indicators, such as: number of views, number of unique visitors, page rank (Google), number of blogs used by the media products and by the company, number of followers on Twitter, number of Tweets (updates), number of friends or number of Facebook pages. According with statistic sites, such as socialbakers.com, these indicators show companies that social media are important. So, everyone oriented to them and adopted them. The problem is if the approaches used to adopt social media in business strategy are good or not.
For instance, according to a study\(^1\) conducted by the Technorati.com website, for 2009, few dimensions of the solutions adopted by companies at blogosphere level are listed. This study shows that 14% of the bloggers hold a blog of a company. Out of these, 56% state that this blog has helped the company become visible in the industry and 71% of them state that through the blog their personal visibility in the industry has increased and that they use Twitter additionally to the company blog. 70% of the respondents to this survey said that, on personal blogs, they write about brands. At the same time, the Facebook platform, which is monitored for statistical purposes by socialbakers.com, is increasingly appealing for media companies, both because of the number of accounts and of the listed brands.

In Romania, the status of the social media shows that there are a total 63,071 blogs, 8,282 active blogs, 46,528 published posts and 33,135 comments, more than 50,000 Twitter accounts, more than 2,000 public groups on Facebook, more than 15,000 public Facebook pages (according to the zelist.ro website statistics\(^2\), of April 2011). Moreover, a survey conducted by the Independent Journalism Centre, the Romanian Press Club (CRP) and the Employer Association of Local Publishers (APEL) and mentioned in 2010 by the online publication, tehnopol.ro\(^3\), shows that “94% of the [Romanian] managers consider that the mass-media not developing online will lose”.

2 Theories, background and related work

The social networks sites reunite around the product or the company’s profile a loyal community of users. According to the specialised studies (Joinson, 2008; Lampe et al., 2008; Nazir et al., 2008; Waltherl et al., 2008), these sites are especially used to launch new products, for the company’s or products’ rebranding, to maintain a live dialogue with the public and to supply details related to certain information or products. Social media give a lot of opportunities to the companies, as many authors say: product development, monitoring the readers’ feedback, advertising campaign, marketing research, or establishing connections between company and users.

Social media platforms and their applications are strongly connected to user-generated content. This content is defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007, 2009) as a digital content, created by the users outside of professional duties and posted with the purpose to be shared. Many studies are dedicated to discover motivations to produce user-generated content (Stoeckl et al., 2007; Daugherty et al., 2008), but social media are not only places to publish a content, they are also places to do business and make decisions.

Most of the times, the social media platforms work like anchors and refer the users to the site of the media product. The emerging problem refers to the option that the media company should have in terms of these platforms. What should the media company choose in its management strategies: a blog or a profile on Twitter, a social network or Twitter, blog or community? The management strategies and practices of the companies using social media show that blogs help more to find new readers (users) and Twitter profile is more important for its influence of the media industry. But both have as a result the increase of the traffic on the sites of the media products and implicitly theirs. By the social networks sites, the media company may attract new readers, but their role is to pursue, to monitor their reactions and expectations. Direct monitoring of audience by
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Their messages may help the company understand what tactics to apply at different periods of time.

Murdough (2009) shows that in a company, the implementation of social media strategy is associated with business objectives and is viewed in several metrics. He considers three decisive pillars related to users/audiences and social media strategy, which a media company must take into consideration:

- authors, their comments, and posts
- discussions and topics approached and feelings generated by them
- results of audience participation on social media platforms.

From another perspective, Owyang (2009) considers that the social media strategy for media companies should be regarded depending on certain moments of its application, namely:

- at the initial moment of launching the social media,
- at the moment of evaluation of the implementation of social media results
- continuous monitoring.

Social media strategy can be organized on different platforms. One solution is the blogging platform. A blog may have one or several authors, and it may have a unitary aspect corresponding to the company. The main reasons for their usage by media companies are presenting expertise in the field and drawing new audiences that are more and more present on the Internet in the detriment of the other media channels. On blogs, companies check and launch information that are then discussed and commented upon in the online editions of the media products. Also, certain topics from the online editions are commented upon and discussed on these blogs. The corporate blog makes the object of study in the specialized literature more and more frequently (Bohorquez et al., 2010; Lockwood and Dennis, 2008; Yardi et al., 2008, 2009).

According to the specialized studies, its role is to sell products and services, to increase company’s visibility or to create a brand. We identify and view a corporate blog first by its aspect and layout unitary with that of the company’s site. The thematic content of the posts of such a blog mainly refers to events, products or services, the market or industry it belongs to and the work team. A special case is represented by media companies that, by the nature of their activity, may combine the features of the corporate blogs with those of the specialists’ blogs, namely the journalists.

Generally, by the Twitter platform, the company monitors the brand and industry, delivers the latest news in a short format, supplies diverse services to users and comes into direct contact with them. This platform also ‘draws’ the user’s attention to certain activities and products. These directions are also underlined in the specialized literature (Agrifoglio et al., 2010; Huberman et al., 2008; Java et al., 2007; Lenhart and Fox, 2009).

The role of social media in media companies is to turn the relationship with the reader into another form of communication and dialogue. Comprehending social media, which is its role, the company would benefit more from these accounts, and especially from Facebook page. Facebook requires constantly communicating with the readers. Facebook assures visibility for the media product and a direct way to contact the readers. This
possibility can be put in practice only with a good social media strategy. It is a relationship between how the social media are understood by the company, the social media strategy adopted, and their efficiency. Facebook requires a new approach of communication with the users. The problem is whether the media companies realise this.

The companies must choose a Facebook or a Twitter account only with a well-defined purpose and using a strategy and not just because everyone else has a profile like this (Bottles and Sherlock, 2011). The same authors say that people prefers ‘brands with an authentic personality’. From this perspective, the social media manager must be a specialised person who make people to be interested and motivated to be with your company and products on the Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The companies establish through Facebook a relationship with the consumers, audiences. Social media are for interaction and participation and companies must exploit these features. This means that the companies must choose the right social channels and the strategy. This option depends on the business objectives and the audience. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, pp.65–68) give ten essential advices for companies that deciding to use social media. They also say that using different social media channels could be profitable for the company but in meantime this must be done with a unique goal of communication which is reducing the ambiguity and confusion of messages and information across these channels. In the same way, Mangold and Faulds (2009) give nine methods of influencing the conversations between consumers and company for a successful social media implementation. Zarrella (2010) considers two types of strategies that can be adopted by a company on social media platforms: ongoing strategy and campaigns. He mentions different phases for a social media strategy: monitoring, responding, and researching. Many authors offer us different theories and practical examples about how companies must apply or should apply the social media strategies. In these conditions, it is really hard to know which one is most suitable for your company. This paper presents the approaches in which the media companies in Romania understand to implement social media for their products.

At present, the development and implementation of social media platforms require increasingly more reviewing their effectiveness by the companies. In this regard, Weil (2010), the writer of ‘The Corporate Blogging Book’ and one of the most famous practitioners in the field of social media application for companies supports the expression of the social media efficiency within the companies by the return of investment (ROI) indicator, especially used as ‘return on influence’. She asserts that, for the social media, the concept of ‘return on influence’ is better suited for two reasons. First, because the outcome of the social media implementation cannot be directly measured in terms of money and second because the measures and metrics for efficiency are still under development. The emphasis is on the concept of social media ‘influence’ for the company and this is underpinned by the social media characteristics. Although the focus is currently especially on Twitter and Facebook, Weil (2010) considers corporate blogs to remain the core for social media marketing. Any marketing strategy of companies through the social media must necessarily include blogs. Corporate blogs must meet the customers or audience needs, and also the requirements of search engines, in order to contribute at the company’s credibility on web.

Effective implementation of blogs strategy for company is a concern for Bernoff and Schadler (2007) who explain how to calculate the ROI indicator for an external corporate blog. Their analysis considers external blog and its benefits for the company, such as:
increase brand visibility by increasing blog traffic, quoting in the mainstream media and on other blogs, better position in search engines, ‘word of mouth’

• reducing the impact of user-generated content

• increase sales effectiveness.

The calculation the ROI of blogging, must consider three factors, benefits, costs and also risks, say Li and Stromberg (2007). They explain that this indicator has some limitations and provide some recommendations for calculating ROI of blogging for a better usage. Hoffman and Fodor (2010) consider ROI for social media from another perspective. They say that social media environment is larger controlled by the consumer, and the measurements of its efficiency must start from this hypothesis. They consider also the quality of the results, not only the quantitative measures. They offered a list of relevant metrics for social media applications (blogs, Twitter, Facebook, social bookmarking, and media sharing sites) organised by key social media objectives (brand awareness, brand engagement, and word of mouth). The metrics in this list is given as quantitative measures of social media efficiency. Their conclusions are related to the fact that the investments in social media environment mean the customers’ investments with the company brand.

Arnold (2011) considers ROI of social media as a marketing tool. The author considers that is quite difficult to measure, because the ‘socially centred value’ is difficult to catch. She mentions a lot of possibilities found in the literature to estimate social media ROI, such as: whether people find your website from Twitter or Facebook, how many campaigns have established. As Hoffman and Fodor (2010), Arnold appreciates as a social outcome, the level of engagement with the consumers and audience, and the participation with them in a less hierarchical way. These authors take into consideration the fact that on social media platforms are found content and also relationships/conversation. So, the ROI must consider both aspects. Content is referring to the business metrics and relationships/conversations are referring to the participation metrics. In the process of ROI measurement for social media must be quantified, also the time, because these platforms are subject to rapid changes. Fisher (2009) appreciates also the fuzziness around the measurement of ROI in social media, and says that the new ROI really means ‘return on influence’, or ‘return on engagement’. Considerations on the calculation and interpretation of ROI for social media are made by other authors, both researchers and practitioners in companies, who put this indicator in relationship to various aspects of companies’ business (Dumenco, 2010; Le Poole, 2010; Warren, 2009; Falls, 2008). They all believe that ROI for social media must be correlated both with economic results, and human interactions and conversations.

3 Methodological framework

The purpose of this paper is to identify the social media strategies and their efficiency, to follow the ways in which the Romanian media companies expand their production and business by considering user generated content. This paper is aimed the media companies, the manner in which the decision related to the social media was made and how such decision was implemented. The monitoring and measuring of social media is
associated to the business objectives and materialised in a well-known metrics (Murdough, 2009), such as:

- number of supporters (fans, friends, followers, commentators)
- number of companies and their type
- topics approached and discussed on social platforms.

The hypotheses considered in this paper are based on:

- The increasing number of users and the quantity of the content created by them through social media platforms. Thus, the media companies must consider this content and the users.
- Users consume the information produced both by the professionals and by the other users.

The existence of the social media platforms and the user generated content has triggered the appearance of new models for the news production and business.

This paper presents case studies of media companies in Romania. For this analysis, we considered the main Romanian companies supplying general news. In early 2010, most media companies and their products had connections with social media platforms. The top of companies used by this analysis was given by the site sati.ro, in March 2010. sati.ro is an important site for internet audience measurement, used on Romania online media market. The order of companies is related to audience and internet traffic of their main products from category 'general news'. The companies in the hierarchy given by sati.ro, and also their sites from the category 'general news' are considered:

- **F5 Webcorp (Company (Q2M))** – [http://www.realitatea.net](http://www.realitatea.net) – The site of the television channel ‘Realitatea’.
- **Internet Corp** – [http://www.9am.ro](http://www.9am.ro) – The site of the newspaper ‘9 AM’.

The analysis is based on data collected from the interviews with representatives of companies’ new media departments, data collected from a survey applied to Romanian journalists, and also data collected from online archives of their media sites and from social media accounts. The questions of interviews were directed to identify the social media strategy of each company and how it was established. The data collected from
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The survey had the purpose to determine if the journalists realise the specificity of social media strategy and apply it in their work practices. The collected data from online archives of media sites and from social media accounts of the companies’ news product identify the importance of activities on these platforms and the results of social media strategy implementation. These data are:

- performances of Facebook and Twitter accounts: number of fans, friends and followers, topics, links, number of tweets
- social media platforms used: types and numbers of social media used, types of blogs (personal, company, product)
- places and manners in which social media are connected with the media sites
- level of use for social media platforms: the Facebook and Twitter accounts number, number of blogs, number and identity of blog authors
- the topics approached
- attractiveness to the users: traffic, networking, readers’ notification, news and publicity broadcast, feedback, direct contacts with the industry and readers.

From these data, we could notice that, though the social media solutions chosen by most companies were the same (meaning that they have a blogging, Facebook and Twitter platform), they were differently implemented. In certain cases, they use other platforms as well, such as LinkedIn, StumbleUpon or Digg. Moreover, the corporate site is most of the time assimilated to the media product achieved.

We could notice that only same companies in the top given by sati.ro use blogs, Twitter and Facebook accounts for their general news sites. To follow the goal and manner in which the companies made the decision to choose a platform, we resorted to the interviewing of the responsible persons from companies. The questionnaire was given only to the companies having a blog, Twitter and Facebook account. The questionnaire with the responsible persons had 14 questions relating to:

- the existence of a strategic plan for social media
- reasons for extending work on social media platforms
- moment of social media implementation
- reasons and criteria for choosing a certain social media platform
- the company staff in charge with these channels
- measuring the efficiency of using the social media
- type of blog used (corporate, for the media product or journalist).

Having regard to these data obtained, this paper analyses, for some of the media companies listed, the manner of implementation of the social media platforms and then tries to look for a model related to the social media strategy.

This paper gives the relation between the data that identify the importance of activities on these platforms and the results of social media strategy implementation, with the data obtained from the responsible persons from companies. Thus, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted in relation to the
decision to implement social media in business only for four of the following companies: The SWOT analysis is a strategic analysis method – thus, appropriate to the aim of this paper. From sati.ro hierarchy, next companies were considered under study for SWOT analysis: Ringier România, Pro TV, Hotnews.ro, and Mediafax. Each of these companies realises a different type of media product: newspaper, television newscast, news portal, and news agency.

This paper uses also quantitative and qualitative methods of research. In order to identify the manner in which the social media implementation was performed by the journalists, the quantitative analysis of the data collected following an online survey of Romanian journalists was applied. The survey was taken by 142 Romanian journalists. It was created and accessed on surveymethods.com site. It was sent to over 600 journalists by e-mails, Facebook and LinkedIn sites. It has 20 questions both with close and open answers. Regarding the social medial strategy implementation within the company, nine questions out of the 20 questions asked to journalists are important to be considered for this purpose. Out of the 142 journalists having answered, only 73 answered the question relevant for this research.

The qualitative methods were applied to data collected from the executives from new media departments and from responsible persons from companies.

4 Data and findings

4.1 SWOT analysis for the media companies

In media industry, companies use blogs of different types, such as corporate, of products or of journalists. Every company has a vision of its own in this respect. Thus, one may notice at least three solutions regarding the blogging activity of this company. It must be mentioned that the blogging strategy and practice of this company is implemented and used from a diversity of situations: solutions for corporate presentation, transmission of information related to the company, transmission of information related to the created products and also personal opinions of the journalists.

A special case of implementation of a strategy for blog use is that of the company F5WebComp, better equipped from this point of view. The group of companies made of Hotnews, Antena3 and Adevărul Holding implement the same strategy for blogs, namely they use blogs of journalists with corporate features. The company Mediafax is the only company having a unitary blog and a corporate site, with the same authors, layout, design, and approached topics.

Users insistently look for rapid and free information, but they also try to share opinions and comment on topics. For this reason, the Romanian media companies have entered into relations with users by Twitter platforms and the social network sites, especially Facebook. The number of ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ show whether this strategy of informal communication with users is strong at this moment for the company.

We may notice that the ways used by the Romanian media companies when approaching the social media are somehow similar in terms of Twitter and Facebook. Thus, this analysis determines whether companies decided to implement social media in accordance with strategic internal and external factors. The SWOT analysis on the social
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media implementation applied for Hotnews, Mediafax, ProTv and Ringier companies for their main media products, considered the following:

- The company efforts – assessed by means of the availability of the social-media specialised personnel, such as social media managers; creating a channel-appropriate content; choosing the right social media platform, according to the media product.
- The company benefits – assessed by means of the brand visibility level (site and blog traffic, online quotes, position in search engines, number of users).

The SWOT analysis applied for the considered media companies shows the strategy applied by such companies in relation to social media. The purpose of this analysis is to implement and adopt social media, their effectiveness. For a full picture of this situation, the SWOT analysis results have been correlated to the social media objectives of the company and the ROI measures. The SWOT results are presented in a matrix such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Threats</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The criteria and data considered in the SWOT analysis for the media companies in relation to the social media were considered according to Table 1.

Table 1  SWOT criteria for the social media strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal factors</th>
<th>Strengths:</th>
<th>Weaknesses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification of the media industry activities characteristics and the main media product.</td>
<td>Lack of specialised personnel in charge with such strategy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The relationship with the public, with the readers for the main media product site (number of unique visitors, number of displays, number of friends on Facebook, number of followers on Twitter).</td>
<td>Channel selection without solid criteria or reasons.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of the traffic related to the media product (number of visitors). Place in the ranking sites such as sati.ro, and trafic.ro.</td>
<td>Posting of content inappropriate for the channel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility to communicate, to discuss with the readers, the possibility to get feedback from them (number of comments per articles, or posts, number of blogs used and connected to the main media product site, number of updates on Twitter).</td>
<td>Lack of correlation between the media product and the selected social media channel.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online promotion and identification of new audiences.</td>
<td>There is not user generated content platform used. Failure to consider the multimedia content provided to users.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand visibility in search engines (position on Google – for a so-called ‘keyword’, PageRank indicator).</td>
<td>There is not Twitter, Facebook or other accounts used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of user approach, lack of feedback. There is not possibility that users react, to give feedback or content.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manner of measuring the social media effectiveness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improper positioning on search engines.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1  SWOT criteria for the social media strategy (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal factors</th>
<th>Weaknesses:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Launching of campaigns, discussion groups on relevant topics (number of campaigns, number of discussion groups, forums, and blogs) on social media platforms.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Launching the user generated content platforms to collect content and to bring audience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consideration of user generated content and the freelancers’ activity (bloggers, especially).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External factors</th>
<th>Threats:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Approach according to a specific characteristic of the media product (newspaper, TV show, TV channel, TV newscast, news portal, news agency).</td>
<td>• Emergence of other competition areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The internet support is one of different uses. Possibility to attract new audiences.</td>
<td>• The market is growing; hence, it is not matured.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The number of users increases on social media channels.</td>
<td>• The users’ comments may influence certain feelings, positions in relation to the company of the media product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• European and international opening.</td>
<td>• Traffic orientation on specific topics, media products.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opportunities and threats which show the external factors on which the company is dependant, such as: macroeconomic issues, technological changes, legislation, social and cultural changes, changes of the competition position on the market are considered equally for all companies subject to analysis. For the SWOT analysis, a visual online tool was used. For the SWOT method application purposes, the social media rations, according to Table 2, were considered.
Table 2  Indicators considered for the SWOT analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of social media strategy and implementation</th>
<th>Means of goal achievement</th>
<th>Metrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand visibility and business interest</td>
<td>Traffic.</td>
<td>Number of visitors, number of unique visitors on a platform, and number of ‘like’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship between the company and the social platforms.</td>
<td>Number of topics taken-over from blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship with the audience.</td>
<td>Number of comments on blogs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship between the company and the search engines, places where the users come.</td>
<td>Number of comments on social platforms related to the companies or the main media product.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship between the company and the search engines, places where the users come.</td>
<td>Number of subjects on Facebook and Twitter social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User generated content involvement in media production</td>
<td>User generated content impact, degree of contribution and involvement from users.</td>
<td>Number and types of user generated content platforms used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User generated content involvement in media production</td>
<td>Obtaining the audience and the content.</td>
<td>Number of persons commenting on the social platforms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obtaining the audience and the content.</td>
<td>Number of friends, fans, followers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantity of user generated content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Types of user generated content.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each of four media companies were considered the indicators above, regarding brand visibility and business interest, and also involvement of user-generated content in media production. The status of the four companies for ‘strengths’ and ‘weaknesses’ considered for the SWOT analysis related to the type of social media platforms is presented below:

1  Hotnews/hotnews.ro – date of March 2010
   a  the relationship with readers (number of hits = 16,811,691)
   b  possibility to communicate, conversation with readers, feedback
      •  number of blogs used = 14
      •  number of followers on Twitter = 1,679
      •  number updates on Twitter = 11,945
      •  number of friends Facebook = 2,965
   c  traffic orientation on specific topics, media products (number of unique visitors = 1,345,581)
   d  links to news = 180
   e  brand visibility through search engine (Google position = 8 for keyword = ‘latest news’)
2 MediaFax/mediafax.ro – date of March 2010
   a the relationship with readers (number of hits = 5,393,684)
   b possibility to communicate, conversation with readers, feedback
      • number of blogs used = 1.
      • number of followers on Twitter = 825.
      • number updates on Twitter = 17,455.
      • number of friends Facebook = 4,636.
      • 11 topics of discussion on Facebook pages.
   c traffic orientation on specific topics, media products (number of unique
      visitors = 780,640)
   d links to news = 1,425
   e brand visibility through search engine (Google position = 2 for
      keyword = ‘latest news’)
   f Google PageRank = 6/10
   g sati.ro position in the category ‘general news’ = 11
   h there is not a specific user generated content platform used.

3 ProTV/stirileprotv.ro – date of March 2010
   a the relationship with readers (number of hits = 18,541,132)
   b possibility to communicate, conversation with readers, feedback
      • number of blogs used = 1
      • number of followers on Twitter = 985
      • number updates on Twitter = 344
      • number of fans Facebook = 796
      • 41 topics of discussion on Facebook pages.
   c traffic orientation on specific topics, media products (number of unique
      visitors = 1,408,795)
   d links to news = 87
   e brand visibility through search engine (Google position = 11 for
      keyword = ‘latest news’)
   f Google Page Rank = 6/10
   g sati.ro position in the category ‘general news’ = 3.

4 Ringier/evz.ro – date of March 2010
   a the relationship with readers (number of hits = 16,994,221)
   b possibility to communicate, conversation with readers, feedback
The role of social media for media companies

- number of blogs used = 0
- number of followers on Twitter = 129
- number updates on Twitter = 22,983
- number of fans Facebook = 392.

c traffic orientation on specific topics, media products (number of unique visitors = 1,086,914)
d brand visibility through search engine (Google position = 1 for keyword = ‘latest news’)
e Google Page Rank = 6/10
f sati.ro position in the category ‘general news’ = 4
g there is not a specific user generated content platform used.

4.2 Social media channels selection

These data in the SWOT analysis were completed with the information obtained from the responsible persons in the companies by means of interviews. These data depending of the obtained answers were positioned to ‘strengths’ or ‘weaknesses’.

These interviews with the executives from the new media departments of these companies were aimed at the following matters:

- The existence of specialised personnel in charge with the social media strategy.
- The manner of selecting the new media channel (reasons).
- The correlation between the media product and the selected social media channel.
  The manner for expanding on a social media-type platform.
- The manner of measuring the selected social media channel efficiency.

The persons answered to the questions were from Hotnews company (online editor), Mediafax company (PR Executive), ProTV company (content manager stirileprotv.ro site), Ringier (Online Editorial Development Manager), Adevărul Holding (publishing director Web Division).

The question related to the employment of specialised persons who to be in charge with the social media strategy revealed the following:

- **Hotnews** – “Yes, there are both a social media manager and two editors”.
- **Mediafax** – “There are two persons within the Marketing Department in charge with Facebook and Twitter, respectively – they make daily posts on the two networks, they answer questions/comments or take part in the dialogues began on the concerned page [...].”
- **ProTV** – “For now, there is no person in such a position. The accounts are updated either by the Brand Manager or by me (stirileprotv.ro Content Manager)”

As regards the reasons for choosing the social media channel, the respondents stated the following in this regard:
• Hotnews – “If you are not out there, you do not exist for a part of the public. The Facebook public is not necessarily the target public for HotNews.ro, but a part of it is certainly out there”.

• Mediafax – “For us, it is about the mixed effect of two factors:
  1. Mediafax does not target only the business sector anymore […]
  2. the social media platforms allow you to directly communicate with an increasing number of ‘virtual friends’, to whom to share useful/interest information and from whom to receive feedback, comments, suggestions […]

During the first one and a half year, it has become apparent that a part of the (potential) readers of www.mediafax.ro are on Twitter and Facebook, […]”.

• ProTV – “Social media brings another type of feedback for our products than the feedback on the site. Apart this, new users can be found in these media, who might be interested in our products and who we have not reached by other media”.

• Ringier – “Because we are taking the first steps in the formal implementation of social media in our company, I’d avoid direct answers to the questions in your survey. There is a strategic plan for the development of a platform which to replace the ‘whole communication system’.”

Identification of a relation between the media product and the selected social media channel, justification of the company decision to expand on a social media platform was detailed as follows in the respondents’ answers (Table 3).

In order to verify the basis of the social media strategy selection by the companies, one of the questions asked was aimed at the means of measuring the channel effectiveness: ‘How would you measure the effectiveness on the social media channels?’ The answers to this question were as follows:

• Hotnews – “No. An indicator is the number of fans but, considering the high number of HotNews.ro users, is not relevant.”

• Mediafax – “We are using a solution to monitor the references to Mediafax recorded on Twitter. The reports generated by this monitoring solution (on a daily, weekly and monthly basis) include the RTs of the information posted by us on the Mediafax account and the tweets of users, other than those of Mediafax compared to the references recorded by other mass-media. Thus, we can see how many references have been recorded by other mass-media, how many RTs there were within a specific period of time, what is the evolution compared to the previous month or week, etc. This is useful information and sometimes more relevant than the number of followers recorded by one account or another.”

• ProTV – “Yes, in traffic.
  1. We can see how many unique users derive from Facebook each day. It is harder in what Twitter is concerned.
  2. we can see the product impact on the concerned platforms according to the number of comments in a debate, for example.”
The role of social media for media companies

Table 3 The companies’ reasons for expanding on a social media platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Main media product</th>
<th>Reasons for expanding on a social media platform, correlation between the media product and the selected social media channel – the answers received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotnews</td>
<td>Online news site, hotnews.ro</td>
<td>“Brand awareness, interactivity”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediafax</td>
<td>News agency, mediafax.ro</td>
<td>“Twitter is a good platform for communicating the latest news [...] and Mediafax is sending such information (for instance, this platform has worked very well at the presidential elections from the end of last year). Facebook allows us dialogue with friends from the network based rather on soft news [...] and on significantly original news. This is, perhaps, the type of news Mediafax, as a press agency, is not associated with, but they can be found on <a href="http://www.mediafax.ro">www.mediafax.ro</a> and are heavily read.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProTV</td>
<td>TV channel and stirileprotv.ro news site</td>
<td>“We have decided to register on Facebook for the brand awareness, in order to reach the new users I was referring to before by means of a context exclusively designed for this platform. It is made of debates on interesting topics or on presentation of stories/investigations having become ‘old news’ on the site, but which continue to cause reactions on Facebook.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data were considered to ‘strengths’, and ‘weaknesses’ for social media strategy in the companies. For instance, the lack of specialised people to deal with this strategy is classified as a weakness. The manner of selecting the social media channel without criteria or reasons, or by inappropriate criteria is also considered a weakness. The correlation between the media product and the social media channel and also the manner for expanding on a social media platform is considered as ‘strength’ for the company. Also, measuring the efficiency and the results on social media channel used are ‘strength’ for the companies.

The status of the four companies for ‘opportunities’ and ‘threats’ considered for the SWOT analysis related to the type of social media platforms is presented below:

1 Opportunities:
   - internet is a support with various possibilities of use
   - media channels are rising, the number of users increase
   - international openness
   - approach after the specificity of media product.

2 Threats:
   - the social media market is rising, and still immature
   - users’ comments can fuel certain negative feelings
   - orientation traffic on certain topics, and media sites
   - the emergence of other social media solutions
   - all other media companies have chosen social media profiles
   - large variety of options to choose social media by users
   - handle multiple platforms by the company
• competition with other companies
• user-generated content as alternative to professional, journalistic content.

The same results identified for all companies and their media products were not been taken into consideration. The textual or numeric data were introduced into the SWOT online software, INGHENIA. The following results were obtained following the application of the SWOT analysis according to the above-mentioned criteria:

• Hotnews/hotnews.ro – a point with the coordinates (4.8; +0.7)
• Mediafax/medialfax.ro – a point with the coordinates (4.4; +0.6)
• ProTV/stirileproTv.ro – a point with the coordinates (4.2; +0.6)
• Ringier/evz.ro – a point with the coordinates (1.8; +0.6).

The pair of values obtained for each company and media product is calculated by the soft and represents a value for ‘strengths/weaknesses’ (first value) and one for ‘opportunities/threats’ (second value). The first value is an average of all factors taken into considerations for ‘strengths/weaknesses’. The second value is an average of all factors taken into considerations for ‘opportunities/threats’.

It can be seen that all these companies approached social media strategies, mainly for their main products. The SWOT data show that this process is still under development.

The SWOT analysis and the respondents’ answers show that the decision to implement the social media is not clearly defined. SW and OT values obtained are very similar for the four cases analysed. Also, the point that shows the current situation is closer to zero and beyond to what looks like an ideal position for social media strategy in companies. This means that this strategy is under construction. This is also confirmed by the indicators that have no values considered significant.

4.3 Approaches for social media strategy implementation

The data obtained marking the initial stage of implementing social media strategy in media companies in March 2010 were correlated with data showing how this implementation has occurred. These data were collected from a survey having the purpose to determine if the journalists realise the specificity of social media strategy and apply it in their work practices. Some of the questions were put both to responsible persons in companies and to journalists. The manners in which the journalists use these facilities within the media company were established by the application of an online survey with 20 questions and 142 respondents. Out of them, only 73 journalists answered the questions related to the social media/user generated content topics. The questions in this research considered these issues:

Q4 Identification of competencies and skills of online journalists. Five choices were presented. One of the choices allowed the journalists to add other necessary competencies.

Q5 Identification of the means and practices used to produce news on the online medium, mainly on social media channels.

Q6 Identification of three blogs used as information sources as part of the professional activity.
Q10 The importance of user generated content for journalists and to what extent.

Q12 Identification of the media product managers’ position in regard to blogs, whether there is feedback from them on the social media content of journalists, identification of the manner in which the manager assesses this channel (from an economic, business, publishing and content perspectives).

Q13 The importance of the freelancer activity for journalism.

Q19 Assessment of the wiki platform content in the journalistic activity.

Q20 Considerations related to the use of user generated content for the media product.

The data obtained as a result of this survey showed that more than 90% of the respondents consider being necessary that a user generated content be diluted or edited before being included in the company information production process (Q20). Moreover, the journalists assessed the importance of the user generated content as multimedia materials (audio, video, photo or text) for their activity, on a scale made of five values (consistently, usually, often, sometimes, and seldom). The answers consistently showed that only 27.4% of the respondents use social media content and 32.66% usually use it (Q10). However, this content is not assessed by 1.32% of the journalists. The importance of the social content on wiki platforms is distributed almost equally between the respondents (Q19).

From the perspective of the influence expressed as contribution on social media platforms (Q13), the respondents to this research exercise show that the freelancer activity is ‘extremely important’ and ‘very important’ in a percentage of 69.87%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
<th>The importance of user generated content for journalists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q10: What is the importance of user generated content for journalists and to what extent?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistently</td>
<td>27.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>32.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>16.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>21.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seldom</td>
<td>1.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5</th>
<th>The importance of the freelancer activity for journalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q13: What is the importance of the freelancer activity for journalism?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>28.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>41.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>27.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>1.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all important</td>
<td>1.37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The launch of social media strategies by companies is also related to the work on social media in the journalistic production activity. Such work supposes journalists with certain
competencies and skills (Q4). If the company has such type of human resources trained from this point of view, the implementation of the social media strategy is much easier and effective. As such, this result shows that it is important for the journalists to know how to create content for the web according to its specific standards. This was the answer of 64.38% of the respondents. At the same time, they deem necessary to apply the basic journalistic rules.

As regards the production process, the manner in which the news is produced and distributed through the social media (Q5), the respondents showed that the media company must adapt to new practices, such as:

“training of multitasking specialists”; “introduction of live real-time news”; “hypertexts (links) and multimedia must be combined”; “The traditional practices of heading, of editing the lead, the inter-headings and the end of a piece of news must be adapted to the SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) writing, and this may overturn specific means used, for instance, in the written media”.

The change of the production process taking blogs or other social media channels into account as sources of information is another approach related to the social media business. Thus, almost 43% (31/73) of the respondents say they do not use blogs or other type of social media as sources of information in their professional activity. This answer shows, once more, that the social media strategy is mostly intended for marketing, and less for information and news production and distribution.

The most important question (Q12) on the social media strategies within the companies related to the managers’ opinion of the content produced on social media channels. Their position also determines to a great extent the company business strategies in this regard. The answers showed that the managers get involved for the journalists’ social media content mainly from the economic perspective, i.e., in order to obtain thereby higher audiences for the media products of the company (53.42% of the answers in this sample). However, a similar percentage of 34.25% shows that the media company managers are also interested in the social media content from the publishing perspective.

Table 6  The media product managers’ position in regard to blogs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q12: What is the media product managers’ position in regard to blogs?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic, business interest or interest of audience</td>
<td>53.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing/editorial interest</td>
<td>34.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other interest</td>
<td>12.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data collected following this survey show that, even when there is no well-substantiated decision regarding the social media strategy of the company, the social media channels are used especially for the marketing and public relation practices, in order to gain audiences or to include information and news in the online media products.

Additionally, certain media companies decided that some of the news sites have own platforms for user-generated content collection and storing, such as: videonews (Antena3), voxpublica.ro (F5 Webcorp), Hotreporter (Hotnews.ro), Comunitatea Gândul (Publimedia International), and My Adevarul (Adevarul Holding Company).
5 Practical implications and conclusions

5.1 General conclusions

This paper aimed to establish the manner in which the social media strategy was implemented by the media companies, both by the managers and also by the journalists. This study identified if companies choose a strategy for social media or it was just a simple decision to use the newest channels of distributing information. The conclusion of this study sustains the hypothesis that these channels are more for participation, engagement, and communication with the consumers and audience, as Hoffman and Fodor (2010), and Arnold (2011) saying.

It can be noticed that the implementation of the social media by the companies from media industry is very different in terms of type and number. The social media channels are more applied to the media product and less oriented towards the presentation and promotion of the company. In all analysed situations, the companies use the Facebook and Twitter accounts for their media products, in the category 'general news'. The content of these channels is taken from their media sites. Some companies use specific user-generated content platforms with intention to determine the users’ participation. From the analysed data, it is obvious that the managers consider the social media platforms and their importance.

5.2 Conclusions on strategy and role of social media in companies

Social media strategy is related with the human resource that works with these channels. This study showed that the managers considered necessary to be engaged specialised journalists for these channels, persons who post daily news and also give answers and comments to dialogues from these accounts. This conclusion confirms the Bottles and Sherlock (2011) theory. According with the answers given by the responsible persons in the companies, it would be good to have a social media manager and at least two editors for these channels. In some of the analysed cases, this task is accomplished by a content manager or a journalist, but not by a specialised person for social media. Generally, the companies’ employees working on the social media channels perform several other activities related to the internet. The format and the social media activities are generally tasks of the web department of the company.

Reasons to implement the social media channels are justified by the managers of analysed companies, in terms of audience and users. Some of they consider these platforms just as a new channel that must be tested: ‘If you are not there, you are not for a part of the public’. Other managers in this study argue that social media platforms bring new audiences and also another ‘type of feedback’ for their media products.

The theorists say that the social media strategy must be chosen in accordance with the media product and with the specificity of the channel. Thus, the managers of analysed companies appreciated the social media strategy in the following terms. For a media product such as a news portal, social media accounts are used for ‘brand awareness and interactivity’. For a news agency ‘twitter is a good platform for latest information’, and Facebook account ‘permits dialogues with the users/audience’. In the situation of the television newscast, Facebook account is used for brand awareness, ‘to offer exclusivist content on this platform to the users’. On Facebook are very important the debates on
different topics that generate reactions and they are no longer interesting on the media site.

The measurement of efficiency of the social media channel is a part of the strategy of the company. In the analysed cases, some managers said that these measurements are not so important. Others said that it is important to have a significant number of friends, fans, or followers, number of unique visitors on these accounts. In a single situation, the manager said that is used the number of references to their content from the Facebook and Twitter accounts: “This information is more important than number of followers or friends registered on our accounts”. Another measure considered is the number of comments obtained on these accounts.

As it can see, the main directions for social media implementation were identified by the companies for their media products. However, there are different approaches and also resources and possibilities for each company. The type of media product (newspaper, television shows, news portal or news from press agency) in category ‘general news’ is also different. Differences are also found in terms of persons who deal with social media strategy, the reasons for working with them or the measurement the effectiveness of the channel.

The SWOT analysis showed and confirmed that all companies choose right from the start a strategy for social media implementation based on their resources and on specificity of media product. The time and the conditions of social media implementation were very similar for all companies.

The social media strategies are also related to the journalists’ work on social media platforms. The journalists that answered to the survey and work for the media companies showed a limited trust for these social channels. Their opinions were that the information obtained through these channels must be edited before being included in the information production process. However, they noticed the multimedia content offered by the users and its importance, although they do not often use this content in their daily activity. On the contrary, the content offered by freelancers, considered as a professional category, is well appreciated by the respondents. The journalistic work on these platforms supposes that journalists have certain competencies and skills. The results of this study showed that it is important for the journalists to know how to create content for the web according to its specific standards and at the same time, to apply the basic journalistic rules. Important operations were identified by the respondents regarding the production and distribution of information through the social media, such as: ‘introduction of live real-time news’, ‘multitasking’ operations, or ‘news adapted to the search engine optimisation (SEO) writing’.

Journalists that responded to the survey showed also their opinions regarding the use of social media channels as sources of information in their professional activity. Their answers showed that the social media platforms are mostly intended for marketing. An important aspect that revealed from this survey was that the managers get involved for the journalists’ social media content mainly from the economic perspective, i.e., in order to obtain thereby higher audiences for the media products of the company. The data collected following this survey show that, the social media channels are used especially for the marketing and public relation practices.

There are companies which substantiate the strategy of choosing the social media platforms. In general, they created their own platforms to collect the content generated by the user, and created Facebook and Twitter accounts to collect opinions and feedback from the users.
As a general conclusion, the media companies listed according to the site sati.ro have chosen to use the social media for their products and indirectly for the promotion of the brand or the company itself. Generally, chosen strategy by all these companies is to draw the audience and to develop consumer loyalty to the activity on the media site. The data collected from this study showed that the television channels and online media products are more linked to the social media platforms. The links between the sites of online newspapers and magazines, with the social media platforms are especially oriented to collect comments to the articles.

In all analysed cases, it is evident that the social platforms are effective in the informal communication between the media product and audience. At this moment, the Romanian media companies build a relationship with the users through social media. Both media companies and users want to know one each other better. This relationship will turn very quickly into a business relationship generating income for both parties.

As a conclusion for the things presented so far, we may say that the interest and implementation of social media by companies are different taking into account the type of the media product and the audience. The size of the social network correlated to what users may write on these platforms shall probably determine the media companies to modify ‘on the run’ the strategy adopted in this respect. But, it is very clear that the media companies’ strategic plans will consider these non-formal communication platforms more and more important, especially for the promotion or social awareness campaigns or for drawing the audience’s attention to a certain topic.

The conclusions of this study show that the management methods and practices in media companies have evolved differently through the implementation of the social media platforms.

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2 http://www.zelist.ro/blog/
   F5 Webcorp – http://www.realitatea.net
   Ringier România – http://www.evz.ro
   Pro TV – http://www.stirileprotv.ro
   Hotnews.ro – http://www.hotnews.ro
   Adevarul Holding – http://www.adeverul.ro
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   Mediafax – http://www.mediafax.ro