The Use of Social Networking Sites in Public Administration: The Case of Slovenia

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Abstract: This paper presents the results of research aimed at analysing the usage of Facebook as the most popular social networking site among 112 Slovene state administration organizations. Private entities use social networks to enhance their visibility, interact with clients, and for (related) marketing and sales of their products and services. Social networks also represent the potential for increased interaction between public administration and its users. However, statistics on the usage of social networks in public organizations is scarce. The methodology of our research is based on 16 indicators measuring usage, engagement, multi-channel features, and multi-media content. The results reveal that only a few organizations have established their Facebook presence, and for most of them considerable room for improvement has been identified in terms of usage of Facebook as a social network with the highest potential of reach and engagement in the number of its users. An extensive literature review in the field of social media usage in public administrations worldwide is also provided.

Keywords: social networking sites, public administration, level of usage, type of usage, engagement, literature review

1. Introduction

Social media (including social networks) are among the strongest marketing tools used by private companies in the last five years. Private entities have soon recognised that almost two billion social media users represent a large potential for their image building, marketing of services and/or products, improved customer service, and user involvement in the development of new products and services. Most of the marketers experience several benefits by exploiting social media as an (additional) channel in their marketing strategies, such as increased exposure of their businesses, increased traffic, development of loyal fans, and many others (Stelzner, 2015). Almost two thirds of marketing experts spend at least six hours per week on social media activities (ibid.).

Public administrations, on the other hand, have not been so eager in exploiting the potential of social media (including social networks). Even though the (potential) motivation for social media usage in public organizations differs greatly from the prevailing motivation in private organizations, there are many advantages of social media for public organizations, among them, for example: improved service delivery, transparency and organization image, as well as more inclusive policy processes.

However, empirical evidence on social media usage in public administrations is very scarce, especially compared to those related to social media usage by citizens and businesses. Two international surveys were conducted in this field: one by the United Nations (UN, 2014) and one by the OECD. The first one revealed that 61% of the UN member states were using social media for e-consultations; however, the level of uptake within a specific country was not investigated (i.e. how many public organizations are using social media and social networks specifically and for what purposes). The OECD's research, on the other hand, revealed that only a minority of governments in the OECD area adopted a social media usage strategy, indicating that social media as a channel for communication with customers is still an experiment in public administration (Mickoleit, 2014).

Slovenia is among the countries without a social media usage strategy. Furthermore, there is a lack of empirical evidence on social media usage in the Slovenian public administration, and this holds true for social networks as a subgroup of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) as well. A research analysing the usage of social networks in the Slovenian public administration has not been conducted yet. This is the motivation for the main research question of this paper: "Is the Slovenian public administration exploiting the potential of social networks?" The objective of the paper is two-fold: (1) to evaluate the extent and the level of Facebook

usage in the Slovenian public administration and (2) to compare the results to the results of other studies on social media usage in public administration.

We present an analysis of social network usage in 112 organizations of the Slovenian public administration. More precisely, we have focused on Facebook as a social network with the most users by far (thus presenting the greatest potential for a large reach[1] of information). The 112 analysed organizations represent all the organizations of the Slovenian state administration (ministries, their affiliated bodies, and administrative units). A detailed analysis and discussion of Facebook activities of the organization that is most active within this social network is also given.

The paper is organized as follows: in the next chapter, we present the definition of social networks and its relation to social media. In the following one, the potential of social networks is explored in terms of the number of its users (citizens, businesses, and public organizations). After that, an extensive literature review in the field of social media usage in public administration is provided. Later on, the methodology of our research is presented, followed by the presentation of results and detailed analysis of the organization with most frequent Facebook activities. Finally, the discussion with suggestions for further research is provided.

2. About social networks

The terms "social networks" and "social media" are frequently used interchangeably. Thus, we have to define both and present the relationship between them.

According to Kaplan & Haenlein, "Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content" (2010, p. 61). In the context of public administration, social media is understood as Web 2.0-based technologies fostering engagement with citizens, businesses and other organizations (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia, 2013, p. 320). Based on the level of social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure, social media can be classified into six groups, with social network as one of them[2] (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In general, social networks are defined as networks of "individuals (such as friends, acquaintances, and coworkers) connected by interpersonal relationships" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). In the context of Web 2.0, social networks are services enabling their users three main features: (1) development of a public or partly public profile within the boundaries of a specific social networking site; (2) insight into the list of users with whom a user has a joint contact within the social networking site; (3) monitoring their own and other users' lists of connections (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The most popular social networking sites nowadays are Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (Milanovic, 2015); however, there are numerous other social networking sites and applications (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) – see, for example, the list of 40 most popular presented by Jain (2012).

Trends of social networks use (and social media in general) are largely dependent on the number of Internet users, i.e. share of population using the Internet. In 2014, more than three quarters of EU-28 individuals aged between 16 and 74 were using Internet regularly, i.e. at least weekly (Eurostat, 2015a), which is 10% more than four years earlier (Eurostat, 2015b), and the trend is still growing. In Slovenia, Internet is being used by 72% of individuals – 81% of them are using the Internet every day or almost every day (Zupan, 2014), indicating a good starting potential for a large number of social networks users. Similarly, a growing trend can be identified in the number of available social networking sites and applications.

The potential of social networks is explored in terms of number of their users – the larger the number, the bigger the target group(s), the bigger the (potential) reach of information communicated to them. This potential is addressing three groups of social networks users: (1) individuals, (2) businesses, and (3) public organizations.

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[1] Number of users who have seen Facebook posts/public messages.
[2] Others are: blogs, virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g., YouTube), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft).

2.1   Use of social networks among citizens

Participation in social networking is one of the most common online activities in EU-28; approximately half of individuals aged between 16 and 74 are using the Internet in order to use Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites (Eurostat, 2015c). Figure 1 reveals a growing trend in online social network participation[3]. While there were 40% of EU-28 individuals using the Internet to participate in social or professional networks in 2011 (33% in Slovenia), the percentage is much higher four years later: 52% for EU-28, and 38% for Slovenia (Figure 1).
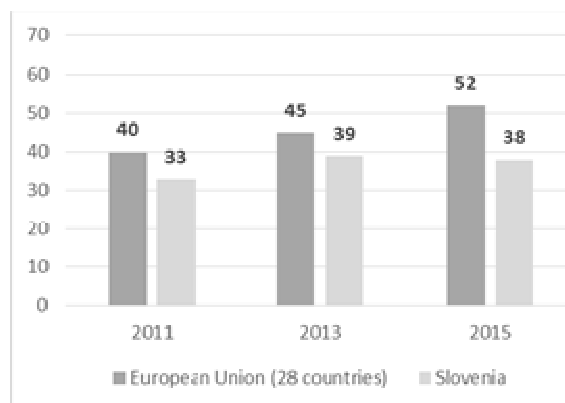

Figure 1: Individuals using the Internet to participate in social or professional networks in EU-28 and in Slovenia. Source: Eurostat (2015b)

From the worldwide perspective, global social network penetration is estimated at 29% (Statista, 2016b). There were 1.96 billion users of social networking sites and applications in 2015, and the number is expected to reach 2.44 billion in 2018 (Statista 2016c). Facebook is by far the leading social network in terms of number of users; in 2015, it had 1,550 million users (Statista, 2016a).

2.2   Use of social media/networks by businesses

Social networks and social media in general gained attention among business entities as well. The latter have soon realised that this sort of media presents additional marketing channels, through which they can reach potential customers and increase their revenue. Enterprises use social media for different purposes, the prevailing being image building and product marketing (73% of enterprises using social media); half of enterprises used social media to obtain customer opinions or reviews, or to answer their questions (i.e. improving customer service). About 30% of enterprises used social media to involve costumers in development or innovation of goods and services (Giannakouris & Smihily, 2014).

In 2013, 30% of enterprises in EU-28 were using at least one type of social media (e.g. social networks, blogs, content-sharing sites, and wikis) (Giannakouris & Smihily, 2014). Social networks were more popular than other types of social media, as 28% of enterprises in the EU-28 were using social networks.

In Slovenia, 37% of enterprises with at least 10 employees were using social media in 2013. The percentage was the highest among large enterprises with more than 250 employees (65%) and the lowest among small enterprises with 10–49 employees (35%). Social networks were the most frequently used type of social media among Slovenian enterprises as well (34% enterprises use social networks).

2.3   Use of social media/networks in public administration

As presented in previous sections, almost two billion individuals are using online social networks and almost one third of EU companies is exploiting the potential of such networks. Social networks present a huge potential for public organizations as well. The number of users participating in these networks undoubtedly represents an important (potential) additional channel for communication between public organizations and their customers (i.e. citizens and businesses). Unfortunately, research in this field is not as frequent and as detailed as in the case of individuals (citizens) and businesses. From the international perspective, there are two main surveys dealing with this issue, one conducted by the United Nations and the other by the OECD. But

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[3] Although a slight decrease in Slovenia in 2015.

even these two mainly explore social media usage in general. The latest results of the first one (UN, 2014) reveal that 118 out of 193 UN member states (61%) use social media for e-consultations[4]. A closer look into the results for 2010 and 2012 reveals an extremely positive trend: in 2010, 11% of the countries and in 2012, 40% of the countries observed were using social media for e-consultations (UN, 2014). These results definitely indicate that public organizations have already recognised the potential of social media. On the other hand, the research does not reveal the level of uptake within specific countries (i.e. how many public organizations are using social media and social networks specifically and for what purposes).

The OECD report on public administration "Government at a Glance 2015" provides a comparison of public administrations of the 34 member states in various fields, including social media usage in the executive government institutions. The survey is focused on the usage of two major social networking sites (Facebook and Twitter) among the most important institutions of the executive branch (president, prime minister, or the government as a whole). The results presented below are based on 25 responses (24 from OECD member states[5] and one from Columbia, a partner state). The OECD survey reveals that only a minority of governments in the OECD area has adopted a social media usage strategy (28%), indicating that the usage of social media as a channel for communication with customers is still an experiment in public administration (Mickoleit, 2014). Approximately half of the responding countries (12 out of 25) have defined explicit goals and expectations related to social media usage; the prevailing expectations and objectives are improved communications, stakeholder engagement, and service delivery improvements (ibid.). A relatively low number of countries with a defined social media strategy, or at least goals and expectations related to social media usage, is somehow surprising. Namely, this makes it difficult to allocate sufficient resources (human or/and financial) to individual social media channels and, most importantly, to monitor and evaluate the results of social media activities (see Sacred Heart University, 2017). This could be one of the reasons for a low percentage of citizens using social media platforms for posting their opinions on civil or political issues (approx. 18% of Europeans) – especially compared to the general uptake of these technologies (see Mickoleit, 2014, p. 34). One could argue that this is in line with the generally low participation in civic and political issues (especially) among young people. However, an established social media strategy should include an agenda on how to stimulate citizens (or/and businesses) to be more active in this context. But still, they are already there – using social media every day and participating in crowd-sourcing activities initiated from private entities.

Chile, for example, is a country with a well-developed social media strategy; it started in 2010 with an official circular encouraging the use of social media across the Chilean government, followed by the integration of social media in the national e-government strategy 2011-2014 and a digital guide with technical assistance on the use of new technologies (including preconditions, capacities and skills necessary to make the best use of social media) (Mickoleit, 2014).

Even though the number of countries with a formal social media usage strategy and/or explicit goals and expectations regarding these media is low, this is not reflected in the number of countries present on Twitter and/or Facebook. Namely, 76% of the OECD member states (26 out of 34) have institutional Twitter accounts for heads of state, heads of government, or governments as a whole, and 53% countries (18 out of 34) are officially presented on Facebook (ibid.). However, this data does not tell anything about social media/network usage in specific public organizations (ministries, municipalities etc.). In addition, the OECD's survey reveals that only five out of 25 responding countries measure the effects of social media usage (Mickoleit, 2014).

Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) propose a three-stage adoption process for social media usage in government: (1) intrapreneurship and informal experimentation, (2) constructive chaos and (3) institutionalisation. In the first stage, social media are used informally within individual departments by those who have been using social media before for private purposes. The second stage is a response to the first one; namely, in this stage, the advantages of social media have been recognised by the organizational management, resulting in the development of informal rules and standards for the deployment and usage of the technology (social media) within organizational subunits. In the final stage (institutionalisation), the organization's official social media strategy or policy document is developed indicating a high level of formalization and standard setting related to social media (acceptable) usage by government employees and citizens interactions via official governmental social media accounts. Table 1 summarises the main characteristics of all three stages.

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[4] In terms of "engaging people in deeper contributions to and deliberation on public policies and services" (UN, 2014, p. 63).
[5] From 34 member states.

Based on this classification and the data on social media usage in the OECD members (as presented above), one can conclude that most of OECD members are between the first and the second stage of social media adoption.

Table 1: Characteristics of the three-stage process model for social media usage in government

	Role of Organizational Structure	Role of Technology	Role of Outcomes	Organizational Response
Stage 1: Decentralized, informal experimentation	Important to allow for experimentation	Following outside best practices (replication of successes)	Early tests lead to first insights	Unsanctioned accounts, not on the organizational radar screen
Stage 2: Coordinated chaos	Important to consolidate heterogeneity of use	Increases in importance but mainly because of innovative use and routines	Highly important to create business cases	Task force, steering committee, draft policies/strategies
Stage 3: Institutionalization and consolidation	New organizational structures	Set of accepted technologies versus wide range of innovative technologies to support different purposes	Important for future resource allocation	Formalized institutions, work assignments, tasks, roles, dedicated resource allocation, formal social media policies

Source: Mergel and Bretschneider (2013, p. 397)

In the following section, literature review in the field of social networking sites usage in public administrations of specific countries is presented.

3. Review of Relevant Research

Social media usage in public administration has been most often investigated in the United States. Mossberger, Wu and Crawford (2013), for example, focus on the usage of social media and other interactive tools fostering civic engagement in large US cities between 2009 and 2011. The use of social media was measured indirectly by investigating the presence of links to social media accounts on organizational websites. Their results reveal a considerable increase in social media usage between 2009 and 2011; in 2011, almost 90% of cities included in the survey were using Facebook and Twitter, followed by YouTube (75%) and Flickr (37%). All of those with Facebook and/or Twitter accounts enabled comments to be posted by other users. In 2011, social media usage in US local government was in focus of the study performed by Reddick and Norris (2013). Their results reveal that two thirds of US local governments adopted at least one social medium tool, with Facebook and Twitter being the prevailingly used tools. The majority of local governments investigated were using social media for one-way interaction. Factors affecting the adoption of social media were: type of government (municipality or county), size in terms of population, region, metropolitan status (central city, suburban, independent), citizens' education and years of experience with e-government[6]. A year later, Maultasch Oliviera (2013) investigated the usage of social media in US local government. The study was conducted among city managers. The results are similar to those by Mossberger, Wu and Crawford (2013) and Reddick and Norris (2013): social media were used broadly (88% local governments), among them most frequently Facebook (92% of those using social media) and Twitter (78 %), followed by YouTube (59%), instant messaging (56%) and LinkedIn (50%). Although external dissemination of information is the main reason for social media usage, a substantial portion of US local governments uses social media technologies for other tasks as well: getting a feedback on service quality, internal collaboration on work tasks, and enabling/facilitating citizen participation. Social media obviously gained considerable attention in the US (mainly local) government. This increases the need for proper policies guiding the use of social media and enabling transparent engagement with citizens. Such policies were addressed by Bennett and Manoharan (2016), who confirmed that most US cities integrated social media into daily operations, but many lacked social media policies guiding this usage[7] (see also Mergel, 2013a). In addition, the measurement of interactions and of the impact of social media communications is one of the most important tasks. This has been recognized by private sector organizations relatively soon – otherwise, how can they evaluate the value of their social media activities? According to the study conducted by Mergel (2013b), social media managers in the executive branch of the US federal government recognise the lack of measurement practices for social media interactions. Despite that, social media usage in public administration clearly has broader positive effects in the US. This was indicated by the survey, the results of which revealed that "social media is an effective means for government to improve citizens' trust in government by enhancing their perceptions of government transparency."[8] (Song and Lee, 2016).

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[6] Gesuele (2016), for example, focused on drivers of Facebook adoption in Italian municipalities. The main driver turned out to be the general economic status of the citizens.

[7] On the other hand, several social media policies have been adopted in order to regulate employee behaviour on their private social media and/or institutional accounts (see Bezboruah and Dryburgh, 2012).

[8] Similarly, the survey conducted in Malaysia (Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafa, 2014) revealed that "using social media for civic engagement has a significant positive impact on trust propensity and that this trust had led to an increase in trust towards institutions."

The research conducted in Romania and Lithuania revealed a relatively high adoption of social media in public administration as well. Two studies in this field have been identified recently in Romania. Urs (2016) evaluated Facebook accounts of Romanian city halls. Eight of them (17%) did not establish Facebook presence at the time of the survey, five published less than five posts in the period observed. 19 city halls (40%) had more than 100 post published in 454 days (574 on average). The pages with the highest number of followers are those presented by mayors[9]; on average, the Facebook pages analysed had 15.260 followers. Another research in the Romanian environment was performed by Nicolescu and Mirică (2015) who evaluated the use of Facebook in the Romanian National Institute of Statistics. They identified several advantages of social media usage in the field of official statistics, such as: increased statistical literacy, enhanced popularity of statistics, presentation of statistical agencies as attractive employers, and improved image of statistics organizations. Facebook adoption in Lithuanian municipalities was in the focus of the research conducted by Sinkienė and Bryer (2016). They came to the conclusion that the majority (77%) of municipalities used Facebook, 41% of them established their Facebook presence in 2015[10] or later. But the usage is relatively limited – mainly one-way interaction with very little feedback. Lithuanian municipalities do not have legal regulation/strategy for social media-related activities/communication. Mainly one-way Facebook interaction was identified in the Egyptian context as well, as revealed by Abdelsalam et al. (2013) who evaluated social media usage in the Egyptian government. First, they examined all registered governmental domains in Egypt, followed by a two-stage analysis of: (1) existence of social media applications (forums, surveys, blogs, RSS etc.) on governmental websites and (2) usage of Facebook by governmental organizations. They identified 33 working governmental Facebook pages representing half of the total Facebook pages linked to active websites. On average, these pages had 36.824 Facebook followers and 1.326 posts. In general, social media communication by the Egyptian government is very basic and one-way.

The impact of social media usage on de-bureaucratisation and shift in information flow was studied in the Netherlands and China. De-bureaucratisation in relation to social media was studied by Meijer and Torenvlied (2016) who focused on Twitter usage in the Dutch Police. The main question they addressed was: "Does the use of Twitter de-bureaucratise the organization of police communications?" They came to the conclusion that most of Twitter communication "… still fit the bureaucratic model of government communications." The shift of information flow due to social media usage in the Chinese government was evaluated by Zheng (2013), whose research revealed that in China, social media had, to some extent, shifted the information flow … "from a vertical, centralized and closed model into a horizontal, decentralized and open network." Also, Chinese government employees lack social media usage-related skills, and the government capabilities are not in line with the capabilities of external society resulting in inadequate, improper and delayed microblogging.

Some studies evaluate social media usage in (local) government in the context of crisis management. Panagiotopoulos, Ziaee Bigdeli and Sams (2014), for example, evaluated the use of Twitter during and shortly after the riots in England (in 2011). The authors analysed 1.746 Twitter posts by 81 local governments in order to explore how they attempted to reduce the effects of the riots and support community recovery and to identify citizen-government Twitter collaboration. They came to the conclusion that "Twitter's conversational features enabled different forms of collaboration. Collective action of citizens and councils co-evolved in actions such as cleaning the streets, disproving rumours and identifying suspects."

Social media readiness in German state administration was in the focus of the study conducted by Hoffmann, Lutz and Meckel (2014) who developed the social media readiness model presented in Figure 2. The model consists of five organizational and seven individual antecedents of social media readiness. Individual antecedents include:

- Demographics (age): younger employees have more experiences with social media, thus they are more open for social media usage in public administration.
- Experience in terms of previous private or business use of social media.
- Performance expectancy – perceived usefulness of social media usage in public administration.
- Effort expectancy: fear related to increased workload caused by social media usage.
- Social influence (peer pressure).
- Self-efficacy related to personal affinity to innovative ICT and actual use experience.
- Computer Anxiety: privacy and security-related fears.
- The five organizational antecedents of social media readiness are:

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[9] Namely, in some cases, the fan pages by mayors instead of the city halls pages were used.
[10] Year of elections.

- Leadership support for social media projects.
- Autonomy of those working on social media.
- Structure (coordination between organizational units).
- Processes (hierarchy and bureaucracy as the key obstacles).
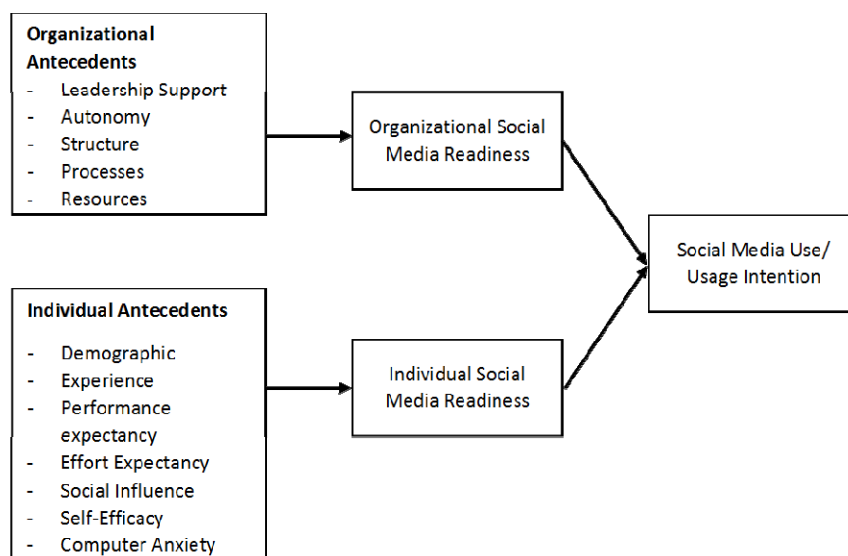- Resources (mainly time and personnel).

Figure 2: Social media readiness model. Source: Hoffmann, Lutz and Meckel (2014)

Table 2 provides a review of recent research in the field of social media usage in public administration. It shows that social media usage in public administration has mainly been measured on the level of local government with prevailing focus on Facebook and Twitter.

Table 2: Review of research in the field of social media usage in public administration organizations

Source	Geographical focus	Measurement unit	Social media evaluated	Focus
Nicolescu and Mirică (2015)	**Romania**, compared to Australian Bureau of Statistics	National Institute of Statistics	Facebook	Social media impact on official statistics communication and dissemination
Gesuele (2016)	Italy	Municipalities	Facebook	Drivers of Facebook adoption among municipalities
Hoffmann, Lutz and Meckel (2014)	Germany	Agencies and district administrations	Social media in general	Social media readiness
Abdelsalam et al. (2013)	Egypt	Organizations with gov.eg domains	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wiki, LinkedIn, Skype	Presence, usage and effectiveness
Oliveira and Welch (2013)	US	Local government (cities)	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Govloop, Skype, Flickr, Instant messaging, MySpace, GoogleDocs	Social media usage, its purposes and organizational factors determining the coupling of social media technology
Bezboruah and Dryburgh (2012)	US	Local government	Social media in general	Social media policies
Urs (2016)	Romania	Local government	Facebook	Facebook usage and analysis of Facebook pages
Sinkienė and Bryer (2016)	Lithuania	Local government	Facebook	Facebook adoption and performance in municipalities
Jukić and Merlak (2016)	Slovenia	Local self-government (municipalities)	Facebook	Facebook usage and analysis of Facebook pages
Meijer and Torenvlied (2016)	The Netherlands	Police departments	Twitter	Impact of Twitter on de-bureaucratization of the police communications organization

Source	Geographical focus	Measurement unit	Social media evaluated	Focus
Panagiotopoulos, Ziaee Bigdeli and Sams (2014)	England	Local government	Twitter	Twitter usage during and shortly after the 2011 riots
Warren, Sulaiman and Jaafar (2014)	Malaysia	Citizens	Facebook	Social media effects on fostering online civic engagement and building citizen trust and trust in institutions
Song and Lee (2016)	US	Citizens	Social networking sites, blogging, Twitter	Citizens' Use of Social Media in Government, Perceived Transparency, and Trust in Government
Snead (2013)	US	Executive branch (Agencies)	Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, Flickr, RSS feeds, podcasts and videos	Use of social media and public participation with the media
Mergel (2013a)	US	Federal government	SM in general	Factors influencing internal adoption decisions to use social media
Yi, Oh and Kim (2013)	US and Korea	Government	Social media in general	Evaluation of social media usage and policies
Mergel (2013b)	US	Federal government (executive branch)	Social media in general	Measurement of social media interactions
Mossberger, Wu and Crawford (2013)	US	(Large) cities	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr	Use of social networks and other interactive tools for civic engagement
Zheng (2013)	China	Local (municipal) government	Microblogging	Drivers, challenges and capabilities
Reddick and Norris (2013)	US	Local government	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and blogging	Social media adoption and drivers for adoption
Bennett and Manoharan (2016)	US	Local government (cities)	Social media in general	Social media policies

4. The use of social media in public administration: The case of Slovenia

4.1 Methodological framework

We analysed the Facebook profiles of 112 organizations of the Slovenian state administration[11]. More precisely, we analysed Facebook usage by:

- ministries (14)
- bodies affiliated to the ministries (40)
- administrative units (58)

The analysis was conducted in the period between 24 December 2015 and 7 January 2016. For each organization, 16 indicators were assessed, which were classified into four groups: (1) usage, (2) multi-channel features, (3) engagement, and (4) multi-media features. A detailed list of all indicators measured is presented in Table 3.

A detailed analysis of Facebook activities was performed for the Slovenian armed forces, identified by the research as the leading organization in the field of social media communication. This analysis was performed with two tools: FacePager (Keyling and Jünger, 2014) and TagCrowd (2017).

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[11] The Slovenian administrative system is two-tiered, meaning that state administration and local self-government are separated; primacy is given to the state government, while local self-government (municipalities) has an instrumental nature (Kovač, 2014). Local self-government (municipalities) is not included in the research.

Table 3: List of measured indicators

Group	Indicators measured	Indicators' values
Usage	Existence of organization's Facebook profile	yes, no
	Year of entry on the Facebook network	year (e.g. 2011)
	Number of all posts in 2015	number
	Types of posts	▪ calling for suggestions, cooperation via Facebook ▪ calling for suggestions, cooperation via other channels (e.g. e-mail) ▪ providing information on past events ▪ providing information on future events ▪ other posts
Multi-channel features	Availability of link to the Facebook page on the organization's web page	yes, no
	Availability of link to the organization's web page on the Facebook page	yes, no
Engagement	Number of Facebook fans (likes/followers)	number
	Possibility of writing on the Facebook page by other users	yes, no
	Number of posts by other users in 2015	number
	Number of posts calling for cooperation/opinions in 2015	number
	Number of polls in 2015	number
	Number of comments to posts	number
	Number of comments posted by organization	number
	Number of comments posted by other users	number
	Number of shared posts	number
Multi-media features	Number of posts with multi-media content in 2015	number

4.2 Presentation of the results

4.2.1 Usage and multi-channel features

The first step in our research was aimed towards determining whether the organizations were present on Facebook, the social network with by far the most users among all social networking sites. The research revealed that 14 out of 112 analysed organizations were present on Facebook, representing 13% of studied organizations (Table 4 – left). Once a Facebook page is set up, the challenge is to attract the target groups (i.e. fans, the target group of messages/posts published on the Facebook page). One of the basic principles in web marketing is to put the link to the Facebook page on the website of the organization, thus informing website visitors that the specific organization is present on Facebook as well, and that they can follow its posts via additional channel(s). On the other hand, Facebook, in the context of web marketing, is a good channel to attract visitors to the organization's website. Most of the organizations with Facebook profiles (71%) have a link to their Facebook page placed on their websites (Table 4), while all except one have a link to their websites placed on their Facebook profiles (in the "About" section). Among the organizations with a Facebook page, 8 (57%) have joined Facebook in the last three years, whereas others did so earlier (the first one in 2009).

Table 4: Organizations with a Facebook page (left) and links to their Facebook profiles on the websites (right)

Facebook presence				**Link to Facebook page on website**		
	n	**%**			**n**	**%**
Yes	14	13%		**Yes**	10	71%
No	98	88%		**No**	4	29%
Total	112	100%		Total	14	100%

The main feature used by Facebook users (be it individuals, businesses, or public organizations) are posts – messages published on the wall/timeline of a specific Facebook page. There is no specific guide on how often to publish posts in order to be seen by more Facebook users/fans. However, the research conducted on the sample of Facebook pages owned by private organizations (Cohen, 2015) indicates that posting 1 to 4 times per week has the highest reach (the number of people who have seen posts/messages published) and engagement rate, i.e. the percentage of people who see a post and like, share, click, or comment on it (Facebook, 2015). On average, organizations with a Facebook page published 152 posts on their walls in 2015, accounting for 2.9 posts per week. However, this number should be considered with some reservations. Namely, two organizations (General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces and Ministry of Foreign Affairs) had more than 500 posts, while five organizations had zero to 20 posts in 2015. On average, only six organizations comply with the 1–4 posts per week rule of thumb. The number of posts in 2015 for all organizations is presented in Figure 3.
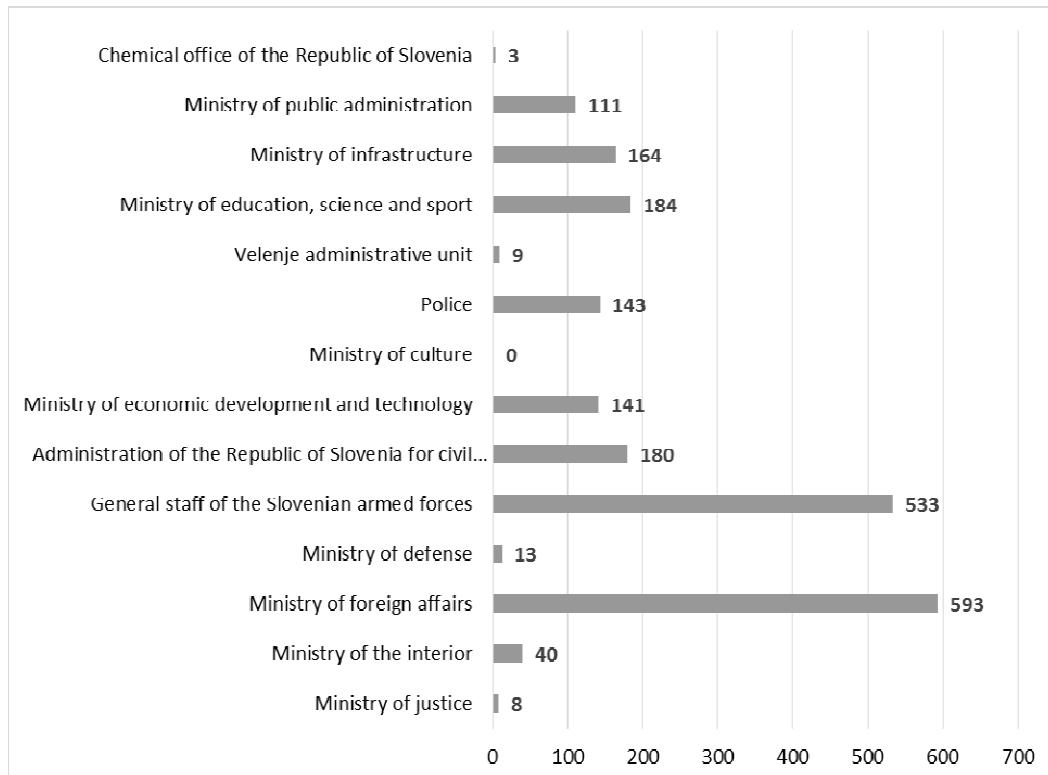

Figure 3: Number of Facebook posts in 2015

These posts were classified into five groups: (1) calling for suggestions, cooperation via Facebook, (2) calling for suggestions, cooperation via other channels (e.g. e-mail), (3) providing information on past events, (4) providing information on future events, (5) other posts. As presented in Table 5, the intention of 51% of all posts published in 2015 was to provide information on past events, approximately 10% of the posts provided information on future events, almost 40% provided other information (of a more "static" nature, e.g. about elected councillors, new road sections, etc.), and less than 2% of the posts encouraged fans to submit suggestions via Facebook or other channels (e.g. e-mail). While the first two categories of posts (calling for suggestions/cooperation) will be discussed in the next section, it can be noted at this point that the ratio of posts informing fans about past to posts informing about future events is not ideal. While informing Facebook fans about past events may be useful in terms of image building and raising fans' awareness of the organization's activities, announcements of future events have the potential of engagement of fans in these events (indeed, not all events are meant to include/invite all target groups).

Table 5: Types of posts published on Facebook pages in 2015

	n	%
Posts calling for suggestions, cooperation via Facebook	1	0.05
Posts calling for suggestions, cooperation via other channels (e.g. e-mail)	24	1.13
Posts providing information on past events	1073	50.57
Posts providing information on future events	200	9.43
Other posts	824	38.83
Total	**2122**	**100**

4.2.2   Engagement

On average, organizations with Facebook pages have 2,601 users liking their pages (i.e. fans). The page with the lowest number of Facebook fans is the one by the Chemical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (7 fans). Only two organizations have more than 10,000 Facebook fans: General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces (13,262 fans) and the Police (11,782 fans). In general, it can be concluded that there is room for improvement in terms of numbers of fans that organizations attract via Facebook. The number of fans, namely, is an important factor of reach and engagement rates. To put it simply, the effect of a Facebook page of a (private or public) organization is not significant if it does not attract fans – target group of Facebook communications. The higher the number of fans, the higher the reach and the higher the potential for engagement.

An organization can enable or disable the option of other users writing on their Facebook page. Enabling this option definitely opens room for cooperation and indicates that an organization is open to feedback, suggestions, and other types of users' input. Our analysis reveals that only half of organizations with a Facebook page (7 out of 14) enable writing on their Facebook wall by other users. Among those that do allow that option, 58 such posts were published on their walls on average in 2015. The Ministry of Justice had the lowest number of other users' posts published on its Facebook wall (7), while the largest number of such posts (177) was written on the page of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces. While the number of organizations allowing posts from other users on their Facebook pages cannot be satisfactory (taking all of 112 organizations from the initial sample as a base, only 6% of organizations enable this option), the average number of other users' post on Facebook pages of organizations allowing that is relatively high.

Social networks have the potential to involve users/fans in the early stages of policy process – problem identification (see a complete policy cycle in LAITS, 2016). In this stage, fans have the potential to highlight the issues they believe are important. Social networks, and Facebook specifically, can be used in this context for encouraging fans to communicate the suggestions via Facebook or via other channels (e.g. e-mail). In the previous section we classified all posts published on Facebook pages of the organizations analysed into five groups (Table 5). The results of our analysis, in terms of number of posts with the potential of involving fans in the early stages of policy process, are somehow worrying. In 2015, only one post out of 2,122 called for suggestions or other forms of users' cooperation via Facebook, while altogether 24 tried to encourage users to do so via other channels. None of the organizations with a Facebook page exploited the potential of Facebook polls, even though there are free and user-friendly applications available to implement this option.

One indicator of Facebook engagement rate is also the number of comments posted to specific posts published on organizations' Facebook pages. These comments can be posted by other users or by the organization "owning" the specific page. Both indicators are important. While the number of comments by other users indicate higher engagement rate, the number of comments posted by the organization owning the page, on the other hand, indicates the importance of Facebook communication in the eyes of the specific organization. Our analysis (manually) identified 4,060 comments to the post published on Facebook pages of the organizations studied. These posts include comments to posts published by organizations and other users. Among these comments, the majority (97%) were posted by fans, and only 3.4% were posted by organizations (owners of specific Facebook page). Among all the comments (4,060), 94% were posted on the Facebook page of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces (56%) and the Police (38%).

Sharing Facebook posts is also an indicator of the engagement rate. It also has the potential to attract new fans. The results of our research reveal that Facebook fans shared posts published on Facebook pages of public

organizations 5,949 times (on average 425 times per organization with a Facebook page). Most of the shares (4,842) happened via the Facebook page of the Police (46%) and the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces (36%).

4.2.3 Multi-media features

It is a common guideline in the context of web marketing that posts with multimedia content (photo, video, or audio content) have a higher reach. The reason for that is that online visitors do not read online content thoroughly, but usually just scan through it. On average, the organizations analysed posted 1,504 posts with multimedia content, which accounts for 71% of all posts. While this result is relatively good, it still indicates room for improvement for approximately 30% of the content published on Facebook. Three organizations posted none, and six of them posted more than 100 such posts.

5.   A detailed analysis of Facebook activities of the Slovenian Armed Forces

Since the Slovenian Armed Forces (hereinafter: SAF), an organization affiliated to the Ministry of Defence, has been identified as a leader in terms of Facebook activities[12], its Facebook profile will now be explored in greater detail.

SAF established its Facebook presence in 2012. A link to its Facebook profile (as well as to four other social media tools) is placed on its official website[13] and vice versa – its website URL is placed on the Facebook profile. This indicates that, at least from this point of view, it established some (formal or informal) channel integration strategy. SAF is also successful in reaching its fans/followers; namely, the number of followers of its Facebook page (13.262) is the highest among all of the organizations observed in the research.
Facebook users can post messages on the SAF's profile, which is an indication of its willingness to establish a two-way interaction with Facebook users. This is not the case in the Police and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which are also leaders in terms of quantity of Facebook activities (i.e. the number of followers, published posts and comments to the posts).

In 2015, SAF published 533 posts on its official Facebook page; this result ranks it second among the organizations observed (right after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with 593 posts). The intention of most of the posts is to inform followers about past (299 or 56%) or future (58 or 11%) events in the area of SAF's work (e.g. about trainings attended by members of the SAF). Using a word cloud tool TagCrowd (2017), the most frequent words appearing in the posts were identified (Figure 4). The cloud presented below indicates that words related to the members (Slovenian: "pripadniki", "pripadnikov") of the Slovenian (Slovenian: "slovenske") Armed Forces (Slovenian: "vojske" or "SV" for Slovenian army) are most frequent in the SAF's Facebook posts (altogether used 355 times). Photos-related words (Slovenian: "foto" and "fotografije") are also relatively often included in SAF's posts content; this is in line with the fact that SAF has the highest number of posts (498 or 93%) with multimedia content (e.g. photos and videos).

Figure 4: Frequency of words in the posts published by the Slovenian Armed Forces on its Facebook page in 2015

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[12] 2nd place with number of posts, 1st place with number of followers and 1st place with number of comments to the posts published on their Facebook page.
[13] Slovenian Armed Forces (2017).

The level of engagement of SAF's Facebook followers is enviably high. This is reflected by the number of times they liked and commented SAF's posts published in 2015, as well as by the number of posts initiated by Facebook users. Altogether, SAF's Facebook posts gained 64.040 likes representing an average of 120 likes per post. 2.198 comments were posted to their posts (on average four comments per post). A detailed insight into the content of the comments reveals that SAF's Facebook fans mainly express a large amount of support to SAF and its members. Figure 5 represents a word cloud generated from the comments to SAF's posts; the most frequently appearing words are "bravo", "congratulations" (Slovenian: "čestitke") and "good luck" (Slovenian: "srečno"). In addition, SAF joined the communication with its own comments 85 times which again ranks it first among the observed organizations of the Slovenian state administration. This indicates that SAF is using Facebook for two-way interaction which is not the case in other organizations. SAF holds a leading position also when it comes to posts initiated by Facebook followers; namely, 177 posts were posted by other Facebook users. Most of them, again, promote SAF's activities (e.g. trainings, important meetings, new equipment etc.).
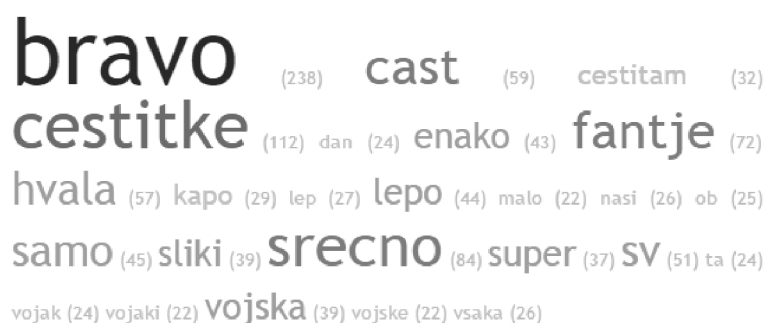

Figure 5: Frequency of words in the comments to posts published by the Slovenian Armed Forces on its Facebook page in 2015

To summarise, SAF represents the only organization of the Slovenian state administration that has integrated social media activities into its daily operations. It has attracted a considerably large number of Facebook users as well as their high engagement level. Most of the social media activities are evidently focused towards building the SAF's public image. The analysis confirms they are successful in pursuing this goal.

6. Comparison of the results with other countries

A detailed comparison of the results of the above and other research in the field (as presented in chapter 3) cannot be carried out due to four reasons, all related to methodological frameworks:

- Different measurement units: while the research on social media usage in Slovenian public organizations focused on state administration organizations (ministries, bodes affiliated to the ministries and administrative units), most other research in this field focused on municipalities. However, as mentioned in the methodological framework of our research, the Slovenian administrative system is two-tiered meaning that state administration and local self-government are separated. This implies that tasks and responsibilities of the municipalities in some countries might be the responsibilities of state administration (especially administrative units) in Slovenia.
- Social media channels observed: the research focused on different social media channels (mainly Facebook and/or Twitter).
- Timespan: research in the field was conducted in different years. In addition, where specific social media activities were measured (i.e. number and content of the posts published on social media sites), different periods were observed.
- Indicators measured: the research instruments used differ in what was measured/observed as well. While presence on social media platforms is a constant in such research (although sometimes observed only via links to organizational social media profiles on their official websites), other indicators include number of posts, engagement rates, number of followers etc., and different average values of these indicators, as well as integration of social media in daily activities and similar.

Due to the above differences in methodological frameworks in the field of social media research in public administration organizations, the comparison can only be superficial.

The research presented in chapter 4 reveals that only 14% of Slovenian state administration organizations established a Facebook presence. This is a very low portion compared to all other research in the field. Namely, the latter reveals at least one social medium tool was adopted by 88% of US local governments two years earlier (Maultasch Oliviera, 2013), indicating that, in 2015, when the research was conducted in Slovenia, this portion could be higher. A relatively high adoption of social media was also identified in Romania and Lithuania – while in Romania 83% of city halls established a Facebook presence (Urs, 2016), a 77% adoption rate was identified in Lithuanian municipalities (Sinkienė and Bryer, 2016). In Egypt (Abdelsalam et al., 2013), the adoption rate was lower (50%), but still much higher than in Slovenia.

While external dissemination of information is the main reason for social media usage in US local governments, a substantial portion of US local governments use social media technologies for other tasks as well – for example, for getting a feedback on service quality and enabling/facilitating citizen participation(Maultasch Oliviera, 2013). This is not the case in the Slovenian state administration where Facebook is mainly used for one-way interaction, which is also the case in Romania (Urs, 2016), Lithuania (Sinkienė and Bryer, 2016) and Egypt (Abdelsalam et al., 2013).

The number of followers (i.e. users liking a specific social networking page) is one of the indicators (though the most basic one) revealing the engagement rate. In Romania, for example, the average number of fans was 15.260, while in Slovenia this number was much lower – 2.601 on average. However, the target group(s) in the Romanian and Slovenian context differ greatly in size (Slovenia has approximately two million of residents, while Romania around 20 million). The number of post published on social media sites is another indicator revealing how much effort organizations put into social media activities. This was measured in Romania (Urs, 2016) where 574 posts were published on Facebook sites of city halls on average in 454 days, while 152 posts on average were posted by Slovenian public organizations.

Slovenia has no strategy or formal policy on social media usage for external communication and the same strategic deficit was identified in the US, Romania and Lithuania (ibid.).

To summarise, the level of Facebook adoption in Slovenia is very low in the international context as well. One-way interaction is the main reason for social networks usage not only in Slovenia, but in other countries as well. The same holds true for the lack of strategic framework in the field and/or policy on social media usage. An exception here are the Slovenian Armed Forces which have managed to integrate Facebook activities into their daily operations, resulting in a high number of Facebook followers and their engagement level.

7.   Discussion and suggestions for further research

Social media and social networks specifically have been recognised as an extremely valuable marketing tool in private sector organizations. Public organizations, on the other hand, seem to be somehow lost in this field. On the basis of our research, we can answer the initial research question ("Is the Slovenian public administration exploiting the potential of social networks?") negatively. Only 14 out of 112 analysed organizations have established their Facebook presence, and for most of them considerable room for improvement has been identified in terms of usage of Facebook as a social network with the highest reach and engagement potential in terms of number of its users.

Based on the three-stage adoption process for social media usage in government developed by Mergel and Bretschneider (2013), we can conclude that the Slovenian state administration organizations are at the first stage – intrapreneurship and informal experimentation. In order to proceed onto the next stages, the Slovenian government will have to adopt an official social media strategy and related guidelines. Such strategy has to define the goals of social media usage, key roles (i.e. administrators of Facebook pages), processes (e.g. the policy making process supported by social networks), challenges, and analytics indicators enabling measurement of success in reaching the goals of social media usage.

Taking into account previous research in the field, two common points can be identified for social media usage in the Slovenian public administration and public administrations worldwide: social media are mainly used for one-way interaction and there is a lack of formal policies guiding social media usage in public administration. We believe that the results of our research present an added value for practitioners and researchers – both domestic and international. For domestic practitioners, they provide a thorough situation report in the field of

social network usage in the Slovenian state administration and its unexploited potential. For foreign practitioners, they enable a comparison of the situation in this field (between their organizations and Slovenian public organizations). The most important lesson for public administration organizations from other countries is the importance of a social media strategy. Such strategy should focus on two-way interaction with stakeholders, otherwise there is not much added value from the social media communication compared to well-established websites. For researchers, the paper provides a basis for a comparative review in this field and methodology developed for measuring the usage of social networks in public administration.

The main shortcoming of our study is not taking into account the organizations' target audiences (which is the case in the majority of similar studies). This is why some results should be read (and understood) with some reservations. Namely, some organizations have larger target groups of users than others. This is why the number of followers and the number of posts by other users, for example, do not say much when compared among organizations. However, they do, to some extent, indicate the level of Facebook adoption among organizations in focus.

Even though we have included in our research a considerable number of Slovenian public administration organizations, further research efforts in this field might consider expansion in three directions. First, it would be interesting to analyse the usage of other popular social networks in public administration (e.g. Twitter). Second, the results would be more indicative if municipalities (i.e. local self-government) were included in the research. The Slovenian local self-government system consists of 212 municipalities, thus it would be interesting to analyse how these municipalities exploit social networks for strengthening citizen participation in local governance. Finally, the research in this field lacks an international dimension. While OECD's and UN's efforts in this field are valuable, they do not provide a detailed view on online social networks exploitation in their member countries.

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