

Social Media Networks Unveiled. Mapping the Romanian and German Youth

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Abstract: *In the present study we focus on the use of social network sites by Romanian and German youth in a comparative manner. Our research questions are 1. Are there differences in the use of social network sites by young people in Germany and Romania? 2. Are there differences in the motivation to use social network sites? and 3. How do they see the information shared on social networks? The present study is of exploratory nature and it was only the first step in analyzing the differences between Romanian and German students with respect to the use of SNS such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and WhatsApp. Based on a qualitative methodology, our results cannot be subject for generalization. Nevertheless, we emphasized some relevant tendency such as: a migration towards*

Instagram in both Romania and Germany and similar reasons for this behavior. Privacy seemed to be much more relevant for the German students than for the Romanian and this is reflected in news sharing behavior. Differences in the diffusion of information and innovation are not that relevant taking into consideration a global digital perspective.

Keywords: Social networking sites (SNSs); Facebook; Instagram; Uses and gratifications approach; Germany; Romania; Comparative study.

Context and theoretical framework

Social media has become nowadays a relevant item of the media diet of the majority of the population in many countries. It is a dynamic field where platforms and usage practices are subject to constant changes in an established culture of connectivity (Van Dijck 2013) with multi-directional information flow in a hybrid media system (Chadwick 2013). Carr and Hayes (2015) define social media as a *computer-mediated communication, where individuals generate content of their own, see and interact with content of their friends' or other users online*. Our interest is in social networking sites (SNSs), a subdomain of social media, that are networked communication platforms in which participants:

1. have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data;
2. can publicly articulate connections that can be viewed and traversed by others; and
3. can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their connections on the site. (Ellison & Boyd 2013, p. 157 in Alhabash, Ma 2017, 1).

The main SNS we are discussing is Facebook, as it is the main network where people can also share news and has a more informative character than the others. Twitter was not taken into consideration, as previous studies showed us that it does not have the same popularity as Facebook. For example, in 2011 there were 44000 Twitter accounts and 2,95 million Facebook accounts (Aparaschivei 2011); moving to 2017, Twitter remains the Cinderella of the SNSs that are used in Romania, with only 8,4% of the of internet users in the country and over 9 mil. Facebook accounts (Gemius 2017) with account on this platform.

In the present study we will focus our attention on Romanian and German youth, as they are the main users of Social Media Networks. In Germany, the main age groups that use Facebook were, in 2014, between 18-24 (24,11%) and between 25-34 (27,76%). On the other hand, in Romania the main age group that uses Face-