

Social Media and Political Communication:

Case study – the Parliamentary Parties in Romania

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Abstract:

The study aims to examine the extent to which parliamentary parties from Romania are using Social Media to promote their image and political messages, but also the level of participation of supporters in social networks. Another objective of this paper aims to identify similarities between the hypothetical percentages of supporters of political parties in Social Media, electoral percentages of accessing the Romanian Parliament and the current political configuration of the Romanian Parliament. The research is focused on comparative analysis of the "de facto" representation of the parliamentary parties in the Romanian community and the degree of representation in social networks. Through this study we have tried to show that there are similarities between the degree of support for parties in the real world, relative to the virtual environment.

Keywords: *online political communication, Social media analysis, political parties from Romania, Facebook*

Introduction

The new Media caused major changes in the political communication. They have become a resource often used by the political actors in order to strengthen their “capital of visibility”. All the new media resources - among which we can mention the websites, blogs, Facebook and Twitter of the politicians and / or the political parties, allow “the affirmation of a *discursive identity* of politicians, contributing to the *customizing* of the political discourse (the politician presents his political platform in the context of *interaction* with his voter-user)” (Beciu, 2011, p. 281)

This analysis aims to identify how the parliamentary parties in Romania managed to mobilize their voters by means of the communication mediated by the social networks, blogs and videos on Youtube. Another aim of the paper requires the identification of any similarities or differences between the percentages of the supporters of the political parties in the Social Media, the electoral percentages of accessing the Parliament of Romania obtained in the 2008 parliamentary elections and the political configuration of the Parliament of Romania at the end of the parliamentary session.

Functions of the New Media in the Political Communication

In the context of the relationship between the political actor, mass media and the public / electorate, Camelia Beciu (2011, p. 281) identifies a number of functions that the Internet / the New Media have, as follows:

a) The politician broadcasts his “controlled speech” and has the possibility of presenting his point of view without being “interrupted” by the journalists, by his opponents, by the media format constraints, etc;

b) The political opinions and posts broadcast in the traditional media - local and national - are replicated online. Thus, the political actor argues the visibility of his key messages delivered to a target group;

c) Due to the new media, the politicians launch a presumptive political and media agenda. Nowadays, it has become of common practice for the journalists to give visibility to some statements taken from the blogs or Facebook pages of the politicians. It was already created a symbiosis between the traditional media and the new media;

- d) The governors use the new means of mass communication to promote their policies and the decisions they take and which give them the image of “good governors”;
- e) The political doctrines, policies and electoral projects are promoted by the New Media, in a form other than the one in the traditional political communication. There are used publicly available forms – “interactive”, “narrative”, “conversational”.
- f) The visibility of the electoral message - designing an alleged online electioneering is part of a candidate's electoral strategy, and each online resource has a specific function for his campaign;
- g) By means of the Internet, there can be mobilized the voters who are asked to advance their opinion and to participate in the discussion on some issues of public interest.
- h) By using the Internet, the political actor interacts apparently more “efficiently” with his voters, beyond the institutional and bureaucratic rigors.

Facebook – The Dissemination and the “Socializing” of the Political Message

The real revolution of the Internet and mass communication through the new media was realized at the beginning of the third millennium when Web 1.0 has moved to a new phase of its development, namely Web 2.0. This step meant, according to Mihai Horia Bădău (2011, p. 25), the liberation from the “tyranny of technology”. Furthermore, Web 2.0 was named the “Internet of the users”, developing a new model of mass communication, characterized by a high degree of interaction between the broadcaster / broadcasters and the online public.

Another essential feature of Web 2.0 is represented by its “accessibility”; anyone could participate in sharing information and content, not only the IT specialists and web designers, as is the case of Web 1.0.

In another sense, this concept represents “the evolution of the Internet from a repository of information and communication technologies (represented by sites), which were cumbersome forms of communication, to a symmetrical communication space (platform which helps to transfer knowledge and conversations, where people can meet and organize easily)” (Bădău, 2011, p. 25). Facebook is a part of the Social Media category as well. Thus, the Facebook social network has been defined as “a free online social network that allows its registered users to create their personal profiles, to upload photos and videos, to send messages and to interrelate with their friends, family and colleagues” (<http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/facebook.html>). The Facebook social network was founded on February 4, 2004 and it currently has a number of 906 895 580 registered members, 213 countries (www.socialbakers.com, accessed on August 28, 2012). In other words, this site was created from the perspective of at least five dimensions, as follows:

- a) Market - where the members are allowed to post, read and respond to the advertising messages;
- b) Groups - allows the creation of virtual communities based on the common interests of the members;
- c) Events - allows the members to announce an event organized by themselves or by others, to invite their friends to this event and to monitor those who accept or decline their invitations;
- d) Pages - allows members to create and promote a public page (a public figure, politician, singer, company, etc.) built around an idea;
- e) Instantaneous communication - allows all the members who are online to interact instantly by means of the chat box.

In April 2009, Romania recorded a total of 110,000 users, according to the *Facebook Demographics: Trends* study (authors: Ben Lorica and O'Reilly Research), ranking 30th out of 34 in a ranking of the countries in Europe, just ahead countries such as Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta and Ukraine. On November 21, 2010, the number of the Facebook users in Romania reached 1,897,920, given that in May 2010, 1,287,500 members were registered.

Of the total population in Romania, 8.64% use Facebook, meaning 24.37% from the number of people with access to the Internet. In November 2011, Romania ranked 47th in the world ranking

of the countries with the most Facebook members. Only in September 2010, almost 1.7 million Romanians aged between 13 and 64 chose to join Facebook, equivalent to 7.4 percent of the population, as reveals an analysis prepared by eResearch Corp Company (<http://www.etiquettes.ro/marketing/facebook-hi5-si-twitter-roman-preferatele-romanilor-amatori-de-internet/>).

At the end of August 2012, Romania ranked 34th in the world, with about 5 million Facebook profiles (ie - 4963760, according to the data provided by www.facebrands.ro) and the penetration rate in the general population is of 22, 58% and of 63.68% in the population with Internet access.

Of the total active population on Facebook, 30% are between 18-24 years, 30% - between 25 and 34 and 15% - between 35 and 44. The gender distribution is symmetric, 50% of the users are women and 50% are men (www.socialbakers.com, accessed on August 28, 2012). In the last 3 months the age segments that registered the largest increases, of approximately 80,000 users, are those between 25-34 years old and 35-44 years old respectively. The 45-54 years old category experienced a noticeable increase of about 40,000 users. This shows an “aging” of Facebook in Romania, something that will be very important in the context of the political communication and the formation of the online communities of people who are political issues-oriented.

The political figures most visible in the Social Media, according to the data from www.facebrands.ro (accessed on August 28, 2012) are: Silviu Prigoană (87,644 fans), Victor Ponta (52,999 fans), Remus Cernea (45,589 fans), Sorin Oprescu (44,275 fans), Elena Udrea (36,404 fans), Cristian Popescu Piedone (35,479 fans) and Crin Antonescu (31,033 fans). Also, in the “political” section, www.facebrands.ro records, as well, several Facebook pages which do not belong to a politician, but are for political reasons, such as “The Movement of the Green” (29,227 fans), “You are mad at Băsescu. Why?” (26,320 fans), “YES! I Vote” (11.772 fans) etc.

In order to build a relevant research, we will need to consider, as well, the online voters that we find in this social network. Thus, the total population of Romania is of 21,390,000, the number of citizens with voting rights is of 18,292,464, according to <http://www.becreferendum2012.ro/DOCUMENTE%20BEC/Rezultate/rezultat.pdf> (85.5% of the total population), the number of the Internet users in Romania is of 8,578,484, according to <http://www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm> (40.1 %), the number of the Facebook members is of 4,963,760 (57.9% of the Internet users). People who use Facebook and have the right to vote represent a rate of about 85% of the total number of users, ie, 4,189,413, according to www.socialbakers.com (84.4% of the total number of the Facebook users).

ITEM	TOTAL	%
Total population	21.390.000	100%
Citizens with voting rights	18.292.464	85,5%
Internet users (I.U.)	8.578.484	40%
Total Facebook members (Fb.M.)	4.963.760	57,9% from I.U.
Facebook members with voting rights	4.189.413	84,4% from Fb.M.
Fans of Facebook’s political pages	87.200	1,76% from Fb.M.

[Table 1 - Demographic data relevant for the research of the political communication by means of the Social Media]

From the perspective of social cohesion, which can be researched in the field of political communication, a research conducted by Tasește Tănase and Nicoleta Ciacu (2010, p. 185) showed that, in 2010, the Facebook social network was unable to facilitate interaction at the level of large

groups but only at the level of individuals, as members of larger groups. Beyond this, we can state that Facebook has a significant contribution to the social reconfiguration in Romania in terms of the users who need to create and promote their image in this online community, to complete their group of friends and to interact with new people. With the development of the Facebook users database and the growing involvement of the political actors and their team of communicators in this type of communication by means of social networks, we assume that Facebook will be able to facilitate interaction at the level of large groups as well through the online opinion leaders, which will be investigated in the next parliamentary elections held on December 9, 2012.

The Political Context in Romania

The Specificity of the political system in Romania

According to the Constitution, Romania is “a national, sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible state” (http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?den=act2_1&par1=1#t1c0s0a1). The form of the government in the Romanian State is represented by the semi-presidential republic. The State is organized according to the principle of separation and balance of powers - legislative, executive and judicial - in a constitutional democracy.

The Romanian Parliament is bicameral, consisting of the Senate with 137 members, and the Chamber of Deputies, with 314 members. A total of 18 additional parliamentary seats in the Chamber of Deputies are reserved for the representatives of the national minorities. The Parliament of Romania has a legislative role, debating and voting the ordinary and organic laws, both in the specialized committees and in plenary. The members of the Parliament are elected by a mixed uninominal vote, universal, direct and secret. The electoral system is a proportional one (the members of the Parliament are elected from all parties that have exceeded the threshold of 5% of the total votes, based on an algorithm). Elections are held every four years, the last taking place on November 30, 2008, and the next elections will be held on December 9, 2012.

The Parliamentary parties in Romania

The **Liberal Democratic Party** (PD-L) is the heir of the Democratic Party (DP). The DP was formed on March 31, 1993 by fusion, merging the National Salvation Front with the Democratic Party, resulting in a new legal personality, formalized by the Bucharest Court decision No. 13 of May 23, 1993. On April 8, 2004 the NLP-DP Justice and Truth Alliance is recorded in the Register of the Political Alliances. On December 15, 2007 delegates of the DP and the DLP meet in an Extraordinary National Convention, where the absorption of the LDP is announced by the DP, the change of the status, the DP changing its name into the Liberal Democratic Party (PD-L.). This party ruled from December 22, 2008 until April 27, 2012.

The **Social Democratic Party** (PSD) is the largest political party in Romania, the representative of the social democracy, currently in power in the Parliament of Romania. The PSD is the heir of the National Salvation Front, the first political party that ruled Romania after the 1989 Revolution. On February 6, 2011, the Social Democratic Party formed alongside with the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, the Social Liberal Union as an alternative to the PD-L government. Soon, it becomes the strongest current political structure and, at the local elections in 2012, won 41.49% of the major parliamentary seats and 49.48% of the County Council Chairmen (http://www.cdep.ro/pls/dic/site.page?den=act2_1&par1=1#t1c0s0a1).

The **National Liberal Party** (PNL) is one of the main political parties in Romania, considered a historic party as well, with a significant role in modernizing the country. It was established under that name on May 24, 1875. Of the 87 offices of Romania, 30 were led by liberal prime ministers.

The **Conservative Party (PC)**, the former Romanian Humanist Party (RHP), is a political party in Romania, representing the conservative doctrine of the Parliament of Romania. The Conservative Party was founded in 1991 after the fall of communism, as the Romanian Humanist Party (RHP). From 2005 to December 3, 2006, it was part of the ruling coalition. The party took the present name on May 7, 2005.

The **Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR)** is a political organization founded to represent the interests of the Hungarian community in Romania. In 2007 the union became a member of the European People's Party.

The **National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR)** is a political party in Romania represented in the Parliament of Romania. This party claims its political orientation as being left-centered having a social-democratic doctrine. In 2008, the members of the SDP, NLP and CP, as well as of other parliamentary fractions represented in the Parliament of Romania, came out of their groups, because of their support for the President, Traian Băsescu. They formed the parliamentary group of independents. In May 2010, they came together and formed the NUPR, which, allied with the D-LP and the DUHR, participated in government.

The Political configuration of the Parliament of Romania after the 2008 election

According to www.alegeri.tv, a site specialized in analyzing the democratic elections in Romania, the parliamentary seats in the 2008 elections were distributed as follows:

1. The Liberal Democratic Party (PD-L) – 166 mandates from 471
2. The Alliance of Social Democratic Party and Conservative Party (PSD-PC) – 163 mandates from 471
3. The National Liberal Party (PNL) – 93 mandates from 471
4. The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) – 31 mandates from 471
5. Minority group – 18 mandates from 471

Figure 1 - Political configuration after the 2008 election

The current political configuration of the Parliament of Romania

According to www.cdep.ro and www.senat.ro, the political configuration of the Parliament of Romania has undergone some notable changes compared to the results of the last election in 2008, as follows:

The Liberal Democratic Party has 140 MPs, compared to 166 in 2008. The PSD, PNL and PC parties have formed an alliance called the Social Liberal Union, having together 215 MPs. The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania has, at present, 27 MPs, compared to 31 in 2008 and the Group of the National Minorities has 16 MPs, compared to 18 in 2008. The major change in the Parliament of Romania was created by the migration of the PNL, PD-L and PSD MPs in the group of the non-partisan MPs. Subsequently, of the 33 independent MPs, 24 have formed a new political party called the National Union for the Progress of Romania.

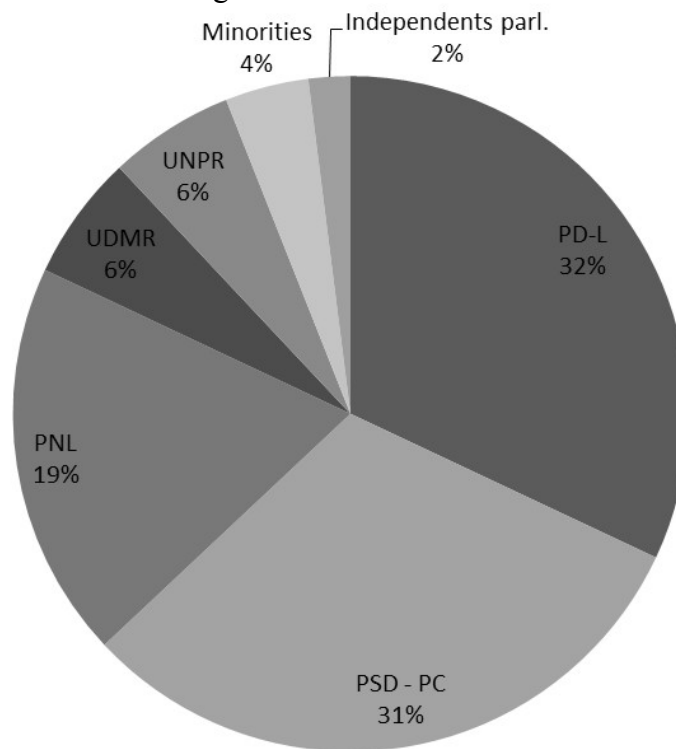


Figure 2 - The current political configuration of the Parliament of Romania

The Research Objectives

O1: Analyzing the extent to which the parliamentary parties in Romania use the Social Media to promote the image and the political message of the political party.

O2: Identifying the presumptive similarities and differences between the percentages of the supporters of the political parties in Social Media, the electoral percentages of accessing the Parliament of Romania and the current political configuration of the parliamentary system in Romania.

The Research Hypotheses

H1: The parliamentary parties in Romania due not fully exploit the promotion of the image and the political message of the party and also the interaction with their voters by means of the Social Media.

H2: Even if the political configuration has changed considerably in the Parliament of Romania, the political party supporters on Facebook is, in percentage, equal to the electoral situation in the 2008 parliamentary elections.

The Research Method

The research method used to achieve the objectives is represented by the quantitative analysis of the documents and the instrument used is the analysis of the traffic and of the degree of participation in the social networks. The problem studied in this paper was also discussed by a team of researchers from Croatia, FYROM and Kosovo, the study being entitled “Facebook and Political Communication - Macedonian case” (Emruli; Zejneli; Agai, 2011, pp. 451-459), published in International Journal of Computer Science Issues.

The instrument used for achieving O1: In the first instance, in order to investigate whether the official websites of the parliamentary political parties in Romania use the social networks and blogs to promote the image of the party, I viewed the website of each party, for noticing if they have on their first page, a link to their Facebook pages, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and other networks, and I also viewed the blogs of the political leaders. Thus, the coding was binary, meaning that if on the political party website there was not one of these social networks, the code was “0” and if there was, the code was “1”.

The instrument used for achieving O2: In order to identify the presumptive similarities and differences between the percentages of the supporters of the political parties in the Social Media, the electoral percentages of accessing the Parliament of Romania and the current political configuration, I will use the following resources:

- www.facebrands.ro – for grouping, in the “Politics” section the Facebook pages of the 6 political parties taken as a research sample and for collecting the total number of fans for each party separately;

- Facebook – for centralizing and grouping the Facebook communities (groups) and the group members of the political parties under study;

- The proceedings of the Central Electoral Commission for the 2008 elections and www.alegeri.tv specialized in analyzing the democratic elections in Romania - for calculating the percentages of the election, on the basis of which the political parties have access to the Parliament of the Romania. We will calculate these percentages from the total number of the citizens eligible to vote registered on the electoral lists and not from the number of the citizens turnout.

- www.cdep.ro and www.senat.ro – for collecting and centralizing the data on the current political configuration of the Parliament of Romania.

The Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained as a result of centralizing the information and the statistical figures from the official websites of the parliamentary political parties in Romania. The entire research was based on the content analysis of the online resources used by the political parties under study.

Analysis: The parliamentary political parties of Romania in social networks

After reviewing the official sites of the parliamentary parties in Romania, the use of the social networks and of the blogs of the political leaders are represented as follows:

Political party	FB	Twitter	Blogs	Youtube	Flickr	Other	Total	%
PD-L	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	13,3%
PSD	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	83,33%
PNL	1	1	1	1	0	1	5	83,33%
PC	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	16,66%

UDMR	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	33,33%
UNPR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0%

Table no. 1 – The Social Media instruments used by the parliamentary parties in Romania on their official websites

The **Liberal Democratic Party**, according to the www.pd.org.ro official website, does not promote the image and the political message of the party in any social network, the only online resource used for the interaction with its voters being the discussion forum. However, there are icons for all the social networks under study, but refer to the main pages of the social networks and not to the custom pages of the party.

The **Social Democratic Party**, according to the www.psd.ro official website, promotes the image and the political message of the party in all the social networks (Facebook, Twitter, blogs of the political leaders, YouTube, Linkedin), less in the Flickr social network. The percentage of the use of the Social Media by the Social Democratic Party is of 83.33%.

The **National Liberal Party**, according to the www.pnl.ro official website, promotes the image and the political message of the party in all the social networks (Facebook, Twitter, of the blogs political leaders, YouTube, Linkedin), less in the Flickr social network. The percentage of the use of the Social Media by the Liberal National Party is of 83.33%.

The **Conservative Party**, according to the www.pc.ro official website, promotes the image and the political message of the party only through the blogs of the politicians. The percentage of the use of the Social Media by the Conservative Party is of 16.66%.

The **Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania**, according to the www.udmr.ro official website, promotes the image and the political message of the party only through Facebook and the blogs of the politicians. The percentage of the use of the Social Media by the DUHR is of 33.33%.

The **National Union for the Progress of Romania**, according to the www.unpr.eu official website, does not promote the image and the political message of the party in any social network.

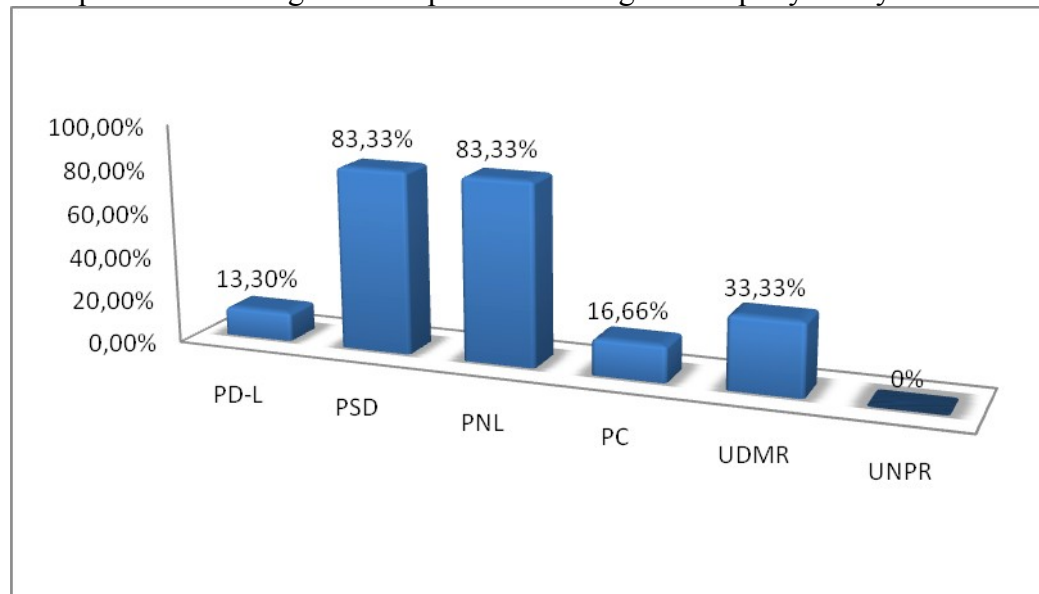


Figure 3 - The extent to which the political parties use the social networks for promoting their image and their political message

Analysis of representation in the Parliament of Romania vs. representation on Facebook

Of the 171 pages of the “Politics” section on the Social Media analysis site called www.facebrands.ro, 102 belong to politicians, supporters and parliamentary parties (the

parliamentary session of 2008-2012), meaning a percentage of approximately 60%. The remaining 69 Facebook pages support a political cause or belong to the politicians or the political parties not represented in the Parliament. Relating to the Facebook groups supporting the six political parties, we find that the total number is of 108 discussion groups, summing 85,269 members. The difference between the discussion groups and the official pages of Facebook is that, in the case of the groups / communities, the initiative of debate is taken by the supporters of the parties who do not impose them a topic for discussion, as it is in the case of the official Facebook pages where most of the times, the communication is one-sided.

Political party	Groups	Members	Pages	Fans	% from total Fb	% 2008 election**
PD-L	22	16.240	26	206545	4,93%	12,64%
PSD***	14	44.069	26	174108*	4,16%	12,86%
PNL	48	17.931	38	97060*	2,31%	7,06%
PC***	6	1.077	7	21460*	0,51%	12,86%
UDMR	5	537	3	1136	0,02%	2,04%
UNPR	13	5.415	2	36780	0,87%	-
TOTAL	108	85.269	102	537089		

Table no 2 – The Facebook social networks of the parliamentary parties

* It was taken into account the Facebook page as well, including the number of Liberal Social Union fans;

** The percentage was calculated from the total number of citizens eligible to vote registered on the electoral

lists

E.g. the SDP – CP Alliance - / 18,292,464 * 100 = 12.86%

*** The two parties run into an electoral alliance

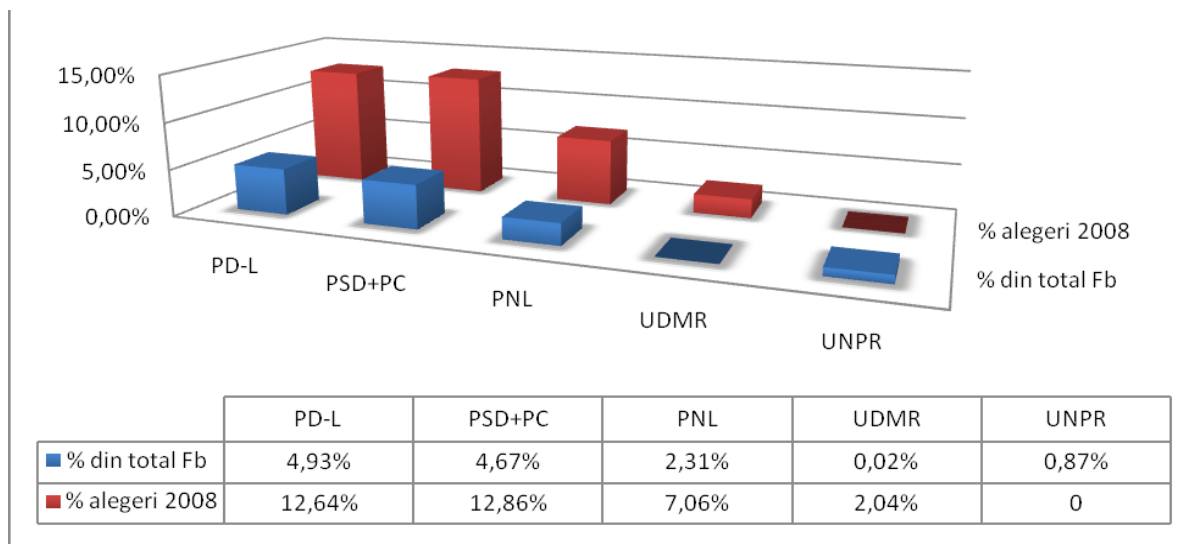


Figure 4 – % 2008 parliamentary election vs. Facebook fans

The **Liberal Democratic Party** has 26 Facebook pages (of politicians or central or local affiliates), for a total of 206,545 fans. The LDP obtained, at the parliamentary elections in 2008, a rate of 12.64% from the total number of citizens eligible to vote registered on the electoral lists. The percentage of the fans of the Facebook pages – the supporters of the political party - is of 4.93% of the total number of the Facebook users in Romania being over 18 years old. Relating to the Facebook groups supporting the DLP, we find that the total number is of 22 discussion groups, summing 16,240 members. The DLP popularity obtained in the Social Media correlates with the

votes obtained in the elections, so that we can state that a sufficient number of them continue their support in the Social Media also.

The **Social Liberal Union**, the political alliance that was formed during the parliamentary session, consists of the Social Democratic Party, the National Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, totaling together 71 pages, and the cumulative number of fans is of 269,230 (taking into account that the Facebook page of the Social Liberal Union has 11,669 members and supporters from all the three political parties). The SDP – CP Alliance obtained a rate of 12.64% from the total number of citizens eligible to vote registered on the electoral lists, and the LNP - 7.06%; therefore the SLU comprise a percentage of 19.70% from the options in the 2008 elections. The percentage of the fans of the Facebook pages – the supporters of the political alliance - is of 6.98% of the total number of the Facebook users in Romania being over 18 years old. Relating to the Facebook groups supporting the SLU, we find that the total number is of 68 discussion groups, summing 63,077 members. After the formation of the political alliance, on Facebook there were created by the supporters of the three parties, pages and groups for supporting the union that emphasized the extent to which they participated in the promotion of their common political message.

The **Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania** has 3 Facebook pages (of politicians or central or local branches), with a total of 1,136 fans. The DUHR obtained a rate of 2.04% of votes from the total number of citizens eligible to vote registered on the electoral lists and the percentage of the fans of the Facebook pages – the supporters of the political party - is of 0.02% of the total number of the Facebook users in Romania being over 18 years old. Relating to the Facebook groups supporting the DUHR, we find that the total number is of 5 discussion groups, summing 537 members. This indicates a very low extent to which the Hungarian communities in Romania participated in the social networks and the politics of the Union is realized only by the politicians without the active online participation of the electorate.

The **National Union for the Progress of Romania** did not participate in the 2008 parliamentary elections, but was formed, during the parliamentary session, by the MPs who left other parliamentary parties. The percentage of the fans of the Facebook pages – the supporters of the political party - is of 0.87% from the total number of the Facebook users in Romania being over 18 years old. Relating to the Facebook groups supporting the NUPR, we find that the total number is of 13 discussion groups, summing 5,415 members. These percentages emphasize that the NUPR is a group that did not receive the popular vote and does not have the reputation and the reliability of the other parties in the Parliament of Romania yet. However, we note that the degree of the online support for the party is greater than the one of the Conservative Party and of the Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania.

Political party	% Groups	% Members	% Pages	% Fans	Avarage	Mandates	% polit. Config.
PD-L	20,37%	19,04%	25,5%	38,5%	25,85%	166	32,96%
PSD*	12,99%	51,68%	25,5%	32,5%	30,67%	163	33,62%
PNL	44,44%	21,03%	37 %	18%	30,12%	93	18,65%
PC*	5,55%	1,26%	7%	4%	4,45%	-	-
UDMR	4,62%	0,63%	3%	0,2%	2,11%	18	6,28%
UNPR	12,03%	6,36%	2%	6,8%	6,80%	-	-

Table no 3 – The participation supporters of the political parties on the social networks related to their electoral support

** The two parties ran into an electoral alliance in the 2008 parliamentary elections.*

From the chart below we see that the Liberal Democratic Party has fewer Facebook groups than the Social Democratic Party and the difference is that the SDP has groups with much more members than the ones of the DLP (over 50% of the total number of members of all the Facebook groups under study). The Liberal National Party has the most Facebook support groups, almost 45% of the total number of the groups under study, but we note that they are groups with few active members.

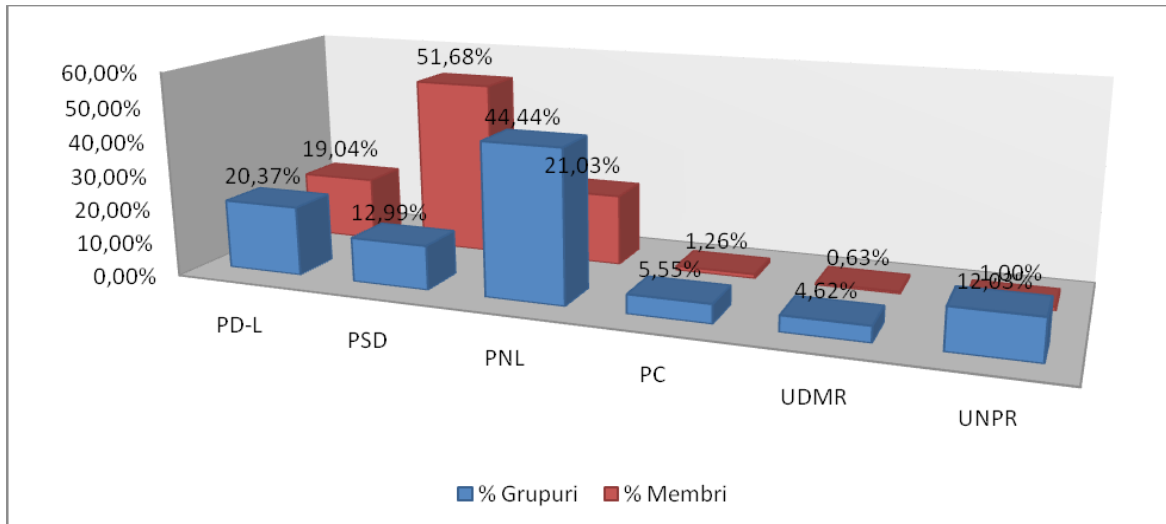


Figure 5 - The Facebook Groups of the political parties and their members as percentages

From the chart below we see that both the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Democratic Party have an equal number of Facebook support pages, but the total number of members is 6 percent higher for the Liberal Democrats. The Liberal National Party has the most Facebook pages, but the total number of fans is much smaller, 18%, compared to 32.5% respectively 38.5%, as of the other two political parties mentioned above.

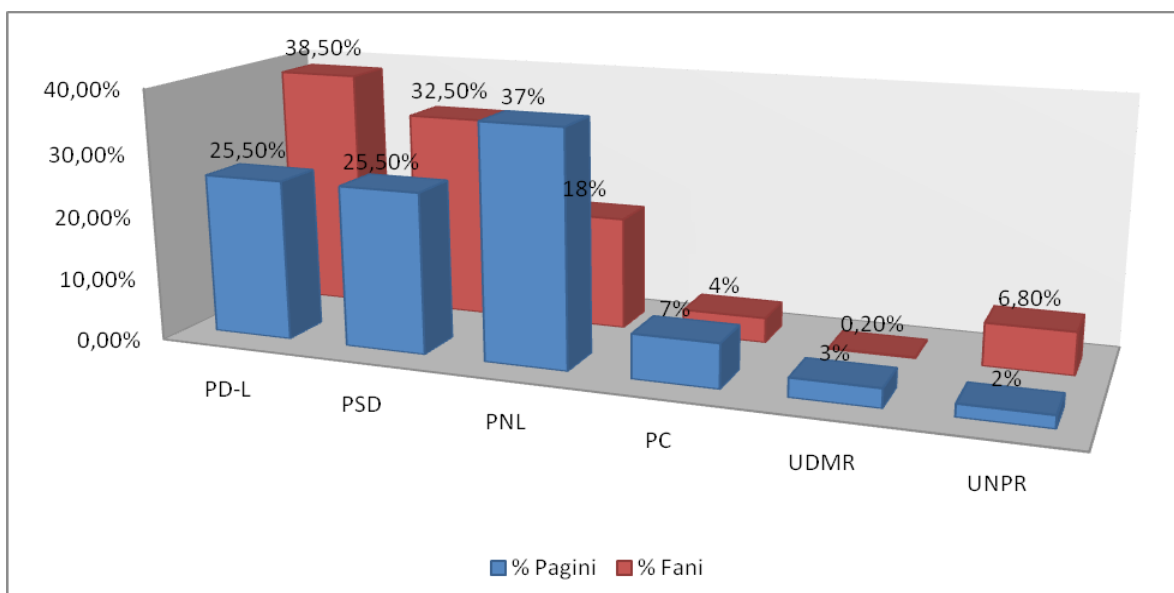


Figure 6 - The Facebook pages of the political parties and their fans as percentages

From the chart below we see that, even if the DLP and the SDP – CP came into Parliament with a noticeably equal number of parliamentary mandates, the participation of the supporters of the Alliance on Facebook is about 10 percent higher than the one of the Liberal Democratic Party. Even if the Liberal National Party had a rate of about 20% in the 2008 parliamentary elections, we find that the participation of the supporters of the political party on Facebook is of 30%, with more than

4 percent over the activity of the Liberal Democratic Party supporters in the Social Media. The DUHR has a very low participation of the supporters of the political party in the Social Media - only 2%.

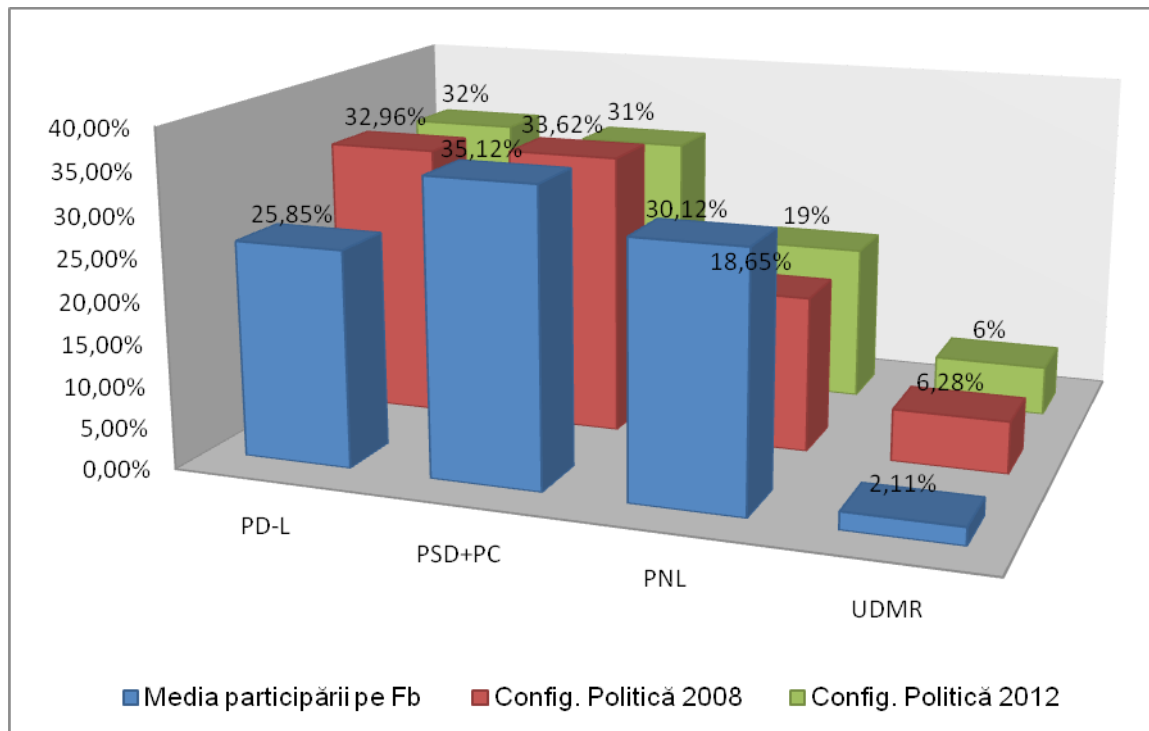


Figure 7 - The average Facebook participation of the political parties and the political configuration of the Parliament

Conclusions

The parliamentary parties in Romania do not use all the social networks. There are also political parties, among which we can mention the Liberal Democratic Party (the winner of the parliamentary elections in 2008) which do not use any social network (only the discussion forum), on their official website, in order to promote their image and their political messages or for interaction with the supporters of the political party. The same applies to the National Union for the Progress of Romania.

Even if the political configuration has changed in the Parliament of Romania, in point of the number of parliamentary seats, the configuration remains approximately the same in point of percentage, as in 2008, the percentage of the political party supporters on Facebook is equal to the electoral situation in the 2008 parliamentary elections.

The political parties, which have exploited the benefits of promoting their image and political messages by means of the social networks, have enjoyed the active participation of their supporters on Facebook. These ones have initiated discussion groups and online communities, and have actively supported the efforts of the parties. In the case of the Social Democratic Party and the National Liberal Party we notice a percentage of participation of the fans in the Facebook social network higher than the “score” obtained in the 2008 parliamentary elections or even higher than the actual percentage of representation in the Parliament.

Beyond this, we must take into consideration the fact that regardless of the smaller number of supporters on Facebook compared to the number of the real voters, the users initiating causes or online discussion groups are very influential opinion leaders, not only in the online but in the real world also. The political parties must take into account that as long as they manage to keep them - the opinion leaders of social networks - close, the degree of influence of the political message will

increase proportionally with the number of the opinion leaders on Facebook. This will “revive” the old communication model developed by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1955, called the “two-step flow of communication”. This theory showed that the opinion leaders are, in fact, the ones who affect the interpretation of the media messages. In other words, the media message is not directly interpreted by the public, but mediated through interpersonal communication and the contact with the opinion leaders. In fact, this is the great “revolution” of the Social Media: the interaction.

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